Institutional barriers to recruitment and employment in the audio visual industries

The effect on black and minority ethnic workers

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Executive summary

This research, funded by the European Social Fund and supported by the Learning and Skills Council, set out to look at employment and recruitment practices in the audio visual industries in London. In particular, it aimed to establish the significance or otherwise of informal recruitment practices in the industry and whether or not these have an adverse impact on maintaining or reproducing discrimination against black and minority ethnic (BME) workers. The research included surveys, interviews and focus groups with a wide range of people in the audio visual (AV) industries including final year students on media-related course, recent graduates, workers and employers.

Demographics of London’s audio visual industries

• There are an estimated 250,000 AV workers in London – and it is estimated that up to half of these are freelancers.¹

• Black and minority ethnic workers are under-represented in London’s AV industries. Ten per cent of the AV workforce in London is from black or minority ethnic groups, even though a quarter of London’s workforce is made up of black and minority ethnic workers. The figures are even lower in some parts of the industry (e.g. in film production, the BME figure is only six per cent.)²

Education, qualifications and media employment

• Despite being at the end of their courses, in the survey thirty per cent of final year students on media-related courses felt they did not have the required qualifications to enable them to find a job in the audio visual industries when they had completed their studies.

• Fifty-three per cent of final year students felt they did not have the required experience to begin their careers in the AV industries.

• Forty-six per cent of the students had some experience of working in the audio visual industries before or during their courses. Of these, over half of all white students had experience of work in the sector, compared to 28 per cent of BME students. The main form of work undertaken by students was as volunteers or through internships, although 21 per cent had managed to secure themselves paid work.
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- Eighty-four per cent of white workers and eighty-five per cent of black and minority ethnic workers surveyed had higher educational qualifications, reflecting the skilled nature of the AV industries.
- Workers reported that ongoing training was a problem in the AV sector, particularly due to the increase in freelance work. Rapid advances in technology adds to this problem, as does the fact that freelance workers find it difficult to take time out of work due to loss of income.
- Sixty per cent of workers surveyed thought they had not been granted an interview or not been given a job because they did not have the necessary experience.
- Seventeen per cent of workers surveyed said they did not feel they had the required skills or qualifications for their work.
- A third of employers also thought that colleges and universities did not adequately prepare students for the audio visual industries and 20 per cent thought media-related courses were not practical enough. In particular, some employers thought that media studies courses were of little benefit to the industry.
- A number of employers noted that there were a number of specialist media courses at specific colleges that were providing a first rate education and skills training which were of particular benefit to sections of the audio visual industries and that more could be done to develop relationships between colleges and employers.

Recruitment and employment

- The findings echo other research that points to the importance of good contacts in securing employment. Informal recruitment methods are still widely used in the industry adding to the perception that old boys’ networks operate to the benefit of some and the detriment of others.
- In terms of how respondents learnt about their current job, the most commonly reported method was through friends in the industry and by word of mouth. Surprisingly, more BME workers than white workers had used friends (35% to 28%) and word of mouth (27% compared to 18%) for finding their current jobs.
- This appears to contradict other data where BME workers have reported the difficulties of securing work because of the role that social networks play and the degree of nepotism operating in the sector. However, what it may indicate is that
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because this is such an important way of finding work, BME workers are more reliant on people they have worked with previously in order to find their next job than white workers, because previous colleagues are aware of their skills and experience and are prepared to assist in providing job opportunities or other useful contacts.

• White students were 20 per cent more likely to have contacts through friends in the industry than black and minority ethnic students.

Working for love or money?

• The expectation that new entrants will have to work without remuneration at the start of their careers adds to the disadvantage faced by workers from lower income backgrounds.

• Even those that do manage to secure paid employment are faced with the problem that the average starting salary for those starting out in the sector amounts to just £12,000. For recent graduates, faced with college debts and the cost of living in London, they are finding it difficult to survive on such low pay.

• One young worker commented; ‘I got offered some great jobs at [broadcaster A] and [broadcaster B] in the documentary department, but [broadcaster B] wanted me to work free for three months, and [broadcaster A] was a six-month free placement. I’d just supported myself throughout the whole of university. I didn’t get any help. Absolutely no way I could do that. And because the jobs weren’t 9 ‘til–5 then I couldn’t even do a bar job in the evening.’

• Forty-seven per cent of workers said they had undertaken unpaid work before getting paid work in the sector. Of even greater concern is the fact that workers reported that it was becoming increasingly common that people would do periods of free work throughout their careers. The expectation was that pay might be forthcoming if the project was successful, or that future work with the company might be possible.

Equal opportunities and discrimination

• Just over half of all workers said they worked in companies that had equal opportunities policies, most of them covering gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and age.
Firstly, in answer to a general question, sixty-one per cent of workers said they thought there was some form of discrimination in the audio visual industries, although BME workers were more likely that white workers to think so (76 per cent compared to 54 per cent).

Secondly, of those respondents who thought there was discrimination in the AV sector, thirty per cent stated this was due to ethnicity and 26 per cent to gender. However, the highest figure related to age discrimination (36 per cent). Discrimination as a result of appearance also scored high, with 26 per cent of respondents having concerns in this area, just a little higher than those who noted disability discrimination (24 per cent).

Overall, we could not find a relationship between those people who had experienced discrimination and those companies that had equalities policies and those that did not. However, in respect of gender and ethnicity, people in companies that did have equalities policies were less likely than those in companies that did not, to think that there was discrimination against women or ethnic minorities, in terms of recruitment and employment. This suggests that equal opportunities create a climate where it is thought that discrimination is being tackled, even if in practice it may have little effect.

Forty-one per cent of respondents had witnessed or been a victim of some form of discrimination in the sector and this related to promotion, pay and recruitment. BME workers were, however, twice as likely to have either witnessed, or been a victim of discrimination than white workers.

Forty per cent of BME workers thought that their ethnic background had made it more difficult for them to get work in the industry while only 5 per cent of white workers held this opinion. Conversely, 21 per cent of BME workers felt that their ethnicity had also assisted them in getting work in the sector, as did 16 per cent of white workers.

A high percentage of people (38 per cent) felt that their lack of contacts affected their chances of getting a job. Again the figures for BME workers were higher than those of white workers (45 per cent compared to 33 per cent). There was no significant difference in terms of gender.

Twelve per cent of women thought they had been discriminated against because of their gender and thirty-two per cent of BME workers said they had experienced discrimination because of their ethnicity, with just one per cent of white workers reporting discrimination based on ethnicity.
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- The figures for disability discrimination were very low – perhaps an indication of the low numbers of disabled people working in the industry.
- In terms of age discrimination, there were no significant differences between gender and ethnicity but, older workers (72 per cent) were also more likely to report age discrimination than younger workers (58 per cent).

‘A white middle-class industry’ – the effect of race, class and culture

- The combination of race, class and culture and the negative effects on BME workers’ careers was a subject discussed at length with workers. While there were few references to direct forms of discrimination or racist abuse, it was found that indirect discrimination, or cultural misrepresentations based on ethnicity are not uncommon in the audio visual industries.
- Workers frequently made references to ‘old boys’ networks and ‘nepotism’ as means of securing employment. The tendency to recruit from within limited cultural circles can result in the exclusion of workers outside of particular social networks.
- Even BME workers with similar educational and middle class backgrounds as white co-workers faced the problem that they were often stereotyped as working class. As this black camera operator commented: ‘there is a lot of class discrimination, but on top of that there is race discrimination as well as sexual discrimination and everything else, but…a lot of people put racial discrimination down to class because people tend to think ‘well black people are working class’.’
- A young black woman working in new media design also echoed these views; ‘I mean, like, as a black person you still end up outside that circle. I mean, like, the old boys’ network. You could be part of the old boys’ association at Eton, but you’re still a black boy. It just doesn’t happen for you the same way it happens for all the other old boys.’
- Even at the start of their careers, recent graduates were aware of the effects that the cultural norms in the industry could impact upon their careers. A young female Asian graduate found it difficult to progress because she did not ‘fit in’ with the general culture of after work socialising: ‘I was up against an old boy that would go out every Friday night drinking with everybody and he is now successfully editing for
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[company]. If I’d stayed on, may be I’d be doing that. But I didn’t really want to go out when I don’t like drinking’.

• This was echoed by a black woman: ‘I think you find that when you’re in this type of industry you do have to, you certainly have to, change your own persona just to fit in with people and you have to go out and drink. They do their thing and if you don’t adhere to that thing, you’re not part of their social thing. You’re so outcast’.

• Whereas a young male graduate said: ‘I’m white and I’m male and I’m young. Everything is geared to make my life easier’.
**Introduction: a review of recent research**

In the last few decades, the UK’s audio visual industries have been a focus for researchers interested in changes in employment practice and industrial relations. The re-regulation of the television industry and changes in technology have significantly transformed the labour process and the nature of the employment relationship since the 1980s. Used as a signifier of future industrial change, the audio visual industries have provided researchers with ample opportunities to investigate what these changes might mean for the future of work (Antcliff 2005; Blair 2001; Dex et al. 2000; Platman 2003). Yet there has been little research into the effect these changes have had on young workers or new entrants to the sector.

For a number of researchers, the focus has been on the changes in the industries that have resulted in a decline in relatively secure full-time employment and an increase in informal, short-term and freelance work, issues we will cover in some detail later in this report. For others, there has been a concern about what these changes mean for some groups of workers (Baumann 2002; Platman 2003; Saundry 2001; Ursell 2000). Platman and Tinker (1998) studied contraction and redundancies at the BBC over a 15-year period in order to understand what effect this had on the employment of older people. Willis and Dex (2003) have noted that the increase in ‘flexibility’ in the audio visual (AV) industries has meant flexibility on the part of employees and less so on the part of employers. Also, the gendered nature of work in the AV sector and the implications this has for equal opportunities appear as evident today as in the early 1980s, despite the introduction of equalities policies (Gallagher 1981; Mitchell 1999). However, it is notable from much of the literature on the audio visual industries that young workers or workers from ethnic minorities, feature little, or not at all in most research accounts, notwithstanding an important recent report on cultural diversity in public sector broadcasting which explores why there are still so few people from minorities in senior creative or editorial roles in the industries (Campion 2005).
London is the hub of the UK’s audio visual industries with a quarter of all AV companies based in the capital and a workforce of around 250,000 – half of all people working in the sector in the UK. Yet it is estimated that, in London, only 10 per cent of the workforce is from BME groups (Skillset 2006) despite the fact that BME workers make up 25 per cent of London’s labour force. The figures are even lower in some parts of the industry (e.g. in film production, the BME figure is only 6 per cent). In noting these discrepancies, the Audio Visual Skills Action Plan for London (London Skills Commission 2003) reports that the AV sector in London is failing to recruit from a sufficiently wide range of sources, resulting in the low representation of BME workers. This is also true for women workers, where certain occupations remain the preserve of men. Other key challenges noted in the report are the over-supply of aspirants (25,000 students graduating from media-related courses in 2000); a rapid increase in small and medium-sized enterprises and micro business (resulting in the need for company development and management and leadership skills); high proportion of freelance workers (up to 50 per cent in London) and a sector that is fast moving and dynamic (creating new skills needs). The report notes that this goes beyond the individual equality implications for recruitment and employment, it also contributes negatively to outputs from the industry at a much wider level. The report states; ‘Cinema, television and radio have a vital role to play in shaping British culture, and encouraging active and informed citizenship in all ages, backgrounds and cultures’ (p.41) and this has been echoed by the industry’s Cultural Diversity Network (CDN).

The CDN was launched in 2000 to ‘change the face of television, ensuring fair representation of Britain’s ethnic population on screen and behind the camera’ (Cultural Diversity Network 2006). Included in the aims of CDN was a desire to set targets for ethnic minority employment and to obtain a comprehensive picture of ethnic minority employment in UK broadcasting. However, a recent report, which was based on the views of over 100 programme makers across the industry, was critical of the slow progress made in this regard. Mukti Campion’s (2005: 14) report concluded that despite such initiatives ‘issues of diversity were simply not on the personal radar of most people in power’ and two of the largest broadcasters were not prepared to share with her the actual numbers of
BME workers they employed. The report was also highly critical of the ‘box ticking’ or ‘colouring by numbers’ approach to diversity within the industry, commenting that it fails in those areas or jobs that are high profile or where power and influence lies. Thus, she claims, ‘box ticking’ becomes a cynical exercise and is likely to cause resentment, and that diversity initiatives often set people up to fail. On one level, the informal approach to recruitment, which is prevalent in the sector, is regarded as a major barrier to diversity, yet the formal methods in some of the biggest employers are also seen to work against certain groups of workers. For example, a broadcasting editor, for a large TV company who was interviewed in Campion’s (2005: 70) report, stated:

*We have these arcane boards, which is very intimidating if you haven’t been to Oxbridge and are not used to that kind of interviewing. It can be very rigid at times and doesn’t allow us to get people in who, frankly, sometimes may not be quite right yet but have the potential.*

This raises important questions about recruitment practice. If both formal and informal recruitment methods seemingly disadvantage some groups of workers, what alternatives are there and how might practices be changed to ensure greater diversity in the industry?

In addition to the issue of diversity, there are other factors that affect young people and new entrants to the AV industries and their chances of securing employment. One is the over-supply of aspirants in the sector. It is estimated that there were 25,000 students graduating from media courses in 2000 (and although there are no more recent accurate figures, it is accepted that the numbers have increased) and 60,000 new entrants seeking work each year (Pye Tait 2004). The Pye Tait report claims that only 12,000 new graduates are recruited each year and of these, less than half are people with media-related qualifications.

Other factors, highlighted in the *Audio Visual Skills Action Plan for London* were the rapid increase in small and medium-sized enterprises and micro business (resulting in the need for company development and management and leadership skills); high proportion of freelancers in the workforce (up to 50 per cent in London) and a sector that is fast moving and dynamic (creating new skills needs). All these are likely to have an impact on recruitment and employment: small business are less likely to have equal opportunities or
formal recruitment policies (Cully et al. 1999) and rely to a greater extent on the use of freelancers, factors which are known to lead to less than transparent employment practices. Together, these factors provide some real challenges for new entrants and under-represented groups in the sector.

Much has been written about the difficulty of finding employment in the highly competitive AV industries in the first instance (Antcliff et al. 2005a; Antcliff et al. 2005b; Blair 2001; Dex et al. 2000; Saundry 2001). But this is magnified by the problem of sustaining work in an industry where freelancing has increased and where many jobs last only for short periods (Antcliff 2005; Antcliff et al. 2005a; Antcliff et al. 2005b). During the last 25 years, the UK television industry has undergone a process of change and re-regulation that has led to substantial changes to working practices, not least the increased competition between workers and the precarious nature of employment (Blair 2001). In a study tracking production workers in the UK television industry from 1994 to 1997, researchers found that the majority of television workers used to be salaried and in long-term jobs, but since the 1980s there have been significant changes with the result that half of the sector’s workforce in London is now working freelance (BFI 1999).

In the case of younger workers (21–30 years), the study found that, in London, 65 per cent were working freelance. One of the effects of the increase in freelance work, the authors’ claim, was that ‘many of the risks associated with television work have been passed to the workforce and away from the broadcasters’ (Dex et al. 2000: 304). In these circumstances, the need to maintain an ‘address book’ of contacts, who may be able to assist in gaining work, has become an even greater necessity, and this is clearly more difficult for new entrants who are likely to have fewer contacts than people who have been working in the industry for some time. Indeed, the British Film Institute Tracking Survey recorded that, although the most popular method of getting a first job in the sector was, overall, by formal application or interview, followed by personal contacts, this situation was reversed for 21–30 year olds (BFI 1995: 14). In the case of this age cohort, 38 per cent got their first job though personal contacts compared to 24 per cent of people aged 51 and above. What these figures show is that the method of securing a first job in
the industry has changed, with younger workers having to rely more on personal contacts to obtain their first job than their predecessors.

Finding work: what has class got to do with it?

A survey of 1,360 young people who were new entrants to the AV sector found that more than three-quarters of workers aged between 20 and 23 had done up to three months’ unpaid work since starting their careers. The survey from Television and Young People (TVYP) also found that 12 per cent had done six months’ work for free. While this has been a common way of gaining the necessary work experience or contacts to enable new entrants to find work for many years, evidence suggests that new workers are now expected to work for much longer periods without remuneration. One independent producer has commented that, ‘the gap between rich and poor in TV is widening all the time – so many young people work for nothing. This advantages the middle class children of London and the south east against the rest of the country’ (Patterson 2001).

The introduction of tuition fees and the fact that many students now leave college with considerable amounts of debt is also likely to add to the disadvantage faced by workers from lower income backgrounds who cannot afford to work for free. Even those that do manage to secure paid employment are faced with the problem that the average starting salary for those starting out in the sector amounts to just £12,000 (White 2006). For recent graduates faced with college debts and the cost of living in London, it is difficult to survive on this pay. One young worker commented; ‘after months without pay and a huge student debt to pay off, I just can’t afford to carry on. I’m keen, hardworking and enthusiastic but it seems that isn’t enough any more. These companies that don’t pay their workers are simply sucking the life out of us for no return’ (Broadcast 2006).

The issue of the class status of workers in the audio visual industries has been highlighted in several other studies (BFI 1995; Campion 2005). It has been noted that there is a high percentage of workers in the sector who have attended independent schools (37 per cent in the BFI Tracking Survey) and significant numbers who received their higher education
from Oxford and Cambridge. Some see the social networks, which result from these educational backgrounds, as an important means of securing employment. The report ‘Look whose talking. Cultural diversity, public sector broadcasting and the national conversation’ published in 2005, examined the views of over 100 programme makers across the broadcasting industry and highlighted how a person’s class status was often very important in establishing or progressing in the sector:

If I hadn’t been to Oxford, I wouldn’t be here. The interesting thing about me is not my Asian-ness but my Oxbridge-ness. (Editor)

You have to know the system. We have these very arcane boards, which is very intimidating if you haven’t been to Oxbridge and are not used to that kind of interviewing. (Editor)

The whole dinner party circuit as a way of getting jobs and influence was rife and this discriminated against white working-class as much as those who were from ethnic minorities. (Human resource manager)

In such circumstances and in an industry that is notoriously difficult to gain entry anyway, the opportunities for young workers from less privileged backgrounds to get a job are reduced.

**What difference does a degree make?**

The last couple of decades have seen increasing numbers of students entering higher education, and more employers expecting young workers to have a degree. Clearly, this is more evident in some professions than others and one would expect many employers in the audio visual industries to perhaps require employees to be educated to degree standard because of the professional nature of many of the jobs in the industries. Research suggests that this is the case, as three quarters of people surveyed in the BFI tracking survey reported that they had higher education degrees. The survey also noted that this increased to 88 per cent for the 21-30 age group – a very high percentage if replicated across the industry as a whole. The BFI survey also noted that the most popular degree subjects were English, art, politics, history and languages, not as young people might expect, media, film or TV studies, although a quarter of 21–30 year olds surveyed in the BFI report did have degrees in these subjects. This raises some important questions about whether those looking for a career in the audio visual industries have the necessary information at an early stage about what educational requirements are required for the jobs that they are
hoping to go into. Is it that they do not know what education or skills the industry requires, or are they getting the wrong information from schools, colleges or universities?

The issues noted in this introduction are those that have been highlighted most often in recent studies or reports on recruitment and employment practice in the audio visual sector and they are the factors which can have a particular effect on the employment of new entrants into the industry. We now explore these from our own recent research.

Given the reliance on social networks to find jobs, and the fact that the AV workforce in London is predominantly white and middle-class, we might assume that BME graduates, who are often assumed to be working-class on account of their ethnicity, would perhaps face greater obstacles than their white counterparts in securing work following graduation. We have sought to test this assumption by exploring the hopes and aspirations of media students and followed this with focus groups drawn from this group once they had left college, in order to explore graduates’ first experiences of the labour market.

In addition, we have surveyed and interviewed BME workers in the sector in order to understand how they have developed and negotiated their careers. Questions were asked about work histories and what, if any, barriers had been faced when trying to progress in their industry. Was there discrimination in the sector? And, if so, what form did it take and what impact did it have on a person’s ability to find work? Recruitment and employment practices were looked at in detail both from the perspective of the employer and the employee (or more often, due to freelancing, the worker). Do informal recruitment practices tend to replicate the demographics of the AV sector or are they a way of BME workers circumventing formal employment practices that still seem to favour cultural norms? What are employers looking for when recruiting workers? Are colleges and universities providing the necessary skills and experience demanded by employers? These were just some of the questions asked during the course of the research and the following chapters attempt to answer these questions with reference to the data collected.
The content of the report

Chapter one sets out the available demographic data on London’s AV sector. It describes a sector that is important, in terms of London’s labour force and at the same time provides some basic data on the geography of London’s AV sector.

Chapter two looks at the educational and qualification background of new recruits into the AV sector. It finds that, by the end of their studies, for many students there had been a reassessment as to whether they were adequately prepared to work in the sector. It also looks at what employers say they are looking for, in terms of qualifications and experience, and shows that, for many, there was a greater interest in students with a subject background that was not in media studies.

Chapter three explores recruitment and employment strategies, both from the perspective of employers and workers. It shows that there is still a high level of reliance on informal methods of recruitment, such as word of mouth and recommendations or introductions, and discusses why this is the case, relating it both to the apparent over-supply of potential recruits and to the growth of freelance work – where word of mouth and contacts are the key to new jobs. For new entrants, as well as for existing workers, the chapter shows that there is a strong perception of the industry being one that relies on ‘old boy’ networks and on contacts. BME applicants perceive this as making it more difficult for them to get work in the sector and to progress within it.

