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# Race and Vocational Education and Training in England.

## **Abstract**

*Black and minority ethnic students (BME) are a significant constituency in VET and FE in England. Despite this recent research on race and VET has become a marginal concern. Insofar as current VET research addresses social justice, race appears to be a supplementary concern. Although there is a substantial literature addressing race and education, this focuses primarily on schools and higher education. This paper examines why there is a need to develop a research agenda that analyses participation, outcomes and experiences of BME VET students, particularly those on 'non-advanced' programmes (equivalent to European Qualification Framework Level 1-3) with uncertain labour market outcomes and who are arguably being 'warehoused' in low status courses. The paper reflects on the historically specific reasons for the dearth of research on race and VET, drawing on a scoping exercise of the literature to evidence this. We conclude by offering a provisional analysis that identifies recent shifts in participation among BME groups, locating this in its socio-economic and historical context. Our analysis reaffirms that VET remains a significant educational site for BME groups, but it is a complex racialised site which makes the current neglect of race and VET in academic research deeply problematic.*

Whilst this paper focuses on race and vocational education and training (VET) in England it is important to acknowledge similarities with other European states that share comparable understandings of the economic role of VET. At the same time, it is necessary to recognise the historical specificity of race and education in England.

In England, research on race and VET has never been prominent, but the topic has recently been especially neglected. In part, this reflects the tendency for such research to focus on the manner in which VET systems develop the competences, skills and dispositions required in the putative knowledge economy (see Appleby and Bathmaker 2006; Mulder and Winterton 2016). Although there is a significant body of VET research addressing social justice in relation to gender and class (Colley *et al*, 2003; Atkins and Avis, 2017), there is a dearth of work on race and ethnicity. There is also a substantial literature on race and education in England, with these researchers focusing specifically on schooling and higher education (HE). It is possible that this neglect reflects the low status attributed to VET and Further Education (FE) with 'social justice' researchers distancing themselves from aspects of race and youth training that have historically been problematic. For researchers concerned with race equality and educational aspiration, FE/VET has come to be seen as something of a *cul-de-sac* that offers limited social mobility and is therefore of marginal concern. If this conjecture is sustainable, it is deeply concerning as BME students remain a significant constituency in VET and FE (Youth Cohort Study and Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE), 2009, 2010). In this paper we seek to address this absence by examining the relationship between race and VET within its broader socio-economic and historical context.

The paper begins by reflecting on the post-war history of race and education in England, discussing shifting concerns in research and policy, in order to explain the current marginalisation of VET research. We then examine the limited inclusion of research on race and VET in academic journals over the past decade. We conclude by offering a provisional analysis of available data, identifying salient shifts in patterns of participation among BME groups in VET. Our analysis reaffirms that VET remains a significant educational site for BME groups in terms of levels of participation but also suggests that, in terms of inequalities, stratification and educational and employment outcomes, VET is a complex racialised site. For this reason, the current neglect of race and VET in academic research is deeply problematic. Whilst our key focus is on the English context, there is some reference to education and employment patterns in Britain as a whole and we note a similar paucity of research on race and VET in European settings.

## KEY CONCEPTS

Our research standpoint is informed by two insights; firstly, amongst the ideas that led us to return to the issue of race and VET are those explored by Blacker (2013) and Marsh (2011) in the US. In particular, Blacker (2013) has suggested that in the current stage of neo-liberalism, marked by the exhaustion both of profitable markets and natural resources, ever larger fractions of society are becoming surplus to capitalism's labour requirements. A growing global underclass (for want of a better term) will, in the immediate future, be eliminated from the equation of proper education and work. Indeed, for Blacker, the whole equation of work for employment, security and modest social mobility is presently being eliminated. The immediate consequence in the world's more affluent societies is that fractions of working-class youth, particularly racialised communities, are, in effect, being removed from the mainstream labour market. They are contained through incarceration and/or by being required to remain in 'post-compulsory' education for ever longer periods, attending courses with limited educational or labour market value.

Although Blacker's (2013) language may appear apocalyptic, in fact, there has long been concern among educators and BME communities in England that education, as a site in which racial identities and inequalities are (re)produced, has too often shunted black youth into forms of VET provision that offer little in terms of skills development or improvement of labour market position. It is for this reason that we draw on the notion of warehousing. This concept developed in the 1970s and 80s, referring to the way in which particular fractions of working class youth were effectively 'parked' on youth training schemes and low level VET, being effectively 'eliminated' from the labour market. This process particularly applied to black male youth (Roberts 2009, 51; Finn 1987, 149. 187-8). Moreover, in a neo-liberal setting where precariousness, under- and unemployment are key features of work, concerns about working-class and black youth being placed on 'dead-end' VET programmes has become increasingly important not only in England but also in Europe (Abrams, 2010; IPPR, 2013). In their report, comparing policies for inclusion in education in Europe, Szalai et al (2014:23) comment,

Vocational training is often not only the dead-end of schooling but it is saturated by discriminatory practices that minority ethnic students have to face... [adding that] in vocational training minority ethnic youths are often subject to mechanisms that not

only multiply their disadvantages but make them feel redundant early in their career.  
(2014:23)

Our analysis of participation data is provisional and makes no definitive conclusions. However, we do explore notions such as ‘warehousing’, and what further research might tell us about its applicability to the English context.

