



GRADUATE WORKFORCE BRADFORD: END OF PROJECT EVALUATION

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1 Introduction

In 2018, the Office for Students (OfS) invited providers of higher education to bid into its Challenge Competition: *Industrial Strategy and Skills – support for local students and graduates*, a three-year funding stream for the development and implementation of projects which identified new and innovative ways of supporting transition to high skill employment and improving outcomes for graduates who seek employment in their home region.¹ It aligned with the OfS goal of ensuring that “students’ access, success and progression are not limited by their background, location, or characteristics” (OfS Strategy 2022-25)², and supported the OfS priorities to promote social mobility and contribute to economic prosperity.

The rationale for the Challenge Competition recognised the persistent difference in the employment outcomes of ethnic minority³ graduates compared with their white peers (Cabinet Office, 2017; Weekes-Bernard, 2017; Henehan and Rose, 2017; CIPD, 2017; OfS, 2018; HESA, 2020; HEPI, 2020) and the importance of place in graduate career decision making, particularly for those from low socio-economic groups (OfS, 2021), which often intersect with race and ethnicity. Participating universities were therefore required to demonstrate impact in respect of:

- Improving the employment outcomes of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority students
- Improving graduate outcomes for students who plan to remain in their local area
- Addressing place-based skills gaps by ensuring graduates can succeed in local industries.

The Graduate Workforce Bradford (GWB) Partnership, co-ordinated through the University of Bradford’s Career and Employability Services (CES), was successful in securing funds. This District-wide partnership group comprised thirteen partners the across the public, private and third sectors (Appendix 1), all of whom worked with and/or supported local students and graduates in developing their employability skills to access appropriate graduate level employment, or who had an interest in doing so. GWB ran from August 2019 to September 2022. The overall aims of GWB were to:

- Address the un/under-employment of Bradford’s ethnic minority graduates
- Support employers in local priority labour market sectors in addressing recruitment skills gaps and diversity challenges
- Develop an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the influence of place and culture in Bradford’s student and graduate career decision making and choices.

As set out in the GWB Evaluation Strategy, the project was underpinned by the principle of developing a sustainable approach to delivery, embedded in the local infrastructure, to provide long term impact for local graduates, local communities, and the local economy.

The purpose of this summative evaluation is to assess the success of GWB in achieving its aims and sustainability ambitions as well as its delivery of OfS Challenge Competition requirements. It considers the operation, delivery, achievements, success factors and legacy of the project.

¹ [Previous funding opportunities - Office for Students](#)

² [Equality of opportunity - Office for Students](#)

³ In recognition of the reductionist implications of ethnic categorisation, the acronym BAME is replaced with the term Ethnic Minority/ies. It is accepted that this is still not ideal as it reinforces racial inequality by maintaining White ethnic identity as privileged.

1.1 Methodology

This summative evaluation was designed to align with GWB’s Evaluation Strategy. Central to its methodology has been an evaluation of the extent to which the project has generated new knowledge in respect of ethnic minority graduates’ career decision-making and progression to graduate level employment, in particular what works for whom, in which circumstances and why. Throughout this report ‘graduate level’ jobs are referred to as ‘high skilled’.

As well as OfS Challenge Competition outcome requirements, the depth and breadth of evaluation inquiry have been informed by GWB aims, objectives and key performance indicators; the context for delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic; short to medium term impact; and the potential for longer term sustainability.

Evaluation has been undertaken as a mixed methods study using both quantitative and qualitative data, taking account of context and experience, as well as the number of outputs and achievement of targets. In assessing the success of the project analysis was informed by the principles of realist evaluation, examining not only what outcomes are produced from activities but also how they are produced. As part of this approach, summative evaluation has considered:

- Operation of governance and effectiveness of partnership working.
- Key inputs, activities, outcomes, and targets as defined in GWB’s original submission and any subsequent amendments.
- Factors which have facilitated or have presented barriers to change.
- Efficacy of project theories set out in the Evaluation Strategy.
- Engagement of students and alumni with activities and services across the Partnership.
- Engagement of employers in GWB activities and with partners in the recruitment of local graduates.
- Overall benefits accrued to students, alumni, partners, and employers.

Methods to be used to gather data included:

Quantitative Data:	Analysis of project documentation including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Quarterly and annual reports■ GWB assets, e.g., case studies and podcasts■ Graduate outcome data (both DLHE Light and GO)■ Data generated through GWB’s Action Research strand
Qualitative Data:	Semi structured interviews with representative stakeholders. A total of 25 interviews were held across all stakeholder groups.

All sources of data were triangulated to identify where activities and practice can be associated with positive outcomes; where new models of practice have been developed; and where sustainability has been/can be achieved. This has generated a holistic picture of how contextual factors have interacted with personal experiences (and vice versa) in the career trajectories of local ethnic minority graduates, as well as indicating how and where GWB has been able to use learning from its action research approach to deliver outcomes and created impact for change.

2 The context for Graduate Workforce Bradford

The focus of the OfS Challenge Competition funding on graduate progression to local employment provided applicants with the opportunity to shape their initiative around their local context, taking account not only of student/graduate and community demographics but also the economic and workforce landscape. As a place based initiative, the outputs and outcomes of GWB have therefore been both influenced and determined by its local context. It is an important factor in considering the success and achievements of the project and how it has facilitated sustainability.

2.1 Community and University demographics

Bradford is an ethnically diverse District, with an estimated 32.6% of Bradford residents being from an ethnic minority background, the largest proportion of whom identify as South Asian (26.8%).⁴ Of this 26.8%, more than 20% identify as Pakistani.

The District's population increased by 0.5% between 2018-19, largely due to an increasing birth rate⁵ with 82.8% of its population born in the UK⁶. This means that Bradford is a 'young' city with more than a quarter of its population (26.3%) aged under 18, the fourth highest percentage in England⁷. The University of Bradford is a beacon for this young population as they progress from school to degree-level study. In the academic year 2020/21, 73.6% of the University of Bradford's undergraduate students identified as being from an ethnic minority background. Of these students 87.9% were UK domiciled, with 62% from a Bradford postcode.

In terms of career progression, University of Bradford graduates are well served by their degree achievements. In the academic year 2017/18, at the time of the GWB application for funding, 94% of all graduates progressed to high skilled employment. Analysis of the 6% of Bradford graduates who did not progress to a high skilled job indicated that ethnic minority graduates were significantly more likely to be unemployed than their white peers - 51% of unemployed ethnic minority female and 35% of unemployed ethnic minority male ethnic minority graduates compared to 5% and 9% of white unemployed graduates respectively. Similarly ethnic minority graduates were more likely to be under-employed than their white peers - 21% of under-employed female ethnic minority graduates compared to 11% of white graduates. Male ethnic minority graduates fared a little better at 13% compared to 17% of white graduates. Whilst these levels of un-/under-employment are not disproportionate to the student body demographic, the increased likelihood of ethnic minority graduates being un-/under-employed indicates systemic disadvantage.

Analysis also identified a sustained trend for the University's ethnic minority graduates to remain in the area after graduation (Ball, 2017), with 70% entering employment in West Yorkshire, and 31% of these graduates taking up employment within the Bradford Metropolitan District. Significantly, 89% of ethnic minority graduates who were unemployed resided within five Bradford postcode areas. These areas comprise the majority of the ring around the city centre covering the inner suburbs, situated in wards which are amongst the 10% most deprived in England as measured by the index of

⁴ [Demographics of Bradford District.pdf](#)

⁵ <https://datahub.bradford.gov.uk/opendata/population/2019-based%20Population%20Estimates%20Alert.pdf>

⁶ [ethnicity-in-bradford.pdf](#)

⁷ [Population | Bradford Council](#)

multiple deprivation. National data indicates that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are those who are most likely to seek employment in their local area (OfS Insight Briefing, 2021).

This emerging evidence suggests that ‘place’, intersecting with socio-economic and ethnic background are key influences on the career decision-making of ethnic minority graduates.

2.2 Local economic and employment landscape

Bradford is a City and District which is working hard to develop its economy and vitalise its communities, and where new opportunities are being created for regeneration, not least demonstrated by recent success in becoming the Capital of Culture 2025. Bradford has evolved its industrial base and economy, moving from textile and heavy manufacturing industries to advanced engineering, chemicals, automotive and food manufacture, financial services and digital technologies. Bradford also benefits from a strong entrepreneurial culture.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, unemployment across the District was falling alongside an increase in median weekly earnings (Bradford District’s Economic Recovery Plan, 2021). The City was attracting inward investment from national companies and was identified as the best place in Britain to start a business, by Barclays Bank SME Growth Factors Index and listed as one of the top 20 cities for business growth by the Sunday Times in 2020.

At the time of GWB’s application for funding, local labour market intelligence identified Health and Social Care (Bradford’s largest employment sector), Engineering and Manufacturing, and the Public Services (Education, Social Work, Police) as priority sectors for Bradford, experiencing significant recruitment and skill gap challenges. Similarly, Leeds City Region Local Economic Partnership (LEP) economic analysis predicted that health, care, STEM, and education occupations would see the fastest job growth over the next decade in Bradford. These sectors were therefore placed at the forefront of GWB activity in addressing differential outcomes for Bradford’s graduates, to contribute to local regeneration and economic prosperity.

Bradford is a city which still faces significant challenges in ensuring that all its citizens can be active participants in and gain meaningful benefit from these opportunities, as demonstrated by the differential employment outcomes for Bradford’s ethnic minority graduates. As identified by Archibong and Imoh (2022) and the TUC (2022) structural inequality within education and employment has a profound effect on the ability of students and graduates to achieve, access high skilled employment, and progress in their careers. This was brought into sharp relief during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.3 The pandemic

Covid-19 struck barely 5 months into the project, with almost 2 of GWB’s three year operating period undertaken during pandemic conditions. Therefore, in evaluating GWB it is recognised that the pandemic inevitably had an impact on its intended delivery model and its work to improve employment outcomes for Bradford’s ethnic minority graduates.

Particularly significant for GWB was the reduction in employers’ recruitment activities, which were scaled back at all levels, except in those organisations directly related to the pandemic response, for example the NHS and Bradford Council. Employers were also focused on prioritising their own business pandemic responses which impacted on levels of engagement with both employers and communities. Consequently, the operational delivery and trajectory of the project was influenced by economic and labour market changes.

2.3.1 Impact on the labour market

At the beginning of the pandemic and the first lockdown in March 2020, unemployment increased to its highest level in four years at 5.1%, with benefit claimants increased by 113.2%⁸. Redundancies reached a record high, with working hours dropping to their lowest since 1994 (Powell et al, 2022). The Bradford District Economic Recovery Plan (2021) noted a sharp increase in the level of unemployment particularly amongst younger people and those in Bradford's most disadvantaged communities. Given Bradford's demographic profile this particularly impacted the city's ethnic minority population.

