

From Promise to Progress: The Efficacy of Race and Ethnicity Programmes in the UK Post 2020

What five years of workplace race and ethnicity initiatives in the UK reveal

September 2025

By Chika Aji and Razan Abdelgadir

Foreword



Targets alone don't change lives; accountability does.

Razan Abdelgadir, senior global DEI manager,
Chanel



Progress is personal: every data-point is somebody's career.

Chika Aji, global head of DEI, Britvic

In May 2020 the world paused, reflected, and promised to do better. Boardrooms across industries and geographies made sweeping pledges to advance race and ethnicity initiatives post-2020. Five years on, the promises and the performance no longer match in too many UK organisations. We commissioned this white paper because practitioners told us they needed hard numbers *and* a clear storyline to cut through fatigue and scepticism. The findings are sobering but hopeful: when leaders own the targets, publish short-cycle updates, and invest in mid-career sponsorship, progress follows quickly. Where intent stays symbolic, trust evaporates just as fast.

This report is offered as a practical roadmap.

Our deepest thanks to the 332 employees and 65 diversity and inclusion professionals who shared their experiences, to Honeycomb Works for statistical rigour, and to our partners, BYP Network, Equity City, and the Asian Leadership Collective for amplifying participation. Together, we can turn data into decisive action.



Executive summary: assessing UK workplace equity initiatives

The UK's journey towards racial equity in the workplace has long been framed by legislation, from the Race Relations Acts of the 1960s to the Equality Act 2010. Yet it was the global reckoning following George Floyd's murder in 2020 that created an unprecedented corporate flashpoint.¹ The UK witnessed its largest anti-racism demonstrations in decades, while businesses worldwide pledged over \$1.7 billion to racial equity initiatives, and more than 70 UK-listed companies set measurable diversity targets. For many minority professionals, this moment carried the promise of real change and hope that workplaces might finally deliver on long-delayed promises of fairness and representation.²

Five years later, however, that promise hangs in the balance. Economic headwinds and the rise of US-inspired anti-DEI narratives threaten to erode momentum, even as UK regulators strengthen disclosure and accountability requirements. Against this backdrop, the crucial question is not whether commitments were made, but whether they are delivering structural, lasting impact, or if the surge of 2020 risks fading into rhetoric without reform. Findings from a survey of 332 members of the public and 65 DEI practitioners reveal that, while incremental progress is evident, UK organisations remain far from fulfilling their promises.

Key findings:

- 1 — Surface level fairness is improving, but psychological safety remains weak
- 2 — Data collection with no systemic change creates an illusion of progress
- 3 — Microaggressions remain common
- 4 — A pronounced trust gap persists between ethnic minority employees and their employers
- 5 — Role models matter
- 6 — Accountability is the missing link

Recommendations:

- 1
Define outcomes, not intentions: set measurable impact targets with unambiguous accountability.
- 2
Hardwire DEI into leadership: make progress on targets a core metric in every people leader's performance.
- 3
Interrogate the data: apply an intersectional lens and publish progress with transparency.
- 4
Unblock the 'frozen middle': deploy strategic interventions that accelerate career pathways for ethnic minority talent.
- 5
Embed cultural humility: move beyond competence to cultivate an organisation-wide practise of reflection, openness, and equity.



Purpose, scope and audience: examining UK race & ethnicity programmes

This white paper critically examines the efficacy of race and ethnicity programmes implemented across private and public organisations in the UK post-2020. Our objective is to identify effective approaches, recognise persistent barriers that impede progress, and address areas where accountability may be lacking. Our insights are built upon comprehensive evidence, combining both primary and secondary data sources.

	
Primary data • A comprehensive DEI Council public survey capturing the experiences of 332 individuals working across the UK. • A targeted practitioner survey gathering key insights from 65 dedicated diversity and inclusion leads.	Secondary data • A rigorous literature review encompassing key government and industry reports (a full list is available in Appendix A).

This paper serves as a valuable resource for boards, C-suite executives, and diversity and inclusion leaders in the UK, offering practical insights to guide their organisations. It also supports minority professionals seeking to understand the current landscape, as well as policy stakeholders working to foster systemic change.



Five pivotal signals from the data

69%

Optimism versus lived experience

of ethnic minorities feel they are treated fairly at work, yet one-third still report microaggressions.

72%

Targets without accountability

of firms set goals, yet fewer than 40% link them to leadership compensation.

96%

Data without action

of organisations collect ethnicity data, however only 37% actively nurture senior ethnic minority talent pipelines.

23%

The power of representation

increase in authenticity scores of organisations when visible role models are present. Representation positively influences trust and engagement.

19%

Board versus C-suite representation

of FTSE 100 board seats are held by minority directors. However, fewer than 10% occupy C-suite roles, suggesting that the glass ceiling may have shifted, but it certainly has not shattered.

 Statistics taken from the DEI Council public survey.



Beyond promises: accountability imperatives

For organisations

- Link race and ethnicity outcomes directly to executive bonuses, promotions, and succession planning to ensure meaningful progress.
- Commit to publishing annual ethnicity data and progress milestones, not just targets, so stakeholders can measure accountability.
- Invest in measurable interventions: structured sponsorship programmes, transparent promotion pathways, and mandatory middle-management training to disrupt bias.

For ambitious minority talent

- Choose employers who 'walk the talk': those with visible ethnic diversity in leadership and demonstrable commitments to equity.
- Use published data as leverage: ask critical questions and hold organisations accountable for closing gaps.
- Expand your career capital by actively engaging in external mentoring networks, leadership programmes, and skills platforms when internal opportunities fall short.

Traffic light scorecard: UK workplace race & ethnicity initiatives

 ***Status:** green  ≥ 80 %, amber  40–79 %, red  < 40 %.

†2020 baselines estimated from Race At Work and Change the Race Ratio launch data.

FTSE 100 boards with ≥ 1 minority director 74% → 95% 	Minority share of FTSE 100 board seats 12% → 19% 
Minority share of FTSE 100 executive roles 11% → <10% 	Firms collecting ethnicity data 76%† → 96% 
Firms with minority leadership pipelines 29%† → 37% 	Leaders held accountable for race targets 34%† → 38% 
Employees experiencing microaggressions 40% → 33% 	

The scorecard highlights a concerning trend. While UK organisations have made significant strides in diverse board representation and data collection, these efforts often fail to translate into tangible shifts in executive leadership roles or robust accountability mechanisms. The decline in minority share of FTSE 100 executive roles and the persistent low accountability for race targets are critical areas demanding attention. Furthermore, the prevalence of microaggressions, despite a slight decrease, indicates that everyday experiences for minority employees remain challenging. This data reinforces the need to move beyond symbolic gestures towards systemic changes that embed equity at all levels of an organisation.

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Introduction and context

Policy and social backdrop after 2020

Long before 2020, numerous reports highlighted the slow pace of race equity in Britain. The Macpherson Inquiry (1999)³ introduced the term *institutional racism* after the Stephen Lawrence case, while the McGregor-Smith Review (2017)⁴ showed that ethnic-minority talent loss cost the economy £24 billion a year. The first Parker Review (2017)⁵ counted only 47 FTSE-100 boards with a minority director, and the Lammy Review (2017)⁶ stressed a 'trust deficit' in the criminal justice system, driven by disparities in outcomes for BAME (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic) communities.

Against that unresolved backdrop, two events in 2020 shook the world and reset the agenda:

- **George Floyd's murder**
Floyd's death triggered UK's largest anti-racism protests since the 1980s—Black Lives Matter marches in at least 260 towns and cities across Britain.
- **COVID-19 revealed health disparities**
Black men were 4.2 times and Black women 4.3 times more likely to die than their white counterparts (ONS)⁷.

Public pressure and corporate responses

- **Government response**
Formed the Commission on Race & Ethnic Disparities (Sewell Report 2021)⁸ and launched *Inclusive Britain* (74 actions).
- **Regulatory shift**
The Parker Review lifted its 'one-by-2024' board target.
- **Progress achieved**
The number of minority-director boards rose from 47 (2016) to 95 in 2024.
- **Remaining disparity**
Minority share of FTSE-100 executives remained below 20%⁹, largely unchanged since 2016.



Corporate responses to shifting economic tides

2020–2023: Increase in pledges and new roles

Within twelve months of the protests, more than 70 UK-listed companies issued public race-equity pledges. Global estimates suggest over \$200 billion was earmarked worldwide for racial-justice causes.¹⁰

2024–present: Economic challenges and shifting priorities

The economic downturn of 2023–2024, marked by inflationary pressures and widespread cost-cutting, led several UK-based multinationals to reduce or rebrand diversity & inclusion programmes. UK multinationals such as Meta, McDonald's, and Ford announced diversity & inclusion headcount reductions or reclassified initiatives under broader designations such as 'culture' or 'belonging.'¹¹ Job advertisements for diversity & inclusion roles fell approximately 70% from their 2021 peak.¹² Conservative commentary framed diversity & inclusion as 'downgrading excellence.'