Secondly, in exploring articulations between race, class, gender and VET, our position is one of *race ambivalence* (Leonardo, 2005). In short, our understanding is that while race may be ‘unreal’ in the sense that it is not a coherent scientific category, its effects or ‘modes of existence’ (Leonardo, 2005: 409) are real and have innumerable consequences. For this reason we have not trivialised the term race by placing it in quotation marks. In short, we live race *in practice*, experiencing the world in ways that are mediated by racialised social categories and relationships. These are divisive and often arbitrary, nevertheless, we live, day-to-day, *as if* race has meaning (Warmington, 2009). It is not sufficient, therefore, merely to regard race as an epiphenomenon of other more ‘real’ relationships, such as class. The other implication of our understanding of race is that it must be treated as ‘more than just a variable’ (Lynn and Dixon, 2013: 3). As Apple reminds us, ‘Race is not a stable category ... “It” is not a thing, a reified object that can be measured as if it were a simple biological entity. Race is a construction, a set of fully social relationships’ (Apple, 2001: 204). In short, our research does not treat race as a social identity that simply exists prior to the field of education and we are interested in the ways in which racial identities and divisions are produced within neo-liberal VET.

## **RACE AND EDUCATION IN ENGLAND**

The political economy of race and education in England comprises a complex settlement, shaped by unstable and sometimes antagonistic relationships between the education sector, the wider state and BME communities. In the early 1960s policies on race and education emerged both as a part of the government’s haphazard response to Commonwealth migration and out of African-Caribbean and Asian communities’ concerns about their children’s schooling (see Tomlinson, 2008). Early policy was principally concerned with managing the numbers of African-Caribbean and Asian pupils entering the

school system. Much of this early research focused on supposed cultural and linguistic deficits among newly arrived pupils but said little about structural inequality (Grosvenor, 1997). A more critical body of research emerged as black and anti-racist educators drew attention to low teacher expectations, disproportionate rates of school exclusions and narrow curricula (Coard, 1971; Sivanandan, 1989).

However, it was not until the late 1960s that youth training and employment began to figure in research on the experiences of black communities. As growing numbers of black pupils reached the end of their formal schooling, government departments were confronted with evidence that racial inequalities in schooling were being reproduced in the youth labour market, a trend that deepened across the 1970s and into the 1980s (Lee and Wrench, 1983). In 1979 total unemployment in the UK rose by 2.5% but it rose by 13.5% among African-Caribbeans and by 10.1% among Pakistanis (Runnymede Trust, 1980). In early 1981 when large-scale disturbances erupted in Brixton, South London, unemployment among black males aged sixteen to nineteen in this area stood at an estimated 55% (Scarman, 1982). Reflecting on the early 1980s, Dhondy *et al* (1985, 13) wrote that for black youth in many English cities post-16 education seemed to have become less a place of learning than a holding pen for 'unruly section[s] of the working class at the bottom of the British ladder of labour.' With the onset of mass youth unemployment, black youth were disproportionately locked into what Finn (1987) termed 'training without jobs'.

Much of the contemporaneous research on race and VET addressed the youth training schemes developed during the 1980's. This was a period, much like the present, in which there were concerns about the consequences of youth unemployment for social stability and about how best to inculcate in young people the skills and dispositions required for employment. Among policy-makers, researchers and black communities, issues of education and training were increasingly conflated, with broader questions about the socialization of *black youth* (as they were now often defined) within British society. Eggleston *et al* (1986) noted, that as a consequence of unemployment, young African-Caribbean and Asian people were disproportionately represented on youth training schemes and in colleges of further education. African-Caribbean youth were also likely to remain in education longer than their white counterparts (Eggleston *et al*, 1986; see also Avis, 1988; 1991). This had the additional

effect of limiting their entry to age-specific apprenticeships, a process compounded by the informal networks frequently mobilised to secure these. Lee and Wrench (1983) noted that white workers in skilled labour drew on contacts to secure apprenticeship places for their children an intergenerational advantage rare amongst migrants.

