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## Executive summary

In December 2019, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) was commissioned to undertake a rapid evidence review focused on the recruitment of workers into low-paid occupations and industries. The purpose of the review was to find out whether people with protected characteristics, that is, 'protected groups', experience discrimination in the recruitment process, and the barriers they encounter when seeking to enter the workplace. The review covers evidence from England, Scotland and Wales, making a distinction between that which is Great Britain / UK-wide and that which is country-specific.

Overall, the findings of this review show that the availability of evidence on the recruitment practices of UK employers is good. Insight into the recruitment practices of specific sub-sectors and occupations is also good, although it often relies on non-representative survey and / or small-scale qualitative research.

The availability of evidence on the experiences of protected groups is variable and is focused mainly on age and race (particularly nationality). There are, however, significant evidence gaps in regard to gender identity, marriage and civil partnership, sexual orientation and religion or belief.

Of the available evidence that focuses on the experiences of protected groups, the vast majority is non-representative survey and / or small-scale qualitative research. Much is also indirect, relying on the expressed opinions of self-selected employees, employers, agencies and / or welfare support workers. It is therefore likely that the evidence presented in this review does not capture the true extent of recruitment discrimination.

This review also identifies a significant reliance on informal recruitment methods across the UK labour market, with word of mouth being the most commonly used recruitment method. The use of online recruitment methods, including social media, has increased in recent years, while the use of recruitment agencies has decreased, often due to issues around cost.

The review suggests that informal recruitment methods and word of mouth can result in discrimination. This is often because they disadvantage people with smaller social and / or work networks, and entrench existing workforce demographics resulting in labour market marginalisation, particularly for migrant and ethnic minority groups. Evidence relating to migrant workers is particularly pertinent, suggesting that while closed social networks may support migrants to find low-paid jobs in the short-term, opportunities for longer-term social and economic integration may be limited. The findings of this review also suggest that discrimination can occur via online recruitment methods. This is mainly due to issues around accessibility, particularly for older and disabled people, as well as employers' use of social media in potentially discriminatory ways.

The findings of this review also identify evidence of discriminatory behaviour by recruitment agencies on the basis of age, disability, nationality and pregnancy. This includes evidence of agencies facilitating employers' requests only to shortlist certain applicants for interview. There is evidence of unconscious bias, such as focusing on softer skills in interviews and making assumptions by filtering out applications on the basis of physical capability and mobility. There is also evidence of direct discrimination during applicant shortlisting, with correspondence studies identifying unequal outcomes on the basis of age, disability, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation, as well as for women during pregnancy, maternity and when returning to work after time out for caring.

Overall, the findings of this review identify substantial opportunities for employers, recruitment agencies, the Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission to work collaboratively to address recruitment discrimination. This includes:

- Further exploration of high-risk, under-researched groups. This is particularly important for groups whose experiences may go largely unnoticed in broader discrimination research, such as: ethnic minority women, disabled women or other intersectional groups; Gypsies and Travellers; Muslims; Pakistanis and Bangladeshis; single parents; and intersex, transgender and / or non-binary jobseekers.
- Conducting an inquiry into online recruitment methods including employers' use of social media.
- Conducting further research and / or an inquiry into the practices of recruitment agencies to address widespread claims of discrimination, as well as into the practices of the largest employers.

- Exploring the feasibility of alternatives to word of mouth recruitment to avoid the entrenchment of workforce demographics and socio-economic segregation, to address labour market marginalisation. This is particularly important for sectors such as hospitality and food manufacturing that currently rely on migrant social networks for recruitment.
- Increasing enforcement activity against discriminatory job advertising and inappropriate interview questioning on health, and encouraging the Government to consult on implementing a ban on questions relating to pregnancy and family status at interview.



# 1 Introduction

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), established under the Equality Act 2006, is an independent statutory body that works to encourage equality and diversity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, and protect and promote human rights across England, Scotland and Wales.

Ensuring that people have equal access to the labour market and are treated fairly at work is one of the EHRC's priority aims, as set out in its 2019-22 Strategic Plan. This is in recognition that there is still significant inequality in the UK labour market, and that people with protected characteristics, that is, 'protected groups', still face barriers in accessing the workplace (EHRC, 2019). Its past research has also found that part-time and flexible working are important ways of enabling many people to enter and remain in the labour market (Hegewisch, 2009). However, part-time employment tends only to be available in low-paid jobs where women, ethnic minorities and disabled people are over-represented. Flexible working is key to ensuring that certain protected groups such as pregnant women, new parents, disabled people and older people stay in employment (EHRC, 2017).

In December 2019, the EHRC commissioned the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) to undertake a rapid evidence review focused on recruitment practices in low-paid occupations and industries. The purpose of this review was to find out whether protected groups experience discrimination in the recruitment process, and the barriers they encounter when seeking to enter the workplace.

Chapter 2 describes the methodology. Chapter 3 synthesises evidence on the main recruitment methods used (for all positions not just low paid ones) by employers across England, Scotland and Wales. Chapter 4 focuses on specific occupations and industries, providing insight into recruitment practices within cleaning, construction, food manufacturing, hospitality, social care and retail. Chapter 5 synthesises evidence related to different protected groups, outlining the discrimination and barriers they experience across low-paid occupations and industries. Chapter 6 outlines the main conclusions of the review.

## 2 Methodology

This research was undertaken using a rapid evidence review research design. This consisted of two stages: a scoping stage to identify systematically the nature, availability and range of evidence, and a critical evaluation and synthesis stage, to assess the quality of evidence for inclusion in the review.

Literature searches were undertaken using a pre-determined protocol. Searches focused mainly on evidence published since 2012. This was partly to keep the review concise, but also to ensure that the findings were representative of the recent economic and employment climate. As discussed by Keep and James (2010), focusing only on recent evidence in the field of recruitment and selection poses a significant risk of overlooking important historical information and trends over time. This timeframe was therefore enforced flexibly to ensure the inclusion of key texts. The review focused on peer-reviewed academic journal articles. This was supplemented by the manual searching of key organisations' websites to identify grey literature, and the manual review of bibliographies of publications identified to be relevant.

The review covers evidence from England, Scotland and Wales, making a distinction between that which is Great Britain / UK-wide and that which is country-specific. It also covers specific regions, where possible. The review was limited to evidence available in the English language only, or evidence with English summaries readily available. As discussed by Hasluck (2011), there is a strong tendency for disciplinary compartmentalisation within the study of recruitment and selection. Our review therefore made a deliberate attempt to scope a wide range of databases and search engines to ensure as full coverage as possible. The full methodology is provided in Appendix 1.

For this review, 'low pay' was defined on the basis of two-thirds of median hourly earnings, as used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2019a). To aid with literature scoping, this review also focused on occupations and industries often described as 'low-skilled', as defined using the ONS 2010 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC 2010) (ONS, 2020a). This was to make sure relevant studies that used alternative definitions were included, and to reflect the often unspecified and interchangeable way 'low pay' and 'low-skilled' are used within the literature. Crucially, both these definitions were used to assess the relevance of evidence, as opposed to providing a strict basis for scoping. A full list of relevant occupations is provided in Appendix 2.

This review sought to cover all protected characteristics as identified by the Equality Act 2010. This includes age, disability, gender reassignment,<sup>1</sup> marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. This review also sought to cover evidence that explores intersecting identities and multiple disadvantage, where possible.

As this review will identify, the quantity and quality of evidence on the recruitment of workers into low-paid occupations and industries is variable; it is concentrated on certain recruitment methods, industries, regions and protected groups. As a result, lower-quality thresholds for inclusion in the review have been used in areas of limited evidence.

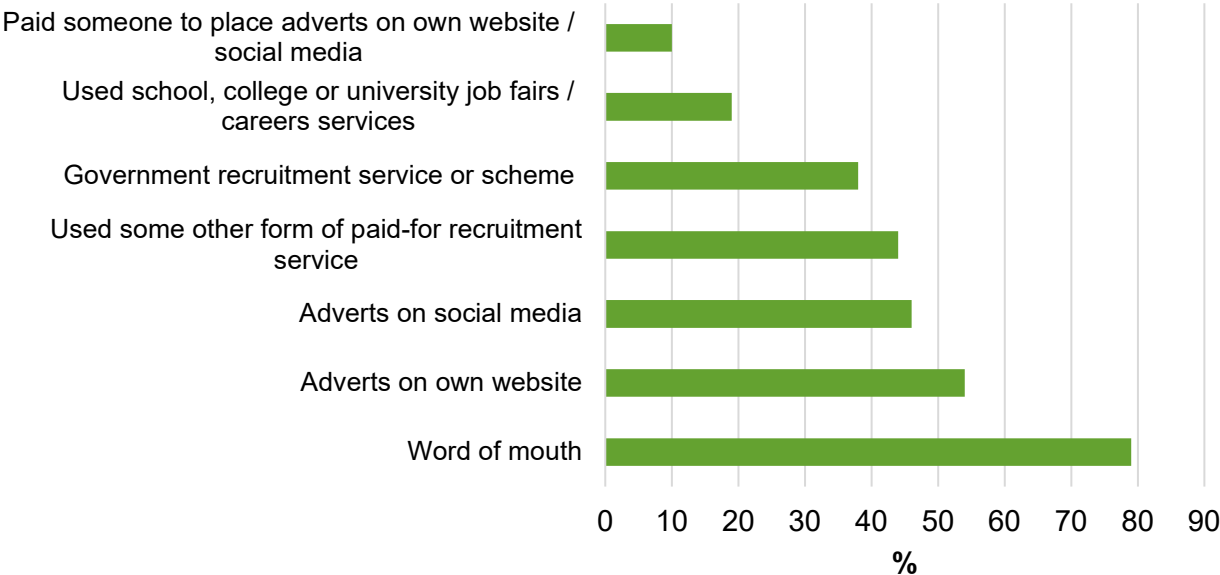
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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this review the term ‘gender identity’ was used during the literature scoping. This was to reflect more recent terminology used within the evidence base, and to ensure inclusivity of non-binary gender identities.

# 3 Trends in employer recruitment practices

The most recent Employer Perspectives Survey (EPS), conducted between May and August 2016, provides detailed insight into the recruitment practices of over 18,000 employers in the UK (Shury et al., 2017). This covers all recruitment methods, not just those that apply to low-paid jobs. Findings from this survey show that employers more commonly use internal resources when recruiting staff, with the most common practices being word of mouth or personal recommendations (79%), placing adverts on internal websites (54%) and the use of social media (46%) (Figure 3.1). Of the external approaches used, paid-for recruitment services (44%) were most common. This includes a range of recruitment channels, of which recruitment agencies (18%), recruitment websites (16%) and use of the local press (14%) were the most frequent.

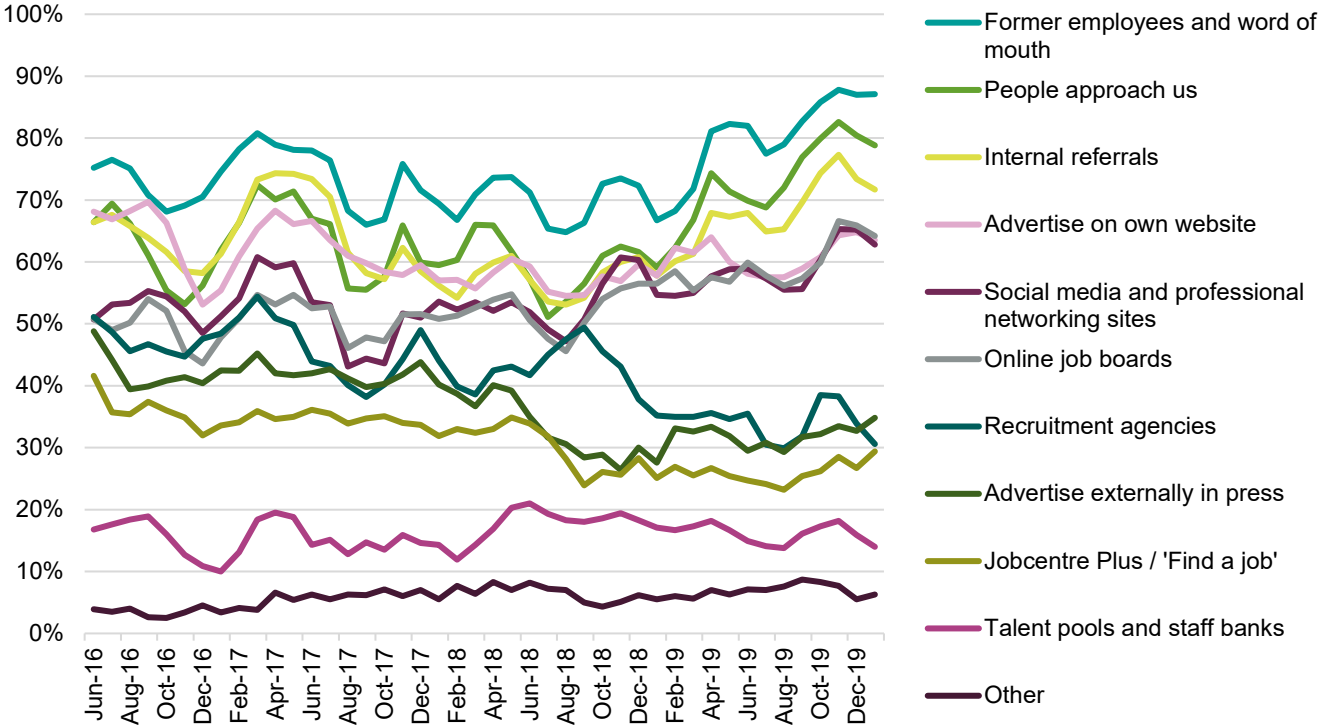
**Figure 3.1 Recruitment methods used in the last 12 months**



Base: 12,151 recruiting employers across all UK sectors.  
Source: Employer Perspectives Survey 2016.