Contextual overview

Between 2020 and 2024, public scrutiny, health disparities, and new disclosure requirements contributed to notable gains at the board level. However, current economic pressures and socio-political discourse now present challenges to further progress, particularly within middle management. The subsequent findings examine whether **organisations** have translated data and commitments into tangible progress and identify critical next steps.



Methodology

Survey design and questions



We asked 332 individuals (who live and work in the UK) about their experiences of workplace fairness and their perceptions of racial equity. This involved evaluating 15 statements (using the Likert scale), several yes/no questions, open-ended text responses, and basic demographic information.

We surveyed 65 DEI leads about their organisational practises, including targets, pay-gap analysis, and sponsorship schemes. Both surveys were conducted online at the end of 2024.

Data analysis and interpretation

Quantification & comparison

We looked for trends across statements and intersectional analyses across gender and sexual orientation.

Correlation examination

We examined correlations between organisational policies (reported by DEI leads) and employee perceptions.

Thematic analysis

All open-ended comments were analysed for main themes, with only those common to both datasets being retained for further consideration.



How we checked our results against outside evidence

After analysing the survey data, we triangulated the findings with 25 government, regulator, and industry reports (full list in Appendix B). We compared:

1

Numbers

96% data-capture rate against Inclusive Britain's statistics; Our 37% pipeline rate against the new Parker Review 2025 senior management target.

2

Patterns

Targets without enforcement (Race at Work scorecards, FRC 2020) and mid-career 'inclusion dips' (Culture Amp 2024) that mirror our results.

3

Narratives

Points where external sources challenge our data, such as CRED 2021's 'post-racial' claim versus our lived-experience gaps.

This cross-check increases confidence where trends align and identifies areas of divergence.



Key findings

- 1** Surface-level fairness is improving, but psychological safety remains weak
- 2** Data collection with no systemic change creates an illusion of progress
- 3** Microaggressions remain common
- 4** A pronounced trust gap persists between ethnic minority employees and their employers
- 5** Role models matter
- 6** Accountability is the missing link

1. Surface-level fairness is improving, but psychological safety remains weak



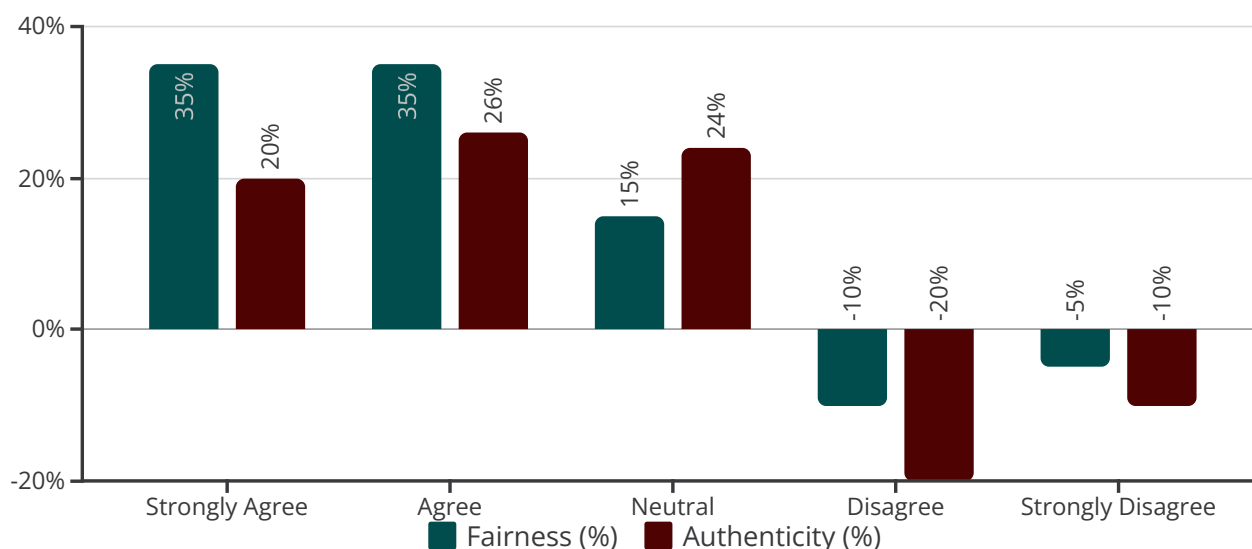
Why?

This insight highlights the distinction between overt bias reduction and deeper cultural change, where surface-level fairness improves, but psychological safety, which requires nuanced approaches, remains a challenge.



Who?

Organisations that invest in comprehensive diversity and inclusion programmes, particularly those addressing leadership accountability, demonstrate improved psychological safety scores.



i 70% report being treated fairly at work (an increase from 63% in 2020); however, only 46% feel able to express their authentic selves, indicating a disparity between perceived fairness and psychological safety.

2. Data collection with no systemic change creates an illusion of progress

Many organisations diligently track diversity data, yet a gap remains between measuring disparities and dismantling the systemic barriers behind them. Our findings highlight this 'illusion of progress' where data collection risks becoming an end in itself rather than a driver of genuine transformation.

96%

Firms tracking ethnicity data

of firms report tracking ethnicity data across multiple areas of their workforce, yet only a fraction translate these insights into meaningful action.

37%

Senior-talent cultivation

of organisations actively cultivate senior-talent pipelines for employees from underrepresented ethnic minority backgrounds.

24%

Ethnic minorities in senior roles

of ethnic minority individuals actually hold senior roles.

This trend indicates a concerning divergence: a focus on observation rather than active intervention.



Data collection and action discrepancy

Only **4 in 10** organisations connect ethnicity data to concrete action plans.



Accountability gap

Only **29%** link pipeline outcomes to public diversity targets.



Pay gap persistence

Only **62%** of organisations analyse their ethnicity pay gaps.

The failure to translate data into action becomes particularly evident at the highest levels:

68%

Leadership gap

of employees perceive a lack of ethnic diversity in senior leadership teams.

37%

The pipeline gap

of organisations have structured programmes to support ethnic minority progression into senior roles

Tokenisation, feeling like I'm there because I fit the D&I trend.

Black Female DEI Council Public Survey Participant

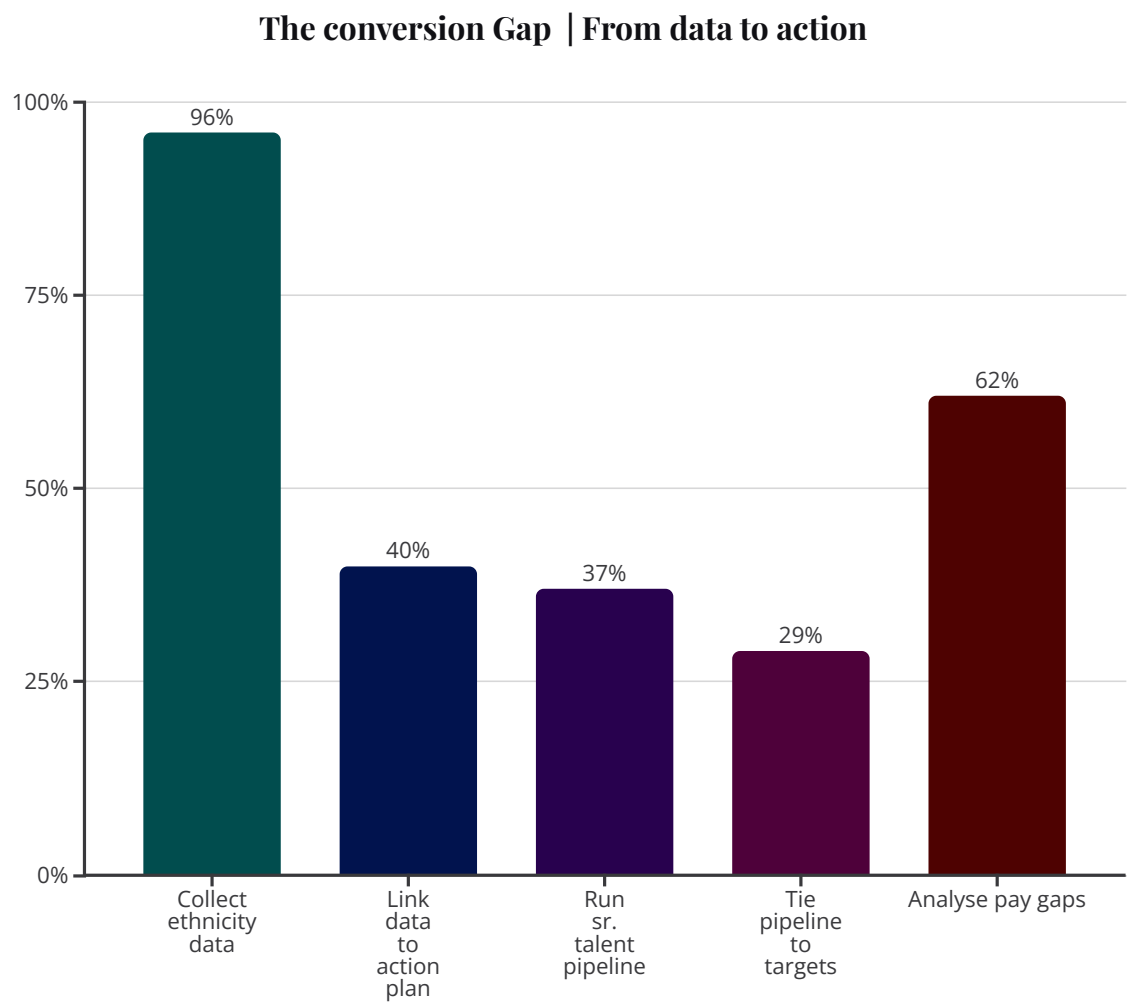
The pursuit of true equity requires more than data points; it requires intentional structural changes to remove barriers that impede talent progression. Achieving genuine representation necessitates accountability, empathy, and deliberate action rather than solely good intentions.

