Islington Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Employment Research Project

Final Report:

London Metropolitan University

Dr Jane Lewis
Dr Qicheng Yu
Associate Professor Patrick Mulrenan

London Borough of Islington

Dionne Gay
Jimmy Flynn

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1. Executive Summary

London Metropolitan University, in partnership with the London Borough of Islington, have conducted a research project to identify the levels of unemployment among different ethnic groups living in the Borough and the extent to which existing employment services in the Borough support specific black, Asian and other minority ethnic (BAME) communities. The research had two key elements: a quantitative analysis of employment patterns to identify those ethnic minorities suffering most from unemployment, and a series of focus groups with different minority groups to further investigate barriers to employment.

Previously, it has been difficult to accurately assess, and respond to, the employment support needs of specific black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities in Islington because the available data groups the population into large, general 'BAME' cohorts. However, these general cohorts comprise several sub-groups, each with different experiences and needs. The purpose of the research is to disaggregate the existing data in order to identify those specific black, Asian and minority ethnic groups which suffer most from unemployment and have least access employment services and to identify, and to respond to their specific employment support needs.

The research project found that many residents are not accessing employment support provided by the Council. Most were unaware of the services, and many expressed mistrust of employment organisations based on their experience of using Job Centres. The key recommendation is that the Council seeks to build trust and raise the visibility of services by locating employment services in locations that communities use, and in which they feel comfortable.

The research is part of the London Metropolitan University, London Met Lab Empowering London initiative, which aims to engage the University with its community partners

The key barriers to work emerging from the research were:

Age - emerged as a key theme across most of the focus groups and was considered a major barrier to accessing even entry-level jobs. Older residents in their 40s, 50s and 60s experienced significant barriers in terms of language and digital literacy in particular, but also having no or low level educational qualifications.

Health - poor health emerged as perhaps the most significant issue and barrier to accessing work. This included poor physical and mental health and was a striking factor across all focus groups. This confirms quantitative data, which highlights that Islington has the highest proportion of people claiming benefits on the basis of disability and sickness in London, and that a particularly high proportion of these claimants (over half) were claiming benefits primarily due to mental health problems. Mental health problems were identified by men in the Algerian and Bangladeshi focus groups in particular, as a consequence of particular sets of circumstances

including isolation, exclusion, overcrowded housing and a loss of identity associated with loss of employment during the COVID pandemic.

Language – was a major barrier to employment for many especially older Bangladeshi, Somali and Algerian residents. The lack of English language skills was strongly linked to another major barrier, that of digital literacy, especially with the shift to on-line provision of classes and services during the COVID pandemic. Digital literacy depends of fluent English language skills. The lack of such skills was identified as a major barrier to accessing and navigating online services, taking part in courses and completing job applications.

Digital literacy – as with language, digital literacy emerged as a significant barrier to accessing work and employment support services. Again, this was particularly the case for older residents in all focus groups, However, it should be noted that employment service providers questioned the assumption that young people are necessarily digitally literate. The issue was especially emphasised by the Algerian and Bangladeshi residents, both male and female.

Digital poverty – a further barrier for many was not having access to a laptop (most used their phones) or a reliable and fast internet connection.

Childcare and hours of work – almost without exception, the women in the focus groups had children and the majority were only looking for employment during school hours. This need to work within school hours was a major barrier for women, particularly in accessing higher skilled work or training and higher education. As a result, most women with school aged children focused their job search on low skilled and paid work. Interestingly, not one woman in any of the focus groups mentioned child care as an option.

Lack of experience – this was seen as a key barrier to successfully getting jobs. Many jobs require experience, and getting a first step on the employment ladder was identified as a problem. Voluntary work was identified as an important way of getting experience and the voluntary sector organisations involved in the focus groups all offered voluntary work opportunities.

Lack of skills and qualifications – many women identified a lack of relevant or out-dated skills as a barrier to accessing work. Many older generation men and women in all focus groups, especially Somali, Bangladeshi and Algerian residents, had no qualifications. Again, this correlates with the quantitative data analysis. The iWork engagement data highlights that Somali, Eritrean, Caribbean, Bangladeshi and White British residents have the lowest levels of educational attainment and qualifications. A further key factor highlighted in the Pakistani focus group was the lack of recognition and the downgrading of qualifications gained overseas.

Low confidence and aspirations – all of the above factors fed into low levels of confidence and aspiration for many residents, particularly older ones. Particularly in the Bangladeshi and Algerian focus groups participants were looking for a narrow

range of low skilled and low paid work. This reflects past experiences, including of racism, shaping their aspirations.

Experience of poor and worsening working conditions and pay - most older Algerian, Bangladeshi and Somali participants worked or had worked in a narrow range of poorly paid jobs with poor and worsening conditions. Many talked of the impact of COVID on jobs in the hospitality sector, and of worsening conditions in a range of jobs and sectors including retail, restaurants and mini-cab driving. Many of the older men and women had no qualifications, low levels of English language skills, low levels of digital literacy and many had serious health conditions. Many people in these groups are confronted with a range of barriers to accessing work.

Experience of employment support services

Alongside identifying the barriers to employment faced by specific sub-groups, one of the main aims of the research was to identify which groups are not taking advantage of existing employment support services. The research sought to identify how employment services can better shape and deliver their services to meet the needs of these specific groups. A number of key issues stood out and are highlighted below.

Lack of knowledge of employment support services or where to find or access them – across all of the focus groups, the key issue was that participants had very little or no idea where to go to get advice and guidance on getting a job, aside from the Job Centre. There were some participants in the focus groups who had used iWorks and mostly their experiences had been positive but even these participants had stumbled across the service by accident. Most participants had no idea the Council provided employment support services. In looking for work, most participants relied on word-of-mouth.

Lack of trust of the Job Centre – a major issue and barrier was widespread lack of trust and, in some cases, fear of the Job Centre. These experiences carry over to using other services, and there was widespread suspicion and anxiety about approaching council services especially among the Bangladeshi and Algerian participants.

Negative experiences of online services – during the COVID pandemic most employment support services moved online. This was seen as a major barrier. Participants preferred face-to-face services, not least in the context of the barriers of language and digital literacy and access to laptops.

Outreach and community-based employment services –there was widespread enthusiasm for services to be based in trusted community organisations and spaces, and in the places which people regularly use in their daily lives, such as schools, GP and other health services, faith centres and community groups and organisations.

2. Recommendations and targets

2.1. Recommendations

Target employment support services to particular black, Asian and minority ethnic communities

- Employment support services should be targeted at the needs of particular communities including the Algerian and other north African, Afro-Caribbean, Somali and Bangladeshi communities (see proposed targets for BAME sub-groups for 2022/23 below, Section 2.2)

Employment support community outreach strategy

The key recommendation (from both stakeholder and resident focus groups) is for the Council to develop an employment service community outreach strategy. The strategy should:

- include all employment support service providers operating within the Borough
- start with 'target' communities which have high levels of unemployment, particular issues with accessing the jobs market and low levels of engagement with the Council's employment services

The outreach strategy should:

- Initially map the social and public spaces used by the target groups in their daily life – this might be schools, GP and other health centres, Mosques and churches and community centres and organisations
- Identify key 'intermediaries', and set up links with these 'intermediaries'
- Promote co-location of employment services jointly with key intermediaries in the social and public spaces used by target communities
- Set up an effective iWork presence in key social and public spaces used by target communities in the Borough – for example in key community centres and organisations such as Muslim Welfare House, the Somali Centre and the Islington Bangladeshi Association

- Build the capacity of the voluntary and community sector organisations in the Borough to target and reach Algerian and other north African, Somali, Bangladeshi, and Afro-Caribbean communities,

- Develop and offer volunteers or workers within these organisations an accredited qualification

- Make computers and space available for target group use at key community centre locations

- Monitor the impact of the BAME Employment Forum in connecting community organisations and employment support services and employers.

iWorks should:

- Broaden its remit of employment support roles in iWork to include outreach and community development skills in new and existing posts

- Review signposting of services and develop more effective signposting to employment support services in the Borough
- Continue to share best practice and networking among employment service providers through structures like Islington Working and Employability Practitioners' Network.

Integration of Adult Community Learning (ACL) and Employment Support services

The Council should:

- Develop a community outreach strategy for Adult Community Learning
- Set up co-location and joint service delivery between Adult Community Learning and employment support services
- Enhance adult vocational training in the Borough for target communities
- Ensure ACL services reach target groups
- Increase free ESOL and digital skills ACL provision
- Provide free ESOL and digital/IT skills training in social and public spaces and community centres used by target communities especially in Finsbury Park, Tollington, Caledonian, Bunhill and Holloway wards, with the highest levels of unemployment

Develop links with City and Islington College and other Further Education and Higher Education providers in the Borough

The Council should:

- Work in partnership with City and Islington College and other Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) providers in the Borough to incorporate them into the community outreach strategy reaching out to target communities
- Seek to co-locate FE provision initially in ESOL and IT/digital skills in identified community organisations serving target groups

Develop links between employment support and the Council's financial resilience teams and the 'We are Islington' services

Retain separation of Council employment services from DWP services

The focus groups highlighted the high levels of distrust of DWP services and of the Job Centre in particular. **The Council should:**

- Create an identity for its employment support services which is clearly distinct from DWP services and the Job Centre
- Make it clear that Council premises are 'safe places', where residents are not sanctioned

Enhance funding for employment support for people with physical and mental health conditions

The Council should:

- Expand their outreach capacity by building on existing employment support services (including Hillside Clubhouse, Scope and the Work and Health Programme) that work with people with physical and mental health conditions
- Develop more holistic services that support people's health and employment support needs within all employment support services

Childcare

The Council should:

- Review childcare services across the Borough
- Build up childcare support within communities
- Carry out additional work to explain to parents how childcare support, including bursary, can help residents find work.

Work with employers in the Borough

The Council should

- Seek to further develop voluntary and internship opportunities
- Further develop links with employment service providers working with people with physical and mental health conditions
- Facilitate employer workshop session in community spaces

2.2. Proposed Targets: Inclusive Economy & Jobs - performance Indicators 2022/23 for supporting BAME residents into jobs

Based on the quantitative analysis of ONS and LBI data, which identified those BAME groups suffering from the highest levels of unemployment in the Borough (as discussed in Section 4 below), the following targets are proposed for supporting different BAME groups into employment for 2022/23. Three scenarios are set out for targeting 1,000, 1,500 or 2,000 residents into work for 2022/23.

Scenario 1: Target 1,000 residents into work

The first scenario is to target 1000 unemployed Islington residents into work. Although white residents account for 53% total unemployment in Islington this reflects the fact that more than 71% residents are white. However, BAME groups have a much higher unemployment ratio with Black and Bangladeshi populations having an unemployment ratio of over 40%. Targeting the higher unemployment rate among the BAME population would mean that 60% of residents supported into work should be BAME residents - a target of getting 600 BAME residents into work.

Based on the data analysis of unemployment in the BAME population in Islington, the African, Caribbean, Turkish, Bangladeshi, and other Black sub-groups together account for 80% of BAME unemployment – thus the following targets for each subgroup should be set:

Sub group 1 – African population – target 280
Sub group 2 – Caribbean population – target 160
Sub group 3 – Turkish population – target 80
Sub group 4 – Bangladeshi population – target 56
Sub group 5 – Other Black population – target 24

Scenario 2: Target 1,500 residents into work:

Scenario 2 is based on the target of supporting 1,500 residents into work, the target in this scenario would be 900 BAME residents which would be further broken down as follows:

Sub group 1 – African population – target 420
Sub group 2 – Caribbean population - target 240
Sub group 3 – Turkish population – target 120
Sub group 4 – Bangladeshi population – target 84
Sub group 5 – Other Black population – target 36

Scenario 3: Target 2,000 residents into work

Scenario 2 is based on the target of supporting 2,000 residents into work, the target in this scenario would be 1,2000 BAME residents which would be further broken down as follows:

Sub group 1 – African population – target 560
Sub group 2 – Caribbean population – target 320

Sub group 3 – Turkish population – target 160
Sub group 4 – Bangladeshi population – target 112
Sub group 5 – Other Black population - target 48

3. Research aims and methodology

London Metropolitan University in partnership with the London Borough of Islington have conducted a research project to identify the levels of unemployment and the extent to which existing employment services in the Borough support specific black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities. Previously, it has been difficult to accurately assess, and respond to, the employment support needs of specific black, Asian and minority ethnic communities in Islington because the available data groups the population into large, general 'BAME' cohorts. However, these general cohorts comprise several sub-groups, each with different experiences and needs. The purpose of the research is to disaggregate the existing data in order to identify those specific black, Asian and minority ethnic groups which suffer most from unemployment and least access employment services and to identify and respond to their specific employment support needs.