Due to changes in the collection of data on recruitment methods, time series comparisons are not possible using EPS data. However, time series data provided by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC) gives some insight into UK businesses' recruitment practices over time. Based on a rolling monthly survey of 200 UK employers across sectors, Figure 3.2 shows word of mouth and personal referral-type recruitment have consistently been the most commonly used recruitment methods. Figure 3.2 also shows overall increases in the use of online recruitment methods, including websites and social media, as well as a decline in the use of private and public recruitment agencies and the advertising of vacancies in the press.

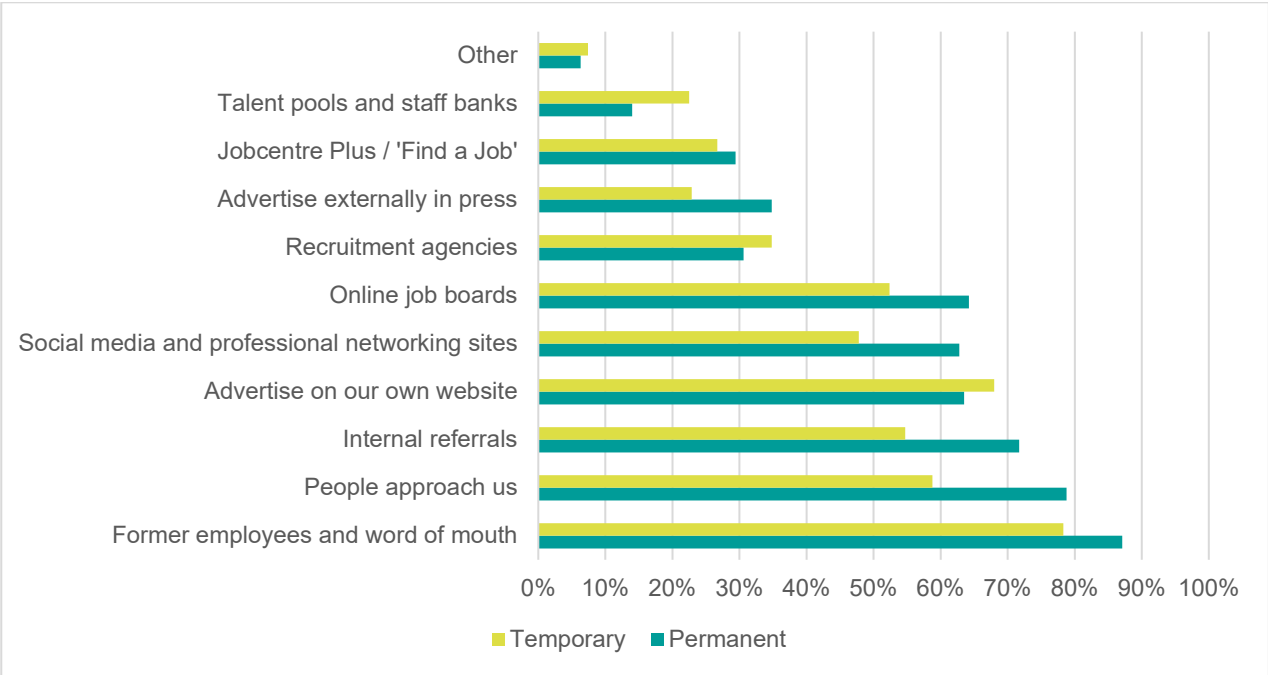
**Figure 3.2 Recruitment methods used for permanent staff (2016–2019)**



Base: Rolling monthly survey of 200 UK employers across sectors.  
 Source: JobsOutlook survey, REC.

Figure 3.3 draws on the same REC data to provide a comparison of recruitment methods for permanent and temporary staff. Overall this data shows consistency in the methods commonly used. Key differences, however, include permanent staff being more likely to be sourced from personal networks, and temporary staff more likely to be recruited via adverts on companies' own websites.

**Figure 3.3 Recruitment methods used for permanent and temporary staff (January 2020)**



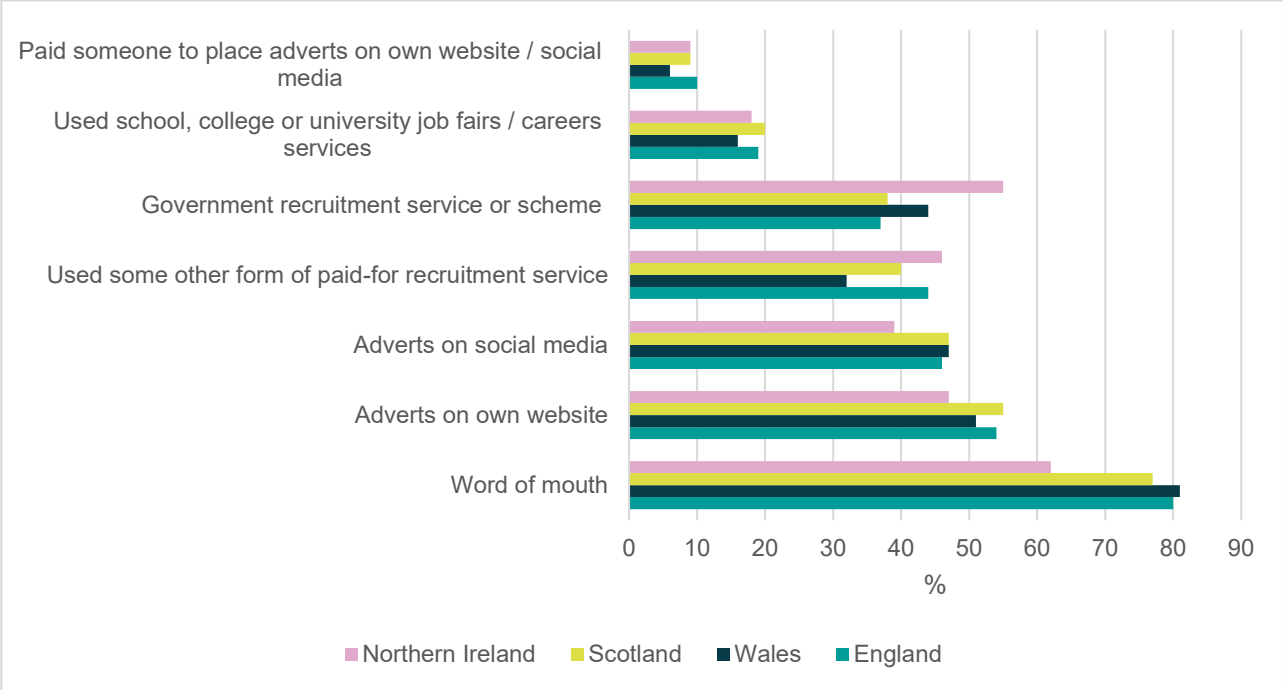
Base: Rolling monthly survey of 200 UK employers across sectors.  
 Source: JobsOutlook survey, REC.

As shown by Figure 3.4, ESP 2016 data demonstrates that approaches to recruitment are largely consistent across England, Scotland and Wales, with the most common methods being word of mouth (ranging from 77% to 80%), use of company websites (ranging from 51% to 55%) and social media (46% to 47%) (Shury et al., 2017). The approach to recruitment in Northern Ireland, on the other hand, differs considerably, with more employers using government recruitment services (55%) than their own website (47%) or social media (39%) (Shury et al., 2017).

More recent time series data is available for Scotland via the 2019 Scottish Employer Perspectives Survey (Kik et al., 2019a). Based on a telephone survey of 2,652 employers across different sectors in Scotland, this research shows that while word of mouth remains the most commonly used recruitment method (78%), use of social media has grown (from 50% in 2016 to 59% in 2019), and has become more commonly used than employers advertising on their own websites. Use of government recruitment services or schemes decreased in Scotland from 38% in 2016 to 26% in 2019 (Kik et al., 2019a).

Some research (not all of which focuses specifically on low-paid jobs) explores the implications of preferential treatment given to friends, family and business acquaintances, and how this may exclude those already disadvantaged in the labour market (McCabe et al., 2013). As discussed by Sumption (2009), widespread reliance on social networks in the labour market can lead to social stratification by limiting an individual’s opportunities to those that only peers can provide. There are therefore concerns that unemployed jobseekers are disproportionately disadvantaged through the limitations of their social networks, which are often socioeconomically and geographically biased towards those with similar experiences (Hasluck, 2011; Green et al., 2012). Related to this, Culliney (2013) also explores how a lack of variety in rural employment, the relative absence of big business in rural areas and the nepotistic recruitment practices of small firms all disadvantage those without access to the crucial networks.

**Figure 3.4 Recruitment methods used in the last 12 months, by country**



Base: 12,151 recruiting employers across all UK sectors.  
 Source: Employer Perspectives Survey 2016.

As shown in Figure 3.5, EPS 2016 data shows that the likelihood of using any recruitment approach increases with business size (Shury et al., 2017).





Wider evidence suggests that the internet and social media has led to greater use of online recruitment methods among UK employers. Due to changes in data collection within EPS surveys it is not possible to track the exact growth in online recruitment methods over time, with the exception of ESP 2012 to 2014 which shows an increase in own website use (17 to 21%), free recruitment websites (9% to 11%), paid-for recruitment websites (7% to 9%) and social media (3% to 7%) (Shury et al., 2011; 2012; 2014; 2017).

Robust evidence on the use of online recruitment methods is sparse, with most evidence coming from non-representative surveys or case study research. The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) (2013), for example, through an online survey of 590 of its members, identified that 54% use social media to inform recruitment decisions. Similarly, Broughton et al. (2013), through an online survey of 401 HR decision makers carried out by Acas, identified that 47% of respondents made either 'extensive' or 'some' use of social media when recruiting staff, most commonly via LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. Parry and Tyson (2008) provides one of the few longitudinal studies on internet recruitment, showing an overall increase in use, resulting in a third of organisations advertising vacancies on corporate websites and a quarter on commercial websites by 2006.<sup>2</sup>

Case study research undertaken by Broughton et al. (2013)<sup>3</sup> suggests a greater use and reliance on the internet at initial recruitment stages, often through either generalist or industry-specific recruitment websites. This is a finding reinforced by Pollard et al. (2015) which, through qualitative research with 76 graduate employers across a range of sectors, found greater use and reliance on the internet to advertise vacancies and manage applications. Case study research, focused on low-skilled roles in construction, hospitality, social care and retail in the West Midlands,<sup>4</sup> also found evidence of increased use of company websites and commercial internet job boards in the recruitment process, particularly among larger hospitality and retail organisations (Green et al., 2013; 2014).

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<sup>2</sup> This involved a six-year longitudinal study quarterly survey of HR managers (1996–2006). It had an average yearly sample size of 935 organisations: 32% were manufacturing private sector organisations, 63% were from the service sector, and 5% did not classify themselves as either.

<sup>3</sup> Pets at Home, G4S and Monmouthshire County Council.

<sup>4</sup> Based on research with 34 employers, 10 recruitment agencies and 33 workers.

Overall, the evidence suggests that use of online recruitment methods varies significantly by sector and occupation, commonly supplementing offline practices rather than replacing them. This is a finding reinforced by Broughton et al., (2016) which, through survey research with 1,200 employers and 100 recruitment agencies, found workplaces most commonly advertising vacancies via external recruitment websites (44%), their own company website (35%) and through word of mouth (34%).<sup>5</sup>

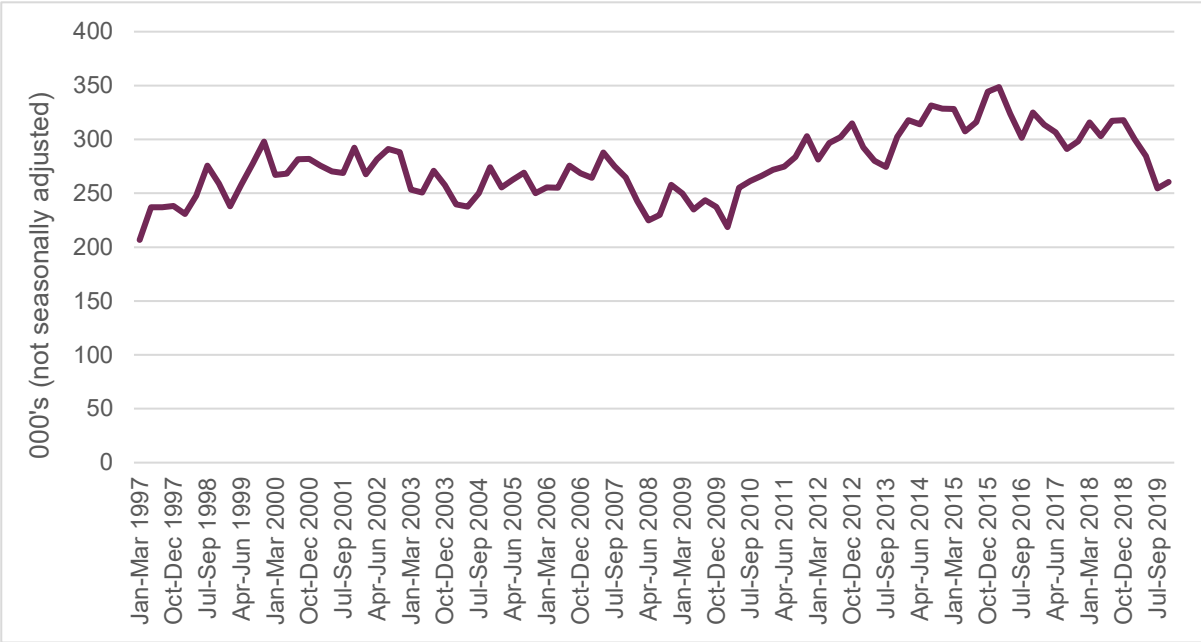
Research with employers suggests a wide range of benefits associated with using online recruitment methods. These included saving time and money, increasing applicant pools, and being able to target recruitment at specific groups (Broughton et al., 2013; Gopalia, 2012; Tunstall et al., 2012). There is, however, a growing body of research that explores how online recruitment methods may disadvantage some jobseekers, either through exclusion from the application process and / or the introduction of subjective discrimination (Broughton et al., 2013; CIPD, 2013; Green et al., 2012; 2013; Green, 2017). The risks posed by social networking sites is also a growing theme in the literature. Although currently under-researched, some studies suggest that employers' use of social media websites may introduce discrimination because recruiters are subject to information about an applicant's ethnicity and race, gender, health, undisclosed disabilities, sexual orientation, and other highly sensitive information often available on a social media profile (Broughton et al., 2013).

