



TfL Corporate Archives Research Guides

Research Guide No 21: Ethnic Minorities in the Workforce

Transport for London has had a long history of employing overseas workers, particularly from the Commonwealth. This guide outlines some of the main developments and details the main resources held by the TfL Corporate Archives in this area.

A recruitment problem

Before the more well-known recruitment from the West Indies began in the 1950s, Transport for London's predecessor, London Transport (LT) was already employing labour from overseas. LT began, for example employing Poles on the railways in significant numbers as early as 1939 (LT001455/1506).

Yet it was following severe staff shortages and high turnover in post-war London (best documented in LT000367/042, LT001658/003, LT000232/173 and LT000344/092) that LT began to look further afield for staff to fill its many vacant lower grade roles such as bus conductors, Underground staff, and canteen assistants. Initially this involved the promotion of opportunities in other parts of the UK such as Northern Ireland and Lancashire (LT000073/37), but LT also looked overseas, recruiting directly from countries including Malta (LT001455/1506, LT1670/1977) and Ireland (LT000232/173, LT000998/033). The Transport for London Corporate Archives also contains documentation relating to the employment and promotion of ethnic minority workers dating as far back as 1949 (LT001455/1583).

Barbados at the time was suffering from a job shortage so, at the invitation of its government, LT began recruiting directly from the island in 1956. The 1956 Recruitment and Training Annual Report states that *'In February, a recruitment official and a senior medical officer visited Barbados, and recruited 50 men conductors, 20 women conductors and 70 stationmen. They also made arrangements for the local*

Commissioner of Labour to continue recruitment on our behalf on the basis of LT Standards and a further 88 conductors and 20 stationwomen have subsequently arrived in this country' (LT000232/173).

New recruits were loaned the fare for the trip to the UK (LT001609/039) and a designated Barbados Migrants' Liaison service was established to help them to secure housing in London. They were warned that they would '*initially regret the change, but will change their minds after a month or so in England*' (LT001455/1576). The Corporate Archives contains some names of individuals recruited in this period (LT001455/1583).

In 1966, recruitment offices were also opened in Jamaica and Trinidad. Throughout the late 1950's and the 1960's many people followed friends and relatives by making their own way from the West Indies to the UK and finding employment with LT and other large employers. The scale of migration at this time was not insignificant and LT had to consult with the various trade unions which initially wanted to impose certain restrictions on the migrants (LT001670/1977).

The Commonwealth Immigration Acts of 1962 and 1968 imposed greater regulations on immigration to the UK from the British Empire and numbers began to fall substantially from the mid 1960s. Formal recruitment in the West Indies occurred until 1970 although some people continued to secure employment with LT thereafter. Although comprehensive figures on the background of employees were not kept until the 1980s, a survey in 1971 estimated that LT had 7,500 'coloured' employees (12% of the total workforce of 60,000 (LT 001670/1563)).

The impacts of a changing workforce



Although individuals recruited overseas had intended to stay in the UK only a few years, many others remained indefinitely and had a significant impact on life in LT. Staff magazines held within the Corporate Archives show substantial contributions to the organisation's sports teams, especially in athletics and cricket. Yet the recruitment of people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds also threw up considerable challenges for LT and its new employees.

The Corporate Archives holds evidence of early resistance to the recruitment of ethnic minorities to work in booking offices by the existing workforce as documented in a memo from staff representatives in

1959 (LT001455/1580), and a letter from LT to the Transport Salaried Staff Association (T.S.S.A.) in 1960 (LT001455/1579). Another similar example can be found in LT001455/1580.

The archival material also suggests that bus garages located in areas where suitable housing could be found for immigrant workers felt overburdened, which resulted in some tension with existing staff. There was also a tendency for new employees to seek early transfer from the station where they had been sent due to accommodation issues, perhaps defeating the policy of *'recruiting them for areas where labour is required but otherwise difficult to obtain'* (LT001670/1977).

The Corporate Archives also holds information which demonstrates the friction relating to the perceived 'special treatment' of immigrant workers by LT. In 1967/68, the Sikh community mounted a campaign to secure the right for Sikh employees to wear a beard and turban which was contrary to LT regulations at the time. LT changed its regulations to accommodate this, but archival material demonstrates the ill feeling this caused amongst other drivers and conductors, who protested in a hat parade in July 1968 (LT001670/1563).

Some of the archive's records more directly underscore wider attitudes to ethnic minorities in the mid 20th century, for example the abuse faced by one black employee during the 1958 racial disturbances in London (LT001455/1579).

Promotion was another contentious issue. After working in lower grade jobs for several years, many people aspired to work their way up through the organisation. Whilst in 1950, the Unions were concerned that Polish labour was eligible for promotion on an equal footing with British Nationals (LT001455/1506), in the years to follow, some immigrant workers, particularly those working on the buses, experienced barriers to promotion, which they attributed to racial discrimination by LT. The archive contains documents from a range of sources challenging the company's promotion procedures, along with LT's responses to these (LT001455/1582).