Aims of the research project - research questions

The aims of the research project are set out below:

1. What is the overall employment/unemployment picture for BAME residents in Islington?
2. As we emerge from the pandemic, what is the differential employment impact on BAME groups in the borough? What is the risk of longer term 'scarring'?
3. What sub groups within the category 'BAME residents' are most affected by unemployment?
4. How do BAME employment/unemployment outcomes differ across gender, disability and religious background?
5. What are the skills outcomes differentials according to ethnic background?
6. What are the issues and barriers to employment faced by specific sub groups?
7. Which groups are not taking up the employment support that is on offer?
8. How can employment support/skills services better tailor and deliver their programmes to specific groups, particularly those where familiarity with services is low?
9. What would be aspirational/stretch targets that could drive meaningful change to labour market outcomes and address the economic inequality experienced by BAME communities?
10. Who should be our priority ethnic groups and areas of intervention?

Methodology

The research involved both quantitative data analysis and qualitative data collection and analysis. The quantitative data analysis included the analysis of a range of ONS data alongside data provided by the London Borough of Islington including housing benefit and council tax data and iWork engagement data. The key purpose of the quantitative data analysis was to highlight which minority ethnic groups in the Borough suffer the highest levels of unemployment and least access employment support services.

The data was analysed using descriptive and correlational research methods. Descriptive research methods are used in the initial data analysis to explore, find, and explain the current employment related status of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups in Islington. Data published by Office for National Statistics (ONS) covering the period 2000-2021 are the main resources used for the study. However, data from the ONS are typically at a high granularity level with six main ethnic groups. To obtain a more detailed view of the BAME community in Islington, 2021 data on residents who are out of work in Islington from Islington Council are used and correlational research methods applied to investigate further the relationship between employment and other key factors. More detailed BAME groups and their unemployment distributes are highlighted which provide a good foundation for recommendations on future targets of BAME employment support.

The quantitative data analysis highlighted those groups with high levels of unemployment. Focus groups were then conducted with six minority ethnic communities (listed below) identified as experiencing high levels of unemployment in order to get more detailed information on the barriers they are experiencing in accessing employment:

- Afro-Caribbean residents;
- Algerian residents;
- Bangladeshi (female) residents;
- Bangladeshi (male) residents;
- Pakistani residents; and
- Somali residents.

A focus group was also conducted with 12 employment support service providers in the Borough, all members of the Islington Employment Support Hub.

Students studying Sociology and Computing related under- and post-graduate degrees at London Metropolitan University were involved in a number of roles in the research project – including both quantitative and qualitative research, shadowing research leads in conducting focus groups (assisting in filling in consent forms and questionnaires) and assisting in transcribing interviews and in identifying the key themes emerging. This experience of conducting qualitative research has formed part of their assessment in which they have been asked to reflect on and record their experience.

4. Quantitative data analysis

4.1 Overview - ethnic minority population in Islington

Islington is an Inner London Borough, the 3rd smallest London borough by area and has a population of 206,125 according to ONS Population profiles for local authorities in England. Overall, 68.2% of the population is white and 31.8% is classified as ethnic minority which is further broken down into Black, Asian, mixed ethnic and other as shown below:
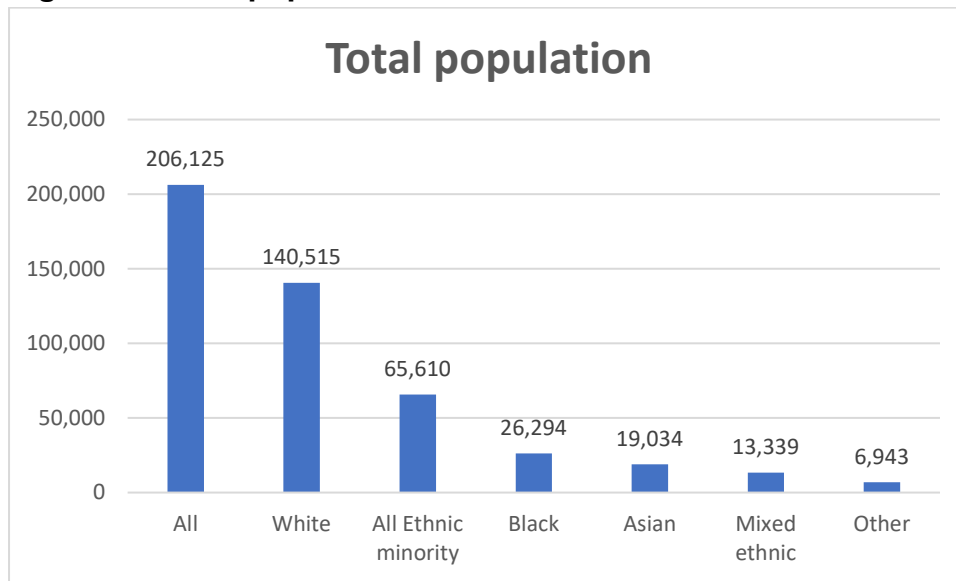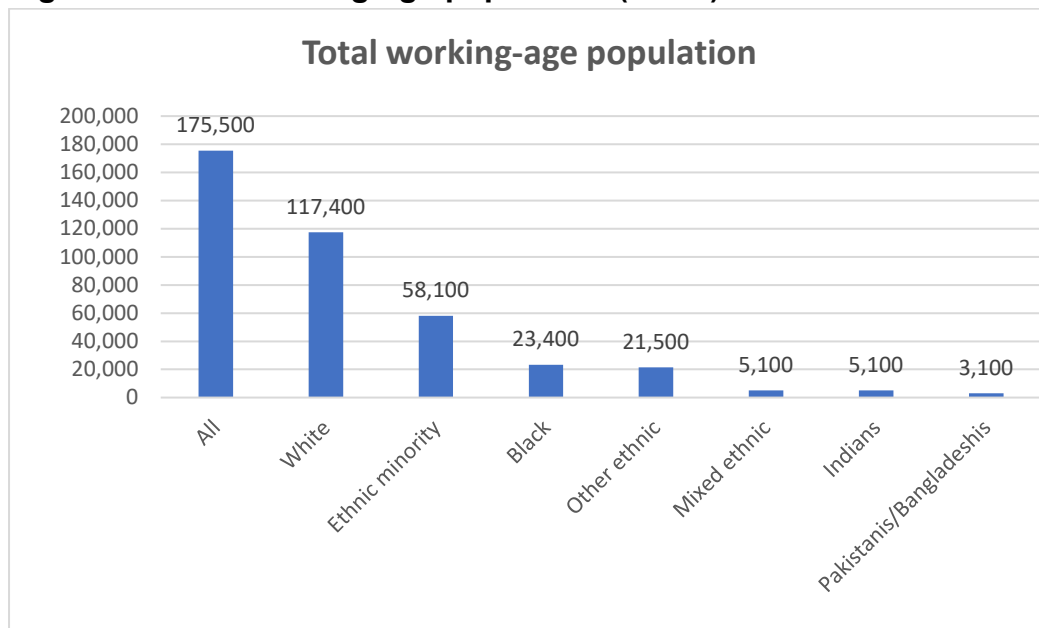
Figure 1 - Total population

Figure 1 shows that the ethnic minority community make up more than 31% of residents in Islington. The largest ethnic minority community is black, followed by Asian and mixed ethnic groups.

4.2. Total working-age population (16-64)

Islington has a working population of 175,500 working-age (16-64) based on the 2019 ONS data. The working population is 66.9% white and 33.1% ethnic minority. The ethnic minority working population can be further broken down into black, Indian, Pakistani/Bangladeshi, mixed, other as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows that BAME groups make up one-third of working-age residents in Islington. The largest BAME working-age community is black followed by other-ethnic group whilst the Pakistani/Bangladesh population has a smaller working-age population of 3,100.

Figure 2 - Total working-age population (16-64)

Total working-age population

(Bar chart values: All 175,500; White 117,400; Ethnic minority 58,100; Black 23,400; Other ethnic 21,500; Mixed ethnic 5,100; Indians 5,100; Pakistanis/Bangladeshis 3,100)

4.3. In-work population

Islington has an in-work population of 135,300, based on the 2019 ONS data, 71.1% of whom are white and 28.9% ethnic minority. Ethnic minority can be further broken down into black, Indian, Pakistani/Bangladeshi, mixed ethnic and other as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 - Total in-work population

Total In-work population

(Bar chart values: All 135,300; White 96,200; Ethnic minority 39,100; Black 13,800; Other ethnic 15,300; Mixed ethnic 4,000; Indians 4,400; Pakistanis/Bangladeshis 1,600)
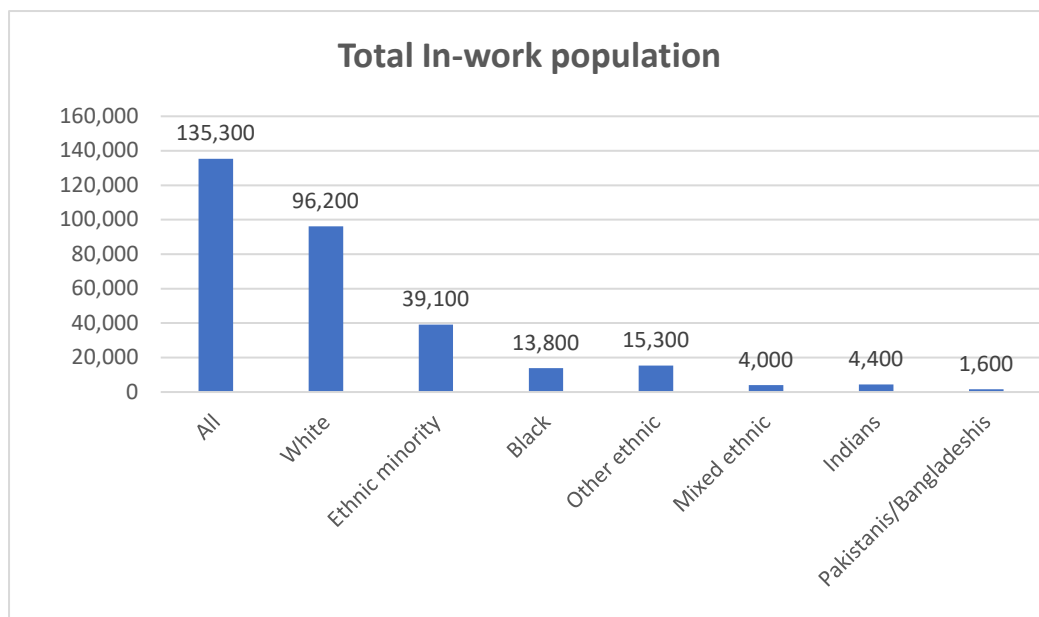
Figure 3 shows that BAME groups comprise less than one-third of the in-work population in Islington and that the Black in-work population is falling behind other

ethnic groups. To investigate the ratio of the working population, Figure 4 shows that the average employment in Islington is 71.1% and the rate of Indian, White, and mixed ethnic groups are higher than average, but that Black and Pakistani/Bangladeshi ethnic groups are falling behind. Since black is the largest ethnic group in Islington, it has a significant impact on the employment rate despite Pakistani/Bangladeshi having the lowest employment rate overall.

Figure 4 - Employment Rate
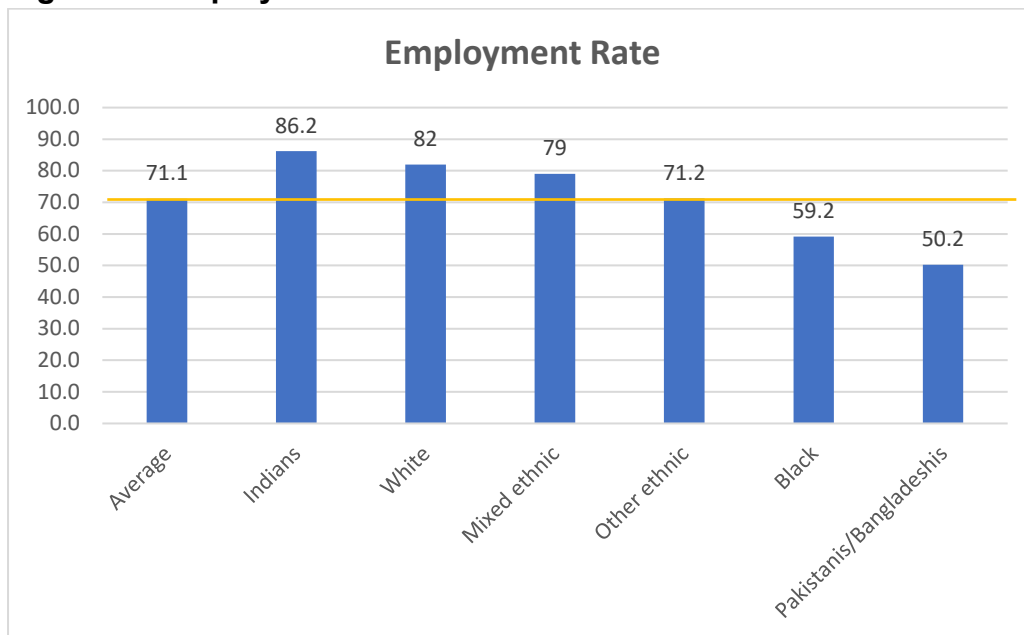
4.4. Out of work population