The use of recruitment agencies is another key trend in the literature. As discussed by Runge et al. (2017), inconsistent definitions and methodologies within the evidence base make identifying the total number of agency workers in the UK a complex task. Data from ONS (2020b), however, suggests that despite being subject to significant fluctuation, the number of temporary agency workers has increased overall since 1997 (Figure 3.6).

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<sup>5</sup> Based on the food manufacturing, accommodation, food and beverage service, computer programming and social care sectors.

**Figure 3.6 Number of people in temporary contracts via an agency (1997–2019)**



Source: ONS (2020b).

Consecutive survey research from the CIPD shows a recent trend of reduced use of recruitment agencies, in part due to employers’ attempts to reduce recruitment costs (CIPD, 2015; 2017).<sup>6</sup> In line with this, CIPD (2017) shows that 54% of all recruitment activity is now being conducted in-house, alongside an increasing trend for employers to combine in-house and outsourced approaches (2017: 44%; 2015: 40%; 2013: 28%). This is further evidenced by Kitching (2016) which, through case study research with 20 UK employers in manufacturing, construction and the personal and business services sector, identified employers increasingly using a combination of recruitment methods including informal networks, social networking sites, print media and agencies.

Although agency workers can be found across the UK labour market, research suggests a concentration within lower-paying sectors and roles, particularly within manufacturing, health and social work and business activities (Judge and Tomlinson, 2016).<sup>7</sup> Qualitative and case study research also suggests that

<sup>6</sup> Base survey sample sizes: 604 (2013); 513 (2015); 838 (2017).

<sup>7</sup> This includes a wide range of industries and sectors, including packaging, security, data processing, among many others.

agencies act as an important means of entry within certain industries, including cleaning, food manufacturing and hospitality (Keep and James, 2010).

## 4 Employment recruitment practices in different industries

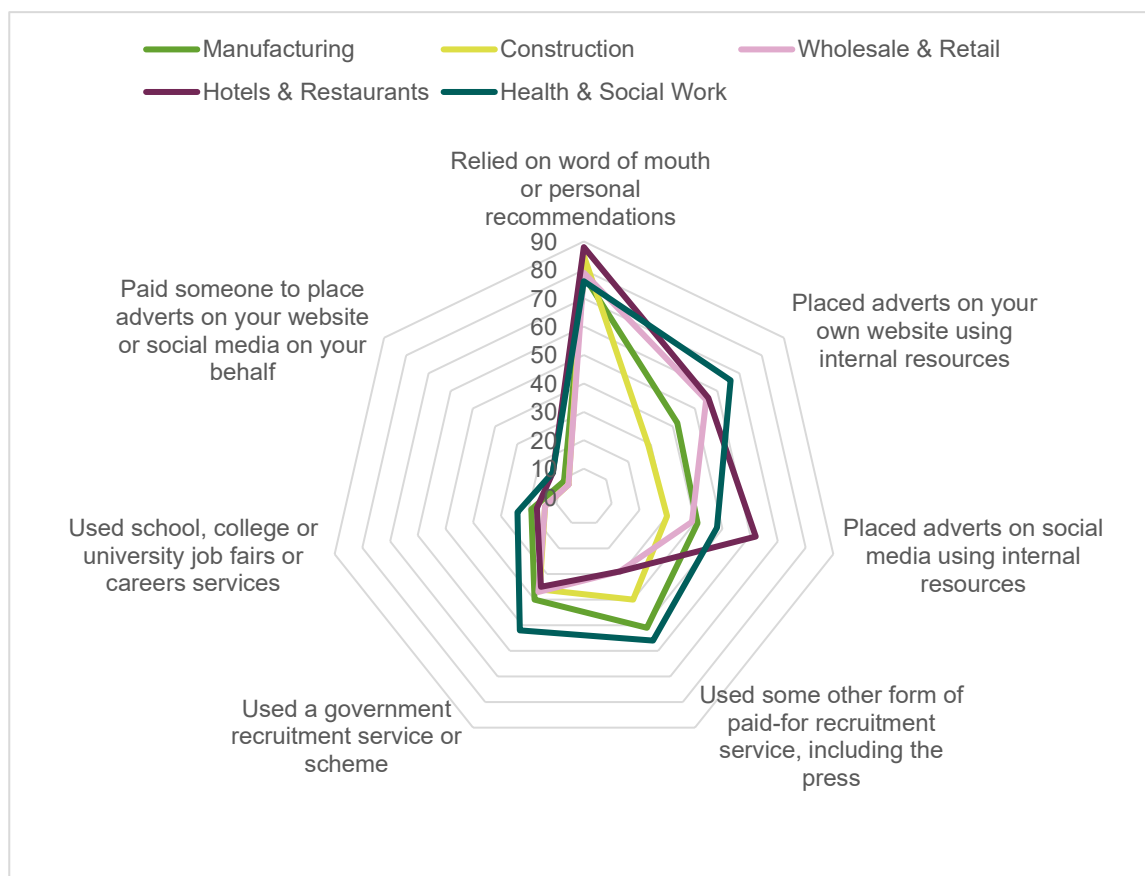
As the following chapter will show, UK employers' recruitment practices across low-paid occupations and industries is underpinned by five key factors:

- widespread use of word of mouth recruitment
- the use of multiple recruitment methods
- a preference for low-cost methods
- a requirement for staff flexibility, and
- a focus on soft skills in recruitment decision-making, with an emphasis on positive work ethic, attitude and perceived 'fit' within organisations (Calanca et al., 2019; Hasluck, 2011; Green et al., 2013; 2014; Keep and James, 2010; Tunstall et al., 2012).

This chapter focuses on the recruitment practices of six industries / sub-sectors within the UK. These are cleaning, construction, food manufacturing, hospitality (focusing on hotels and restaurants), retail and social care. These industries were chosen in response to the availability of evidence. Much of the available evidence focuses on the recruitment practices of small and medium-sized business, except for some case study research focused on larger national retailers.

By way of introduction, Figure 2 draws on ESP 2016 data to outline sectoral trends in the recruitment practices of UK employers (Shury et al., 2017). Since food manufacturing, social care and retail are sub-sectors within manufacturing, health and social work, and wholesale and retail, caution needs to be taken when interpreting this data. A trend towards word of mouth recruitment within these industries is clear, however, alongside sectoral differences in the use of social media, company websites and recruitment agencies.

**Figure 4.1 Recruitment methods used in the last 12 months, by sector**



Source: Employer Perspectives Survey 2016.

## 4.1 Cleaning

Drawing on 2019 ONS UK Business Council Data, the British Cleaning Council (BCC) suggests that there were 64,765 cleaning companies operating in the UK. Of these, 87% were based in England, 7% in Scotland and 4% in Wales, with the majority (88%) employing 10 or fewer employees. The BCC also suggests that the industry largely comprises outsourced contract cleaning, supplemented by some directly employed, in-house staff (BCC, 2020).

The BCC (2020), through an analysis of 2019 Labour Force Survey (LFS) data, suggests that most of the cleaning industry workforce are aged between 25 and 54 (65%) (BCC, 2020). The proportion of staff under 25, however, is lower than seen across the UK labour market (6% compared to 11%), while the proportion aged over 55 is higher (29% compared to 20%) (BCC, 2020). Analysis of 2019 LFS data also suggests that the proportion of male and female workers is fairly evenly split – 53% and 47% respectively. There are, however, significant sub-industry differences. Provisional 2019 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings

(ASHE) data, for example, suggests that 69% of employees in elementary cleaning occupations are female (ONS, 2019b). The BCC (2020) also suggests that 23% of those working in the industry are foreign-born. There is, however, substantial regional variation, with 62% of the industry workforce in London being foreign-born, compared to just 9% in the North East.

There is limited research that explores recruitment practices within the UK cleaning industry. Much of the available evidence comes from Grimshaw et al. (2014), which conducted six case studies with cleaning procurement companies across England, Scotland and Wales, and Sykes et al. (2014), which carried out in-depth interviews with 93 cleaning operatives. This research identified a combination of formal and informal recruitment methods being used within the cleaning industry. Smaller cleaning firms (which are the vast majority in the sector) more commonly used informal recruitment methods, such as word of mouth. Larger firms used more formal routes, such as Jobcentre Plus, or advertised online and in local shops. Only a very small number of cleaning firms that took part in the research stated that they use recruitment agencies to fill permanent or temporary positions (EHRC, 2014).

Qualitative interview research with businesses and representative bodies within the cleaning industry from Hudson-Sharp et al. (2019) also provides evidence of a reliance on word of mouth recruitment. It was suggested, however, that the UK's exit from the EU, could potentially undermine the success of this method for the recruitment of migrant workers, resulting in companies setting up online platforms to aid recruitment instead (Hudson-Sharp et al., 2019).

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## 4.2 Construction

As identified by Rhodes (2019), there are 2.4 million jobs in the construction industry, accounting for 6.6% of all jobs in the UK.<sup>8</sup> The majority (71%) of construction businesses are small, with fewer than five employees (Winterbotham et al., 2018). Self-employed jobs account for all jobs in the construction industry, almost three times the proportion in the economy as a whole (13%) (Rhodes, 2019). Evidence identifies the construction industry as fragmented, with high levels of skill shortages and a prominence of low-skilled

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<sup>8</sup> England: 6.5%; Wales: 6.4%; Scotland: 6.6%.

work (Winterbotham et al., 2018). Evidence also suggests fluctuating demands for labour, resulting in high use of temporary employment and extensive subcontracting arrangements (Forde et al., 2008).

Evidence suggests the construction sector has a predominantly White male workforce (Rolfe and Hudson-Sharp, 2016). Analysis of 2018 LFS data shows an extremely high proportion of men in the industry, accounting for 98% of those in construction and building (ONS, 2018). While the proportion of non-UK nationals working in the construction sector is in line with the economy as a whole, a significant proportion of non-UK construction workers are concentrated in London (Rhodes, 2019). Evidence also suggests that migrants are highly concentrated in low-skilled work within the sector (Rolfe and Hudson-Sharp, 2016). Vershinina et al. (2018), through qualitative research with migrant construction workers in London, also provide evidence of illegal and forced self-employment of migrant workers so that employers can avoid costs relating to taxes, national insurance and annual leave.

Research consistently shows widespread use of informal recruitment methods within the construction industry, particularly via word of mouth and personal networks (Tutt et al., 2013; Winterbotham et al., 2018). This is reinforced by Green et al. (2013) who, through qualitative research with 17 construction workers in the West Midlands, identified a preference of sub-contracting arrangements via personal referrals. EPS 2016 survey data also shows the construction sector to be less likely to use online recruitment methods, such as companies' own websites (29%) or social media (30%), compared to the UK average (54% and 46% respectively) (Shury et al., 2017).

Forde et al. (2008), drawing on 188 postal survey responses and six interviews with construction employers, identify a reluctance among employers to use recruitment agencies due to concerns around supplied workers' skills and reliability. More recent evidence from Tutt et al. (2013), based on ethnographic fieldwork within 10 construction sites across the UK, provides evidence of a movement away from recruitment agencies, and towards community-based, localised advertising of vacancies via family and friends' networks, including those of migrant workers.

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### 4.3 Food manufacturing

As outlined by the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) (2020), the food manufacturing industry employs approximately 106,000 people across the UK, with businesses evenly spread across England, Scotland and Wales. 96% of



food manufacturing businesses in the UK are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), defined as having between 1–249 employees (FDF, 2020). Estimates suggest that 33% of the workforce are non-UK EU nationals (Rhodes, 2020), with migrant workers concentrated in the meat, fruit and vegetable, and preservation sub-sectors of the industry (Rolfe and Hudson-Sharp, 2016).<sup>9</sup> Analysis of provisional 2019 ASHE data also shows a high proportion of women in the industry, accounting for 82% of employees in food manufacturing (ONS, 2019b).

