

## Social diversity and the forestry profession

National legislation such as the Equality Act 2006 has placed duties on public bodies to ensure they actively promote equality of access to the services, functions and goods they provide. At present (2009–2010), using some demographic measures of the profile of its employees, the Forestry Commission (FC) is not representative of UK society as a whole. It is particularly noticeable that there are few employees from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds (BAME). Although there are strong regional variations, the size of the minority ethnic population was 4.6 million in 2001 or 7.9 % of the total population of the United Kingdom. The Civil Service average for employees from BAME backgrounds runs at about 8%. FC statistics show that on 31 March 2009, less than 1% of the Commission's employees were of BAME origin. The factors that contribute to the socio-economic profile of the Commission's workforce are complex and ways to change this situation present a significant challenge.



*"I imagine to work for this organisation, this is something you have to be passionate about personally – the environment"*

Mid-career Asian British male

### Background

The FC has been working to change the number of job applications from BAME individuals for a number of years using a variety of different approaches to advertising posts and marketing employment opportunities. However, the impact has been limited and the number of applications from BAME candidates remains very low overall. While some posts attract larger numbers of applicants (e.g. science and engineering jobs) others may have no BAME applicants. This research employed a social marketing approach to try and understand ways to change application rates from BAME candidates in and around the Forestry Commission England national office, Bristol.

### Objectives

This research aimed to:

- apply a social marketing approach to understanding and changing the number of applications for jobs in the FC by BAME individuals
- identify opportunities and barriers for BAME groups applying for jobs with the FC
- recommend ways to improve recruitment practice

### Methods

- A literature review and desk-based research provided information about BAME demographics and the national employment situation, and a characterisation of the employment market in the Bristol area.
- A desk-based review and analysis was carried out of the FC's job application and recruitment data.
- Qualitative data were drawn from semi-structured telephone interviews conducted with 10 representatives of public organisations and agencies, and six focus group discussions with 44 people from different BAME origins living close to the FC's Bristol office.
- The public organisations and agencies represented were chosen based on institutional characteristics and their track record of changing the percentage of BAME staff employed. Sampling of the focus group participants was undertaken by a professional research organisation to recruit individuals who were economically active, clustered by age groups defined as 'early' and 'mid-career', and drawn from the four major ethnic categories defined in the National Census.

## Findings

In line with much of the published literature, there were some clear issues and trends around employment for individuals from BAME backgrounds. Overall, 'the environment' was not a common or popular sector in which to seek employment. Most respondents stated preferences for employment in science, engineering and technology, banking and finance, medicine, social services and care, and retail. The wide range of roles on offer in the FC was not recognised. The FC was perceived to be an organisation linked with strong environmental values and a 'tree-loving' or nature conservation culture.

Respondents from Asian and Asian British backgrounds were interested in jobs and careers that held a degree of social status and positive recognition in the Asian

community. Respondents from Black and Black British backgrounds were led by social values, wanting through their employment to provide services and benefits at a community level. Respondents from Chinese backgrounds held strategic attitudes to their careers and future prospects.

Upon testing a range of FC adverts with respondents, it was clear that certain aspects of the organisation were attractive, including: civil service terms and conditions; the provision of staff training and development; flexible working; role diversity. It was also clear that in order for people to be attracted and respond to job adverts, they needed first to recognise, know and understand the 'face' and values of an organisation.

## Recommendations

- Market the FC both as an organisation and an employer using community outreach and BAME-focused press and media in areas close to potential jobs.
- Consider how best to reflect the 'whole career package' in vacancy advertising and marketing, using those criteria of greatest interest to BAME candidates.
- Treat each job recruitment as a 'micro-project', targeting specific local populations to the job on offer and using an understanding of local labour markets and the specific business sector.
- Target recruitment campaigns using mainstream local media identified by BAME populations in the likely catchment area for jobs on offer.
- Market the FC website, and the careers and vacancies area in particular, as a distinct marketing tool or 'product'.
- Make better use of career influencers (e.g. career services of schools, colleges and universities, community gatekeepers, parents) to attract early career recruits.

### Reports and publications

Ambrose-Oji, B. (2010). *Social Diversity and the Forestry Profession*, Report to Forest Research and Forestry Commission, 66pp. Downloadable from [www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-83NHZC](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-83NHZC).

### Partners

Forest Research, Forestry Commission England and Strategic Social Marketing.

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