Islington has a working age population of 175,600 (based on the 2019 ONS data) but there are more than 40,000 people unemployed. Figure 5 - Islington Unemployment by Ethnicity shows the population of unemployed by ethnicity. White (21,200) is the largest unemployed group because it account for 53% working age population in Islington. Black and other ethnic groups have 9,600 and 6,200 people unemployed repectively. To better understand the unemployment situation in each ethnic group, Figure 6 - Islington Unemployment Ratio by Ethnicity, shows that the Pakistani/Bangladeshi ethnic groups has the highest ratio of 48% unemployment while amongst the black population, 41% of people are unemployed. Since the black population is the second largest ethnic group in Islington, it has more impact on unemployment in Islington.
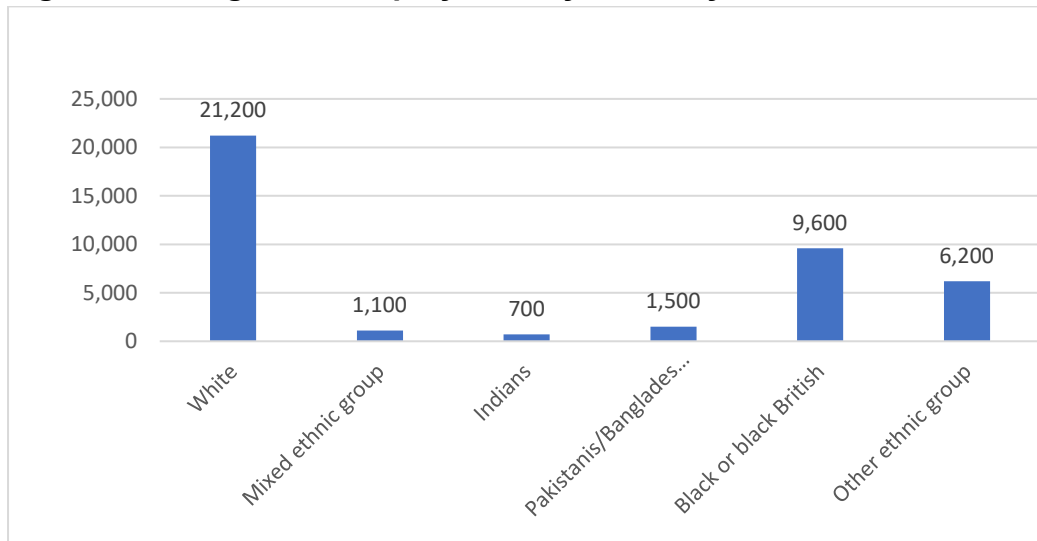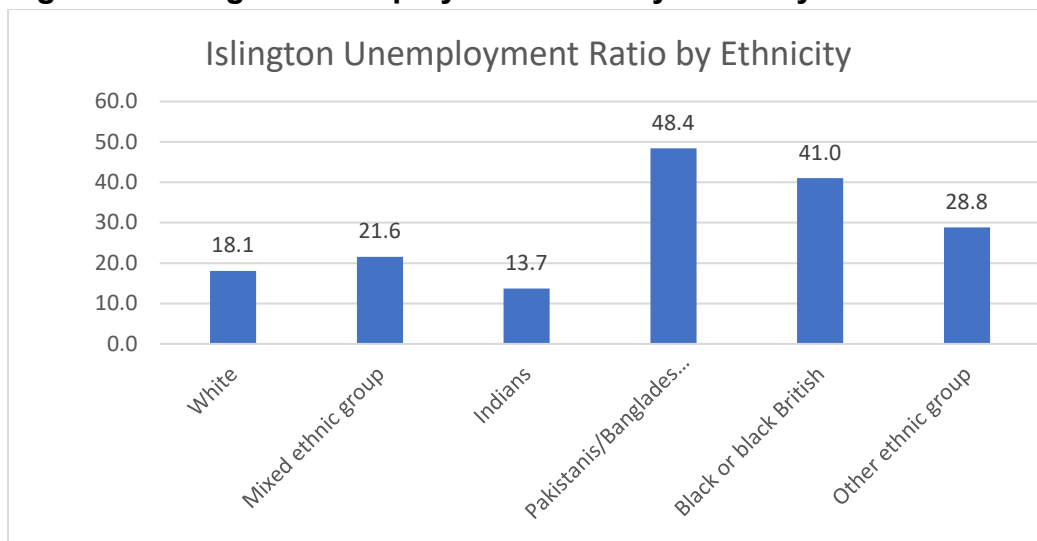
Figure 5 - Islington Unemployment by Ethnicity

**Figure 6 - Islington Unemployment Ratio by Ethnicity**

4.5. Out of work population with Benefits

As ONS data does not breakdown the detail of ethnic groups, to obtain a better understanding of the unemployment situation in Islington, housing benefit and council tax benefit data and iWork engagement data are used for further investigation. Figure 7 - Unemployment with Benefit in Islington shows that there are 8,838 unemployed people claiming either housing or council tax benefits which account for 22% of unemployed people in Islington. White British (2,856) as usual has the highest number of people claiming benefits due to the large portion of population in Islington. The second largest group is "NOT KNOWN" (1,211) which may need further attention. Black - African and Black- Caribbean are two BAME groups with 644 and 582 unemployed people claiming benefits. In addition, the

EUROPEAN, Turkish / Turkish Cypriot, other White background, and Irish communities are easily ignored as they are usually counted into white ethnic group in the ONS data. However, it should be noted that these four groups have significant number of unemployed people claiming benefits.

Figure 7 - Unemployment with Benefit in Islington
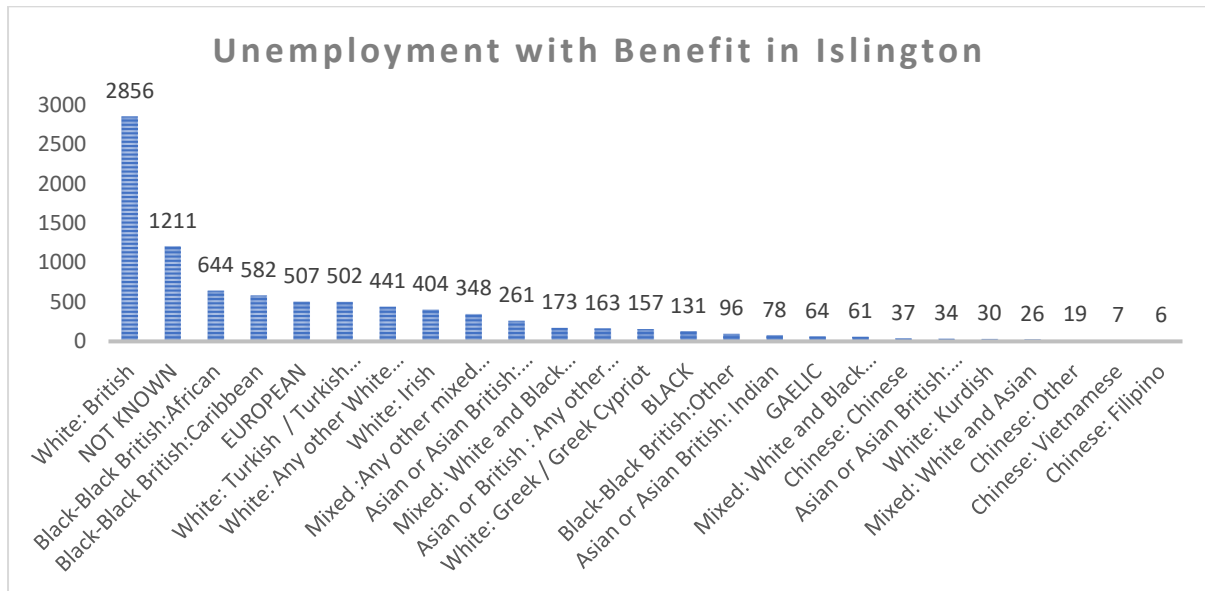
4.6. BAME groups with highest unemployment

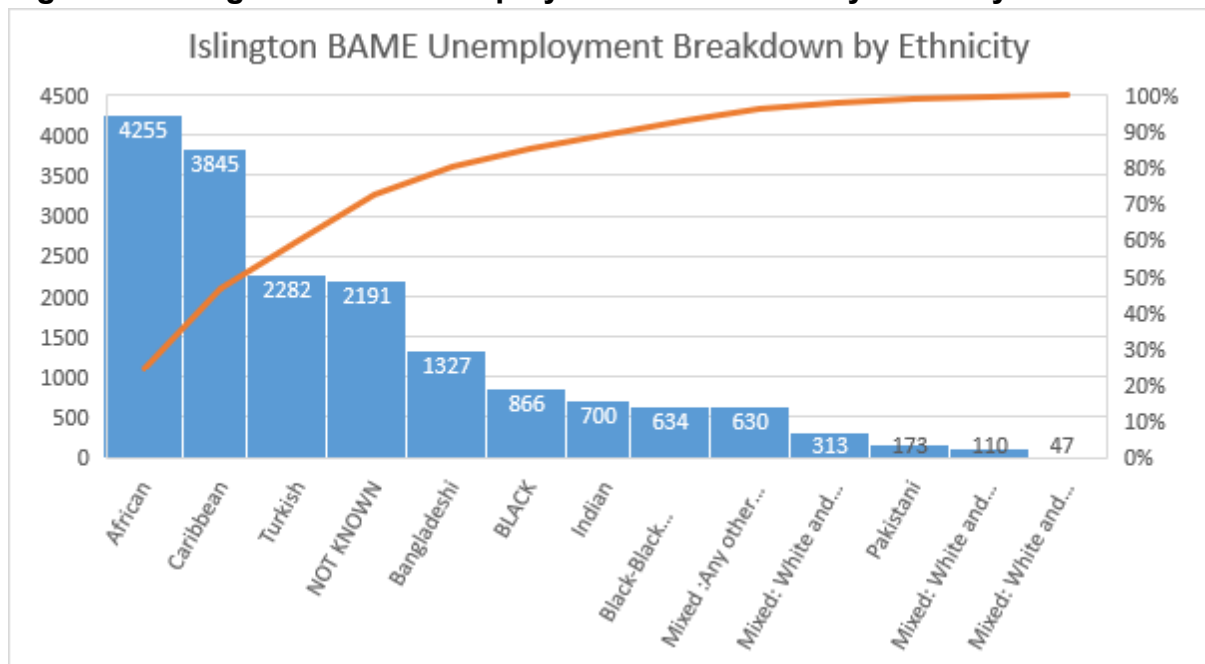**Figure 8 - Islington BAME Unemployment Breakdown by Ethnicity**

Figure 8 above shows a Pareto chart of the best estimate of Islington BAME unemployment numbers broken down by BAME ethnic groups using the ratio of sub-ethnic groups in the housing benefit and council tax benefit data.   The Pareto chart shows that the first three sub-ethnic groups account for 70% of BAME unemployment in Islington. If the fourth unknown group is included, the first four groups will account for 80%. African, Caribbean, Turkish, Bangladeshi, and Unknown sub-groups together will account for 90% of BAME unemployment. Therefore, if the unemployment issues of these sub-groups are well addressed, BAME unemployment in Islington will be significantly reduced.

4.7. BAME Unemployment Group Distributions

Figure 9 below shows that those who are unemployed with benefits varies across in each ward in Islington from between 372 to 693. Finsbury Park has the highest number of unemployed people with 693 claimants and Highbury East the lowest with 372. Caledonian, Holloway, Bunhill, and Tollington also have more than 600 cases. It is worth mentioning that there 76 cases from outside of Islington which are not included in Figure 9.

