Mapping the Young Person's Journey

With Young Black and Young People of Colour in Scotland

INTERCULTURAL YS YOUTH SCOTLAND

This is a movement.

OVERVIEW

The Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) aims that "within 2 years every 16-24 year old in Scotland will either be in paid employment for a period of between 12 and 24 months, enrolled in education, actively involved on an apprenticeship or training programme, or engaged on a formal volunteering or supported activity programme." (Young Person Guarantee No-one Left Behind: Initial Report, p. 7).

The Initial Report recommends involving young people in co-designing the YPG (p. 10) and states that the YPG aims include "ensuring greater equality, social mobility and inclusion" (p. 5) and "to keep young people connected to work and education, including addressing pre-existing inequalities faced by young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, young disabled people and young women and girls." (p. 6-7).

It is therefore critical that the Scottish Government and stakeholders hear the voices of a wide range of young people.

Intercultural Youth Scotland (IYS) were invited to be part of a group to take forward the implementation of this report to establish this Guarantee which will help to support all young people into employment, education or training, chaired by Sandy Begbie CBE.

For the Young Person's Journey mapping, it was critical for IYS to create a culturally appropriate safe space environment where intersectional young people who face structural racism would be able to speak with trust and confidence about their experiences, expectations and needs from the YPG. This safe space enabled them to participate effectively in the mapping. The following report first describes the mapping that was undertaken.

The key issues identified by young Black and young People of Colour and recommendations regarding the YPG are presented in three sections: expectations of and challenges in participating in the YPG; access to YPG opportunities and provisions of support; and the YPG application process. The recommendations were supplemented by IYS' specialised experience and knowledge of education and employment barriers faced by young Black and young People of Colour in Scotland.

This is a movement.

The Mapping

Two members of IYS' team observed the consultation undertaken by Young Scot with young people on 3.10.2020 to familiarise themselves with the questions explored.
The IYS team then adapted these questions to be culturally appropriate in order for them to capture the unique experiences, needs and perspectives of young Black and young People of Colour.

These adapted questions were then presented in a 3 hour consultation session on 5.10.2020 with members of IYS Anti-Racist & Pro Black Youth Ambassadors, a youth led platform to support young Black and young People of Colour Scots in activism and gaining access to decision making. **As the consultation was undertaken by the IYS team, who have specialist experience of working with young Black and young People of Colour in Scotland, and was attended exclusively by young Black and young People of Colour, it provided a safe and judgement-free space for participants to explore common experiences pertaining to race and ethnicity in relation to the YPG. The long term participation in the Ambassadors program also contributed to the participants' ability to express their views in a clear and insightful manner.**

2 of the facilitators contributed their own experiences and perspectives on the YPG during the consultation, which in turn encouraged the participants to share their own. In addition, short interviews were conducted with a few young people who attended The Block, IYS' youth club, on 6.10.2020. The consultation and interviews were conducted face-to-face, in accordance with the Scottish Government's current regulations on in-door youth work.

Overall, 10 young Black and young People of Colour were consulted. Their ages ranged from 17 to 23. 6 identified with she/her pronouns and 4 identified with he/him pronouns. The makeup of their self-identified ethnicity comprised of: Scottish-West African, Scottish-Asian, Indian-Punjabi, Black-African (Zimbabwean), Afro-Hispanic, Scottish-Caribbean, Black-African, Black-European, Sudanese and mixed-race. For those who chose to disclose their religion, the makeup was: Sikh, Christian, Muslim, Agnostic, no religion and practicing elements from different religions. One participant identified as queer and one participant disclosed suffering from anxiety and depression.

The following issues were explored in the consultation and interviews:

- The effect of **race and ethnicity** on education and employment
- The effect of **cultural background and religious identity** on education and employment
- The effect of **gender** on education and employment
- The effect of **low socio-economic status** on education and employment.
- **Support and access** needed by young Black and young People of Colour for employability, further/higher education and future career path
- **Potential barriers and challenges** for young Black and young People of Colour in employability, further/higher education and future career path
- What organisations and companies should offer young Black and young People of Colour so they can succeed

Key Issues and Recommendations

Expectations of and challenges in participating in the YPG.