However, the youth training schemes of the 1980's were not all of piece, as is still the case, with some schemes offering greater employment opportunities than others. In the 1980s African-Caribbean and Asian youth were more likely to be found in community-based provision and in FE colleges than in schemes that offered work experience on employers' premises which were more successful in leading to employment. Solomos (1983, 53), referring to the work of Bedeman and Harvey (1981), suggested that much of this community-based provision concentrated on the development of 'social and life skills, as opposed to actual training.' A number of writers were critical of what they saw as ghettoization (Troyna and Smith, 1983; Racial Equality in Training Schemes, 1985; West Midlands Youth Training Scheme Research Project, 1985; Newnham, 1986; Hollands, 1990). Their research suggested that substantial sections of BME youth were, in effect, being removed from the labour market and placed on VET programmes that had limited purchase in the labour market: a process comparable to that which later was described as 'warehousing' (Blacker, 2013; Varn, 2013).

### **MARGINALISATION OF RACE/ VET RESEARCH**

By the end of the 1980s BME communities featured strongly in a new reading of education. The emergent discourse of access to HE positioned black students as an 'under-represented' group in universities. By the late 1980s the grassroots access movement, which had in part grown out of the aspirations of black adult learners (Heron, 1986), was being increasingly subsumed into government directed widening participation policies, embedded in neo-liberal discourses of meritocracy and social mobility (see Moodley, 1995). For those with historical understandings of the centrality of educational opportunity to the political struggles of BME communities, the resonance of the widening participation discourse was very apparent. The hinterland of colonial experience had, after all, stressed education as *the* route to social mobility in post-war Britain. It should be remembered, other routes to social



advancement – apprenticeships, white collar occupations and nepotism in recruitment, were largely closed to African-Caribbean and Asian entrants to the labour market. Moreover, Britain under neo-liberal economics was experiencing wider social shifts, akin to those described by Marsh (2011) in the US, where in the absence of broader policies on tackling poverty and inequality, HE came to be regarded, by default, as the *only* pathway to social mobility. It was a case of education, education, education.

In terms of numbers entering HE since the 1990s, most major BME communities have been beneficiaries of widening participation drives, although increased diversity in the student population has not necessarily meant greater equity in terms of race, class and gender (Alexander and Arday, 2015). Recent research has identified racialised gaps in degree attainment, in access to elite HE institutions and entry to the graduate labour market (Equality Challenge Unit, 2008; Stevenson, 2012). The confluence of educational aspiration, community activism and evident inequalities within HE has understandably made race in academia topical in contemporary educational research. However, this focus may also have contributed to the eclipse of FE and VET in research on race and education. In short, VET is not an object of ‘educational desire’ (cf. Mirza, 2009).

Contemporary research on race in schools and HE has explored issues to which VET research has thus far paid limited attention. The availability of detailed local and national performance data for schools and universities has enabled intersectional analyses of race, class, gender and disability. Thus, for example, critical studies of school attainment have interrogated underachievement discourses and celebratory government claims about the narrowing of attainment gaps (Gillborn, 2008; Gillborn *et al*, 2016). Scrutiny of degree outcomes among BME groups has suggested that UK HE has tended to reproduce racialised stratification (Stevenson, 2012; Alexander, 2015; Boliver, 2016).

In research that has focused on student experiences, identities and institutional cultures there has been notable work on race, gender and educational identities (Mirza, 2009; Mac an Ghail and Haywood, 2014); on educational pathways among the UK’s nascent BME middle-classes (Vincent *et al*, 2012); and on racialized constructions of ‘behaviour’ and ‘ability’ in schooling (Wright *et al*, 2010). Such studies have sought to theorise BME

students' negotiation of institutional racism through resistance and inclusive acts. They have also explored the complex mobilisation of racial and ethnic identities in educational sites and the re-inscribing of race in neo-liberal settings. Such research suggests directions and an agenda that future explorations of race and VET might take.

### **CONTEMPORARY COVERAGE OF RACE AND VET**

One indication of the marginal status of race and VET in contemporary educational research is the limited coverage it is afforded in academic journals. In autumn 2015, one of the authors of the current paper conducted a small-scale scoping of research literature on race and VET in peer-reviewed journals in the ten publication years between 2005 and 2014. Six British-based journals with international reach were reviewed. Three of these were journals with a special interest in VET and FE: (i) *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* (JVET); (ii) *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* (RPCE); (iii) *Journal of Further and Higher Education* (JFHE). The fourth was the leading international journal on race and education, (iv) *Race Ethnicity and Education* (REE). The fifth was the generic educational research journal published by the British Educational Research Association, (v) *British Educational Research Journal* (BERJ). The last is a journal focusing on VET and workplace learning, (vi) *Journal of Workplace Learning* (JWL).