Labour demands within the food manufacturing industry are subject to seasonal fluctuations and the volatile demands of supermarkets (Thompson et al., 2013). The industry therefore relies heavily on temporary migrant labour, in part due to employer difficulties in attracting British workers to the low-paid jobs, particularly on an agency basis (EHRC, 2010; Rolfe and Hudson-Sharp, 2016). FDF (2016) suggests that in 2016 over 70% of the temporary workers in the industry were recruited by members of the Association of Labour Providers (ALP), predominantly into unskilled and semi-skilled positions. This reliance on recruitment agencies to source migrant labour is identified in several other studies, focused on a variety of sub-sectors across England, Scotland and Wales (EHRC, 2010; Scott, 2013; Findlay and McCollum, 2013; Hopkins, 2011; Sporton, 2013).<sup>10</sup> EHRC (2010) and Findlay and McCollum (2013) also found evidence of temp-to-perm recruitment of migrants through agencies, often by larger organisations via informal probationary work trials.

Evidence suggests the use of migrant transnational social networks and word of mouth are increasingly important recruitment channels within the UK food manufacturing industry. This in part due to employer dissatisfaction with recruitment agencies, as well as a need to reduce costs (Findlay and McCollum, 2013; Rolfe and Hudson-Sharp, 2016; McCollum and Findlay, 2018). This has resulted in a variety of practices including the hiring of Eastern European

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<sup>9</sup> Based on analysis of 2016 Labour Force Survey Data, and interviews with 24 employers and 6 stakeholders across hospitality, construction and food manufacturing industries.

<sup>10</sup> 140 face-to-face interviews with meat processing workers in 15 different locations across England and Wales, 120 of which were workers; 37 interviews with horticultural growers / processors and 268 farmers across England; 61 interviews with employers and recruitment agencies in agribusiness across England and Scotland; 50 interviews across 3 case study food manufacturing businesses in England; case study research in Doncaster.

consultants within local communities, intracompany transfers and employers undertaking overseas recruitment visits (Findlay and McCollum, 2013; McCollum and Apsite-Berina, 2015). EHRC (2010) also found some evidence of recruitment within the meat and poultry processing industries via Jobcentre Plus and newspaper adverts. Research by Rolfe and Hudson-Sharp (2016), which includes case study research focused on the food manufacturing industry, suggests that the UK's exit from the EU is likely to have a significant and damaging effect on employers' ability to recruit staff. This is in part due to a perceived lack of staffing alternatives to migrant workers, evidenced by a lack of applications and high turnover among British employees.

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## 4.4 Hospitality

The hospitality industry is the third-largest private sector employer in the UK. Hospitality is a broad category within the service industry, with hotels and food and drink serving being the largest sub-sectors, accounting for approximately 7% of all UK workers (Winterbotham et al., 2018).

The hospitality industry is heavily reliant on young people, with a slight over-representation of women in the workforce (People1st, 2016). Analysis of provisional 2019 ASHE data, for example, suggests that 53% of employees in accommodation and food service activities are female (ONS, 2019b). Evidence also suggests that the industry comprises a high proportion of part-time workers, and extensive use of temporary and flexible contracts. This is in part due to fluctuating demand for labour due to seasonal variation (Markova et al., 2013). Research suggests the need for flexibility is a key driver for the recruitment of migrant labour in the sector (Alberti and Danaj, 2017). The hospitality industry is subsequently one of the largest employers of migrant workers in the UK, with estimates suggesting approximately a quarter of the workforce being foreign-born (UK Hospitality, 2017). This is further evidenced by Broughton et al. (2016), which, through a survey of 606 employers, identified that those in the accommodation sector were twice as likely as workplaces as a whole to target foreign-born workers in attempting to overcome recruitment difficulties.

ESP (2016) survey data identifies high use of informal recruitment methods among hotel and restaurant employers, including significant use of 'word of mouth' recruitment (88% compared with the UK average of 79%). Several qualitative studies focused on the hotel industry corroborate these findings, suggesting that employers explicitly prefer 'word of mouth' and personal referral-based recruitment to minimise cost and attract reliable, trustworthy staff (Alberti

and Danaj, 2017; Bolton et al., 2018; Piso, 2016).<sup>11</sup> Piso (2016) also provides evidence of employer attempts to recruit via own advertising locally or through a job centre with minimal success. Research from Markova et al. (2016), drawing on a survey of 155 hotel managers and 51 in-depth interviews in London, also provides evidence of employers commonly relying on migrant workers' networks to maintain recruitment, with participants suggesting it to be a more reliable form of advertising than online job platforms, job centres and advertising vacancies locally. Kik et al. (2019b), drew on six interviews with industry experts and 32 employee interviews across the UK to provide further evidence of informal recruitment within the restaurant and food industry; word of mouth was identified as a common recruitment method, mainly due to the need to address high workforce turnover.

Research suggests that online recruitment and social media are also key recruitment channels within the UK hospitality industry. Shury et al. (2017) shows that hotels and restaurants are more likely to exclusively use internal resources to advertise vacancies (through their website and social media) than any other sector (37% compared with the 28% UK average). The same data also shows high recruitment via social media (62% compared with a 46% average). Bolton et al. (2018) and Ladkin and Buhalis (2016) also provide evidence of high use of social networking sites and industry-specific online forums within hospitality. Janta and Ladkin (2013) also provide evidence of migrant-run online platforms acting as an important source for hotel employers' job advertising, emphasising migrants' increasing role as ad-hoc recruitment agents for the sector.<sup>12</sup> This is further evidence by McCollum and Apsite-Berina (2015), who identify migrant 'middlemen' linking employers and potential employees through informal social networks.

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<sup>11</sup> Based on in-depth case study research within the Glasgow, London and Yorkshire hotel industries.

<sup>12</sup> Based on a combination of exploratory fieldwork, interviews with six hospitality workers, and the responses of 315 migrant workers to an online survey posted on sites dedicated to Polish people seeking work in the hospitality sector in the UK.

## 4.5 Retail

Wholesale and retail accounts for 20% of all UK businesses, employing roughly 10% of the UK workforce (Shury et al., 2017). LFS data suggests that approximately 38% of retail workers are under the age of 25, and that women are over-represented in the sector (Akhal, 2019). Analysis of 2018 LFS data, for example, suggests that 62% of those working within customer service occupations are female (ONS, 2018). Similarly, analysis of 2019 provisional ASHE data suggests that females account for 57% of employees in retail trade, excluding motor vehicles and motorcycles (ONS, 2019b). Over recent years the UK retail sector has been in decline, largely characterised by a reduction in the number of smaller, miscellaneous retail outlets, alongside a substantial growth in online retailers (Gardiner and Tomlinson, 2019).

ESP (2016) shows that the most common recruitment methods used by wholesale and retail employers in the UK is 'word of mouth' (79%), followed by advertising via companies' own websites (55%) and social media (39%) (Shury et al., 2017). Use of these recruitment methods within retail are well-evidenced in the literature. Green et al. (2014) and Nickson et al. (2012; 2017) collectively identify widespread reliance on informal recruitment methods, including referrals from current staff and local advertising.<sup>13</sup> Nickson et al. (2012) also identified evidence of retailers using recruitment agencies and job centres. Further research, however, suggests that the use of public and private agencies is a less-preferred method for retail employers. McGurk (2015), for example, interviewed 32 members of a national food retailer's management and staff in 2014. The research shows that, despite initial employer interest in the Work Programme to fill vacancies, retail employers quickly returned to informal recruitment methods, such as 'word of mouth' and placing advertisements in the local community. Evidence from Green et al. (2014), through case study research with 15 retail organisations in the West Midlands, also showed that while recruitment via agencies can help fill seasonal retailers' vacancies, high cost and dissatisfaction with the quantity and quality of recruits prevented ongoing use.

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<sup>13</sup> Case study research with 15 retail employers in the West Midlands; a survey of 173 clothing, footwear and leather goods retailers in Greater Manchester; and 37 interviews with managers, supervisors and employees in 15 fashion retail outlets based in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

As outlined by Winterbotham et al. (2018), recruitment and selection processes for low-skilled / entry-level occupations across the UK tend to focus on soft skills, rather than training or qualifications. This is well-evidenced in the retail literature, with multiple studies suggesting a focus on 'soft skills' (in the form of attitude and appearance) within the industry's recruitment and selection decision-making (Green et al., 2013; Nickson et al., 2012; Nickson et al., 2017).

Case study research focused on large national retailers, including Tesco (Gopalia, 2012), Pets at Home (Devins et al., 2014) and River Island (Proctor, 2010), and two unnamed UK food retail chains (Rieucan, 2015), provides rare insight into the recruitment techniques of larger retailers in the UK. This evidence collectively identifies the use of online recruitment methods, recruitment events, assessment centres and centralised shortlisting functions. These studies also show a preference for these methods within larger retail organisations to reduce costs and time spent on recruitment. Green et al. (2014) also provide evidence of large retail employers using Jobcentre Plus for 'mass recruitment', such as in the case of opening a new store, including engaging in service level agreements, whereby a proportion of Jobcentre Plus clients are guaranteed interviews.

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## 4.6 Social care

Estimates suggest there are approximately 1.73 million jobs in the adult social care industry across England, Scotland and Wales (Kearney and White, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c). English workforce data from Skills for Care (2019) identifies that 83% of employees in the industry are female, 25% are over the age of 55 (a similar proportion to the economically active population), and 21% identify as being from ethnic minorities. Data also shows that around 84% of the adult social care workforce in England is British, with 8% and 9% from the EU and non-EU, respectively (Skills for Care, 2019). Data from the Scottish Social Services Council (2019) and Local Government Data Unit Wales (2017) indicates similar gender and age workforce compositions. It is, however, difficult to identify adult social care workforce demographics in Scotland and Wales, due to issues disaggregating data from the rest of the social services sector.

Evidence largely suggests that employers in the adult social care sector face considerable staffing difficulties, with high labour turnover and growing vacancy rates. This has mainly been attributed to the increased marketisation of services and ongoing budgetary pressures (Devins et al., 2014).

Research suggests that the UK social care sector is highly segmented, with considerable differences in recruitment approaches between private and public

businesses, between home and residential care workers, and between regular and irregular workers (Devins et al., 2014). Figgett (2017), based on survey responses from 140 adult social care employers in England, identifies a wide range of recruitment methods within the sector. This includes employee referrals, advertising online (via company websites, social media and elsewhere), as well as advertising in the local press and community. 49% of respondents to this survey stated employee referrals and other word of mouth were the most successful recruitment techniques. These techniques were also praised for being low-cost and for attracting people with ‘the right values and behaviours because the existing staff know the organisation’s core values’ (Figgett, 2017:17). These findings are reinforced by Green et al. (2014) who, through qualitative research with 15 social care employers in the West Midlands, found evidence of advertising in the local press, company websites (for larger employers) and personal referral.

Some research focuses on adult social care employers’ recruitment of migrant carers. Drawing on findings from 557 postal survey responses from members of the UK Homecare Association (a professional association of homecare providers) collected in 2007–2009, Cangiano and Walsh (2014) identify a combination of local and national advertising, informal networks and use of agencies in adult social care employers’ recruitment of migrant carers. Informal networks were identified to be particularly common, used within 63% of responding organisations. More recent research from Manthorpe et al. (2018), drawing on interviews with 121 social care managers across four English local authority areas in 2009–2014, identifies similar recruitment trends. This research also suggested that opportunities for employing non-EU workers were falling due to immigration limits being applied, alongside greater availability of workers through EU free movement of labour (Manthorpe et al., 2018).

Green et al. (2014) also provide evidence of larger social care employers using public (Jobcentre Plus) and private recruitment agencies. These employers commonly stated being dissatisfied with the quality and quantity of recruits via these channels. Private recruitment agencies were also thought to be too expensive, and therefore only used as a last resort. Further evidence is also provided by Cangiano and Walsh (2014), which identified high use of recruitment agencies to source migrant care assistants. Participants in this research identified advantages of using recruitment agencies to handle immigration regulations, but also noted high costs.

## 5 Recruitment practices and protected groups

Having provided an overview of employer recruitment practices across different industries, this chapter will now outline the evidence as it relates to different protected groups. As this chapter will show, the availability of evidence is highly variable, focusing predominantly on age and race (particularly in terms of migration), with significant evidence gaps regarding gender identity, sexual orientation and religion and belief.

Much of the available evidence comes from small-scale qualitative or non-representative survey research, often exploring perceptions of discrimination. Some research uses nationally representative survey data, such as the Labour Force Survey, but this is often out-of-date. Since discrimination is very difficult to observe, arguably the most robust research comes in the form of correspondence studies, which are designed to identify employer discrimination at the recruitment stage. These studies, however, are rare, and have so far been undertaken to identify discrimination on the basis of age, disability, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation.

Since the evidence largely relies on small-scale qualitative or non-representative survey research, identifying national and regional similarities and differences is rarely possible within the literature. In addition to this, very few studies have samples or sub-samples based in Wales. Welsh-specific research is therefore a key evidence gap.

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### 5.1 Age

Despite age discrimination affecting people of all ages, most research identified by this review focused on the discrimination of older people (usually defined as 50 and over). Much of this focuses on the prejudices and stereotypes held by employers. McNair et al. (2012), for example, through a review of evidence focused on the experiences of people aged 50 and over in the manufacturing industry, identifies a view among employers that older people are poorly motivated and unproductive. Winterbotham et al. (2015), based on interviews with 10 SMEs across sectors and a survey of 1,002 SME employers, found evidence of employers discounting older workers due to concerns about physical

strength, fitness and / or mobility required for the role. Foster et al. (2014), through 10 in-depth telephone interviews with Work Programme providers and specialist voluntary providers for those aged 50 and over, also reported that employers hold negative stereotypes about older workers, particularly in sectors such as retail, who were thought to often want to promote a more youth-orientated image. Similarly, Kirkpatrick (2012), through focus groups and survey research (311 responses) with job centre advisers, identified an almost universal view that employers discriminate against older claimants and prefer to recruit younger employees.