Racism and Lack of Diversity

When asked what they hope to get out of the YPG, before mentioning work experience, learning skills and getting references, the young people's first response was that **they wished to be treated equally. They expressed significant worries of encountering racism during the YPG, based on their current and past experiences in school and workplaces.** These experiences included overt racist and offensive remarks, discrimination, use of racial slurs, micro-aggressions, an atmosphere of judgement and hatred and dirty looks.

> *"At work people are always asking me about my hair, my skin colour, and trying to touch me."*
>
> – 23, he/him, Scottish-West African, Agnostic

> *"It's annoying when you're asked where you're from. People are ignorant."*
>
> – 22, she/her, Scottish-Asian, suffers from anxiety and depression, practicing elements from different religions

> *"Structural racism lies in every industry but rears its ugly head in different ways."*
>
> – 22, she/her, mixed-race, no religion

The young people debated amongst themselves which actors bear responsibility for educating people on racism. They asked that **education establishments, workplaces and other partners of the YPG commit to undertaking anti-racist training.**
For additional information and resources see IYS' 'Insight' report on the perceptions and experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic young people in Scottish schools and IYS' 'Covid in Colour' report on the experiences of young Black and People of Colour Scots during the pandemic.

Moreover, the young people described how these negative experiences of racism were compounded by the fact **they were often the only Person of Colour at their school or their job and thus experienced a lack of understanding and support from co-workers/pupils and management/teachers.**
This situation also discouraged many of them from reporting racist incidents to their white teachers or management. Thus, **diversity should be an important commitment made by the YPG.**

> *"It's weird to be different at work. You can't learn if everyone is the same, you want to learn from different people."*
>
> - 22, she/her, Scottish-Asian, suffers from anxiety and depression, practicing elements from different religions

The young people also described how racist incidents and being the only Person of Colour in their school or workplace **caused them distress and negatively affected their mental health.**

> *"One day at work I wore my Afro down and was told by one of the managers that I look unprofessional and that I should either tie it up or go home. I'm in a suit jacket, heels and a skirt, I'm clearly professional. The only difference is my hair. But what about it is unprofessional? I spent the rest of my shift crying in the staff room."*
>
> – 22, she/her, Scottish-Caribbean, queer

> *"I would be apprehensive to start a new job where everyone is white, especially a part time job that you get at this age. You're in a tight network with those you work with. Everyone now has an opinion even though race isn't a debate. I would be holding my breath a bit, just waiting for someone to say something. That can cause anxiety. Race has an effect as a barrier in a way of mental health."*
>
> – 22, she/her, mixed-race, no religion

> *"At work, where I am the only Person of Colour, I have to spend time and energy confronting my manager's racism. If it wasn't for that, I could just do my work and be in and out. It has an impact on my mental health."*
>
> – 23, he/him, Scottish-West African, Agnostic

Gender Inequalities

The young people also spoke of **gender discrimination, inappropriate comments and sexual harassment they experienced or witnessed in schools and workplaces.** They worried the same will be true for the opportunities provided by the YPG. Moreover, the combination of gender and racial discrimination was powerfully felt. **Education establishments, workplaces and all other YPG partners should therefore commit to eliminating gender discrimination.**

"The industry I'm in is very male dominated. The manager told me that all her managers are women but when I sit with a team of developers they are all white men. They don't make comments but they make you feel like you can't speak up and they're not going to understand it from the same level."

– 17, she/her, Indian-Punjabi, Sikh

"It's the same as race, people are making little comments that make you uncomfortable, sly comments, not getting invited to things like 'guys only' spaces. It's hard to be the only one, not having many people around you that share your experiences."