In October 2020 unemployment for recent graduates reached a peak at 12.0%, compared to an average of 6.3% over the period 2017-2020⁹, with many taking roles which did not match their qualification profile. In 2020 it was estimated that the volume of vacancies was running at only 55-65% of their levels in 2019, with the health sector being the obvious exception (Ball, 2020).

2.3.2 Impact on GWB delivery

As a project focused on progression to employment, the pandemic created a significant blow to the intended activities and anticipated outcomes of the project. Not only did the employment landscape change almost overnight, but the project's ability to engage across the partnership, other stakeholders, and the local community became restricted. This type of engagement activity had been planned around face-to-face interactions to facilitate community participation. It therefore took time for communities to adapt to the new online world, with digital poverty impacting on the ability for local community members to engage with online activities. Similarly, students and graduates became disconnected from the University with many focusing on home responsibilities and the care of their families.

However, as identified by the OfS external evaluation partners, CRAC, through a flexible and responsive approach, GWB was able to recalibrate their project plan and continue to deliver. CRAC observed that this had not been the case for all projects under this funding stream. The project's adaptability and creativity in responding to unprecedented change is discussed in the sections below.

The context for Graduate Workforce Bradford

Key conclusions:

- As a place based initiative, Bradford's context and the evidence based recognition of the potential influence of the interaction between ethnicity and socio-economic background were central to project planning and delivery.
- The pandemic significantly impacted on the local landscape and consequently on the original intended approach of the project.
- Although the pandemic could have thrown the project irreparably off course, GWB's flexible and responsive approach enabled it to adapt to unprecedented change and continue to deliver to the project's end date.

⁸ [The UK's Covid-19 unemployment crisis in six charts | Job losses | The Guardian](#)

⁹ [Graduates' labour market outcomes during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic: occupational switches and skill mismatch - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

3 An Action Research Approach

The embedding of a research strand as part of delivery and evaluation was a critical aspect of the project’s development, facilitating the generation of new knowledge which continued to inform iterative project delivery throughout its lifetime.

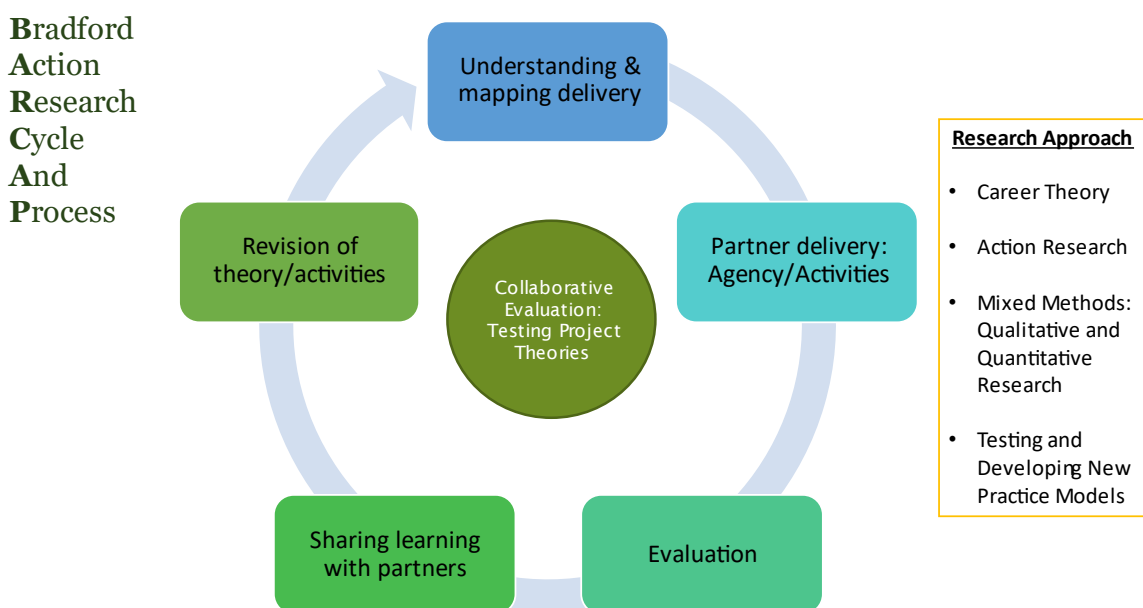
Bradford’s employment context and demographic profile shaped research and evaluation activities. Of significance was the prominence of South Asian communities in Bradford District’s and of its graduates, particularly those who were most likely to be un- or under-employed. Research was therefore tailored to ensure that the voices and lived experience of these communities were foregrounded. This was not to the exclusion of students, graduates, or other stakeholders from other ethnic backgrounds, enabling comparative analysis. This led to the identification of factors which were either specific to South Asian students and graduates, or generic in successful graduate progression.

3.1 Research and evaluation methodology

Action research methodology formed an underpinning strand of GWB activity, using the Bradford Action Research Cycle and Process (BARCaP). The BARCaP is a tried and tested methodology pioneered at the University by Professor Udy Archibong, Professor of Diversity and PVC for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

GWB’s research aim, in response to the context that informed GWB, was to develop an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the extent of place and culture-based decision making in ethnic minority student and graduate career choices. The BARCaP was employed as both an evaluation tool and as a methodology for generating new, empirical knowledge about what influences the career decision making of Bradford’s ethnic minority graduates, and specifically those from a South Asian background (Fig. 1). Professor Archibong was a Board member of GWB and therefore able to provide research guidance.

Figure 1: BARCaP



Evaluation was placed at the heart of the BARCaP model for GWB. It enabled the project to deliver OfS evaluation requirements, including working with their external programme evaluator, CRAC, in the development of a logic model (Fig.2) and theory of change (Fig.3).

The importance of ensuring GWB’s model of evaluation took account of the complexity and multifaceted nature of the project, for example the intersection of its workstreams and multiple stakeholders, was identified at an early stage. This enabled it to focus on an evidenced informed theory of change, which tested project theories through activity and engagement.

Figure 2: GWB Logic Model

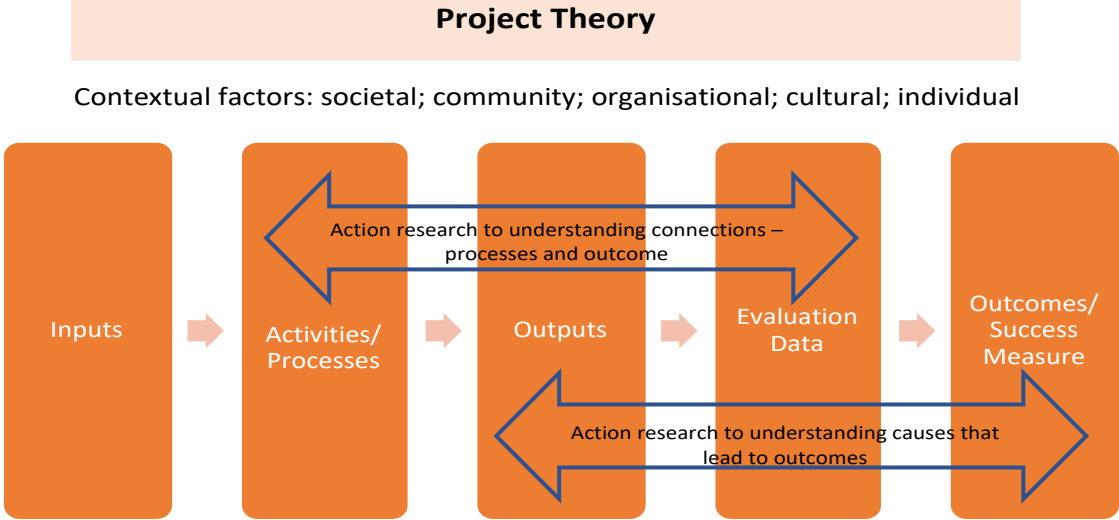


Figure 3: GWB Project Theories for Change

Project Theory 1

Enhanced/bespoke, targeted employability activities will increase the capacity of ethnic minority graduates and support successful progress to a positive graduate destination

Project Theory 2

Increasing employers' awareness of the local ethnic minority graduate talent pool will increase the likelihood of them employing a local ethnic minority graduate.

Project Theory 3

Bringing ethnic minority students, graduates, and communities together with local employers will break down barriers to employment

Project Theory 4

Increased understanding of the influence of place and culture on ethnic minority students/graduates career decision making will support the development of employability services and employment practices

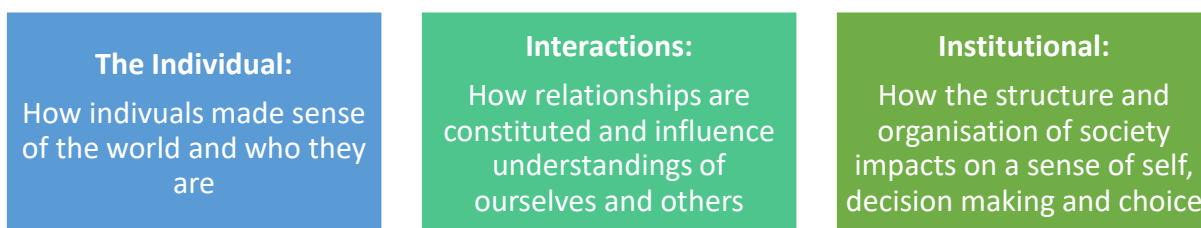
Project Theory 5

The development of a learning community through partnership working across the District will lead to new ways of working and embed sustainable change.

The action research cycle enabled the testing and developing of activity under each project theory and facilitated consideration of the varying structures, conditions and circumstances in which activities took place (Tilley, 2000) to enhance understanding of the influence of place and culture on career decision making for ethnic minority students and graduates in Bradford.

Research and evaluation activity sought to identify causal relationships between structures/processes; employment outcomes; and the lived experiences of students and graduates. Research methods were therefore collaborative, focused on gaining insights through enabling the sharing of lived experience in an environment of trust and mutual benefit.

In recognition of an evidence base of structural and systemic inequality that impacts on the life trajectory and outcomes for people from an ethnic minority, including students and graduates (Thomas & Alderfer, 1989; Cabinet Office, 2017; Weekes-Bernard, 2017; OfS, 2018; HESA, 2020; HEPI, 2020), research analysis was undertaken through a critical realist lens. This allowed researchers to explore relationships between structures/processes, place, culture and identity, where life circumstances and experiences interact in a dynamic way with an individual's career path, impacting on a sense of self, career decision making and choice (Thomas and Alderfer, 1989). Analysis was also overlaid with Jenkins' (2004) framework for understanding identity at the level of:



The result of this approach was to produce a narrative evidence base that amplified the voices of students, graduates and local communities and the barriers they face in access to the labour market and employment. These findings are discussed in Section 6 below.

