



BRIEFING

RACE AT WORK: COMMITMENT ONE

Leaders and employers support young people's pathways into good work and enterprise





Contents

Race at Work Commitment One	2
Leaders and employers support young people’s pathways into good work and enterprise... ..	2
Trends and insights	2
Guiding principles for supporting apprentices	3
Additional Resources	5

Race at Work Commitment One

Leaders and employers support young people's pathways into good work and enterprise.

Supporting young people to access and progress in good work includes supporting marginalised young people who are from Black, Asian, Mixed Race, or other ethnically diverse backgrounds and from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). This may include offering structured work experience, apprenticeship opportunities, skills development opportunities, mentoring, and coaching support.

Trends and insights

This briefing includes ideas on how to support apprentices in your organisation. In Business in the Community's (BITC) Race at Work survey 2025, we asked questions about apprenticeships. We found that:

- Overall, 42% of organisations said they had at least one apprentice in their organisation. The West Midlands were the most likely region to have one or more apprentice in their organisation (49% said they did), followed by the North West (48%). In contrast, employees in Wales and Northern Ireland were the least likely to say they had one apprentice or more in their organisation (32% and 35% respectively).
- 18-24-year-olds were the most likely to say their organisation has one or more apprentice (48%) with the likelihood of employees agreeing with this statement decreasing with age, ending at 36% for those aged 55+.
- Large businesses were almost twice as likely to have one or more apprentice in comparison to SMEs (52% vs. 28%).
- The public sector has the largest proportion of people saying they have at least one apprentice (55%) in comparison to the private sector (39%) and the third/voluntary sector (36%). When looking at job function, those in sales and distribution were the least likely to have apprentices (29% and 24% respectively).

Guiding principles for supporting apprentices

Here are some foundational principles to think about for each apprenticeship experience.

- **Focus on potential, not just experience**

Reframe recruitment criteria to value resilience, motivation, and real-world skills and problem-solving over formal qualifications.

- **Build clear progression pathways**

Apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds are often overlooked for advancement. Ensure there is a transparent route to growth and post-apprenticeship employment.

- **Provide financial and practical support**

Address barriers like travel costs, digital access, and lack of quiet workspaces. These considerations are important. Ensuring fair access to the resources and tools they need can make or break an apprentice's ability to succeed. Employers can also take advantage of [government support](#), such as the £1,000 incentive for apprentices who are care leavers, under 18, or have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) to further support inclusion and participation.

Recruitment and induction

- **Target outreach**

Partner with local schools, FE Colleges, charities, and job centres. Review the [BITC Regional Insights on Race factsheets](#) to identify the most ethnically diverse cities within a region. [Youth Futures Foundation's data dashboard](#) provides latest labour market information and ONS data can help you with additional insights and places.

- **The Career Company's [Employer Standards framework and tool](#)** can help maximise the impact of your outreach to young people. Over 1,350 employers have used the free tool: those doing the most targeted work to promote career pathways are four times more likely to report an increase in young people applying for apprenticeships.

- **Inclusive interviewing**

Use scenario-based questions and allow candidates to demonstrate skills through lived experiences. Consider the use of assessments to identify potential.

- **Onboard for success**

Provide a “handbook or user manual” at induction meetings to understand the apprentice’s needs (e.g. neurodivergence, family responsibilities). Introduce them to a peer network, employee network, or buddy from day one.

Learning and Development

- **Include soft-skills training**

Offer basic office know-how and soft skills coaching, especially if the apprentice is new to a professional environment.

- **Mentoring and Coaching**

Assign a mentor outside their direct team. If internal mentors are not available, external ones are just as valuable. If you can connect them to a mentor from a similar background that will be helpful for them to have someone who understands some of the potential challenges they face. This is desirable, not essential. Someone who is empathetic and can signpost them to the support available in the organisation is what is needed most. BITC’s [Mentorship, Sponsorship and Coaching Framework](#) and Youth Futures Foundation’s [Unwrapped on Mentoring](#) toolkit provide practical guidance.

- **Create an environment of safety and belonging**

Foster a work environment where apprentices feel safe to ask questions and share concerns. This is key to unlocking their full potential if they feel free to ask for the support they need to grow and develop new skills.

Community and belonging

- **Build apprentice cohorts**

Solo apprentices often feel isolated. Organise regular meetups or virtual groups to build community and peer support.

- **Celebrate diverse role models**

Where possible, showcase success stories from similar ethnic and socio-economic

backgrounds to help apprentices “see what they can be.” It can help the apprentice believe that it is possible to grow, develop and progress within their organisation.

- **Employer engagement**

Involve apprentices in real projects and expose them to different departments to broaden their understanding and aspirations.

Think about the long-term impact

- **Measure and monitor progress**

Track outcomes by socioeconomic background to ensure there are no significant disparities in retention, progression, and satisfaction.

- **Champion inclusion from the top**

Appoint senior leaders to advocate for socioeconomic inclusion, set targets to track recruitment and progression, and review employee surveys to ensure it is embedded into your organisation’s culture.

Additional Resources

Action for Race Equality’s 2021 [briefing on ethnic minority young people and apprenticeships](#) in England highlights access to apprenticeship barriers and provides recommendations for employers and policymakers. Building on this, evidence compiled in Youth Futures Foundation’s [Youth Employment Toolkit](#) shows that apprenticeships are likely to have a high positive impact on youth employment outcomes.

Apprenticeships offer a welcome opportunity for marginalised young people to overcome disadvantage and succeed in employment. However, research also shows persistent ethnic disparities. Young people with Black, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi heritage start and complete apprenticeships at much lower rates than their White peers. Employers can help to close the gap by offering apprenticeships with fair entry routes and clear progression routes into good work for marginalised young people.

The Youth Employment toolkit is designed to help you kickstart or elevate your apprenticeship programme. This resource empowers you to build high-quality opportunities for young people.

The government have provided guidance to support employers who want to offer apprenticeships. <https://www.gov.uk/employing-an-apprentice>



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.

Business in the Community

137 Shepherdess Walk
London
N1 7RQ

www.bitc.org.uk
020 7566 8650

Business in the Community is a registered charity in England and Wales (297716) and Scotland (SC046226). Company limited by guarantee No. 1619253.