

# Supporting Black and minority ethnic apprentices

A resource for union negotiators and reps



**unionlearn**  
from the TUC

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# Introduction

This guide explores some of the issues around improving Black and minority ethnic (BME) apprenticeship take-up and achievement.

The guide highlights the need for trade unions to negotiate around the introduction and running of apprenticeship programmes in order to address issues of racial inequality. It also identifies practical issues that unions should cover in their discussions with employers around apprenticeship schemes.

## Race equality and apprenticeships

The TUC's 2017 report *Is Racism Real?* highlighted the levels of racial harassment and discrimination that BME workers continue to face in UK workplaces<sup>1</sup>. We know that BME workers face lower employment rates; and unemployment rates are twice as high for BME workers than white workers.<sup>2</sup> There are significant pay gaps for BME workers at all levels of qualifications, and BME workers are more likely to be in insecure employment than white workers.<sup>3</sup>

The government regards increasing the number of apprenticeships as a way to improve BME young people's access to employment. However, while there were 2.4 million apprenticeship starts in England over the last parliament, the problems of participation by young BME workers haven't been fully addressed.

Recent data from Department for Education (DfE)<sup>4</sup> shows that 32 per cent of white apprenticeships were under 19 and 21 per cent of BME apprenticeships were under 19.

Research by the Learning and Work Institute found that although a proportionately higher proportion of apprenticeship applicants are BME, white applicants are more than twice as likely to secure an apprenticeship position.<sup>5</sup> Even when BME apprentices do complete their programmes, the TUC report *Black, Qualified and Unemployed*<sup>6</sup> showed that BME apprentices suffered far higher rates of unemployment. In 2015 the unemployment rate for white workers with trade apprenticeships was 5.5 per cent while for BME workers it was 28.6 per cent.

<sup>1</sup> [tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Is%20Racism%20Real.pdf](http://tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Is%20Racism%20Real.pdf)

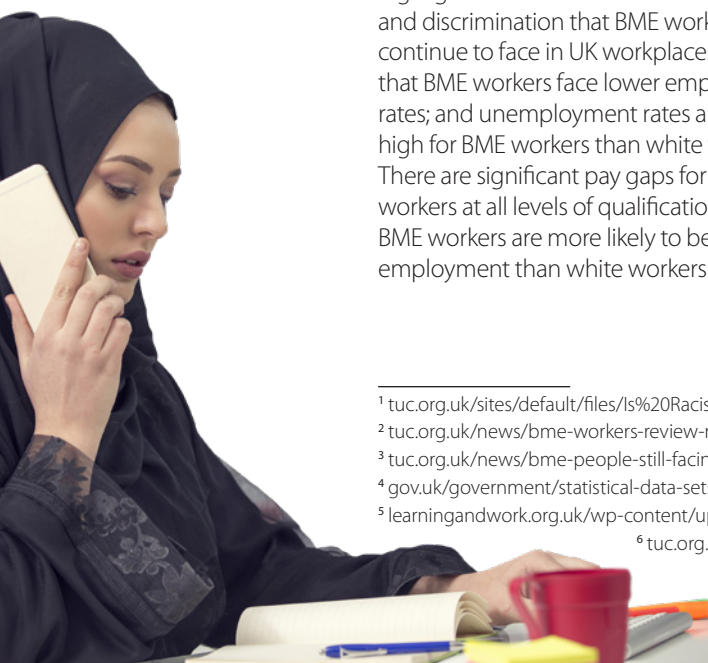
<sup>2</sup> [tuc.org.uk/news/bme-workers-review-must-lead-race-equality-strategy-employment-says-tuc](http://tuc.org.uk/news/bme-workers-review-must-lead-race-equality-strategy-employment-says-tuc)

<sup>3</sup> [tuc.org.uk/news/bme-people-still-facing-racism-and-discrimination-work-says-tuc](http://tuc.org.uk/news/bme-people-still-facing-racism-and-discrimination-work-says-tuc)

<sup>4</sup> [gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships](http://gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships)

<sup>5</sup> [learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Apprenticeship-Policy-Solution-March-2017-3-2.pdf](http://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Apprenticeship-Policy-Solution-March-2017-3-2.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/BlackQualifiedandunemployed.pdf](http://tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/BlackQualifiedandunemployed.pdf)