The aim of the scoping exercise was to identify how many papers published in the six journals could be categorised as focusing on issues of race and non-advanced VET. By specifying 'non-advanced' VET, the review bracketed areas such as graduate training, teacher training and advanced CPD, and focused particularly on **Entry Level, Level 1, 2 and 3 qualifications**. Keywords, titles and abstract information were utilised for initial scoping. The search terms used were generously defined, to avoid omitting potentially relevant items. For journals (i), (ii), (iii) and (vi) the search terms were: 'race', 'racism', 'racial', 'multicultural', 'ethnicity', 'diversity'. For journal (iv) the search terms were 'vocational education', 'training', 'further education', 'post-16', 'community college', 'TAFE' (the last two terms relate to US and Australian equivalents of FE colleges). For journal (v), both sets of search terms were used.

In the second round of scoping, the initial pool of papers identified by these search terms was given a close reading in order to identify items that focused primarily on race and non-advanced VET, (i.e., level 1-3) as distinct from papers whose coverage of race was marginal or those that concentrated on advanced VET. The number of papers in each journal fitting the core criteria (race and non-advanced VET) was calculated, as was the proportion that these papers constituted of the total published papers for the 2005-14 period.

*Table 1: papers on race/ VET published in peer-reviewed journals, 2005-14*

**Insert TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE**

*Table 1* shows the results of the two rounds of scoping. In the ten publication years between 2005 and 2014, the six journals published between 5 and 17 papers focusing on race and VET in general (i.e. both advanced and non-advanced). As a proportion of the total papers published in each journal, coverage of race/ VET ranged from 1.4% to 5.09%. By both measures, the specialist VET and FE journals, *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* (JVET) and *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* (RPCE), offered the most coverage of race/ VET. The number of race/ VET papers published in any one year in the six journals ranged from 0 to 6. Also noteworthy was the number of years in which these journals published no papers at all on race/ VET. For example, between 2005-14 the *British Educational Research Journal* (BERJ) published a total of 7 papers focusing on race/ VET whereas there were 8 years in which BERJ published no papers on race/ VET; most of its 5 papers on race/ VET appeared in a single special issue on race, class and gender in lifelong learning (BERJ 32:5).

The second round of scoping identified papers that focused specifically on race and non-advanced VET. *JVET* remained ahead in terms of coverage, featuring 12 papers on race/ non-advanced VET (the mode average being 7). However, both *BERJ* and *RPCE* published a larger number of papers that focused on race/ non-advanced VET in *British* settings: 6 in *BERJ* and 5 in *RPCE*, compared to *JVET's* 2 papers. *REE*, the leading international journal on race and education published a total of 9 papers on race/ VET and 7 on race/ non-advanced VET, but nothing at all on race/ non-advanced VET in British settings. *JWL* published 5

papers that focused on race and non-advanced VET in Canada, USA and India but nothing that examined British settings. It is worth noting that of the 458 papers published in BERJ between 2005-14, 60 (13.1%) focused on race and ethnicity and 40 (8.73%) focused on aspects of VET, but only 7 (1.53%) examined intersections between race and VET.

The scoping exercise was a small-scale purposive sample of British-based journals specialising in race, post-16 education and VET, we suggest it is illuminating, insofar as it indicates that over a ten year period British journals specialising in VET, race and education gave negligible coverage to research on race and non-advanced VET. It suggests that the claim that research on race and VET (particularly non-advanced VET) is currently marginal is correct.

In the 15 race/ non-advanced VET papers focused on the British context, there were a number of analytic approaches. Papers such as Bidgood *et al* (2006), Moore (2008) and See (2011, 2012) focused on BME participation levels, recruitment and retention, emphasising quantitative measures. A number of papers focused on the development of particular programmes aimed at BME learners (Webb, 2006; Wolf and Jenkins, 2014), whereas others tended towards policy analyses of the ways in which particular VET and lifelong learning policies risked reproducing raced, gendered and class disadvantages or 'barriers' (Hughes *et al*, 2006; Appleby and Bathmaker, 2006; Chadderton and Wischman, 2014). In addition, Quinn *et al* (2006) and Frumkin and Koutsoubou (2013) focused on student experiences and racialised identities in FE and VET.