3.1.1 Range of research activity undertaken

The mixed-methods approach to generating empirical evidence employed by the project, using the BARCaP to facilitate an iterative programme of research activity, tested research findings undertaken across the lifetime of the project. This provided a robust approach to the generation of new knowledge.

As the focus of GWB’s research activity was the lived experiences of students and graduates, qualitative inquiry took a narrative format, with small numbers of participants in focus groups, interviews and in on-going conversations. Review of the data collected through these methods shows this delivered a rich and textured evidence base.

The scope of research activity enabled the gathering of insights across all stakeholder groups (Table 1).

Table 1: Overview of research activity

METHOD	PARTICIPATION AND SCOPE
Research to explore students’ and graduates’ attitudes, perceptions, and experiences	
DLHE Light Surveys (replicating previous national DLHE methodology)	3 x annual survey of graduates 6 months after graduates to provide benchmarking for targets and identify target cohorts for support (Total = 4462 participants over 3 years)
Online Student and Graduate Cohort Surveys	Exploring motivations, aspirations, and influences on career decision making to establish baseline for further inquiry (Total = 327 respondents)
Student and graduate focus groups	2 x Experiences of being a female ethnic minority graduate (Total = 10 participants) 3 x Attitudes towards and experiences of employability support (Total = 12 participants) 1 x Influences on career decision making and a ‘good’ vs ‘bad’ career (Total = 5 participants)
1-1 student interviews	8 x in-depth interviews exploring themes of motivation, aspiration, and influences on career decision-making
Face to face student survey	2 x short, focused surveys administered by GWB ambassadors survey focused on decision to attend University of Bradford and who/what were their major influences (Total = 258 participants)
On-going conversations with students and graduates	Multiple conversations in informal settings providing accounts of lived experiences in career journey experience, aspirations, and challenges face by ethnic minority students in Bradford.
HESA Graduate Outcomes Survey	HESA GOS destinations 15 months after graduation providing an indicator of longitudinal progress
Research with employers	
Employer focus groups	2 x exploring employer perspectives on and experiences of local graduate recruitment and employability (Total = 4 participants)

Belong in Bradford – round table discussions	2 x roundtable discussions to enable students, graduates, community members and employers to share experiences and explore each other’s perspectives on employment, understand issues and barriers, and potential areas for collaboration and local action (Total = 30 participants)
Community based research to explore the attitudes, perceptions, and experience	
South Asian Discussion Forum/	2 meetings Discussion on culture and familial influences on aspirations and careers
‘Can You Hear Me’ events	3 x events organised by the Centre for Inclusion and Diversity, exploring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to a career in academia - The use of labels and the categorisation of ethnic minority groups - Understanding the impact of microaggressions (Total = 360 participants)
Face to face community discussion groups and survey	Community discussion groups and short, focused surveys exploring community-held beliefs of ‘suitable’ careers and knowledge of the local labour market (Total = 61 attendees; 16 participants completed survey)
Community Focus Groups	1 x exploring perceptions of a successful career; the influence of family/community; and concepts of a ‘good’ career (Total = 10 participants)

In terms of reach and scope, the impact of the pandemic on research and evaluation activity should be noted. As highlighted above, it halted planned face to face delivery and curtailed the ability of the team to engage effectively with students and graduate, employers, and the community. In addition, the project’s small team of three were stretched across a broad and continually growing partnership network. As a result of the team adapting its approach in the context of the pandemic, the methodology employed by GWB through BARCaP generated a wealth of data, with research activities organised to respond to action learning. This has led to both effective project delivery and an increased understanding of the influence of place and culture on students and graduates’ career decision making, discussed in sections below.

3.2 Impact of embedded action research and evaluation

Key factors were critical to the successful operation of GWB’s research and evaluation strand, including its design, structured around evidenced based project theories, a test and refine model, and the shifting of discourse from deficit ‘problems’ and ‘interventions’ to the collaborative co-creation of solutions. The BARCaP facilitated iteration in design and delivery resulting in in-project learning, genuine collaboration and co-creation in the planning, design, and delivery of activities. This has included, for example, working with and empowering student ambassadors in the development of new ways of engaging students in careers and employability discussions resulting in face to face surveys; and co-creating community events with employers and community based groups (see 6.2 below).

The intentional sharing of lived experiences across all stakeholders has generated new understandings of structural inequality and has highlighted where assumptions and biases can impact on ethnic minority graduate outcomes. For example, round table discussions provided “*a bridge between industry and students and connect(ed) people on a human to human level*” (Round Table Employer Participant). Stakeholder interviewees reported that this new knowledge had generated “*intelligence and understanding*” in respect of the aspirations and motivations of local ethnic minority students and graduates, and what/who influences their career decisions. They also observed that it provided insights into employment related structural factors which present obstacles for ethnic minority students in their efforts to access a high skilled job, for example in recruitment processes.

Pandemic, engagement, and participation were critical in the generation of research insights. The Project Team reflected, during interview, that due to the pandemic they had not achieved the level of engagement they had hoped. However, through the Team’s creativity and willingness to adapt their methods, a significant volume of research data was generated. The project’s participatory approach can be aligned with public engagement principles with GWB being purposeful in its attention to demographic diversity and inclusion, and to promoting a shared goal through collaboration. This extended to GWB’s governance which was incorporated into the research through Project Theory 5 (see Section 6 below)

Interviews with stakeholders also highlighted the impact of this embedded approach. They reported that the generation of an empirical evidence base had provided a platform for conversations about equality, diversity, and inclusion in employment as well as practice to support students and graduates progress to a positive graduate destination.

“Presenting the research has raised awareness and kickstarted thinking” (GWB Partner)

“The research has given staff confidence (in having diversity conversations) as their observations are backed up by research evidence” (Careers Professional)

Stakeholder feedback indicates that the research has been highly valued as a tool for engagement and dialogue beyond the Partnership, but also to be used in the development of new models of practice and demonstrating what works for whom, in what circumstances, and why.

An Action Research Approach

Key conclusions:

- GWB’s methodology for research and evaluation through the development of an evidence informed theory of change and narrative approach, tested through the BARCaP moved the project away from a deficit approach which describes ‘problems’ and ‘interventions’ to one which engages with lived experiences, collaborative dialogue, and the co-creation of solutions.
- The intention to understand structural inequality has informed the research and evaluation methodology and successfully highlighted where and how assumptions and biases impact on ethnic minority graduate outcomes.
- Engagement and participation, albeit on a smaller scale than intended due to the pandemic, were critical to the successful operation of the research strand. This was facilitated by the incorporation of the principles of public engagement ensured inclusion, collaboration, openness and transparency and the building of trust.
- The wealth of rich research data generated has led to both effective project delivery and an increased understanding of the influence of place and culture on students and graduates’ career decision making.
- Stakeholder interviews highlighted that research and evaluation activity successfully generated new understandings of what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and why, leading to new conversations regarding EDI, and the development of new ways of working for the benefit of students and graduates.

4 Operation and delivery of the project

The structure and operation of GWB was formulated in response to the aims and requirements of the OfS to include collaboration, development of new and innovative solutions that address issues affecting students, and the need to ensure sustainability through embedding effective practice.

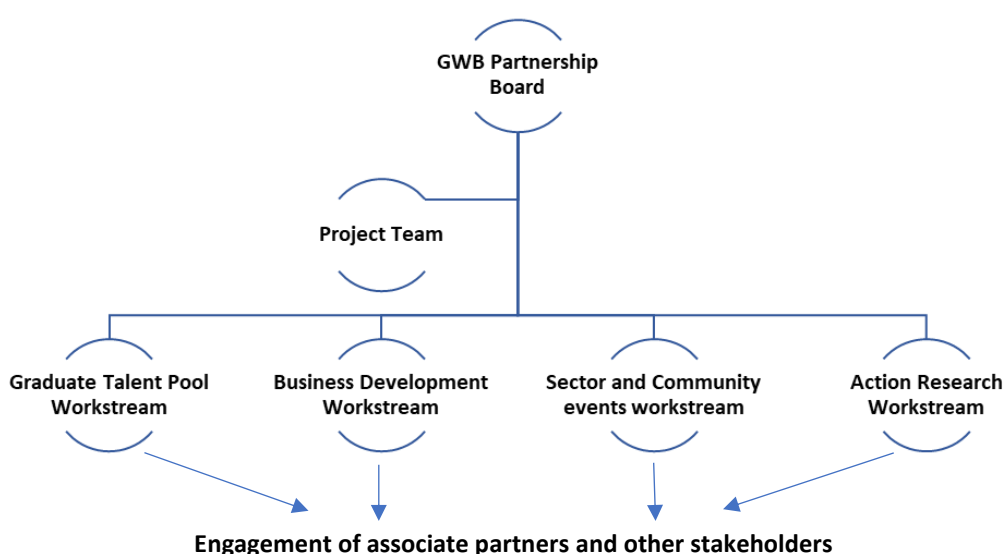
The GWB Partnership, established as a result of the vision and drive shared by the Associate Director Student Services: Careers, Employability and Engagement at the University of Bradford, provided the platform from which GWB was able to deliver these OfS requirements.

In response to the impact of the pandemic, an extension to the project's delivery timeframe was negotiated with the OfS, moving the project's end date from 31 March 2022 to 30 September 2022. This afforded more time for delivery after pandemic restrictions were lifted.

4.1 Project structure and governance

The operational model for GWB was one of devolved delivery across the Partnership. It was set up with a Partnership Board, comprising of the thirteen GWB partner organisations, to provide strategic oversight of the project. The Partnership Board was Chaired by the University of Bradford. Four Workstreams were formed to facilitate the operational delivery of activity, each focusing on a specific project area, as set out in the project bid. GWB was managed by a small central team based in the University of Bradford's CES, whose focus was on project management and research (Fig. 3).

Figure 3: GWB Structure and governance



Due to the pandemic this project structure evolved as partner organisations became focused on their own business responses. Consequently, both Partnership Board and Workstream members were diverted and often unable to attend GWB meetings or engage in activity delivery. The project therefore capitalised on the commitment of project partners to revise its structure, bringing together the strategic and operational elements of delivery into the Project Board. This enabled partners to remain connected with, and input to, project developments and activity.

In addition, the Project Team took a more proactive approach to engagement and delivery. The high level of activity maintained during the pandemic lockdown is demonstrated by the way the Project

Team quickly identified those partners, other local agencies and employers in sectors who were continuing to be proactive across the labour market, for example the NHS, Bradford Council, West Yorkshire Police, and employers in service industries such as supermarkets, in order to develop productive working relationships.

