

# How are ethnic inequalities in education changing?

## Summary

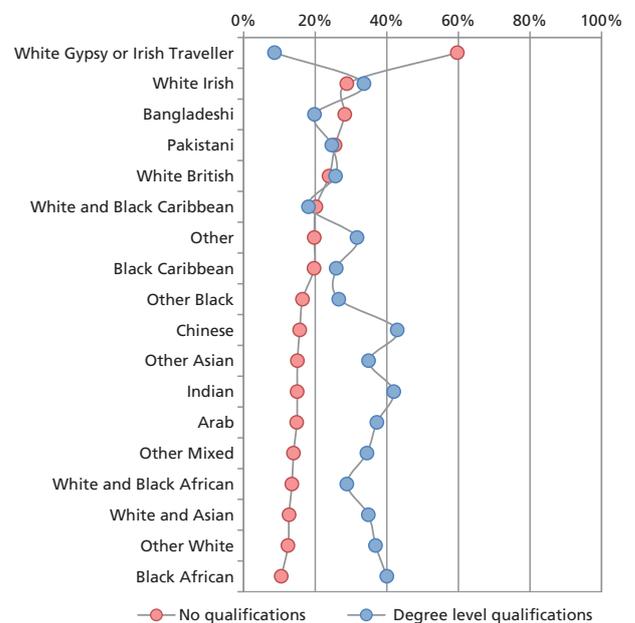
This briefing uses data from the 1991, 2001 and 2011 Censuses to provide an overview of the educational attainment of ethnic groups in England and Wales and to examine how the educational attainment of adults has changed over time. The main findings are:

- Between 1991 and 2011 there was an overall improvement in educational attainment but ethnic minority groups experienced greater improvements compared with the White group.
- The educational disadvantage of Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups compared to the White group declined between 1991 and 2011 but was still present in 2011.
- The Indian and Pakistani groups experienced an increase in those with degree level qualifications by 27 and 18 percentage points respectively, between 1991 and 2011.
- The Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups saw a 19 and 16 percentage point decrease respectively in those without any qualifications between 2001 and 2011.
- In 2011, 60% of the White Gypsy or Irish Traveller group had no qualifications. This was the highest proportion for any ethnic group and was two and a half times that of the White British group.
- In contrast, the figures for the Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups were only a little higher than that for the White British group, 28% of Pakistani people and 29% of Bangladeshi people had no qualifications compared with 24% of White British people.
- Members of the Indian, Chinese and Black African groups had higher educational attainment than other ethnic minority groups and the White British group in both 2001 and 2011.
- Over a third of people born outside of the UK had degree level qualifications compared with a quarter of people born in the UK.
- Young Asian groups aged 16-24, including Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants, were considerably more qualified than their older counterparts.

## Introduction

Historically, ethnic minority groups have been disadvantaged in terms of education compared with the White British group. Many post-war immigrants lacked qualifications,

**Figure 1: People aged 16 and over with no qualifications and degree level qualifications by ethnic group in 2011**



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or had qualifications that were not directly transferable to employers in Britain. Over the last twenty years educational attainment has been increasing among ethnic groups as a result of an improvement in access to education overseas and the increasing proportion of ethnic minority people educated in Britain.<sup>1</sup>

The acquisition of education has been associated with the improvement of employment outcomes among ethnic groups, alongside better income prospects (see also *Ethnic inequalities in the labour market* Briefing).<sup>2</sup>

In order to examine which ethnic groups are more and less advantaged in terms of educational attainment, this briefing focuses on the distribution of high education outcomes (degree level or equivalent qualifications) and low education outcomes (no qualifications). The analysis also provides a breakdown of qualifications by age and country of birth, wherever possible, to explore potential explanations for differences in educational attainment among ethnic groups.

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## Educational attainment by ethnic group in 2011

People from ethnic minority groups were generally more likely than White British people to have degree level qualifications or equivalent. In 2011, only people from the White Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and White and Black Caribbean groups were less likely than White British people to have degree level qualifications or equivalent (Figure 1). The groups with the highest proportion of people with degree level qualifications were the Chinese (43%), Indian (42%) and Black African (40%). Black African people were also the least likely to have no qualifications (11%). The Black African group has grown mainly through migration over the last decade (see *What makes ethnic group populations grow?* Briefing) and includes a substantial number of international students.<sup>4</sup> The Other White group and the Mixed ethnic groups also had a lower proportion of people with no qualifications (between 12% and 20%) than the national average (23%).