Chapter four deals with an issue of much contention within the sector, which is the extent to which unpaid work is an established way of working. Two weeks’ work experience is a commonly recognised part of an established course of study and is valued by students as a way of getting a ‘toe hold’ in the industry. However, the chapter documents that its use is more widespread than this and that periods of unpaid work, both at the start and in the course of many workers’ careers, are no longer considered as exceptional. The chapter also looks at the extent to which work experience has been substituted for other methods of assessing potential new recruits.
Chapter five explores the extent to which barriers to employment within the industry are premised on discrimination. It shows that while much of the industry has adopted equal opportunities policies, they do not necessarily guarantee environments where discrimination is not experienced.

Chapter six takes this issue further, by exploring the effects of race, sex, class and culture on employment within the sector. It shows that stereotyping and narrow definitions of ‘culture’ limit the employment opportunities of black workers and act as barriers to their equal participation within the sector.

Chapter seven sets out the main conclusions from the research and explores some policy implications.
Methodology

This chapter sets out the methodological framework used to collect and analyse data collected over the last two years. Using mixed qualitative methods we sought to gather data from different sources – self-completed questionnaires, telephone and face-to-face interviews, and focus groups – in order to capture a diverse range of experiences and, at the same time, to probe more deeply into some of the issues faced by those working in the audio visual industries in London.

Participants in the research included final-year students studying for media/industry related qualifications and graduates from these courses as well as current workers and employers across the AV sector. An advisory group, comprised of industry representatives, met regularly throughout the research to discuss findings. This included individuals from Skillset, Ofcom, BECTU, BBC, London Development Agency, Asians in Media and academics from London Metropolitan University and Imperial College. These meetings helped to guide the research, to assist in finding participants and allowed us to test whether data accorded with peoples’ experiences of recruitment and employment in the AV sector.

Research aims and objectives

The research was funded by the European Social Fund and supported by the Learning and Skills Council and it set out to look at employment and recruitment practices in the audio visual industries in London. In particular, it aimed to establish the significance or otherwise of informal recruitment practices in the industry and whether or not these have an adverse impact on maintaining or reproducing discrimination against black and minority ethnic (BME) workers.

The intention was that the research should have practical outcomes that were able to inform policy makers in the sector. It aimed to highlight the effects that different employment and recruitment procedures have upon different groups of workers. With this intention in mind, the researchers sought the views of those working in the field at two seminars held in London during the period of the research. The purpose was to present
interim and final findings and to gauge their resonance with workers as well as to encourage feedback on what might be done to eliminate the barriers and hurdles faced by BME workers trying to enter or sustain themselves in the audio visual sector.

**Project design**

The process of drafting a research project generally requires that a research timetable is put together in order to conceive of how the project will develop throughout the allotted time-span. The intention is to identify the different stages that need to take place and how much time is needed for each aspect of work. While these are often presented in research proposals in neat, logical and often linear format, research practice is seldom so neat and tidy. Once the research begins and a review of the literature has been completed, and initial data has been gathered, it is often necessary to reorder the timetable. For example, it may be that survey data makes you rethink the questions you want to put to interviewees or that, discussions with people in focus groups may make you decide to add additional questions to your survey. This process of change, refinement and adaptation is a common feature of research projects. However, in this project, we were somewhat limited in the room we had from deviating from the original research design. As noted earlier, the project was funded by the European Social Fund under the ESF Objective 3 programme for London 2000-2006. Appropriately, the ESF is careful to monitor the progress of the projects it funds and thus appoints auditors to ensure research is being carried out in accordance with the project design. However, this sometimes resulted in a disjuncture between the needs of the research team to vary the stages of the research and to ‘tweak’ the research design, and the requirements of the auditors to follow and monitor exactly the original research design in its linear order. Consequently, the auditing schedule determined how and in what sequence the research was conducted and sometimes restricted the use of different research methods. For example, although the research team had said they wanted to carry out a number of focus groups with BME workers in the AV industry, it became apparent in the course of the research that it was more appropriate to conduct one-to-one, face-to-face interviews with some people who were concerned about talking about their experiences of racism in an open forum. However, as this did not appear in the original research plan and since it would have required ‘re-profiling’ and resultant delay, we felt unable to substitute the focus groups with face-to-face interviews.
Also, the auditing plan required a separate research report for each stage of the research. And, while logical from an accounting perspective, this did not allow cross cutting themes from the different stages of the project to be considered or discussed in project meetings. This was not a logical way of conceptualising and developing ideas from a research perspective. Nevertheless, we hope that we have managed to overcome some of these issues in this final report where we are able to pull the different aspects of the research into a coherent whole.

**Stages of the research**

**Stage one: mapping of pan London statistical sources**

The aim of this part of the research was to provide some contextual statistical information for the project and to highlight the employment characteristics and diversity of London’s audio visual sector. Data has been used from the UK government’s Labour Force Survey and Skillset’s Employment Census. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the most comprehensive survey on worker participation in the labour market, including, pay, conditions, industry, hours, etc and Skillset’s Employment Census provides the best data on employment and diversity in the sector as a whole.

Skillset’s Employment Census is conducted biennially and is distributed to every company in the sector for which records are available. The latest Census, for which we have data, was conducted in 2004. The Census is designed to provide a snapshot of the industry – and those working within it – on a particular day. This methodology was chosen in an attempt to ensure that workers were not double counted. As a consequence, the Census excludes freelancers not working on Census Day. Sectors covered in the survey include television, radio, animation, facilities, interactive media, commercials, corporate production and all film sectors apart from production. Photo imaging and performers are also excluded from the Census as they operate differently from the sectors covered.

**Stage two: final-year student questionnaire**

The first aspect of the fieldwork was a questionnaire survey of final-year students studying media studies, television, radio, production, sound engineering and related
courses. We decided to focus on these students rather than those on general degree courses as it was thought more likely that students on these courses would be considering a career in the audio visual sector. We were aware that these courses are not the only route to jobs in the industries and that some employers particularly value graduates with general degrees such as history, politics, geography, etc. However, with limited resources and without a general survey of students across London, we were unlikely to find sufficient numbers whose career choice was the audio visual industries. By focusing on students on media courses we were able to determine the characteristics, hopes and aspirations of those who were most likely to have decided they wanted to work in this sector.

This phase of the research was designed, firstly, to examine why students chose their courses; the reasons for choosing particular institutions; what they were doing prior to study and what they hoped to achieve afterwards. The intention was to explore how and where students intended to apply for jobs and why. A self-complete questionnaire was distributed to final-year students undertaking degree/diploma courses related to the audio visual industries in London, such as film and media studies (see Appendix one). Eleven colleges assisted with the distribution of the questionnaire and these are listed in Table 1. The colleges from where responses were drawn were a mix of pre- and post-1992 institutions and further education colleges. The list was drawn up in consultation with Skillset.

Students were asked to complete and return the questionnaire by post to the Working Lives Research Institute. We received at total of 226. As the questionnaires were distributed using a range of methods (in person by the research team following classes; handed out by college tutors and circulated via email) it is difficult to quantify how many were actually circulated. However, we are confident that we have covered a range of courses from a number of colleges in London that have a reputation for providing media courses and that the sample represents a cross section of final-year students. We were not aiming for a random representative sample of final-year media students, but to identify a range of views across a number of courses in colleges across London, and also to identify a number of students to take part in the next qualitative stage of the research – the focus groups. Although respondents were given the opportunity to remain anonymous, we did
ask that people leave their contact details should they wish to take part in further aspects of the research or if they would like to be made aware of the research findings. The majority of respondents left contact details and 20 graduates took part in focus groups.

Table 1: list of colleges where the respondents studied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College or institute</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barnet College</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Westminster College</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birkbeck, University of London</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldsmiths, University of London</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Film School</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Metropolitan College</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middlesex University</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ravensbourne</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond College</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roehampton University</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Arts, London College of Communication</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of East London</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>226</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stage three: audio visual workers in London survey

The research aimed to identify if there were any significant barriers preventing people joining or progressing within the sector and if so, what factors may be contributing to such barriers. In particular, the research questioned whether ethnicity had a positive or negative influence on individuals’ employment opportunities, and as such, we were keen to ensure that the survey included workers from ethnic minority groups who are under-represented in the audio visual sector.

A questionnaire survey was distributed to workers in London’s audio visual industries in an attempt to understand some of the issues relating to recruitment and employment in the sector (see Appendix two). Questionnaires were distributed using a number of methods in an attempt to reach a wide range of workers. Approximately 800 questionnaires were mailed (and emailed) to 38 employers to distribute to their staff. In addition, the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU) sent out around 2,000 questionnaires to its members in the London region. We also used established industry networks in order to reach black and minority ethnic (BME) workers
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in the sector, such as the Asians in Media web site, the BBC’s Black and Asian network, the Gathering, and BECTU’s black members’ network.

As we were relying solely on third parties to distribute the questionnaires by post, email and the Internet, we cannot be certain how many reached their intended targets. Although the employers agreed to take the questionnaire it is unclear how many actually gave them to their employers and in what numbers. For example, although some questionnaires could be traced to some employers, it was impossible to tell how many were returned from this source. Similarly, it was impossible to estimate how many people completed the questionnaire on the Asians in Media website, even though we know that around 40 were emailed directly from the site. A consequence of using these methods means that although it was possible to reach individuals who otherwise might have remained inaccessible, it is not possible to know the actual numbers of the questionnaires distributed and consequently, as in the student survey, we were not aiming for a random representative sample, but to collect a sample of views on the industry across a range of workplaces and professions – and again, to identify participants for the focus groups in stage four of the research.

A total of 540 completed questionnaires were returned and we do know that these came from each of the industry networks listed above. And, as just stated, although we cannot claim this to be a representative survey, from the analysis of the demographics of respondents it suggests that these sources have returned responses from a good cross section of the media industries and from a wide range of AV workers. As such, the data provides some new and interesting information on the employment and recruitment of people working in London’s audio visual sector.

Fifty-one per cent of responses were from males and 49 per cent from females. While broadly similar to the UK labour market, the figures include an over-representation of women who only represent 38 per cent of the AV sector. Sixty-seven per cent were from white ethnic groups, 13 per cent south Asian, 10 per cent, black British, Caribbean or African, one per cent Chinese, three per cent mixed ethnic groups and five per cent used the ‘other’ category to describe themselves. With a total BME response of 32 per cent, this represents a figure that is five percentage points higher than the total percentage of
BME people in employment in London across all sectors. It is also much higher than the reported figures of BME workers in the sector, which is estimated at around 10 per cent (Skillset, 2005). It would appear, therefore, that the use of BME industry networks to access workers has provided a larger sample of BME workers than would have been the case using general AV employee/employer networks. The sample figures by individual BME groups are relatively similar to those of the overall numbers in employment in London (see Table 2).

### Table 2. Breakdown by ethnic group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Survey sample</th>
<th>% of people in employment in London*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black British/Caribbean/African</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed ethnic group</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=531 (note: total may not add up to 100 as figures are rounded. * LFS 2005.

Of those that indicated they were from minority ethnic groups, 46 per cent were from Asian ethnic groups, 29 per cent black Caribbean or black British, 10 per cent African, four per cent Chinese, and 11 per cent described themselves from mixed ethnic groups.

If the figures are broken down by gender and ethnicity we find that white males were the largest groups in our sample and the lowest, BME males (see Table 3). As the table shows, the figures from the survey are not significantly different from the percentage of people generally in employment in London. There are no comparable figures from the Skillset data.

### Table 3. Breakdown by gender and ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Survey sample</th>
<th>% of people in employment in London*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BME males</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BME females</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White males</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White females</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In comparison to other surveys of workers in the AV industries (Skillset, BFI), our sample is significantly older, with a much higher percentage of people falling into the 30-50 age groups (see Table 4) and much lower in the 25-29 band (19% in our sample compared to 40% in the Skillset data). Reasons for this are not entirely clear, but given that we had a high number of respondents as a result of using BECTU’s mailing list of members, and
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given that the membership is older than the general AV workforce, then this could be a contributing factor. Clearly, this has the potential to impact on the findings, as people may have worked for longer in the industry and thus had a greater range of experience than might be the case in other research samples.

**Table 4. Breakdown by age**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age groups</th>
<th>Survey sample</th>
<th>Skillset data 2005</th>
<th>% of people in employment in London*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-49</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Only 42 people in the survey had been working in the industry for less than 2 years. The majority (58) had been working in the sector between 5 and 20 years, with almost a fifth having 20 years of AV work behind them. Given the high percentage of people in AV working freelance, we asked respondents how long they had been working in their current job. The highest percentage (24%) had been doing their current job for less than one year, and fewer than 10 per cent had been in post for 20+ years. Despite the increasing use of freelancers in the industry and the fact that the sector is characterised by continual short-term project work, 39 per cent of the sample had, in fact, been in their current jobs for between three and nine years. Again, the fact that older workers are represented in greater number in our sample could explain the relatively high percentage of workers being in their current jobs for between three and nine years. There were some notable differences between BME and white ethnic groups in how long individuals had worked in the AV sector. A third of BME workers had been working in the sector less than five years compared to 19 per cent of white workers. At the other end of the career spectrum, we find the reverse; 58 per cent of white workers had worked in the sector for 10 years or more, compared to 36 per cent of BME workers – perhaps suggesting that there have been more BME workers entering the sector over the last few years than in the past.

We received questionnaires from workers in a total of 133 different companies. Broadcast A was the employer from where there was the greatest number of responses (163) and these represented 30 per cent of the total.
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Other companies ranged from large broadcasters to small production companies and covered all sections of the industry, although workers in production, post production, camera, interactive media, sound and radio broadcasting were the six top occupations. Just over half of all respondents worked for large companies of over 500 workers, mainly in TV broadcasting, and a third worked for small companies with less than 50 workers.

Stage four: BME worker focus groups

Three focus groups with BME workers from the audio visual industries in London were conducted to investigate how people came to get jobs in the sector, what routes were taken to obtain first jobs, the role of contacts in finding work and the impact of increasing freelance work. Participants were found from the questionnaire survey in stage three of the research. All BME respondents to the questionnaire who gave their contact details were written to via email asking if they would be prepared to take part in a focus group. In all, three focus groups were undertaken with 21 participants.

Two researchers from the Working Lives Research Institute facilitated the focus groups; one took place at the Institute and two at the Trades Union Congress building in central London. All took place at 6pm and lasted for approximately 2 hours. The same interview schedule was used in each (see Appendix 3), but discussions were allowed to develop freely in order to take account of the issues people felt most strongly about. The focus groups were recorded, transcribed and analysed using coding sheets to draw out common themes. All individuals were anonymised.

Ten of the focus group participants were female and 11 male. All were from black or South Asian ethnic groups. Most of the participants were in their mid-to-late 30s and a couple were in their 40s. Two were in the early stages of their careers but the majority had worked in the industry for between 5-15 years.

Nearly all participants were working freelance, only two had staff jobs and they were employed at a large broadcaster. It is not clear why the majority of participants were freelance rather than employees, but perhaps the greater flexibility (or uncertainty) of their work meant that they were more likely to be available at the time we held the focus
groups. In addition, the groups were relatively young (compared to the labour market overall) which might reflect the increasing tendency for younger workers to be freelance in the audio visual industries. The fact that the majority were currently freelance, does not particularly affect the findings as these workers discussed their experiences throughout their careers and most had previously had staff jobs at some point in their time working in the sector. A wide range of jobs were undertaken by our sample including: TV directors, sound technician, assistant producer, cinematographer, sound engineer, new media design, writer/director, camera operators, editor/writer, director, lecturer/director, journalist, actors, filmmakers and producers.

**Stage five: graduate focus groups**

Focus groups were conducted with recent graduates to assess their experiences of the labour market and to explore whether or not there were differences between the experiences of BME and white workers. Graduates were identified from the students who had left their contact details in stage two of the research. All were emailed to ask if they would attend a focus group from 6.30pm to 8.30pm at the Working Lives Research Institute to discuss issues of recruitment and employment in London’s audio visual industries. Four focus groups took place approximately eight months after the survey, once students had completed their courses and had entered the job market. There were 20 participants from a number of colleges, 19 who took part in the four sessions, plus one who wanted to take part but could not attend and was interviewed by telephone (see Table 5 and Table 6).
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Table 5: Focus group participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnic origin</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White other</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White Swiss</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White other</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>British Chinese Malaysian</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Kashmiri British</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White Portuguese</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>British Asian/white</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White Portuguese</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian (tel interview)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Colleges attended by focus group participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of the Arts London</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldsmiths University</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Film School</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roehampton University</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Westminster College</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birkbeck University</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middlesex University</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Metropolitan University</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The focus groups explored how individuals had fared in seeking employment. Questions were asked about the type of employment they were doing and how they had found their current jobs as well as how useful their courses were in preparing them for jobs in the AV industries. The same interview schedule was used in each focus group (see Appendix 4), but discussions were allowed to develop freely in order to take account of the issues people felt most strongly about. The discussions were recorded, transcribed and analysed using coding sheets to draw out common themes. All individuals were anonymised.
Nine of the 20 participants were currently working in the audio visual sector, while others had either gone back to college to do further study or were doing other jobs while they looked for work in the AV industries; just two were unemployed. Fourteen graduates were women and nine were from black and minority ethnic groups. The richness of this data was extremely useful in exploring the recruitment and employment issues that were at the heart of this research project.

Stage six: employer telephone interviews

A telephone survey of 100 employers in London’s audio visual industries was conducted in May and June 2006. Employers’ details were obtained from Skillset. A sampling frame was drawn up in an attempt to get a cross section of employers according to industry and company size. As such, we have companies from each of the main industries and at different company size (see Table 7). As can be seen from the figures below, the majority of companies in the sample are small firms, reflecting their dominance in the sector. It was more difficult to get larger companies to take part and a number stated that they had a policy not to take part in surveys. The main purpose of the survey was to identify 20 companies willing to take part in in-depth interviews as well as to gather some basic data on recruitment and employment practices in the audio visual industries (see Appendix 5). The intention was to use data from the survey to inform the research questions for the in-depth interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company size</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Large</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercials production</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate production</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer games/offline multimedia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent production</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post production</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web and internet</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>61</strong></td>
<td><strong>29</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodology

Stage seven: employer in-depth interviews

Twenty in-depth, semi-structured interviews with employers in London’s audio visual industries were undertaken in September, October and November 2006. Interview subjects were located principally through the telephone survey conducted in May/June 2006, when participants were asked whether they would be willing to take part in a longer in-depth interview later in the year. A minority of the interviews were obtained through snowballing. In most cases, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, although in a small number (three) it was not possible to record the interview – mainly because the location where the interview took place was not suitable for recording. All of the employer respondents were anonymised. A copy of the interview schedule is provided in Appendix 6.

As shown in Table 8, the research covers the views of a variety of employers, by company size and by industry.

Table 8. Breakdown by employer size* and industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Small (&lt; 50 workers)</th>
<th>Medium (50-249)</th>
<th>Large (&gt;250)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast TV</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercials production</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution</td>
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<td>Independent production</td>
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<td>Post production</td>
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* Employer size is calculated on number of workers, including freelance workers

The majority of the employer interviews were conducted in companies that had been established within the last 10 to 20 years. In most cases, these had their origins in a single or two-person undertaking that had grown in size over the years. In many cases, the companies were still run by the original owner/manager. An interviewee, for example, had established Independent production A, in 1991, originally as a one-person outfit. It now employs six full-time staff, and also uses around 30 freelance workers in the course of a year. Independent production D had been set up in 1994, at the time to allow the individual to continue to work for a large broadcast company, where he had been told that he either had to become a direct employee or set up a company. It was thus just a ‘mechanism to be employed’ and he ‘didn’t take it seriously as a company’. It was only
about three years on, at which stage ‘you sink or swim’ that it began to grow and develop as a genuinely independent production company. It now employs around a dozen people directly with anything up to 20 freelance workers, dependent on the productions they are working on. Radio A had been set up almost as a ‘joke’ but had really taken off as a popular community radio station, on the air 24/7 and with a London audience of in excess of 80,000. Of the 20 companies, three had been in existence before 1970; two had been established in the 1970s; four in the 1980s; eight in the 1990s and three since 2000. Small employers, in particular, were eager to show that they had a loyal, core staff, even where they relied heavily on freelance and temporary workers for much of the work that they undertook. Independent B pointed out that they ‘don’t have a very big turnover of our permanent staff’.

All of the employers were based in London, but in six cases they also had offices in other UK locations. One company was US owned and thus had its headquarters in the USA.
Chapter one: demographics of London's audio visual industries

The audio visual industries contribute significantly to London’s economy. The sector as a whole is worth around £23bn (around 2.5% of GDP) in the UK. Given that around a quarter of the UK’s companies are based in the capital, employing a workforce of around 250,000, this is an important industry for London.