More recent research by Hudson-Sharp et al. (2019), based on case studies with 19 employers across retail, hospitality, childcare and cleaning, shows that while employers' hiring decisions may not be explicitly based on age, employers perceive benefit in younger workers. Employers in hospitality and retail, for example, often mentioned that younger workers were a useful asset to their workforce due to their availability outside term-time. Employers also reflected on younger employees' ability to cope with the physical demands of some jobs, as well as contributing to the image and brand of businesses, such as in bars and clubs. Related to this, the CIPD (2012), through survey research with 780 HR professionals and 11 employer case studies across sectors, identifies a view that the use of social media by younger employees brings additional value to businesses. Some research explores the prejudices of recruitment agencies. Altmann (2015), through an extensive review of the experiences of older workers in the UK, identified anecdotal evidence of recruitment agencies discriminating against older workers. This included accounts of agencies facilitating employers' requests only to shortlist younger workers for interview. The Centre for Ageing Better (2017), through in-depth case study research in Greater Manchester, also identified a view among older workers that recruitment agencies discriminated against them while trying to find work in local industrial estates.

Some research comes to opposite conclusions, suggesting that employers and agencies have positive views of older workers. Kirkpatrick (2012), for example, through an unspecified number of telephone interviews with large employers, found that large retailers and call centres had positive views of older workers, suggesting that they were loyal, had better interpersonal skills and were more reliable and flexible compared to younger workers. Jenkins and Poulston (2014), through the analysis of 36 postal questionnaire responses from hotel managers in the North of England, also found overwhelmingly positive views of older workers.

As discussed by Drydakis et al. (2017), since much of the available evidence on age discrimination is indirect, often relying on the expressed opinions of self-selected employers, agencies and / or welfare support workers, it is difficult to



know the true extent of the discrimination that older people face in the recruitment process. To address this, Drydakis et al. (2017) conducted a matched-paired field experiment; it compared the rate of invitations to interview between a fictitious 28-year-old male / female applicant and a fictitious 50-year-old male / female applicant for a variety of low-skilled jobs, including in restaurants, retailers, factories and offices. This research showed older applicants to be offered comparatively fewer invitations for interview, regardless of their experience or superiority for the appointment. The findings also showed that older women were more discriminated against than men, and manual workers more than non-manual workers.

Further research suggests age discrimination in job advertising. Metcalf and Meadows (2010), for example, through a survey of 2,205 businesses in Britain, found that 2% included a preferred age range in their advertisements,<sup>14</sup> 42% sought information on age in the recruitment process, and 28% made age information available to recruiters. 10% also stated that age affected selection. The study also suggested that this type of activity was more common when advertising for manual workers and for lower-skilled staff.

Some research also suggests that older people, in anticipation of the type of discrimination described above, self-select themselves out of making applications. Smeaton et al. (2009), through analysing 1,494 telephone survey responses from people aged between 50 and 75, identified that of those respondents not actively looking for a position despite wanting one, 15% attributed it to a belief that no employer would want to recruit anyone of their age (15%). Kirkpatrick (2012) also found evidence of a lack of confidence and motivation among older jobseekers, in addition to a belief that employers would routinely discriminate against them.

Some research also explores how specific recruitment methods may disadvantage older workers. Kirkpatrick (2012) found that 80% of job centre advisers in her survey suggested that a limited knowledge of modern recruitment practices acts as a barrier to older claimants securing interviews for employment. These findings suggested that older claimants had little or no understanding of what was required in terms of a contemporary CV, or how they should go about completing a competency-based application form.

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<sup>14</sup> The preferred ages were not specified in the report and presumably varied between organisations.

Several studies suggest that online recruitment methods are particularly problematic for older jobseekers. Evidence suggests that online applications and testing are less accessible for older people. This was a finding of Neary et al. (2019) which, through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 26 unemployed individuals aged 50–64 years who were engaged in the Work Programme, found a distinct lack of confidence in using computers, and a sense of feeling disadvantaged when applications asked for additional online tasks to be completed before interview. Similarly, Green et al. (2012), who analysed 2006–2009 LFS data, found a continuously decreasing trend in the use of the internet when looking for work by age; jobseekers aged 60–64 years were 19 percentage points less likely to use the internet for job search when compared to those aged 24–59, and 37 percentage points less likely than jobseekers aged 16–24. Green et al. (2012) also found that non-internet jobseekers (generally older respondents) were less likely to use multiple job-search methods.

Online applications are also thought to disadvantage older people in the selection process. As described by Rieucan (2015), automated screening of online applications within the retail sector prioritises certain key words or phrases, as well as standardised CVs, experience and / or qualifications. This means that older people with substantial experience and skills may potentially be overlooked in the early recruitment stages (Kirkpatrick, 2012; McNair et al., 2012). Research also suggests that a lack of standardised experience could be problematic for older people looking for work via agencies. Kendall (2018), through an analysis of responses to a Government Equalities Office call for evidence on returning to work after time out for caring, found evidence of agencies operating on strict shortlisting selection criteria, to the detriment of applicants who did not have a standard CV and recent experience.

Finally, some research identifies a lack of age-related workplace equal opportunities policies among small and medium-sized employers, which may disadvantage older workers. In their survey of 2,205 establishments noted above, Metcalf and Meadows (2010) identified age-related workplace equal opportunities policies to be less likely in smaller businesses. This was also a finding of Stokes et al. (2017) which, through a comparison of the 2004 and 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS)<sup>15</sup> found formal pro-age

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<sup>15</sup> Nationally representative workplace sample: 2,295 workplaces in 2004; 2,680 workplaces in 2011.

policies to be more common in larger workplaces. The extent to which a lack of formal policy leads to (in)direct disadvantage for older workers in recruitment, however, is unclear.

Some research explores disadvantage experienced by younger workers. Much of this reflects employers' reliance on informal recruitment methods, such as 'word of mouth' and personal referrals, suggesting that younger workers are disadvantaged due to having smaller (work) networks. This is a common concern in research focused on youth employment, although it is often a logical extension of secondary research about employer recruitment methods rather than primary research with younger people themselves (Cominetti et al., 2013; Hasluck and Armitage, 2011; Atfield et al., 2011).

Other research also outlines employer biases against younger people, particularly teenagers and school-leavers, whereby employers perceive that younger workers are less productive, lack requisite skills, and that attendance and disciplinary records tend to be poorer than older workers (Hasluck and Armitage, 2011; New Policy Institute, 2017).

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## 5.2 Disability

Drawing on 2012 LFS data, Coleman et al. (2013) show that disabled people of working age are at a distinct disadvantage in the UK labour market. Not only are they less likely to be economically active, but those who are economically inactive are more likely to be unemployed, and unemployed for longer. Disabled people are also more likely to work part-time, to do lower-skilled jobs, and to earn less than other people.

Much of the research that focuses on disabled people's experiences of the recruitment process identifies indirect discrimination of disabled applicants. Winterbotham et al. (2015)<sup>16</sup> and Findlay et al. (2013)<sup>17</sup> provide evidence of both employers and recruitment agencies filtering out applications on the basis of physical capability and mobility. Metcalf and Meadows (2010) also found that a

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<sup>16</sup> Interviews with 10 SMEs across sectors and a survey of 1,002 SME employers sampled via Dun and Bradstreet's UK Trading File.

<sup>17</sup> 87 interviews with employers and recruitment agencies (70 in the UK and 17 in Latvia) within the hospitality and food production sectors.

third of all responding employers take disability or health into consideration during the recruitment process. This was identified to occur more regularly in physically demanding jobs, such as process, plant and machine operatives and drivers (51%), skilled trades staff (50%), routine unskilled staff (45%) and caring, leisure and personal service staff (43%).

Davidson (2011), via 60 in-depth interviews with small and medium-sized employers, also found evidence of employers adopting an inflexible attitude towards employing disabled people, suggesting that recruitment would largely depend on whether disabled people 'could do the job' rather than considering how a job or working conditions could be adapted. This same research also identified employers' reluctance towards employing people with fluctuating physical or mental health conditions, due to concerns about unpredictability. Employer concerns around mental health are further evidenced by Biggs et al. (2010). Through a combination of 20 interviews with employers and recruitment agencies and a survey of 200 businesses in Gloucestershire, this study identified significant employer concerns around the recruitment of people with existing or previous mental health conditions, including a lack of trust and concerns about an inability to use initiative and deal with the public. In line with this, Rolfe et al. (2009), through qualitative research with 84 people exploring experiences of employment discrimination, found respondents reporting disability discrimination in recruitment as soon as the employer knew that they were disabled.

Some research specifically explores disabled people's experiences of the recruitment process. Bennett et al. (2016), for example, identified online channels, complicated application forms, lengthy and complex job descriptions, and jobs not being advertised with flexible or job-sharing options as key barriers for disabled people.<sup>18</sup> López and Keenan (2014) found similar experiences among adults with autism, culminating in difficulties in, and a lack support with, interviews and application processes.<sup>19</sup> These findings are reinforced by Bewley and George (2016) who, through a combination of four expert interviews and two case studies, explored the unsuitability of some recruitment practices for people with neurodivergent conditions, including the use of psychometric tests and inappropriate question formats (such as open-ended, hypothetical questions). Harwood (2016), drawing on 265 interviews with disabled workers, also provides

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<sup>18</sup> Based on interviews with disability support and advocacy organisations, employment support and skills providers, health partners, employers and disabled people in Brighton and Hove.

<sup>19</sup> Purposive survey of 54 adults self-reporting within the autistic spectrum.

evidence of disability discrimination through employers' inability to make reasonable adjustments, particularly for temporary workers. Furthermore, Adams et al. (2013), through a combination of 1,008 survey responses from recent applicants, 400 employers and 10 in-depth interviews with recruitment consultants, found widespread use of pre-employment health questions during the recruitment process, despite this being prohibited under Section 60 of the Equality Act 2010.<sup>20</sup>

Despite widespread survey and qualitative research outlining experiences of disability discrimination in the recruitment process, very few UK studies provide evidence of unequal application outcomes for disabled people. MacRae and Lavery (2006) is one exception which, through a matched-pair research design whereby half disclosed a disability (cerebral palsy or registered blind), compared outcomes for fictionalised CVs at 120 private sector employers in Scotland. This research found that non-disabled applicants were invited to twice as many interviews as disabled applicants.

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### 5.3 Gender identity

Very few studies explore discrimination on the basis of gender identity in the UK employer recruitment process. Of the research that is available, much relies on non-representative survey research and often conflates the experiences of transgender, non-binary and / or intersex respondents with lesbian, gay and bisexual respondents (Hudson-Sharp and Metcalf, 2016). The most valuable research therefore comes in the form of small-scale qualitative studies. The available research looks at recruitment in general, rather than recruitment into low-paid jobs in particular.

Findings from the Government Equalities Office 2018 National LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) survey identified that working-age (16–64) transgender respondents were much less likely to have had a paid job in the 12 months before the survey when compared to LGB cisgender respondents (83%;

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<sup>20</sup> 506 respondents self-reported as having an impairment; 502 self-reported as not having an impairment.

63%).<sup>21</sup> Findings from this survey also suggest that gender identity is a key barrier to respondents who are looking for work, due to perceived discrimination by potential employers, fear of negative reactions, inappropriate questioning, and prejudiced views. In line with this, survey research from McNeil et al. (2012)<sup>22</sup> identifies that 16% of transgender respondents had chosen not to apply for work because they anticipated bullying and negative treatment, and 9% provided no references in job applications due to reasons relating to their gender identity.

Ozturk and Tatli (2016), based on 14 in-depth qualitative interviews,<sup>23</sup> reveal a wide range of workplace challenges for transgender people, some of which began at the recruitment and selection process. Interviewees described how their gender identity often led to disadvantage or pre-emptive exclusion from recruitment and selection. This study also identifies transgender job candidates to be disadvantaged through being forced into career changes, resulting in relevant education, skills and job experience not being represented on their CVs, and employers subsequently perceiving a lack of qualifications, skills deficits and gaps in employment history.

Research also suggests discrimination on the basis of gender identity through a lack of specific non-discrimination policies for transgender staff. Beauregard et al. (2018), through an examination of the websites of FTSE 100 firms as listed in February 2015, found that only 31 made direct reference to transgender individuals. Of these 31, 14 made only indirect references via 'LGBT', suggesting that transgender issues are most likely to be appended to LGB. Drawing on North American research, Beauregard et al. (2018) also suggest that informal recruitment practices may disadvantage transgender jobseekers through lacking close personal relationships with employers and their networks.

Marvell et al. (2017), through case study research with pre-identified good practice employers regarding supporting transgender and / or intersex employees, identified inclusive advertising and targeted recruitment efforts as important for improving the experiences of transgender, non-binary and intersex

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<sup>21</sup> Based on 108,100 responses: 85% cisgender; 13% transgender.

<sup>22</sup> Purposive survey of 889 transgender people living in Scotland.

<sup>23</sup> Interviewees comprised 5 transgender men, 6 transgender women and 3 transgender individuals who identified as genderqueer. The age range was 28–54, with all but one living in the Greater London area.

people. This included the use of inclusivity statements and linking to trans-inclusive policies when advertising, as well as targeting the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer / questioning, intersex and asexual community through Pride, graduate job fairs and charity events.

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## 5.4 Marriage and civil partnership

Only one study identified by this review explored marriage and civil partnership in the context of employer recruitment practices. Based on interviews with 91 individuals of working age<sup>24</sup> living in Birmingham, Liverpool and Cumbria, McCabe et al. (2013) suggest that marriage to British spouses might enable ethnic minorities to develop links through family and friends, and therefore find employment. Importantly, while substantial research explores the disadvantage experienced by single parents through childcare costs and a lack of flexible work (Dewar and Clery, 2019), no research explicitly looking at experiences of the recruitment process was identified.