There are conversations that I can't have at work because the recipients wouldn't understand what I was talking about/wouldn't understand the cultural context.

Black Female DEI Council Public Survey Participant

From data collection to action: the conversion gap

While many organisations collect ethnicity data, a significant gap remains between data gathering and concrete action. The 'conversion ratio' illustrates how few translate data awareness into active and accountable initiatives.



Key insights

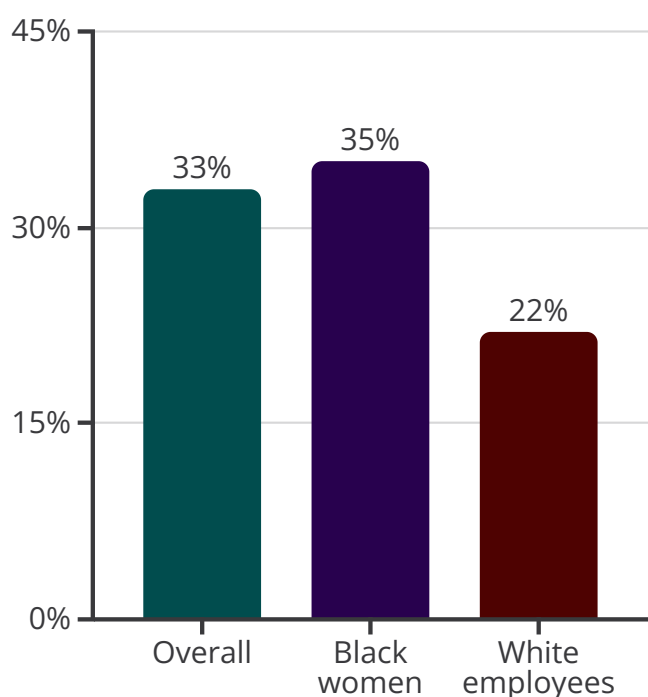
Nearly every organisation counts the numbers:

The high percentage of firms collecting ethnicity data (96%) signifies widespread acknowledgement of its importance. This foundational step is crucial for understanding demographic composition within an organisation.

Conversion to leadership is weak:

Despite robust data collection, there's a significant drop-off in converting this awareness into actionable strategies that impact senior leadership. Only 37% run senior talent pipelines, and a mere 29% tie these outcomes to specific targets, indicating a substantial gap between data collection and concrete, measurable leadership diversity.

3. Microaggressions remain common



The prevalence of microaggressions differs substantially across demographic groups. In total, 33% of respondents reported experiencing microaggressions, with Black women reporting the highest proportion (35%) and white employees the lowest (22%).

1

Progress since 2020

The overall microaggression rate has declined from **40% in 2020** to **33%** currently.

2

Progress moderation

While initial improvements were observed, the rate of change has since moderated sharply, indicating stagnation in progress.

This indicates an ongoing intersectional exposure gap, whereby specific groups report higher incidences of microaggressions.

i Cultural interventions must reach everyday behaviours to make real impact.

Incidence of microaggressions rose from 27% to 39% among employees with over 11 years of service.

If organisations retreat into low-visibility measures, they risk deepening scepticism, driving turnover among experienced minority staff, and increasing legal exposure as ethnicity pay-gap reporting and data standards become more firmly established.

❗ **Implication:** Insufficient or superficial efforts may undermine trust, contribute to the departure of experienced minority talent, and increase legal and investor scrutiny.

A workplace is unsafe where ignorance, poor use of language, racial microaggressions, failure to listen to concerns about areas that need improvement, and racial microaggressions are allowed and not addressed when reported.

Asian Female DEI Council Public Survey Participant

46% of respondents believe race or ethnicity has no bearing on progression decisions, leaving a narrow majority either uncertain or convinced identity still plays a role. Confidence is weakest among mid-career professionals: those with 5–10 years' tenure are 12–15% less likely than new joiners to trust in the fairness of promotions. This aligns with the Parker Review's 2024 warning that board gains can mask pipeline attrition.

 **Takeaway:** Perceived fairness declines as careers progress, indicating that promotion systems may lack transparency or be influenced by bias, particularly at mid-levels where future leaders are expected to emerge.

Explaining the optimism–bias paradox

The regression tests link higher fairness scores to two controllable factors:

1

Visible racially diverse senior leadership
Employees able to identify at least one ethnic-minority role model in their top team score 23% higher on authenticity and 17% higher on fairness, after controlling for age, gender, and organisation size.

2

Management responsiveness
The data also shows that prompt action on reported incidents ('I raised it, my manager shut it down quickly') is cited four times more often in high-fairness organisations than in low-fairness ones.

 In firms with more than 5,000 employees, microaggressions double even when role-model visibility is comparable.

Why this matters

Perceptions of day-to-day fairness are a leading indicator of retention intent. Our data shows that employees who rate fairness four or five on the five-point scale are 3.4 times more likely to state an intention to remain with the organisation for three years. Culture Amp's 2024 UK DEI report identified a similar inclusion dip at the five-year mark, reinforcing the importance of intervention at mid-career stages. Until microaggressions are consistently addressed and confidence in meritocracy surpasses the 50% threshold, progress observed at the board level risks being undermined by voluntary turnover in the organisational layers that cultivate future leadership.

4. A pronounced trust gap persists between ethnic minority employees and their employers

Open-text responses reveal scepticism. Employees in firms that collect data without a pipeline score

14

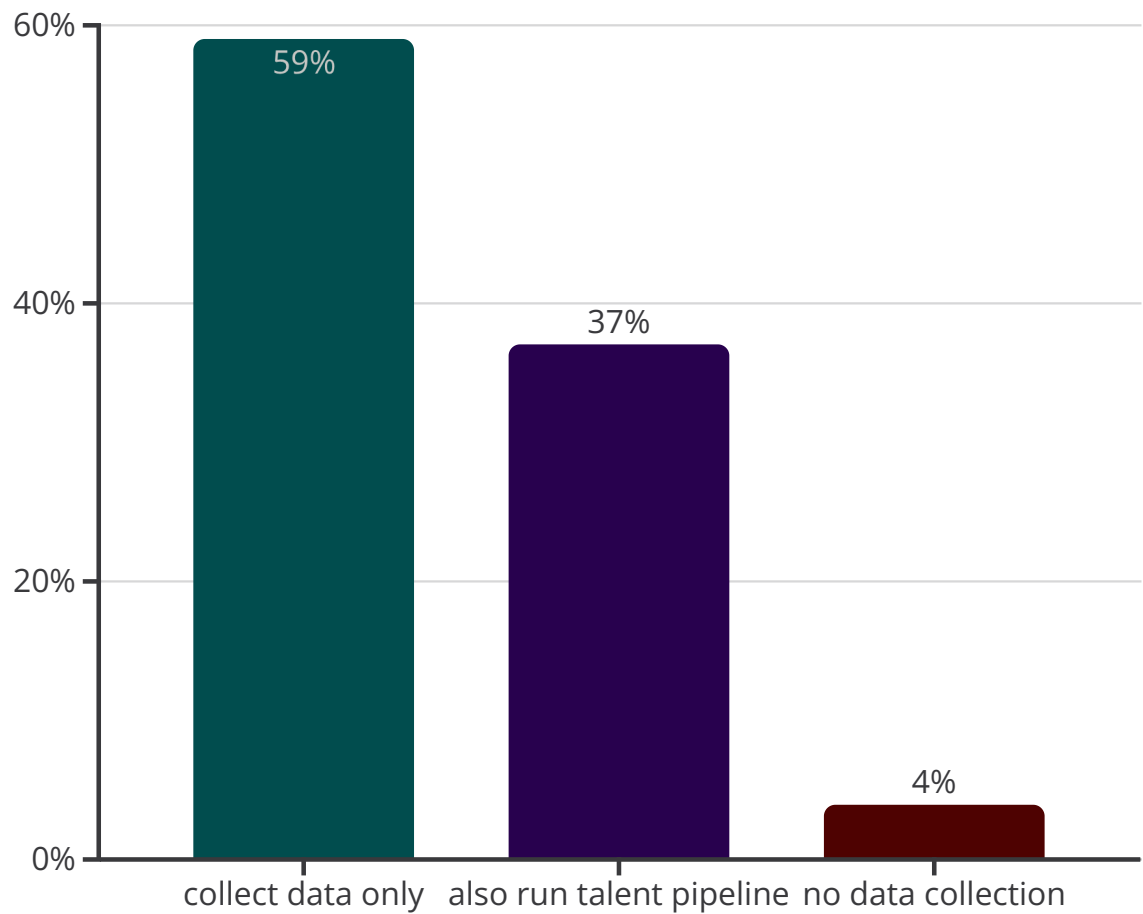
Points lower

on organisational commitment than peers in firms that do both.

