

Conference on Promoting Youth Employability and Rights

21 February 2012, STUC Centre,
Glasgow

Conference Report

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Dr Rowena Arshad (Centre for Education for Racial Equality in Scotland)

Dr Rami Ousta CEO (Black & Ethnic Minorities Infrastructure in Scotland)

Angela Constance MSP

Mark Lynch (STUC Youth Committee)

Hazel Mathieson (Head of National Operation, Skills Development Scotland)

Isobel Miller (Policy Officer Skills Development Scotland)

Mr Gerry Croal (Development Director A4e)

Mr Thomas Moon (Acting Director for performance and development, Life Skills Central Ltd).

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Tanveer Parnez (BEMIS)

Emilia Pietka (BEMIS)

Jeanice Lee (CEMVO)

Zaffir Hakim (STUC)

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Fiori Mezgebo (SRC)

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And most importantly to all the delegates who made the time to attend, participate and demonstrate their commitment to this furthering of Youth Employability and Rights Conference.

Executive Summary

This report is to provide a review of the Youth Employability and Rights Conference that took place on 21st February 2012. At the conference, speakers, papers and workshop discussions focussed on different theoretical, political, methodological and practical aspects of Youth Employability and Rights in the Scottish context. This report discusses the main themes emerging from the conference. On the basis of this discussion, a number of issues and recommendations are made for taking the debates forward:

- Challenges for youth employability
- Development of Modern Apprenticeship
- Lack of engagement with ethnic minority youth
- Need for diverse stakeholders to be engaged
- Need for practical solutions

The following report is based on observations from throughout the conference. These observations do not engage directly with particular papers, but rather point out main themes of the day and raise questions for recommendations for taking the debates forward.

1. Conference Background and Rationale

The relationship between employment, poverty and ethnicity (through employer's behaviour and practices) has been outlined in various researches. Thus this conference aimed to create a sustained knowledge, raise awareness of the issues and to create opportunities for ethnic minorities.

The Conference also aimed to provide a platform for discussion about ethnic minority (EM) communities' rights with regards to employment issues. The conference was part of a continuous drive to promote race equality in employment and active citizenship in the work place and built upon the work and recommendations from previous conferences. It also aimed to highlight employment rights both among employers and employees in order to contribute towards creating a healthy working environment where jobs can be sustained and equality supported. The main conference aims were to:

- Support the EM Voluntary Sector through raising awareness of Employment Rights and Responsibilities.
- Promote and support stronger links between the trade union movement and EM organisations in Scotland

The conference theme and scope was initiated by Black and Ethnic Minorities Infrastructure in Scotland (BEMIS) and the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) in 2009 as a result of feedback from a range of EM employees and community projects who shared their concerns regarding discrimination in the work place. Concerns were also raised at the lack of specific information

regarding employment rights among EM. Examples were given of negative experiences and poor working practices directed against EM employees; from employees in the sector as well as from those working in public bodies. These issues highlighted the need to raise awareness on employment rights as a matter of urgency.

The first conference was delivered in February 2009 and was well received with excellent feedback given through the conference evaluations. Many delegates stated that there was a need to repeat the conference as an initiative to sustain and promote the theme at various levels. As a result of this conference, an educational booklet was developed by both partners (made available both electronically and in published format) and over 1000 copies were shared with EM individuals, community projects and public bodies. As the employment issues of migrants and refugee workers was highlighted as an area to be addressed, BEMIS extended the invitation to the Scottish Refugee Council to join the partnership. As a result of collaborative work between BEMIS, STUC and Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) another conference was organised and delivered in March 2010. The feedback of the conference continues to show benefits and a call to deploy this initiative as part of long sustained campaign.

The aim of this year's conference was to deliver a series of short talks and workshops with themes explaining legislative and civic contexts of employment rights and support available: Role of Unions, Equality Bill and Employment, Migrants' Rights, etc.