The geographical concentration of AV industries in London is largely due to the presence of the sector’s major employers such as the BBC, Channel 4, BskyB, Capital Radio, ITV, Five, Discovery, MTV and most of the larger independents. In addition, the interactive media and commercials parts of the sector provide high quality creative and technical services to London’s global advertising in the financial and business sectors. However, the importance of the industry to London goes far beyond the benefit to the economy. As a recent report (London Skills Commission 2003) noted:

*The strategic importance of the sector, both to London and the UK, is far wider than can be measured using these indices alone. Cinema, television and radio have a vital role to play in shaping British culture, and encouraging active and informed citizenship in all ages, backgrounds and cultures. The broadcasting and interactive media industries in particular have considerable secondary economic impact through their relationship with the advertising industry, which is likely to increase with the growth of new digital channels and platforms.*

In noting the industry’s importance in terms of shaping British culture and encouraging active and informed citizenship in all ages, backgrounds and cultures, the *Audio visual Skills Action Plan for London* has highlighted a significant issue for the sector if it is to meet this challenge. Currently, it is estimated that the audio visual industries in London employ just 10 per cent of their workforces from black and minority ethnic groups, even though quarter of London’s workforce is made up of black and minority ethnic workers.

This chapter presents some basic demographic data on the AV industry. The data is drawn from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and from Skillset’s Employment Census. The LFS is the most comprehensive survey on worker participation in the labour market, and covers pay, conditions, industry, hours, and so on. Skillset, in its remit as the Sector Skills
Council for the AV industries, comprises broadcast, film, video, interactive media and photo imaging. Skillset’s Employment Census provides the best data on employment and diversity in the AV sector as a whole.

LFS is a large sample household survey carried out on a quarterly basis, providing information on the UK labour market. As a sample survey, the LFS is weighted to represent the UK labour force as a whole. While it is possible to use the LFS to get detailed information on sections of the labour market, its use is restricted when attempting to analyse smaller and smaller groups of workers and it is increasingly problematic when seeking data that can break workers down into separate ethnic groups, as there is insufficient data to provide reliable statistics. Skillset’s Employment Census is a biennial survey conducted by the Sector Skills Council. The Census is distributed to every company in the sector, for which records are available. It is designed to provide a snapshot of the industry – and those working within it – on a particular day. This methodology is chosen in an attempt to ensure that workers are not double counted. However, as a consequence, the Census will exclude freelancers not working on Census Day. Sectors covered in the survey include television, radio, animation, facilities, interactive media, commercials, corporate production and all film sectors, apart from production. Photo imaging and performers are excluded from the Census as they operate differently from the sectors covered. Census data includes a comprehensive list of company names and addresses within the London area (as defined by postcode) and includes people employed in the AV industries on the day – both employees and freelancers. However, it should be noted that not all companies record the number of people they employ. As such, Skillset weights data, from estimated employment figures.

**Labour Force Survey and Skillset’s Employment Census data**

Skillset’s Employment Census provides robust data of the AV industries in the UK and details the number of people employed within each. Interactive media (computer games, offline multimedia and web and internet) form the largest industry within the AV sector in London, employing around 23,900 people. Broadcast TV is the second largest industry sector in London employing around 12,300 people, with 10,000 working in broadcast radio. The Skillset Employment Census provides a breakdown of the AV workforce in
terms of their gender and ethnicity. The overall representation of women working in London’s AV industries is 39 per cent and this remained largely unchanged since the previous Employment Census. On Census Day 2004, women comprised half or more of the industry’s workforce in make up and hairdressing (73%), costume/wardrobe (64%), production (51%) and combined ‘other’ or generic occupational groups (51%). In all the remaining occupational groups less than half the workforce was female, with representation the lowest in broadcast engineering (11%), sound (11%), special physical effects (10%), transmission (9%), processing laboratories (7%) and lighting (6%).

The representation of ethnic minorities differs substantially between AV industry sectors in London. Web, Internet and broadcast TV have the highest levels of employment of BME staff. Ethnic minorities in offline multimedia, computer games and commercials, by contrast, represent less than five per cent of the workforce in London. If BME involvement in the AV industries is examined by occupational activity or focus, the picture changes again. For London, Skillset’s data shows that there is the greatest presence of BME workers in journalism and sport (16%) and in broadcast engineering (12%) while their presence in other occupational groups falls within a range of two per cent to eight per cent.

Pay differentials
Skillset’s 2005 Survey of the Audio Visual Industries Workforce (2006) shows that one in five (18%) of those working in London’s AV industries earned less than £20,000 in the year leading up to the survey. At the other end of the scale, 15 per cent earned £50,000 or more. Results also show differences in income between white and BME members of the workforce. Three in 10 (31%) BME workers had earned less than £20,000, from work in London’s AV industries during the past year (compared to 17% of white workers). Just four per cent of those from ethnic minorities had earned £50,000 or more, compared to 15 per cent of white staff.

Company size
It is notable that overall the size of companies in the AV sector is quite small (notwithstanding a few large companies like ITV and the BBC). Using data from 1,210
companies in London (excluding the two above) who have provided details of employees and freelancers, we find that the average sized company employs 31 people. If companies over 500 workers are then excluded (just six), the average company size falls to 26 people with the median figure at just 11. As smaller companies are more likely to have less formal recruitment policies than large companies there is a greater likelihood that people are employed through informal networks operating across the sector. In such circumstances, these employment procedures can result in barriers to new entrants. In addition, groups who are underrepresented in the sector, like BME workers, face additional disadvantages in some industries, in that they have fewer social networks on which to draw. However, at the same time it should be noted that, as the above figures show, BME employment is highest in the area of Web and Internet, which nevertheless has many small firms. Here, it is possible that there are specific BME social networks operating, enabling BME workers to get greater access to these industries than some of the others.
Chapter two: education, qualifications and media employment

The audio visual industries are largely comprised of professional workers who are highly qualified, with most having degrees. Skillset, the Sector Skills Council for the audio visual industries, reports that two-thirds of respondents to its Survey of the Audio visual Industries’ Workforce 2005 were graduates compared to 16 per cent of the population of working age across the whole UK economy (Skillset 2005). In our survey, eighty-four per cent of white workers and eighty-five per cent of black and minority ethnic workers had higher educational qualifications, reflecting the skilled nature of the AV industries.

Students, colleges, courses, advice and guidance

In our survey of final-year students we asked why students chose the courses that they were doing. Eighty-one per cent said that they had done so out of interest and 46 per cent because they felt that it was necessary for their careers, indicating that many intended to establish a career in the audio visual industries. Differences between gender and ethnicity were most marked in this question. The response was similar between BME and white men (76% and 72% respectively), however BME women were the least likely to have chosen their course because of its interest factor (58%), but most likely to have chosen their courses because they thought that it was necessary for their careers. The student survey found that 13 per cent chose their college because they felt that it had good contacts in the industry, which was surprisingly low considering the importance students gave to having contacts in the industry as a means of securing work. This perhaps indicates that the importance of contacts was something that students picked up once they had begun their courses and was not something the majority were necessarily aware of when they chose their courses. However a minority (13 per cent) had this information to hand before starting college and it may be that these students had been advised by friends or family who perhaps worked in the industry.
The graduate focus groups, conducted after final-year students had entered the labour market, tried to look at these issues in more detail. They began with a discussion around the courses undertaken by the participants and what advice and guidance they had sought or been given, either in choosing their course, or about the careers they might have embarked upon once they had completed it. As might be expected, some students had given considerable thought to the courses they wanted to undertake and had a clear career trajectory in mind, while others had chosen their courses because they sounded ‘interesting’ or because they were ‘quite broad’, which allowed them to consider what they might like to specialise in at a later date. Three graduates had already completed degrees prior to their recent courses; one had a BSc in Mathematics, another a BA in Business Studies, and a third a BSc in Chemistry. Few though had sought careers’ advice before choosing their courses, noting that they had ‘not thought that far ahead’. One of those that had asked for advice while she was taking her A-levels reported:

*My tutor told me not to go to university…I wanted to go into journalism and she said to go straight into the industry to gain work experience, but I didn’t want to limit myself.* (White female graduate)

Most students appeared to have enjoyed their courses, but were very critical about aspects of the course content, particularly in relation to the amount of practical work they were able to undertake. Students felt strongly that there needed to be more practical work as part of the degree syllabus in order to equip them with the skills they needed in the workplace. Even in those courses where students understood that there would be an equal divide between practical and theoretical work, they found it not to be the case in practice. Participants talked about being ‘disappointed’ that the practical sides of their courses were much less than was promised – sometimes less than the 25 per cent mentioned in the course prospectus. One college, in particular, was praised for the practical nature of its courses (although it should be noted that these were not degrees, but City and Guilds and HNDs) and two participants had completed sound engineering courses at this college.

**Despite** being at the end of their courses, 30 per cent of students felt they did not have the required qualifications to enable them to find a job in the audio visual sector.
Chapter two: education, qualifications and media employment

Even so, many students who had undertaken practical work were nevertheless critical about the state of the equipment they were expected to use, saying that much of it was old and out-of-date and not of industry standard (although there were exceptions). As one person stated:

*You’re going to come out of the school not benefiting as much, you know, because the equipment they use is not industry standard – like all the film cameras are very old. So if you want to learn camera, you come out still not knowing how to deal with the cameras people are making commercials on.* (BME female graduate)

Another was even more critical:

*X College* hasn’t really got the equipment…these pieces of equipment have been used by three thousand people before you and boy can you tell. And they’ve been there since the year dot. These are not the newest items of equipment and they were probably second-hand when they were bought. Now we’re using them. (White female graduate)

While most were disappointed with the practical side, others very much enjoyed the theoretical aspect of their courses. Yet even in these cases, students felt they had not really been equipped with the knowledge needed to find a job once they had graduated:

*Practically, it was pretty useless, but intellectually my course… I went there to learn about films, not how to get jobs in the film industry, so it taught me a lot about the theoretical side. Loads of issues, wider issues, not just related to film, so in that sense, it was very useful. But for getting a job in the industry, it wasn’t good. It was less hot. It was like an afterthought, like they [lecturers] were like ‘OK, we have to consider that a few people are leaving in the third year aren’t they?’* (White male graduate)

It was notable how little advice students had received during their courses about how their degrees might (or might not) equip them for work either in the audio visual industries or for work in general. Students felt that they could have been given more career advice during their time at college to enable them to start to plan what skills and experience they needed to gain if they wanted to find work in the audio visual industries.

*They don’t really talk [about career advice]. The first time they spoke about making a career in the industry was in like, the last month of our degree. And they had, like, one seminar on it where they had past people who’d made careers for themselves in the industry, and they came and did a talk. But that’s the only incident.* (White female graduate)

*They [lecturers] definitely could have given more advice. I kind of figured it out for myself.* (White male graduate)

Fifty-three per cent of students felt that they did not have the required experience to begin their careers in the audio visual industries after completing their degrees.
Often, when they did receive advice, students felt that it was too late in their studies (often late in the final year), and that really they needed to be provided with information much earlier. Some had only received advice in the last couple of months before their courses ended. One student, who had gone for advice to the careers service at the end of her second year, thinking she was being proactive, was told that she had left it ‘a bit late’ and should have sought advice earlier. We were interested in exploring why was it was that students were so poorly informed about future careers and would suggest that this is an issue that colleges could help to remedy, either through specialist careers’ advice or as part of course content.

One of the questions posed by the research was the extent to which the industry considered media/media studies courses to be useful to the industry. Our survey of students and the focus group interviews with recent graduates found that media and ex-media students had, in general, anticipated that they would work within the audio visual industries and indeed had chosen to study media for that reason. Yet some students became aware early on in their courses that their degrees were not necessarily held in particularly high esteem within the industry and the wider world of work. One participant described how even the students on her course had arrived at university with the view that media studies would be an easy way to obtain a degree.

I found it really frustrating the amount of people I spoke to on my course who were, like, ‘well my mum and dad wanted me to get a degree, so I thought, well, film studies would be a doss!’ And I’m like, ‘Ahh…!’ It just made me so mad. I suppose I shouldn’t feel bad as I didn’t really research [my course]… but I was really passionate about it and I really enjoyed studying, so that really pissed me off. I think it didn’t really matter to them not getting a career in the industry. (White female graduate)

A number of students were told by their tutors that their degrees would not count for very much with employers in the audio visual industries, which felt quite demoralising for this new graduate:

It doesn’t help, I think, that my tutor has constantly installed in me that if you want to have a career in media, don’t do a media degree. That was one of the first things that I got told. (BME female graduate)

Another was given a similar message:
Chapter two: education, qualifications and media employment

One of the first things – on the first day – someone told me was don’t do a media degree. Well they are right in some concerns! (White female graduate)

While others were told by employers who came to give lectures at their college that;

You don’t need a degree in media to work in the media industry. They don’t take your course seriously and when you tell people you’ve done television and film, they are, like, ‘oh!’ (White female graduate)

Established workers also told how, as students, they were advised not to do media studies degrees, but to study a subject they could ‘fall back on’. None of the established workers in the focus groups had undertaken general media studies degrees – they had either done vocational courses or non-media related degrees – and were critical of the usefulness of general media courses. These workers perceived media studies degrees as too general and not technical enough, failing to provide students with specific skills needed for a profession or particular job. These views reflect those often heard from the industry and the popular media. A journalist reported on a conversation she had with someone who had worked at a major broadcaster for 25 years:

…he said if you do a media studies course we are going to laugh at you, people are going to laugh at you. If you do a degree in Chinese politics, I will be so ecstatic. I can teach you everything you learnt in your media studies course in two weeks, but I can’t teach you what you learnt in your Chinese politics course. (Female journalist)

We will look at employers’ views on this subject in the following section.

What educational background did employers favour?

The employer telephone survey showed that an overwhelming majority of employers (85 per cent) recruited graduates. However, the survey also found that only a small minority of employers (13 per cent) thought that media colleges and universities prepared students adequately for jobs in the industry, while 10 per cent felt that they were not prepared at all. In the course of the in-depth interviews we asked employers what educational qualifications they sought, omitting any leading questions that might cause them to identify one type of graduate over another. Some employers indicated that they favoured students who had taken media-related courses. Independent production D, for example had recently taken on a lot of workers through media colleges and ‘that’s on the whole
been very good’. Independent production B said that he did not mind what individuals had studied and made it clear that, ‘I’m not one of those people, incidentally, who thinks that media studies is a waste of time’. He had taught over the summer at one media course and ‘it was a really tough course…it was really demanding, intellectually demanding stuff…These are really smart people and they’re really pushed through their paces’. Radio A said that they would ideally like to take on media graduates but the nature of the industry it was operating in (a small local community radio station) meant that, in reality, most of its presenters were not formally media trained and the majority were not graduates.

However, without prompting, the majority of employers indicated that they would either not recruit individuals with a background in media studies or would be less likely to recruit from this group. Independent production C, for example, while stating that most of their work experience students were from media studies courses, did not look for media studies students when seeking recruits. The company had considered funding a graduate training programme but was targeting students with first class English degrees from Russell group universities. CommercialsB was more likely to recruit someone with a history degree. Broadcast C tried to avoid specifying any subjects unless these were absolutely necessary.

The general view expressed by employers was that media studies courses did not provide a suitable background for individuals entering the industry and that the courses raised unrealistic expectations. Even if it can be argued that their views were incorrect or ill-informed, it is nevertheless the case that media studies qualified students were more likely to be excluded from working in the sector. Broadcast C described media studies students as ‘two a penny’ and said that the problem was that ‘every college has a media studies course.’ Post production A, which had employed a runner with a media qualification, nevertheless said that recruits did not need media qualifications and according to this employer:

…the average person that goes into media studies is either conning themselves or being conned by a college that wants to take them on. I think college actually does more harm
than good in a lot of ways, because they come out with these false illusions that they know it all... I think the staff shouldn’t pull the wool over people’s eyes and tell them that at the end of college is heaven.

Other employers also made the same point about media studies students being misinformed. Broadcast B noted:

*In my experience they [media studies tutors] do not give people good career advice. I mean I’ve got very mixed views. I mean worked with people on all of these courses…but I do not think any of these courses give decent careers advice. People don’t leave the courses knowing how to set out CVs, how to find out information about jobs. They come out with very naïve ideas of how they should work.*

This view that media studies students were not well-prepared for work in the industry was also vocalised by Post production B, who again, without prompting, said that she would take on ‘anything except for media studies’ and particularly favoured history students. The company felt that the colleges had given a ‘false picture’ of what the industry was like and that some candidates thought ‘it was all glitz and glamour’. As a consequence, the company was

*reluctant to take on people who’ve done media studies, the reason being that we’ve noticed from experience that it doesn’t matter which college they’ve gone to or anything possibly what they are taught. There is a kind of misconception that because they have learnt how to film…They have this attitude…I’m ready to start filming now’.*

Independent production B talked of favouring someone who ‘has obviously had a rigorous education’ citing science, English or history as examples. He stated, ‘that’s what I am looking for, you know, somebody who’s had an intellectually rigorous education that’s taught them those skills in addition to them being jolly nice people and pleasant around the office’.

This employer also rated as ‘absolutely brilliant’ an anthropology of filmmaking course, provided by a number of universities. Broadcast B stated that the company was more

*interested in people coming in with something like history or geography or a physics degree, because they’re coming in with something different. If people come in, you know a 21-year-old coming out of university with a media degree going into journalism hasn’t got much to say.*
Chapter two: education, qualifications and media employment

The chief executive of Commercials A, herself an ex media studies student, nevertheless did not favour media studies courses, describing them as ‘heavily theoretical’ and, while noting that knowledge or theory could provide ‘added value’, favoured more practical, technically-based courses for new recruits. Distribution A thought that media studies trained individuals had skills that were useful for marketing, but not for the bulk of jobs that the company offered. Post production D felt that media studies courses were fine but anything with technology or someone with customer experience was better and more generally, the company was looking for English or history graduates. Broadcast A felt that there were too many media studies courses, ‘which means the quality has to come into question. I think also that there is a danger that they build up expectation. This is a very tough industry to get into. You know there is also an element of to ‘walk before you run’.

Post production C, while rating highly some media studies courses, described media studies as ‘creating an expectation’ and that it is ‘often taught by people who have never been in the industry and is studied by students who haven’t settled on what they want to do.’ In discussing media studies courses, the reaction of some employers showed that they had a perception of the type of student that would chose to do media studies. Independent production A thought that a media studies degree would be the ‘last thing I think would be useful’ adding: ‘But it kind of tells you that they probably won’t be bright enough to do something else’.

While they might not have favoured media studies courses, the same employers were predisposed to candidates who had followed core subject courses, like English, history and politics. These core subjects were also seen as being the kind of courses that ‘better’ students would take. They were felt to give individuals an ability to question and to delve, as Broadcast A described them, people who displayed ‘a certain amount of argumentation’. At the same time this employer accepted that perhaps it was important to challenge these norms, in terms of ‘targeting different types of degrees, because you’ll get a different type of person’. Independent production A strongly favoured generalist degree students, rather than media studies students, describing the former as those who have done ‘what I call a proper degree, in English, history, you know’. Independent production D
also looked at more general qualifications, stating that he was ‘more likely actually to have a philosophy graduate’ than a media studies graduate.

**Relationships between employers and colleges**

Some employers had established contacts with particular colleges and a few were regularly mentioned. In general, where this had occurred, the colleges were offering media courses and it may be that through developing these contacts the prejudice against media studies, as evidenced above can be challenged. Certainly, it was those employers who had established such contacts who were more likely to be open to recruiting those with media studies backgrounds. Independent production D had found that some media courses at least gave individuals some technical skills and mentioned two colleges favourably. Broadcast B had also spent time developing relationships with specialist colleges. Some of the regional offices of Broadcast A had established contacts with their local colleges and this had assisted in recruitment.

Independent production A had established a relationship with a college in Sweden and this had resulted in some long-term traineeships, funded in part by the university grant and in part by a ‘wage’ of £100 a week to the students. Students did a nine-month placement and often stayed on in an employed role at the end of their course. This employer favoured this type of placement and would have worked with a UK college if similar arrangements had been possible. In his view, the two-week work experience was too short and compared unfavourably to the Swedish system.

**What plans did students have after graduation?**

In our survey, 58 per cent of students indicated that they hoped to find work in the audio visual sector when they finished college and 80 per cent said that they hoped to be working in London six months after completing their courses. Over a third intended to continue in education, perhaps indicating that students considered they need further qualifications to get the type of jobs they wanted, or indeed in order to have a better chance of securing a post, given the stiff competition for jobs.
Ten per cent suggested that they would be looking for work outside of the sector once they had completed their courses, while the remaining intended to take a gap year. There was indication of some differences between BME and white students with regards to their future plans: more BME students indicated that they intended to look for work outside of the audio visual sector and there was a similar pattern reflected among female students where only half intended to look for work in the sector straight after finishing their courses. Female students were also more likely than male students to continue their education following their current courses.

The research shows that the views of employers and of job applicants on the appropriateness of media studies as an entry qualification into the industry are not as divergent as might be thought. Students, in general, believed that their courses could benefit from being more practically based with more ‘hands on’ training. Employers too valued those media courses that were industry specific. But importantly there was a disjuncture between the understanding of students – that media studies courses were the route into the industry – and the perceptions of employers, that students of subjects like English or history, were more valuable as new recruits. There is also a need to ensure that courses are more closely linked to developing the skills needed for the industry. The research also identifies the need for more informed careers’ advice to young people who hope to work within the sector. It may also be appropriate to consider whether alternative forms of sandwich course or courses which incorporate longer periods of ‘on the job’ training are better suited to the needs of the industry and better equip young people to enter and progress within it.
Chapter three: recruitment and employment – a perspective from employers and workers

In the different stages of the research we asked participants about their personal experiences of recruitment and employment in the AV sector and, in particular, we asked graduates and established workers to reflect on their employability in what is a technologically fast moving industry. First we will look at employers’ views about recruitment practice before looking at the different experiences of our sample of graduates and established workers, mainly focusing on the effects of freelance working and the impact this has on equal opportunity practice.