The most disadvantaged group in terms of educational attainment was the White Gypsy or Irish Traveller group. In 2011, 60% of White Gypsy or Irish Traveller people had no qualifications. This was the highest proportion for any ethnic group and was 2.5 times higher than for White British people. Similarly, only around 1 in 10 (9%) White Gypsy or Irish Traveller people had degree level qualifications or equivalent. There were also higher proportions of people with no qualifications in the White Irish (29%), Bangladeshi (29%) and Pakistani (28%) groups than in the White British group (24%). This partly reflects the different age composition of these groups and the lower rates of participation in education among some ethnic minority women. For example, the White Irish group have an older age structure than other groups, while Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are less likely to have qualifications than women belonging to other ethnic groups due to earlier marriage, family formation and cultural practices.<sup>5</sup>

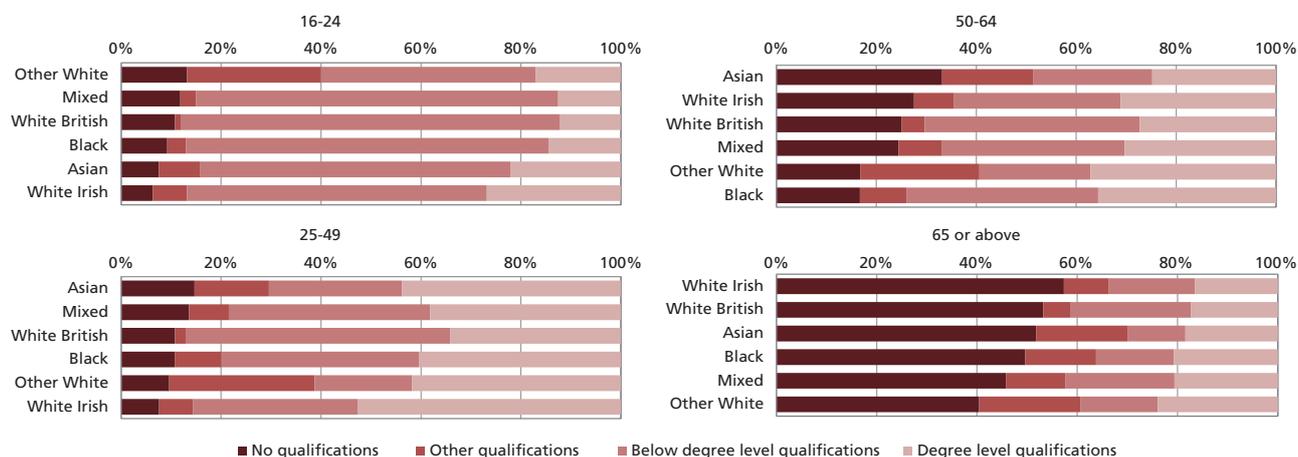
## Measuring educational attainment

In 2011 people aged 16 and over were asked by the Census to indicate all the types of educational qualifications they held from thirteen options, ranging from no formal qualifications through to degree level qualifications. People with qualifications gained outside the UK were asked to tick the 'foreign qualifications' box and the nearest UK equivalents. Responses were combined into five categories for the highest level of qualification held, plus one category for no qualifications, and one for other qualifications. Other qualifications included foreign qualifications where an equivalent qualification was not indicated. The 2011 qualifications question is broadly comparable with the 2001 Census question although this question in 2001 was only asked of people aged 16 to 74. In 1991 people aged 18 years or over were asked to write-in the name of any degrees or vocational qualifications attained excluding school level qualifications. The 1991 Census qualifications question was processed only for a ten per cent sample of households and people in communal establishments. In this briefing we focus on degree level or equivalent qualifications, which allows comparison across the three Census years, and on no academic or professional qualifications, which allows comparison between 2001 and 2011. Degree level or equivalent qualifications correspond to a completed education at Level 4 or above, including first and higher degree, vocational and professional qualifications.<sup>3</sup>

## Educational attainment by ethnic group and age in 2011

The published 2011 Census data do not provide a breakdown of qualifications by gender, however it is possible to examine qualifications by age for broad ethnic groups. As shown in Figure 2, there were differences in educational attainment between younger and older groups,

Figure 2: Qualifications by age and ethnic group in 2011



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but these were more marked for ethnic minority groups. For example, the proportion of Asian people aged 25 to 49 with no qualifications was nearly double that of people in the 16-24 age bracket (15% compared with 8% respectively), but the proportion of White British people with no qualifications in the same age groups was almost identical (11%). Among people aged 50-64, members of the Asian group were also (1.3 times) more likely than people in the White British group to have no qualifications.

However, across all age groups members of ethnic minority groups were more likely to have degree level qualifications than people in the White British group. Members of ethnic minority groups in the younger age groups had particularly high levels of attainment. For example, the proportion of Asian people and White Irish people aged 16-25 with degree level qualifications was double that of White British people in the same age group (22% and 27% for the Asian and White Irish group respectively compared with 12% for the White British group).