However, within the literature there is considerable variation in the treatment of race and racism. Gillborn *et al* (2017) have argued that research that intends to draw attention to racial inequalities, in practice, often sends ambiguous messages because it concentrates on correlations between race and low educational achievement, while insufficiently examining discriminatory mechanisms within education. Statements about correlations between race and achievement may unintentionally risk implying a deficit reading of particular ethnic groups. For example, Bidgood *et al*'s (2006) study of withdrawal from FE programmes concludes that 'while external factors such as financial hardship are likely to play a part in influencing the decision of students to withdraw, other factors such as gender, ethnicity and

social background are also important' (Bidgood et al, 2006: 236). Such analyses offer a limited understanding of structural racism and do not assert strongly enough that ethnicity itself is not the *cause* of withdrawal or low attainment. Frumkin and Koutsoubou's (2013) study of mature BME learners in FE also tend towards a 'correlative' reading. They conclude ethnic minority learners in further education in England either under-achieve or are under-represented because they face various inhibitors connected to their ethnicity... being a member of a minority culture and/or religion may increase feelings of isolation in academic settings. (Frumkin and Koutsoubou's, 2013: 147)

By contrast, Chadderton and Wischmann's (2014) examination of English and German apprentices' training pathways, informed by critical theories of race, argue that students' 'choices' are heavily shaped by racialized norms within the labour market and that BME/migrant students' supposedly free choices are constrained by a 'realism' about where they are likely to fit in the labour market.

Beck *et al* (2006) foreground the processes through which young BME entrants became locked into limited VET pathways, noting that 'young people receive very little practical information and guidance about the consequences of pursuing particular occupational pathways, and are not engaged in any formal opportunities to debate gender and ethnic stereotyping as related to the labour market' (Beck *et al*, 2006, 667). Beck *et al*'s (2006) analyses is comparable with earlier work on the production of racialised and classed identities in VET (see Ball, 1998; Preston, 2003). Analyses such as those of Beck *et al* (2006) and Chadderton and Wischmann (2014) potentially point towards the existence of racialised 'warehousing' in VET reflected in exclusions surrounding apprenticeships (cf. Ball, 1998; Preston, 2003).

### **ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH GAP**

The preceding discussion indicates that in terms of academic research, current coverage of race and VET in Britain is limited. While we suggest there are historically specific reasons for this, Britain is not exceptional in its oversight. Internationally, insofar as VET research has addressed social justice issues, recognition of race and ethnicity has usually been couched, somewhat gesturally, in terms of articulations between race, class and gender. For example,

Virolainen (2015) and Jørgensen (2014) have highlighted the different VET strategies present in Nordic countries and the relationship of these to classed and gendered processes. In Germany, writers such as Deissinger (2015) have also noted the relationship of VET to class. Where race/ethnicity has been addressed, it has often been in terms of migration (see, Chadderton and Edmonds, 2015, or, outside Europe, Taylor *et al*, 2012, for a Canadian example).

Turning specifically to VET in England, provisional analysis of existing literature and patterns of BME participation and outcomes, suggests a need to reinvigorate research on race and VET. There are a number of overarching reasons why race/ VET remains a necessary site of study we flag these below and in the following commentary evidence these:

- Despite the strong focus in research on race and education on schools and HE, only 47% of young people in England follow a purely academic route through education after the age of 16.
- The majority of English VET is provided in FE colleges; historically post-16 BME students have tended towards FE colleges but this pattern is changing, not least because most major BME groups now have increased rates of entry to HE.
- There is evidence that certain BME groups (e.g. black Caribbean; white/ black Caribbean) have relatively poor outcomes on FE-based VET programmes.
- There is also compelling evidence that BME youth are disadvantaged in relation to work-based routes and apprenticeships.
- Since VET programmes are diverse in the kinds of knowledge and skills they develop, and in the ways they are positioned in relation to employment and continuing education, it is necessary to examine not only rates of participation and achievement but to develop an understanding of the *types* of VET programmes in which BME students are concentrated.

The overarching message from our provisional analysis is that ‘participation’ in post compulsory education and training in itself does not equate to social mobility. This may be particularly true of fractions of working-class BME students on VET programmes, who may still be channelled towards particular types of ‘non-advanced’ VET programmes and who may struggle to access apprenticeships and employment with structured training. These racialised dynamics may have been obscured by recent emphasis on growth in BME entry to HE (Alexander and Arday, 2015) and partial gains in, for instance, GCSE attainment (DfE, 2014). The following sections of this paper reflect on current patterns of participation and outcomes among BME students in FE in England.

## **THE ENGLISH CONTEXT**

It is important that readers note that the variety of terms describing ethnic groupings derive from our sources. It is still the case that data on race and ethnicity is collated and analysed using inconsistent categories and terminology. In one survey ‘Asian’ may be the sole category whereas in another there may be two or even three sub categories. Although we maintain that our provisional analysis helps to identify salient shifts in patterns of participation and outcomes, we are aware that we are not always comparing like with like.