Recruiting directly employed workers

In the telephone survey of employers 64 per cent said they recruited by word of mouth and 41 per cent used other informal networks, such as friends and family in order to fill posts. In face-to-face interviews, it was clear that, in most cases, employers had a wide field from which to choose prospective workers and this had influenced their choice of recruitment methods and, in particular, whether they favoured formal or informal approaches. Save for the few areas of skills shortages (see below), there were always many more candidates than jobs available and employers felt they did not have to take additional steps, such as advertising, to locate suitable candidates. Independent production B explained that the company no longer advertised:

Since so many are looking for jobs...there are so many people out there looking for work, you know, and such a big turnover, that I think it’s very unlikely that we would advertise.
(Independent production B)

One employer, explaining why individuals might express concern at being passed over for work in favour of others, said that people generally did not appreciate how wide the field of applicants was.

People don’t realise how many people apply for these jobs, you know, if we advertised for a senior broadcast journalist externally we would get 250 applicants. (Broadcast A)
This wealth of supply encouraged employers to by-pass formal recruitment systems and to opt for the lowest cost route. Inevitably, recommendations and applications from existing channels were favoured. As Independent production D noted:

*We really do prefer to work with people we’ve already worked with…Our greatest success has been where we’ve taken people where there’s been some recommendation. You know they’ve worked with somebody that we know and we can be sure of getting a completely frank reference about them.* (Independent production D)

**Sources of recruitment**

Nevertheless, the employers interviewed had also used a variety of other methods to recruit new workers. These ranged from using employment agencies and holding data banks of speculative CVs, to Internet and email. In a minority of cases, employers had either developed relationships with specific higher education institutions or attended their careers’ days. In most cases, more than one method of recruitment was used. Most employers spoke of major changes to the way that they selected new recruits, mainly due to the development of the Internet and most had used their own web sites to advertise specific jobs. The telephone survey of employers also picked this up with 49 per cent reporting the use of web sites, bulletin boards and email. Broadcast B found that more than 99 per cent of applicants contacted it through the company’s website. Commercials B recruited mainly through its own website. Independent production D admitted that when applications were on paper ‘I used to dump them’ but that now he filed them on a database. Only a couple of employers had ever used job centres and neither spoke favourably about the candidates that had been sent to them by this route.

**Speculative CVs**

The majority of employers encouraged speculative applications and many operated data systems that allowed them to store CV information that had been sent to them. The number of such applications received varied from around one a month (small Independent production company), to three to four a day (small Independent production company). A large Independent production company was receiving 100 a day, while Radio A received about 10 a month. It is difficult to judge whether the number of speculative applications had
increased or decreased in recent years. One employer said that they ‘don’t get so many as we used to’ while others suggested that the number was on the increase. It was generally in larger companies that speculative CVs could be a major source of recruitment. Distribution A, part of a large multinational company, held speculative applications and referred to these when seeking recruits. In some cases, these had become the primary method of recruitment, as Post production B, which received around 40 CVs a week, noted:

> The most common one [method of recruitment] is the many speculative letters and CVs that we get and we get loads of those. So we look through those first and foremost and then we’ll advertise on a couple of websites that we use very frequently in the industry. (Post production B)

Some employers categorised the applications, either by type of job workers would be most suited to or by the ‘quality’ of the applicant, although it was usually not clear how these qualities had been assessed. Independent production B had created a database which was ‘the first port of call’ when looking for a new recruit. In some cases, applications were stored for six months, in others for less. Distribution A held CVs on its database and when jobs came up those who looked ‘suitable’ would be contacted. Post production C said it stored CVs for at most three months on the basis that anyone still out of work after that length of time ‘are not likely to be very good’.

However, there were also some employers who ignored speculative CVs. One large employer, Broadcast A, received thousands of speculative applications but did not hold them on a database as it was not feasible, and additionally, it felt that, in general, they didn’t ‘deliver a particularly good recruit’. Post production A, a small, four-person company, said that they did get lots of CVs but rarely acted on them and considered most of them ‘absolute rubbish’. However, here, the incidence of recruitment was so rare as to not warrant keeping CVs.

For the individual applicant these differences in practice present a dilemma. There is no way of knowing which prospective employers hold on to CVs and which do not. And
since most employers do not acknowledge the receipt of CVs, even those who retain them, an applicant cannot know whether their CV will, or will not be examined.

**Identifying ‘suitable’ candidates**

In the interviews with employers we asked if they could identify the attributes that suitable candidates should possess. We gave no direction as to what these attributes might be. Criteria like experience, intelligence, creativity, passion and determination were referred to, although often the methods of assessment in relation to such criteria were based on the employer’s own instincts, rather than on verifiable data. Many other factors were extremely subjective, such as having the right attitude, ‘fitting in’, and so on.

Many employers described how they could tell right away whether a candidate was right for the job or not, referring to a ‘gut feeling’ about candidates. Post production A believed that he could ‘pretty well read someone’ and say whether or not they would be suitable. Commercials A relied on ‘an instinct and a good eye for the right person’. Independent production C felt that whether someone was ‘available to help…becomes apparent quite quickly’. They also wanted applicants for whom the specific type of work on offer was their goal, for example Distribution A wanted to be sure that its candidate employees actually aspired to work in that particular part of the industry. Commercials B admitted that the most likely attributes a new recruit could possess would mirror those held by the existing managers.

**Previous experience**

Although the telephone survey had suggested that nearly three out of four employers said it was important that the people they employed should already have experience in the audio visual industries, in the in-depth interviews, when questioned about new recruits, not all employers felt that previous experience was necessary for a candidate to be considered as suitable. Indeed, some were adamant that experience was not a requirement. In some cases, such as in Post production A, where the operation was very specialised, skills could only be ‘picked up on the job’ and that ‘is the only way that it can be done’. But this view was also generalised beyond very specialist operations. For example, Commercials A felt it did not matter if someone was ‘completely green’ as they could be
trained up. Indeed, for this company, prospective employees did not necessarily have to have worked in the industry or even studied media. Independent production D employed runners with no previous experience. Post production B thought that some experience was ‘handy’ although not essential and that it was ‘actually better’ to learn skills on the job. Some interviewees held the opposite point of view and for them experience was important. However, this did not necessarily translate into the individual having had experience in the industry. It was an ability to relate their working experiences to the job on offer, even if the experience seemingly had nothing in common with the audio visual sector. Post production D wanted some evidence of ‘hands on’ experience. Distribution A did value hands on experience and a candidate with this would ‘be head and shoulders above’. Broadcast A while stating that experience was necessary for some posts and an advantage for others, there were ‘always exceptions to the rule’. Broadcast B said that previous experience ‘makes a huge difference’. However, what it was looking for was people ‘that worked in, for example, student magazines, hospital radio, community radio, placements with local newspapers, radio stations, anything like that. Usually the more, the better.’ Broadcast C similarly was interested in those who had worked in local radio or at a local magazine while undertaking their studies. As can be seen, much of this ‘experience’ would have been as unpaid employment. Thus individuals who, for example, during a period of study, had been able to devote their time to such activities, as opposed to those who had been required to take up paid work to fund their studies, would be advantaged.

**Intellectual abilities and creativity**

Although many employers suggested that they set high standards for recruits and that they were able to do so due to the large potential pool from which they could draw recruits, only a small minority of the employers interviewed made specific reference to a requirement for high intellectual abilities. Independent production A wanted someone ‘who’s bright and can pick up the actual day-to-day skills they need pretty quickly’. Broadcaster A sought individuals who were ‘creatively bold’. Independent production B
Chapter three: recruitment and employment – a perspective from employers and workers

wanted individuals who were ‘intelligent, capable of working under their own initiative, but knowing when to ask’. But these represented a minority of respondents.

Equally surprising was the fact that few employers referred to the need to demonstrate creativity among potential recruits. Despite the fact that the industry promotes itself as a creative industry, this was not an attribute that the majority referred to in speaking of potential recruits. It was only one employer, Post production C, which referred to the company wanting ‘creative people’.

**Passion and determination**

While intellectual abilities and creativity did not automatically spring to mind among employers, passion and determination were much more readily identified as key attributes for new recruits. The problem with such criteria is that they are hard to define and are subject to culturally determined types of behaviour and are dependent more on the evaluation of the assessor than on the abilities of the assessed. More importantly, they were often defined as held by those who were prepared to work long hours and to submit to high levels of exploitation, both in terms of time and money. For example, Independent production D referred to the ability to show ‘that it’s [work] an important aspect of their life’. ‘Passion’ was demonstrated in ‘the kind of guy who’s willing to sit up in the top of a tree and wait three days to get the shot that he wanted. You know someone who’s that determined…Just kind of knowing that someone like that is going to deliver, no matter what, makes you feel very confident as an employer’. Broadcast C accepted that some managers with responsibility for recruitment had totally ‘unrealistic expectations of new recruits’. Independent production C was looking for individuals who were ‘genuinely passionate’, while Independent production B described wanting to recruit those who ‘need to be passionate’:

> I think that a decision people have to make when they go into this industry is how much, what price they’re willing to pay essentially to do what they want to do. And there are two types of price you pay. One price to pay is you know you serve your time in jobs you don’t really enjoy, you know, working as a researcher on this, that, other programme and hoping to become an assistant producer and then you know hoping that you’ll be good enough to become a production manager and then hoping that one day you will end up directing something you’re interested in. (Independent production B)
For this interviewee, those with passion could survive and make it in the industry but it meant that on their way towards their goal they had to be prepared to do jobs which did not inspire them and about which they were unlikely to feel passionate.

**Having the ‘right’ attitude and ‘fitting in’**

Many of the employer interviewees referred to recruits having the ‘right attitude’ to do the work, which they were required to do. This included being ‘capable’ and able ‘to work on their own initiative’ (Independent production A) and having an ‘attitude to succeed’ (Independent production D). As this employer described it, ‘there are certain key moments when you’ve really got to pull the stops out’. Anyone suggesting that they had a personal life which did not permit this was ‘almost the death knell, you might as well go away, you know because that person is never going to get on’. Post production B was looking for a ‘can do’ attitude because:

> We’re the kind of company whereby we don’t necessarily like somebody who kind of thinks because this is my role, because this is my job title, this is you know my job description; this is all I will do. We like to kind of think that we have somebody on board who’s more than willing to do things that are outside…Somebody who’s enthusiastic; somebody who’s proactive, definitely. Within this industry or especially working here, there are times when it gets especially busy. So it’s either somebody kind of recognises that and will pitch in when they can, not necessarily waiting to be asked … it could be something as simple as making sure that the toilets have got air freshener, a loo roll, that kind of thing. (Post production B)

Another respondent took up this theme by pointing to the fact that runners needed to understand that they had entered at ‘a very junior level; that much of the work was not ‘very glamorous’ and that individuals had to be able to work under pressure (Post production D). Post production B wanted recruits with good interpersonal skills and who were ‘not constantly complaining’. Commercials B also spoke about the need for staff to ‘add value, show enthusiasm’ and that there was a requirement to be ‘quite flexible’, as they are not a large company. Commercials A defined it as ‘enthusiasm, willingness to stay late, willingness to do any job required, very enthusiastic, full of energy, very friendly, very social.’ Much of this description identifies behaviour at its extremes, with the frequent use of the word ‘very’ to set the level of attitude and commitment required.
This employer also noted that the ability to ‘fit in’ made it likely that some individuals would be excluded. While commenting that there were many individuals from Middle Eastern backgrounds within the industry, she was honest in that those who were observant (possibly of any religion) would not fit in. A ‘veiled woman,’ she thought, would not fit the ideal model of being ‘hard working, dedicated and friendly’. Thus ethnicity was not an issue of exclusion, provided that the individual presented her/himself as ‘Westernised’ and merging in with the rest of the workforce.

It also was about being able to ‘fit in’ with one respondent going as far as suggesting that a person’s ‘face had to fit’ and another referring to the need to be ‘personable’. Again these are loose criteria, highly dependent on cultural and gendered norms. It is likely that individuals with different ethnic, class, age and gender backgrounds will be perceived as not ‘fitting in’. This is an issue we will discuss in more detail from the perspective of workers in Chapter five.

**Employers’ use of employment agencies to recruit workers**

There are a number of well-known specialist recruitment agencies operating within the audio visual sector. Those mentioned by the employer interviewees include Production Base, Grapevinejobs, Start in TV and Broadcast. An examination of the agencies’ web pages shows that some offer advice on how to prepare CVs, while others focus on putting individuals in touch with employers, or on advertising vacancies. None of the recruitment agencies make specific reference to ethnicity or diversity nor to equal opportunities, or to the promotion of diversity.

In the telephone interviews, 34 per cent of employers reported the use of employment agencies. From the in-depth interviews some employers said that they used agencies, such as those above and found them a useful source of new recruits. Some suggested that particular agencies were more likely to attract minority ethnic applicants. Independent production A had employed black workers through the agency. However other employers had tried, but rejected agencies. Animation
A, for example, had found them too expensive and had not been impressed with the quality of workers sent to them through the agency it had used.

Some used non-AV agencies to recruit to jobs that were not normally identified with the sector, for example, accountancy and finance jobs. The nature of Distribution A’s work, for example, meant that it employed lots of people in jobs not in ‘media’ roles, including administration, finance, legal, IT and marketing.

**Advertising vacancies**

Very few of the employers interviewed had advertised job vacancies, Independent production A, a small specialist art based company, had advertised in design journals. Radio A, in addition to advertising jobs on its own station, also advertised in the local ethnic minority press. Some employers mentioned the cost of advertising as a deterrent; others suggested that the quality of applicant they had though general adverts had been poor and that other methods were preferred. Animation A had tried recruiting through adverts but had not found it to work well. Even among larger companies there was a move away from paid advertising. Broadcast B had decreased its advertising in a national newspaper because it was costly and did not produce results. In the past, it had also advertised in the minority ethnic press but had not found that to be effective either. Instead, the company believed that it had more success through its more recent work in developing relationships with colleges. Distribution A had advertised in one trade magazine but couldn’t remember a single job filled in this way.

**Recruitment systems**

The propensity for informal recruitment meant that few of the employers interviewed were able to describe formal recruitment systems, for example involving application, interview and selection criteria. Of those interviewed, Radio A was among a minority that described its interview procedures as ‘stringent’, although they were still heavily reliant on ‘good’ references. Broadcast A claimed that it had ‘a very structured, open process that is primarily aimed at trying to improve opportunity both internally and externally’. However, even here, the
interviewee accepted that the company was ‘still missing a trick in terms of attracting enough people from a diverse background’ citing a need to perhaps get to people at a younger age and also to move away ‘from the traditional criteria of certain qualifications’. Broadcast B had more formal recruitment systems with a team of ‘talent managers’ whose job it was to build relationships with newer recruits and to foster talent. Particularly in the smaller companies, systems were not at all transparent. Post production A described ringing those who had sent CVs and having ‘a chat with them on the phone’. Independent production A admitted ‘we’re not that organised, really.’

Those who received high numbers of speculative CVs also had ad hoc methods of dealing with them. Independent production C randomly chose 10 CVs a day to contact and call for interview. If and when a job came up, candidates who had been interviewed would be called in again.

In the few cases where traineeships or other internships were offered, these were accompanied by more formal recruitment mechanisms. For example, Broadcast B had advertised its bursary scheme widely. It had built a special website to promote it; had produced posters and postcards that were sent out to hundreds of diversity organisations; had targeted colleges where there were large minority ethnic populations, and as a consequence, had achieved almost one in three applications from minority ethnic candidates. Furthermore, 70 per cent of successful candidates had been hired when the bursary period was completed.

**Word-of-mouth recruitment**

The employer interview questions did not directly ask if word of mouth was used as a method of recruitment. This was done deliberately to see whether it emerged in the course of the interviews. In most cases, employers referred to its use, even for directly recruited staff, with employers indicating that, in at least some cases, individuals had come through recommendations. Only one employer, Broadcast A, did not make reference to word of mouth while Broadcast B made it clear that word of mouth was no longer the prime method of recruitment, indicating that there had been changes in recruitment procedures, in response to the need to recruit candidates from a more diverse background. However,
some recruitment was still based on word of mouth. Both were large employers and the
interviews suggest that larger employers were more aware of the discriminatory impact of
word of mouth. For smaller employers, word of mouth was useful, cheap and delivered
the kind of recruits they wanted. It was what some described as ‘risk free’.

Thus although sometimes word of mouth was used in conjunction with other forms of
recruitment, it remained a consistent feature of an industry which presented itself as
reluctant to take what it perceived as ‘risks’, in hiring those of whom it did not have some
prior knowledge. As Animation A noted, word of mouth is ‘the best method’. The
company had tried advertising but had not found that it worked and that instead
‘recommendations from other people’ was the most successful method. Word of mouth
was sometimes particularly associated with entry grade jobs. Post production B reflected:

*I think [word of mouth] is more for the runner, office administration role where you know
people, just know friends of family or a relative who actually wants to do either work
experience or their first role in the industry.* (Post production B)

At Post production A, a small company with just two staff, recruitment was relatively rare
but when it did take place it was usually by word of mouth. Commercials A, again a small
company, but with around nine directly employed staff, sometimes recruited by word of
mouth. Distribution A, a large company with formal procedures, nevertheless accepted
that some recruits came by word of mouth. Post production C had formal procedures in
place for recruitment, but nevertheless some people came through ‘friends of friends’.
Similarly, Post production D hired individuals recommended by existing workers.
Independent production A rarely used employment agencies, but was more likely to use
word of mouth or Internet searches. Independent production D used word of mouth,
particularly when looking to fill specialist posts. The interviewee described requiring a
project manager with both video and web experience, needing skills in two different areas,
which is harder to find:

*I kept thinking where would I advertise to find this kind of person and it wasn’t obvious
because at the merge of these two kinds of industries, so then I thought ok, who do I know
that does this and then I realised that XX, who I do a lot for, they’re obviously both on the
web and on video and I asked XX and he did know. And he recommended the most
outstanding person whom I’ve interviewed and I’ve taken on. So I always think, do I know
But of course, first jobs lead on to other jobs and if recommendations are common at that level, they narrow the range of individuals further up the promotion ladder. But word of mouth may also be the most likely route into employment for BME recruits, as our report on the findings of the BME survey shows. Independent production D also made this point stating that ‘if you trace the roots of how [BME] people go in, it was some contact already in the industry that helped them get there. That is certainly going to be the case because there just aren’t many [BME] people in it.’ Thus the fact that word of mouth is still such a prevalent method of recruitment means that BME entrants are as likely or perhaps more likely to use it.

**Methods of finding jobs for workers**

The phrase ‘it’s who you know not what you know’ was a constant refrain from graduates and established workers throughout the research, and seemed to be a factor in determining how well a person is able to advance and get work in the industry. The process of securing jobs by word of mouth and through contacts was described as frustrating and confusing. Workers said it was not just about knowing someone who could assist you, but being friends with them and involving yourself in their social networks as well. This social element of work is difficult to maintain on a constant basis, particularly due to long hours worked on projects and the rapid movement from project to project. It is also more difficult for people with childcare responsibilities – particularly women, who are still primary carers. Often thought of as a problem associated with new entrants, the necessity of having good contacts to find work is also an ongoing process throughout a person’s career, particularly due to the increase in freelance work over the last couple of decades. It is also the case that old contacts cannot always be relied on to secure work, as the circles of social networks are often not wide enough to maintain a constant work flow.
Several established workers talked of the degree of nepotism in the industries, where people or companies would only hire freelancers on projects where they were known and trusted; ‘I think the problem with the industry is its nepotism’. Two remarked, ‘it’s very difficult to get access to those inner circles’ and ‘it’s quite difficult to know how to infiltrate these secret societies’. While another felt that there was very little in the way of equal opportunities in the sector as finding work depended on personal contacts:

*I don’t think anything’s going to change with equal opportunities and enforcement unless the government really enforces a change into the way they employ people in the media and AV related industry sector. I mean, it’s all contacts and networking, because that’s the way it’s been the whole time. So it’s going to be very like hard to change because of the nepotism.* (Female television director)

This word-of-mouth recruitment and reliance on personal contacts was seen as frustrating in two ways: it was difficult to break through the nepotism, but also it resulted in people sometimes being given jobs they were not qualified to do or did not have the skills to carry them out; ‘if your daddy is a director, you get a job regardless of whether you know anything’. This practice was seen as being particularly irksome as people we interviewed had learnt and developed their skills and experience over many years and took great pride in doing a professional job, whereas, when people were given jobs through family and friends, they were not always believed to be qualified to do the work they were given.

In the workers survey, we asked respondents how they learnt about their current job and the most commonly reported methods were, overall, through friends in the industry and by word of mouth. Yet as Table 9 shows, more BME workers than white workers had used friends for finding their current jobs (35% to 28%) and word of mouth (27% compared to 18%).

### Table 9. Methods of finding work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>% White</th>
<th>% BME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends in the industry</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approached and asked to apply</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was working in company when job came up</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word of mouth</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry publication</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N=483*
This appears to contradict other data where BME workers have reported the difficulties of securing work because of the role that social networks play and the degree of nepotism operating in the sector. However, what it may indicate is that because this is such an important way of finding work that BME workers are more reliant than white workers on people they have worked with previously in order to find their next job because previous colleagues are aware of their skills and experience and are prepared to assist in providing job opportunities or other useful contacts. As was noted in the worker focus groups, BME workers talked about the industry being dominated by a ‘white culture’ and the degree of prejudice, discrimination and lack of equal opportunities in parts of the sector. The old boys’ networks frequently referred to can lead to a limitation or narrowing of social networks for BME workers, particularly in more powerful, prestigious or highly paid jobs. So while it may appear contradictory for BME workers in our survey to rely more on friends and family to secure them work than white workers, what may be happening is that BME workers are in fact much more dependent on their personal contacts than other workers, precisely because of prejudice and discrimination which can close down other opportunities for finding work.