The team initially capitalised on the strong ties it had with project partners in the development of activities, for example bringing together the University of Bradford with Bradford Council through SkillsHouse, the Bradford for Everyone initiative, and the Inclusive Employer Network (see Section 6.2.2 for information regarding the Inclusive Employers Network). They also accrued added value through expanding the project’s reach, drawing in associate partners as a result of conversations across the Partnership and proactive networking on the part of the Associate Director CES, and Project Lead. Here we see the project drawing on the strength of weak ties, with new relationships bringing new ideas and new possibilities, and new ways of thinking (Granovetter 1973). This diversification of the partnership base supported the development of new activity, for example working with local employers, particularly through the Inclusive Employers Network, to development positive action approaches to recruitment. It also strengthened the generation of research insights through engagement with community organisations such as WomenZone and Keighley Association for Women’s and Children’s Centre (KAWACC).

As observed by CRAC, this agile working was made possible by GWB’s light touch structure which enabled it to be flexible in effectively adapting to the changing and unprecedented working environment created by the pandemic. One GWB Board Member commented that this brought about “*collaboration in response to a crisis*” which led to mutual benefit and increased learning (see 4.3 Outputs Targets and Impact Measures below).

4.2 Project Management

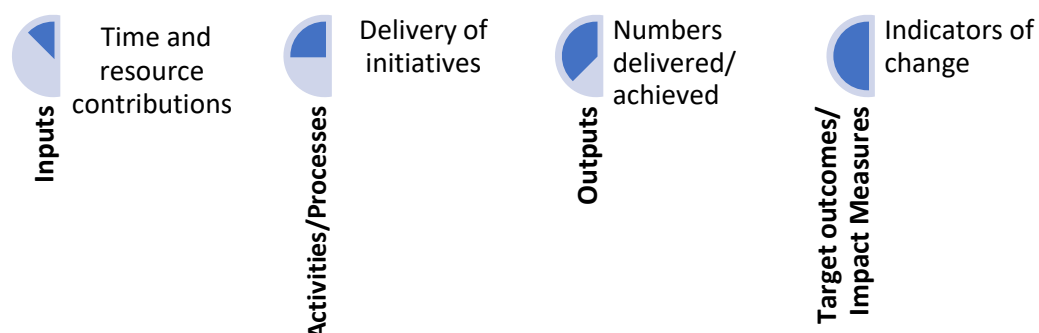
Feedback from stakeholders and the Project Board indicates that the project was well managed and responsive. The Project Team established good relationships at strategic and operational level across GWB partners and were able to expand the GWB network as a result of the proactive approach to engagement.

Board Members reflected that meetings were well run and informative and that this was a result of “*Good staff on the project*” and the project was “*Delivered well, and partners felt supported*”. Interviewees also reflected that the visibility of senior managers on the Board showed commitment across the District to addressing differential outcomes.

4.3 Output Targets and Impact Measures

GWB output targets and impact measures to demonstrate change were set in line with OfS requirements. These were developed to align with the project’s logic model (Fig.4).

Figure 4: Logic model presentation of output targets and impact measures



In setting indicators for change, a benchmarking exercise was undertaken in respect of the proportion of ethnic minority graduates progressing to high skilled employment. This led to (i) numerical delivery targets, for example, numbers of graduates progressing; numbers of events, and (ii) project success criteria in respect of an increase in the proportion of ethnic minority graduates progressing to high skilled jobs. It is understood that GWB was the only project in this OfS funding stream to set such success criteria.

4.4 Data Collection

GDPR agreements were put in place with those partners who were working with students and employers for data sharing purposes. As GWB did not operate a direct delivery model it was reliant on partners, including the University, to provide monitoring data and information.

Whilst significant amounts of data have been willingly shared, it has not always met the monitoring and evaluation needs of the project. Access to data was not streamlined, therefore collecting, collating, and analysing this data was time consuming. The project team worked within these constraints to deliver as robust a quantitative data set as possible.

Whilst improvements have been made, for example the implementation of a new data collection system in the University's CES (Handshake), this is an area for attention in order to ensure effective management and development of activities post GWB.

Operation and delivery of the project

Key conclusions:

- GWB's light touch flexible structure facilitated agile and the flexibility to effectively adapt to the changing and unprecedented working environment created by the pandemic.
- The central proactive approach to engagement ensured that momentum was maintained in difficult circumstances and resulted in an expanded network, bringing ideas for new activities and strengthening research insights.
- Data to support project monitoring and evaluation was not always easy to obtain and was often time consuming to manage and analyse. This is an area for future attention.

5 Performance against Targets and Project Success Criteria

The targets and project success criteria set prior to the pandemic in 2019 were substantial and not without challenge, and although the pandemic affected the operation of GWB, these targets remained largely unchanged. Where small changes did need to be made, for example in the target to develop and distribute employer guides which needed to be reconfigured for new online ways of working, these were successfully negotiated with the OfS.

5.1 Performance against delivery targets

Although the project’s initial structure of Workstream Groups evolved to be incorporated in the Project Board, the workstream approach was maintained for delivery purposes. This ensured that none of GWB’s delivery targets were lost, and that engagement activity was maintained across all stakeholder groups. This was especially important for community stakeholders who could have become invisible through a lack of face to face engagement opportunities. As highlighted by a Board Member, the project “*continued with successful output in spite of the pandemic*”.

Appendix 2, GWB Executive Summary, provides an overview of the range of activities undertaken under each Workstream.

5.1.1 Graduate Talent Pool Workstream

As shown in Table 2, of the seven delivery targets set for this Workstream, the project achieved or exceeded all but two. It should also be noted that number accessing employment may be higher as numbers successfully progressing to West Yorkshire Police were not available at the time of writing.

Table 2: Graduate Talent Pool Workstream delivery against targets

Target	Delivered	% of Target Achieved
60 Unemployed ethnic minority graduates into employment	113 graduates progressed to employment	Exceeded target by 88%
300 coaching sessions delivered	577 ethnic minority graduates accessing coaching 1,599 appointments delivered	Exceeded target by 92% Exceeded target by 433%
100 students and graduates matched with a mentor	234 students and graduates matched with a mentor	Exceeded target by 134%
18 GWB ambassadors/interns recruited	21 ambassadors recruited = (16 ambassadors/2 interns/3 podcast volunteers)	Exceeded target by 17%
9 graduate case studies	9 graduate case studies completed	100% of target
550 students and graduates engaged in sector events	482 students and graduates engaged	88% of target
18 ambassadors achieve HEAR recognition	10 achieved HEAR recognition	56% of target

Of note is the level of engagement with local students and graduates that has been generated through GWB facilitating access to coaching and mentoring to support progression to employment. Although direct correlation is difficult to ascribe, given the level of progression to employment for graduates

through GWB (+88% on target), it is likely that these activities will have contributed positively to this progression. Conversations with the Project Team also indicate that these numbers may be understated as GWB’s network approach has resulted in capacity building for students and graduates and referrals resulting in employment outcomes not recorded by the project.

With regard to the two targets that were not achieved, the impact of the pandemic played a role in the shortfall as a result of changing to online working and the need to find new ways of engagement. Local students and graduates were often distracted by the need to provide family support where Covid-19 effected health, employment, and wellbeing.

For both of these targets activity has significantly picked up since society has opened up once again with an increase in the recruitment of GWB student ambassadors and interns (+17% on target) and greater opportunities to engage with students and graduates on campus. In terms of the HEAR, it was difficult for the first two cohorts of ambassadors to achieve as a lack of face-to-face project delivery impacted on the number of hours available to the students undertaking these roles.

5.1.2 Business Development Workstream

The change in employment and business landscape brought about by the pandemic impacted on GWB’s ability to deliver on all the targets set. It is notable that all except one was achieved or exceeded (Table 3).

Table 3: Business Development Workstream delivery against targets

Target	Delivered	% of Target Achieved
50 employers engaged in sector events	116 employers engaged	Exceeded Target by 132%
6 employer case studies	6 employer case studies in production	100% of Target
2000 Inclusive Employer Toolkits distributed	2021 toolkits distributed	101% of Target
100 employers engaged in workforce planning and graduate recruitment	122 employers directly engaged by GWB	Exceeded Target by 22%
250 employment opportunities secured	302 opportunities secured via GWB employer engagement	Exceeded target by 20%
45 ethnic minority graduates to high skilled employment	Of those, progressing to employment, 77 graduates progressed to high skilled employment	Exceeded Target by 70%
100 new employers engaged in mentoring	19 new employers engaged in mentoring	19% of Target

The achievement of targets in respect of employer events, case studies and distribution of the Inclusive Employers Toolkit was helped by the Project Team having a direct influence over their delivery. All other targets largely fell within the direct purview of employers and the changing fortunes of the labour market during lockdown, and so out of the control of the Project Team. The proactive, targeted approach taken, particularly by the Project Team, ensured a significant number of employment opportunities were secured for direct promotion to University of Bradford graduates (+20%), and the work delivered across the GWB Partnership resulted in at least 77 graduates progressing to high skilled employment (+70% on target). This does not include data from West Yorkshire Police but it is noted that 900 application were received by the Police from Bradford ethnic

minority graduates, 109 of which were for police officers during the lifetime of the project. This improved level of employability has resulted in a rise of 16 employability ranking placed for the University of Bradford in the last year.

In terms of mentoring, (19% of target achieved), it is likely that the pandemic also impacted the number of new employers engaged through GWB. The experience of the Project Team in their efforts to engage employers in mentoring indicates that they would like to be involved in mentoring, but this was not the right time to do so. It was observed that the University’s CES mentoring programme expanded in respect of employer mentor numbers who joined via other routes and noted that more ethnic minority mentors need to be recruited.

5.1.3 Sector and Community Events Workstream

Despite initial difficulties as a result of pandemic lockdowns, all targets under this Workstream were met. This can be directly attributed to both the creativity and proactive approach to engagement of the Project Team.

Table 4: Sector and Community Events Workstream delivery against targets

Target	Delivered	% of Target Achieved
24 community career and employment events	16 community-led events 10 university-led events	Exceeded Target by 8%
120 graduates engaged in community events	262 graduates engaged in community events	Exceeded Target by 118%
400 community members engaged in community events	460 community members engaged	Exceeded Target by 15%
18 sector career and employment events	23 sector careers events and forums	Exceeded Target by 28%

The project’s swift response to online working resulted in the initiation of the South Asian Discussion Forum to engage with community based individuals and organisations. Although not ideal, as there was an awareness of the level of digital poverty across the District, relationships forged through the Forum led to increased face to face engagement as soon as lockdown restrictions were lifted.