“ There is significant under-representation of BME apprentices in some of the industrial sectors with higher earnings potential, such as engineering and science. ”

Additionally, a lower proportion of BME apprentices than white apprentices complete their apprenticeships.<sup>7</sup> There is also significant under-representation of BME apprentices in some of the industrial sectors with higher earnings potential, such as engineering and science.<sup>8</sup>

### **The role of trade unions**

People from BME backgrounds are a growing part of the UK working age population and therefore of potential union members too. Unless the problem of BME under-representation in apprenticeship schemes is tackled, apprenticeship programmes are

likely to perpetuate and compound existing inequalities in relation to BME employment.

As trade unionists, we are concerned with tackling not just overt racism – the obvious discrimination and harassment that still occurs in some workplaces – but the deeper-rooted, less apparent processes and structures in employment that place BME workers, apprentices included, at a disadvantage. We are concerned with tackling not just overt racism but with dealing with the policies and practices that keep up racial inequality in the workplace.

<sup>7</sup> [gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships#apprenticeship-starts-and-achievements](http://gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships#apprenticeship-starts-and-achievements)

<sup>8</sup> [http://stats.learningandwork.org.uk/events\\_presentations/BTEG2014/Dave%20Simmonds.pdf](http://stats.learningandwork.org.uk/events_presentations/BTEG2014/Dave%20Simmonds.pdf)



# Current apprenticeship landscape

From April 2017 the government introduced an apprenticeship levy. All employers whose payroll exceeds £3m annually must now pay 0.5 per cent of payroll to central government.

Employers can recoup their levy payment by using it to fund the cost of training apprentices, who can be either new employees recruited specifically as apprentices, or existing staff. Public sector organisations must aim for 2.3 per cent of their staff to be also apprentices under a target imposed by government.

## **Quality in apprenticeships: all about the training**

Via apprenticeship funding rules, and through principles established by the Institute for Apprenticeships,<sup>9</sup> there is a level of quality control around apprenticeships. Employers can spend their apprenticeship levy funds only on training towards established apprenticeship frameworks or nationally recognised occupational standards. Funding rules are intended to ensure that apprentices are being trained, are benefitting from a minimum level of paid time for off-the-job training, and that their apprenticeship programme is a genuinely developmental process, rather than simply an accreditation of the individual's existing knowledge and skills.

Ofsted, the government's education regulator, evaluates the planning and delivery of apprenticeships and the resulting achievement rates. Inspectors should also consider apprentice welfare and employment sustainability, though they are reliant on employers' reports on the reasons for apprentices leaving before completion.

## **Employment**

Recruitment and employment practices around apprentices as new entrants to the workplace are less closely scrutinised. A large proportion of new starter apprentices apply via a central vacancy system, are then matched by the training provider to the relevant employer and attend an interview with the employer. Apprentices who are existing employees are selected by whatever method their employer uses. The recruitment processes do not have to be overseen by any third party. Unions have a role in influencing



<sup>9</sup> [instituteforapprenticeships.org/quality/what-is-a-quality-apprenticeship/](https://instituteforapprenticeships.org/quality/what-is-a-quality-apprenticeship/)



“ Though it is commendable that the government has recognised the need to address the disparity in BME apprenticeship starts, targets don’t address concerns around the apprenticeship quality. ”





recruitment practices which are believed to be a major factor preventing better BME participation in apprenticeship programmes.<sup>10</sup>

As employees, apprentices have statutory employment rights but the government has not regulated apprenticeships beyond these legal minimum standards. There is a lower national minimum wage rate for apprentices. Unions have frequently argued that young people starting employment as apprentices are potentially vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous employers. This makes apprenticeships union business.

### Targets

The government has committed to three million new apprenticeship starts by 2020. This is an ambitious target, and significant increase on previous take-up rates. Since the levy was only introduced in 2017 it is difficult to predict whether this target will be achieved at present. Additionally, the government wants to increase BME apprenticeship starts by 20 per cent: another challenging objective, albeit one that will not deliver full parity.