Even though slightly less than half of all young people in England follow a purely academic route through education after the age of 16 (House of Lords 2016, 14), the alternative vocational route enjoys less status (Avis 2009). The vocational route is more complicated (Pring et al 2009) and its qualifications have less exchange value in the labour market than academic ones (Greenwood et al 2007). In England the majority of vocational education, especially at lower levels, takes place in FE colleges. In the recent past a greater proportion of some BME youth (notably African-Caribbeans) have attended FE than those attending schools or sixth form colleges who are more likely to focus on academic study (Eggleston *et al*, 1986; Connor *et al* 2004), but this pattern appears to be changing. Data for colleges in England is not collected as systematically or as comprehensively as for schools or universities, consequently our analysis draws on statistical reports from government agencies as well as survey data from the LSYPE (2009, 2010). Together these indicate a complicated picture, but one where there remain distinctive patterns in the engagement of

BME youth in vocational education. Whether this constitutes 'warehousing' is discussed after setting out a statistical description of the situation.

Data from the LSYPE (2010, 19) referring to young people turning 18 in England in 2009 found that 22% were still in FE, normally in the second year of a two-year course, though a substantial minority were studying academic subjects. The data indicated that 39% of Black African and 36% of Black Caribbean young people were in FE compared with 21% of white students. Figures for Asian youth were more mixed: with 33% Pakistani, 25% Bangladeshi and 19% of Indian origin. However, in 2015, figures for sixteen and seventeen year-olds suggested quite a different picture.

**(Insert Table 2 about here)**

The 2016 figures show progression from state schools into post-16 education in the year 2013/14. These figures are for slightly younger students than those for 2009 because they relate to students in the first year of a two-year course, so the categories are broadly comparable. The table distinguishes between school sixth-form and sixth form colleges as the former generally have the lowest proportion of students from deprived backgrounds and may be perceived as having the most elevated status. White students had the highest percentage going on to (predominantly vocational) FE colleges (36%) and the lowest percentage going on to study in (normally more academic) school sixth-forms (37%). By comparison, 22% of Asian young people, 27% of Black young people and 24% of students from other ethnic origins went to FE colleges in the same year (DfE 2016, 7). There are significant regional differences within these figures, especially between London and the rest of England. Nationally 34% of young people were attending FE colleges, 43% in the North East and only 24% in London (DfE 2016) As against earlier patterns of participation in which black youth were over represented in FE/VET the current statistics suggest that their participation has diminished, with white youth having the highest percentage of FE/VET attendance. This shift in participation warrants explanation.



One conjecture is that the relative decrease in proportions of BME young people entering FE may be related to their increased participation in HE, a phenomenon widely noted (see Lymeropoulou and Parameshwaran, 2014; Alexander and Arday, 2015). In 2015 the highest percentages of young people progressing to HE institution by ethnicity were students from Asian (64%) and other ethnic origins (63%). This compares to students from Black (61%), Mixed (51%), and White (45%) ethnic origins. Students of Asian-origin are also more likely to go to the elite Russell Group universities; 13% of Asian-origin; 7% of Black-origin; 11% of White-origin (all figures from DfE 2016, 16-18). Interestingly, Boliver (2016) points out that where a large number of BME students apply for a course in a Russell group university, some of those who are suitably qualified may nevertheless be excluded. She suggests that tutors may be attempting to ensure a more 'representative' student body.

We are, of course, aware that both HE and FE entry are shaped by intersections between race and class. Socio-economic factors remain significant in predicting young people's post-secondary destinations. This is apparent, for example, in statistics for young people eligible for free school meals, who comprise the most deprived group. The gap between those eligible for free school meals and those not eligible going to a university in the top third widened from 7 to 9 percentage points between 2010/11 and 2013/14 (DfE 2016, 16-18). In FE colleges whether students take vocational or academic routes also appears to vary substantially according to ethnicity (see Table 3). In England in 2011-12, 73% of Black or Black British Caribbean students in FE colleges on level 3 courses (usually completed at age 18) were on vocational courses, while 15% were taking academic A level courses. For Asian or Asian British-Pakistani students the figures were 66% and 27% respectively and for White British students the figures were 73% and 22%. The relative proportion of students in FE colleges taking vocational courses rather than academic A level courses has grown for all ethnic groups (Smith *et al*, 2015, 34-35).

**Insert Table 3 about here**

Lymeropoulou and Parameshwaran (2014) also note from census data that overall education attainment rates across all ethnic groups rose between 1991 and 2011 but ethnic gaps remain. In 2013-14 80.4% of "English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish/ British" students aged 16-18 successfully completed their vocational courses compared with 75.3%

of students of Caribbean origin. Mixed White and Black Caribbean young people fared worst, having a success rate of 74.5%, with male students consistently doing worse than females. Even though success rates have significantly improved for all groups, Black students' achievement rates on VET courses have consistently been 5% lower than White British students. For students over the age of 19 the rates are similar and show a similarly consistent gap between the achievements of White and Black Caribbean students (SFA, 2016a, b). When we consider whether colleges are genuinely offering a second chance or merely warehousing students, these gaps are important.