– 22, she/her, Scottish-Caribbean, queer

Cultural Sensitivity

The young people stressed the importance of workplaces showing **an understanding of, and flexibility toward their cultural and religious beliefs.** For example, not making Muslims sell alcohol or pork and allowing days off for religious and cultural holidays and celebrations.

Additional Barriers

Other barriers the young people mentioned encountering by employers and workplaces were **their age; lack of experience; zero-hour contracts; English as a second language; not being paid for all the hours they actually worked; struggling to align opportunities to pre-existing commitments; and not showing understanding of mental health needs, which are often invisible.**

"You can call in to say you broke your leg so you can't come in to work and because employers can see that your leg is broken it's okay by them but you can't call and say you have a panic attack because they can't see it."

– 22, she/her, Scottish-Asian, suffers from anxiety and depression, practicing elements from different religions

Lack of confidence was another barrier young people faced, which itself can also stem from the many barriers mentioned above. Restless Natives - Intercultural Youth Scotland's employability and positive destination support service, which focuses on giving young Black and young People of Colour insight and support into career opportunities and guiding them towards sustainable futures in their desired fields - identified the following additional barriers to employment: **poor knowledge of career paths; lack of specialist support agencies; poor relationships with teaching staff and career service; arranged marriage; and low income households.**

The Inner Strength of Young Black and Young People of Colour in Scotland

Despite all of the barriers they face, the young people show **remarkable resilience in pursuing education and employment.** They explained that they stay in hostile workplaces because they need the money and are determined to face present and potential barriers in order to achieve their career aspirations. They recognised that this determination was not faced by some of their white counterparts, who enjoyed privilege in similar situations.

> *"I would never not do something because there are obstacles. I won't let it affect me."*
>
> – 22, she/her, Scottish-Caribbean, queer

Access to YPG Opportunities and Provisions of Support

Navigating Cultural Expectations and Familial Support

The young people spoke about how their **parents were not always aware of opportunities available to them and are unable to offer them support and advice in seeking further education and employment.** Moreover, the young people described how **cultural expectations from their family and community can affect their involvement in the YPG** in general and the specific opportunities they will choose to engage with. Many young people are interested in pursuing a career as musicians, yet their parents disapprove of such a career choice or want to make sure their children also apply for more stable and secure career opportunities. **Lack of support from family** was seen as especially challenging in staying in the preferred career path/employment given all the other barriers that were already mentioned.

A young woman of Indian-Punjabi ethnicity elaborated on **differing gender expectations** in her culture: Young Punjabi men are expected to enter certain careers which reinforce stereotypes of masculinity. This prevents some of them from pursuing careers they might prefer or are more suited for, such as childcare.
Some young Punjabi women are expected to be married by the age of 25 and their employment after marriage is subject to their family's consent. As a result, Punjabi girls who are struggling academically at school are not always supported in continuing their studies. This was contrasted to tutoring that white families provide for their children who struggle academically.
IYS therefore recommends that services with specialised cultural knowledge will provide one-on-one support to young people as well as work with community leaders and elders to encourage women's education and career development and freedom of choice for young people.

> *"My mum told me I'm not allowed to go to University but I told her that I am. I've been supported with my confidence and how to communicate sensitively by Intercultural Youth Scotland".*
>
> – 17, she/her, Indian-Punjabi, Sikh

Support from Schools and Organisations

With regards to learning about opportunities through various organisations, many of the young people expressed **dissatisfaction with career counselling** and education at school and the opportunities it afforded them. **They suggested career counsellors get to know them better** - ask about their family situation, cultural background and preferences – and help them get on the career path they desire.