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## 5.5 Pregnancy and maternity

Little research explores pregnancy and maternity-related discrimination in relation to UK employers' recruitment practices. Much of that which is available comes from Adams et al. (2016a; 2016b), which used interview and survey research to explore the experiences and perceptions of mothers and employers.

Based on 3,254 survey interviews and 60 follow-up in-depth interviews with mothers, Adams et al. (2016a) report that three in four (77%) respondents stated that they had a negative or possibly discriminatory experience during pregnancy, maternity leave, and on their return from maternity leave. A small proportion (3%) of respondents had attended job interviews while pregnant. Of these women,

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<sup>24</sup> 39 men and 52 women from a range of ethnic backgrounds, explicitly mentioning the background of the candidate in the cover letter, and that the applicant was fluent in a language (Urdu), clearly identifying the country of origin on the CV. Applicants included a sales representative, a cook, a payroll clerk, a store assistant and a software developer.

one in 12 (8%) said they experienced being asked by an employer if they were pregnant. Three-quarters of these mothers (77%) who were unsuccessful in their job interviews while pregnant felt that it had affected their chances of success.

One in five mothers surveyed (21%) attended an interview after the birth of their child. Around a quarter of mothers (23%) reported being asked by an employer whether they had a young child. Among those who were unsuccessful, around half (47%) felt that having a young child had affected their chances of getting the job. Of the 749 survey respondents who were not in work, one in 12 mothers (8%) said that they were not looking for work; one of the main reasons for this was a feeling that employers would be unwilling to employ pregnant women.

Based on 3,034 survey interviews and 49 follow-up interviews with employers, Adams et al. (2016b) found that the majority of employers (70%) believed that job-seeking women should declare to potential employers if they are pregnant. Moreover, one in four felt it reasonable to ask women about their plans to have children during recruitment. Generally, this research showed that small employers (defined as fewer than 50 staff) were less likely to feel it was in the interests of their business to support pregnant women and those on maternity leave.

This research also showed that the view women should declare pregnancy upfront during recruitment was more likely in the construction (87%); agriculture, fishery and mining (84%); manufacturing (82%); and hotel and restaurant (76%) sectors, many of which are male-dominated (Adams et al., 2016b).

Winterbotham et al. (2015), based on a survey of 1,002 SME employers sampled via Dun and Bradstreet's UK Trading File, found that 17% of respondents considered whether a candidate was pregnant or had a young family in the recruitment process. The most common underpinning concerns were around maternity leave, and whether pregnant staff would be as committed or as loyal as other staff. In line with this, Young Women's Trust (2017), through a YouGov survey of HR decision makers weighted to be representative of the UK business population by size and sector, found that one in six HR respondents (15%) said that they would be reluctant to hire a woman who they think may go on to have children.

The EHRC (2010), through 140 face-to-face interviews with meat and poultry processing workers in 15 different locations across England and Wales,<sup>25</sup> also

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<sup>25</sup> 120 of whom were migrant workers.



found evidence of discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, with a quarter of respondents mentioning poor treatment of pregnant workers in industry. The research also identified reports of pregnant workers being forced to continue work that posed risks to their health and safety, and not being given any further work after managers realised that they were pregnant. Interviews with recruitment agencies who supply workers to the meat and poultry industry also identified pressure not to supply employers with pregnant agency workers (EHRC, 2010).

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## 5.6 Race

There is a substantial body of literature that explores recruitment discrimination on the basis of race and nationality. This includes qualitative research that explores perceptions of discrimination and experimental correspondence studies that outline outcomes of discrimination.

Through analysing data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the UK Household Longitudinal Survey (UKHLS), Brynin and Longhi (2015) identified that not only are ethnic minority groups over-represented in low-paying occupations, but are also on average more likely to be paid less than the Living Wage than White employees. This disadvantage was recognised to be especially acute for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, who were identified to have higher probability than any other ethnic group to be paid less than the Living Wage in all occupational classes.

Multiple correspondence studies have identified that members of ethnic minority groups face discrimination in the recruitment process. Wood et al. (2009), through a multiple matched research design based on 2,961 applications,<sup>26</sup> found that people from ethnic minority backgrounds had to submit 16 job applications to receive a positive response, while White candidates only had to submit nine. This study found racial discrimination to be high across all cities included, with variation by ethnic minority group, ranging from 21% for Pakistani /

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<sup>26</sup> Applications were sent in response to a wide range of available positions, including IT support, IT technician, accountant, accounts clerk, human resources manager, teaching assistant, care assistant, sales assistant and office assistant across Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol, Glasgow, Leeds, London and Manchester. Racial identity was conveyed on applications via name.

Bangladeshi applicants to 32% for Indian, Chinese and Black Caribbean applicants.

More recently, Heath and Di Stasio (2019) sent 3,200 online job applications to advertising employers in England, randomly varying the minority background of fictitious job applicants while holding their skills, qualifications and work experience constant. The findings showed ethnic minorities to receive positive responses 15% of the time, compared to 24% of the time for the majority group. Pakistani and Nigerian applicants were identified to be particularly disadvantaged, having to send on average 70% and 80% more applications to receive a positive response, respectively. Discrimination against Pakistani job applicants is further evidenced by Larsen and Di Stasio (2019) who, through an unpaired correspondence research design of 2,241 fictitious job applications, showed that Pakistani<sup>27</sup> applicants received statistically significantly fewer call-backs than the majority group.

In addition to correspondence studies, there is a substantial body of work that explores recruitment methods and their impact on ethnic minority workers. Kerr (2018), through a survey of 6,506 employees (2,669 of whom were ethnic minority employees), identified that ethnic minority employees are more likely than White British employees to register with a recruitment agency (57% versus 46%). Of all groups covered in the survey, those from a Black African background were most likely to register with an agency (75%). Battu et al., (2011), through an analysis of 1999-2001 UK Quarterly Labour Force Survey data,<sup>28</sup> shows that personal networks are a more popular method of finding a job among people from ethnic minorities, compared to White respondents. Pakistani and Bangladeshi respondents, for example, most commonly identified friends and family as a primary job search method (14%, compared to 11% of White respondents). Crucially, this study also showed that, despite high use, personal networks were comparatively less effective for ethnic minority groups in gaining employment, and in achieving higher-skilled jobs.

Several qualitative studies explore the impact that informal networks have on the ability of ethnic minorities to secure work. McCabe et al. (2013) interviewed 39 men and 52 women from a range of ethnic backgrounds in Birmingham, Liverpool and Cumbria. They identified that while personal networks were important in enabling access to jobs, this often resulted in a concentration in

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<sup>27</sup> Signposted primarily by the name of the applicant.

<sup>28</sup> Analysis based on males of working age (aged 16 to 65) only.

particular employment sectors (such as Eastern Europeans in the rural hospitality industry, or Lithuanians and Nepalese in food-processing plants). This study therefore suggested that a reliance on closed and relatively disadvantaged networks often kept ethnic minority groups in poverty, with long hours, limited job security and low wages. McGurk (2015) also showed this for the food retail industry. McGurk identified, through semi-structured interviews with 12 national, regional, area and store managers and 21 shop floor staff, managers' disproportionate selection of staff from their own ethnic groups. Evidence by Hudson et al. (2017)<sup>29</sup> also identifies the food manufacturing business engaging in discriminatory informal recruitment practice, including the compartmentalisation of ethnic minority staff into low-paying roles, negatively affecting employment trajectories and social mobility.

## Ethnicity

While ethnicity-focused correspondence studies find little difference in discrimination on the basis of gender, qualitative research highlights potential problematic experiences for ethnic minority women looking for work. Tariq and Syed (2018), through 20 interviews with second-generation Pakistani heritage Muslim women, found that gender was not generally considered by interviewees as a key factor in their discrimination. However, intersections between ethnicity and religion highlighted important issues, such as assumptions from employers that Muslim women will leave paid employment after they have children. Kamenou et al. (2013), through 16 semi-structured interviews with senior and human resources / diversity managers in Scotland, identified similar findings, including the perception that South Asian women lack commitment to work due to assumptions and stereotypes around ethnic minority families' and communities' expectations regarding employment.

Personal testimony submitted to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Race and Community Inquiry into Ethnic Minority Female Unemployment provides some insight into ethnic minority women's experiences in the recruitment process (Butler, 2012). This includes evidence of discrimination based on name and accent, and stereotyping and discrimination once ethnic minority women reach interview stage. Examples included a number of Black women highlighting

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<sup>29</sup> Case study research in nine workplaces across England and Scotland, including 35 interviews with low-paid workers and 22 interviews with managers.

negativity in job interviews, including the attitudes of prospective employers dramatically changing once they realised they were not White.

## Gypsies, Roma and Travellers

There is limited research on the employment-related discrimination experienced by Gypsies and Travellers, including barriers to entry to employment. Anecdotal evidence collated from across the UK indicates that Gypsies and Travellers who live on a site, or who are known to be members of local Gypsy or Traveller families, encounter discrimination when applying for paid work (Cemlyn et al., 2012). Qualitative research with 95 members of the Gypsy and Traveller community also found evidence of Travellers experiencing racist stereotyping at work leading to constructive dismissal (Ryder and Greenfields, 2013).<sup>30</sup>

## Migrants

There is a substantial body of literature exploring the experience of migrants in the UK recruitment process, much of which focuses on low-paid occupations and industries, in which they concentrate.<sup>31</sup>

A significant part of this literature focuses on migrants' reliance on personal networks to find employment. Through an analysis of 1992 to 2010 Labour Force Survey data, Giulietti et al. (2013) show immigrants to be more likely than White British-born respondents to rely on social networks to find work.<sup>32</sup> High reliance on social networks is also identified by McCollum and Apsite-Berina (2015), which, through an online survey of 1,000 responses, found that 74% of Latvian migrants to the UK cite friends and relatives as their main source of information on employment opportunities in Britain. This is further evidenced by Sumption (2009), which, through an analysis of 2004–2007 Labour Force Survey data, found a steady increase over time in the proportion of employed Polish respondents who found a job via social networks, up to 36% in 2007.

Several studies tie together migrants' and low-paid, low-skilled sectors' simultaneous reliance on word of mouth recruitment, suggesting that industries like construction (Tutt et al., 2013), health and hospitality (Batnitzky and

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<sup>30</sup> 86 English Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers; 9 Roma and New Travellers.

<sup>31</sup> Broughton et al. (2016) provides an extensive review of this literature.

<sup>32</sup> Sample restricted to working-age men.

McDowell, 2013), food manufacturing (Findlay et al., 2013) and social care (Cangiano and Walsh, 2014) can circumvent formal employment practices through the use of migrant worker networks. Sectoral reliance on migrant workers' informal networks has led to a substantial body of literature exploring industries that have become largely comprised of particular ethnic groups and / or nationalities. Batnitzky and McDowell (2013), for example, based on 120 interviews of purposively sampled migrants in West London, provide evidence of 'ethnic economies' within health and hospitality.

Migrant employment via recruitment agencies is another substantial part of the literature. Rolfe and Hudson-Sharp (2016), through an analysis of 2015 Labour Force Survey data and case study research in hospitality, food production and construction, highlight high rates of agency recruitment of migrant labour. Broughton et al. (2016), however, through telephone surveys with 1,200 employers and 100 recruitment agencies, and 25 interviews with workers and 10 interviews with employers / recruitment agencies, showed that despite high proportions of migrant workplaces in these sectors, employers tended to use similar recruitment channels and processes for UK-born and foreign-born workers. Only 2% of surveyed workplaces advertised a vacancy aimed specifically at foreign-born workers, and just 4% used specialist recruitment agencies that find foreign-born workers who are living overseas and bring them to the UK.

Research largely suggests that while employers do not seek specifically to recruit migrants, the type of work, pay and contracts most readily available tends to deter British applicants (Rolfe and Hudson-Sharp, 2016; McCollum and Findlay, 2015). Some studies do, however, provide evidence of employers' recruiting on the basis of national stereotyping, with worker suitability being determined categorically with a view of 'good migrant' rather than on an individual basis (EHRC, 2010; Findlay et al., 2013; McCollum and Apsite-Berina, 2015).

Several studies explore how reliance on social networks and recruitment agencies contributes to migrants' marginalisation in the UK labour market. This evidence largely suggests that while social networks probably help migrants to find jobs in the short-term, opportunities for full, longer-term social and economic integration may be limited. This, as described by Sumption (2009), leads to social stratification, 'locking-in' migrants in low-skilled jobs. Evidence of this is provided by Hopkins and Dawson (2016) who, through an analysis of 2006–2012 Labour Force Survey data, found that 12% of A8 migrants were in some form of temporary employment, compared with 4% of UK nationals, with higher rates of

involuntary temporary employment among migrant workers.<sup>33</sup> Similar findings are provided by Vershinina et al. (2018), through interviews with 20 Ukrainian construction workers in London, who found evidence of forced illegal self-employment in the construction industry.

Further research explores the unfair treatment of agency migrant workers. Hopkins (2011), for example, through 50 semi-structured interviews with workers at three food manufacturers, found evidence of agency migrant workers receiving lower wages than their directly employed peers, and receiving poorer treatment, particularly related to job roles and security. Similar findings are reported by Alberti (2014) in the London construction and hospitality industries, food manufacturing (Thompson et al., 2013), and cleaning industries (EHRC, 2014).