In the workers survey responses, it was also common for people to be approached and asked to apply for jobs. This was the case for a slightly higher percentage of white workers than BME workers (21% compared to 18%). Where there is a significant difference is between white and BME workers who had got their current job as a result of the fact that they were already working at the company when the job became available (20% compared to 8 per cent), but we do not have any further data to suggest why this might be the case, however, it may indicate that white workers are more likely to be encouraged to apply for internal posts, once they have become established within a workplace.

If we take the figures from the workers’ survey for the numbers of people using social networks to find work and look at them by company size, we are able to see the extent to which this is a factor relating to the more informal recruitment practices that are often associated with smaller companies. As might be expected, a higher percentage of workers
found their jobs through friends in small and medium-sized companies than large companies (small, 35%; medium, 39%; and large, 24%). However, we see a higher figure in large companies for those who were ‘asked to apply’ (small, 24%; medium, 32% and large, 29%). ‘Asked to apply’ could, though, have a multitude of interpretations. For example, an employer could have directly approached a person they thought would fit a particular post and had already decided to offer them the post if they applied, or it could be a more general comment made to a range of people who might have the skills necessary for the job. People perhaps found their jobs by being told about them by their friends but may have, nevertheless, gone through a formal recruitment process, or their friends may have recruited them using an informal process, but this is not clear from the data. There was, however, little difference across company size for those workers who found their jobs by ‘word of mouth’ which suggests that may be similar social networks are used across the board to notify people about jobs that are about to come up.

However, if we disaggregate the figures by ethnicity, and although the figures are relatively low, we do find that BME workers are less likely to find their jobs through friends and through word of mouth, or to be asked to apply in larger companies. Similarly, workers at Broadcast A were also much less likely (only seven cases recorded) than those in other parts of the industry, to report using such methods to find work. This is perhaps due to more formal recruitment methods or to the fact that people are less transient and are in a more permanent employment situation.

Overall, though, these figures are lower than might have been expected given other data collected from this research and other research which has reported on the predominance of the use of social networks and contacts in finding work. What the data do show is that there are a multitude of methods of finding jobs in the AV sector, beyond the newspaper and industry publications routes that are more traditional in other industries.

**How do new entrants establish their contacts and find jobs?**

Around half of respondents to the student survey – note these were final-year students – had contacts in the AV sector; 68 per cent of these were friends, 20 per cent family and the remainder were college lecturers with contacts in the industry, or people students had
met while working or volunteering in the sector. White students were 20 per cent more likely to have more contacts through friends than BME students. Most of the contacts were with in the field of TV and film, with 10 per cent or less in each of the other sections of the industry.

Having already done work experience in the AV sector while at college and been in the labour market for around six months, graduate focus group participants were fully aware of the necessity of having contacts to find work. All commented on how it was essential in being able to secure employment – even temporary and unpaid work. This is in line with the experiences of many in the industry and is widely reported in academic literature. Of those graduates who had got jobs, only two had done so without having prior contacts in the company. The remainder had relied on family, or friends, or friends of friends, to get them an introduction.

I wanted to get a job as…to start off as a runner for a studio or something like that. I went to a few interviews, and they were all unpaid positions, which didn’t bother me at the time because I’d heard that was the way everyone starts. I think everyone was put off by my lack of practical experience. So eventually I got to the stage where financially it just wasn’t going to be possible so I found a part-time job with a Housing Association. And then, I was friendly with a girl whose mother worked for a company called [XXX] Television. So I just emailed her and said 'I know your daughter and she said you might be able to find some work for me.' So I’ve just got some work experience with them, just one day a week.

(White female)

The only way I got my job at [company] was because they were a client of my sister who works on a magazine. That’s the only reason I even got seen for that job. (BME female)

One person, whose friend had told him about a job going at the post production company where he worked, said:

I just turned up at some office suite and just barged my way in, said I could do software that I couldn’t and do this stuff and I’ve leaned it there. So, it is who you know. That’s really horrible but… (White, male)

Yet, others were also troubled by this approach to gaining work, feeling that it was not merit, or skills that ensured a person got the job, but nepotism, and this was felt to be unfair.
I feel like the experience at the film school where I’m supposed to be getting a Masters from hasn’t really geared me towards anything to be honest. And even though it’s great that I still have contacts in the industry...I don’t really like the idea that, just because I know someone they’ll give me a job. I like actually thinking that I’m an efficient person and I feel like I’m quite intelligent, and I feel really sad that there’s not enough out there. (BME female)

Two black female graduates talked about how they had been given mentors during their degree courses (although one was on a previous degree course) and thought that this was a really useful way of introduction to work. Both of these schemes had come from within the colleges and appeared to be directed specifically at black students. They found the support and advice extremely useful and both had kept in contact with their mentors after the schemes had ended. As one commented:

I was able to work in a TV department just because she contacted me with up [with them], but if it wasn’t for her they would never have given me a second look. (BME female)

None of the other graduates mentioned mentoring schemes, which would suggest that these are not particularly utilised by colleges or universities. It is clear from the above statements – from employers and workers – that social networks and personal contacts play a huge role in assisting people to find and sustain work in the audio visual industries. There was a considerable amount of regret that, as students, they were not given as much help and advice about finding a job and working in the industry. This is summed up by this person offering advice to future students:

I would say do absolutely everything you can whilst you’re doing your degree to try and get experience. Phone and email people 100 times a day and if they say no keep going for it. Don’t sit on your arse and not do anything. Don’t take your degree as your ticket into the industry. You have to go out and do it yourself. That’s something I completely regret. The fact that I only did one amount of work experience and now I’m paying for that. I’m doing a job that I don’t want to do, that’s giving me no experience to do what I want to do. And that’s because at the time, when I was lucky enough to have my student loan, I didn’t capitalise on it and didn’t do work experience. (White female)

Many concurred with this sentiment and felt that their degrees did not adequately equip them for the world of work and some seriously questioned whether they would have been better off attempting to get into the industry straight from school, rather than taking a degree. A few seemed to think that all they had done by taking a degree was to put
themselves three years behind others entering the industry. They thought that at least by going straight into work, they may have had an advantage over others and they would not have accumulated large debts. One person, in offering advice to others thinking of an audio visual career, was to look for training in the industry rather than undertake a degree:

*I’d say go looking for training. Instead of looking for a degree, go looking for training. They’ve got to avoid degrees if at all possible, especially media-related degrees, unless it’s something that can lead on to something definite. Seek out training schemes more than anything else, because the training schemes accept all types of people; doesn’t matter if they’re graduates or undergraduates. So it’s a more sure way of getting in. If you’ve got some experience…you become useful instead of just becoming a spare pair of hands to hire cheaply.* (White male)

Although some participants agreed to a large extent with these sentiments, others felt that while the degree itself might not be that useful (in audio visual industry terms), it has now become generally expected by employers that people should have degrees when they enter the world of work. As one person said: ‘if it’s difficult with a degree, I think it would be impossible without.’ It seemed to be agreed that it didn’t really matter what sort of degree you had as long as you had a degree, otherwise you were more likely to be eliminated at selection stage if this qualification was missing from a CV. If anything, graduates seemed to think that media degrees often worked against their chances of gaining employment in the audio visual industries.

The data that we have collected and which has been presented in this chapter shows that informal methods of recruitment persist, even in those companies where there are formalised methods. In part this is due to the widespread reliance on freelance workers, where informal recruitment is almost always the norm. As far as the recruitment of directly employed staff is concerned, employers are more likely to use formalised methods of recruitment, but the over-supply of applicants and the ready availability of speculative CVs, has changed the way that the industry recruits. There is now little reliance on advertising vacancies (other than in some of the very large companies) and inevitably new recruits are drawn from established networks. Without changes to the way that recruitment takes place it is difficult to see how the industry can encourage and develop a more diverse workforce.
Chapter four: working for love or money?

Industry publications have, for some time, been reporting on the exploitation of new entrants to the audio visual industries, many of whom work without pay at the start of their careers. In addition, this has become a hot topic on AV workers’ bulletin boards where workers have been discussing the implications and the legality of much of what is referred to as ‘work experience’. While it is assumed and indeed encouraged by colleges and employers, that students will spend some of their time while at college getting to know how the industry works by spending short periods in companies, sometimes this goes beyond what can genuinely be called work experience. For example, if the work experience is part of a course and organised by an academic institution then it need not necessarily be paid work. In this respect, it is meant as a period of training and assessment, work that students can benefit from while completing their courses. Outside of this, employers who take on workers – giving them a job to do without remuneration – are likely to be in breach of employment regulations, most notably the national minimum wage. Yet a recent survey by Television and Young People found that young people starting out were working for considerable periods without pay – up to six months in some cases. The Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television (PACT), the UK trade association that represents the commercials interests of independent feature film, television, animation and the interactive media companies, has said that this breaches their guidelines on unpaid work experience, which puts the limit at two weeks. Industry newspaper, Broadcast, has reported a PACT spokesperson as saying: ‘The ideas of people working for three months for nothing clearly isn’t helpful in making sure we have a diverse labour market from all backgrounds…Attracting a wide range of people is not just the politically correct option, it makes business sense. We live in a diverse country and you need to reflect that’ (White 2006).

In our survey of workers, 47 per cent of respondents reported that they had undertaken unpaid work before getting paid work in the sector. It should be noted that this does not refer to work experience placements that are, more often, unpaid. Instead it refers to free work done outside of official training programmes. Of those that had worked without pay
at the start of their careers, 32 per cent had done so as volunteers/interns, 12 per cent as trainees and eight per cent in specific jobs, by which it is meant that they were formally working without a wage. Although we do not know the amount of time people spent doing unpaid work at the start of their careers, the fact that so many have worked without pay suggests that it is a common expectation that people will have to work for free in order to establish themselves in the industry. This resonates with research undertaken by Skillset who report that 38 per cent of AV workers carry out unpaid work during their careers (Skillset 2005: 74).

Clearly, working without pay for considerable lengths of time is not an option open to many new entrants who do not have independent economic means to see them through periods without pay. Our research explored the extent to which work experience was undertaken by students and graduates, but also focused on the issue of established workers working for free throughout their careers. This chapter begins by looking at work experience from the perspective of students and graduates.

**Student work experience and placements**

Forty-six per cent of the students surveyed had some experience of working in the audio visual industries before or during their courses. Of these, over half of all white students had experience of finding work in the sector compared to 28 per cent of BME students, who had fewer contacts in the industry. The main form of work undertaken by these students was as volunteers followed by internships, although 21 per cent had managed to secure themselves paid work.

As might be expected, given that students mainly volunteered or held internships, the length of time spent working for audio visual companies were quite short. In the main these ranged from a couple of weeks to three months. However, a number of students had worked in the sector for a number of years, and a few had worked throughout their time as students. Experience of work in the sector was important to these students in two ways, first in gaining experience, which helped to strengthen their CVs, and secondly, in building up contacts which could be used to find future work.
Most of our focus group participants were working and most of these were working in some form in the audio visual industries, although not necessarily in the jobs they would like to be doing. A couple of the members of the groups had gone back to college to undertake further study. One was doing an MA in filmmaking, and another had just begun a PhD. Jobs that people were doing (or had done), for example, included a woman who had formed her own production company, a journalist, sound engineer, film editor, runner, production assistant and work in a recording studio. Others had found jobs outside of the industry working in administrative jobs such as a library, housing association and another in a factory.

In the graduate focus groups all participants talked about how they thought it essential to have experience in audio visual work before even attempting to look for a job and many had either tried or obtained work experience while they were at college. There was a strong feeling that colleges and universities needed to do much more to forge links with the industries and to arrange placements during their courses. Some colleges did this, but sometimes they were for very short periods of time and students felt that they did not get the opportunity to learn very much. Others left it to students to organise their own work experience placements. One student was pleased that she had independently managed to arrange a two-week placement, only to find that her tutor would not let her have time off:

*I actually got told – it was one week during the holidays and one week during term time – and I actually got told that, if I went on it I would be put on a warning, if I actually took that week off college. And I said ‘I’m being honest with you, I’ve got some work experience, I’m going to go. It’s only one week out, we’re only in for six hours a week. I’ll keep up with all my work and things’ and they said ‘if you go on it you’ll be put on a warning’. I did go on it, but that was hard.* (White female graduate)

Others who had found work had done so independently and a couple had enrolled with job agencies and had managed to obtain several short-term jobs that they felt were useful in ‘beefing up’ their CVs. One person had found a job with a production company and had done some freelance editing. Others were much more advanced in their work experience and two focus group participants who had been working in the industry before they started their degrees felt they had a considerable head start on their fellow students when it came to finding work. One graduate, whose college did not arrange placements, felt that it would be useful if courses were designed as sandwich courses, where there was
time to actually learn some practical skills on the job. Some felt that it was very difficult to arrange company placements on their own without any introduction, particularly in small companies where people were too busy to have time to teach students. One female graduate commented:

*I think it is important to may be get some work experience. And if you were, may be, part of the university, and the company were working in partnership, they would respect you more. When you go and do it off your own back, they [companies] don’t give you the time of day. You’re sitting on the computer for three hours doing nothing. And they won’t give you any work unless you really nag them.* (BME female graduate)

Interestingly, in our workers’ survey, 38 respondents said that they had chosen to work for their current company on the basis that it was the place that they had undertaken work experience. While only nine per cent of the sample, this demonstrates that work experience carried out while at college can, for some, provide a route into work after graduation. The figure is perhaps lower than might be expected, but it must be remembered that, in the workers survey, the sample has an over representation of older workers when compared to the overall AV workforce in London. However, if we break down the figures by age or length of time in the industry, then younger/newer workers are, as might be expected, more likely to be working in places where they had undertaken work experience.

**After college: working without pay – not an option for some**

In the focus groups, graduates talked of the real difficulty presented by the fact that many companies expected new entrants to work without financial recompense. As students, many had left college with considerable debts and simply could not afford to live without an income. Unpaid positions as runners, a traditional way of new entrants to ‘get a foot in the door’, appeared to be common, but few of our participants were able to afford to do such jobs for any length of time. Some also doubted the usefulness of this approach anyway – particularly when some of these jobs seemed to have little relevance to gaining work experience. One woman who had worked as a runner for six months told how for the whole period that she was with a company, she had never done anything other than make sandwiches. Although willing to ‘muck in’ and do what was necessary, it seemed to her to be a waste of her time and training, never to have left the kitchen.
This issue of lack of training on the job was a point raised by several participants, who considered many of the new entrants’ jobs, like runners, to be little more than a source of cheap labour:

They’re looking to exploit you. They’re not looking to bloom this wonderful flower of creativity or anything. It’s just cheap labour…that’s the way it works…like a friend of mine who has spent four months just applying for runners’ jobs and he’s finally got one. The pay is shit, he doesn’t actually learn anything, but he’s happy because he’s got it. (White male graduate)

Others echoed these sentiments and talked about how even when runners’ jobs were paid, the remuneration for this type of work was not enough to live on in London, which eventually forced people out of the industry:

A friend of mine did that [worked as a runner] for three years. And he was like, ‘I’ve had enough, I don’t know what to do.’ And I was like, ‘Well may be you should leave or threaten to leave, you’ve got to be worth something to the company.’ And he said, ‘No, that’s the point, they haven’t taught me anything. After three years, on £15,000 in London. If I leave what are they going to do? Give me a pat on the back and say thank you very much and get somebody else for £13,000 a year for three years.’ (White male graduate)

Another person, although pleased that she was selected for a number of prestige new entrants’ jobs, had to turn them down, as she could not afford to work without payment:

I got offered some great jobs at [Broadcast C and Broadcast A] in the documentary department, but [Broadcast A] wanted me to work free for three months, and [Broadcast C] was a six-month free placement. I’d just supported myself throughout the whole of university. I didn’t get any help. Absolutely no way I could do that. And because the jobs weren’t 9 ‘til 5 then I couldn’t even do a bar job in the evening. (White female graduate)

Graduates discussed these issues in distinctly class terms, reflecting the inherent discrimination in the practice of new entrants’ jobs being unpaid. People noted that in their experience, the industry was very much comprised of the ‘middle-class’ and ‘upper class’. Reliance on the wealth of parents to see students through college, followed by financial support at the start of careers, was considered an option not available to working-class people trying to establish themselves. Several people talked about how people they had encountered in the sector had managed to ‘buy’ themselves into jobs by getting financial backing. Consequently, these graduates concluded that it was definitely more difficult for working class people to get work in the audio visual industries. The
Chapter four: working for love or money?

following is an extract from a discussion in one focus group that began around the issue of racism in the sector, but quickly turned into a discussion of class status:

And there’s a whole thing with class as well. [Broadcast A] and [Newspaper A] are very middle class. And I think there are assumptions made that if you’re black, you’re not middle class, you’re working class and so you won’t fit in. And I know that that does happen from speaking to other friends. One friend got a first class honours degree in publishing or something like that. And she went for a job and all the jobs she went for, even work experience, everyone was upper class and middle class. And she just didn’t stand a chance… (BME female)

I’ve also had problems with my class because I couldn’t afford to do it for free, and I didn’t have mummy and daddy who would pay. (White female)

…I but she didn’t have the accent either, because she’s very working class, and she just didn’t stand a chance. (BME female)

I kind of recognise that because it annoys me quite a lot, when I know people who got into the media industry through who their parents know. That is a lot to do with class. (White female)

There appeared to be a consensus from focus group participants on the issue of a person’s class status playing a significant role in employment in the sector. This was not raised as a question by the researchers, but it nevertheless came out during wider discussions that were taking place around other forms of discrimination. The first comment above by a BME woman was an attempt to highlight the fact that racism compounds the discrimination encountered by a person’s class position. In the case she was referring to, she gave the example of a friend who she described as ‘middle-class’. As middle class, she argued that her friend would in normal circumstances stand a better chance at securing employment. Yet, this was not the case as it was assumed that her friend was working class because of the stereotyping associated with her ethnicity.

Work experience: an employers’ perspective

Unpaid work experience is normally limited to two weeks and most of the employers interviewed claimed that this was the maximum amount that they permitted. Post production B offered two weeks and felt this was ‘long enough to give an idea as to whether the person would work well’. However, some employers admitted that they offered longer work placements. Independent production B offered six weeks at £40 a
week, dependent on age. Work experience was described as requiring ‘a lot of effort’ so that the company only tried to offer it ‘when we’re quite busy so there is something, a defined task that you give them to do’. Ideally, this employer felt that it should be paid for offering the work experience. Others hinted that they did not enquire too closely as to whether all work experience candidates were currently studying and were using the two weeks as part of their studies. For one, work experience was ‘an important part in finding people’. Most recruitment began with a work experience fortnight during which time the company could assess the individual’s suitability, should work become available. Independent production B, while acknowledging that ‘there is a big debate about work experience’ described it as ‘a good way of getting to know people’. Animation A had offered a 10-week work placement where students were performing work at almost the same level of output as paid staff. Broadcast B offered four-week placements and thought that three to four weeks’ unpaid work experience was the right amount, any longer and the individual would need to be paid. It had just offered a new scholarship that would combine a bursary of £5,000 a year plus the opportunity for four weeks’ paid work experience, where individuals would ‘get the opportunity to do something that’s going to be really valid and useful’. Distribution A found having the students on the two-week placement useful and while they are unpaid they are sometimes offered the opportunity to cover for holidays and are paid for this cover.

As can be seen from the descriptions of work experience, while formally the schemes imply that their aim is to give the student the opportunity to sample working in the industry, in practice they are seen by employers as a legitimate way of screening future candidates to decide who might or might not be employable. Post production B referred to a recent appointment who had previously done two weeks’ work experience and who had ‘made a good impression’.

Post production C argued in favour of extending work experience but for different reasons. In her view, work experience might be the route to opening up the industry a bit more, encouraging more diverse candidates and those from less privileged backgrounds. But there was still no way that the company itself could fund such a scheme. In contrast to the views of graduates reported earlier, some employers opposed the idea of long periods
of work experience, as a structured part of media courses. Post production C felt that two weeks was about right, any less would mean that individuals felt they did not belong, any longer and you would have to find them ‘a proper job’.

Only a small number of the employers interviewed had any experience of Film and Television Freelance Training (FT2) training scheme but those that had were very complimentary of it, describing the quality of the people coming through as ‘really, really high’, so that they could be given ‘proper’ jobs to do.

One or two employers admitted to having individuals working for a period without payment. Commercials A had individuals working unpaid for three months, during which time they would be assessed. According to the company during that period the individuals were not formally employed under a contract of employment. Independent production C gave runner jobs to the best of their work experience candidates. The runners worked for a minimum of six months at £275 a week, after which they normally either progressed or left. This employer would have favoured three months’ unpaid work experience, if they had been able to offer it.

Broadcast A offered about 16 or 17 trainee schemes and stated that around 70 per cent of those who completed the course were given jobs. With around a third of trainees being BME, this was advanced as a way of encouraging a wider diversity of applicants. However, the numbers that could be accommodated were very small, while the number of applicants was very large. There were 3,000 initial applications, whittled down to the 16 or 17 successful candidates. Thus while the scheme was clearly successful in encouraging diversity, the level of provision could not really make a significant dent in the under-representation of BMEs within the organisation.