When you know your work/ output is not trusted because you are Black.

Black male DEI Council public survey participant

Information alone does not shift representation. Without clear pipelines and leadership accountability, measurement risks fuelling cynicism and compliance fatigue. The gap identified here connects directly to our recommendations tying target metrics to leadership incentives and middle-management sponsorship so that data is converted into visible, lasting change.



An environment that is not a safe space prevents individuals from being their authentic self in the workplace.

Black Female DEI Council Public Survey Participant

5. Role models matter

1

89% report importance of diverse leadership

Employees with visible ethnic-minority role models in leadership report stronger experiences across key measures.

A notable proportion of potential candidates would hesitate or decline to join an organisation that lacks visible ethnic-minority leaders, irrespective of other considerations such as compensation or brand reputation.

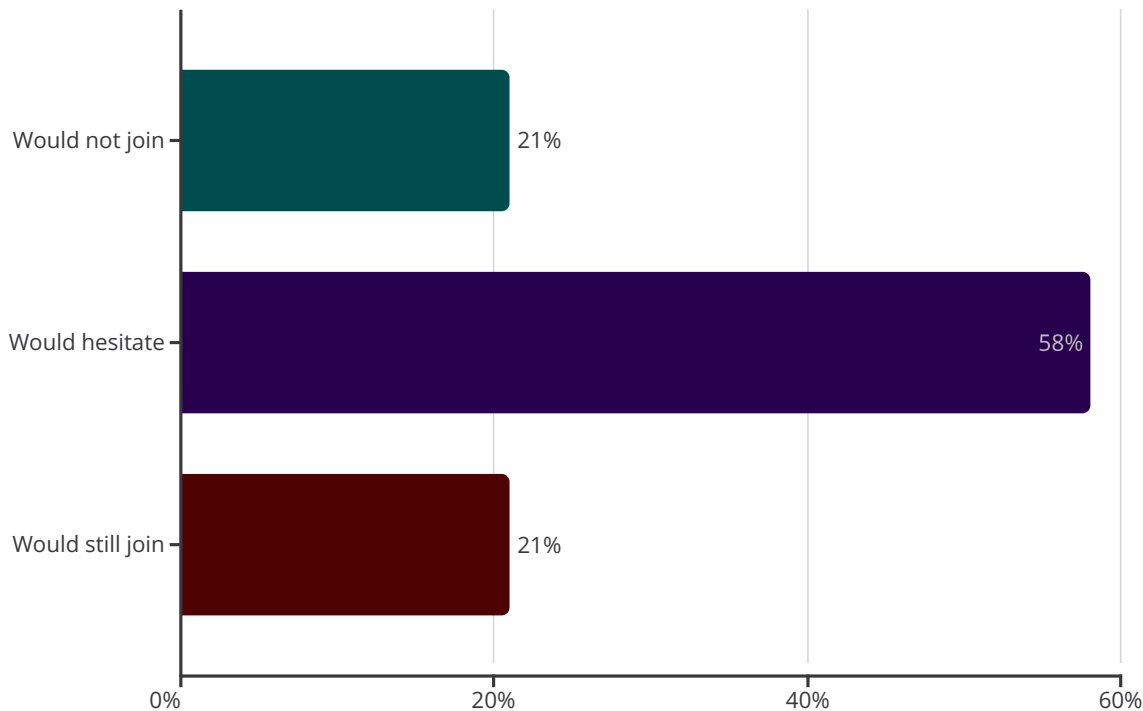
2

Findings across demographics

- 94% of Black women
- 83% of White men

The importance of visible ethnic-minority leadership is consistently observed across various demographic groups.

Leadership diversity and employer selection



I don't see people like me even in middle management.

Black female DEI council public survey participant



Differential impact of visibility

Beyond the general uplift, the data reveals important, nuanced findings. For specific groups, the presence of an ethnic-minority role model is highly impactful, providing substantial benefits, particularly in areas where they are most needed.

Employees able to name at least one ethnic-minority role model in senior leadership score higher on two key indices even after controlling for age, gender and organisation size.

23%

Authenticity perception

Employees with a visible role model experience a significant **+0.8 point increase** in their sense of authenticity (from 3.4 to 4.2 on a 0-5 index).

17%

Fairness perception

A visible role model correlates with a notable **+0.6 point increase** in fairness perception (from 3.6 to 4.2 on a 0-5 index).

This demonstrates a tailored impact. Visible leadership generates distinct advantages for those who have historically encountered greater barriers, and it serves as a significant mechanism for fostering an inclusive and equitable workplace.

6. Accountability is the missing link

50%

are on track (overall)

Only half of ambitious organisations believe they are on track to meet their own deadlines.

82%

**set targets
(finance/professional services)**

A staggering 82% in finance and professional services have bravely set targets.

28%

**on track
(finance/professional services)**

Yet, a disheartening mere 28% foresee reaching targets by the promised date in these sectors.

The path from intention to impact is clearly fraught with unseen obstacles. The core of the problem, it seems, lies in accountability. That crucial, often elusive, ingredient – the performance objectives or pay consequences tied directly to target delivery – is present in a meagre 38% of organisations. This troubling trend echoes the FRC's Ethnicity Reporting review (2020), which exposed a pervasive lack of measurable targets or meaningful consequences among most FTSE-250 companies.

71%

with accountability

Organisations that tie targets directly to leadership accountability are far more likely to be on track to meet their goals.

38%

without accountability

Fewer than four in ten organisations without accountability mechanisms report staying on course.

Key insight: The direct correlation between leadership accountability and target attainment underscores the need for robust, enforced accountability frameworks to bridge the gap between diversity ambition and tangible results.

Among organisations that publish targets and provide progress updates, accountability plays a significant role in success

68%

on track (high cadence reporting)

Organisations reporting progress updates at least twice a year are **on track** to meet targets.

43%

on track (low cadence reporting)

Organisations with annual or irregular updates are **on track** to meet targets.

Practitioner feedback links higher reporting cadence to a sense of 'healthy discomfort' in executive committees – a pressure echoed in investor press such as Board Agenda (2021), which connects this dynamic to stronger disclosure and faster progress.

1

Accountability drives progress

Organisations that tie diversity targets directly to leadership accountability are far more likely to remain on track to achieve them.

2

Commitments without consequences

In contrast, fewer than half of organisations without accountability mechanisms manage to stay on course.

Numeric goals signal ambition, but without ownership and regular scrutiny they risk fuelling cynicism. Our findings show that employees in organisations with accountable leaders score 11 points higher on fairness and 16 points higher on organisational commitment. Raising accountability from today's 38% to a clear majority is the fastest lever for turning data awareness into visible progress, a theme we return to in our recommendations.

“

I needed a space where I could relate to others with similar experiences. I wanted to speak to people who were likely to understand the issues I faced and also help pull me up on issues that may not have been race related but are my perception. Good places that champion possibilities and accountability.

Black Female DEI Council Public Survey Participant

”



Recommendations

Define outcomes, not intentions: set measurable impact targets with unambiguous accountability

- 1** Organisations must transition from aspirational statements to concrete, measurable impact targets for their DEI initiatives. This involves setting clear metrics for progress and assigning unambiguous accountability for their achievement across all levels.

Hardwire DEI into leadership: make progress on targets a core metric in every people leader's performance

- 2** Embed DEI progress as a core performance metric for every people leader within the organisation. Linking target achievement directly to performance reviews and incentives will ensure that DEI is not just a HR function but an integral part of leadership responsibility.

Interrogate the data: apply an intersectional lens and publish progress with transparency

- 3** Move beyond superficial data collection by applying a rigorous intersectional lens to workforce data. Regularly publish transparent progress reports, highlighting areas of success and persistent challenges, to build trust and foster continuous improvement.

Unblock the frozen middle: deploy strategic interventions that accelerate career pathways for ethnic minority talent

- 4** Implement strategic interventions to accelerate career pathways for ethnic minority talent, particularly addressing the 'frozen middle' where progression often stagnates. This includes structured sponsorship programmes, transparent promotion panels, and targeted development initiatives.

Embed cultural humility: move beyond competence to cultivate an organisation-wide practice of reflection, openness, and equity

- 5** A mindset of ongoing self-reflection, self-critique, listening first and interrogating power dynamics can deepen effort towards awareness and fairness.