The level of engagement achieved is also testament to the willingness of local communities to interact with GWB. Feedback from community organisations indicates they could see the benefit of doing so for young people and their families and also felt able to share their experiences and contribute to co-creating solutions. This was engendered through trust, openness and consistency in communication which nurtured and built productive relationships.

5.1.4 Action Research Workstream

Only one delivery target was set for the Action Research Workstream which was exceeded (Table 5).

Table 5: Action Research Workstream delivery against targets

Target	Delivered	% of Target Achieved
3 dissemination events	12 dissemination events attended	Exceeded Target by 300%

Whilst not specifically target driven, of note here is the significant level of research activity delivered over the project’s three years of operation (see 3.1.1, Table 1). Research findings acted as an enabler in engaging with different groups of stakeholders, and as a tool for networking. For example, GWB was invited to attend local, regional and national events and conferences to share findings, using its research evidence as a platform to both share learning and act as an agent for change. This is discussed in more detail in Section 6.

5.2 Performance against Project Success Criteria

The success criteria identified for GWB were designed to deliver a shift in outcomes for ethnic minority graduates over the lifetime of the project. Table 6 shows performance over each year of the project against the baseline set in 2018/19.

Table 6: Achievement against project success criteria

Project Success Criteria (2019 – 2022)	Project baseline	Year 1 2019/2020 Graduates	Year 2 2020/2021 Graduates	Year 3 2021/2022 Graduates
Reduce unemployment rate of Ethnic Minority female graduates to 5.5% or under	8%	Target: 7% Actual: 5.9%	Target: 6.2% Actual: 9%	Target: 5.4% Actual: 3.9%
Reduce unemployment rate of Ethnic Minority male graduates to 5% or under	7.2%	Target: 6.2% Actual: 4.6%	Target: 5.4% Actual: 7.8%	Target: 4.6% Actual: 6.5%
Reduce under-employment rate of Ethnic Minority female graduates to 12% or under	14.1%	Target: 13.1% Actual: 10.7%	Target: 12% Actual: 16%	Target: 11.6% Actual: 12.9%
Reduce under-employment rate of Ethnic Minority male graduates to 7% or under	8.8%	Target: 7.7% Actual: 10.4%	Target: 7.5% Actual: 24%	Target: 7% Actual: 16.9%

The proportion of all graduates experiencing both unemployment and under-employment grew during Year 2 of the project, as a result of the impact of the pandemic on the labour market. As identified by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2020), the UK economy retracted with significant numbers of workers being made redundant or put onto furlough. At local level Norman and Petrie (2020), highlight that Bradford was severely impacted by this downturn, as this occurred on top of already high levels of pre-pandemic unemployment. In terms of under-employment, pre-Covid evidence indicates that in 2017 16.1% of all those in employment had more education than required for their occupation. Among graduates this proportion increased to 31% (Savic et al 2019). In 2020, as new graduates entered a weakened labour market, the likelihood of them accepting accept job opportunities that did not match their qualification profile increased. Therefore, it is unsurprising that proportions under all the project’s success criteria increased rather than decreased during 2020/21 (Year 2).

Despite continued lockdowns into 2021 and the rise in unemployment rates, Year 3 unemployment saw a fall in levels of unemployment for both female and male ethnic minority graduates to below the

project's baseline in 2018/19, from 8% and 7.2% to 3.9% and 6.5% respectively, with the % for female graduates falling 1.5% below the set target.

In terms of under-employment, again for female ethnic minority graduates this level fell to below the baseline. However, for male ethnic minority graduates, although their level of under-employment fell by 7.1% from Year 2, the proportion had almost doubled on the original baseline of 8.8% to 16.9%.

Whilst direct cause and effect between these outcomes and GWB activity is difficult to ascribe, given the level of engagement across all stakeholders it is reasonable to postulate that GWB has had an influence. The level of under-employment for ethnic minority male graduates is anomalous and it is unclear as to why this has increased. It could be that the pandemic had a particular impact on this group of graduates. This will need monitoring over time and, if this trend persists, further research inquiry.

Performance against Targets and Project Success Criteria

Key conclusions:

- A proactive approach has assured a high level of performance against challenging targets and Project Success Criteria and in the face of unprecedented pandemic circumstances, with most targets being achieved.
- Embedding community engagement principles enabled the Project Team to engage effectively with local communities and extend the reach of the project's network.
- Research evidence has been a tool for engagement, not only in respect of enabling project delivery and meeting targets, but also in a wider context, influencing practice and enabling EDI conversations.
- Whilst cause and effect between project outcomes and GWB activity cannot be directly ascribed, given the level of engagement across all stakeholders, and the project's success against targets, particularly in relation of progression of graduates to high skilled employment, it is reasonable to postulate that GWB has had an influence in enabling graduates to progress to a positive employment outcome.
- The level of under-employment for ethnic minority male graduates is anomalous and it is unclear as to why this has increased, rather than decreased as for all other groups. This will need monitoring over time and further research inquiry if this trend persists.

6 Testing Project Theories and Developing New Models of Practice

Developing an understanding of the influence of place and culture on the career decision making of Bradford's ethnic minority students and graduates formed a thread across all GWB activity. It was the aim of GWB's research strand and embedded in the project's theory of change set out in its Evaluation Strategy.

Research findings were linked to the demonstration of GWB's theory of change. New knowledge generated through the BARCaP both informed the development of activities and served to demonstrate the validity of project theories. This facilitated the development of an understanding of how different groups of stakeholders see and experience the world in relation to the labour market and employment and how this impacts on the development of their identity (Jenkins, 2004). These insights have facilitated awareness and appreciation of how support and services can be better formulated and delivered to different groups of people.

In understanding how and why GWB has been effective, and how the project has delivered against its theory of change, an overview of research findings is considered below.

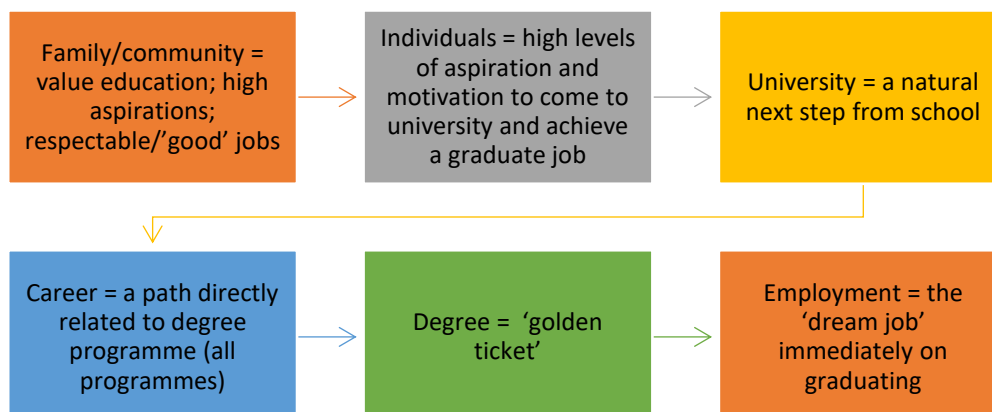
6.1 Understanding the influence of place and culture

Research was undertaken across all stakeholder groups, including students, graduates, employers and local communities, with the largest body of evidence generated related to students and graduates. Due to the high South Asian demographic of Bradford and its students, findings are particularly relevant in this community context. Research activities were initially informed by anecdotal evidence and led by the GWB's project theories. Emergent findings were further tested across the programme of research, providing a robust project evidence base.

6.1.1 Ethnic Minority students and graduates

i) Aspirations in education and career

The aspirations of students and graduates is high, reflecting the value placed by family and community on the respectability that education and a good career bring. Progression to university is a taken for granted milestone and it is often assumed that employment will be both related to degree discipline and the degree itself is the golden ticket to the 'dream job'. This image of a successful graduate is often influenced by discourse in the media, through government and funding bodies and in school. It was found that social media was a critical communication tool and source of information.



As the research progressed students became more aware of the potential positive benefits of an apprenticeship or degree apprenticeship route, they generally looked down on them, regarding part-time working as a better opportunity to gain some financial independence and experience.

Students and graduates regard financial stability as important and so a 'good' job not only provides opportunities for progression and personal development, but it also allows them to contribute to supporting their family. This is an important factor in the drive to find local employment. Research findings also indicate that personal interests are becoming a greater factor in career choice.

Research highlighted a lack of awareness of what the labour market has to offer, not only in students and graduates, but also their families and within the community. Career paths are often directed to 'traditional' vocational professions, such as doctor, optician, or dentist. There is therefore a limited knowledge as to what is possible.

"[Parents] don't show you that there's so many more routes you can take" (Student Podcast Participant)

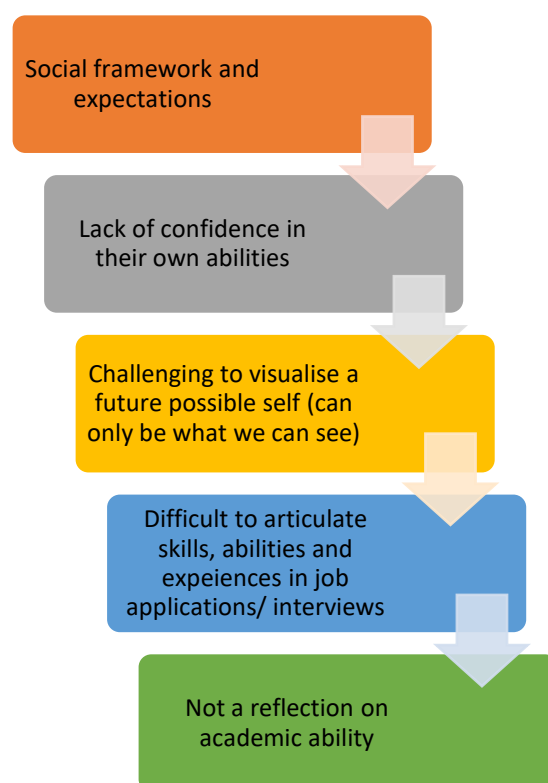
This is exacerbated by a lack of role models in 'non-traditional' professions. As many students and graduates stated, *"we can't be what we can't see"* outside their sphere of experience. Feedback from student and graduate discussions indicates that their choices are limited by a lack of geographical awareness of the District. Many regard Bradford as being small, *"it's quite small"*; *"everyone knows each other"*, and do not take account of outlying areas, e.g. Shipley and Bingley, Keighley, where potential local employment opportunities may exist.

ii) **Confidence in who I am: identity and belonging**

Research findings demonstrate that both place and culture are significant influencers in the shaping of the way ethnic minority graduates from Bradford approach their career trajectory. This relates directly to how they see themselves, where and how they belong and how they relate to society at large (Jenkins, 2014).