## Educational attainment by country of origin and age in 2011

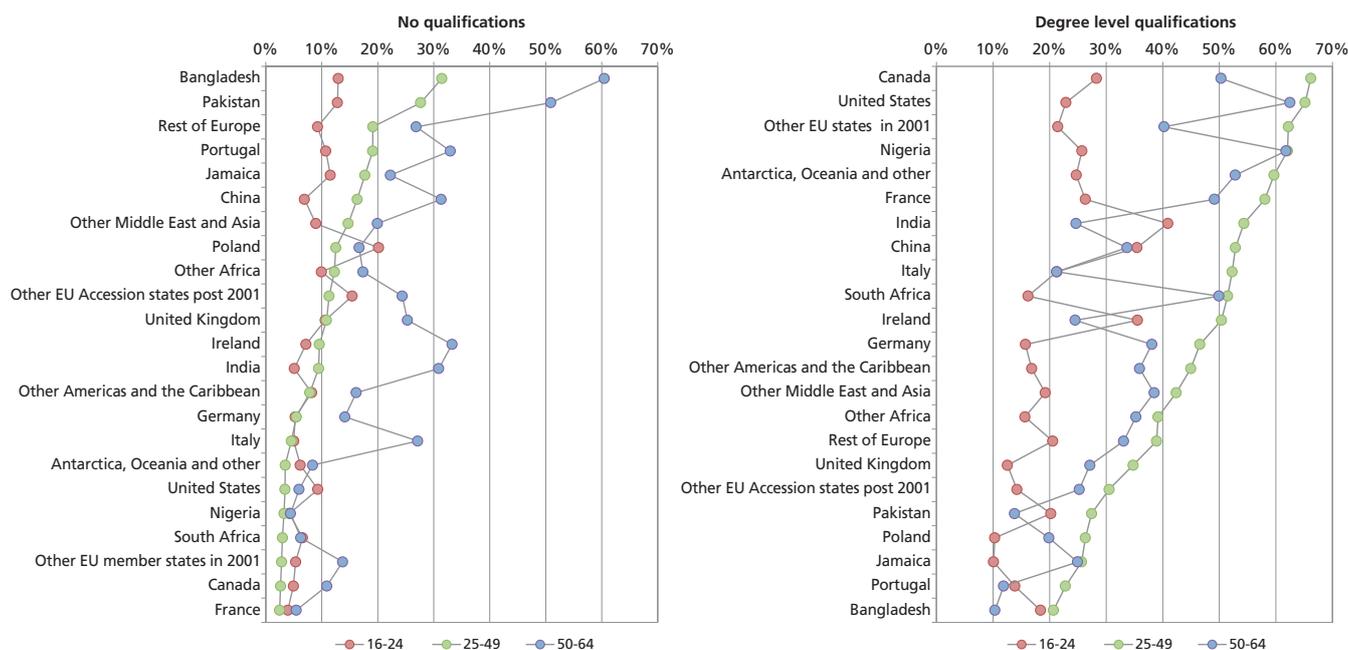
The differences in educational attainment between younger and older groups are more pronounced for those born outside the UK. Among Bangladeshi and Pakistani migrants, 13% of each group of those aged 16-24 had no qualifications, compared with 31% and 28% respectively

of those aged 25 to 49. However, more than half of the Bangladeshi and Pakistani migrants aged 50 to 64 were without any qualifications (60% and 51% respectively) (Figure 3). Among Indian migrants aged 16 to 24, only 5% had no qualifications but nearly a third of those aged 50 to 64 had no qualifications. Conversely, 41% of Indians aged 16 to 24 had degree level qualifications. This reflects, to some extent, the large numbers of student migrants comprising the Indian group. In the age group 25 to 49, Nigerians had the highest proportion of people with degree level qualifications among Africans at 62%. In the same age group, only a quarter of Jamaicans had degree level qualifications. EU Accession groups, including Polish migrants, were less likely to have degrees; this reflects the large numbers of migrants with other (foreign) qualifications. Across all ages, over a third (35%) of people born outside the UK had degree level qualifications compared with a quarter (26%) of people born in the UK. Similarly, the foreign born population were less likely to be without any qualifications than the UK born population (19% and 23% respectively)

## Educational attainment 1991 to 2011

A comparison of the 1991, 2001 and 2011 Censuses suggests that all ethnic groups experienced improvements in educational attainment over the last twenty years. These improvements reflect, to a large extent, improved access to higher education, particularly among women.<sup>6</sup> The largest improvements between 1991 and 2011 were