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## 5.7 Religion or belief

This review identified only a few studies that explored discrimination on the basis of religion and belief within UK employers' recruitment practices. This includes qualitative research exploring perceptions of discrimination, as well as correspondence studies looking at recruitment outcomes.

Rolfe et al. (2009), through 84 qualitative interviews, identified perceptions of recruitment discrimination on the basis of religion. Examples included a Sikh respondent being refused work in a restaurant via an agency due to his beard and turban, and associations of Islam with terrorism harming the employment prospects of Muslim jobseekers. Bonino (2015), through qualitative interviews with 39 Muslims in Edinburgh, also found evidence of concern around the detrimental impact that presenting as Muslim could have in securing a job due to employer prejudice. Qualitative research with second-generation British Muslim women presents similar findings, suggesting that those who wear the hijab or niqab experienced difficulty obtaining, and discrimination during, job interviews (Bunlawala, 2008; Tariq and Syed, 2018).

Di Stasio et al. (2019), through a cross-national harmonised field experiment, examined discrimination towards Muslim job applicants in five European

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<sup>33</sup> A8 countries are the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

countries (Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom) when applying for a variety of jobs.<sup>34</sup> This study identified evidence of religious discrimination in the UK, with Muslim job applicants receiving comparatively less invitations for interview. However, as described by Di Stasio et al. (2019), disentangling discrimination on the basis of ethnicity from religion is conceptually and methodologically challenging due to the high correlation. Further research exploring religious discrimination in the recruitment process would therefore be useful.

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## 5.8 Sex

This review identified little research that explored sex discrimination during the recruitment process. This is in part due to the bulk of research being focused on discrimination in relation to pregnancy and maternity. Of that which was identified, the majority explored indirect discrimination through the unfair treatment of those returning to work after time caring. Kendall (2018) analysed 360 self-selecting responses to a Government Equalities Office (GEO) call for evidence on returning to work after time out for caring; 96% were from women and identified evidence of discrimination from employers and agencies during the recruitment process. A third of submissions identified themselves as having been discriminated against due to gaps in their CV. These respondents felt that their lack of recent employment experience meant that they were not considered for roles by employers or recruitment agencies. Submitted evidence also described employers' and recruitment agencies' unwillingness to consider requests for flexible, part-time and / or shared working. Some submissions also identified problems with online recruitment processes; they were thought to prevent re-entry into work through initial screening processes requiring a consistent work history and work-related references.

Rolfe et al. (2009), through 84 qualitative interviews, also identified evidence of recruitment discrimination on the basis of sex, whereby both male and female interviewees referred to gender-segregated organisations which they felt rejected their application, often without interview. These findings are reinforced by Riach and Rich (2006), which, through a matched-paired research design, found statistically significant discrimination against men applying for jobs within a

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<sup>34</sup> Applications included to jobs as a cook, payroll clerk, receptionist, sales representative, software developer, and store assistant.

perceived 'female occupation' (secretary) and against women applying for jobs within a perceived 'male occupation' (engineer). McDowell et al. (2016), through 10 interviews with young Goan men and six managers of employment agencies in Swindon, provide further evidence of segregation, suggesting that low-wage jobs in many British towns are constructed as feminised, low-waged and demanding personal skills of empathy and servility, rendering the young men included in this research ineligible.

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## 5.9 Sexual orientation

While there is a fairly large, non-robust, body of evidence that explores the discrimination that lesbian, gay and bisexual people experience in the workplace, very little explores inequalities in the recruitment process (Hudson-Sharp and Metcalf, 2016).

Findings from an online survey of 223 LGBT people living across England, Scotland and Wales identified that one in five (18%) who were looking for work said they were discriminated against because of their sexual orientation (or gender identity) while trying to get a job in the last year (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018).<sup>35</sup> The Government Equalities Office 2018 LGBT survey also provides evidence of sexual orientation being a barrier to looking for a job, due to perceived discrimination by potential employers, fear of negative reactions, inappropriate questioning, and prejudiced views (Government Equalities Office, 2018).

Drydakis (2015), in a matched-pair field experiment based on 144 third-year undergraduate jobseekers and their correspondence with 5,549 firms, found that gay and lesbian applicants receive fewer invitations to interview (5.1%) than heterosexual male or female applicants.<sup>36</sup> These results also showed that gay men receive significantly fewer invitations for interviews in traditionally 'male-dominated' fields and lesbian women receive significantly fewer invitations for interviews in traditionally 'female-dominated' fields.

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<sup>35</sup> The breakdown between LGB and T survey respondents is unspecified.

<sup>36</sup> Applications were made to entry-level jobs relevant to participating students' studies. Sexual orientation was based on membership of their universities' gay and lesbian unions.



## 6 Conclusions

The purpose of this review was to synthesise evidence on the recruitment of workers into low-paid occupations and industries, to find out whether protected groups experience discrimination in the recruitment process, and the barriers they encounter when seeking to enter the workplace.

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### 6.1 Employer recruitment practices

Overall, the findings of this review show that the availability of evidence on the recruitment practices of UK employers is good, although it is of variable quality. While national data on the recruitment channels commonly used by UK employers is readily available and disaggregated on a sectoral level, insight into specific sub-sectors and occupations often relies on non-representative survey and / or small-scale qualitative research.

The review also indicates a significant reliance on informal recruitment methods across the UK labour market. Word of mouth has, and continues to be, the most common recruitment method; it is used consistently across organisations of different size, sectors and regions. The findings of this review also show increased use of online recruitment methods, and decreased use of recruitment agencies; both of which are underpinned by pressures on cost. Robust evidence on employers' use of online recruitment methods, however, is sparse. Further exploration of employers' use of online recruitment methods is therefore required, particularly in regard to social media, with the limited evidence currently suggesting that recruitment discrimination may occur through social media revealing applicants' protected characteristics.

The review also identifies a high use of multiple recruitment methods, particularly among larger employers. Much of the available research, however, focuses on the practices of smaller and medium sized businesses. The practice of the largest employers is therefore relatively under-researched; this is a key evidence gap considering that businesses with 100+ employees account for approximately 42% of employment in the UK (Winterbotham et al., 2018).

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## 6.2 Employer recruitment practices across low-paid industries

The availability of evidence on the recruitment practices of specific occupations and industries is good, but heavily reliant on non-representative survey and / or small-scale qualitative research. As a result, systematically identifying national and regional similarities and differences in recruitment practices across sectors is rarely possible. In addition to this, very few studies have samples or sub-samples based in Wales. Welsh-specific research is therefore a key evidence gap.

This review also reinforces the wider survey research. It identifies a significant use of 'word of mouth' and other informal recruitment methods. These are often supplemented by online recruitment methods (usually depending on employer size), and sometimes by recruitment via agencies within industries with high staff turnover and chronic skills gaps. The findings of this review also highlight how employer choice of recruitment methods is often intrinsically linked to business demand, such as the need for staff flexibility, particularly within food manufacturing, hospitality and retail. The findings of this review also show that employers who are recruiting low-paid staff prefer low-cost recruitment.

This review suggests that 'word of mouth' and informal networks recruitment can have several disadvantages. This includes disadvantaging people with smaller social and / or work networks, including those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as entrenching existing workforce demographics, such as men in construction, migrants in hospitality, and younger people in retail.

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## 6.3 Employer recruitment practices and protected groups

Evidence on the effects that employer recruitment practices have on protected groups is highly variable. Much of the research focuses on age and race (particularly in terms of nationality). Some research focuses on disability and sex, albeit less. There are significant evidence gaps regarding gender identity, marriage and civil partnership, sexual orientation and religion or belief.

Much of the available research focuses on the recruitment of protected groups generally, as opposed to specifically, within low-paid occupations and industries. Of that which does focus specifically on low-paid occupations and industries, the vast majority is small-scale qualitative or non-representative survey research. Furthermore, much of the available data is indirect, often relying on the

expressed opinions of self-selected employees, employers, agencies and / or welfare support workers. It is therefore likely that the evidence does not capture the true extent of recruitment discrimination.

In addition to this, while some research explores the impact that specific recruitment methods have on protected groups, most explores the recruitment process more generally. Equalities-focused research is therefore needed to explore the impacts of specific recruitment methods. Further research is required for online recruitment methods and employers' use of social media, which may be biased against ethnic minorities and women, as well as disabled and older people. Discriminatory behaviour by recruitment agencies on the basis of age, disability, pregnancy and nationality was also identified throughout this review. Further research and / or an investigation into the practices of recruitment agencies by the Equality and Human Rights Commission should therefore be considered a priority.

## **Age**

This review suggests that employer and recruitment agency prejudice has a negative impact on younger and older people during the recruitment process. The findings also identify that online recruitment methods may be excluding older people, in terms of accessibility and not recognising non-standardised work histories.

## **Disability**

This research suggests that employer and recruitment agency prejudice based on physical capability and mobility, as well as mental health, has a negative impact on disabled people during the recruitment process. This review also provides evidence of online recruitment methods being inaccessible to disabled people, employers not making reasonable adjustments, and continued use of pre-employment health questions.

## **Gender identity**

This review identified virtually no research regarding recruitment discrimination on the basis of gender identity. That which was identified suggests that employer hostility on the basis of gender identity disadvantages transgender and non-binary people in the recruitment process. Evidence in this area, however, is considerably lacking and therefore requires further research.

## **Marriage and civil partnership**

This review identified virtually no research regarding recruitment discrimination on the basis of marriage and civil partnership. While substantial research explores the disadvantaged experienced by single parents through childcare costs and a lack of flexible work (Dewar and Clery, 2019), no research explicitly looking at the experiences of the recruitment process was identified. Future research in this area would therefore be beneficial.

## **Pregnancy and maternity**

This review identified little research exploring pregnancy and maternity-related discrimination in UK recruitment practices. That which was identified showed inappropriate questioning during interviews, as well as potentially hostile views among a sub-set of employers.

## **Race**

This review identified substantial research on discrimination on the basis of race in the recruitment process. Multiple correspondence studies identified that members of ethnic minority groups face discrimination, with Pakistani jobseekers identified as experiencing particularly negative outcomes. Findings also identified that a reliance on disadvantaged social networks may contribute to the marginalisation of ethnic minority groups in the UK labour market, as well as discriminatory behaviour by employers.

This review identified a considerable body of research exploring discrimination experienced by migrants specifically within low-paid occupations and industries. In addition to identifying how limited social networks may disadvantage migrants in the recruitment process, this review also identified evidence of unfair, discriminatory treatment of migrants and British nationals (particularly within the food manufacturing industry), and potentially unlawful behaviour by employers and recruitment agencies through making closed selection decisions based on national stereotypes.

## **Religion or belief**

This review identified limited evidence on discrimination in the recruitment process regarding religion and belief. That which was identified suggests that discrimination against Muslim job applicants exists in the UK. Disentangling discrimination on the basis of ethnicity from religion is conceptually and

methodologically challenging due to the high correlation. Further explorative, qualitative research is therefore required.

## **Sex**

The findings of this review suggest there to be significant barriers in returning to work after time out for caring, which most regularly affects women. Online recruitment methods were identified to be particularly problematic through not recognising non-standardised work histories. The evidence also suggests that there is gender segregation within the UK labour market, which adversely affects both men and women attempting to access certain occupations and industries.

## **Sexual orientation**

This review identified little research regarding recruitment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Overall, the findings of this review identify that LGB people have concerns around employer hostility in the recruitment process, as well as evidence of variable job-search outcomes. Future research in this area would therefore be beneficial.

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## **6.4 Research and policy implications**

Overall, the findings of this review identify substantial opportunities for employers, recruitment agencies, the Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission to work collaboratively to address recruitment discrimination. This includes:

- Further exploration of high-risk, under-researched groups. This is particularly important for groups whose experiences may go largely unnoticed in broader discrimination research, such as: ethnic minority women, disabled women or other intersectional groups; Gypsies and Travellers; Muslims; Pakistanis and Bangladeshis; single parents; and intersex, transgender and / or non-binary jobseekers.
- Conducting an inquiry into online recruitment methods including employers' use of social media.
- Conducting further research and / or an inquiry into the practices of recruitment agencies to address widespread claims of discrimination, as well as into the practices of largest employers.
- Exploring the feasibility of alternatives to word of mouth recruitment to avoid the entrenchment of workforce demographics and socio-economic

segregation, to address labour market marginalisation. This is particularly important for sectors such as hospitality and food manufacturing that currently rely on migrant social networks for recruitment.

- Increasing enforcement activity against discriminatory job advertising and inappropriate interview questioning on health, and encouraging the Government to consult on implementing a ban on questions relating to pregnancy and family status at interview.

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# Appendix 1: Scoping review protocol

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## Aims and processes

The aim of this review was to provide a synthesis of existing research on the recruitment of workers into UK low-paid and low-skilled occupations and industries. More specifically, this review sought to:

- Understand the main barriers that disadvantaged protected groups experience in recruitment to the workplace; and
- Understand what is known about recruitment practices in the workplace for different protected groups.

In order to meet this aim, this review sought to identify and synthesise evidence that addressed five key research questions:

1. What are the main formal and informal recruitment methods used in low-paid and low-skilled occupations and industries? How do they vary?
2. What is the role of recruitment agencies within and across low-paid and low-skilled occupations and industries? How does this vary?
3. To what extent are different protected groups more likely to be recruited to low-paid and low-skilled occupations and industries via formal or informal methods, or be recruitment agencies? Why? How does this vary?
4. What impact do commonly used formal and informal recruitment methods and the use of recruitment agencies have on protected groups in terms of (re)-entry to employment, as well as on hours, pay and skills progression? How does this vary?
5. In all the areas identified above, what similarities and differences are there between and within England, Scotland and Wales? What accounts for these differences?