In addition, a range of educational materials were produced and distributed at the conference in order to enhance employees and employers' knowledge about legislative frameworks of equality and rights. 1000 copies of our updated booklet provided advice on equality and employment rights. These were shared with delegates and made available to relevant projects to share with own members, EM community projects, individuals employees, etc. In addition, an electronic copy of the booklet has been made available on all partners' web sites. Finally, a charter regarding employment rights and equality will be developed and shared with policy makers, employers, and the public as part of a campaign to promoting such rights and stimulate good practice.

Collaborative work between BEMIS, STUC and SRC, Scottish Interfaith Council (SIFC), and Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisation (CEMVO) has ensured that relevant themes were used to effectively engage with concerned community groups. Legislative issues regarding equalities and responsibilities also contributed to creating a better understanding and more informed practice.

100 delegates attended the conference.

2. Core values of BEMIS and of the Conference

BEMIS's vision is of a Scotland that is equal, inclusive, and responsive: a society where people from the diverse communities are valued, treated with dignity and respect, have equal citizenship, opportunities and quality of life, and who actively participate in civic society. BEMIS' core values extend to a commitment to democracy, enterprise; social justice; equality; human dignity; inclusion and tolerance; fighting discrimination and promoting equality. Central to making these principles operational is BEMIS' long-term commitment to partnership working, through which active citizenship can be effectively enacted at an individual and organisational level. Employment has been highlighted as one of the key areas where most ethnic minorities are excluded in the labour market.

BEMIS's mission statement is clear: as a strategic national infrastructure organisation, the organisation aims to empower the diverse Ethnic Minority third sector. We are committed to promoting inclusion, democratic active citizenship, through youth employment, human rights education, and wider representation, as well as affecting a proactive role in maintaining and enhancing pathways to influence government policy at local, Scottish, UK and EU levels. We are committed to engaging with policy makers and empowering and building the capacity of EM youth in employment. This reflects the fit between BEMIS' overarching aims; the core values of the conference; and HRE imperatives at a local, national and global level.

3. Main Themes

At the conference speakers focused on the issues, recommendations and good practices around Youth Employability and Rights. The first speaker, Angela Constance, MSP, highlighted the concerns about negative influence of long term unemployed on young people's life and communities. As a result, various initiatives have been put in place since 2007, including a record, 25,000 Modern Apprenticeships. The Youth Employment Strategy lays out the approach the Scottish Government is taking in supporting young people. It was acknowledged during the presentation that there is no single solution to eradicate Youth Unemployment in the current climate, and thus multiple approaches and mechanisms to address unemployment are required.

Second speaker, Mark Lynch from the STUC Youth Committee indicated that young trade unionists had been campaigning for equality and social justice for seventy years. During this time, the Youth Committee produced the 'There is a Better Way' Strategy to support the STUC Campaign. In addition, Mr Lynch gave his experience of Modern Apprenticeship and shared his concerns around unemployment, cutbacks in public sector spending affecting a range of services e.g. education, housing. He supported and encouraged students taking action to defend their public services, and highlighted the role that trade unions play in defending rights at work.

The third speaker, Hazel Mathieson from Skills Development Scotland presented and explained public sector duties in relation to the Equality Act 2010 and the impact of Equality Impact Assessment on public services. In

addition, she indicated, based on statistics collected by Skills Development Scotland, that women, BME clients and people with disabilities are under-represented in the labour market. Skills Development Scotland acknowledged that there is a need to engage with ethnic minority employers to develop recruitment incentives, flexible training opportunities and promote Modern Apprenticeship to ethnic minority businesses during Scottish Apprenticeship Week.

The final speaker, Gerry Croall from A4e, indicated that a more practical help is required to support Youth employability. Although policy is important for driving behaviours and actions, it has been agreed that more community actions are required. Therefore, public bodies and NGO organisations need to work together and put people and communities at the centre.

In addition, all speakers during the morning session indicated that long periods of unemployment can have a particularly damaging effect on young people, with a negative impact on their future earning potential, personal aspirations, health outcomes and family relations. Young unemployed people may also be more at risk of becoming involved in crime and substance misuse.