Research findings indicated that young people from a South Asian background are used to being directed within a social framework and sets of expectation related to social and life milestone. These include going to university, achieving a 'good' job, getting married, providing for the family as a whole. Students and graduates also noted generational differences regarding career advice.

Many of Bradford's graduates are from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and have little life experience outside their own community. They do not have access to networking opportunities or situations where they can develop 'bridging capital' that enables them to develop relationships across different social groups. They often do not recognise their talent and skills, nor do they acknowledge the value of their own cultural capital. For example, one focus group participant had extensive experience with a predominantly white voluntary organisation but did not acknowledge the significant transferable skills she had gained through this work.



6.1.2 Employers and access to employment

Appetite for more diverse workforce and inclusive workplace but unsure of how to do this

Lack of understanding of who our graduates are and what they offer

Willingness to try new approaches

Importance of making the workplace a safe, inclusive space

Research with employers indicates that whilst diversity is a high business priority, many struggle to recruit a diverse workforce locally. Employers reported that where they have achieved some diversity, ethnic minority employees at their workplace are generally not local to Bradford. Employers also report that the difficulties they have in retaining ethnic minority employees is a source of concern.

Employers participating in focus group activities indicated that they were aware they needed to review their recruitment and retention practices, recognising that new approaches were needed. One reflected that a CV could be regarded as a “*form of systemic conformity*” (Focus Group Employer) and that assessment centres can unintentionally perpetuate negative stereotypes. This finding aligned with graduate’s experiences in finding recruitment processes a barrier to access to employment, particularly at assessment centre and interview stage.

Employers also identified that they do not have well developed cultural intelligence and understanding with regard to local communities, citing the impact of unconscious bias. Research findings indicated that whilst they want to avoid performativity or tokenism in their inclusion work, they feel under pressure not to make mistakes, and do not know where to start.

6.1.3 Community and family

GWB research has generated new understandings of community and family influence, particularly the over-riding motivation for their young people to do well. The strong connection that students and graduates have with their families and community is influential, particularly in terms of an appropriate employment sector, or what constitutes a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ job. This is often tinged with “*comparison culture*” (Student Focus Group Participant) and a drive to emulate or outdo relatives or other community members and the need to fulfil expected social milestones.

This is often overlaid with a lack of opportunity to gain a broader knowledge of careers. Research evidence indicates an intersection between careers knowledge and socio-economic circumstances.



6.1.4 Systemic and societal factors

The GWB Partnership’s proposal for funding to OfS recognised that systemic and societal factors impacted on progress to employment for ethnic minority graduates. Research has illuminated these factors in Bradford’s local context.

Socio-economic circumstances, coming from a working-class background, is likely to impact on ethnic minority communities' knowledge base around careers. Ethnic minority graduates are disadvantaged by their lack of familiarity with professional spaces or professional role models which would enable them to develop 'bridging capital'.

Focus group and interview participants reflected that they felt they were not good enough for many of the graduate jobs on offer, not least as they could not see anyone who looked like them undertaking the role. This lack of confidence, coupled with pressure to secure a high skilled graduate role, observed in the media, university, community, and social policy constructs, to get a 'graduate'/'high skilled' job, resulted in graduates not looking at or not being directed to roles that could be regarded as 'stepping-stone' roles as a route to build experience, confidence, and social capital. This did however shift during the pandemic with graduates accessing medium skilled, Covid response related roles.

A lack of confidence was also evident in how students and graduates engaged with support services. Students often reported they felt it was a failure to ask for help, particularly after graduation. It was evident that building consistent trusting relationships with an individual adviser was more effective than a more impersonal approach to providing support.

Socio-economic background = community knowledge base

Understanding how the 'right' sort of social capital is developed

Lack of role models = Is this me? 'I'm not good enough'

Under-valuing of 'stepping-stone' jobs as a route to build confidence and social capital

Lack of confidence = need to develop trusting relationships with those providing support

Normative concepts of a 'job ready' graduate = the 'right sort of social capital'

Fear of racism and fitting into the workplace = How do I fit? Do I fit?

Staying local/ impact of social context often translates into negative discourse = 'lazy'; 'unmotivated'; 'unrealistic'

Expectation that graduates will broaden their horizons and step outside comfort zone to be successful

Pressure to get a graduate job on graduation = graduates in graduate level jobs are happy, socially mobile and 'successful'

These findings aligned with employers' perception of what a 'job ready' graduate looks like. Findings from employer workshops indicate this perception often translates as having normative social capital rather than skills. For students and graduates, their lack of "*the right sort of social capital*" (Graduate Focus Group Participant) lets them down, particularly at interview stage.

The desire to stay local was often presented negatively in discourse about graduates' ambitions, reflecting a lack of understanding of students and graduates' motivations. It was reported by some careers professionals that they had heard local ethnic minority students and graduates described in derogatory terms in respect of their ambitions and motivations in both university and employer conversations.

Students and graduates, as well as their families and community were fearful of racism, often stemming from personal experience.

"At the end of the day, no matter where you're gonna go, there's always going to be racism" (Student Podcast Participant)

Reflecting fears of racism, students and graduates indicated they would not include multi-lingual skills on a CV as they felt it would disadvantage them. Many students and graduates expressed the feeling that they would not fit in. Stepping into a predominantly white employer as your first employment experience in these circumstances is a daunting thing to do. This is often not accounted for when graduates are encouraged to step outside their comfort zone. Those who do, reported that they did so through the attributes of perseverance and resilience but often did not include these on a CV or reflect on them in an interview situation.

6.1.5 The influence of place and culture on career decision making

Research evidence confirmed the importance of context, both geographically and culturally, and the significance of place for Bradford's graduates.

Whilst students and graduates report they feel able to make autonomous decisions about their careers and have a broader purview of employment opportunities, ethnic minority students from Bradford generally still give priority to the close connection they have with family and community. They take account of their expected social milestones and despite negative discourse about choosing to stay local, for example, the need to move to get the right job and to broaden horizons, they regard staying local as a positive choice. Remaining in Bradford for study and work provides social, emotional, and financial support in a safe space. It affords students, graduates, and their families a sense of security and belonging. This is understandable in a world in which ethnic minority communities often feel that they do not fit in to normative social expectations.

Strong connection with family and community does influence career decision making

Social milestones/expectations are important

Autonomous decision making which takes account of family/community wishes

Staying local regarded as a positive choice = a sense of belonging

That is not to say that many do not step outside their community environment. However, it is important that for those who chose to stay close to home their choice is understood and not devalued.

6.2 Testing Project Theories – New Models of Practice

GWB's project theories were designed to demonstrate the project's theory of change. Rather than defining this in terms of issues and problems, which tend to focus on deficit, for example students and graduates lacking the 'right sort of social capital', the theory of change was built to focus on systems change in terms of delivery of support, and ways of breaking down barriers through engagement.

As a result of linking this approach with research findings and an iterative approach to the development and delivery of activities the project has kickstarted a change in conversations, moving away from a deficit discourse to one that recognises the need for systemic change.

Rasmussen (2016) identified the role of theory in the delivery of an initiative as to underpin the creation of new ideas and new ways of working with research principles. This is demonstrated through GWB. An assessment of changes in discourse and the development of new models of practice as a result of GWB activities are set out below.

Whilst new models of practice can be regarded as effective, gaps were found in data gathering and the evaluation of activities delivered. This was largely outside of the control of the project. As demonstrated by the BARCaP, building in effective methods of review and evaluation at the outset of any activity alongside the collection of robust monitoring data for the development of a robust evidence base, will support further development and result in greater buy in and engagement.

6.2.1 Project theory 1

Enhanced/bespoke, targeted employability activities will increase the capacity of BAME graduates and support successful progress to a positive graduate destination

The majority of activities to test Project Theory 1 were delivered by the University of Bradford and Bradford Council, through SkillsHouse, with an initial partnership activity delivered by the DWP. Activities were developed iteratively in response to emergent research findings, resulting in the embedding of management information to identify a target cohort; a proactive communications approach to engaging students and graduates; and a coaching approach to the delivery of services to graduates who found it difficult to access the labour market. The GWB Partnership facilitated a more joined up approach to supporting students and graduates, for example, through referral between the University's CES and SkillsHouse. **During the first two years of GWB's operation, as a proportion of their representation in the student body more ethnic minority students accessed the University's CES than their white peers, (19.47% and 15.9% respectively),** with an increase of 3.87% for ethnic minority students in year two. There was a similar increase for white students (4.43%) but their rate of access remained lower. This changed in the third year, 2021/22, with equity in access **at 16.5% for all students**, an increase for white but decrease for ethnic minority students. **RATE OF ACCESS**

Despite this drop, the employment outcomes achieved by the project as a result of the targeted and tailored employability activities undertaken across the GWB partnership has demonstrated that new approaches can make a difference to graduates employment outcomes. The BARcAP methodology of test and refine has been central to this, alongside the empowerment of students to engage others through topics and media channels that interest them.

NEW MODELS OF PRACTICE: REACHING OUT

Building a Target Cohort: The DLHE 'Light' survey was modified to include a section for graduate respondents to ask for support in their career planning and job search. This resulted in more than 300 students, who would otherwise have been unlikely to reach out for support, requesting help in their job search and career planning who were contacted and signposted to further support as appropriate. The benefit of this methodology was that it was proactive, overcoming the reluctance of graduates who might be struggling to access the labour market to seek support, enabling them to build a relationship with providers of careers advice and guidance, particularly the University.

Communication for engagement: Feedback from students and graduates through focus groups and discussion consistently indicated a need to review how information about careers and support was communicated. Although traditional methods were still valid, e.g. email, it was clear that social media was a key medium to engage students and graduates in thinking about their careers. The development of a new social media presence for GWB from September 2021, resulted in increased engagement through Instagram (average of 3,173 unique views per post), Podcasts via YouTube (average of 213 views per podcast), Vlogs (average of 263 views per post), a 92% increase in engagement through LinkedIn, and incremental increases through engagement in CES platforms. These approaches have now been mainstreamed into the CES approach shifting the way messages are communicated for greater engagement.

GWB Ambassadors: Recruiting and working with paid student ambassadors was key to the delivery of the new approach to communication. Communication thrived through the ambassadors' peer to peer engagements. It could be argued that initially financial reward was an incentive to participate. However, ambassadors' enthusiasm and commitment generated through being empowered to use their own voices to engage others has resulted in all ambassadors recruited in 2021/22 moving to become volunteer careers ambassadors.

Referral Relationship with SkillsHouse: Partnership working with SkillsHouse highlighted that making graduates aware of specific vacancies and providing application support was more likely to result in a successful outcome than generic services or communications alone. The proactive referral relationship that was established provided for the secondment of a dedicated SkillsHouse Employment Coach as a point of referral and signposting. This practice has now been embedded into the University's CES.