Though it is commendable that the government has recognised the need to address the disparity in BME apprenticeship starts, targets don't address concerns around the apprenticeship quality.<sup>11</sup>

### The Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network

A key part of the Department for Education's (DfE) strategy to widen participation in apprenticeships is the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network (ADCN). A grouping of employers from a range of industrial sector, the ADCN seeks to champion apprenticeships and diversity amongst employers and to encourage more people from under-represented groups to consider apprenticeships.

Members of the ADCN pledge to work towards measurable targets on improving apprenticeship diversity, create internal structures to promote positive support for diversity in their organisational culture, champion diversity among their business contacts and collate and report on data on their progress.<sup>12</sup> Employers such as B&Q, Rolls-Royce, and some local authorities are ADCN members, as well as Local Enterprise Partnerships, apprenticeship providers, schools, and community groups.

### Targeted local area strategy

Another key strand of the DfE's strategy is to establish working groups of local partners to develop and agree a strategy for improving

<sup>10</sup> [unionlearn.org.uk/publications/research-paper-19-under-representation-gender-and-race-apprenticeships](https://unionlearn.org.uk/publications/research-paper-19-under-representation-gender-and-race-apprenticeships)

<sup>11</sup> [learningandwork.org.uk/2018/04/06/one-year-whats-happening-apprenticeship-levy/](https://learningandwork.org.uk/2018/04/06/one-year-whats-happening-apprenticeship-levy/)

<sup>12</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/708780/ADCN-Report-160518.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/708780/ADCN-Report-160518.pdf)

“ Another key strand of the DfE’s strategy is to establish working groups of local partners to develop and agree a strategy for improving BME representation. ”

BME representation. The strategy aims to drive public and private sector employers to:

- share best practice in advertising and recruiting apprentices
- introduce unconscious bias training for employees involved in recruiting and supporting apprentices
- lower or remove some of the artificial educational requirements used in apprenticeship selection
- make interview panels more diverse
- collect their own data on ethnicity and set themselves targets to improve their workforce diversity
- raise diversity as an issue at board level to drive action.





# Supportive initiatives

A number of initiatives have emerged to help address the government's target of an increase in 20 per cent of BME apprenticeship starts by 2020. Here are a few of them:



## Get in, go far

The government's central hub on all things related to apprenticeships, although not purely focused on BME apprentices, provides some useful information and resources for people considering an apprenticeship, and for employers looking to recruit them. It also contains some helpful information for schools and parents. This is potentially important, because gaps in career advice provision relating to apprenticeships, along with parents' negative perceptions of the relative value of apprenticeships, have been found in the past to be significantly influential in the lower take-up of apprenticeships from BME young people.<sup>13</sup>

[getingofar.gov.uk](https://getingofar.gov.uk)

## Young Apprenticeship Ambassador Network

The Young Apprenticeship Ambassador Network (YAAN) is a group of past and current apprentices that are members of a local YAAN in their region. Again, this is an organisation

aiming to grow and expand apprenticeship participation generally, but it does attempt to ensure that its ambassadors are ethnically diverse.

YAAN volunteers perform an outreach function to school students, seeking to inspire others by explaining their own positive experience as apprentices. There are many regional networks within the overall YAAN umbrella.

<https://yaan.amazingapprenticeships.com/>

## The Five Cities project

In February 2018 the government announced that the National Apprenticeship Service will work with the mayors of Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester, London and Greater Manchester to improve apprenticeship take-up from under-represented groups, including BME. Each city has pledged targets to increase participation.

The project will engage with key partners including employers (especially those in the ADCN), local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships, apprenticeship providers, schools, and community groups. The aims will be to identify successful approaches to widening participation in apprenticeships and disseminate them more widely. The mayors will also look at removing barriers to

<sup>13</sup> [unionlearn.org.uk/publications/research-paper-19-under-representation-gender-and-race-apprenticeships](https://unionlearn.org.uk/publications/research-paper-19-under-representation-gender-and-race-apprenticeships)

“ The Young Apprenticeship Ambassador Network (YAAN) seeks to inspire others by explaining their own positive experience as apprentices. ”

widening participation and seek to promote higher level apprenticeships as a route to career progression.