**How long are you expected to work without pay?**

There have been many reports on how new entrants are expected to work without pay at the start of their career as they gain experience (Patterson 2001; Salt and Clarke 2001; Ursell 2000; White 2006) and the examples above add to this wealth of data. However, less is known about whether this also applies to ‘established’ workers in the audio visual industries. Evidence from the established worker focus groups and the workers’ survey
suggests that far from it being an issue for new entrants only, many people in the sector continue to do work without remuneration throughout their careers, particularly freelancers. Focus group participants considered it had become ‘normal practice’ to do some work for free in order to keep in with contacts and to let it be known that you were in the market for work. Yet it was also felt that some employers were taking advantage of the fact that there is so much competition in the industry and too many people chasing too few jobs. This is an extract from one conversation in a focus group:

B: You get these sorts of things where [employers] are advertising for someone and it’s, you know, ‘I want a director of photography with his own kit and set and even transport…But you’ll have a really fab time and just no money [laughs] for six months’…So I just think people want a meal ticket most of the time. And [this is] people who can pay as well!

INT: Really?

B: Yes.

R: People just want you to do things for free. I had a phone call today, ‘do you want to come and do this thing tonight…there’s no money in it, are you interested?’ [There is] not even a sandwich or a cup of tea or, you know!

Similar views were reflected in other focus groups, as this conversation shows:

INT: It seems today a lot of employers have this kind of expectation that new entrants will undergo work experience or there’s an expectation that people will do unpaid work. Did you find that and how did you manage to navigate a way around that?

H: You either grit your teeth and try not to drown and do a lot of free work, which is what I did…

INT: And how long did you do it for?

H: You never really stop doing it…but in my particular experience I think, there is a lot of it in London, in the UK. Much of what would be laughingly called an industry relies on that such as in [Broadcast A and Broadcast C] because this culture has existed for some time…

D: …and is now pretty big even in the feature film industry. [Film companies] are looking for cheaper crews and they will ring around to see how much you want and [they find] that [the other] guy’s cheaper, so they will have him.

H: Yeah…You do have to bite the bullet and do free work, but at the end of the day, it’s a long term business partnership that you’re trying to create. Sometimes, you know, it could work out and sometimes, the very few times that you really do connect with someone next week or two years later. That’s where the money comes from. It’s like a nebulous way of working.

C: I’m just increasingly frustrated with this sort of emphasis on new entrants and I think it’s just a way for employers to get cheap labour and they’re always saying, ‘ooh, there’s a new entrants’ scheme’. [But] what about the people that
are already here? They’re just like, ‘oh, they’ll come and work for free, oh, come and get some experience’. I just think it’s just a way to forget about the people that they’re having to sort of pay the decent money and, and sort of nurture careers and can always look to the new people. But, you know, what about the people that, you know, are sort of sinking and sort of trying to get on.

These comments demonstrate the extent to which people are either working for free or lowering their rates of pay due to the pressure of being freelance. Workers told how this was necessary in order to remain competitive and show that they are looking for work – either presently or in the future. It was also clear that these occurrences were not confined to one section of the industry but were happening across the board. The consequences of this are that for some individuals, their pay, year-on-year is not increasing. In fact, in some cases workers were finding that their earnings were dropping, rather than increasing over time. It was felt that the exploitation of new entrants contributed to this situation and made things difficult for workers as a whole:

There’s some exploitation as well with a lot of the young people coming in and they’re working as runners, some not getting paid at all, working hours that are against legal limits as well. Then it means that someone like me, who’s been in the industry for a long time…you have to then may be cut your rates because somebody is obviously going to do it for a lot less than you. (Female, television director)

There was genuine concern that somehow the industry should be forced to do something to stop the level of exploitation of trainees, not only for the sake of new entrants, but also to protect the pay of those already in the industry. There were a number of references to the time when trade unions played a role in regulating the industry in this way, but also recognition that this was no longer possible in their weakened state. Comparisons were made with the industry in other countries like the US and France, where it was claimed the unions played a much stronger role in preventing the worst excesses evident in audio visual work.

Unpaid work persists within the AV sector. Although on the face it is regulated, it appears relatively easy for employers to circumvent the guidelines on work experience, simply because there are so many applicants willing to work without payment, in the hope that this will open up avenues to paid employment. So long as unpaid work experience continues to be a route into the industry, it is inevitable that those who can afford to do it will be over-represented and those who cannot afford it will be under-represented. While
there may indeed be a valid role for work placements, particularly as part of more industry-focused training, it may need to be accompanied by funding to ensure that access is not dependent on class and income.
Chapter five: equal opportunities and discrimination
Chapter five: equal opportunities and discrimination

One of the concerns of the research was to explore the extent to which barriers may exist for some groups of workers, in obtaining jobs in the audio visual sector. Having noted the under-representation of black workers within the sector, while at the same time noting that a high proportion of London’s media students are BME, we wished to explore whether policies in relation to equality of opportunity were evident within the sector and the extent to which they improved opportunities for London’s BMEs. We also wanted to see what the experiences of students and AV workers were and their awareness of discrimination.

In this chapter we will first look at how student and recent graduates perceived the industry in terms of its equality of opportunity, before describing the experiences of established workers who may or may not have encountered equal opportunities and/or discrimination. Following this, we will assess the extent to which equal opportunities policies operate within the sector and the views of employers on issues of diversity and their impact on employment practice.

Do students anticipate any likely barriers to obtaining work?

We asked respondents to the student survey if they thought there might be any barriers to finding work in the audio visual industries. They clearly had a relatively good understanding of the labour markets and the problems that they might face in getting their first job as the three main barriers identified were that there are ‘not enough jobs’, ‘too much competition’ and that it was difficult to get work without good contacts. Although not yet working in the sector, we also asked students if they thought there were barriers for any particular groups of workers. Relatively few cited racism or sexism as factors creating barriers to employment (see Table 10 for actual numbers).
Table 10: Barriers to obtaining work in the audio visual sector – sex and race discrimination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sex discrimination (n)</th>
<th>Race discrimination (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BME female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BME male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=226

It was notable however, that of these, it was older students that were more likely to think that race and sex discrimination were potential barriers to employment. This is perhaps, due to the fact that graduates who had gone straight from school to college or university were likely to have much less experience of the labour market or to have faced actual discrimination in employment. We explored these issues in more detail in the graduate focus groups, which were comprised of BME and white graduates (in separate and mixed groups).

We asked graduates what they thought about how a person’s identity might affect their employment opportunities. In one focus group, in which there were only white graduates, people appeared relaxed and confident about speaking about the effect of gender on recruitment and employment, but much less so when the discussion moved on to discussing ‘race’. Both men and women talked about how gender segregation was evident in certain jobs (for example, sound, camera, administration) and the female graduates, in particular, felt that men were more likely to succeed in the industry than women due to long-held prejudices. For example, one woman recounted how she was told that she would never become a cinematographer because she was ‘too little’ and that ‘we need big boys to hold the cameras’. Another woman, even though working as a sound engineer, thought a similar view prevailed among sound engineers where the job was constructed as a male preserve. However, when discussions moved on to explore whether ethnicity could be a possible barrier to employment in the sector, there was much less certainty about this issue. The consensus from this white focus group was that race discrimination did not seem to be an issue: ‘certainly not in London’, ‘no, not in London’, ‘I don’t think so in London’. When this group referred to disadvantages experienced by black students at their college, for example, these were perceived to be an effect of class prejudice rather than racism: ‘that [class] was the issue, rather than their colour; it’s their lack of money’.
These views contrast with another focus group comprised of just BME graduates. The discussion on sexism, racism and general equal opportunities in this group was more extensive than that of the white focus group. The gendered segregation of labour (in terms of job type) was again raised, but this group highlighted that success in obtaining (and retaining) a job was more related to the type of company, your contacts, and the way that you ‘fitted in’. There was comment on the fact that some women had managed to get to fairly high positions in companies in the audio visual sector and this had an effect of creating greater opportunities for the recruitment of other women: ‘because there’s a lot of women higher up in the companies that are sort of giving other women a chance’. Despite this, the ‘old boys’ network’ was perceived to still exert an influence in some quarters, particularly in some jobs and in certain types of companies, as this woman explains:

[Broadcast A], I would imagine, would be more male-orientated, because it’s quite an old boys’ place. But some of the smaller companies, you know, I think a lot of the companies I worked for, the managing director was a woman and everybody below her pretty much was a woman as well. But in the creative field I’m not quite sure… like in editing and things like that, it would be male. (BME female graduate)

An important point to note about this comment is that large public sector companies are generally considered to have substantially better equal opportunities policies and practices than small private companies, but the views from this group of graduates contradicted the accepted evidence in this regard. In an industry where contacts appear paramount in securing employment, these BME workers saw the ‘objective’ and formal recruitment practices as an even more difficult hurdle to gaining employment.

Another participant in this group, a young Asian woman who had worked in the industry for about a year before doing her course, found it difficult to progress because she did not ‘fit in’ with the general culture of after work socialising:

I was up against an old boy that would go out every Friday night drinking with everybody and he is now successfully editing for XXXX. If I’d stayed on, may be I’d be doing that. But I didn’t really want to go out when I don’t like drinking. (BME female graduate)

This woman expressed concern about the cultural norms that were expected and associated with career progression. As someone who did not drink, she did not feel she should have to take part in this form of social networking in order to keep or progress in her job, and this was echoed by another participant:
‘Fitting in’ for the BME graduates in this focus group was felt to be more difficult because of their skin colour, each of them talked from personal experience about how they felt marginalised or had been given less interesting things to do at work than their white colleagues of equal status, or were ‘shoved in a corner’ out of the way. These are some of the experiences that three different graduates referred to in recent jobs:

When I was working at the [XX] Production, there was only one black man and everyone else was white. I was, like, the first black female as well and it was so weird. I was, like, you try to mingle in and some people are really nice. I’m not saying people are racist, some people are really genuine, and they’re like, are you all right? But you can tell the difference, you really can, that’s just how it is. It’s just how long you can tolerate it for. (BME female graduate)

When I was a runner I was trying to employ people from different backgrounds because I was the only Asian… but I wanted some more colours in the ring… I employed a black guy [who was]… wearing, like, this really funky shirt and the whole day they [other workers], the women, they were just really rude to him basically. They were rude and they were racist and they were like, ‘We’re not having him. Is this a joke?’ (BME female graduate)

When I started my work experience I started with another girl – a white lady – and she got so much more things to do than I did. I was just stuck on reception or in the office, but they took her round the place, you know? And I was just thinking, ‘whatever’, and after I thought ‘I don’t care anyway’. I think you have to take it with a pinch of salt. It depends on your character. I didn’t let it effect me but it does still happen. Like, as much as you want to say ‘oh equal opportunities’, this sort of thing, but it does happen. (BME female graduate)

Besides these personal experiences, the people in this graduate focus group talked about similar experiences encountered by BME friends, colleagues and family. When asked to rate the industry in terms of its equality of opportunity, one remarked ‘there aren’t opportunities, let alone equal ones!’ This sentiment was echoed by this female graduate, who said:

I don’t know from personal experience but I was reading something the other day, and it said they [Broadcast A] still don’t have the right quota of people from ethnic minorities and the ones that they do have do tend to still be at the lower grades. So that’s… I mean I’d love to work for the [Broadcast A or Newspaper A], but that does put me off. I know it shouldn’t but I do think that’s another barrier I’ve got to face. (BME female graduate)
In general, there appeared a reluctance to talk about discrimination in the context of racism apart from in the black focus groups. White graduates seemed more comfortable talking about different experiences as being of much broader general discrimination on the basis of individual prejudices. For example, a young white male began by noting that the only people who were not white in his workplace were the cleaners, but he did not identify this as an effect of the racialisation of employment, which was, perhaps, driven by the dynamic of race discrimination. Instead, he felt this was an issue of inherent personal prejudice:

*There’s a weird dynamic going on somewhere there. It [racism] isn’t an open thing, but I think just inherently people are prejudiced…They [employers] see a CV that looks good, and they’ve got them to come in…and then [they find] they’ve got a really heavy ethnic accent, or something like that, this might put them off. They may have a certain something about them that isn’t a personally racist, sexist, classist, but they may just be prejudiced slightly on a personal level and they may not choose them.* (White male)

Thus racism was conceptualised as in-built personal and individualised prejudice rather than as an ideology or social relationship that embodies power relations resulting in domination or subordination. Describing different (and detrimental) treatment as personal prejudice does not take into account the different forms by which racism (or sexism) manifest themselves, such as direct and indirect racism and structural and institutional racism. The two latter categories specifically take into account the fact that, actions and structures amount to racism if they disproportionately exclude members of some ethnic groups. Similarly, institutional racism describes the collective failure of organisations to provide appropriate and professional services because of skin colour or ethnic status. In two of the focus groups (mixed and white), participants, although appearing more comfortable talking about sexism, were more likely, when discussing racism, to articulate this in terms of individual or personal prejudice and contextualised by the need for employers to be able to ‘get on’ with employees because of the close team working involved in many aspects of audio visual work. As the participant below noted, the industry is intensely competitive and this was seen as the real issue determining whether people get jobs or not. This person saw this in terms of ‘survival of the fittest’, rather than an issue of discrimination:

*I think if you asked me if the media industry is like, inherently sexist, classist, racist, and all these other ‘ists’, then I would say no, because if you’re going to pick something to say about it you can pick so many other things. It’s not because it’s a nasty industry, it’s...*
because it’s so competitive and humans are competitive. And that’s going to come out of it. It’s a secondary function of it really. It’s not inherently racist or anything, or classist or sexist. (White male graduate)

Yet this recent graduate then contradicted himself when asked to comment or rate the audio visual sector in terms of its commitment to equal opportunities. He said he did not really feel able to because, ‘I’m white and I’m male and I’m young. Everything is geared to make my life easier’.

**Established workers and their experience of equality and discrimination**

Similar questions on equality and discrimination were asked of established workers both in the survey and in focus groups. But unlike the students and graduates, these workers had extensive knowledge of the audio visual industries and we were interested in what their experiences had been in working in companies that had equalities policies and those that did not.

Just over half of all respondents were working in companies that had equal opportunities policies, most of them covering gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and age. However, if we eliminate large companies (mainly the large broadcasters), this figure drops to 36 per cent. Respondents were asked if they thought there was any form of discrimination (general) in the audio visual industries and if so, what form it took. Sixty-one per cent said they thought there was discrimination, 18 per cent said there was not and 21 per cent did not know. Slightly more people in small companies (66%) were likely to feel that there were forms of discrimination in the sector. Table 11 shows the breakdown of these figures by ethnicity.

| Table 11. Do you think there is discrimination (generally) in the AV industry? |
|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|
|                         | % White | % BME  |
| Yes                     | 54      | 76    |
| No                      | 21      | 11    |
| Don’t know              | 24      | 12    |

As can be seen, BME workers were considerably more likely to think there is discrimination (perceived generally) in the sector than white workers and Table 12 shows
that there is a similar pattern in term of the views of men and women, with women more likely to report discrimination than men.

Table 12. Do you think there is discrimination (generally) in the AV industry?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Male</th>
<th>% Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those respondents who thought there was discrimination in the AV sector, 30 per cent thought this was due to ethnicity and 26 per cent to gender. However, the highest figure related to age discrimination (36%), but unfortunately we are unable to say if people believed this was due to discrimination against younger or older workers, as this was not specifically asked in the questionnaire and this is an issue that requires further research. Discrimination as a result of appearance also scored high, with 26 per cent of respondents having concerns in this area, just a little higher than those who noted disability discrimination (24%). It is not clear exactly what people were referring to when they mentioned discrimination in terms of appearance, although from data gathered in the worker focus groups it was evident that in some instances ‘attractiveness’ or ‘stylishness’ was something that helped to secure employment for some people. Although it is hard to ascertain the material necessity of such subjective criteria for most AV jobs, the industry is clearly very image and style conscious and this appears to play a role in determining if some people, in some circumstances, are offered jobs.

It is notable that those groups more likely to be discriminated against are also the people most likely to think there is discrimination in the industry. For example, 61 per cent of BME workers reported that they thought there was discrimination based upon ethnicity, compared to 46 per cent of white workers. Although the disparity is not as large, 48 per cent of women thought there was discrimination on the basis of gender, compared to 40 per cent of men. In terms of age, older workers (72%) were also more likely to report age discrimination than younger workers (58%) suggesting that the figure above perhaps relates to discrimination against older workers.
Ten per cent of people answering the question on forms of discrimination in the industry ticked the ‘other’ box and were given the opportunity to expand upon what forms of discrimination were evident or experienced in the AV sector. Ten respondents wrote about the prevalence of nepotism or ‘old boys’ networks’ and, perhaps related to this, 15 people said that people were often discriminated against because of their perceived working-class status or educational backgrounds. This is an issue we will look at in more detail later in this report.

Overall, we could not find a relationship between those people who had experienced discrimination and those companies that had equalities policies and those that did not. However, in respect of gender and ethnicity, people in companies that did have equalities policies were less likely than those in companies that did not, to think that there were greater barriers for women or ethnic minorities getting work in the audio visual industries. This suggests that equal opportunities perhaps create a climate where it is thought that discrimination is being tackled, even if in practice it has little effect.

Forty-one per cent of respondents to the workers’ survey had witnessed or been a victim of some form of discrimination in the sector and this related to things such as promotion, pay and recruitment. BME workers were, however, twice as likely to have either witnessed, or been a victim of discrimination as white workers.

Also, 40 per cent of BME workers thought that their ethnic background had made it more difficult for them to get work in the industry while only five per cent of white workers held this opinion. Conversely, 21 per cent of BME workers felt that their ethnicity had also assisted them in getting work in the sector, as did 16 per cent of white workers. Although ethnicity was an ‘advantage’ for a small number of BMEs, for most it had created difficulties in entering or progressing within the industry. Ethnicity was perceived as much less significant – either positively or negatively – by white workers, an indication that ethnic identity is a category imposed by a majority ethnic community on minority ethnic communities.
Discrimination and barriers to employment

We were interested to explore the reasons people gave for the fact that they had been turned down for jobs or had not been selected for interview. There were a wide range of responses in the workers survey, but by far the highest (60%) was that people felt that they did not have the required experience to do their jobs. This suggests lack of time for on-going training throughout a career – an issue that was raised earlier in this report – is causing some people to become deskillled (and this is likely to be a greater problem for freelancers).

As technology was advancing all the time in parts of the sector, the issues of on-going training was raised several times by participants. As freelancers it was hard to combine work and continuing professional development, as there was often the more immediate and pressing need to be earning. It was acknowledged that there were some very good training programmes around (for example FT2), but it was felt these were aimed at new entrants rather than people who had been working in the industry for a while. Although Skillset was mentioned by a couple of participants, it was clear that not all workers were aware of the training that it funded. This is an extract from a conversation on the lack of training within the sector, particularly for established workers:

H. There’s actually quite a lot of [training] opportunities for 18 and under…[but] I think in the sort of 25-30 age market there seems to be a massive lack of help. There is nothing after you get past a certain age to keep you in the industry.

U. That’s what I’m worried about.

H. I think there is such a serious lack of anything…of contacts, opportunities…

D. Or even funding for training.

H. …funding…just learning things…you know, you need to learn all the time…all that kind of stuff. But actually establishing people in various industries, there’s a serious lack of it, whether you’re black or white or anything.

Although this group of workers had been working in the sector for a number of years, they acutely felt the pressure to develop their skills as technological advances were introduced. At the same time, there was a collective consciousness that even with considerable experience and up-to-date skills, employers were increasingly prepared to employ the cheapest rather than the most experienced workers – despite the effect this might have on quality. People talked about how they were passed over for work because
they were ‘too qualified’ and the fact that people were employed who could bring along their own new and expensive kit, which reduced costs by saving employers having to hire these materials themselves.

As might be expected given other data in this research, a high percentage of people (38%) felt that their lack of contacts affected their chances of getting a particular job. The figures for BME workers were higher than those of white workers (45% compared to 33%). Yet there was no significant difference in terms of gender.

We also asked whether people thought that they had been turned down for jobs or not granted an interview because of their gender, ethnicity, disability or age. Twelve per cent of women thought they had been discriminated against because of their gender, and 32 per cent of BME workers said they had experienced discrimination because of their ethnicity, compared to just white workers (1%). The figures for disability discrimination were very low – perhaps reflecting the low numbers of disabled people working in the industry or the numbers of disabled people completing the survey. In terms of age discrimination, there were no significant differences between gender and ethnicity, but 13 per cent of respondents said they had felt discriminated against because they were too old and six per cent because they were too young.

There was widespread feeling that there were a considerable number of barriers in place that made it difficult to get work in the industry. These ranged from structural factors such as too much competition (66%) and a feeling that the industry was going through a difficult period (29%) and issues relating to identity such as image, ethnicity and gender. As can be seen from Table 6 very few respondents (5%) felt there were absolutely no barriers to securing work.
Table 6. Perceived barriers to getting work in the AV sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived barriers</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too much competition</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need good contacts to find a job</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges do not adequately prepare people for the industry</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People need to have a certain image or style</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry is going through a difficult period</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications from colleges/universities do not meet the skills needs of employers</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination against ethnic minorities</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination against women</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are no barriers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once again the need for good contacts secured a high score with 58 per cent of respondents highlighting this factor. However, an issue not discussed much in academic research is the fact that a significant number of people felt that colleges and universities were not adequately preparing students for work in the sector, an issue we discussed in Chapter two.