1. Define outcomes, not intentions: set measurable impact targets with unambiguous accountability

38%

Employers linking targets to pay

Only **38%** of employers in our practitioner survey link ethnic-diversity targets to senior pay.

71%

On-track when linked

Where targets are linked to senior pay, **71%** of employers report being on track.

Lloyds Banking Group allocates 10% of group executive bonuses based on meeting senior-manager diversity targets and publicly reports year-on-year progress.¹⁷

Minority share within Lloyds increased from 10.2% in 2020 to 12.6% in 2023, demonstrating tangible results.

Implementing enforced targets for representation across all organisational levels and publishing ethnicity pay gap data are crucial steps. These measures demonstrate concrete commitment beyond rhetorical support.

Black female DEI council public survey participant

Defining clear, measurable outcomes rather than merely stating broad intentions is paramount for the success of any DEI initiative. While intentions often remain vague and aspirational, outcomes compel organisations to establish specific goals, timelines, and accountability mechanisms. This precision ensures everyone understands what success looks like and how progress will be tracked.

Vague intentions

Statements like: 'we intend to improve diversity' or 'we will be more inclusive' are often aspirational but lack specific actions, timelines, or accountability mechanisms. They leave the 'what, when, and how' undefined, making it difficult to measure true progress.

Precise outcomes

Outcomes demand clarity, such as: 'increase Black and minority ethnic employees in senior leadership by 20% in three years' or 'reduce pay gaps by 10% by year-end.' This specificity clarifies success, tracks progress, and allows for robust accountability.

Without clearly defined outcomes, it becomes easy to defer responsibility. Ambiguous promises allow decision-makers to claim 'good intentions' even when observable change is minimal. With precise outcomes, performance can be tracked, critiqued, and rewarded, enabling stakeholders to hold organisations accountable for their commitments. Data, metrics, and timelines transform DEI from rhetoric into tangible reality.

The power of shifting from intentions to outcomes: case studies

1

Microsoft

Intention: 'Foster a diverse and inclusive workplace.'

Outcome/Target: Double the number of Black and African American managers, senior leaders, and partners in the U.S. by 2025.

Result/Lesson: Annual reporting builds accountability; progress is visible and measurable.

2

UK civil service

Intention: 'Reflect the society we serve.'

Outcome/Target: Increase ethnic minority representation in the Senior Civil Service to 13% by 2030, with annual dashboards.

Result/Lesson: Transparency drives departmental accountability; highlights pipeline vs. progression issues.

3

Unilever

Intention: 'Champion inclusion and equity.'

Outcome/Target: Achieve 50/50 gender balance in management by 2025; publish annual pay equity reports.

Result/Lesson: Close to gender parity globally; outcomes embedded in business reporting cycles.

4

FTSE 100 (Parker review)

Intention: Solidarity statements post-2020.

Outcome/Target: Requirement for at least one ethnic minority director on boards by 2024.

Result/Lesson: 96% compliance by 2023; regulation accelerates change faster than voluntary action.

5

Starbucks (cautionary case)

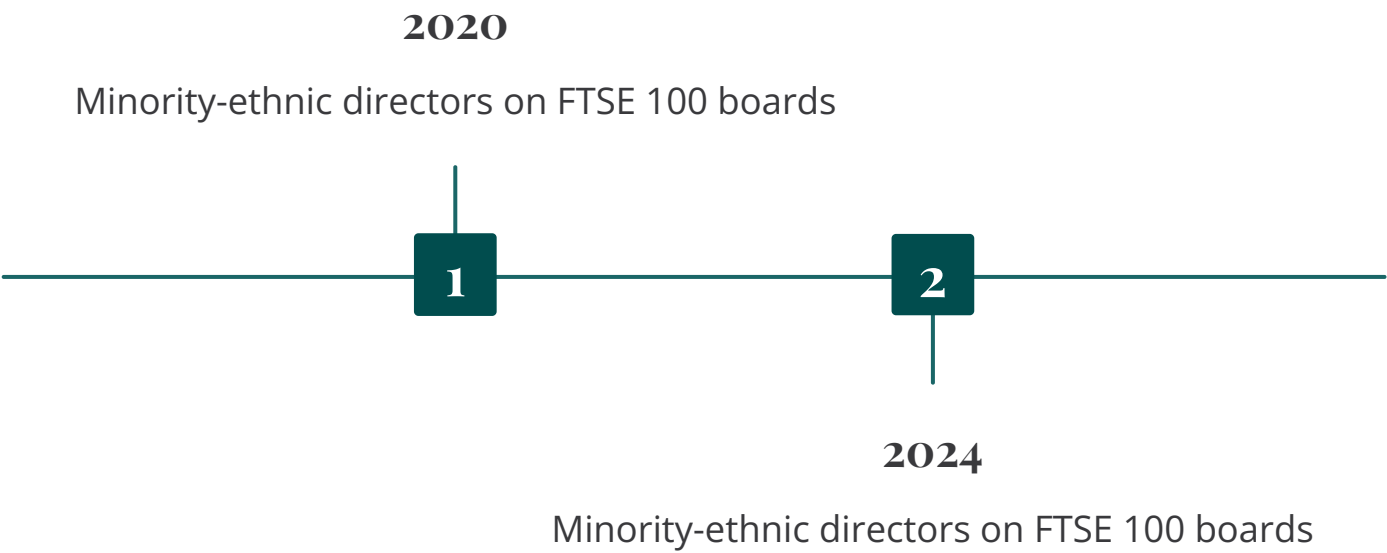
Intention: 'Be a model for inclusion.'

Outcome/Target: Increase BIPOC representation in senior roles by 2025; deliver anti-bias training.

Result/Lesson: Limited progress; shows outcomes fail without strong accountability and cultural change.

Board representation: evidence of progress

External benchmarks indicate that established targets and increased oversight can facilitate change.



In public companies, clear targets, investor scrutiny, and mandatory disclosures drive progress – factors often absent further down corporate structures.

-  **Clear targets**
-  **Investor scrutiny**
-  **Mandatory disclosures**
-  **Achieved progress**

2. Hardwire DEI into leadership: Make progress on targets a core metric in every people leader's performance

Anchors accountability into leadership actions

When DEI outcomes are woven into performance evaluations, leaders stop treating them as 'nice-to-haves' and start treating them as **mission-critical objectives**. This establishes **consequential accountability**, elevating DEI from aspiration to tangible leadership practice.

Builds sustained strategic focus

By embedding DEI in performance metrics, organisations ensure that leaders consistently collaborate on inclusion, not just react during high-visibility moments. It turns DEI into a strategic imperative, not a sporadic initiative.

Enhances resource deployment and leadership buy-in

Performance-linked DEI targets motivate leaders to actively seek and allocate resources, be it through training, mentoring, or policy reform to move the needle on inclusion. Metrics make progress visible, which garners ongoing organisational support.

3. Interrogate the data: apply an intersectional lens and publish progress with transparency

Move beyond surface metrics

An intersectional approach transcends basic demographic reporting, revealing how combined identities lead to unique experiences and often compound disadvantages that standard data points miss.

Uncover hidden disparities

By disaggregating data and examining specific cohorts, organisations can pinpoint areas where certain groups, like LGBTQ+ women, face amplified barriers in authenticity, progression, or psychological safety, enabling targeted interventions.

Fuel accountability & growth

Leveraging data with an intersectional lens provides strategic insight. Transparent, granular data fosters trust, informs robust action plans, and enables organisations to track measurable progress towards true equity and sustainable growth.

Report progress at least twice a year

Regular reporting reinforces strategic priority and sustains progress.

- **Why:** Firms publishing bi-annual updates are 25 percentage points more likely to be on track than annual reporters.
- **Who shows it works:** Guy's & St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust posts bi-monthly Inclusion Pulse dashboards tracking diversity data. Staff agreement that action is taken on the data we share climbed from 47% to 63% in 12 months.

To achieve meaningful progress in DEI, organisations must evolve beyond basic data collection to a deeper, more nuanced interrogation of that data. This critical shift involves applying an intersectional lens, which reveals how overlapping identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation) create unique experiences and often lead to compound disadvantages. Here are some key insights from our analysis (full details available in Appendix C):

3.2

Authenticity scores for LGBTQ+ women

Out of 5, the lowest scores compared to all other groups, indicating a significant gap in psychological safety.

45%

Fairness perception for women in large organisations

Perceptions of fairness in promotion and pay equity declined significantly from 75% positive in smaller firms to 45% in companies with over 1,000 employees.