Figure 9 - Unemployment with Benefit by Ward in Islington
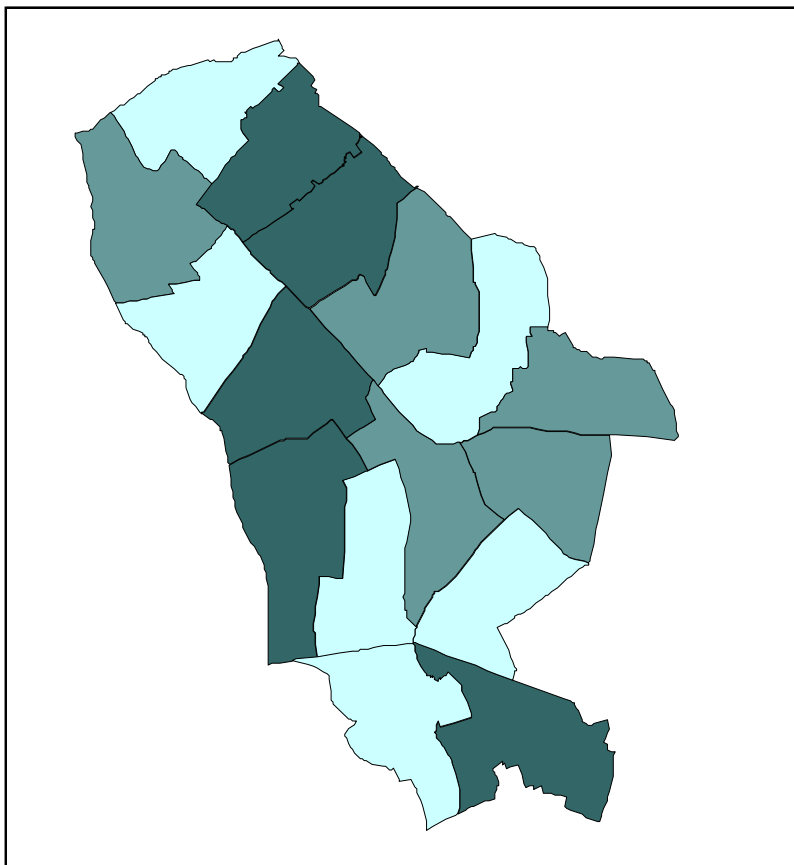
1	Barnsbury	499
2	Bunhill	626
3	Caledonian	684
4	Canonbury	573
5	Clerkenwell	433
6	Finsbury Park	693
7	Highbury East	372
8	Highbury West	535
9	Hillrise	498
10	Holloway	672
11	Junction	558
12	Mildmay	535
13	St George's	490
14	St Mary's	507
15	St Peter's	474
16	Tollington	613
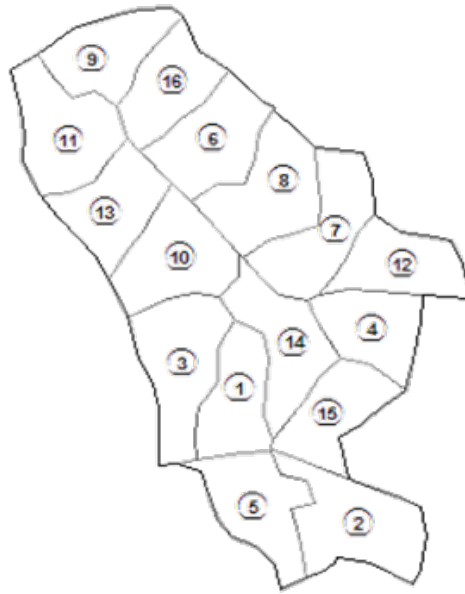
4.8. BAME Unemployment Age Distributions

Figure 10 – BAME Age Histogram of Benefits Claimants
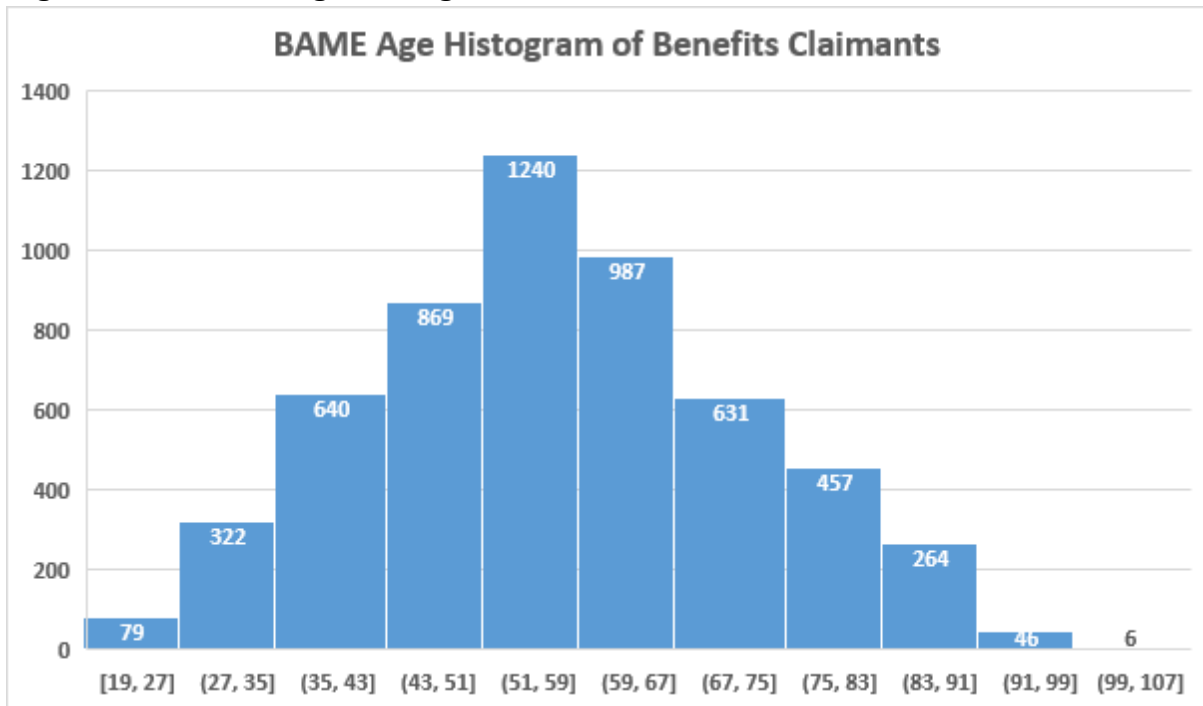
Figure 10 - BAME Age Histogram - shows that most BAME unemployed people with a benefits claim are within the middle age populations, aged between 43 and 67, if the age range is enlarged from 35 to 75 years, it will cover 90% of BAME

unemployed people. The age of sub-groups of BAME groups are further explored below.

Figure 11 – African Age Histogram of Benefits Claimants
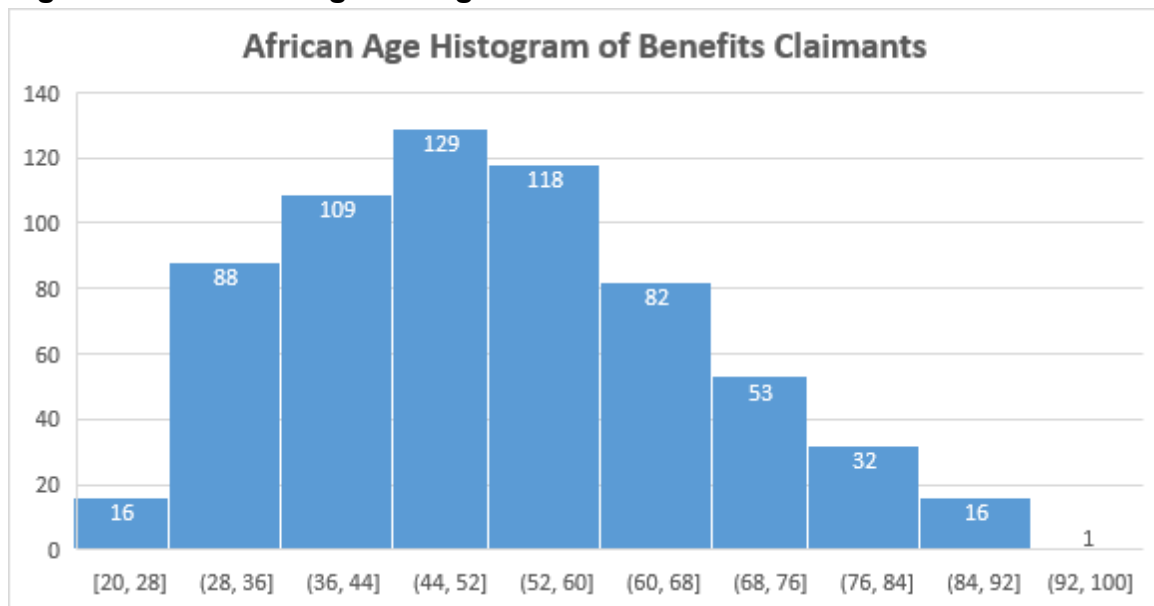
Figure 12– Caribbean Age Histogram of Benefits Claimants
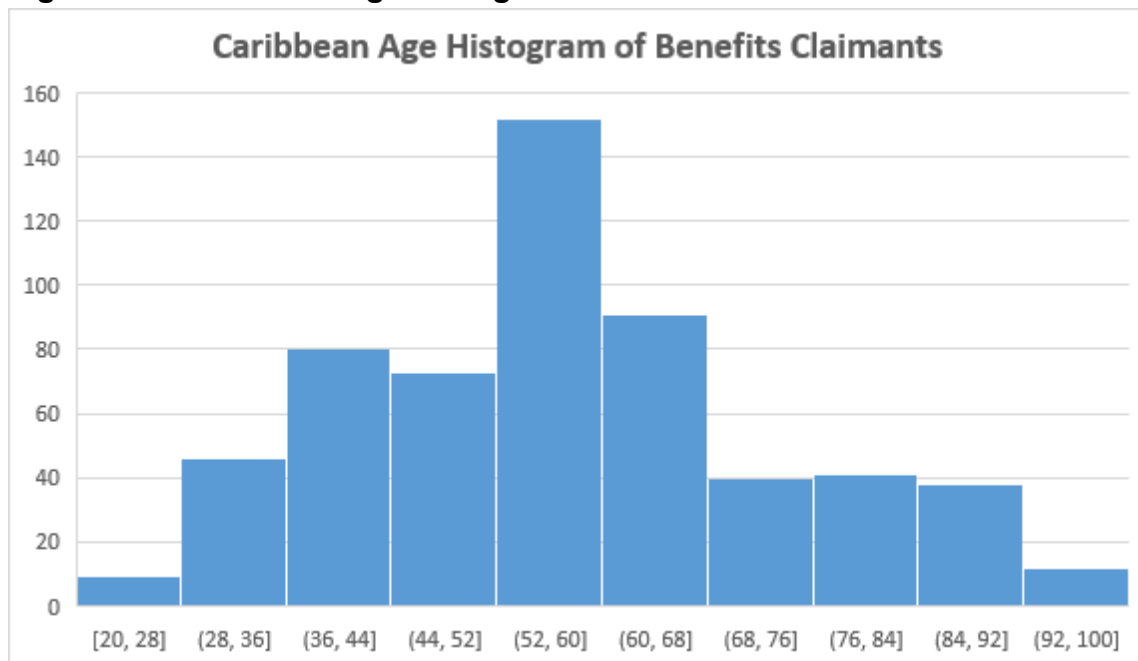
Figure 11 - African Age Histogram of Benefits Claimants - and Figure 12– Caribbean Age Histogram of Benefits Claimants - show that the unemployed African population is more likely to be unemployed from a younger age, while the Caribbean population

are less likely to be unemployed at a young age. Figure 13 shows the Bangladeshi unemployed population is slightly older.

Figure 13 – Bangladeshi Age Histogram of Benefits Claimants
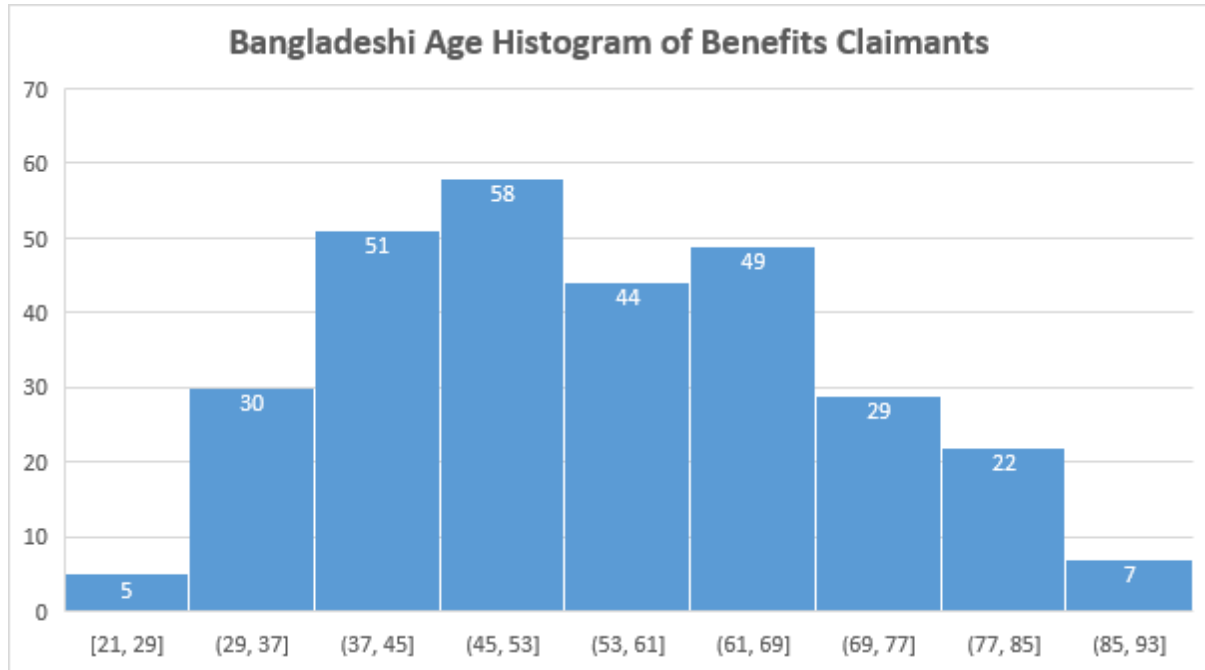
4.9. BAME Group Education Level