Following the speakers presentations conference participants were able to attend a series of workshops focusing on different aspects of Youth Employability and Rights. Each of the workshops provided opportunities for learning from each other's practice through interactive discussion, knowledge exchange and the sharing of ideas.

4. Morning Workshops

A. Human Rights Education in Employment and Service Provision

This workshop looked into both the financial and social costs of the high levels of youth unemployment. The session discussed how to achieve inclusive and job rich growth in our societies while giving back autonomy to young people in their life choices. It also highlighted the rights and responsibilities of both an employer and an employee in relation to Human Rights Education and Active Citizenship. The workshop facilitators indicated that youth unemployment has an adverse effect on young people's social and civic participation and engagement. According to recent National Statistics (ONS 2012), 21.9% of young people (16-24 year olds) are unemployed in the UK compared to 24.7% in Scotland. These figures mean that almost 1 in 4 young people in Scotland are unemployed. In addition, globally - young people represent around one fifth of the world's population but half of the total unemployed global workforce. Unemployment amongst young people can result in an increased dependency on parents (and/or the state), loss of confidence, lower participation and engagement, increased levels of poverty and vulnerability (to drugs, disease or crime).

The main barriers to employment indicated during the workshop were:

- Cost (e.g. travel, childcare, clothing, resources, qualification/course)

- Lack of literacy and/or IT skills
- Inflexible working patterns (work doesn't fit with family commitments)
- Lack of confidence
- Low social capital
- Cultural differences
- Prejudice and discrimination in workplace or learning institutions
- Myths and stereotypes (e.g. 'hoodies', migrant workers, refugees, travellers)
- Lack of proficiency in English language
- The 'benefit trap' (low wages combined with cost implications of working)

Following the group discussions, the main recommendations from the workshop were:

- Youth Parliament could provide more opportunities for active engagement for young people
- Lessons can be learned from the German model where internships are a mandatory part of degrees
- More volunteering opportunities and internships for young people are required
- More consultation and greater involvement with young people is required in order to develop programmes that support the changes in the labour market
- There was general agreement among participants that being an Active Citizen is not only the responsibility of young people and that other agencies should be involved: employers, public institutions, NGOs, communities groups etc. Therefore, for Active Citizenship to be a successful method of supporting Youth Employment, there is a need for multiple and mutual engagement with young people and other agencies.

B. Employment through Social Enterprise

This workshop explored the potential for Social Enterprise as a route into employment for ethnic minority young people. During the workshop, facilitator Jeanice Lee (Development Officer, CEMVO Scotland) defined the meaning of Social Enterprise and some examples of existing Social Enterprise were given as Housing Associations, The Big Issue, Homeless World Cup, Dundee International Women's Centre and Sikh Sanjog.

The main benefits of Social Enterprise for unemployed youth:

- Direct access to jobs
- Access to relevant training – i.e. tailored to the needs of the labour market
- Opportunities for personal development and
- Confidence building

During the workshop discussion the barriers into employment in Social Enterprise of ethnic minority young people have been identified as follows:

- Poverty of employment opportunities
- Limited information about suitable funding for young people
- Myths, stereotypes and discrimination of young people
- Lack of awareness of the diversity of ethnic minorities
- Education (e.g. low literacy)
- Language
- Business issues e.g. form filling, tax and health & safety legislation
- Housing status – increase in homelessness amongst young people
- Lack of self confidence/ Self esteem
- Geographical location
- Attitudes of EM parents towards vocational jobs as opposed to academic

Following the groups discussion, the main recommendations from the workshop were:

- Organisations, agencies and schools need to flag up Social Enterprise with young people
- Need for more and better partnerships – organisations need to work with the statutory sector, and vice versa, to ensure positive outcomes for young people.
- Attitudinal changes – view vocational training and jobs in a more positive light (parents, schools etc)
- National programmes need to link back into local communities
- Need for assurances that young people will not be exploited through initiatives and programmes
- DWP should ensure more equity around the issuing of contracts e.g. currently, larger organisations tend to be offered contracts. Small organisations are more likely to be community based but should also have access to funding and contracts.
- Scottish Government and UK Government need to talk.