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## Definitions

'Low pay' was defined upon the basis of two-thirds of median hourly earnings, as used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS)

'Low-skilled occupations and industries' was defined using the [ONS 2010 Standard Occupational Classification \(SOC 2010\)](#). A full list of relevant occupations is provided in Appendix 1.

These definitions were used to assess the relevance of evidence identified, as opposed to providing a strict basis for literature searching. This was to ensure relevant studies that might use alternative or unspecified definitions were included.

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## Protected groups covered by the review

This review sought to cover all protected characteristics as identified by the 2010 Equality Act: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. It also sought to cover evidence that explored intersecting identifies and multiple disadvantage.

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## Geographical coverage

This review covered evidence from England, Scotland and Wales, making distinction between that which is Great Britain / UK-wide and country-specific. It also covered references to specific regions, where possible.

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## Search process and methods

This review consisted of two stages: a scoping stage systematically to identify the nature, availability and range of evidence relevant to the research questions; and a critical evaluation and synthesis stage where the quality of research evidence for inclusion in the final report was evaluated.

## **Stage one: scoping exercise**

The main search terms used are listed on the following page. The list includes primary search terms, which cover both general and specific terms relevant to recruitment into low-paid, low-skilled occupations and industries, as well as additional search terms where less evidence was expected. It was recognised that there would be far more evidence in some areas than others, generally and regarding certain protected characteristics. Given the varied evidence base, this review adopted a flexible approach to the searching strategy to ensure maximum coverage. This included the use of primary and secondary keywords relating to recruitment, employment practices and labour demand, in conjunction with keywords related to protected groups when necessary to focus the evidence base.

The search process variously used Boolean operators to ensure its focus. Depending on the engines' search technology, appropriate and proportionate approaches were used to reduce the number of irrelevant hits (for example, eliminating historical and literary literature). This search process largely took an iterative approach, working within the confines of each search engine / database and their technology to find the most effective approach.

## Scoping review search terms

“recruitment discrimination” “hiring” “recruitment and selection” “job advert”  
“application sifting” “shortlisting” “job interviews” “recruitment agencies” “pre-  
employment questionnaires” “social media recruitment” “network recruitment”  
“recruitment algorithms” “word of mouth recruitment” “e-recruitment”  
“temporary agencies”

### AND

“England” “Scotland” “Wales” “Britain” “Great Britain” “United Kingdom” “UK”

“hospitality” “wholesale” “retail” “agriculture” “health” “social care” “social  
work” “manufacturing” “food processing”

### AND

“age” “older” “younger”

“disability” “disabled” “sickness”

“gender reassignment” “gender identity” “trans” “transgender”

“race” “ethnicity” “ethnic minority” “black and ethnic minority” “BAME” “BME”  
“ethnic group” “religion” “belief”

“sex” “male” “female” “women” “gender”

“sexual orientation” “lesbian” “gay” “bisexual”

“marriage” “civil partnership” “single”

“pregnancy” “maternity”

“lone parent” “single parent”



## Sources

The review focused on articles published from 2012 onwards, but the timeframe was sometimes extended to ensure coverage of key texts. The review was limited to evidence available in the English language, unless English summaries in other languages were readily accessible. The quality of translation, however, was considered when assessing inclusion in the final review.

<b>Geography:</b>	Research (wholly or in part) conducted in relation to the UK or parts of the UK
<b>Timescale:</b>	Published (or disseminated) from 2012 onwards
<b>Publication status:</b>	Published or pending publication, including working papers
<b>Language:</b>	English
<b>Research method:</b>	None prescribed

Literature searches used a wide range of databases and search engines, including:

- International Bibliography of Social Sciences
- JSTOR
- Google Scholar
- Academic Search Complete
- Informaworld
- IngentaConnect
- Public Information Online
- Sage Journals Online
- Scopus
- Social Policy and Practice
- Web of Science
- Social Care Online
- Social Science Research Network (SSRN)
- Web of Knowledge

Journals with a track-record in covering issues related to equality and recruitment were also searched. This included, but was not limited to:

- British Journal of Management
- British Journal of Industrial Relations
- Equal Opportunities Review
- European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology
- European Management Journal
- Human Resources Management
- Human Resources
- Industrial Relations Journal
- International Journal of Human Resource Management
- International Journal of Management Reviews
- International Journal of Selection and Assessment
- Journal of Management Studies
- People Management
- People and Strategy
- Policy Studies
- Strategic HR Review
- Work Employment and Society
- Workforce Management
- Journal of Retailing
- Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management
- Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism
- Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation

Websites of expert, sector-based and campaigning organisations and research institutes / academic departments were also searched. This included:

- Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE)
- Ageing Better
- Age UK
- Employment Research Institute
- Institute of Employment Studies
- Institute for Fiscal Studies
- Institute for Public Policy Research
- Institute of Economic Affairs
- Learning and Work Institute (previously Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion)
- National Centre for Social Research (NatGen)
- New Economics Foundation
- New Policy Institute
- Nuffield Foundation
- Policy Exchange

- Policy in Practice
- Poverty and Social Exclusion
- Reform
- Resolution Foundation
- Social Market Foundation
- The Smith Institute
- The Work Foundation
- Independent Living Fund
- Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)
- Equality Trust
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- TUC
- Unite
- Unison
- Scope
- Citizen's Advice
- Gingerbread
- Child Poverty Action Group
- Women's Resource Centre
- Disability Rights UK
- Young Women's Trust
- Runnymede Trust
- Scope
- Inclusion London
- Just Fair
- Race on the Agenda
- Mencap
- Inclusion Scotland
- Fawcett Society
- Race Equality Foundation
- Stonewall
- Recruitment and Employment Confederation
- British Retail Consortium
- UK Hospitality
- CIPD
- Acas
- Trust for London

Bibliographies of publications identified as relevant were also searched to ensure maximum coverage.

## **Stage two: Critical evaluation and synthesis of evidence**

Once relevant literature was identified, a two-staged sift process was conducted. The first sift assessed relevance specifically to recruitment, and to specific protected characteristics where appropriate, and was based on title and abstract / summary. The second sift of those sources was based on the full document. Here literature was assessed according to its relevance and quality. This included consideration of reported findings, as well as on the underlying research processes and evidence upon which they were based. This included an assessment of:

- Whether there was an explicit account of the research process, including design and methods and analysis of data.
- Whether the methods were appropriate and reliable.
- Whether data was of good quality.
- The scope and size of the sample (including response rate)
- Whether findings were reliable, credible and clearly related to the evidence, for example, no obvious ideological bias.

Inclusion-exclusion criteria were implemented in conjunction to the amount of evidence identified in this area, applying a lower threshold for inclusion where relevant. Given the limited evidence base for some protected groups, it was anticipated that the research report would include small-group studies and studies using convenience samples. Priority was given to higher-quality evidence sources where there was a larger evidence base. At the reporting stage, a discussion of the quality of evidence and presence of evidence gaps was made throughout the report, including the identification of key literature and key researchers in the field.

## Appendix 2: ONS classification of low-skilled occupations

The following tables lists the 4-digit Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) occupations defined as low-skilled by the definition used by the Office for National Statistics.

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### 41: Administrative occupations

4112	National government administrative occupations
4113	Local government administrative occupations
4114	Officers of non-governmental organisations
4121	Credit controllers
4122	Book-keepers, payroll managers and wages clerks
4123	Bank and post office clerks
4124	Finance officers
4129	Financial administrative occupations not elsewhere classified (n.e.c.)
4131	Records clerks and assistants
4132	Pensions and insurance clerks and assistants
4133	Stock control clerks and assistants
4134	Transport and distribution clerks and assistants
4135	Library clerks and assistants
4138	Human resources administrative occupations

4151	Sales administrators
4159	Other administrative occupations n.e.c.
4161	Office managers
4162	Office supervisors

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## 42: Secretarial and related occupations

4112	National government administrative occupations
4113	Local government administrative occupations
4114	Officers of non-governmental organisations
4121	Credit controllers
4122	Book-keepers, payroll managers and wages clerks
4123	Bank and post office clerks
4124	Finance officers
4129	Financial administrative occupations n.e.c.
4131	Records clerks and assistants
4132	Pensions and insurance clerks and assistants
4133	Stock control clerks and assistants
4134	Transport and distribution clerks and assistants
4135	Library clerks and assistants
4138	Human resources administrative occupations
4151	Sales administrators
4159	Other administrative occupations n.e.c.
4161	Office managers
4162	Office supervisors

4211	Medical secretaries
4212	Legal secretaries
4213	School secretaries
4214	Company secretaries
4215	Personal assistants and other secretaries
4216	Receptionists
4217	Typists and related keyboard occupations

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## **61: Caring personal service occupations**

6121	Nursery nurses and assistants
6122	Childminders and related occupations
6123	Playworkers
6125	Teaching assistants
6126	Educational support assistants
6131	Veterinary nurses
6132	Pest control officers
6139	Animal care services occupations n.e.c.
6141	Nursing auxiliaries and assistants
6142	Ambulance staff (excluding paramedics)
6143	Dental nurses
6144	Houseparents and residential wardens
6145	Care workers and home carers
6146	Senior care workers
6147	Care escorts

6148 Undertakers, mortuary and crematorium assistants

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## 62: Leisure, travel and related service occupations

6121 Sports and leisure assistants

6122 Travel agents

6123 Air travel assistants

6125 Rail travel assistants

6126 Leisure and travel service occupations n.e.c.

6221 Hairdressers and barbers

6222 Beauticians and related occupations

6231 Housekeepers and related occupations

6232 Caretakers

6240 Cleaning and housekeeping managers and supervisors

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## 71: Sales occupations

7111 Sales and retail assistants

7112 Retail cashiers and check-out operators

7113 Telephone salespersons

7114 Pharmacy and other dispensing assistants

7115 Vehicle and parts salespersons and advisers

7121 Collector salespersons and credit agents

7122 Debt, rent and other cash collectors

7123 Roundspersons and van salespersons



7124	Market and street traders and assistants
7125	Merchandisers and window dressers
7129	Sales related occupations n.e.c.
7130	Sales supervisors

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## **72: Customer services occupations**

7211	Call and contact centre occupations
7213	Telephonists
7214	Communication operators
7215	Market research interviewers
7219	Customer service occupations n.e.c.
7220	Customer service managers and supervisors

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## **81: Process, plant and machine operatives**

8111	Food, drink and tobacco process operatives
8112	Glass and ceramics process operatives
8113	Textile process operatives
8114	Chemical and related process operatives
8115	Rubber process operatives
8116	Plastics process operatives
8117	Metal making and treating process operatives
8118	Electroplaters
8119	Process operatives n.e.c.
8121	Paper and wood machine operatives

8122	Coal mine operatives
8123	Quarry workers and related operatives
8124	Energy plant operatives
8125	Metal working machine operatives
8126	Water and sewerage plant operatives
8127	Printing machine assistants
8129	Plant and machine operatives n.e.c.
8131	Assemblers (electrical and electronic products)
8132	Assemblers (vehicles and metal goods)
8133	Routine inspectors and testers
8134	Weighers, graders and sorters
8135	Tyre, exhaust and windscreen fitters
8137	Sewing machinists
8139	Assemblers and routine operatives n.e.c.
8141	Scaffolders, staggers and riggers
8142	Road construction operatives
8143	Rail construction and maintenance operatives
8149	Construction operatives n.e.c.

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## **82: Transport and mobile machine drivers and operatives**

8211	Large goods vehicle drivers
8212	Van drivers

8213	Bus and coach drivers
8214	Taxi and cab drivers and chauffeurs
8215	Driving instructors
8221	Crane drivers
8222	Fork-lift truck drivers
8223	Agricultural machinery drivers
8229	Mobile machine drivers and operatives n.e.c.
8231	Train and tram drivers
8232	Marine and waterways transport operatives
8233	Air transport operatives
8234	Rail transport operatives
8239	Other drivers and transport operatives n.e.c.

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## **91: Elementary trades and related occupations**

9111	Farm workers
9112	Forestry workers
9119	Fishing and other elementary agriculture occupations n.e.c.
9120	Elementary construction occupations
9132	Industrial cleaning process occupations
9134	Packers, bottlers, canners and fillers
9139	Elementary process plant occupations n.e.c.

## **92: Elementary administration and service occupations**

9211	Postal workers, mail sorters, messengers and couriers
9219	Elementary administration occupations n.e.c.
9231	Window cleaners
9232	Street cleaners
9233	Cleaners and domestics
9234	Launderers, dry cleaners and pressers
9235	Refuse and salvage occupations
9236	Vehicle valeters and cleaners
9239	Elementary cleaning occupations n.e.c.
9241	Security guards and related occupations
9242	Parking and civil enforcement occupations
9244	School midday and crossing patrol occupations
9249	Elementary security occupations n.e.c.
9251	Shelf fillers
9259	Elementary sales occupations n.e.c.
9260	Elementary storage occupations
9271	Hospital porters
9272	Kitchen and catering assistants
9273	Waiters and waitresses
9274	Bar staff
9275	Leisure and theme park attendants
9279	Other elementary services occupations n.e.c.

## Contacts

This publication and related equality and human rights resources are available from [our website](#).

Questions and comments regarding this publication may be addressed to: [correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com](mailto:correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com). We welcome your feedback.

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## EASS

For advice, information or guidance on equality, discrimination or human rights issues, please contact the [Equality Advisory and Support Service](#), a free and independent service.

Telephone 0808 800 0082

Textphone 0808 800 0084

Hours 09:00 to 19:00 (Monday to Friday)

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