Other broad and longstanding ethnic disparities persist. In 2003 Bhattacharyya *et al* (2003, 26) found that in Britain "The greater proportion of minority ethnic young people in post-16 education is mirrored by the smaller proportion following work-based routes" (see also Payne 2003). BME students are still less likely than White students to follow employment-based training such as apprenticeships. In 2014-15 only 4.2% and 3.4% of all apprenticeships went to Asian or Black students respectively (SFA 2016b, 32). In the previous year (2013-14) a total of 5% of 16 and 17 year-olds from state-funded schools went onto apprenticeships; however, 6% of White students secured apprenticeships, as against 2% of Asian and 2% Black students (DFE, 2016).

Within this context, whether FE colleges and in particular vocational courses are warehousing students, partly depends on perceptions related to the economic cycle and the availability of employment. However, it is important to acknowledge that disproportionate rates of unemployment have been a fact of life for BME youth since the 1970s. The difference between the perception of valuable work-related education and training and that of warehousing for young people may be the difference between experiencing economic boom and bust. FE colleges may also offer a second chance to young people who have failed at or been failed by school.

The available statistics do not allow cross tabulation between ethnicity and proxies for class or social background, which may be significant. As Gillborn (2008) has consistently argued, however, ethnic gaps cannot be explained merely as epiphenomena of class. Black Caribbean students, in particular, have been up to four times as likely as White students to be excluded

from school and some will have had antagonistic relationships with teachers (DfES, 2006). The choice of FE for some young Black men may indeed allow a second chance at education and training. Nevertheless, even if some FE colleges do offer 'second chances' there is consistent evidence that Black Caribbean students underachieve in FE. Our provisional analysis of the data on BME participation in VET leads us to speculate that if the notion of 'warehousing' is applicable to the English context (and possibly other European contexts), it may occur not only in FE but also in parts of the HE sector in which working-class BME students tend to be concentrated. Figures for university students who graduated in 2008-9 indicate that by 2013-14, 74% of White graduates were in full-time employment, compared with 60.2% of Black and 70% of Asian graduates (HESA 2013). Sullivan (2016, 2) has also noted that BME workers tend to have 'slightly higher educational qualifications than their white counterparts (and) that disproportionately more BME workers are overqualified for their jobs.' Arguably, therefore, widening participation does not equate to social mobility in any simple sense, and participation in itself does not equate to social justice (Avis and Orr, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

There is historical data to support the contention that Black youth have been warehoused in VET on low level courses. However, the current evidence is more complicated and in recent years (2015) there is data to suggest there has been a shift in patterns of participation. Black youth are less likely to attend vocational FE and more likely to attend academic sixth forms and HE than their white counterparts. Whilst black youth are more likely to attend university than their white counterparts, in the case of elite universities the pattern is reversed. When black youth attend FE they do worse than their white counterparts, and such graduates from HE and FE are more likely to be unemployed. There are two questions that follow from this. Firstly, is this the result of statistical anomalies or does it represent a new development? Secondly, and in relation to the latter how can we explain this possible trend? In the near future there will be another round of data gathering for the LSYPE and fresh data from the Millennium Study will also come on stream which will allow us to assess this possible development. Despite the paucity of data, there is nevertheless compelling

evidence that black youth are disadvantaged in relation to work-based routes and apprenticeships (Crook, 2014). Importantly, there are also significant regional variations in engagements with VET. London, as a metropolitan centre, is in many respects unique, but there are also significant differences between the north and south. This sits alongside questions about the re-composition of class and the way this articulates with the social relations of race. Srnicek and Williams (2015, 102-3), in an argument that resonates with Blacker (2013) and Marsh's (2011) discussion of surplus labour, comment on the overrepresentation of African Americans in prison, suggesting that middle and upper class African Americans are 'largely left alone' (p102). But note the use of largely - the point is that we do need to consider questions of intersectionality and the manner in which race, class and gender articulate with one another. The key issue is to move beyond a gestural politics towards a stance where the social relations of race are placed in a pivotal position. A critical approach to researching race and VET – that is, those informed by critical theories of race, as well as by critiques of education policy and practice under neo-liberalism – necessitated an examination of how discriminatory mechanisms may operate and how VET, like other educational sites, may be complicit in reproducing racialised norms and racial stratification. 'Mass incarceration' is merely one way of managing and warehousing surplus labour. Education has also served such a purpose, as illustrated in English research from the 1970's and 80's.