Figure 14 - Education level by Ethnicity of iWork Participators

Education level by Ethnicity of iWork Participants
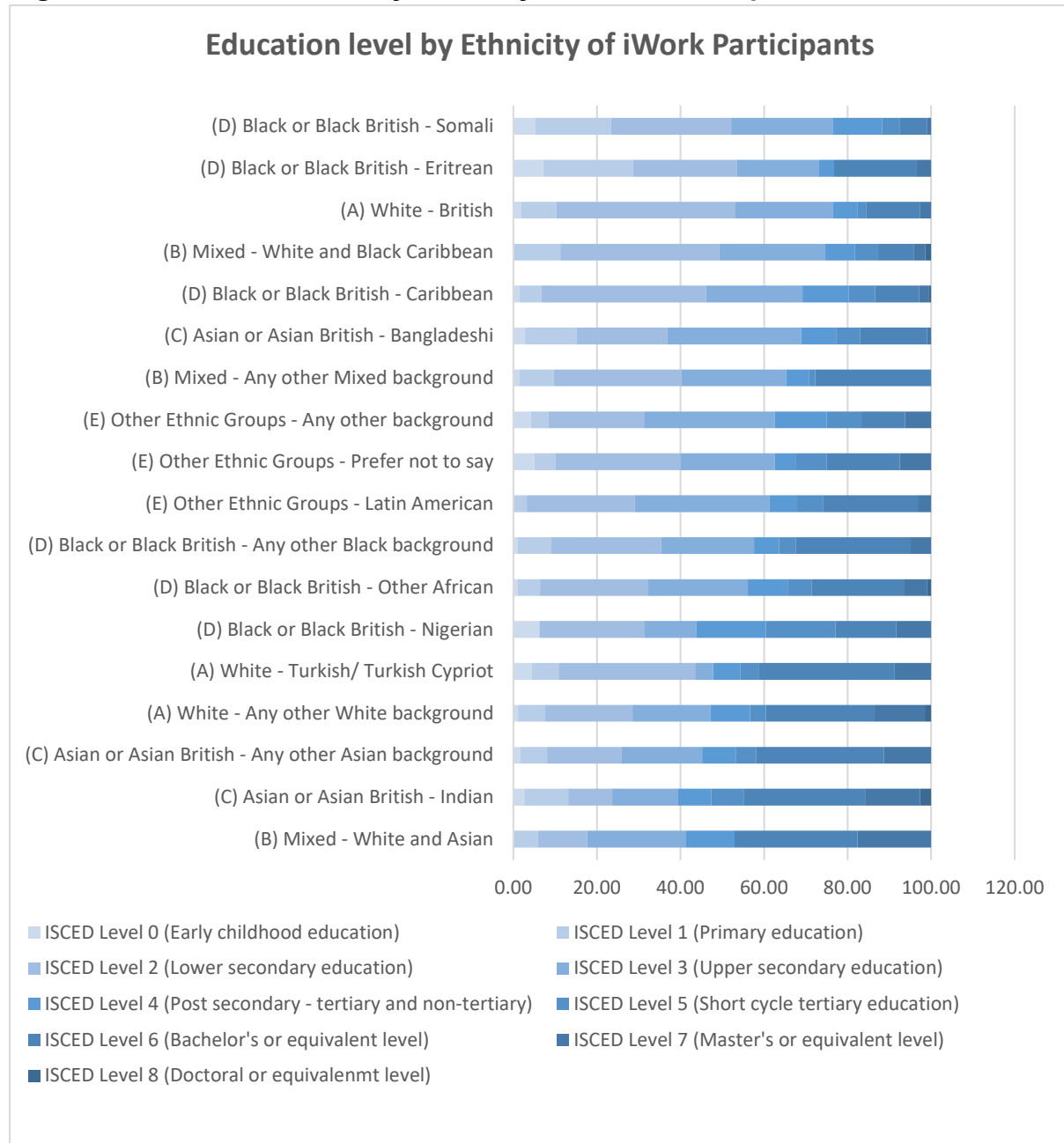
Education level is one of the most important factors affecting employment, but data of education level by ethnicity in Islington are not readily available. Islington iWork engagement data is used for identifying education level by ethnicity in this study since the dataset contains 2104 unemployed residents in Islington who were seeking help from iWork, with detailed information about education level and ethnicity of each participant.

Figure 14 above shows the order of ethnic groups sorted top-down according to education level. Where lowest level indicates a lighter colour and highest level

indicates a darker colour. The size of the bar in each colour indicates the percentage of the people in the level of the ethnic group. Therefore the ethnic groups with the lowest level of educational attainment are: Somali, Eritrean, White-Britsh, Caribbean, and Bangladeshi. Those with the highest are Mixed - White and Asian, Indian, and Other Asian groups.

4.10. Employment Correlation Analysis

Figure 15- Employment Correlation Analysis
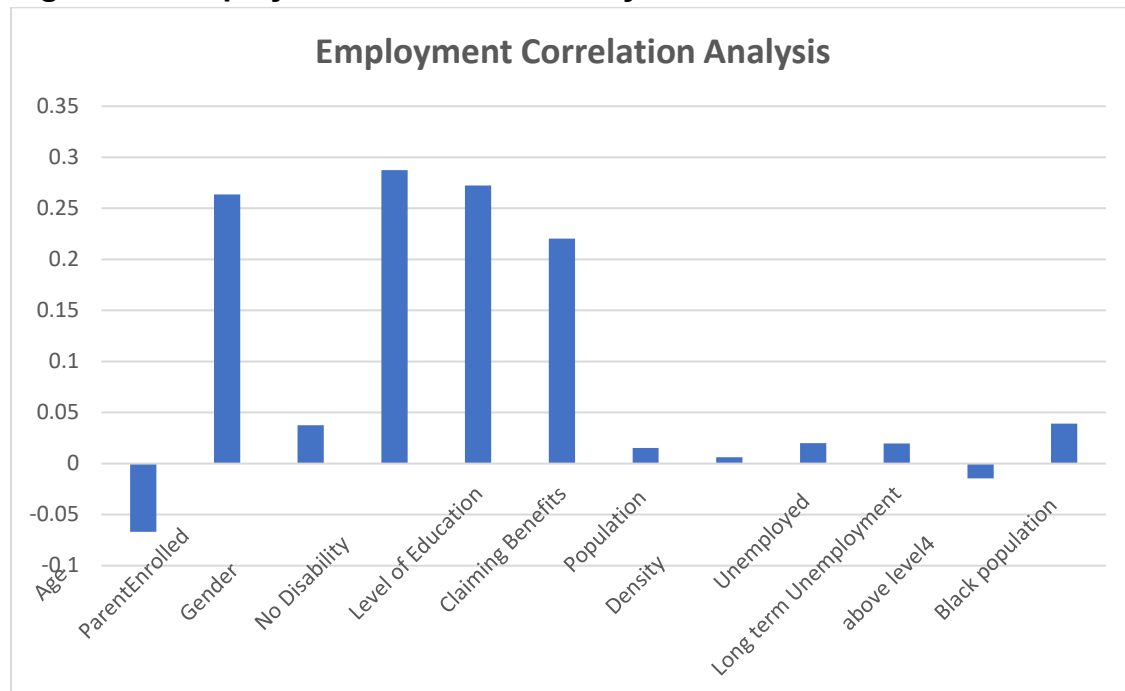
In order to further identify how different factors are inferred from the Islington iWork engagement data, Employment Correlation Analysis using the Islington engagement data to measure the strength of the relationship between factors with the target, in this case employment. A high percentage score of correlation factor points to a strong relationship.

Figure 15 - Employment Correlation Analysis - shows that various factors which may be likely to influence a participant's employment. The size of the bar indicates the strenght of the inference. Positive and negative value indicates positive or negative impact on employment. The lst six factors are based on demographic data of the ward where people live.

The results of the employment-related analysis chart in the Figure 15 above show that age, parental status, disability, education level, and benefits claimed are significantly related to employment. Age is negatively correlated, indicating that the older the age, the less likely to be employed. The other four factors have a strong positive correlation with employment. This means that if the client's parents participate in the program, the client is more likely to find a job, and the higher the client's education level, the greater their chances of employment.

For Disability, and Claiming Benefits data, there are many 'not stated' or blank fields in the dataset. In order to find out the inference of "missing" data, we further investigated the data and found that the strong correlation with employmnt is directly contributed by the "missing" data. In other words, if clients did not provide clear answers "yes" or "no", they are more likely not to get a job. While if we only take "yes" or "no" in the consideration, 'Claiming Benefits' does not have a significant correlation with employment. This may provide evidence that will help people into employment.

Demographic factors of ward does not play a significnat role, however it is clearly indicated that wards with a higher black population, higher ubemployemnt and lower than level 4 educational outcomes, are more ikely to get employment when they are helped by iWork.

4.11. Key findings from the quantitative data analysis

Islington is an Inner London Borough, the 3rd smallest London borough by area and has 206,125 population according to ONS data, 31.8% of whom are Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents. The average employment rate in Islington is 71.1% and BAME groups generally have a lower employment rate, particularly Pakistani/Bangladeshi and Black ethnic groups. Since black is the largest ethnic group in Islington, it has much significant impact on the employment rate.

As ONS data does not breakdown into details of different ethnic groups, to obtain a better understanding of the unemployment situation in Islington, housing benefit and council tax benefit data and iWork engagement data are used which reveal the following significant findings:

- Turkish as one of the important BAME groups was often ignored as the ethnic sub-group are usually treated as White in ONS data. However, this sub-group has the third largest unemployment among BAME groups in Islington. Together with African and Caribbean sub-groups, they account for 70% of the BAME unemployed population.

- African, Caribbean, Turkish, Bangladeshi, and Unknown sub-groups together account for 90% of BAME unemployment. Therefore, if unemployment issues within those sub-groups are well addressed, BAME unemployment in Islington will be significantly reduced.

- Unknown is an important issue directly linked with unemployment. It also affects the overall accuracy of analysis and decision making. It may be associated with trust and confidence.

- Unemployed Benefits Claimants distribution in Islington is relatively even between 372 – 693 in different wards. Finsbury Park, Caledonian, Holloway, Bunhill, and Tollington are the five wards with the highest levels of unemployment with above 600 claimants.

- BAME Age Histogram shows that most BAME unemployed residents who are claiming benefits are middle-aged populations between 43 and 67. African are more likely to be unemployed from young age, while Bangladeshi residents need more support after middle age.

- Education level is one of the important factors affecting employment. Somali, Eritrean, Caribbean, and Bangladeshi are BAME sub-groups requiring more support to improve their level of education.

5. Focus groups: key findings

As noted in Section 3, seven focus groups were conducted to get a more detailed picture of the experiences and employment support needs of the specific minority ethnic communities most affected by unemployment in the Borough. The questions asked are available in the appendices.

This section outlines the key findings from each of the seven focus groups starting with the key findings from the six focus groups with different ethnic minority communities and followed by the key findings from the focus group with the 12 employment support service providers.

Ethnic minority resident focus groups: key findings

The quantitative data analysis identified those ethnic minority groups in the Borough with the lowest employment rates as Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black ethnic minority groups, but acknowledges that some of these communities – especially Pakistani – are small in number in Islington. The data indicates that there are a particularly large number of black and minority ethnic residents not in employment. Further data analysis of housing benefit and council tax benefit data indicated that black or black British, other ethnic and Pakistani and Bangladeshi residents have the highest unemployment rates and that African, Caribbean, Turkish, 'not known' and Bangladeshi residents together account for 90% of BAME unemployment in the Borough. This information was used to identify the 6 resident focus groups.

It should be noted, however, that data on housing and council tax benefits became available as the qualitative research was already taking place. Some ethnic minority groups, notably the Turkish community, were not captured in the focus groups. Further research is therefore recommended to assess the experiences and employment support needs of the Turkish community in the Borough.

The focus groups reinforced the fact that while there are many common experiences between different minority ethnic groups in terms of the barriers they experience in accessing work, there are also significant differences. This supports the research project aims of seeking to identify the needs of specific minority ethnic communities in the Borough.

The research also highlights the inter-section of ethnicity, gender, social class, age and health and disability in shaping people's experiences of and difficulties in accessing work and employment support services in the Borough. **Alongside ethnicity, gender, age and health were all key factors acting as barriers** to accessing jobs and especially higher paying and skilled jobs.