C. STUC Modern Apprenticeships: Barriers to participation

Modern Apprenticeships have evolved to provide training opportunities for people of all ages, helping to ensure that both new and existing recruits have the right skills required to undertake real jobs. Of those undertaking a Modern Apprenticeship in 2010, in the 16-25 age group; 27% were female; 0.6 were disabled and 0.9 were from the black and minority ethnic (BME) group.

Via a panel of speakers from First Scotrail, ASLEF Union, STUC Youth Committee, One Workplace Equal Rights and Scottish Union Learning the interactive discussion with participants attending the workshop took place. The discussion indicated the following issues:

- There is a need for large employers to engage in modern apprentices via procurement process with recruitment issues specified within government contracts.
- There is a need for comprehensive monitoring to assess how strategies on diversity in apprenticeships are working.
- Better access with mechanisms put in place to ensure that discrimination by employers is tackled.
- Address occupational segregation on the basis of gender/race.
- Better family friendly policies for people with childcare responsibilities e.g. flexible working.
- Better use of diverse role models.
- Focus on outcomes as well as apprenticeship starts to ensure that BME apprentices graduate to full time jobs or higher learning.
- Unions and employers working in partnership to create opportunities for all.

5. Afternoon Workshops

A. Religion and Belief Workshop

The Religion and Belief workshop was designed to assist the participants to identify

- the barriers to young people (YP) from religion and belief backgrounds being able to **fairly** access employment
- what is needed to assist in removing those barriers

The workshop began with a brief introduction to the topic. A handout on current employment legislation was given to the participants, and this was followed by an activity where participants were asked to identify (by moving to an area of the room) whether they agree, or disagree, with statements that were read out. The statements were all linked to religion and employment. Participants were then asked to justify their reasons for agreeing/disagreeing with the statement. This activity allowed the participants to consider different viewpoints and to identify some of the barriers to religious people gaining employment. A handout relating to the statements made was then given to the participants.

The participants were then asked to discuss

1. What they thought the perceived barriers to employment of a person from a religious background would be from the point of view of an employer
2. What they thought a YP with strong religious views would consider a barrier to specific types of employment

The outcome of this part of the workshop helped to identify the ‘fears’ that employers might have in employing a young person of faith and included the following:

- The YP might demand extra time off work for festivals and prayers

- The YP might not agree to wearing a specific uniform for religious reasons
- The YP might cause tensions with colleagues because of their beliefs
- The organisation might be forced to change the 'culture' of the workplace
- It is easier to pick someone who appears to be a 'safe' option rather than risk getting it wrong in terms of Religion and Belief Legislation
- The organisation might have to make major adjustments in terms of diet, prayer space, holidays, dress etc.
- There is a real fear of offending a religious person and not being PC; and ,worst case scenario, then being taken to a tribunal

The second question in the workshop demonstrated that religious people themselves may have few limitations on the type of work they would want to do and it was pointed out that most people, whether religious or not, seek employment that reflects their value base. Typical answers to question (2) were about bar work, pornography, being asked to participate in abortions and working in non-halal butchers. However, as already stated very few areas of work may be off limits to a religious person.

B. Young Migrants and Refugees: Rights to work and Rights at Work

The workshop facilitated by Scottish Refugee Council focused on young migrants and refugee barriers into employment. It has been highlighted that since economic recession in 2008, migrants and refugees have been portrayed as a threat to 'British jobs for British people' . In addition, the workshop recognised that forced unemployment during the asylum process has a negative impact on future employability – deskilling refugees. The policy of granting 5 Year Leave to Remain for refugees can also negatively impact on opportunities to the labour market. For example, potential employers not understanding the right to work and unwilling to make an offer to someone who may not be seen as a 'good investment'. This is compounded by badly worded official correspondence which implies the case will be under review during this period

After discussion of Scottish Refugee Council integration briefings (education and employment) and two case studies of two young refugees with different backgrounds, skills and employment the general recommendations were made:

