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BRIEFING

RACE AT WORK: COMMITMENT FOUR

Inclusive leaders and managers ensure fair access to opportunities and development for everyone in their team

Contents

Race at Work Commitment Four

Inclusive leaders and managers ensure fair access to opportunities and development for everyone in their teams

Actions should include setting performance objectives for leaders and managers with a responsibility to promote conscious inclusion and fair access to opportunity for all staff. Teams should be built where the voices of Black, Asian, Mixed Race, and other ethnically diverse colleagues and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are included in decision-making and young people entering the workplace can grow and develop new skills.

Trends and insights

Business in the Community's (BITC) Race at Work survey 2025 discovered half (50%) of managers said they had a performance objective to promote equality at work, an increase from the 34% in 2021 and the largest proportion of employees who said they had an objective since the survey began in 2015.

Whilst the gap between the number of White and ethnically diverse managers who had a performance objective to promote equality had been narrowing from 2015 to 2021, in 2025 the gap widened again. In 2021, the proportion of White managers who had one was 32% and for ethnically diverse managers it was 36%, in 2025 this changed to 44% of White managers and 54% of ethnically diverse managers respectively.

Managers today and in the future must be equipped with a dynamic skill set to lead people and teams effectively in an increasingly complex world. Success hinges on their ability to:

- **Lead diverse teams:** Navigate cultural, generational, and experiential differences to foster collaboration, fairness, and belonging.

- **Manage uncertainty:** Adapt swiftly to volatile market conditions, shifting workforce expectations, and unpredictable global events.

- **Harness emerging technologies:** Stay ahead of rapid technological change, integrating innovation while managing disruption.

- **Balance local and global dynamics:** Lead UK-based teams and global workforces amid rising geopolitical tensions and fragmented international relations.

- **Champion fairness and opportunity:** Ensure fair and equitable access to meaningful work, stretch assignments, and career-defining projects.

- **Unlock full potential:** Create environments where employees' skills, expertise, and creativity are fully recognised, utilised, and celebrated.

The increasing number of managers having objectives to promote equality may also be contributing to the increase in employees believing that they have an equal opportunity to advance regardless of personal characteristics or circumstances. Since 2015, the percentage of people agreeing with this statement has increased from 48% to 59% in 2025.

BITC's Race at Work survey 2025 also found:

- Men are more likely to believe that they have an equal opportunity to advance regardless of personal characteristics or circumstances than women in 2025 (61% of men vs. 57% of women).

- Younger employees are also more likely to agree with this statement (67%) and, as age increases, the amount agreeing that they have an equal opportunity to advance decreases, reaching 50% for the age group 55+.

- There has been a steady increase in the proportion of people that feel they have been encouraged to gain skills needed for more senior roles over the years. In 2025, over half (51%) said they agree with the statement compared to 38% in 2015.

Actions for employers

Supporting young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and racially diverse communities requires intentional, inclusive leadership. Line managers should support young people's learning in the workplace. Below are some examples of how line managers can support learning and adapt and deepen their support:

1. Model a learning mindset
- Managers should share their own learning experiences, challenges, and growth.
- Be open about mistakes and lessons learned. These stories encourage employees to realise that there is a process of learning and experiences when taking the steps to progress in the workplace.
- Explain unwritten rules, jargon, and be clear about expectations.

2. Have regular learning conversations
- Include learning goals in one-to-ones and team meetings. Use sessions to focus on some of the key skills needed in the workplace and identify areas where there is scope for development.
- Ask reflective questions like "What is something new you have tried this week?".
- Foster open conversations about identity, background, and belonging and how that may impact individuals learning.
- Understand individuals preferred learning styles.

3. Set stretch assignments
- Give tasks that push comfort zones but are achievable with support.
- Encourage 'learning by doing' through real responsibilities. When new tasks are assigned, ensure there is an understanding of where to go for help should an employee experience barriers to delivering any tasks assigned.
- Audit and review who gets stretch assignments, visibility, or praise and ensure that these opportunities are fairly shared in the team.
- Ensure fair access to training, development and progression opportunities.

4. Personalise development
- Tailor opportunities to each young employee's interests and strengths.
- Do not just consider one-size-fits-all training — think mentoring, shadowing, or micro-projects.
- Recognise how race, class, and other identities intersect to shape experiences. Explore this in conversations with your employees to build understanding.

- Avoid assumptions about skills that need development or projects and assignments that will be of interest – each young person's journey is unique. Do not just assume they will not be interested in certain opportunities – ask them.

5. Use a coaching style
- Ask guiding questions, to help employees identify what they want to develop by way of skills and expertise, rather than giving direct answers.
- Help them to reflect and find their own solutions – it builds confidence and autonomy.

6. Make Learning Visible
- Create space for sharing insights, lightbulb moments, or lessons learned.
- Offer flexible formats – visual, verbal, hands-on – to suit different learning styles.
- Avoid assuming prior knowledge or access to resources. Ask them about what they know, sign post them to learning resources available in your organisation.

7. Encourage peer learning and offer mentoring
- Pair young employees with others for collaborative tasks.
- Promote knowledge-sharing across roles and departments. Encourage them to build connections with key people in other teams who are important stakeholders in delivering the work of your unit, directorate, or team.
- Where possible, connect young employees with mentors who reflect diverse backgrounds. This could be in the form of a mentoring circle, 1-2-1 mentoring session, or employee masterclass session delivered by an employee network.
- Seeing representation at different levels builds trust and helps young people envision their own potential for success.

8. Track progress together
- Use simple trackers or journals to reflect on the development.
- Celebrate milestones and growth – the steps of achievement on the journey – not just outcomes.
- Use feedback tools to understand how supported young employees feel. This could be surveys, listening groups, conversations and wellbeing check-ins. Act on these insights to improve culture and practices.

- Encourage participation in initiatives that promote skills development, expertise, potential, and readiness for additional stretch opportunities and progression.

9. Connect learning to business goals

- Show how their development contributes to team and organisational success. Help them see the 'why' behind tasks, and why their contribution is important – it boosts motivation.
- Break tasks into manageable steps and celebrate progress as each milestone is achieved and/or new learning occurs.
- Use strengths-based feedback to build confidence. Ensure this is referenced within appraisals and development conversations.

10. Recognise and celebrate learning and celebrate diverse journeys

- Acknowledge effort, curiosity, and resilience, especially from those who have additional hurdles to navigate and overcome.
- A shout-out, small reward, or personal note can make a huge impact.
- Acknowledge resilience, adaptability, and unique perspectives, especially from employees from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Share success stories that reflect a range of backgrounds.

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