The **key barriers to work** emerging from the focus groups were:

Age – emerged as a key theme across most of the focus groups, acting as a major barrier to accessing even entry-level jobs. Across all of the focus groups, residents in their 40s, 50s and 60s experienced significant barriers in terms of language and digital literacy in particular, but also having no or low level educational qualifications. Many women were seeking employment for the first time in their 40s and their lack of previous employment experience acts as a major barrier to accessing jobs.

> '*I think that the generation we are talking about are like **the ignored generation.** [employment] will give people two things- one that they get employment, two that they get back their self-respect*' (Bangladeshi man)

This finding from the focus groups also correlates with the quantitative data which indicates most unemployed BAME benefit claimants in the Borough are middle aged, between 43 and 67 years old. The quantitative data also highlights significant differences between ethnic minority groups in terms of age, indicating that African benefit claimants are more likely to be younger while Caribbean claimants and Bangladeshi claimants are more likely to be middle aged.

Health – poor health emerged as perhaps the most significant barrier to accessing work. This included poor physical and mental health. This again correlates with the quantitative data which highlights that Islington has the highest proportion of people claiming benefits on the basis of disability and sickness in London and that a particularly high proportion of these claimants (over half) are experiencing mental health problems. Mental health problems were identified by men in the Algerian and Bangladeshi focus groups in particular. Poor mental health was a consequence of particular sets of circumstances including isolation, exclusion, overcrowded housing and the loss of identity associated with loss of employment during the COVID pandemic. The focus group with service providers also highlighted the high and growing levels of mental health problems (anxiety and depression) among black, Asian and minority ethnic women clients. Trauma from past experience is also likely to contribute to mental health issues. This was mentioned by some support workers within community organisations but is not a topic that was directly explored with focus group participants.

There was a particularly high proportion of residents in the focus groups reporting physical health problems, especially back pain and mobility problems and diabetes with the majority of health conditions linked directly to heavy lifting and long hours

standing in previous low skilled and paid employment as chefs, kitchen porters and care workers.

Language – language was a major barrier to employment for many especially older Bangladeshi, Somali and Algerian residents. The lack of English language skills was strongly linked to digital literacy. This is particularly important in the context of a shift to on-line provision of classes and services with the COVID pandemic. Digital literacy depends of fluent English language skills. The lack of such skills was identified as a major barrier to accessing and navigating online services, taking part in courses and completing job applications. It is increasingly a key element in all aspects of daily life.

> *'Yes, I have a lot of certificates from college…I have social care level two, level 3 and diploma, and ESOL, but my English no good, I'm scared. sometimes when I apply job say not acceptable, I have some basics in education, but sometimes I don't feel comfortable' (Somali woman)*

Digital literacy – as with language, digital literacy emerged as a significant barrier to accessing work and employment support services. Again, this was particularly the case for older residents in all focus groups, However, it should be noted that employment service providers questioned the assumption that young people are necessarily digitally literate. The issue was especially emphasised by the Algerian and Bangladeshi residents, both male and female. Many older people were dependent on younger family members or friends for help in applying for jobs and accessing services online.

> *'Most of these people here, except maybe one or two, most of them are digitally illiterate. This is a daunting task they have. It is making them excluded' (Bangladeshi man)*

> *'To apply for a job you have to know how to use a computer, but we don't know' (Bangladeshi woman)*

> *'If we can learn how to use technology, we can apply for jobs and for more jobs, anything you apply for you have to use a computer, so yeah it would be good if we could learn, so we don't need to depend on anyone else' (Bangladeshi woman)*

Digital poverty – a further barrier for many was not having access to a laptop (most used their phones) or a reliable and fast internet connection.

Childcare and hours of work – almost without exception, the women in the focus groups had children and the majority were only looking for employment during school hours. This need to work within school hours was a major barrier for women, particularly in accessing higher skilled work or training and higher education. As a result, most women with school aged children focussing their job search on low skilled and paid work in social care, providing school meals and on teaching assistant posts. Interestingly, not one woman in any of the focus groups mentioned child care as an option.

> *'I had an interview for a good job, but I couldn't take it, as I have kids and I want it in school time, so this is better [social care]' (Bangladeshi woman)*

> *'We have to do school runs and when they ask us to be there from 9 to 5, it's not possible' (Pakistani woman)*

> *'It's a complex situation as I trained in taxation, but because I have small kids as well and it is so difficult to find flexible hours, part-time roles in the field where I spent a lot of time and money to train, that's why I have to change my field. I would say that there should be more flexible patterns for women with young children. It's difficult.' (Pakistani woman)*

Lack of experience – this was seen as a key barrier to successfully getting jobs. Many jobs require experience, and getting a first step on the employment ladder was identified as a problem. Voluntary work was identified as an important way of getting experience and the voluntary sector organisations involved in the focus groups all offered voluntary work opportunities.

> *'If you go for an interview, the first question they ask you, they look at your CV they see about your experience, and nobody is going to hire you if you don't have that experience, nobody is going to train you' (Somali man)*

> *'I am working as Uber driver, when I come in this country, I worked in a factory then I worked with a restaurant, then I job lost, then I go so many places, I apply for jobs. when I applied [they said] have I got experience. I said*

'my friend, I didn't work before this.so how can I get experience? Give me job, then you see me, what I do' (Bangladeshi man)

'Another problem, everyone wants experienced people. If someone is just starting their career at 40, which happens, many south Asian mums, they never worked before and their children are old enough now but everyone wants experience' (Pakistani woman)

Lack of skills and qualifications – many women identified a lack of relevant or out-dated skills as a barrier to accessing work. In particular, the challenges faced by many South Asian women seeking work for the first time in their 40s with no previous work experience was highlighted. Many older generation men and women in all focus groups, especially Somali, Bangladeshi and Algerian residents, had no qualifications. Again, this correlates with the quantitative data analysis. The iWork engagement data highlights that Somali, Eritrean, Caribbean, Bangladeshi and White British residents have the lowest levels of educational attainment and qualifications. A further key factor highlighted in the Pakistani focus group was the lack of recognition and the downgrading of qualifications gained overseas. At least three of the participants in the Pakistani focus group had high level qualifications – in engineering, accountancy and teaching - which were either not recognised or had been down-graded in the UK context.

Low confidence and aspirations – all of the above factors fed into low levels of confidence and of aspiration and expectation for many residents, particularly older ones. It was striking in the Bangladeshi and Algerian focus groups that participants were looking for a narrow range of low skilled and low paid work. This reflects past experiences, including of racism, shaping their aspirations. This was raised in both the resident focus groups and the focus group with employment service providers. It was noted that many black and minority ethnic clients come to employment services with low aspirations shaped by their experiences of racism, often starting at school.

'It depends of the type of job, if it is a high paid job, especially for minorities, compared to the white person, it just seems like this is not the type of people they [the NHS] are looking for, they do not 'fit that bill' (Somali woman)

Participants also highlighted how experiences of unemployment affected their confidence, identity and mental health:

*'I'm a tough person but when you have been made redundant it does knock your confidence and when you have been unemployed for such a long time, it is a very lonely place. You've got people around you and family around you, but it's **you** that's unemployed, so it can be a lonely place and it can be a depressing place, especially if you are looking for a job and you are getting knocked back, knocked back, knocked back.' (Afro-Caribbean woman)*

*'A lot of people are having a negative thought about their own identity, we are not working any more, we are just surviving, they are in '**survival mode'** and so fearful of everything, we are now ignored and everything is now happening to get rid of us, or ignoring us.' (Bangladeshi man)*

When the availability of nursing apprenticeships was mentioned in one focus group, it provoked a great deal of interest, highlighting the need for support, information and guidance in helping to raise expectations and aspirations.

Experience of poor and worsening working conditions and pay – most older Algerian, Bangladeshi and Somali participants worked or had worked in a narrow range of poorly paid jobs with poor and worsening hours and conditions. It was notable that all the Bangladeshi men worked or had worked as mini-cab drivers or in restaurants and hotels in food preparation, while all of the Bangladeshi women worked in social care. Most of the Algerian men worked or had worked in 'odd- jobs' or in restaurants as chefs or kitchen porters. Most talked of the impact of COVID on jobs in the hospitality sector and of worsening conditions. Many of these older men and women had no qualifications, low levels of English language skills, low levels of digital literacy and many had serious health conditions. People in these groups are confronted with a range of barriers to accessing work.

Experience of employment support services

Alongside identifying the barriers to employment faced by specific sub-groups, one of the main aims of the research was to identify which groups are not taking up existing employment support services and identify how employment services can better shape and deliver their services to these specific target groups. A number of key issues stood out here and are discussed below.

Lack of knowledge of employment support services or where to find or access them - the key issue in all focus groups was that participants had very little or no idea where to go to get advice and guidance on getting a job, aside from the Job

Centre. Some participants in the focus groups had used iWork, and mostly their experiences had been positive. But it was notable that even these participants had stumbled across the service by accident. Most participants had no idea the Council provided employment support services and would not consider going to the Council for employment support. Participants mostly relied on word-of-mouth or using online services such as Indeed. Most people had little idea of where to begin and were very keen to get advice and support.

> *'They don't know where to go to get advice' (Bangladeshi man)*

> *'I have to admit that really helped me to get back on my feet. For example, I didn't have money for a passport and the lady who was working at that time with the iWork team, I don't know if she is still there, she helped me to get my passport. I didn't have a passport I wouldn't have been able to go forward to do what I had to do. Obviously, I've got to do things for my own self but the main thing was for me, they helped me to make that first step. I needed a DBS check they helped me to do that. I never forget how I started on my journey, and my journey started with the iWork team' (Afro-Caribbean woman)*

Lack of trust of the Job Centre – a major issue and barrier was the widespread lack of trust and fear of the Job Centre which spills over into suspicion of coming into contact with any 'official' services. Many had experienced threats of sanctions from the Job Centre, and some had their benefits cut. Many with chronic health conditions felt anxious and threatened by pressures imposed on them by the Job Centre to take unsuitable work. This was a factor in widespread suspicion, anxiety and fear about approaching council services, especially among the Bangladeshi and Algerian focus group participants.

> *'When I was initially made redundant and then sick, I thought they would help you to find a job. I didn't find it so helpful. I think my finding work was through friends [applying for jobs] was more about ticking boxes, it's all about that, even if you are not well' (Afro Caribbean woman)*

> *'This generation that come to this country. They come for jobs, factory jobs. Those in their 40s, 50s lost their jobs and there is no chance nowadays. These people done a lot of physical work, as a result they are now suffering and they are not fit for work but the Job Centre, they are after them, asking them, go, do that. A hundred times they are chasing them, it is a great problem' (Bangladeshi man)'*

Negative experiences of online services – during the COVID pandemic most employment support services moved online, which was a major barrier highlighted in all the focus groups. Participants emphasised that they needed face-to-face services not least in the context of the barriers of language and digital literacy and access to laptops highlighted above.

'everything going online, a little bit hard' (Algerian man)

'want face-to-face, I don't like online learning' (Pakistani woman)

'I think also digital inclusion, everything is moving from face-to-face interaction to online interaction, and most of these people, most of them are digitally illiterate, this is making them excluded' (Bangladeshi man)

Outreach and community-based employment services – the need for services to be based in the community was widely discussed in all of the focus groups, both with residents and with the service providers. There was overwhelming enthusiasm for basing services in trusted community organisations and spaces, and in the places which people use on a daily basis, such as schools, GP and other health services, faith centres and community groups and organisations. The community centres that facilitated meetings with Algerian, Bangladeshi and Somali residents were especially keen to see regular employment advice and guidance sessions based in the respective community centres alongside meaningful education and training provision in ESOL and digital skills.

Appendices

Appendix1:

Individual focus groups: key findings

Afro-Caribbean focus group

Three women in their late 50s attended the focus group, one of whom was working and the other two looking for work but both suffering from ongoing health problems. The key issues and barriers that emerged were;

Lack of confidence – both women looking for work had a wealth of job experience but being unemployed and out of the labour market had resulted in low confidence and mental health difficulties:

> *'I'm a tough person but when you have been made redundant it does knock your confidence and when you have been unemployed for such a long time, it is a very lonely place.' (Afro-Caribbean woman)*

> **'***Anyways, I wasn't in such a good place, I was better at putting myself in writing and when it came to expressing myself, I wasn't in a good place. Anyways, I went to the interview, its' a bit emotional but I just can't believe, it was a very simple interview, I remember 3 people and the questions were very straightforward but I just couldn't put anything together and I left the interview feeling really deflated and I didn't get the job and I beat myself up for that for a long time' (Afro-Caribbean woman)*

> *'I will go through the requirements and the person spec and think 'yeah, I can do that' and then I get to something and I think, no I will leave that and I think it's confidence I kind of say 'for goodness sake, you've got all the skills', and then I'm kind of like someone else will march in and tick all the boxes, they'll wing it better than me" (Afro-Caribbean woman)*

Age – the women also all felt their age was a barrier to them getting jobs:

> *'I'm beginning to think there's a bit of ageism there, maybe it's just me, I am sensing that it is because when you go for a job, they think 'yeah, yeah, yeah,*

she's good but you know when choosing workers, a 30-year old, or a 58-year old? That's what I'm sensing' (Afro-Caribbean woman)

Health – poor health was also identified as a barrier to work, with one woman returning to social care with back and knee problems caused by previous work in social care.