78%

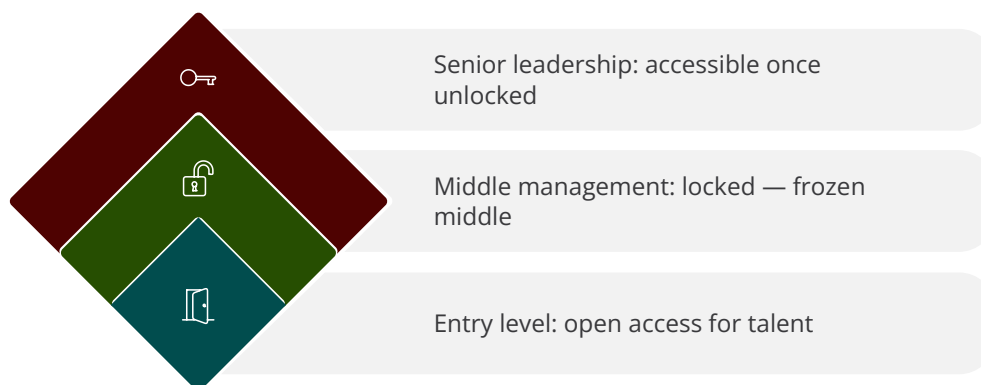
Microaggressions for black non-binary individuals

Highest reported rates of microaggressions, demonstrating how broad metrics can obscure critical barriers.



4. Unblock the frozen middle: deploy strategic interventions that accelerate career pathways for ethnic minority talent

Talent often advances effectively through entry-level roles, but encounters a significant barrier at the middle management stage, impeding progression to senior leadership. This frozen middle can be addressed through strategic interventions.



Structured sponsorship plus transparent promotion panels unblock the frozen middle

Case study 1: AMS –Empowering Black and Underrepresented Ethnicities (EmBue) programme

A|M|S

The context

AMS, a global talent company with **8,500 employees**, found only **4%** of its leadership roles were held by ethnic minorities in 2020, indicating a significant disparity.

The approach

AMS launched EmBue (meaning 'to grow' in Shona), a targeted development programme for ethnic minority mid-level managers. It offered specialised training, mentorship and leadership exposure.

The outcomes

The EmBue programme achieved **0% attrition** among participants. Ethnic minority leadership representation significantly increased to **18.5%** at AMS, demonstrating the power of tailored development.

Case study 2: Synchrony development consulting – The Solaris Executive Leadership Development Academy

The context

Synchrony Development Consulting identified the systemic underrepresentation of Black women professionals in executive leadership, where traditional career paths often fail to provide adequate support.

The approach

They established The Solaris Executive Leadership Development Academy, a comprehensive **12-month blended programme** designed to empower Black women professionals with critical tools, networks, and strategic guidance.

The outcomes

The Solaris Academy proved highly effective, leading to significant career growth for participants, including numerous promotions. This initiative created equitable pathways and drove meaningful progress in diversifying executive leadership.

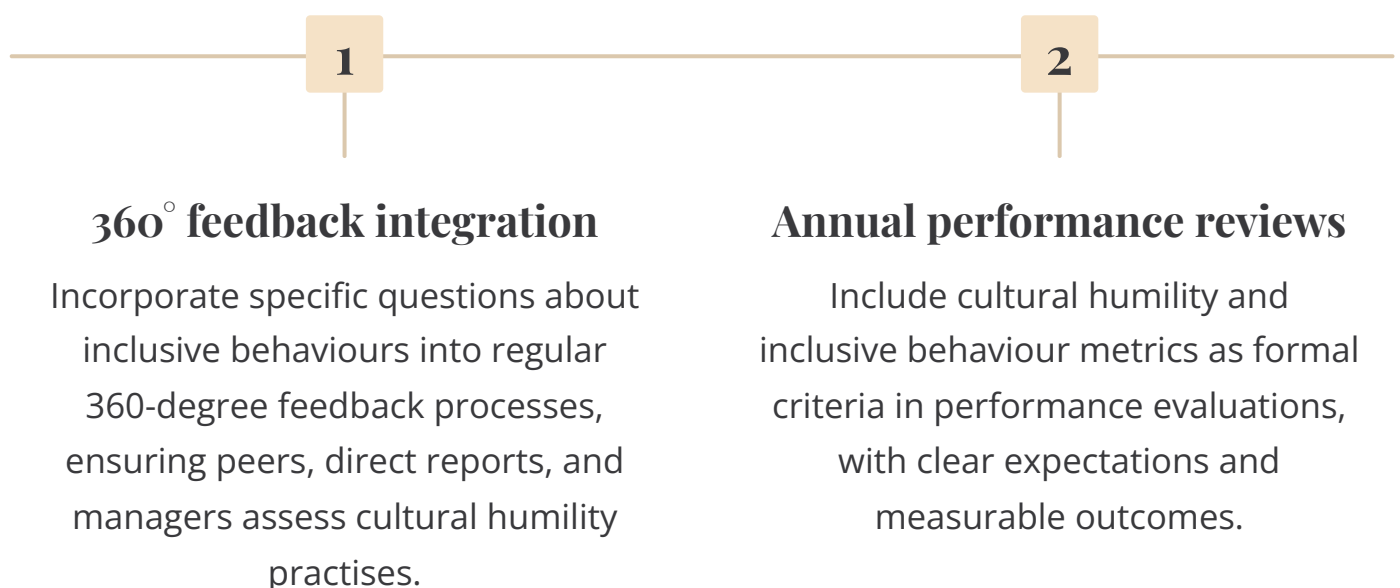
5. Embed cultural humility: move beyond competence to cultivate an organisation-wide practise of reflection, openness, and equity

Embedding cultural humility means moving beyond cultural competence and requires system redesign to encourage self-reflection, bias awareness, active listening, and giving and receiving feedback.

“Surface level conversations, work events that are all about alcohol, people who take very little interest in you, people who don't remember things you share with them about your heritage — these are huge barriers for me.”

Black female DEI council public survey participant

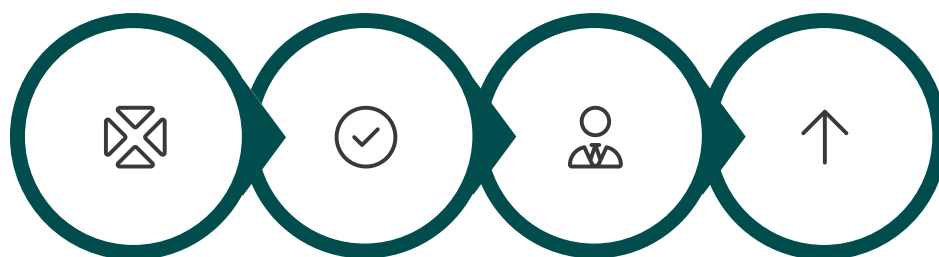
Accountability mechanisms for inclusive behaviours



Conclusion

Progress is visible but fragile: ethnic minority representation on FTSE 100 boards has doubled since 2019, yet persistent microaggressions, weak senior talent pipelines, and limited accountability mechanisms expose deep credibility gaps.

Without stronger links between targets, accountability and leadership behaviours, today's headline gains risk stalling tomorrow's progress.



Clear targets

Being
accountable

Leadership
behaviours

Sustained
progress

Closing thoughts

Momentum is fragile but fixable. The next decade will determine whether the UK shifts from isolated board level gains to system-wide equity. The tools exist, the choice is collective, and the cost of inaction will only grow.

Boards have already shown that public scrutiny can transform the visible top layer of leadership. Yet in the middle layers where careers either accelerate or stall pipelines remain frozen, data often sits unused, and everyday experiences of bias continue to erode trust.

The signal is clear: progress without accountability is performance without permanence.

The organisations that thrive in the years ahead will be those that choose transparency over tokenism, cadence over complacency, and sponsorship over slogans. They will be remembered as employers who embedded fairness into governance, made mid-career equity non-negotiable, and treated diversity not as a brand veneer but as business infrastructure.

For minority professionals, the next chapter offers both challenge and leverage. Transparency is expanding pipeline dashboards, pay-gap reporting, and regulatory scrutiny, which are opening space for sharper questions. Who gets promoted? Who holds power? Who is accountable when progress falters? Each question asked and each answer demanded accelerates the shift from symbolic gestures to systemic change.

The story of 2020–2025 was one of awakening. The story of 2025–2035 will be one of endurance. If accountability is embedded now, fragile optimism can be converted into lasting equity. If delayed, the next decade risks being defined by squandered talent and wasted promises.



About us

DEI Council

Who we are

The Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Council is an independent, practitioner-led body founded by Chika Aji (global head of DEI, Britvic) and Razan Abdelgadir (senior global DEI manager, Chanel). It exists to drive the advancement of DEI within the United Kingdom, supported by extensive research and insights derived from data analysis. (dei-council.com) Both founders bring first-hand corporate change experience and a shared commitment to evidence-based action, which underpins the survey programme and this white paper.

What we do



Research & insight

Commission large-scale surveys and publish public-domain reports.



Knowledge exchange

Convene quarterly roundtables for DEI practitioners, regulators and investors.



Advisory support

Offer consultative services on target-setting, data dashboards and intersectional programme design.



Community platform

Connect corporate sponsors with specialist networks serving diverse talent.