### **The employer toolkit**

The Learning and Work Institute's employer toolkit brings together case studies of

employers who provide an inclusive apprenticeship programme, along with hints and tips on how to improve the accessibility of apprenticeships. There is a section dedicated to ethnicity.

[\*employer-toolkit.org.uk/ethnicity-3\*](https://employer-toolkit.org.uk/ethnicity-3)



# What trade unionists need to do

Trade unions have an important role in negotiating the basis on which young people enter the workplace, ensuring that they get a fair deal and are not exploited through apprenticeship schemes as a source of cheap labour by employers.

Workplace reps can play a key role in apprenticeships programme design and operation in the workplace.

Trade unions predominantly organise in large employers, who will be paying the apprenticeship levy. At 0.5 per cent of the total payroll above £3m, this represents a significant outgoing. Employers can use their levy payments to fund apprenticeships for, existing employees, specifically recruited new starters or both. Advertising apprenticeships externally is an obvious opportunity to bring young people in to the workforce. Unions should enforce the importance of workforce planning when discussing apprenticeships and future skills needs.

For this reason, how employers spend levy money should be a key concern for trade unions. The questions to ask are:

- 
- Who gets access to training opportunities and how is this decided?
  - How many new apprentices are going to be recruited?
- 

- 
- What roles will they be performing at work and at what rates of pay?
- 

These are all issues that affect the future of the organisation – they are industrial issues, not solely issues around training.

## **An opportunity for trade unions**

The introduction of the apprenticeship levy presents an opportunity for union negotiators and reps to take the initiative in working with employers, to provide good quality apprenticeships and long-term opportunities for young people to enter the labour market.

It also provides unions with an opportunity to address some of the barriers that have been faced by young BME workers in accessing good quality workplace apprenticeships with secure employment outcomes.

It is important that union bargaining agenda includes a focus on addressing the issue of under-representation of young BME workers





in apprenticeships. Union reps need to take this into account when they start negotiating with employers about the nature and structure of apprenticeship schemes.

Reps need to consider and develop a clear position on issues relating to apprentices' contractual pay and conditions, and issues such as work organisation, monitoring minimum 20 per cent off-the-job training requirement and health, safety and welfare. Reps need to safeguard against the use of young people in apprenticeships to displace existing job holders.

Negotiators also need to consider the following:

- Does the composition of the workforce reflect the local community?
- Does the employer have an equal opportunities policy?
- Does the employer have a workforce training and development plan and, if so, does it include firm commitments to equal opportunities?
- Are there any objectives in the apprenticeship scheme to address under-representation of BME workers in the workplace?
- Does the scheme provide long term employment opportunities with the employer?

To ensure that these issues are addressed it is important that the union negotiates the following:

- there is proper equality monitoring of all aspects of apprenticeships programmes
- the recruitment process addresses issues of under-representation
- there is proper support for BME apprentices helping them to complete the programme
- plans are put in place to assist BME apprenticeship to secure permanent employment at the end of the apprenticeship.

## Monitoring checklist

Employers cannot claim to be committed to equality of opportunity if they do not carry out monitoring, as there is no mechanism to measure the effectiveness of equal opportunities policies and initiatives, however extensive they may be.

The information collected by monitoring is also important for the union, as it will reveal any institutional discrimination in the organisation's employment practices. If race equality monitoring of your employer's apprenticeship schemes is not being carried out, it is important to establish this process with management.

“Employers cannot claim to be committed to equality of opportunity if they do not carry out monitoring.”

When negotiating with management on the introduction or extension of monitoring on your employer's apprenticeship scheme you should ensure that agreement is reached on the points in the following checklist:

- Is the union consulted on any proposed monitoring arrangements?
- How will the information be shared with the union?
- How will the information be stored?
- Who will have access to the information?
- How will the information be published?
- Ask the employer for six-monthly updates on the information collected through monitoring, and report back to the members
- Does monitoring extend to all apprenticeship processes (eg applications, completion rates, grievance and disciplinary actions, including results such as termination of contract)?
- If monitoring has revealed any disproportionate results for BME workers, has any further work been undertaken to establish the reasons for this?
- Have any targets been set because of the ethnic monitoring information? Are they realistic and measurable?