Bradford Graduate Programme: The development of this new programme, delivered by the University, is a good example of how research evidence has influenced the evolution of careers support and guidance. Developed as a result of learning from the DWP Graduate 2 Work programme, it embedded a coaching approach, initially for small cohorts of graduates, evolving to the current, more cost effective model of 1-1 tailored support. 94 participants were supported with 20 (21%) known to have progressed to employment so far.

Bradford Graduate Internships: Whilst this programme of activity already existed as part of the University's careers support offer, it adapted the way it worked with graduates in line with research findings, for example through a coaching approach. The programme benefited from increased numbers of available internships as a result of partnership working, for example through the 'Building Our Future' Community Renewal Fund and new relationships with employers, resulting in a 128% increase in the number of opportunities offered over the lifetime of the project.

"Opportunity to work in an active environment and work in a professional team is extremely valuable" (BGI Participant)

Brad i-COUNT Work Experience: As a result of an internal funding opportunity for projects which supported the University's EDI ambitions, CES successfully bid to deliver a short programme of work placements across Bradford employers for 10 student participants. Participation was incentivised through an end of programme prize based on a peer assessed presentation. Feedback indicated that this was a good vehicle to increase communication and networking skills, with all participants stating they were more confident about their career than when they started the experience. This opportunistic approach to funding has resulted in a programme that will be scaled up for more cost effective future delivery. It has been embedded into CES delivery and also led to a proposal for a bespoke scheme being developed with Enterprise Rent-A-Car for 2023, funded through their charitable foundation.

"If you listen to the support and advice people can give you, and attend sessions like these, you will learn more." (Brad i-COUNT Participant)

6.2.2 Project Theory 2

Increasing employers' awareness of the local ethnic minority graduate talent pool will increase the likelihood of them employing a local ethnic minority graduate

The pandemic made it difficult for GWB to engage employers, particularly during lockdown. What made a difference in difficult circumstances, was the continued proactive outreach undertaken by the Project Team to employers in those sectors who were still recruiting during the pandemic. This included the NHS, West Yorkshire Police, service industry employers such as Morrisons Supermarket and Lloyds Bank, and sector bodies, such as Bradford and Airedale Manufacturing Alliance (BAMA).

This enabled the Team to link with shared agenda and campaigns, e.g. pandemic recovery; local economic development; the Social Mobility Pledge; to show case local graduate talent to an increasing number of employers. A key mechanism in this regard was the Inclusive Employers Network. Working with Bradford 4 Everyone, GWB supported the development and operation of the Network which enabled the project to engage directly with employers. This work will be sustained through the University's CES.

Discussions at Inclusive Employers Network and GWB events enabled employers to share their willingness to address diversity in the workplace, to take new approaches to addressing their diversity ambitions and to participate in discussions with students, graduates and communities. Such engagement included a recognition among employers that a lack of diversity in the workplace can be off-putting for potential ethnic minority candidates; that socio-economic background impacts on access to professional networks; and that certain aspects of recruitment processes can present a barrier, including a traditional CV, assessment centres, and the interview itself. Employers also observed that they need to better present themselves to potential candidates and the local community to show their worth as employers.

Evident through the work of the Inclusive Employers Network and Bradford 4 Everyone as well as GWB activities is that this approach has begun a process of breaking down barriers which is now resulting in new and innovative ways of supporting the progression of students and graduates and helping employers to deliver more inclusive workplaces. In the short term this has increased awareness of the local graduate talent pool, and in the medium to longer term it is likely that it will increase local employers' diversity.

NEW MODELS OF PRACTICE: INCREASING DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Inclusive Employers Network: Funded and led by Bradford 4 Everyone, GWB input to Grant Thornton's development of the Inclusive Employers toolkit and its role out and connecting employers with the Network, whose membership now totals 100, with 190 individual organisational representatives. This is an example of effective partnership working and has illuminated to local employers and providers of support the structural barriers ethnic minority graduates face in accessing employment. The Network is being sustained beyond the lifetime of both GWB and Bradford 4 Everyone.

Working with Industry Bodies: The outreach and networking facilitated direct GWB input to the BAMA, with the University now represented on their Steering Group. This resulted in the University's sponsorship and involvement in the 2022 Bradford Manufacturing Weeks and the development of relationships between BAMA and the Faculty of Engineering and Informatics. This will be a relationship that is sustained for the benefit of students, graduates, and local manufacturing industries.

'In Bradford' Events: Round table format events delivered on campus and in the community developed by GWB, brought employers together with students, graduates, and community members. It resulted in the developing of networks and conversations which broke down stereotypes and assumptions about what a graduate 'looks like' on the one hand and what employers have to offer on the other. It is a model which will be replicated by CES as an engagement tool in the future.

Positive Action Initiatives: GWB worked with Morrisons Supermarkets to access positive action summer internships places for Bradford’s ethnic minority students in their 2nd year to a guaranteed fast track to interview for the company’s graduate scheme. This model was rolled out to Lloyds Bank and will be sustained by both companies.

GWB also worked extensively with West Yorkshire Police to support their graduate recruitment to both general and police officer roles. As a result, West Yorkshire Police took a proactive positive action approach in their recruitment practices, providing targeted support for ethnic minority applicants. As a result, West Yorkshire Police reported a sharp increase in applications with 900 received applications from Bradford ethnic minority graduates, 109 of which were for police officers during the lifetime of the project. In addition, a curriculum partnership with the University’s Department of Sociology and Criminology to provide positive action work experience opportunities has been established.

6.2.3 Project Theory 3

Bringing ethnic minority students, graduates, and communities together with local employers will break down barriers to employment

This was initially a challenging area of work for the Project Team, not least due to the pandemic which meant that it was not possible to deliver activities that brought students, graduates, and community members together with employers. However, the project’s ability to find creative solutions resulted in the online South Asian Discussion Forum. Evidence gathered through this engagement indicated that there had been an initial over-estimation of the level of knowledge and motivation within the community regarding the local labour market landscape and what the Bradford District had to offer. It also illuminated the extent of their role as an influencer in their adult children’s career trajectory. It was evident local communities felt comfortable with the career lens that they were looking through so there was no perceived need to find out more or to change fixed ideas about certain employers, for example West Yorkshire Police. This informed face-to-face engagement once lockdown restrictions had been lifted.

The level of community engagement that has been achieved in a short time has been significant, with events to bring communities together with employers taking place on the University’s campus (see ‘In Bradford’ above) and in community settings. These events are a starting point for enabling dialogue and breaking down barriers in the community. They now need to be continued to maintain momentum and ensure that raised community expectations in which their voice is being listened to and heard are not dispelled. The value of what has been achieved so far is best demonstrated by community engagement with West Yorkshire Police and the increased applications from Bradford ethnic minority graduates for police officer roles.

NEW MODELS OF PRACTICE: ENGAGING WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES

South Asian Discussion Forum:

The Forum was delivered online and provided a safe space for people from Bradford’s South Asian communities to share their experiences and thoughts about access to local jobs, opportunities and what would help improve progression for graduates.

Model for Delivering Community Engagement:

Community based face-to-face events were most successful when they were organised in partnership with community organisations/leaders, were directly promoted by community organisations/leaders and ideally were planned to coincide with other regular community events or meetings. It was also found that offering food/refreshments made a significant difference to attendance.

6.2.4 Project Theory 4

Increased understanding of the influence of place and culture on ethnic minority students/graduates career decision making will support the development of employability services and employment practices

As highlighted above, the development of an evidence base through GWB's research approach has provided a platform for developing new shared understandings. This evidence base has confirmed the importance of place and the influence of culture and provided a tool for developing new conversations and enabling partners and stakeholders to apply an equality lens to their practice, for example in the delivery of careers advice and guidance or in terms of recruitment processes.

Through the BARCaP and the project's approach to change, this new understanding has resulted in the development of new/improved ways of working, as well as capacity building among staff helping to change thinking and decolonise practice through a diversity of perspective in relation to the progression of ethnic minority graduates to high skilled employment. We recognise there is still more work to be done in this regard. Work with employers and professional staff across all partner organisations, for example through the Inclusive Employers Network, is continuing to tackle unconscious bias and stereotyping of ethnic minority graduates. The importance of ethnic minority staff as role models was highlighted as important in this regard.

NEW MODELS OF PRACTICE: DRIVING CHANGE

Building an Evidence Base for Change:

GWB has demonstrated the value of embedding an action research cycle approach to creating change. This is demonstrated through the generation of empirical research evidence and a project theory approach to articulating a theory of change.

Professional Discussions: Using GWB's research evidence base, a series of professional discussion sessions were developed and delivered in CES, with a focus on equality and inclusion in professional careers practice. Staff identified that these have supported the development of their practice and enabled them to better apply an equality and inclusion lens to their practice. They provide a sustainable model for staff

6.2.5 Project Theory 5

Development of a learning community through partnership working across the District will lead to new ways of working and embed sustainable change

The discussion above demonstrates the value of the GWB Partnership in delivering the project's aims, outputs and targets. It also demonstrates that through partnership working new understandings can influence the development of more effective and sustainable practice.

As stated by one Board member, "... *the value [of being involved] is the networking and learning from the operational delivery*". Another reported that "*I always come away with insights*".

The influence of GWB's partnership and networked approach has extended beyond the GWB Partnership itself. It has succeeded in facilitating opportunities to access further income streams to provide further opportunities for ethnic minority graduates to progress to high skilled employment, for example the 'Building Our Future' programme, developed and delivered in partnership with Bradford and District Community Action and SkillsHouse offering 18 graduate internships in voluntary sector organisations. In addition, raising the profile of its work and illuminating the barriers faced by

ethnic minority graduates, has enabled a national profile through the Social Mobility Pledge and Purpose Coalition.

Interviews with Board members confirm that GWB has been a learning partnership, demonstrated by the project's success in generating new knowledge and facilitating new ways of working. Many of these are already becoming embedded but as part of creating sustainable change, the cycle of generating new knowledge, testing, and refining needs to be maintained.

Testing Project Theories and Developing New Models of Practice

Key conclusions:

- GWB has generated new models of practice built on research findings and a test and revise approach. These have facilitated greater engagement and supported the progression of a greater proportion of Bradford's ethnic minority graduates into employment over the lifetime of the project
- Research evidence has generated an evidence base which has provide a platform for partnership working through developing their thinking and new ways of working.
- GWB's work, its output and resulting outcomes have demonstrated the validity of its project theories. The project theory methodology has enabled the project to be innovative and test different approaches to addressing differential graduate employment outcomes for local ethnic minority graduates, as well as articulate the project's theory of change.
- Alongside its embedded research approach, a strength of GWB has been its partnership for learning partnership. The project's success in generating new knowledge and facilitating new ways of working has resulted in changes in thinking for sustainable change.