Experiences of employment support – the women had all heard of or used iWork and had good experiences of using the service:

'I never forget how I started my journey, and my journey started with the i-Works team' (Afro-Caribbean woman)

However, they had found out about iWork by accident (one had gone to 222 Upper Street to sort out utility bills and a' nice man' had pointed her to iWork) or through informal networks. All three women had used the Job Centre in order to claim Universal Credit but none had used the service to find work:

'When I was initially made redundant and then sick, I thought they would help you to find a job, I didn't find it so helpful, I think my finding work was through friends' (Afro-Caribbean woman)

Algerian focus group

Seven men attended the Algerian focus group (which was based at Muslim Welfare House) in addition to a community support worker. Only one of the men was currently in employment. Their previous job experience had been mostly in low paid work in catering and most had very low expectations of what job opportunities were available to them. Again, experience was highlighted as key:

> '*I am looking for work, but this situation, COVID, I applied but the answer is always rejected and ask for experience*' (Algerian man)

The key issues and barriers that emerged were:

COVID - Perhaps more than any of the other focus groups, this group highlighted the negative impact of COVID on them losing their jobs in the hospitality sector in particular (as chefs and kitchen porters), on not being able to find new jobs, on the shift to everything being online and on their mental health due to the isolation of being (often alone) at home.

Isolation - many in the group appeared to lack family or community support structures, one of the participants who works as a community support worker mentioned that isolation is a major issue for many Algerian men locally.

Poor physical and mental health – almost all of the men in the focus group suffered poor physical health and many mentioned their mental health difficulties as a result of being unemployed and stuck at home, frequently alone and without family support. For several of the men (as with findings from other focus groups especially the Bangladeshi focus groups), their poor physical health resulted from previously working in manual roles involving heavy lifting.

Age – the men were mostly in their 40s, 50s and 60s and felt strongly that their age was a major barrier to finding work.

Language – language was a significant barrier to accessing work for many of the men in the group.

Digital literacy and access – most of the men had a lack of digital literacy and most did not have a laptop and no or a very slow internet connection at home, relying on friends to help them. The shift to online delivery of employment support services was identified as a particular problem for them as a result both of a lack of digital skills and access but also because of language problems. The combination of the need for support with language and digital skills highlighted the importance of face-to-face service delivery for this group;

> *'It's weak, internet is very weak, sometimes I can't do it, then I have to go to my friend and maybe he's busy, so I'm struggling. I have one wing, just one wing!' (Algerian man)*

Lack of knowledge of where to access employment support services – no one in the group knew where to get employment support advice and guidance to help them identify and apply for jobs and most did not have an updated CV. None of the group had any idea that the Council provided employment support services and none had, for example, heard of the Income Maximisation service including the community support worker. There was also a distinct sense of a lack of trust and fear of the Council services. This group very strongly articulated the view that regular, face-to-face employment support services together with ESOL and digital literacy training (and the provision of computers) could best be run from trusted community centres such as Muslim Welfare House and that knowledge of services needed to be increased and made available in the public spaces and institutions that people use such as schools, health centres, Mosques and churches as well as (for younger groups) through social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram.

Mistrust of external or 'official' services – Participants in the Algerian focus group were very worried about engaging with official bodies. While they all gave verbal consent to take part in the focus group, none were willing to give their name while introducing themselves or write their name on an attendance register, but all were regular users of Muslim Welfare House services. This highlights the major difficulty for new services wishing to engage this group but also suggests the opportunity that exists from close working with a trusted organisation that already has both the trust and the community links.

Bangladeshi women focus group

A total of 12 women attended the focus group of Bangladeshi women plus one community support worker (who helped as an interpreter for some of the older women). Four women were in their 30s, 2 in their 40s and 4 in their 50s. All of the women had children (some now adults) and 9 of the women worked in social care. The key issues and barriers that emerged were:

Working in jobs with low pay and poor employment conditions – most of the women worked in social care, a job found by word-of-mouth within the community and one which above all else fitted in around caring for school age children and other family caring responsibilities for elderly relatives and did not require formal educational qualifications or fluent language skills. All of the women worked with one agency and were on zero-hours contracts working seven days a week, evenings and weekends with no holiday or sickness pay and no pay for travel in between clients. Whilst working in social care jobs, which most of them enjoyed, most of the women were currently looking to increase their hours by finding other jobs during school hours such as school meals attendant roles. Their aspirations and expectations focussed on a narrow range of low skilled and paid roles as a consequence of the combination of barriers of childcare, language and lack of digital skills and educational qualifications.

Childcare and other caring responsibilities and the need to work during school hours – all of the women were looking for work during school hours and could think only of school dinner and breakfast club roles as fitting these requirements. All of the women had children and several also had responsibilities caring for elderly or unwell relatives. Childcare was not mentioned as an option by any of the women.

Language – many of the women in the focus group didn't write or speak fluently in English and for most of them, especially the older women, language was a major barrier to getting work. The shift online with COVID was especially difficult as navigating online systems in English was a major barrier for the women. There was widespread agreement that working outside of the home was very important in terms of improving confidence and language skills.

Digital literacy and access – perhaps one of the major barriers for almost all of the women in the Bangladeshi focus group was the lack of digital literacy skills, with digital literacy not only required to do many jobs but also required in order to access and apply for any jobs. Most of the women had no computer skills, no lap top and many had poor internet connections at home:

> *'To apply for a job, you have to know how to use a computer, but we don't know'* (Bangladeshi woman)

> *'We don't know how to use the computer, myself I don't know where to go. We know this office. My children know, they can apply for me, but I don't know'* (Bangladeshi woman)

> *'If we can learn how to use technology, we can apply for jobs and for more jobs, anything you apply for you have to use a computer, so yeah it would be good if we could learn, so we don't need to depend on anyone else'* (Bangladeshi woman)

Heath - a number of women in the group suffered poor health with a range of health conditions including back pain and diabetes. Again, many health problems had been caused by heavy lifting in social care roles.

Experience of employment support services – none of the women in the Bangladeshi focus group had any idea of where to go to get advice on getting a job or where to find job vacancies. One older women with a chronic health condition who had never previously been in employment, was very fearful of speaking having been pressurized by the Job Centre to find work or lose her benefits. Interpreting on the women's behalf the community support worker emphasized:

> *'They don't know where to go to get advice, to get help with CV'* and

> *'The Job Centre is pressurizing her to get a job but she doesn't have any experience and she is saying 'I don't know why I came here [to the focus group], I am scared, I might have my benefits stopped', they're pressurizing her, she's never worked in her life'* (Bangladeshi woman)

Outreach and community based employment support services – there was a strong view among the participants in support of employment support services including ESOL and digital skills training being based in community organisations, such as the Islington Bangladeshi Association (IBA.)

Bangladeshi men focus group

Ten men attended the focus group with Bangladeshi men plus two community support workers working at the IBA who helped as interpreters for some of the participants. The key issues and barriers that emerged were:

Health – poor health was perhaps the single key barrier to getting a job for many in the group. In fact, it was striking how many men participating in the focus group (perhaps more so than in any other of the focus groups) had serious and chronic health conditions including diabetes and kidney problems and severe back pain, frequently as a consequence of heavy manual work in previous jobs,

> *'This generation that come to this country. They came for jobs, factory jobs. Those in their 40s, 50s lost their jobs and there is no chance nowadays.* ***These people done a lot of physical work, as a result they are now suffering and they are not fit for work*** *but the Job Centre, they are after them, asking them, go, do that. A hundred times they are chasing them, it is a great problem' (Bangladeshi man)'*

Alongside physical health problems, mental health had also been negatively affected by unemployment, for a generation of men whose identity and self-respect was based on paid work;

> *'Sitting at home with the children, family and nothing to do, mental health is a great problem now' (Bangladeshi man)*

> *'A lot of people are having a negative thought about their own identity… we are not working any more, we are just surviving, they are in* ***'survival mode'*** *and so fearful of everything, we are now ignored and everything is now happening to get rid of us, or ignoring us.' (Bangladeshi man)*

Language – participants ranged from having fluent to very little English and again, for many of the middle-aged men language was a major barrier to getting work. Some of the men discussed how having limited English meant only the least skilled and most poorly paid work with poor working conditions was available to them and that employers knew this and often further exploited them but also that their limited English meant they were not offered more highly skilled or front of office or sales jobs leaving them with little experience to get new jobs:

> *'Basically, our generation, they can't speak English, so they didn't get proper training, some people take advantage' (Bangladeshi man)*

> *'My manager used to hire a lot of people, and I say 'every time you hire people, most of the people they can't speak English, why do you hire?' They say 'Look, if they speak proper English, they don't work hard, they ask for too much.' (Bangladeshi man).*

Working in low skilled, poorly paid jobs with poor and worsening working conditions – all of the men worked or had previously worked (usually through informal connections) in a narrow range of low skilled, poorly paid jobs as mini-cab drivers or in food preparation in restaurants and hotels in which working conditions were thought to be worsening. Many felt that their job opportunities were in fact further narrowing. Uber and other mini-cab drivers, for example, were fearful of new more stringent English language regulations and of the high costs involved in meeting these requirements alongside declining working conditions and increased surveillance:

> *'Minicab, I do almost 17 years, then Uber I do, when I do the minicab in the local office, it was good and it was cash money and we could take a rest, at least there was a room to take a rest. Now because they have a mobile phone in the back, they can just complain to Uber' (Bangladeshi man)*

Digital literacy and access – the lack of digital skills was identified by many of the men in the focus group as a major barrier to looking for and getting work:

> *'most of them are digitally illiterate… it's difficult for them, they are used to doing physical work' (Bangladeshi man)*

Age – many of the middle-aged men also felt age was a major barrier for them in accessing work and that they were 'an ignored generation'

Experience of employment support services – the Job Centre was the only employment service that any of the participants in the group were aware of and they had no awareness of any Council employment support services. There was a significant level of fear and mistrust of services, especially of the Job Centre where some participants with health problems had been told to apply for jobs which were

unsuitable, others had been sanctioned and one had their benefits stopped and had to appeal against the decision.

Community based employment services – there was again a strong feeling that employment services would best be provided in the community, in and alongside trusted community organisations and a feeling that the Council needed to be more pro-active in putting this in place:

> *'If the Council really wants progress, the Council has to take steps to bring them in. These people do not have the skills set or the ability to connect with the system' (Bangladeshi community support worker)*

Pakistani focus group

Six people attended the Pakistani focus group, 4 women (aged 35 to 44) and 2 men (aged 46 and 54). With the exception of the older man who had chronic health conditions and was not currently working, all of the participants had high level educational qualifications including at post- and under-graduate level. The key issues and barriers emerging were:

Childcare and the need for flexible working hours within school hours – all of the women were looking to return to work after caring for young children and all were only looking for jobs within school hours. One woman with 4 children stated:

> *'It is a complex situation, as I trained in taxation but because I have small kids, it is so difficult to find flexible hours, part-time roles in the field where I spent a lot of money and energy to train, so that's why I have to change my role (Pakistani woman)*

Experience – lack of relevant job experience was mentioned by many in the focus group as a key barrier to getting jobs. It was emphasised that a lot of South Asian women return to work in their 40s but with no previous experience of employment and that this is a major barrier for them:

> *"There is a lot of stereotyping. A lot of thinking that Pakistani women are either not qualified or don't want to work. They don't know how qualified we are and how much we want to work. I know so many women, whose children are having careers and they are feeling left out" (Pakistani woman)*

One of the men in the focus group was a qualified electrical engineer, but without experience had been unable to find work in that area and had taken a number of lower skilled roles. This linked to a further issue highlighted in the group, that of the lack of recognition and under-valuing in the UK of qualifications gained overseas.

Qualifications gained overseas unrecognised – many in the group had under- and post-graduate qualifications gained in Pakistan which had been either unrecognised or under-valued in the UK.

Language – most of the group were fluent English language speakers and yet most still experienced language as a key barrier to them getting jobs.

Digital literacy – while all but one of the participants had a good level of digital literacy, one of the women worked for a community organisation working with a lot of South Asian women and she highlighted the lack of digital skills among this group, especially among women in their 40s seeking to return to work. She also highlighted the fact that many IT and ESOL courses had moved online since COVID and that this was a significant barrier to women navigating online provision in English and that face-to-face courses and advice and guidance were preferable.

Experiences of employment support services – This group had more positive experiences of using employment support services than other focus groups. One woman had an especially positive experience of using iWork, with a supportive coach identified as key.

> '*When I was planning to start work, I didn't know where to start so I searched online and saw iWork and called them and they provided me with a coach. He helped me a lot, having a coach really helped. I was stuck on two sections, my personal statement and referees so I asked him and he even offered me you can write my name as a referee.' (Pakistani woman)*

Others had less positive experiences of employment support organisations and follow-up was identified as key. Two participants had positive experiences of using Hillside Clubhouse and specifically mentioned the importance of one-to-one and face-to-face follow up and of keeping in touch.