In the current conjuncture the acquisition of vocational qualifications, at whatever level, does not guarantee employment and the increasing participation of black youth in HE does not necessarily lead us to reject the notion of warehousing. If we conceive of warehousing as embedded in a relational analysis of race and VET, the term is not limited to quantification of a student's progress and attainment or to identifying 'barriers' to access. This calls for an analysis that explores VET in particular and education in general as a site in which race as a social relationship is (re)produced. Participation in particular forms of VET or HE does not necessarily lead to social mobility, an association that is rooted in a narrow and restrictive understanding of the social formation, and indeed of education (Avis and Orr, 2016). This association is one predicated upon individualism and the development of human capital and is what Lingard, Sellar and Savage (2014) refer to as an equity model of social mobility as against one based on equality. The former model reduces social mobility to a technical

issue, ignoring the broader philosophical issues within which it is embedded, and for our purposes the reproduction of the social relations of race. To more fully understand how race is (re)produced and experienced in VET there needs to be better availability of systematically recorded data on ethnicity, participation and destinations, similar to that which exists for HE in England. There also needs to be a critical examination of curricular issues (in particular, access to powerful knowledge and not just access to a narrowly defined set of skills) and examination of identities, expectations and 'choice' in VET pathways. Such an examination responds to notions of distributive justice and the manner in which education of whatever type and in whatever locale can offer students not only fulfilling experiences but also access to 'really useful knowledge'. Such an educational politics is one embedded in social justice and is far removed from limited and technicist models of VET

**suggesting an agenda for future research on race and VET. This agenda places VET and race in a pivotal position seeking to address and theorise BME students' negotiation of institutional racism through resistance and inclusive acts of accommodation. This agenda will also seek to explore the complex mobilisation of racial and ethnic identities in VET.**

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Journal	Total race/VET papers, 2005-15	Range (p.a.)	Zero years	Race/ non-advanced VET	Race/ non-advanced UK
<b>(i) JVET</b>	17/ 334 (5.09%)	0-6	2	12	2
<b>(ii) RPCET</b>	10/286 (3.50%)	0-3	4	7	5
<b>(iii) JFHE</b>	5/ 358 (1.40%)	0-2	6	3	2
<b>(iv) REE</b>	9/ 292 (3.08%)	0-3	3	7	0
<b>(v) BERJ</b>	7/ 458 (1.53%)	0-6	8	7	6
<b>(vi) JWJL</b>	11/348 (3.16%)	0-4	3	5	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	59/ 1728 (3.41%)	r = 0-6	r = 2-8	41	15

**Table 1:** papers on race/ VET published in peer-reviewed journals, 2005-14

Ethnicity (total number in cohort)	School sixth form (academic)	Sixth-Form College (academic)	FE college (predominantly vocational)	Other education destination
Asian (46,190)	51	19	22	3
Black (27,010)	46	18	27	3
Mixed (21,240)	42	13	31	4
White (451,960)	37	12	36	5
Other (9,390)	54	14	24	2

**Table 2:** Destinations of students after the age of 16 from state-funded mainstream schools by ethnicity and percentage in England, 2013/14 (adapted from DFE, 2016, 6)

		<b>2007-2008</b>	<b>2011-2012</b>
<b>Asian or Asian British-any Asian background</b>	<b>Vocational qualifications</b>	59%	67%
	<b>Academic qualifications</b>	34%	25%
<b>Asian or Asian British –Bangladeshi</b>	<b>Vocational qualifications</b>	52%	60%
	<b>Academic qualifications</b>	47%	36%
<b>Asian or Asian British –Indian</b>	<b>Vocational qualifications</b>	56%	63%
	<b>Academic qualifications</b>	41%	33%
<b>Asian or Asian British –Pakistani</b>	<b>Vocational qualifications</b>	57%	66%
	<b>Academic qualifications</b>	38%	29%
<b>Black or Black British - any other Black background</b>	<b>Vocational qualifications</b>	66%	69%
	<b>Academic qualifications</b>	19%	16%
<b>Black or Black British –African</b>	<b>Vocational qualifications</b>	55%	57%
	<b>Academic qualifications</b>	27%	21%
<b>Black or Black British –Caribbean</b>	<b>Vocational qualifications</b>	69%	73%
	<b>Academic qualifications</b>	19%	16%
<b>White –British</b>	<b>Vocational qualifications</b>	74%	73%
	<b>Academic qualifications</b>	22%	22%

**Table 3** Proportions of students taking courses leading to level 3 vocational or academic qualifications, normally completed at age 18, in English FE Colleges by ethnic group in 2007-08 and 2011-12 (percentages do not include mature students taking access to HE courses) (adapted from Smith et al. 2015, 34-35)