Our partners for this white paper



BYP Network

Black early career and professional community



Equity City

Social-mobility accelerator for ethnically diverse founders



Asian Leadership Collective

Leadership development for British-Asian professionals

Governance



Executive leads

Chika Aji and Razan Abdelgadir.



Advisory circle

Seven external advisers drawn from academia, consulting, and the DEI sector.



Data stewardship

All datasets stored on encrypted SharePoint; access restricted to named analysts and audited annually.

How to engage with the council



Download the report

Download the full race & ethnicity report. Register at dei-council.com to receive the PDF upon publication.



Join our practitioner roundtable

Join the practitioner roundtable. Quarterly sessions facilitate discussion on implementation strategies; email info@dei-council.com for an invitation.



Sponsor or partner

Organisations can support future research initiatives, provide anonymised data, or co-host learning events.



Disseminate the findings

Share key charts and recommendations via professional networks or internal channels to promote transparency and accountability.

Appendices

Appendix A — citation references

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Appendix B — External reports and datasets used for triangulation

#	Report/dataset name	Organisation
1	Parker Review 2024	Sir John Parker
2	Race at Work Charter	Business in the Community
3	Inclusive Britain report	UK Government
1		
4	FTSE Women Leaders review	Hampton-Alexander Review
5	McGregor-Smith Review	UK Government
6	Inclusive Britain report	UK Government
7	FTSE Women Leaders review	Hampton-Alexander Review
8	Ethnicity Pay Gap report	Equality and Human Rights Commission
9	Change the Race Ratio	Change the Race Ratio
10	Diversity & Inclusion survey	CIPD

External reports and datasets (continued)

11	BITC – Race at work charter progress report	Business in the Community
12	Culture Amp – UK workplace DEI report	Culture Amp
13	NHS workforce race equality standard (WRES) – annual report	NHS England
14	BVCA & Level 20 – Diversity & inclusion in UK PE/VC	British Venture Capital Association
15	BVCA & Level 20 – Diversity in UK PE/VC data pack	British Venture Capital Association
16	Robert Walters – ED&I ethnicity report	Robert Walters plc
17	Practicus – DEI recruitment benchmark report	Practicus
18	Diversity Economics Institute – The colour of success	Diversity Economics Institute
19	Board Intelligence – Race equity in UK boards	Board Intelligence
20	Dentons – Ethnic diversity in the labour market	Dentons
21	Kingsley Napley – Race equality in pay & senior roles	Kingsley Napley LLP
22	Prospect Magazine – The DEI flash-point	Prospect Magazine

23	BoardAgenda – Diversity in the UK (report series)	BoardAgenda
24	LinkedIn talent insights – D&I hiring trends UK	LinkedIn Corporation
25	McKinsey Institute for Black Economic Mobility – Corporate racial-equity commitments	McKinsey & Company

Appendix C — Additional analysis: intersectional insights

Leadership diversity is essential, yet our data shows a stark reality: women's perception of fairness declines sharply as organisations grow, while men's perceptions remain relatively stable. This widening gap highlights a troubling gender disparity that intensifies in larger companies and demands targeted intervention.

Fairness perception scores (1-5 scale) by organisation size and gender

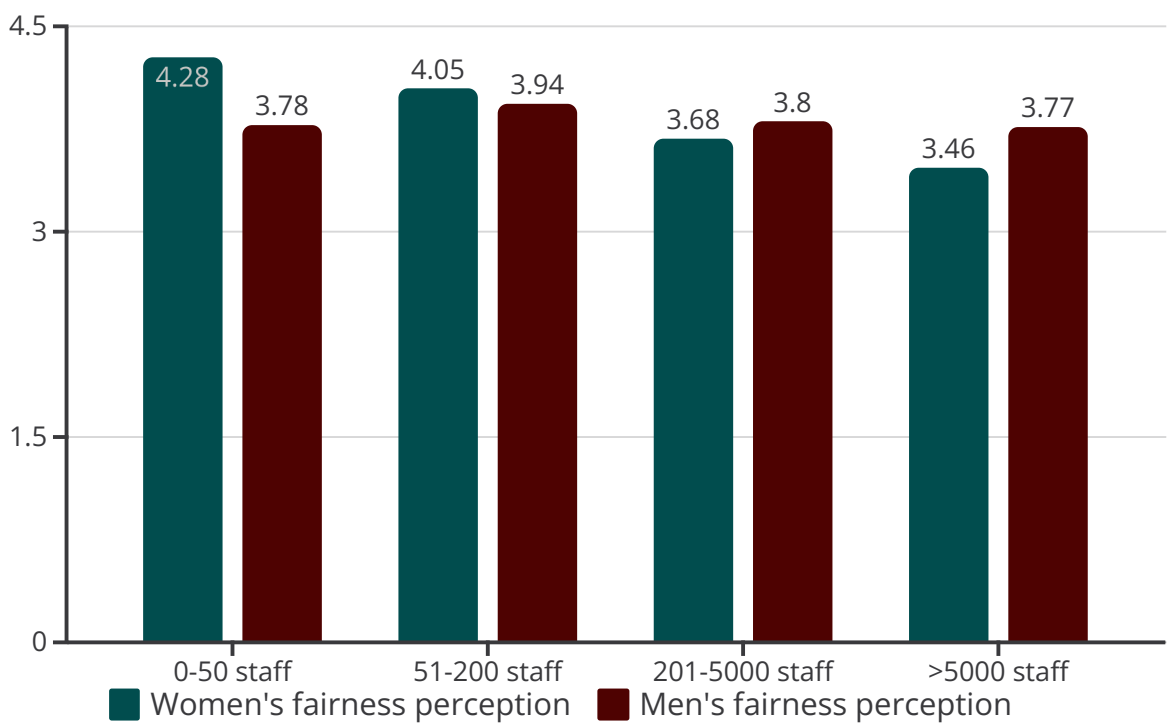


Chart: Women's vs. men's fairness perception scores (1-5 scale) by organisation size — 0-50 staff, 51-200 staff, 201-5,000 staff, >5,000 staff.

0.82

Point decline

A steep decline in women's fairness perception as organisations grow.

4.28

Smallest firms

Women's fairness perception in organisations with 0-50 staff.

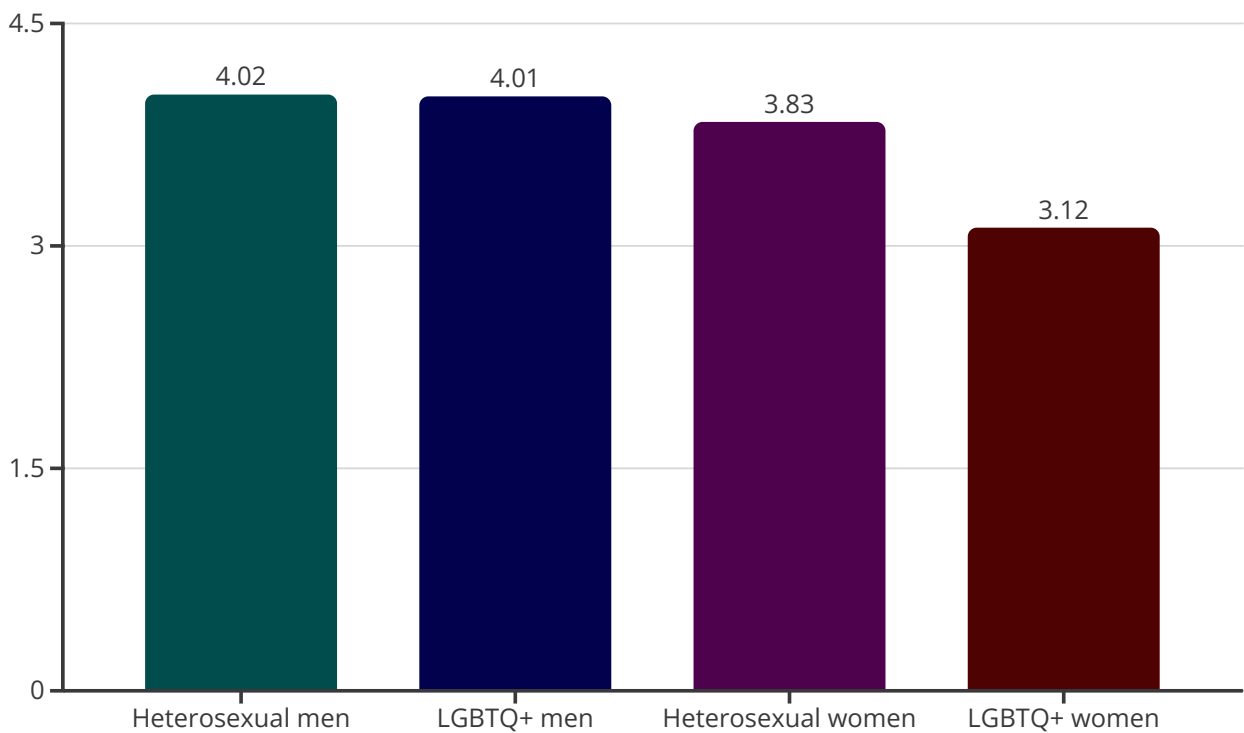
3.46

Largest firms

Women's fairness perception in organisations with >5000 staff.