**Figure 3: People with no qualifications and degree level qualifications by age and country of birth in 2011**

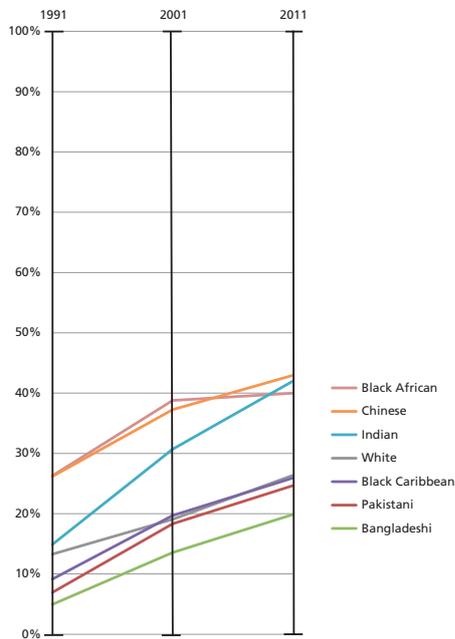


Note: The figures show the country or broad region in which people were born. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has grouped countries into five broad regions: Europe (European Union (EU), Rest of Europe), Africa (Nigeria, South Africa, Other Africa), Middle East and Asia (China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Other Middle East and Asia), the Americas and the Caribbean (Canada, United States, Jamaica, Other Americas and the Caribbean), and Antarctica and Oceania. Countries in the EU are grouped into those that were EU members in 2001 (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Other EU) and those that joined the EU subsequently as part of the EU enlargement (Poland and Other EU Accession states). Rest of Europe includes all other (non EU) countries in Europe.

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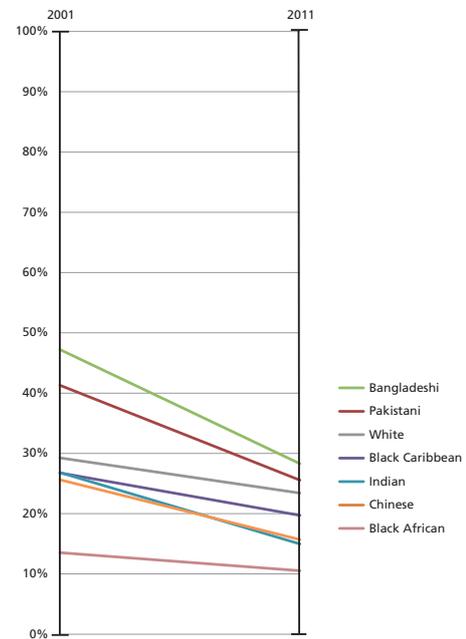
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**Figure 4:** People with degree level qualifications by ethnic group in 1991, 2001 and 2011



[Click here for data in Excel](#)

**Figure 5:** People with no qualifications by ethnic group in 2001 and 2011



[Click here for data in Excel](#)

for the Indian and Pakistani groups, which experienced an increase in those with degree level qualifications by 27 and 18 percentage points respectively (Figure 4). There were also large increases in degree level qualifications for people from the Chinese and Black Caribbean groups (17 percentage points in each). These groups, with the exception of the Pakistani and Black Caribbean group, grew mainly through immigration rather than through natural change between 2001 and 2011. In particular, these groups are comprised of a large number of international students (see *What makes ethnic group populations grow?* Briefing). Overall, more of the increase in the proportion of people with degrees

occurred between 1991 and 2001 than between 2001 and 2011. The least improvement in the proportion of people with high qualifications was in the White group.

Similarly, between 2001 and 2011, there was a reduction in the proportion of people without any qualifications (Figure 5). The Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups saw the greatest improvement in educational attainment with a 19 and 16 percentage point decrease respectively in those without any qualifications. In contrast, the proportion of people with no qualifications in the Black African group was roughly equivalent in 2001 and 2011 (14% and 11%).

<sup>14</sup> Simpson, L. K., Purdam, A., Tajar, E., Fieldhouse, V., Gavalas, M., Tranmer, J., Pritchard, D., Dorling, D. (2006). Ethnic minority populations and the labour market: an analysis of the 1991 and 2001 Census. DWP report No. 333. The Department of Work and Pensions, London.

<sup>2</sup> Clark, K. and Drinkwater, S. (2007). Ethnic minorities in the labour market, dynamics and diversity, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<sup>3</sup> Level 4 qualifications or above correspond to degree (for example BA, BSc), higher degree (for example MA, PhD, PGCE), NVQ Level 4-5, HNC, HND, RSA Higher Diploma, BTEC Higher level, and Foundation degree (NI) qualifications.

<sup>5</sup> Dale, A. (2002). Social exclusion of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women. *Sociological Research Online*, 7(3) <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/7/3/dale.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Lindley, J., Dex, S., Dale, A. (2006). Ethnic Differences in women's employment: The changing role of qualifications. *Oxford Economic Papers* 58 (2), 351-378.

Sources: The 1991 2001 and 2011 Censuses (Crown Copyright)

This briefing is one in a series, *The Dynamics of Diversity: evidence from the 2011 Census*.

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