BRIEFING

RACE AT WORK: COMMITMENT FIVE

Inclusive leaders take action that supports Black, Asian, Mixed Race, and other ethnically diverse employee career progression

Contents

Race at Work Commitment Five

Inclusive leaders take action that supports Black, Asian, Mixed Race, and other ethnically diverse employee career progression

Include fair access to development opportunities, facilitating two-way mentoring, sponsorship, and coaching especially where this intersects with employee ethnicity, gender, and/or lower socioeconomic background. This should include developing skills and career progression planning for young and entry-level employees.

Trends and insights

Employers must support employee career progression. This briefing includes ideas on how employees can support young people's skills development and progression pathways that can also be applicable to mid-level employees.

We recommend acting from day one, by increasing the transparency of the career pathways within your organisation, setting out clearly the progression and titles of different roles, including the different skills needed at each level, and the potential salary ranges at the various levels within the organisation.

Business in the Community's (BITC) Race at Work survey 2025 discovered that those from an ethnically diverse background are more likely than those from a White ethnic background to have a mentor (39% of ethnically diverse employees have a mentor vs. 22% of White employees) or a sponsor (22% of ethnically diverse employees vs. 9% of White employees), and are more likely to be a mentor (35% of ethnically diverse employees vs. 24% of White employees) or a sponsor (19% of ethnically diverse employees vs 9% of White employees). This pattern is consistent with previous years, however, the proportion of ethnically diverse employees reporting they have a mentor has increased since 2021, rising from 28% to 39%.

Among those who have a mentor, those who are ethnically diverse are more likely to feel the benefits than those from a White ethnic background:

- Three quarters of ethnically diverse employees with a mentor (74%) agree that their mentor actively tells them about opportunities for development that are relevant to their career aspirations, compared to 66% of those from a White background.
- Four in five ethnically diverse employees with mentors (81%) agree that having access to a mentor helps them to achieve what they want, compared to 75% of those from a White background. Agreement for both statements has also increased among those who are ethnically diverse since 2021 (from 64% to 74% and from 73% to 81% respectively).

Those who are ethnically diverse are also more likely to have a career role model than those from White ethnic backgrounds (46% of ethnically diverse employees have a career role model vs. 26% of White employees), increasing from 38% in 2021. Those who are ethnically diverse are also more likely to agree that a role model needs to be from the same background as them (35% of ethnically diverse employees vs. 27% of White employees).

Actions for employers

Understanding what the progression pathways look like, and the skills required to be successful at each level, can help an employee to decide on the skills they need to focus on and enhance and to explore with their line managers what posts and opportunities will help them to develop and demonstrate their talent, competence, and ability.

There are many actions that employers can take to expand opportunities for skills development and career progression pathways.

1. Build progression pathways from day one
- Develop career progression planning targeted at young and entry-level employees, as well as those at mid-level.
- Map clear routes upwards, with tailored milestones and internal mobility options. This may require some lateral and sideways moves before a step up is realistic or viable. Discuss this to manage expectations about the art of the possible, especially if progression requires the acquiring of specific technical skills that have their own timetable.
- Embed coaching, sponsorship, and mentorship opportunities at each career stage.

2. Co-create career journeys

- Invite employees to co-design individual career plans aligned with organisational goals.
- Include regular coaching sessions and feedback loops to identify and close skills gaps.
- Use career conversations as a space to reflect, strategise, and build confidence.

Employers should co-create a structured skills development and progression plan for young people joining the workplace at entry and junior levels. This plan can focus on some key pillars that include:

- Building on and enhancing foundational skills that are essential for workplace professional behaviour:
    - Communication skills (verbal, written, digital)
    - Time management and organisation
    - Basic digital literacy (e.g. use of IT software, email etiquette)
    - Teamwork and collaboration
    - Problem-solving and critical thinking

- Highlighting the importance of soft skills to help them thrive in dynamic and sometimes changing environments:
    - Adaptability and resilience
    - Self-awareness and confidence
    - Conflict resolution and interpersonal skills
    - Growth mindset and feedback receptiveness

- Career pathway mapping from your organisation's perspective, giving them a sense of direction and purpose:
    - Clear progression routes (e.g. junior → mid-level → senior)
    - Milestones and goals (e.g. certifications, promotions, project team participation, project management, and leadership)
    - Mentorship or buddy systems for guidance and support

3. Encourage employees to expand professional networks

- Enable cross-departmental collaborations and project-based learning.
- Invest in employee networks and resource groups to host events and amplify voices. Invite new and young employees to join employee network groups to enable them to expand their networks within the organisation, increase their feelings of connectedness, and reduce attrition.
- Support skills sharing through volunteering and inter-team shadowing initiatives.

4. Empower with mentorship and peer support
- Facilitate mentoring circles focused on inclusion and leadership development.
- Encourage employees to become mentors themselves and encourage managers and leaders to be reverse and two-way mentors for junior colleagues.
- Create sponsorship programs and models and identify the most impactful inclusive leadership behaviours needed to champion high-potential talent from underrepresented backgrounds.

5. Promote inclusive conversations and leadership
- Make space for dialogue about fairness, allyship, solidarity, and representation at the top.
- Prioritise engagement in decision-making by, asking employees to co-create skills development and career progression plans and embed inclusive leadership support, coaching, and action into the design.
- Encourage line managers and senior leaders to actively support inclusive progression approaches and plans.

6. Attribute credit for ideas and contributions to projects and teams
- It is important that credit for ideas is correctly attributed.
- This is motivational and ensures that selections for stretch assignments and progression opportunities are extended to those who are actually fuelling innovative ideas and creating opportunities for delivering additional services to clients and customers.

7. Monitor, measure, and adapt
- Regularly review access to opportunities for transparency and fairness
- Identify any hidden barriers to progression and respond with targeted interventions.

- Foster a culture where all talent can thrive through challenge, visibility, and fair recognition.

8. Make inclusion and wellbeing support available
Encourage a healthy and inclusive environment and signpost employees to:
- mental health resources
- equality and fairness training and your organisation's policies
- safe spaces for questions and concerns
- support networks or employee resource groups available within your organisation

9. Empower employee progression through fair performance reviews and feedback loops
Have open conversations on how you can track progress and refine goals:
- Schedule regular check-ins with managers.
- Encourage 360-degree feedback, through examination of employee survey trends, as well as one-to-one conversations and focus groups.
- Create and keep personal development plans (PDPs) live and current.
- Look for opportunities for public recognition (internally and externally) and rewards for achievements.
- Explore how there can be enhanced opportunities to access good work to demonstrate skills, expertise and potential to increase effectiveness and impact.

10. Use data to drive fairness and track access to opportunities
- Develop dashboards to highlight fair access to stretch assignments, secondments, and training.
- Monitor trends in promotions, representation, and access across diverse groups.
- Engage progression sponsors or employee advisory panels to ensure accountability.

BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY

Business in the Community is the UK's largest and most influential responsible business network dedicated to building a fairer and greener world together, supported by His Majesty the King for over 40 years. We inspire, engage and challenge purposeful leaders to take practical action to mobilise their collective strength as a force for good in society.