Discrimination against ethnic minorities is perceived as a barrier by 19 per cent of all respondents, but when disaggregated by ethnicity the figures are 43 per cent for BME workers and 10 per cent for white workers. Interestingly, although the number of those stating that women are discriminated against when it comes to getting work in the industry, slightly more men than women are of this opinion (23% of men, compared to 18% of women).

Equal opportunities policies: how effective are they in increasing diversity?

In the focus groups with established workers, many commented on the overall lack of implementation of equal opportunities. Nevertheless, there was support for schemes and policies that aimed to assist in bringing excluded groups into the sector. While it was felt that, in some cases, equalities or diversity schemes appeared to be ‘just ticking boxes’, it was also acknowledged that some had been successful and at least allowed some minorities to be seen ‘where they would absolutely not have been seen in certain circles 5-10 years ago’. The ‘ticking boxes’ approach by some employers, which was referred to by some participants, was felt to be good for public relations and the image of the company, but it did not necessarily mean that minority ethnic groups were being employed in greater numbers. For example, this playwright who had worked in the industry for 15 years, said:
This is something that particularly matters to [company b], because [company b] are very, very good at avoiding issues, like ticking the boxes around it, and saying...we just have to show that we audition black people, we don’t give them the job. I did a film last year and it was the first time that I’d seen a non-white crew; it was a real mix. I just went ‘what is going on?’ [I spoke to the] 55 year old white director and said to him ‘I have never seen this much colour in a crew”. And he said, ‘yes, it’s amazing isn’t it’. (Male playwright/actor)

In another example, a filmmaker and member of BECTU’s negotiating team, reported on a meeting that had taken place when the union had been discussing with a craft guild how to increase the diversity in the profession:

_I’m on the black members’ committee...and last week we were talking about trying to get diversity within the guilds and we met with quite old-fashioned people there. I mean...they’re quite old fashioned and they’re quite conservative and not, you know, prone to change at all. And when we said that we’d like to get diversity within the guilds they said, ‘well, there’s not enough jobs and the second thing is we don’t want anybody coming and taking our jobs’. (Male, filmmaker)_

While such ‘protectionist’ views are not necessarily expressed so openly and forthrightly these days, they do demonstrate the reluctance to the opening up of some professions to ‘outsiders’ and that there are some entrenched views within parts of the sector where people are resistant to change. In these circumstances people are prepared to fiercely defend their jobs in what is a highly competitive industry.

The concern about diversity schemes was that there were not enough people in the sector, in sufficiently powerful positions, committed to the equality agenda, who were able to effect change. Consequently, even when there were good intentions and policies in companies, it seemed they tended to remain as aspirations rather than actual good practice. It was felt that the equalities agenda had become eroded in recent years and that this was a consequence of the deregulation and casualisation of the sector. In this regard, there was a feeling that things were moving backwards rather than forwards, particularly, it was noted, that some large employers had cut staff in diversity departments with the intention of devolving this to individual departments. This was seen as a retrograde step because of the difficulties of ensuring the equalities agenda was carried out at these lower levels of management – particularly as it had often been at this level that most resistance to diversity policies had occurred.
Employers’ views on equality and discrimination

In-depth interview questions asked employers to consider how equality and diversity could best be achieved in the AV industry, given the low representation of women and ethnic minorities and the over-supply of aspirants. Only a minority of employer interviewees referred to having an equal opportunities policy. This does not mean that they did not have one, but suggests that the policy did not necessarily inform their day-to-day activities and was not a focus of their discourse on barriers to employment. Post production B noted that recruitment agency websites did not carry messages on encouraging diversity and was one of a small minority of employers who, without prompting, stated that the company did stress, in all its literature, that it considered itself an equal opportunities employer. Post production D also had an equal opportunities policy, but as the employer respondent honestly admitted, ‘it’s sort of got dust on it and it’s not been looked at and not spoken about’. There was no monitoring information and consequently the company had no sex or ethnicity-based data on those it employed.

Two employers emphasised that as national companies, even though their main operational bases were in London, they also had remits to reflect geographical and regional diversities and accepted that there could be tensions in trying to achieve a service that reflected the wide diversity of its viewers. In the case of these national employers, equality issues had to be managed to encompass all aspects of diversity.

*Our definition of diversity is very wide. Obviously ethnicity is very important. We clearly have strong views about geographic diversity as well, about diversity of voices, age diversity is important and obviously gender diversity.* (Broadcast B)

Their concern was that the successful management of one could result in an under-representation of another and in their view they could not just take account of the relative size of the BME population in the area where the organisation happened to be located.

In the course of the in-depth interviews we asked all of the employers whether they knew of the *Audio Visual Skills Action Plan for London*, and its aims. The *Audio Visual Skills Action Plan for London*, a report prepared by the London Sector Skills Forum and Skillset in 2003 to address the needs of all those working in the industry, be they employers, employees or freelancers, aimed to widen access to employment opportunities in the
sector for London’s diverse population. To take the Plan forward, it naturally requires that employers know about it and consider its recommendations within their employment policies and strategies. A majority of employers had not heard of it and of those that had, none spoke of having shaped their employment policies around it. One interviewee, Post production C, knew that there was a plan and also had seen a summary of it. However, this employer felt that it was only good if it got used. In her view, the plan focused too much on ‘changing the industry to let people in, by looking at those who do not have skills and determining how they might enter the sector’. For a small company ‘struggling to make a profit’ this was not how it conceived an action plan. In the interviewee’s opinion what was needed were greater opportunities for work experience to ‘open up the industry a bit more’ to those from ‘less privileged’ backgrounds. Broadcast C also knew of the Plan but commented that while many audio visual companies have some contacts with local minority ethnic communities, these contacts were of a ‘superficial nature’. What was needed was a consistent, robust and continuing relationship between broadcasters and the audiences they served.

**Gender and employment**

Very few of the employer interviewees made any reference to gender barriers to recruitment and progression within the industry. Only one employer, Distribution A, noted that there were fewer female runners than male. She could give no explanation as to why this was the case, other than possibly because the work offered was more technically based. Thus despite it really wanting ‘to try and get more girls in’ in this respondent’s view, ‘their CVs were a lot worse than [those of] the men that have come through’ and she could only conclude that the industry, or at least distribution, was ‘still more attractive to men at the moment’. In contrast, only two other employers who raised the issue of gender discrimination believed that there had been significant changes. Broadcast B stated that as far as its bursary scheme was concerned, there was now an almost 50:50 gender split. Independent production B saw the industry as having a better gender balance today than 20 years ago.
Chapter five: equal opportunities and discrimination

Ethnicity, class and employment

The telephone survey suggested that very few employers felt that race discrimination was a barrier to entry into the sector. In the in-depth interviews we explored this issue in more detail and it was clear, particularly in relation to ethnicity that account also has to be taken of class in any discussion of ethnicity, when talking about barriers to entry in the sector. As Commercials A pointed out, the sector did not necessarily discriminate per se on the ground of a person’s ethnicity, but it did not admit those who were not, in the interviewee’s words, ‘westernised’ and this implied that there was more room for those whose class background enabled them to ‘fit in’ with an existing middle class white workforce. This view was not universally held. Broadcast A believed that ‘people from ethnic minorities who are successful are the ones who do it on their terms’ whereas those who tried to compromise or fit in were less successful.

Some employers claimed to already employ ethnically diverse workforces. For example Distribution A, with around 150 employees, described the workforce as ‘relatively diverse’ although there was no diversity strategy and no monitoring data. People, however, ‘seem to come from all over the world’ although the interviewee had no knowledge of the career paths they had pursued to arrive in its employment. However, once in the company there were clear career paths that acted as an encouragement to remain. Animation A argued that it recruited solely on merit and although it did employ a number of male BME workers, it could not say how many, nor what proportion of the workforce they represented.

Many employers accepted that there was under-representation of ethnic minorities. A number of possible reasons were given. Radio A felt that the reason why so few people from BME groups had jobs in the media was to do with racism. He had employed ‘excellent’ people who had wanted to move from community into mainstream broadcast, but would never get taken on. Mainstream broadcasting did not, in his view, reflect the real diversity within the UK population and significant minority ethnic groups were completely absent from representation in the media. Broadcast C also felt that while the media now employed some non-white staff in front line positions, they conformed to a fairly narrow image, which missed out the diversity of London’s BME communities. A small number of respondents felt this low level of representation was because BME
workers did not seek jobs in the sector, although this view was usually drawn from a very limited evidence base, since most did not know how many BME staff their company employed. Independent production A commented ‘I never see them [BME workers]’ save perhaps in production management and that the range of recruits provided through the agencies ‘just doesn’t seem to be the mix you’d expect. I have no idea why’. Reflecting on this he suggested that there was an ethnic divide. Chinese and Asian workers were present within the industry, but that there was an almost complete absence of black Africans and black Caribbeans. In his view, this was explained by the fact that they were not attending the design and media courses that his sector recruited from. Independent production C argued that there was no ‘conscious discrimination’ but there were very few applications from minority ethnic candidates, which he put down to the fact that broadcasting does not reflect the realities of a diverse UK and therefore sends out messages to BME candidates that there is no place for them in the industry. Broadcast C similarly felt that the company was not attractive to BME applicants and that they ‘did not see themselves as XXX people.’ It was finding that while it was getting initial applications from people from BME groups, they were dropping out of the process after first interview.

Independent production D felt that it was the way that recruitment took place that excluded BME applicants, but at the same time, the financial constraints under which small employers operated, encouraged exclusionary procedures. For him the main reason for under-representation was that small companies like his did not advertise, because the costs were prohibitive and this was the only way ‘you’re likely to get a whole spectrum of people coming forward’. Instead, they relied on speculative CVs and on recommendations. These just did not produce BME candidates. For him, anything that could be done to reduce the cost of advertising jobs would help in making the industry more diverse. One suggestion was a paper for London offering free job adverts. This employer also referred to small employers in the sector being ‘risk adverse’, if ‘you’ve only got a small number of jobs, you don’t really want to take risks’. This ‘encouraged’ them not to think outside the box and not to recruit, save from their recognised entry channels. His view was that if perceived ‘risks’ could be ‘managed’, through some form of state support, then perhaps employers might recruit from a larger pool.
Thus even when BME workers did apply for jobs, they would be screened out because they did not demonstrate an empathy with middle class values. This view was advanced to explain why it was not overt racism that was necessarily the main reason for exclusion. Employers took decisions almost subconsciously about what qualities were valued and what were not. Broadcast A noted:

\[...\text{when we’re assessing people, it is people from certain backgrounds that seem to be better prepared. You know they seem to have kind of got their head around the whole job, so that when they go into those assessments they can perform better. I don’t know why but sometimes you get people from different backgrounds who seem to just have a lack of understanding of what it is and therefore they don’t perform well…People from white middle class backgrounds have managed to kind of prepare themselves in a way that they can ask questions in a way that matches our expectations. So we have to think about our expectations, but I think we also need to think about how we can give people from different backgrounds that insight.}\] (Broadcast A)

Independent production B spoke of the advantages that middle class applicants possessed, illustrating this through the story of one successful applicant, contrasting her experiences with that of unsuccessful working class applicants:

\[\text{She hasn’t got the job through any personal contact at all. But what she had was a body of knowledge that led her to know what these jobs were and what the opportunities were…whereas if you don’t come from an environment in which it’s part of everyday conversation [it is more difficult to succeed].}\] (Independent production B)

However, holding such views meant that there was no challenge to the industry’s own reference points. It primarily addressed the issue of under-representation by a requirement that applicants change their values and definitions of culture, as opposed to the industry changing its values and culture.

There was a strong view, advanced by some interviewees, that BME people did not make it into the sector because their predominantly working class position meant that they did not carry with them an inherent comprehension of how the industry operated. As one respondent pointed out:

\[\text{There is a whole world of people out there who’ve got skills and aspirations that could be matched in this industry, but nobody is telling them about it.}\] (Independent Production B)

Some employers suggested that the only way to deal with under-representation was by tackling the issue of exclusion at school age. School was seen as potentially being able to
address some of these issues, by opening those cultural references to working class children, black and white. Independent production B referred to a ‘fantastic ignorance among working class inner London school 16-year-olds about what this industry is and what the opportunities in it are.’ This employer had worked on a successful school project and in describing it said,

*It would made you weep it was so exciting, you know, that what you’ve done is you’ve just opened these peoples’ eyes and that I really think, in terms of tackling that issue of diversity, I think that is where the work has to be done.* (Independent production B)

But schools were often seen as not providing young working class children with the cultural framework that would assist them to get into the industry. As Independent Production E stated,

*You need to know those things, and I'm not sure that people who are coming out of school have that grounded cultural understanding of the world in which we live.*

Broadcast A spoke of the need to ‘catch people early enough’, when they were 15 or 16 years old. If not, they were disadvantaged predominantly because they did not understand the cultural norms that operated within the industry.

The AV industries operates within a relatively closed world, where questions of what is ‘culture’, how it is defined and what encourages the development of new and challenging cultures, are not always contested. Although there is often a recognition of the need to operate within an environment that encourages equality of opportunity, the experiences of many BME workers suggest that in practice the changes that they anticipate need to occur, to genuinely open up the sector, are not happening. The problem is that practices are rarely challenged because jobs in the industry are so highly fought for and there is always perceived to be more applicants than places.
Chapter six: ‘a white middle-class industry’ – the effect of race, class and culture

In this chapter we want to look at the intersection of race, class and culture and its effect on recruitment and employment within the audio visual industries. While individuals may be subject to discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, class or age, for example, there often occurs an intersection of discrimination where people are subject to multiple forms of discrimination. The issues of race and class are often closely intertwined such that it can be difficult to prise them apart, to find a single underlying cause of discrimination. In some respects, race discrimination becomes class discrimination – one of which is unlawful, the other not. The first socially unacceptable, the second, a subtle form of discrimination that can be passed off as cultural norm or bias and one that seldom raises complaint. Mukti Campion, (2005: 85) in describing the cultural diversity of the UK broadcasting industry, talks about institutional discrimination as arising from a dominant industry monoculture, where the industry ‘wasn’t just physically White, it was culturally White’ as well. Many of these issues have been picked up in previous chapters, but this chapter will focus on the impact of intersectionality in more detail.

Race, class, culture and discrimination

The combination of race, class and culture and the negative effects on BME workers’ careers was a subject discussed at length in each of the focus groups, even though the interviewers did not instigate this through direct questions. There were a number of issues raised that will be dealt with in turn. Firstly, and as might be expected, there were few references to direct forms of discrimination or racist abuse. Even so, the examples that will be referred to in this chapter suggest that indirect discrimination or cultural misrepresentation based on ethnicity are not uncommon in the audio visual industries.

As was noted earlier, the need for good contacts is almost essential in finding and sustaining employment. Immediately this can create barriers for some BME workers, as there are relatively few ethnic minorities in the audio visual industries as a whole and the fact that parts of the sector are noted for the fact that they are predominantly white and middle class. Earlier in this report references were made to Oxbridge/public school
environments, and a tendency to recruit from similar cultural backgrounds. Together these can create barriers and disadvantages at the start, as this black cameraman explains:

*I am from a working class background and I haven’t gone through the same educational system as them. So their encounter with black people is very limited. When they do meet someone they have stereotype idea…it’s kind of weird. When they find out that your outlook may be similar to theirs, or different from the stereotype, they don’t know where to put you. That’s a very uncomfortable feeling.* (Black cameraman)

Even those BME workers who had similar educational backgrounds to ‘white middle-class’ employers faced the problem that they were, as black people, more often that not, bracketed as working class.

*…there is class discrimination, there is a lot of class discrimination, but on top of that there is race discrimination as well as sexual discrimination and everything else, but…a lot of people put racial discrimination down to class because people tend to think ‘well black people are working class’.* (BME male camera operator)

In some senses, there was a feeling that class was almost an ‘acceptable’ prejudice in a way that was not the case for race or gender. While it is unlawful to discriminate on the basis of race and gender, there is no corresponding legislation relating to class status. So people talked about how there was a subtlety surrounding discrimination where ‘a lot of it is steeped in class and not necessarily race’ and ‘they think you are working class or you just came of the boat’. These viewpoints resonate with the perceptions that parts of the industry function on the basis of old boys’ Oxbridge middle-class networks that are seen to be exclusive and thus beyond the reach of many BME workers. But there is also a complexity about the race/class issue, particularly for those BME workers who are ‘middle-class’ and have gone though public school and university education. Here there is an assumption that such BME workers are ‘one of us’ and can be ‘moulded to fit’ due to their middle-class background, yet their ethnicity still sets them apart and cultural stereotypes continually come into play, which affect the work they are given and the way they are treated.

*I mean, like, as a black person you still end up outside that circle. I mean, like, the old boys’ network. You could be part of the old boys’ association at Eton, but you’re still a black boy. It just doesn’t happen for you the same way it happens for all the other old boys.* (Female designer)
Participants talked about how they were also ethnically bracketed in terms of the work expected of them; ‘there is this strange idea that if you’re black you only want to shoot black films’. An actor/playwright who had worked in the industry for 15 years described how the effect of cultural stereotyping had affected his work:

So I said to him [casting director] ‘do you realise this is the first time – I’ve worked in radio for years – the first time I’ve been in a radio play that I haven’t been cast for my colour’. This is radio! And I just think, it was such a head turner... I thought, ‘I can’t believe that all these years of working you are the first person who has cast me because of a character on the radio, and not the colour’. (Male actor/playwright)

Another actor, a woman with a highly successful 20 year plus career in radio and television, also noted; ‘I have done masses of radio and I can count on one hand the number of parts I have had that are not defined by race’. A filmmaker, who had been an actor and had experienced the problem of not quite fitting the part on account of his ethnicity, thought that the situation would be different on the other side of the camera. Yet in his experience there was little difference:

The film making side to me is very disconcerting, because I’ve come from acting, so being mixed race as well, I was never black enough for a part or I was not white enough or this, that and the other. I never fitted into any particular house. So [now] I’m behind the camera, [I thought] it’s not going to happen! [It’s] very odd, and most of the dinosaurs are still there, you know, the establishment and they have the keys; they have all of the control. (Male filmmaker)

This was not a one off experience as this female actor and male sound engineer explain:

That side of things is changing. [It] makes your heart soar when you see a [black] camera person or sound person or director, but they are few and far between. (Asian female actor)

I know of only one other person of non-white origin who works in sound. (BME male sound engineer)

Both commented on their continued surprise at seeing other black workers on set.

**The influences of race, class and gender: why identities matter**

Despite, or perhaps as a consequence of the difficulties many of the BME focus group participants had in getting into and remaining in the audio visual sector, all wanted to remain in the sector and develop their careers. However, there was a worry that the sector had become more focused on money, rather than skills in recent years and there was concern about the impact this was having on workers. The increasing requirement that
freelancers should have their own kit or access to expensive equipment was transferring this burden from companies to individuals. The consequence was that only those people who were very well established and had built up capital, or those who had means of acquiring capital or credit, were able to get jobs in parts of the sector. The effect of this could be to exclude those without economic capital, such as the lower paid and new entrants who did have access to financial resources. Thus this limits the diversity of people entering and remaining in the sector.

There was also the factor that, because of developing technologies, audio visual workers needed to be continually developing and refining their skills and, although Skillset provides a wide range of subsidised courses for freelancers, it was not clear the extent to which workers were aware of this service, or if they did whether or not they were able to arrange time off to attend the courses. Workers recounted the difficulties of combining freelance work and training, explaining that finding time for training often was not practical or economically viable, as valuable income was lost when not actually at work.

In addition, workers felt that their incomes were not rising with the cost of living. Some explained how their relative earnings were falling year-on-year. This aspect of freelance work inevitably has a disproportionate effect on women who may take time out of the labour market to have and care for children. Other research has noted the impact gender has had on the audio visual industries, where women working in the sector tend to either put off having children as late as possible or decide not to have them at all (BFI, 1995; Willis and Dex, 2003) due to the consequences that having time out of the industry has on their careers and levels of pay, or decide to leave the sector for more family-friendly jobs.

Gendered discourse and assumptions about people’s different roles and abilities were noted throughout discussions and reflect the gendered divisions of labour that are still evident in the industries. For example, participants in the graduate focus groups talked about how unusual it was for women to be working in sound and the British Film Industry report of 1995 reported the breakdown of jobs by gender noting the predominance of women in secretarial jobs and men in the higher paid producer/director roles. Similarly, the BME workers focus groups discussed the current gendered assumptions that were capable of affecting the type of work you were able to obtain:
Chapter six: the effect of race, class and culture

A friend of mine was a trainee camerawoman and the camera officer said to her, ‘you’re not going to be doing this for long, because you’re probably going to go along and have babies afterwards, aren’t you’. That kind of, you know, sexual harassment… (Male cameraman)

Again echoing a discussion in a graduate focus group, people talked about those best able to progress in this industry, reflecting the race, gender and class bias already referred to.

U: I think unless you’re white and Oxbridge…you can be basically anything else [and it’s much more difficult]…

B: Well, white, male and Oxbridge

U: White, male and Oxbridge. Yes. Yes. I think it is not geared towards women at all.

N: I think that’s just about it; white, middle-class, straight men…although the actors, they can be gay.

H: …If you have a financial background no matter what your family background is, it does make it a lot easier to get into this business, which as a rule expects you to work for free for quite some time in order to be trusted, in order to get anything…And even if you are white, middle class, there’s just not that much help out there, but if you’re black, Asian and, especially female, then there’s very little regard for the cloth of your work and also, at the same time, there’s very little support for it as well.