> *"Career lessons in school aren't motivating, it feels like they do it because they have to".*
>
> – 18, he/him, Black-African (Zimbabwean), Christian

> *"My career advisor asked what I enjoy doing at school, what's your favourite subject. Not what your parents want for you. That was good."*
>
> - 17, she/her, Indian-Punjabi, Sikh

The young people said they would like to get **more support from school and organisations** in choosing their school subjects and figuring out what they wanted to do once school has ended. Some suggested learning about the YPG through school and online and most asked to **hear about YPG opportunities through IYS because they relate to its young staff and feel empowered through the organisation.**

Moreover, the young people identified the **lack of representation** of Black and People of Colour in positions of power and in their aspired professions as limiting their career aspirations and opportunities. They also described how white people benefit from networks which they do not have access to. **They stressed the need for diverse organisations and mentors that understand young Black and young People of Colour in Scotland, provide services for them and keep in contact with them.**

> *"I want to hear about opportunities through IYS. IYS changed me, gave me support and confidence and improved my conversation skills."*
>
> – 17, he/him, Sudanese, Muslim
>
> *"If it wasn't for IYS I would say I need support and resources."*
>
> – 17, she/her, Indian-Punjabi, Sikh

The importance of **providing safe spaces** for young Black and young People of Colour through specialised organisations such as Intercultural Youth Scotland was evidenced in the consultation itself. The young people felt comfortable sharing sensitive personal experiences of contending with societal challenges in education, workplaces and other arenas. Moreover, **they were able to support one another in facing these challenges**, for example by validating one another; encouraging those who shared stories of racial and sexual harassment to complain; engaging in networking; recommending appropriate career and education opportunities to one another; and warning each other of racist workplaces to steer clear from.

The YPG Application Process

In addition to the barriers described above, which could prevent young people from applying to the YPG, the young people also identified specific challenges they expect to face when applying to the YPG.

The young people expressed **serious reservations about applying to an all-white environment.** They worried about **feeling threatened and scared; not having the support and understanding of their colleagues; not feeling part of the company culture; carrying the burden of constantly proving themselves; and being ostracised.** They also expressed concern that they would only be chosen for the job so that the company could meet a diversity target, that they would serve as a **"poster child" of diversity** and they would **carry the burden of representing their entire race/ethnic group in the eyes of their colleagues.**

> *"Working in a place where you don't feel like you fit it would be so weird. Basically like school but you get to choose where you want to work. I don't want to be the only one there who isn't white."*
>
> - 17, she/her, Indian-Punjabi, Sikh

Some of the young people said they might still apply depending on the opportunity they are offered or out of necessity. Young Black and young People of Colour in Scotland that IYS has engaged with through its Restless Natives programme, described having **positive experiences in very diverse workplaces.** This stresses even more the **importance of getting YPG partners to commit to being diverse.**

> *"I guess I would apply to work in an all-white workplace, it's just something I've kind of accepted. But working with IYS shows me that it doesn't have to be like that, we shouldn't accept it, it's part of the survival of being a young Person of Colour."*
>
> – 22, she/her, mixed-race, no religion

> *"Unlike working in IYS, working in all-white workplaces gives me corporate anxiety, I'm always thinking about the power structures. What if something happens - I wouldn't know who to talk to. If there's something in the news (about race and racism), I don't know if I can talk to people at work about it."*
>
> – 22, she/her, Scottish-Caribbean, queer

The young people also worried they would be **discriminated against when applying because they do not have Scottish sounding names** and were weary of application forms asking for their ethnicity and nationality, as they felt this would put them at a disadvantage. Witnessing and hearing about racial discrimination in hiring made them **feel frustrated, angry and helpless.**

Based on previous experience and knowledge in the field of employment, IYS recommends **making early stages of recruitment accessible to all applicants; making the recruitment process easy; and creating a dialogue between employers and applicants even when the applications are unsuccessful.**

> *"Sometimes I don't apply because I know I have no chance. I'm Black in a white system. I don't have a Scottish accent and when I sit in interviews I feel like nothing will come out of it. There is no way for me to gain experience."*
>
> – 19, he/him, Black-African, Christian

CONTACT

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