### The recruitment process checklist

The TUC has had a long-standing concern about the difficulties young BME workers face in gaining access to employment, apprenticeships and decent quality government training schemes. While we acknowledge that some of the problems of apprenticeship recruitment are due to the lack of knowledge about apprenticeships in communities, we believe that the race discrimination that affects BME workers more generally in the labour market is also a main influence on young BME workers gaining entry to apprenticeships.

It is important that trade unions ensure they are involved in decisions about the way that apprentices are recruited, to ensure that the recruitment process is fair.

When negotiating with management on recruitment strategies on the apprenticeship scheme you should ensure that,





as a minimum, agreement is reached on the following points:

- 
- The employer takes steps to ensure job advertisements are targeted at under-represented groups.
- 
- Monitoring is carried out at the application, shortlisting and appointment stages of the recruitment process.
- 
- A standard application form is used for all recruitment and forms are anonymised before being given to selection panels.
- 
- If recruitment agencies are used, they should be given clear guidance on the need to ensure that they put forward BME candidates.
- 
- The recruitment process is suspended and investigated if BME candidates are not present at the application or interviewing stage.
- 
- Assessment centre processes are checked to ensure that the criteria used for assessing candidates are not racially biased.
- 
- BME staff are present on interviewing panels.
- 
- Job descriptions and selection criteria are made clear to all potential applicants.
- 
- The selection criteria should be objective and measurable and avoid references to personal characteristics or character.
- 
- Positive action is implemented.
- 
- Training is provided to staff involved in the recruitment and selection process, including training on the employer's equal opportunities policies and their application in the recruitment process.
- 
- Union reps have an induction session with the new apprentices.
- 



# Supporting BME apprentices in the workplace

The TUC is not only concerned about the problems that BME workers have in being recruited into apprenticeship schemes, but also about their experience when they are on the schemes.

The racial harassment and institutional racism that is experienced by BME workers equally affects BME apprentices. As stated earlier in this guide, a lower proportion of BME apprentices than white apprentices complete their apprenticeships.

The TUC's *Is Racism Real?* report identified that 37 per cent of BME workers had been bullied, abused or experienced racial discrimination by their employer, with young BME workers facing a higher level of racist abuse than older BME workers. The report also identified 20 per cent of those that raised issues of abuse were subsequently treated less well in the workplace.

Trade unions have an important role in ensuring that BME apprentices are supported during their apprenticeships, and that procedures are in place to deal with any problems of harassment or discrimination that they may face.

Many unions have a charter for apprenticeships, designed to prevent exploitation and ensure that apprentices are not used to undermine collectively agreed terms and conditions. The charter is an excellent starting point for ensuring that BME workers' participation is improved. Unionlearn has a model charter that can be used if your union has not yet developed its own.<sup>14</sup>



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<sup>14</sup> [unionlearn.org.uk/charter-apprenticeships](http://unionlearn.org.uk/charter-apprenticeships)



Don't forget that union reps can make ideal mentors for young workers. You could agree with the employer that reps are included in any mentoring scheme to support them. Find out more about mentoring in our Apprenticeships Toolkit [unionlearn.org.uk/publications/apprenticeships-toolkit](https://unionlearn.org.uk/publications/apprenticeships-toolkit).

When negotiating with management around support for apprentices you should ensure that agreement is reached on the points in the following checklist:

- There is a clear plan on what the apprentice is expected to achieve and a commitment statement has been signed.
- Union reps are recognised as mentors who apprentices could look to for support and guidance on the world of work, in recognition of the fact that the environment is totally different from college or school.
- Additional support to achieve Level 2, GCSE or functional skills in, English and maths is provided where needed.
- It is clear what standards are used to assess performance and that they are measurable.
- Regular supervision is part of the apprenticeship process, and written records of supervision meetings and their outcomes are kept.

- Any concerns on performance are put in writing following discussion, and that a copy is given to the apprentice.
- There is a process through which apprentices can appeal if they believe that concerns about their performance are inaccurate or unfair.
- All apprentices are made aware of their rights to trade union representation during discussion about their performance or progress on the scheme.

### Union negotiator's checklist

It is vital that unions can challenge any incidence of racism, whether it's overt or subtler. To do this BME members have to be confident that, if they raise issues of racism through the union, action will be taken. The TUC's 2015 *Race at Work* survey found that only around 30 per cent of BME employees raise concerns about racism with their union.