7 Factors for success

As the above analysis indicates, GWB has performed well against its targets and success criteria. Alongside this, added value can be identified that will contribute to medium and longer term sustainability of GWB's legacy. This includes creating an environment for change in terms of making a difference for ethnic minority students and graduates and their progression to higher skilled employment.

A number of factors have enabled these achievements. They are factors that were not necessarily captured in project planning, but which have emerged as a result of GWB's structure, its action research approach, and the proactive, collaborative work approach of the GWB Team. These are summarised below.

7.1 Responsiveness

GWB's ability to respond and adapt, particularly in the face of the pandemic has been central to its success. The pandemic forced the partnership to review and redevelop its plans, adapting to a new online world and finding new and different ways to engage students, graduates, employers, and communities.

This responsiveness can be identified through the project's structure the way it was managed, the way it was set up, and its ability to understand and work with the local context.

7.2 Strength in Research

The embedded research strand of GWB has been critical in its development and has facilitated the generation of new knowledge and empirical evidence which has been informed by and through the BARCaP. The success of the project has been contingent on the use of this research evidence. Its foundation in career theory and theory of identity, and its focus on the lived experience and voices of ethnic minority students, graduates and communities illuminated assumptions, biases and structural or systemic barriers impacting on ethnic minority graduate outcomes.

GWB's research intentionally set out to understand such structural inequality and successfully did so. Although initially unconsciously, GWB's research was underpinned by public engagement principles which took account of inclusion and demographic diversity in research activities and ensured collaboration and shared purpose. The open and transparent operation of GWB engendered trust and resulted in the generation of new empirical knowledge and learning across and beyond the Partnership. Impact can be seen not only through the delivery of research output but also in the number of new models of practice which have been created.

7.3 Connectedness: the network effect

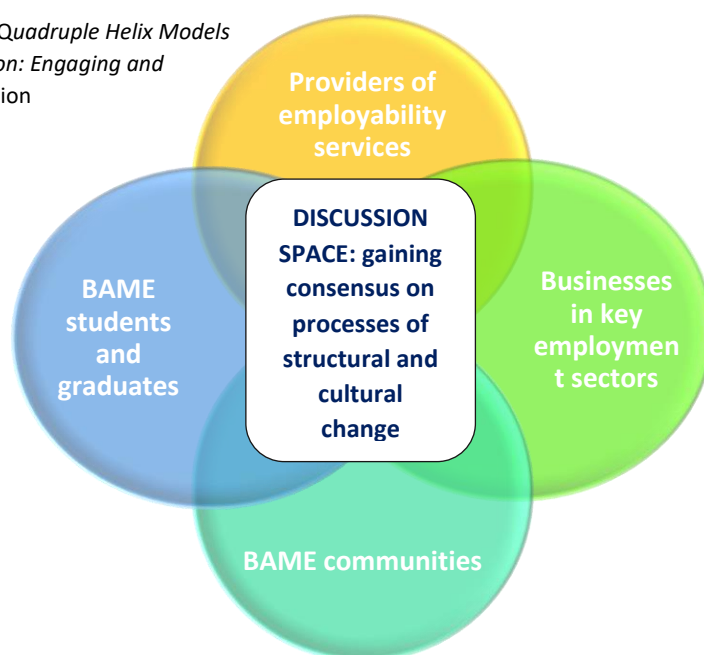
The third factor that has facilitated the effective working of GWB has been the way it has made connections. Expanding its network outside of the strong ties GWB had established through the partnership with key District players, such as the Council, the DWP, Bradford Health and Social Care Economic Partnership, West Yorkshire Policy, Project Trident and QED, to what could initially be regarded as 'weak' ties, for example through WomenZone, KAWACC, Well Bradford, and Bradford and Airedale Manufacturing Alliance, has not only enabled local project delivery, but also raised the profile of GWB's work regionally and nationally, for example through the Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Act as One, Grant Thornton, and the Social Mobility Pledge.

As identified by project partners, GWB is “a great example of engagement well done” (Board Member), and “Rather than going for all the usual suspects ... there were smaller organisations and employers getting involved” (Community Partner).

The impact of bringing all these partners and stakeholders together can be described as a quadruple helix model (Steenkamp, 2019; Roman et al, 2020) (Figure 5), which has ensured diversity of perspective and the opportunity to contribute to a shared purpose, collaborative learning and the co-creation of solutions. This way of working is an effective tool in creating sustainable change.

Figure 5: GWB Quadruple Helix Model of Connectedness

Adapted from Roman et al 2020, *Quadruple Helix Models for Sustainable Regional Innovation: Engaging and Facilitating Civil Society Participation*



7.4 A multi-agency approach

At times the fact that GWB was run through a small project team and did not operate on a direct delivery model was challenging. This meant that it was reliant on its partners to undertake activities. Its base within CES at the University was of significant benefit in this regard providing a presence in a careers advice and guidance environment.

The Project Team’s small size was also to GWB’s advantage. Not only did it mean that it could be agile in coping with the impact of the pandemic, but also activities were part of partners’ delivery from the outset, ensuring a higher likelihood of sustainability.

The benefit of this multi-agency approach can be observed in the provision of support for graduates through partnership, for example between University’s CES, Bradford Council/Bradford 4 Everyone, SkillsHouse, Health and Social Economic Partnership and Bradford and Airedale Manufacturing Alliance, Project trident and QED to respond to the labour market, build proactive relationships with employers and the creation of opportunities for students and graduates to access work experience, internships, and jobs. University partners report that this has resulted in better and broader linkage with employers for the benefit of students and graduates, demonstrated by new curriculum developments.

7.5 Changing conversations

GWB's research findings have facilitated open discussion about equality, diversity and inclusion in employment. The opportunities created for open conversations have enabled some difficult conversations. However, these have undoubtedly increased understanding of the influence of place and culture and the impact of structural inequality. It has changed thinking about who our graduates are, the value of their talents, and what they bring as employees. This has included employers' honesty about their need to develop cultural intelligence in respect of local ethnic minority communities and their needs. There is an emergent recognition on the part of students that they need to learn more about the labour market and recruitment processes and to take action to develop confidence to help them take the next steps after graduation.

Placing lived experiences at the centre of these conversations has enriched discussions and facilitated deeper learning.

Factors for success

Key conclusions:

- GWB has performed well against its target and performance measure outcomes and targets as well as generating added value which will contribute to medium and longer term sustainability of GWB's legacy. This includes creating an environment for change in terms of making a difference for ethnic minority students and graduates and their progression to higher skilled employment.
- Factors which have facilitated this success emerged as the project matured and developed. These include:
 - Responsiveness
 - Strength in research
 - Connectedness: the network effect
 - A multi-agency approach
 - Changing conversations
- New insights into the structural/systemic inequality that impacts on the progression of ethnic minority graduates to high skilled employment, resulting in a greater understanding for:
 - GWB partners: the lived experiences of, and challenges for, ethnic minority graduates and sensitivity to their needs;
 - Graduates: increased knowledge of the labour market and building of confidence in their own cultural capital in an employment context;
 - Employers: increased awareness of the need for cultural sensitivity to develop inclusive workplaces.

8 Final Reflections

8.1 The power of partnerships for change

At the start of the GWB Partnership it could not have been anticipated that of the two year of a three project would be delivered through a global pandemic. In spite of this GWB has delivered a comprehensive package of research and activities across all its stakeholders but has also been successful beyond the delivery of OfS requirements.

- GWB has **achieved its aims, delivered impact** during its project lifetime, and **created a medium to long term legacy** for future work.
- The project has **demonstrated the power of partnership and of networking**. Through its open and transparent approach to delivery, using its evidence base as a platform, it has built trusted relationships and generated opportunities which are bringing benefit to only to students and graduates, but also to employers, communities, and the local economy.
- These **relationships have created a momentum** in the drive to address differential graduate employment outcomes for ethnic minority graduates. In turn this is impacting on some of the structural inequalities experienced by ethnic minority communities, for example changing perceptions of different employment sectors and raising awareness of labour market opportunities.
- GWB has been **a catalyst for sustainable change**. Not only has it generated new models of practice, but it has also created a shift in thinking and behaviour. This is observed through the increased engagement of students, new collaborations with employers which are beginning to take account of structural disadvantage impacting on people from an ethnic minority background, and meaningful engagement with local communities.
- Most importantly, **GWB has been instrumental in changing conversations**, enabling its partners to better apply an equality lens to the work they are doing across the district in terms of supporting students and graduate to successfully progress to high skilled jobs and in employment practice, which, both of which will, of course, impact on economic growth.
- GWB has been both **a disrupter to the status quo, and an enabler for structural change**. However, although a great deal has been achieved, this is only the beginning.

8.2 Moving forward

As well as capitalising on the network, GWB has created and the new models of practice that have been developed, to consolidate and sustain GWB's legacy it is suggested that the following areas of work will maintain momentum:

- Listen to and understand where students and graduates are in relation to their career, taking account of their context, enabling them to progress at a pace which suits them, and to visualise a future possible self.

- Address gaps or ease of access to good data, ensuring that monitoring and evaluation are embedded from the outset of the delivery of activity and initiatives. Whilst this is not easy for all partners, the BARCaP framework can provide a creative tool in this regard.
- Enhance the careers offer around supporting students and graduates to develop skills to access jobs using a personalised approach, e.g. self-awareness, opportunity awareness, career planning, applications and interview preparation.
- Mainstream new ways of engaging with students and graduates, as well as employers and community stakeholders, making connections between employers and local graduates.
- Continue to engage in a meaningful way with local communities and ensure that raised expectations are met, maintaining principles of public engagement.
- Using employer networking, build further partnerships with academic programmes of study, to deliver ‘real world’ work experiences which demonstrate employment possibilities, such as that developed with West Yorkshire Police.
- Maintain the momentum in changing conversations, moving away from deficit a discourse to one that takes account of the systemic and structural disadvantage they face.

Taking account of context has been important for GWB; a project’s success is dependent on the needs and characteristics of its community (Community Tool Box, 1995). Although best models of practice need to be adapted to local conditions and cultures to make them work well, the lessons learnt from GWB will provide transferable learning for other initiatives which seek improve outcomes for ethnic minority students and graduates.

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 The Centre for Inclusion and Diversity
 October 2022

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Appendix 1: GWB Project Partners

Bradford 4 Everyone, Bradford Council

Bradford Council Employment and Skills Service (SkillsHouse)

Department for Work and Pensions

Education Development Trust

Health and Social Care Economic Partnership

Khidmat Centre

Opportunity Area

QED

Trident

University of Bradford Careers and Employability Service

University of Bradford Students Union (UBU)

West and North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce

West Yorkshire Police