- Westminster should increase the 28 day move on period: the pressures of securing , imminent homelessness (n.b. reserved UK matter)
- Orientation is necessary into contemporary life
- Refugees/ migrants need assistance to understand the labour market – a skills based approach to employment opportunities
- Refugees expectations need to be managed – the labour market can be challenging for all especially during recessionary times
- Employers the wider workforce and society need to see refugees as assets

- Employer engagement is critical – including in work support e.g. ESOL
- Find a way of recognising artisan skills e.g. woodcraft: how can they be matched to traditional ‘City & Guilds’ such as carpentry
- Educators & employers need to work with refugee parents to see the value in non -academic career progression i.e. the value of apprenticeships etc.

Following the groups discussion, the main recommendations from the workshop were

1. Educate employers regarding legislation and rights to see refugees and migrants as skilled and an asset
2. Employers should be encouraged to engage and provide in work support e.g. ESOL for the workplace.
3. Work opportunities (non-mandatory placements volunteering, etc.) should be offered and created so that people can gain insights into the workplace, references etc.

C. Individual Learning Accounts (ILA) – What are they and how can they help me get back to work?

The main recommendations from the workshop were:

- Raise awareness of the ILA initiative and of the 5 areas of individual programmes
- Young people need help to access practical core skills such as literacy or financial awareness/education
- Practical skills training – specific skills training to enhance existing skills and experience e.g. leadership course

7. Plenary - General Feedback

At the end of the conference, workshop reporters’ feedback summarised the different discussions and raised further questions, challenges and recommendations as follows:

- Concern was raised about application forms and discrimination taking place, based on an ‘ethnic sounding’ name, thus eliminating ethnic minority young people from the interview process.
- There is a need for training on equality issues in general but specifically around race and religion. Employment agencies, employers, employees and trainers need to have a good understanding of equality issues. This should be provided to a high standard
- There is a need for a supportive approach (education, knowledge exchange and share), to employers regarding anti-discrimination. This is especially true in terms of micro employers, who may require more support and advice due to limited resources.
- There is a need to encourage employers to develop internships or work placement programmes and to consider ways to employ candidates with little or no experience.

8. Moving forward: challenges and recommendations:

Recommendations for Charter:

1. Provision and development of awareness about fundamental employees and employers rights, freedoms and responsibilities through Human Rights Education
2. Ensure recruitment and selection criteria do not exclude or discourage de-represented groups and utilise the public sector equality as leverage
3. Stakeholders to work together to ensure effective engagement with protected groups on National Training Programmes.
4. Development of appropriate internship schemes for young people that will create their employability skills and competences on labour market
5. Ensure that national programmes link back into local communities

Appendix 1: Youth Employability and Rights Conference. Results of Evaluation

Q1: Conference organisation

All participants indicated that conference arrangements, venue and catering were convenient and well organised.

Q2: Speakers presentations

Participants stated that they found the conference presentations stimulating and interesting. Some indicated that more time for discussion, question and answers session should be reserved.

Despite the good presentation from invited speakers, some of the participants felt that the issue of Youth Employability had been highlighted before with no real success.

Q3: Workshop feedback

Participants found both morning and afternoon workshops well organised and well facilitated. Participants stated that the information provided during the workshops was well selected and presented.

Q4: General feedback

Participants felt that information presented and shared during the conference was both in-depth and useful.

Many participants declared that the initiatives, good practices and recommendations raised during the conferences would be shared with their work colleagues.

Finally, participants indicated that there is still a need for further initiatives like this, where participants are able to share and exchange knowledge, expertise and good practice on the challenging issue of Youth Unemployment.

Evaluation conclusion

The pre- post evaluation forms from the conference highlighted a greater need for knowledge exchange events and further collaboration on how best to tackle Youth Unemployment. The evaluations showed delegates had a better understanding post evaluation of the issues and challenges around Youth Employability and Rights than they had before the conference. A principal conclusion emerging from the evaluation was that, in order to address inequalities and unemployment among young people, there is a need for collaboration and mutual contributions between diverse stakeholders.