There were also more complex discourses regarding race and gendered identities where negative assumptions were made about a person’s abilities. A cameraman, who had an African name, described how when he was a student and his tutor was trying to get work attachments for him during his course she was repeatedly asked ‘is he English, can he speak English?’ As he explained, ‘this got to me when I wasn’t getting any replies, when I was sending out CVs and I had the qualifications and everything like that. A successful film-maker, also African, having received the same response over many years had stopped sending CVs and instead turned up at offices in person:

When I see freelance jobs and if the office is in London, I actually turn up with my CV and my show reel so I can actually look them in the eye and say; ‘look, you’re not going to waste my time. If you’re not going to employ me, don’t waste my time because now you know I’m black’. Although most of the time, when they see my name, because it’s an African, it’s a dead giveaway. (Male filmmaker)

Appearance appeared to be a key factor in selection for jobs, although workers were unclear as to the reasons for this. It was acknowledged that the industry was very image conscious and that there was a tendency for people to surround themselves with ‘stylish’
people in order to project an image, but it was also pointed out that most work they did was ‘behind camera’, so ‘attractiveness’, particularly as it was so subjective, should not be a criterion for employment.

A recent entrant to the industry described how she had been asked several times recently to send photographs along with her CV and questioned the purpose of such requests. In her mind the motive appeared to be related to ethnicity and was against every understanding she had about equal opportunities. ‘As soon as they see your picture, you know, they’re not going to want you if they don’t want minorities’.

Established worker focus group participants, again reflecting views from the graduate focus groups, thought that in sections of the industry, some producers, directors and employers liked to surround themselves with ‘attractive people’ and although not expressed overtly would use this as a criterion for selection. In discussions, this topic crossed backwards and forwards from gender to ethnicity, incorporating different facets of individuals’ identities. For example, there was the belief that black women were more employable than black men and that black workers ‘had a worse deal than the Asian communities.’ Even so, concern was expressed that a person needed to be the ‘the right kind of Asian’ as Muslims were considered ‘much further down the line’ than Sikhs or Hindus. People from south Asian communities were thought to progress better in the sector on account of the fact that they were not automatically assumed to be working class and due to stereotypes about ‘work ethic’.

Gendered stereotypes, in some circumstances, tended towards reverse discriminatory practice. Gendered stereotypes, in some circumstances, tended towards reverse discriminatory practices and again, it was perceived that this was related to appearance. In a discussion about what appearance and what sort of advice people would give to new BME entrants to the industry, this male filmmaker had these comments to make:

*I think, because a lot of the guys – the money people – are men and liked to be flattered by women, if I could go to a meeting with a short skirt [laughing] . . .sadly, as horrible as that may sound, I probably would, because they are a bit lecherous; they are like that. So yes, I think it is slightly different. I think if you’re a black guy and . . .firstly, I would really try and discourage you from doing it [joining the industry] because it is soul destroying. I was told*
it was soul destroying when I was 13 and I didn’t believe it, but that was true. And when I mean soul destroying I mean pit of despair, where, you know, I sort of found myself crying and stuff like that about decisions that had been made. I can’t change the colour of my skin. What the hell is going on? (Male, filmmaker)

These issues illustrate the complexity that a person’s identity can have on their employment opportunities, but also indicate the levels and extent of discrimination experienced by this group of black and minority ethnic workers. While this sample is small, the types of problems encountered resonate with other research in this area and quantitative data gathered from questionnaires completed as part of this research. Focus group participants welcomed the opportunity to discuss these issues and reflected on the fact that there were few opportunities to do so. It appeared that discrimination on the basis of ethnicity was largely unspoken, even among BME workers themselves. Particularly as noted earlier, the consequences of doing so may mean that you could be labelled ‘a troublemaker’. As one participant said:

And no one talks about the issue as well. That’s the trouble. When we do see each other at parties we look at each other and it’s, yeah, ‘how are you?’ ‘[I’m] all right.’ But no one will talk about it because, you know what? If we talk about it, it must mean it’s true and… and, also we know that white people don’t like hearing you talk about it; that’s a big turn off. (Male filmmaker)

The opportunity to participate in the research was welcomed by this group of workers. As one person commented ‘it’s all pretty new to be honest to sit around a table and talk about all this stuff.’

Recent graduates also discussed these issues in distinctly class terms. They were also aware that the industry was very much comprised of ‘middle-class’ and ‘upper-class’ workers, whose cultural reference points were often far removed from their own. Reliance on the wealth of parents to see students through college, followed by financial support at the start of careers, was considered an option not available to working-class people trying to establish themselves – although some of the graduates had been able to rely on financial support from their parents. Several graduates talked about how people they had encountered in the sector had managed to ‘buy’ themselves into jobs by getting financial backing. Consequently these graduates concluded that it was definitely more difficult for working class people to get work in the audio visual industries. The following is an
extract from a discussion in one focus group that began around the issue of racism in the sector, but quickly turned into a discussion of class status:

*And there’s a whole thing with class as well. [Broadcast A and Newspaper A] are very middle class. And I think there are assumptions made that if you’re black, you’re not middle class, you’re working class and so you won’t fit in. And I know that that does happen from speaking to other friends. One friend got a first class honours degree in publishing or something like that. And she went for a job and all the jobs she went for, even work experience, everyone was upper class and middle class. And she just didn’t stand a chance…* (BME female)

*I’ve also had problems with my class because I couldn’t afford to do it for free, and I didn’t have mummy and daddy who would pay.* (White female)

*…But she didn’t have the accent either, because she’s very working class, and she just didn’t stand a chance.* (BME female)

*I kind of recognise that because it annoys me quite a lot, when I know people who got into the media industry through who their parents know. That is a lot to do with class.* (White female)

There appeared to be a consensus from the graduate focus groups on the issue of a person’s class status playing a significant role in employment in the sector. This was not raised as a question by the researchers, but it nevertheless came out during wider discussions that were taking place around other forms of discrimination. The first comment above by a BME woman was an attempt to highlight the fact that racism compounds the discrimination encountered by a person’s class position. In the case she was referring to, she gave the example of a friend who she described as ‘middle-class’. As middle class, she argued that her friend would in normal circumstances stand a better chance at securing employment. Yet, this was not the case as it was assumed that her friend was working class because of the stereotyping associated with her ethnicity.

**Individual experiences of racism and the effects on careers**

Participants in the research were very open about their personal experiences of racism or being excluded, describing in detail the effect this had on their careers and employment opportunities. These are just a few of the comments made:

*I have had some nice staff jobs but you know, in hindsight there is more discrimination in the industry than I ever thought there would be and I think it is very much down to the luck of the draw in who you are working for… I have faced racial discrimination more than once, and when that happens you, it slows down your career and you always a kind of struggling to get back to where you were before. So, you know, I think that some opportunities are not easily available.* (Female journalist)
I can honestly that my time in XX was the most appalling time I have had in a working environment. I have never come across such bigotry in my working life. It was a shock. It was a real shock. (Female actor)

There were all these reasons… all these excuses about me having this degree, or having done this film, and not being suitable for even minor production positions. They were basically saying, ‘you’re a brown man and we really don’t want you’… Basically, if you were a person of colour, they weren’t going to take you as seriously as some other person who basically would claim to know the same things. (Male filmmaker)

I found it difficult because the culture was that everyone in the company was friends with each other and everything else. [Also] it was new for them, first to have a black person in, to have someone they didn’t know in that company, [and] I just found it alienating, difficult to work in, but I stuck with it for two years. (Male cameraman)

There was a real dilemma about how to deal with incidents of racism, or even in making the decision to define discrimination or different treatment as racism. Because it was seldom overt, and as reported earlier was often contextualised in terms of class rather than race, it made it difficult for individuals to know how to address certain situations. This person explained how she rationalised the treatment she experienced from one large broadcaster when her contract was unexpectedly terminated:

I am the last person in the world to think that racism is going on, but you know when you look at the evidence and there is absolutely no other explanation… you haven’t had a row with anyone… you have never been off sick… you have come in and you have never been late for your five AM shifts… you get on with loads of colleagues and you get on with your work… stay late… you know, you have to ask yourself, ‘what else could it be’? (Female journalist)

In this case, this journalist took her case to a trade union and received compensation, but she was also aware that in doing so, she would never work for that particular employer again. The pros and cons of whether to complain or report discriminatory behaviour were discussed at some length. In the above case, the journalist did not want another black person, who was not as confident of challenging this behaviour, to have to go through a similar situation. Another person, also working for a major broadcaster, who lost her job without any warning, said: ‘I didn’t have your guts because they threatened me and I got scared and I regret it now. I was told ‘if you take X to an employment tribunal you will not work for X again’. Although this woman had the courage to make an initial complaint, the idea of taking it further was not something she could face. There was awareness that race and gender claims made to employment tribunals are notoriously difficult to win, particularly in cases of indirect discrimination. This was brought home to this particular
person when someone from the diversity department called and asked; ‘you don’t mind me saying [this], but how do you know it’s racism, because talking to you on the phone, you don’t sound Indian.’

The consequences of reporting discrimination could lead to accusations of ‘playing the race card’ and the very use of this discourse is to dismiss an allegation outright and serves to prevent people raising such issues again. Even when issues are raised, diversity departments or human resources may try to get people to drop the issue rather than confronting alleged perpetrators as this woman explains:

I had this conversation with somebody at [diversity department] who said to me ‘sometimes it’s not always that good for us to intervene on someone’s behalf because you can get labelled as coming from this diversity angle. So, sometimes it’s best not to, for us to ask any questions on their behalf’. And I heard a producer say, ‘oh, they’re playing the race card so I’m not going to employ them.’ (Female children’s TV)

Therefore even though human resource and diversity departments have a remit to ensure employers abide by legislation and their own policies on equality they can be reluctant to take on issues or are concerned not to ‘push them too far’. The concern seems to be to avoid too much conflict with people within organisations who ‘resent having the diversity departments come in and ask them questions’. But this leaves victims of discrimination isolated with no recourse to action within the employment situation and experiencing a double disadvantage:

If you are asking diversity questions of employers and it’s coming back on you negatively as a minority person, then you’re getting sort of kicked twice because you’re not getting the sort of work in the first place and then when people want to ask questions, then you’re sort of given a label and sort of swept under a carpet. (Female)

In the worst cases, raising discrimination with an employer may mean that it is difficult to find work in the future and this situation leaves people with the choice of confronting the issue or risking their employment status or developing a reputation as a difficult person. These dilemmas were not easy as this conversation demonstrates:

F:  I think on a personal level you have to know where your boundaries are. But, of course, if you upset people you go and raise the experience with your seniors don’t necessarily expect they’re going to call you back for more work. So it depends how far you’re prepared to let things go and just be realistic.

T:  But if you don’t you’ve got two choices. If you don’t challenge then you are…

U:  …condoning it and if you don’t challenge it then…
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T: …the next person comes along has an even harder time and then you don’t have diversity, you don’t really have diversity in the industry at all.

Try as they might, BME workers felt they could not avoid being (negatively) labelled. In speaking out, they became ‘trouble-makers’ or accused of ‘playing the race card’, but even doing nothing, many felt that they were often ‘tarred with the same brush’ if an ethnic minority made a mistake, or was not good at their job. As these workers explained:

When you are ethnic minority you never just represent yourself, you represent your group. And so, I have always felt that and always that’s part of why you do such a good job, because you don’t want to make things difficult for other people, you don’t want them to think ‘oh well, we hired a black person once and it didn’t work out’. (BME Female writer)

Not every single BME director or producer or cinematographer is great, just like other race. But, unfortunately, when one black producer makes a mistake we all get tarred. (They say) we gave one black or Asian person a job, we gave one authority, that’s it. You know? We gave one Asian director a job, he messed up, so that’s the end of it. (BME Male filmmaker)

As noted earlier, there was concern among participants in the focus groups that there was a failure to recognise acts of racial discrimination. They were often passed off as minor issues, class prejudice, or cultural misunderstandings and it was claimed that some people may not view their actions as racism: ‘They think that racism is something that really belongs to white working class neighbourhoods…it doesn’t belong in their offices’. This denial then makes it even more difficult to deal with issues of discrimination, particularly where it is managers, employers or human resources departments that are adopting such views. Thus racism often goes unchallenged and, in a sector where individuals need to rely on networking to gain future work, there is less willingness to challenge racist attitudes. In turn this creates a false picture for some white managers, who may genuinely be unaware of racism within the sector, simply because individuals feel they cannot raise such issues. Furthermore the relationship between race and class allows stereotypical assumptions to persist in relation to BME cultural capital.
Conclusion

In this concluding section, the report tries to focus on the future for workers within the AV industry in London. The preceding chapters have shown that there are significant barriers to BMEs entering and progressing within the sector. In some cases these barriers are structural and could be addressed through the development of equality policies and agendas that focus on improving minority ethnic representation within the sector. But there are other factors that make this progress most challenging, in particular, the over-supply of qualified candidates for employment and the increasing casualisation of the sector.

What future for BME workers in the audio visual sector?

Many of the difficulties faced by BME workers in the audio visual sector had caused people to think about how they might progress their careers outside the ‘mainstream’. A female filmmaker, who had difficulty getting jobs or funding, had resorted to setting up networks of BME workers in the industry to work together on projects. As she explains, this was more fruitful than trying to access traditional routes

*I’m surrounded by young black filmmakers, we formed our own little kind of conglomerate. We’re all a bit under 30, we’ve all made shorts and may be a feature, and we’re all just trying to do our own thing because no one seems to be interested. We’ll make a film that audiences seem to like and wins awards at the film festival [but it doesn’t get anywhere in the mainstream].* (Female filmmaker)

Her advice to new entrants was for BME workers to create their own networks and opportunities and to move to the United States where it was considered there were more opportunities for BME audio visual workers. This was a sentiment repeated several times in different focus groups and the reasons given to justify these viewpoints were that, firstly there was a bigger audience for BME work, there was less discrimination, and the unions in the AV sector were stronger than in the UK. The extent to which these views are an accurate picture of the US industry is not ascertainable in this particular research. But several respondents had spent time working in the US and had much more positive experiences, as BME workers, than in the UK. The female filmmaker mentioned above had recently completed a film and was discussing marketing with the PR person responsible. After drafting a poster to advertise the film, she was told ‘can you do it in a way that the black people don’t appear on the posters because it will alienate the market.’
So the posters were redone without the black actors. But she highlighted the difference between the US and UK markets:

*I’ve made a film about black people; the four main cast members, one of them is white and that’s just incidental. But in this film, I’ve taken these posters to the States, and I’m finding a lot of people were saying ‘I didn’t know there were black people [in your film], I would have brought my friends’. So what works against you here, works for you in the States.*

(Female filmmaker)

As technology is increasing and it is now much cheaper to buy AV equipment and software, the means to create, produce and distribute media via the Internet is becoming available to a wider range of people who, in the past, would never have been able to afford to produce their own material. In these circumstances, new opportunities are opening up which not only give people the opportunity to work, but also provide some with an opportunity to create their own material that has been rejected as not having the perceived attraction for ‘mainstream’ audiences. While this is only currently happening on a small scale, the potential is not lost on large broadcasters who are aware that their current output is not attracting viewing or listening figures from minority audiences and are seeking strategies to address this problem.

However, it is not solely a case of BME workers creating their own cultural spaces. It also means that the cultures of the majority ethnic community cannot themselves develop organically in the ideal way that cultures do, taking the best from one and adding it to another.

This report has suggested that many young workers are finding it difficult to find work or establish themselves in the AV sector, as getting that first job can be extremely difficult without contacts. Always a competitive industry, audio visual workers are also faced with the fact that freelance work has increased over the last few decades. Skillset, the Sector Skills Council for the AV industries, estimated in 2004 that over a quarter of the workforce was freelance (and up to half in London). Consequently, there is intense competition for ‘permanent’ posts. In addition, small to medium size firms predominate in the sector, few of which are likely to have formal methods of recruitment. Consequently, reliance on social networks is key to finding work, as is the ability to work without remuneration, sometimes for considerable periods of time.
Although some of our interviewees were able to overcome these problems, particularly those from more economically privileged backgrounds, the majority of our sample were either struggling to find work or had given up and found jobs outside of the sector or had gone back to college. The dynamic of class and its effect on a person’s ability to secure work was an issue that was raised throughout the focus groups and has been highlighted in other studies. However, the effects of gender and ethnicity appeared less pronounced. The research did, however, uncover differences in perceptions between men and women and BME and white workers in this regard. White respondents, in particular, did not perceive ethnicity or racism as factors in creating a barrier to recruitment or employment, in contrast to their BME counterparts.

One of the strongest issues to emerge from the research was the need for more practical training and for more effective placements within the industry, where students are given the opportunity to learn on-the-job skills rather than being used as a source of cheap labour, which was a major complaint from participants. Focus group participants talked about how sandwich courses could be a useful way of linking students to employers. Added to this, the introduction of apprenticeships and increased use of training schemes are also ideas that perhaps should be given greater consideration by the sector.

In terms of equal opportunities, the expectation that new entrants to the sector have to work without pay (or very little pay) is clearly a factor working against those without independent sources of income to see them through the early years of employment. This adds to the perception that the industry is a bar to many working-class people, who cannot afford this degree of exploitation. Racism and sexism, whether overt, covert, structural or institutional were perceived to be barriers to many women and people from black and minority ethnic groups. The image of those perceived to be best able to progress in the industry was in the first instance people who were ‘white’. While there was some disagreement in the focus groups as to whether men or women had the advantage, this very much depended on the type of jobs on offer. Women were thought to have an advantage in getting secretarial jobs, for example, in TV and radio (less so in more
Chapter seven: conclusion

technical areas), but there was consensus that overall, ‘white men’ were the most likely to still be in the top jobs. However, changing these perceptions can only be undertaken by changing reality. Employment and recruitment practices need to become more open, explicit and transparent. This is a particular challenge, given the fact that small companies predominate in the industry, but the large to medium-sized companies could perhaps do a lot more to promote good practice in this area.

This research has had, as one of its aims, the formulation of policy recommendations that might assist in addressing the acknowledged barriers to employment in London’s AV industries. The research points to four key areas to consider.

**Matching skills and qualifications**
- The report shows that there is an over-supply of media studies students who have chosen their courses primarily because they identified them with offering a route to employment in the sector on completion of their courses. However, the research also reveals that among employers there is a view that these courses are not appropriate, for many of the entry-level jobs into the sector. The research also shows that by the end of their studies, many students have also formed the view that the courses have left them under-qualified to enter the industry and lacking in the experience that would put them at an advantage in seeking work. The research also found that there were areas of skill shortage within the sector but that existing courses did not usually cover them. The research shows that while not universally held, there is a view that the current two weeks’ work experience may not be sufficient to familiarise students with the industry and with what its requirements are. This means that they find themselves without relevant experience when it comes to looking for work.

**Separating work experience from unpaid work**
- The research shows that unpaid work persists within the AV sector and that casualisation and reliance on contacts are the pillars on which this practice rests. While work experience is often used as a means of shortcutting formal recruitment procedures it is also contested as to whether it actually gives potential recruits the opportunity to gain an understanding of the sector and of the skills they would need to find employment in it. While work experience formally is regulated, the research
suggests that the rules governing its use are frequently circumvented and that this practice is encouraged, partly because there is an over-supply of applicants willing to work without payment, in their hope that this will open up avenues to paid employment. And it is clear from the research that the assumptions made about work experience being a route into work are often correct, particularly where work experience has been more extensive than two weeks. This means that it is inevitable that those who can afford to do it will be over-represented and those who cannot afford it will be under-represented among successful recruits. If the industry does believe that work experience is a valuable commodity for new recruits then it needs to consider how this can be funded, rather than, as at present, placing the entire financial burden on the work experience candidate. While there may indeed be a valid role for work placements, particularly as part of more industry-focused training, it may need to be accompanied by funding, to ensure that access is not dependent on class and income.

**Equality of opportunity and cultural norms**

- The research points to an industry that sometimes appears to operate within a relatively narrow definition of culture and which does not necessarily engage in a debate over how culture emerges and over why particular cultural stances have higher esteem. Importantly these may result in the creation of barriers to employment, either because BME applicants perceive their culture as under-valued and therefore do not apply or because those responsible for appointment themselves do perceive minority cultures as not contributing significantly to the development of dominant cultures and therefore do not ascribe value to candidates who demonstrate an affinity to minority cultures. However, as noted above, this failure to engage can result in BME workers moving towards the development of alternative media channels, to the detriment of both minority and majority cultural richness.

**Structural challenges to racism**

- The research reveals that race and class issues dominate the discourse on barriers to entry and progression within the industry. But it also shows that racism is rarely challenged by individuals who have concern for their future employment prospects, particularly where these are reliant on the maintenance of relationships with key givers of work. It also shows that class prejudice is believed to affect decisions as to who
will, or will not be employed. To respond to these challenges, the research suggests that there is a strong case for moving from informal to formal recruitment, for freelance as well as directly employed workers.
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Appendices and footnotes

1. Data provided by Skillset (January 2007)
2. Skillset/UK Film Council 2005 Film Production Workforce Survey
7. Ibid. Additional raw data provided by Skillset.
8. It is important to make a distinction between media studies courses and more specific media courses such as animation, film, or sound, etc. As such we use the terms media courses to refer to the wide range of courses covering media subjects and media studies to refer to courses that specifically refer to this degree.
9. In this report (AVSAP 2003, section 7.1 page 22), makes a recommendation that aims to: “Work[ing] with employers to gain their support and involvement and determine the best mechanisms to secure routes into the industry for both work experience and jobs.”