At workplace level unions need to make sure that they are as inclusive and as representative as possible. A regular equality audit of your workplace can be a useful tool to assess how effectively you are prepared to tackle discrimination. Talk to your union equality rep or officer and ask for advice on how to go about that.

The following checklist will help you ensure that reps in your workplace are aware of the issues affecting BME apprentices and that the

“ The TUC’s 2015 Race at Work survey found that only around 30 per cent of BME employees raise concerns about racism with their union. ”

branch is equipped to deal with problems that may arise:

- Negotiate decent and quality apprenticeships with a guaranteed job at the end.
- Ensure BME apprentices are fully represented.
- Ensure your employer implements positive action at all stages of recruitment.

- Ensure monitoring throughout the process with action plans and regular reviews.
- Ensure employers create a zero-tolerance environment and that apprentices feel able to raise concerns.
- Negotiate an equal opportunities policy or audit the effectiveness of existing ones.
- Negotiate an agreement on racial harassment.
- Ensure the employer provides proper support for the apprentices.





# The Professional Footballers' Association

GOOD  
UNION  
PRACTICE



The PFA has worked with football clubs on the support needs of BME apprentices, particularly focusing on the needs of Muslim apprentices.

The union has worked to help clubs such as Crystal Palace, Portsmouth, Exeter City and Reading FC actively engage with Muslim community organisations, which helps raise peer and family support for apprenticeships as a career route.

The PFA has written a guide for clubs, which aims to provide baseline knowledge around the observance of Ramadan. When the festival falls during the summer its dietary provisos can prove challenging for work

and study. The guide helps employers to understand these issues, and also to know how to discuss them with Muslim apprentices sensitively and supportively.





# Find out more

Most unions have extensive experience in tackling racism, and well-established policy positions. Reps should refer to their union's own policies and seek advice from full-time officers where necessary.

As well as those referenced in this guide, union negotiators may find the following publications useful:

Unionlearn's Apprenticeships Toolkit includes advice for negotiators around apprenticeship schemes, as well as some specific information on equality in apprenticeships. Hard copies of the toolkit can be ordered from [unionlearn@tuc.org.uk](mailto:unionlearn@tuc.org.uk) and there is also an interactive online version.

[unionlearn.org.uk/publications/apprenticeships-toolkit](https://unionlearn.org.uk/publications/apprenticeships-toolkit)

The TUC has conducted extensive research around issues of race discrimination

[tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/equality](https://tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/equality)

The Learning and Work Institute's employer toolkit showcases the work of four major employers who have worked on improving BME apprenticeship participation. You can read the case studies at

[employer-toolkit.org.uk/ethnicity-3/](https://employer-toolkit.org.uk/ethnicity-3/)

The Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network membership application includes a summary breakdown of key steps employers can take:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/708780/ADCN-Report-160518.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/708780/ADCN-Report-160518.pdf)

Breakdown of recommendations for employers on developing BME talent in the workplace can be found in the McGregor-Smith Review report:

[gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/594336/race-in-workplace-mcgregor-smith-review.pdf](https://gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/594336/race-in-workplace-mcgregor-smith-review.pdf)

The Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation has produced a useful practical guide on general workforce diversity, which could easily be adapted specifically for apprenticeships:

[ciht.org.uk/media/4760/ciht\\_the\\_case\\_for\\_diversity\\_interactive\\_12603.pdf](https://ciht.org.uk/media/4760/ciht_the_case_for_diversity_interactive_12603.pdf)

The Wise Campaign is primarily concerned with recruiting women into science, technology, engineering and maths industry. However, its very detailed toolkit offers many excellent ideas that could be adapted to recruiting and retaining BME apprentices:

[wisecampaign.org.uk/apprenticeship-toolkit/](https://wisecampaign.org.uk/apprenticeship-toolkit/)

The BBC's Get In blog showcases the experience of BBC apprentices and is considered by the organisation to be a valuable tool to attract future apprentices from diverse backgrounds:

[bbc.co.uk/blogs/getin](https://bbc.co.uk/blogs/getin)

This title may also be  
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