One particularly well documented case within the archive is that of Lionel Alleyne, a bus conductor who unsuccessfully applied for promotion to inspector 7 times. His case attracted attention from the press in the form of an article in the Evening Standard in 1969 (LT001670/1563). Other similar records include LT001544/1581.

The West Indian Standing Conference and the Campaign against Racial Discrimination (CARD) sought to represent the views of workers who felt discriminated against. The Archive holds various pamphlets and correspondence between LT and these bodies

including *'The Unsquare Deal'* which provides an overview of how some non-white workers felt about their career prospects at the time (LT001670/1563).

Throughout the later part of the 20th Century and in line with a changing on equal opportunities, LT developed a more structured approach to these issues as evidenced throughout the archives. Today Transport for London has an ethnically and culturally diverse workforce, with the descendents of a number of early recruits from overseas now working across the organisation.

Outside interest

Relatively little original information is held in the Archives about the origins and impact of the direct recruitment programmes and the employment of immigrants. LT's approach, however, has been of interest to many organisations and researchers over the years and the resulting research and related correspondence provides a useful source of information for today's researchers.

LT's approach has often been heralded as forward thinking and other organisations have sought its advice, highlighted for example by reports from a 1972 Conference on the Management of a Multiracial Workforce (LT001455/1578) and a request for support from The Public Passenger Transport Association of New Zealand in relation to training 'multi racial staff' in 1974 (LT001670/1563).

During the late 1960s, an independent research project into the absorption of Commonwealth immigrant workers in LT was commissioned by the Acton Society, an early Think Tank. The Corporate Archives holds a number of draft versions of the report, carried out by the Industrial Relations Research Unit of the Social Science Research Council (LT001455/1576, LT000740/036, LT000665/084 and LT000665/085). Whilst the report provides a detailed account of the experiences of the immigrant workforce and is likely to still be of interest to researchers, the accompanying correspondence between LT staff and the researcher D Brookes' records demonstrate that LT felt some of its findings were misleading or out of date, particularly by the time that the resulting book was published in 1971.

A number of recent booklets and exhibitions produced for the public celebrate diversity within Transport for London over the years and provide a more in depth overview of the issues touched upon in this research guide. These include 'Generations,' produced by Transport for London (TfL) in 2006 as part of the 50th Anniversary of the direct recruitment scheme and Wheels under London, celebrating 60 years of LT.

Key archival records

Ref No	Title	Date
(NEW)LT001455/1506	Staff - Employment - Foreign Labour	1947-1968

(NEW)LT000367/042	London Transport Executive (LTE): Staff Issues	1947-1956
(NEW)LT001658/003	Chief Staff and Welfare Officer - 4-Weekly Reports on the Recruitment of Wages Staff	1948-1950
(NEW)LT000232/173	Recruitment, Training and Education Officer Reports; Sectional Council Meetings	1948-1959
(NEW)LT000344/092	Staff Recruitment	1948-1954
(NEW)LT001455/1583	Staff - Employment - Coloured Staff	1949-1965
(NEW)LT001455/1579	Staff - Employment - Coloured Staff	1958-1960
(NEW)LT001670/1563	Papers regarding the Employment of Ethnic People	1962-1986
(NEW)LT001670/1977	Central Bus Committee Minutes	1963-1963
(NEW)LT000665/084	The Acton Society Trust: Industrial Relations Research Trust - A study of the integration of the coloured worker	1964-1973
(NEW)LT001455/1576	Staff - Employment - Coloured Staff - Acton Society Research	1965-1971
(NEW)LT000115/201	Staff - General Letters - Sports Grounds, etc	1961-1968
(NEW)LT000998/033	London Transport Board: Road Operating Services - Drivers and Conductors - Overseas Recruitment - Exhibit 56	1966
(NEW)LT001455/1582	Staff - Employment - Coloured Staff	1966-1984
(NEW)LT001455/1581	Staff - Employment - Coloured Staff - Camden Committee for Community Relations	1967-1968
(NEW)LT001455/1577	Staff - Employment - Coloured Staff - Registration of Guyanese Nationals	1968-1968
(NEW)LT000665/085	Acton Society Trust	Circa 1970
(NEW)LT001455/1578	Staff - Camden Committee for Community Relations	1972-1972
(NEW)LT000740/036	Industrial Relations Research Unit report: Integration of the coloured worker	1974-1978
(NEW)LT000073/037	London Transport External Organisation	1976-1985
(NEW)LT002009/439	Oral Interview: Vernon Recruitment from Barbados - 1960s Memories	Nd
(NEW)LT001455/1580	Staff - Recruitment - Posters	1959-1978
(NEW)LT001609/039	London Transport Staff Matters - General	1954-1962