Somali focus group

Ten participants attended the Somali focus group, 3 from the Somali Community Centre, 3 older people (two women) and 4 younger people, 3 of whom were at University studying employment-related degrees. There were distinct differences in experience between the older and younger participants in terms of the barriers experienced – for the older participants language was a key barrier to getting jobs whereas the younger participants were born in the UK and spoke fluent English. Both younger and older participants identified education and a university education in particular as the route to employment, with all but one of the younger participants at University and one of the older women having 4 of her children currently studying at University. The main issues and barriers that emerged were:

Language – for all three of the older participants, language was a major barrier and al were finding it difficult to get jobs.

Racism – the issue of racism was widely voiced in the Somali focus group as a barrier to black people accessing jobs, particularly at the interview stage of the job application process. There was a consensus that it was harder for Somalis to access higher level roles:

> '*for the high-end jobs there are definitely barriers, let's not lie. It depends on the type of job, if it's a high paid job, especially for minorities, compared to the white person, it just seems like this is not the type of people they [the NHS] are looking for, they do not fit the bill." (Somali man)*

It was felt that as a Somali, as a black person, they were held to different standards from white applicants:

> '*I feel that as a black person, you have to be exceptional" (Somali man)*

Experience - experience, or a lack of work experience, was seen as a big barrier to getting access to jobs especially again at the higher level;

> '*That's a big barrier, if you don't have experience, it's very difficult to get a job' (Somali man)*

You can have the qualifications, but at the same time you need the experience, so you come out of university and no-one is going to offer you jobs straightaway, especially when you are a black man and you are young'. (Somali man)

Experience of employment support services – participants relied on the internet, particularly major sites such as Indeed and Total Jobs, to find job opportunities and all but one were puzzled at the idea of going to the Council to get advice and support in getting jobs.

Focus group with employment support service providers

The focus group with the employment support service providers included 12 staff from the following providers in the Borough:

iWork London Borough of Islington

Central London Works, Ingeus

Project Pro

Scope

Get Back on Track

Hillside Clubhouse

The key issues that emerged from the focus group are set out below.

Language – language was identified as a major barrier especially for many in the Bangladeshi community and in the East African including Eritrean, communities, particularly around the Blackstock Road area. It was suggested that service providers need to do more to address this, especially where with COVID, much ESOL provision has gone online which is very difficult to navigate if you don't speak or read English.

IT and digital literacy and skills – with COVID there has been a shift both to online service delivery and within many people's jobs to working online from home. A number of issues were highlighted here as presenting different groups with problems. It is widely known that working from home whilst offering many parents with children greater flexibility also presents significant difficulties to many women seeking to combine looking after children with working from home. One of the participants highlighted that many minority ethnic women working in retail and in banking and other customer facing sectors are expected to have a level of digital skills in working online that they do not have and that this is adding to work based stress with some women under the threat of losing their jobs. The need for many women to upskill to new digital skills highlights the need for IT skills training.

COVID – participants highlighted the fact that a significant proportion of black, Asian and minority ethnic residents work in entry level positions or customer facing roles in the hospitality and related industries that have been hit hard by COVID, and that many have lost jobs as a result. One participant also highlighted the point that with the shift to online working with COVID assumptions are made that everyone was IT literate and that even the assumption that young people are IT literate needs

questioning but also with every aspect of the job application going online, this has highlighted the digital divide and the high levels of digital poverty that exists with people dependent on applying for jobs using their phones and not having access to laptops or to fast internet connections.

Mental health – was also highlighted as a major issue and a major barrier in preventing people accessing employment. It was emphasised that within many minority ethnic communities and with young black men in particular, mental health is a taboo subject and that this needs to be addressed. It was stressed and that it is very difficult to support someone into employment when the core issue that is not being addressed is their mental health and that engaging with people to open up about and normalise mental health is key.

Mental health was identified as a key issue by a number of providers, some of whom pointed out that while the numbers of their clients with mental health problems steadily increases they are not mental health specialists yet many clients are referred to them with extremely high levels of depression and anxiety:

> *'I think if we could have some sort of a clinical side or something in our team that might compliment the work that our employment advisors do"*

This example of a more holistic service model was one that is used by some of the employment support services in the Borough and is seen as a successful model and one that needs further developing given the high level of mental health problems experienced by many unemployed black, Asian and minority residents.

Experience of racism shaping low expectations and aspirations – one of the major barriers to accessing employment raised in the focus group was the low expectations that unemployed and especially young black unemployed people have. It was emphasised that such low expectations reflect the racism that shapes their experiences and identities from an early age. One participant noted:

> *'one of our young mentees from last year, he came and he'd got these excellent, really good science grades but he was hell bent on working in a warehouse. Not that there's anything wrong with that, but he was sure that's where he was headed. And you know, sometimes I feel that young people feel that because their face doesn't fit the traditional figure seen in certain positions, that they may as well not bother trying'*

Women – it was emphasised that barriers for many women include language, skills and childcare (including struggling to manage childcare with shift working and with working from home):

> *"working from home, when you have children at home doesn't work and I wish more employers would understand that.'*

> *'We get a high number of black and Asian women coming to us and 70% of those women have employment related issues because of language, because of disabilities, because of mental health and because of childcare. We know childcare is really, really affecting women at the moment, especially black and Asian women'*

Outreach and community-based service provision – 'reaching' - a number of participants suggested that once clients access services they return and have a positive experience of the service, but that making the initial contact, 'getting them through the door' can be a challenge. In particular, it was noted that it has been difficult to reach out to and engage young Somali boys and Algerian and other north African men. Similarly, there was mention of services being 'a bit territorial' with some barriers around 'organisations linking up and sometimes letting go of their service users who might benefit from a service from another provider on a specific issue' and that 'there's a bit of 'perceived conflict of interest in that if they let go of one person then another organisation has them and can apply for funding'. This suggests such challenges are being experienced in accessing clients to services.

However, examples were given of how giving even a small amount of funding to community organisations to do outreach work, reached out to people who needed support immediately and that community outreach or engagement is an approach that really works in terms of drawing people in:

> *'You need to reach-in. But literally reach-in and say 'Hey, I'm here!' because people are not going to find you spontaneously'*

> *'Islington takes the role, it's like 'We're here on Upper Street. Come and get us'. And it's like no, people don't come and get you'*

A related point was made that for many, especially young people, the 'corporate' environment of council offices can discourage rather than encourage them. Other

participants noted that the culture of many jobs in employment support services has become more office and desk-based rather than community-facing:

> *You tend to sit there on your laptop for a good chunk of the day. The actual idea of you going to a coffee shop or to where unemployed people are, is kind of unheard of in a way, that's just the sort of culture that's emerged over the last decade or so'*

> *'I agree, we need to get back to that community work and be out there with people and not sitting behind the desk. I think that definitely works in my experience'*

Better signposting of services – while there are already important sign-posting services (such as Making Every Contact Count) available in the Borough, signposting of employment support and other services was highlighted as something in need of attention.

Networking services – finally, a last comment from the focus group of service providers was that further networking events between the employment service providers in the Borough to share good practice, what's working and why, would be welcomed.

Appendix 2

References for quantitative data analysis figures

Figure 1 - Total population, Office for National Statistics, Population profiles for local authorities in England, 14 December 2020
https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/populationprofilesforlocalauthoritiesinengland

Figure 2 - Total working-age population (16-64), Office for National Statistics, Employment Rates by Ethnicity, 31 December 2020
https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/employment-rates-by-ethnicity

Figure 3 - Total in-working population, Office for National Statistics, Employment Rates by Ethnicity, 31 December 2020
https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/employment-rates-by-ethnicity

Figure 4 - Employment Rate, Office for National Statistics, Employment Rates by Ethnicity, 31 December 2020
https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/employment-rates-by-ethnicity

Figure 5 - Islington Unemployment by Ethnicity, Office for National Statistics, Employment Rates by Ethnicity, 31 December 2020
https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/employment-rates-by-ethnicity

Figure 6 - Islington Unemployment Ratio by Ethnicity, Office for National Statistics, Employment Rates by Ethnicity, 31 December 2020
https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/employment-rates-by-ethnicity

Figure 7 - Unemployment with Benefit in Islington, Islington council, Data on residents who are out of work in Islington v3, November 2021

Figure 8 - Islington BAME Unemployment Breakdown by Ethnicity, Islington council, Data on residents who are out of work in Islington v3, November 2021
Office for National Statistics, Employment Rates by Ethnicity, 31 December 2020
https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/employment-rates-by-ethnicity

Figure 9 - Unemployment with Benefit by Ward in Islington, Islington council, Data on residents who are out of work in Islington v3, November 2021

Figure 10 – BAME Age Histogram of Benefits Claimants,
Figure 11 – African Age Histogram of Benefits Claimants,
Figure 12– Caribbean Age Histogram of Benefits Claimants,
Figure 13– Bangladeshi Age Histogram of Benefits Claimants,
Islington council, Data on residents who are out of work in Islington v3, November 2021

Figure 14- Education level by Ethnicity of iWork Participators, Islington i-work, Islington iWork engagement data – Registered 2018 to Present, 16 September 2021

Figure 15- Employment Correlation Analysis, Islington i-work, Islington i-Work engagement data - Registered 2018 to Present, 16 September 2021

Appendix 3

BAME residents focus group questions:

Participants will be asked to fill in an anonymous but individual form along with the consent form before the focus group starts which will include multiple-choice questions covering the following:

1. **Current employment status:**
   a. **In full time employment**
   b. **In part-time employment (hours)**
   c. **Not in employment**
   d. **In education or training (name and level of course)**
   e. **other**
2. **If in employment, job title ………..**
3. **If not in employment, most recent job (with date) ………….**
4. **Educational qualifications (record highest level qualification) …**
5. **Age, gender, ethnicity, disability – using standard LBI categories**
6. **Access to broadband and IT at home yes/no**
7. **Housing tenure – social rented/private rented/owner occupation**

Ice breaker (Qu 1): are you working or unemployed at the moment?

1. **Are you looking for a job at the moment?**

   How long have you been looking for a job?

   If you are working, are you looking to change your job? And why?

   Have you applied for a job in the last six months? If you didn't get it, why do you think you didn't get it?

2. **What are your recent experiences of looking for a job? What barriers have you experienced – e.g. childcare, transport costs, skills, health issues, interview and application form …. Is this harder as a BAME person/women? Why?**

3. **What sort of job are you looking for?**

4. **Where do you look for jobs?**

   Do you use IT to look for jobs?

   Any problems using IT (IT skills or access to IT and broadband at home)? If not got access at home, where do you go to access IT?

5. **Has Covid affected you in looking for a job? In what ways?**

Did you lose your job during Covid? Were you on furlough?

6. **Are you aware of any services in the Borough to help you get a job?**

   Which ones do you know about?

   How did you find out about this/these service/s?

7. **Have you used any services in the Borough to help you get a job? If so, which ones?**

   How did you find out about them? Were they easy to get access to/to use?

   Were they useful? In what ways?

   Could they have been more useful or easier for you to use (in what ways)?

8. **If not used any, what barriers have you experienced in getting to use any of these services?**

   When you stopped using the service, was there any follow up?

9. **Do you want develop your job skills in some area?**

   Would this involve further education/training?

   What are your experiences of education/training as an adult? Have you experienced any barriers in getting access to education/training – what sort?

   What should be done to make it easier to access education/training?

10. **What do you think could be done to help you get a job/the sort of job you would like?**

    How could the employment support services work better to support you getting a job? Or a more skilled/well paid job?

11. **Any other points you'd like to add ….**

Employment Service Provider/Stakeholder focus group questions:

- Thank everyone for joining/taking the time

- Introduce focus group leads – Jane Lewis (LMU), Jimmy Flynn and David Thomas (LBI)

- Introduce the Project – the aims and partnership LBI/LMU

- Take you back over information sheet and consent form – confidentiality, leave the group

- Start - Icebreaker/Introductions - can you briefly introduce yourself and your organisation and what it does to support Islington residents into work

- **Questions/topics:**

1. **What do you think are the main barriers faced by specific BAME groups in terms of getting access to jobs? In your experience, are there particular BAME groups that have more difficulty than others in getting jobs? Are there specific issues faced by women?**

2. **What do you think the impact of the pandemic has been on different BAME groups getting jobs?**

3. **What employment support in the Borough works well and why? Does the Islington Aspire programme and website work well? Do employers know where to go to advertise/recruit locally? Does the outreach work with GP surgeries and with Housing Associations work well?**

4. **What do you think are the main gaps in employment support to BAME communities – are there particular BAME groups that are not accessing advice/support?**

5. **In your view, does your organisation successfully reach out to different BAME communities in the Borough?**

6. **How can employment support services better support unemployed and job seeking people in the Borough from different BAME communities?**