Disparities in authenticity for LGBTQ+ women in the workplace (scale: 1–5)

Authenticity in the workplace is critical for both well-being and productivity. Our data reveals stark disparities across groups with LGBTQ+ women reporting the lowest authenticity scores compared to their heterosexual and male peers.



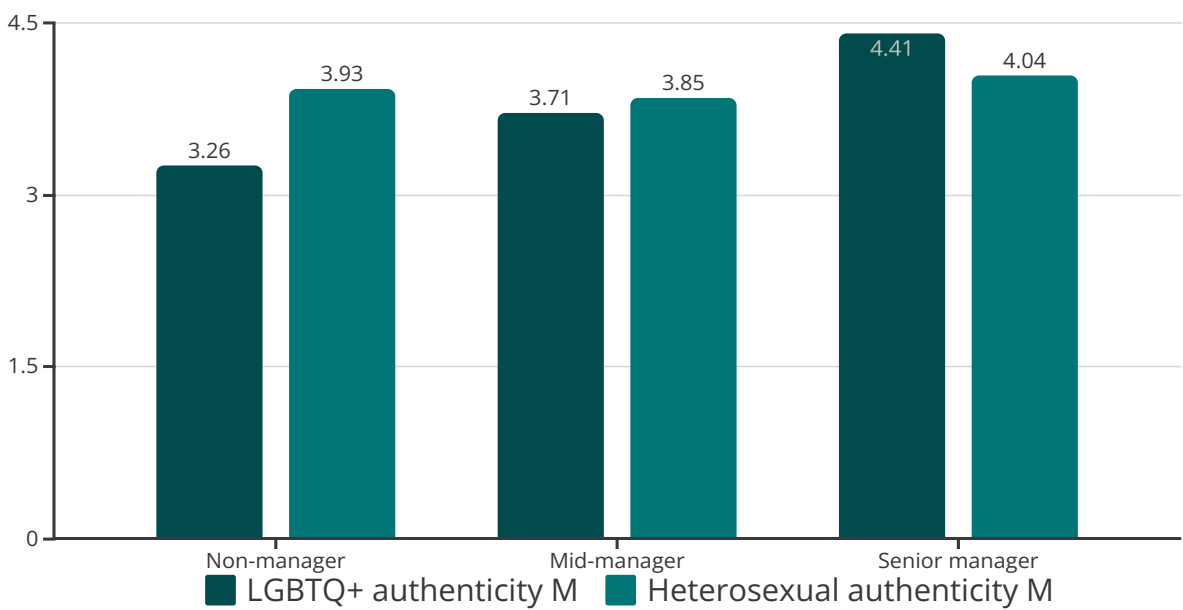
③ Chart: authenticity scores by group — heterosexual men, LGBTQ+ men, heterosexual women, LGBTQ+ women.

This chart highlights the sharp differences in perceived authenticity. Heterosexual men and LGBTQ+ men report similarly high scores, while heterosexual women see a noticeable decline. The steepest drop, however, is among LGBTQ+ women, who report the lowest authenticity score at just 3.12 — a striking 0.90-point gap compared with heterosexual men (4.02).

③ LGBTQ+ women report an authenticity score of **3.12**, a **0.90-point difference** compared to heterosexual men's score of 4.02.

The authenticity journey across role levels

Authenticity in the workplace shifts significantly with seniority, and the effect is particularly pronounced for LGBTQ+ employees. While authenticity remains relatively stable for heterosexual staff across role levels, LGBTQ+ employees report sharper declines as they move into more senior positions.



(Chart: Authenticity scores by role level — non-manager, mid-manager, senior manager; comparing LGBTQ+ vs. heterosexual employees.)

At non-managerial levels, LGBTQ+ employees exhibit a notable authenticity gap, scoring lower than their heterosexual counterparts. This disparity diminishes at the mid-manager level. Conversely, at the senior manager level, this trend reverses. Authenticity dips sharply for LGBTQ+ employees at mid-management, but the trend reverses at the very top. Those who reach senior management actually report higher authenticity scores than their heterosexual peers — by a 0.37-point margin. This suggests that breaking through to senior levels may create a more inclusive and authentic environment for LGBTQ+ leaders.

The mixed-ethnicity paradox: authenticity thrives in larger organisations

Our data reveals a striking pattern for mixed-ethnicity employees: their sense of authenticity rises significantly in larger organisations. This stands in sharp contrast to the experience of many other groups, who often find bigger corporate environments less supportive of their authentic selves.

Authenticity scores for mixed-ethnicity employees by organisation size.

4.28	3.81	3.67	3.31
Very large	Large	Medium	Small
(>5,000 staff)	(201–5,000 staff)	(51–200 staff)	(0–50 staff)

Authenticity and organisational scale: Authenticity scores for mixed-ethnicity employees show an increase from 3.31 in small organisations to 4.28 in very large organisations. This represents a substantial rise as company size expands. While some groups may experience challenges in larger organisations, mixed-ethnicity employees demonstrate higher authenticity scores in these environments.

Compound disadvantage: a nuanced view



Low authenticity

LGBTQ+ women in large organisations face the steepest barriers to authenticity.



High authenticity

LGBTQ+ men in mid-sized firms report the strongest sense of authenticity.



Significant gap

A 0.40+ scale point gap highlights the significant impact of intersecting identities on workplace experience.

We need to address these authenticity gaps where intersecting identities significantly impact the workplace experience. The substantial difference of 0.40 scale points or more clearly demonstrates the challenges faced by some groups compared to others.

***We need diversity
because I prefer to
avoid being a
mouthpiece for an
entire group.***

Black female DEI council public survey participant

The authenticity paradox: size, role, and identity

What headlines show about gender equity

Headlines assume consistent, broad advancement.

What the data actually reveals about gender equity

Women's fairness **decreases significantly** in large companies, reversing perceived progress.

What headlines show: LGBTQ+ inclusion

Narratives imply a **general, one-size-fits-all trend** in LGBTQ+ inclusion.

What the data actually reveals: LGBTQ+ inclusion

LGBTQ+ women score **0.9 points lower** in authenticity than LGBTQ+ men, showing disparities by role and gender.

What headlines show: mixed-ethnicity staff

Perception often **overlooks the unique impact of organisation size** on mixed-ethnicity staff.

Mixed-ethnicity staff find **notable authenticity** and **unique advantage** in large organisations.

Tenure, not geography, is a primary factor in explaining experience gaps

London vs. rest of UK: differences are minor and not statistically significant

Contrary to common assumptions, employee location demonstrates a negligible impact on experiences of fairness or microaggressions. Our analysis reveals a consistent pattern in the data, regardless of whether employees are located in London or elsewhere in the UK.

① A statistical analysis (one-way ANOVA) confirms **no significant regional effect** on fairness ($p=.73$) or authenticity ($p=.78$) scores. This indicates that geography is not a primary factor in explaining experience gaps.

London & south-east

Survey responses from **149 participants** in this region indicate:

- Fairness score: **3.82** (out of 5)
- Authenticity score: **3.92**
- Microaggressions: **34%** report incidents

□ This region, often perceived as having unique workplace dynamics, exhibits patterns similar to the rest of the UK.

Rest of UK

From **113 participants** across the rest of the UK, the figures are:

- Fairness score: **3.79** (out of 5)
- Authenticity score: **3.89**
- Microaggressions: **32%** report incidents

□ These figures are statistically indistinguishable from those reported in London, challenging regional assumptions.

Sector differences: insights into strengths and gaps



Finance & professional services: High targets, low credibility

Finance and professional services demonstrate an **82% target-adoption rate**.

However, only **28% of minority respondents** believe these targets will be achieved.

ⓘ This creates a **24-point 'credibility gap,'** which is the widest of any sector.

This aligns with observations that diversity commitments often show reduced emphasis following annual reporting cycles.



Public sector: Low bias, low visibility

Public-sector employees report the **fewest microaggressions (27%)**.

However, only **41% are aware of any race targets**, indicating a substantial visibility gap.

ⓘ This aligns with findings from the NHS workforce race equality standard (2024) and Baroness Casey's review (2025) on data-to-action gaps.



Technology: Balanced, mid-table performance

Technology and telecom firms exhibit a balanced performance:

- **75%** set targets.
- **50%** are on track.
- Microaggression incidence is slightly below the cross-sector average.

ⓘ High turnover is identified in the Practice DEI report 2024 as a factor impeding long-term diversity programmes in this sector.

Manufacturing faces a dual challenge

Key challenges

This sector records below-average target uptake and on-track rates, whilst still reporting a high incidence of microaggressions.

Qualitative evidence highlights dispersed production sites and limited HR capacity as structural barriers.

69%

Target uptake

44%

On-track rates

1/3

**Employees facing
microaggression**

Implications of sector-specific findings

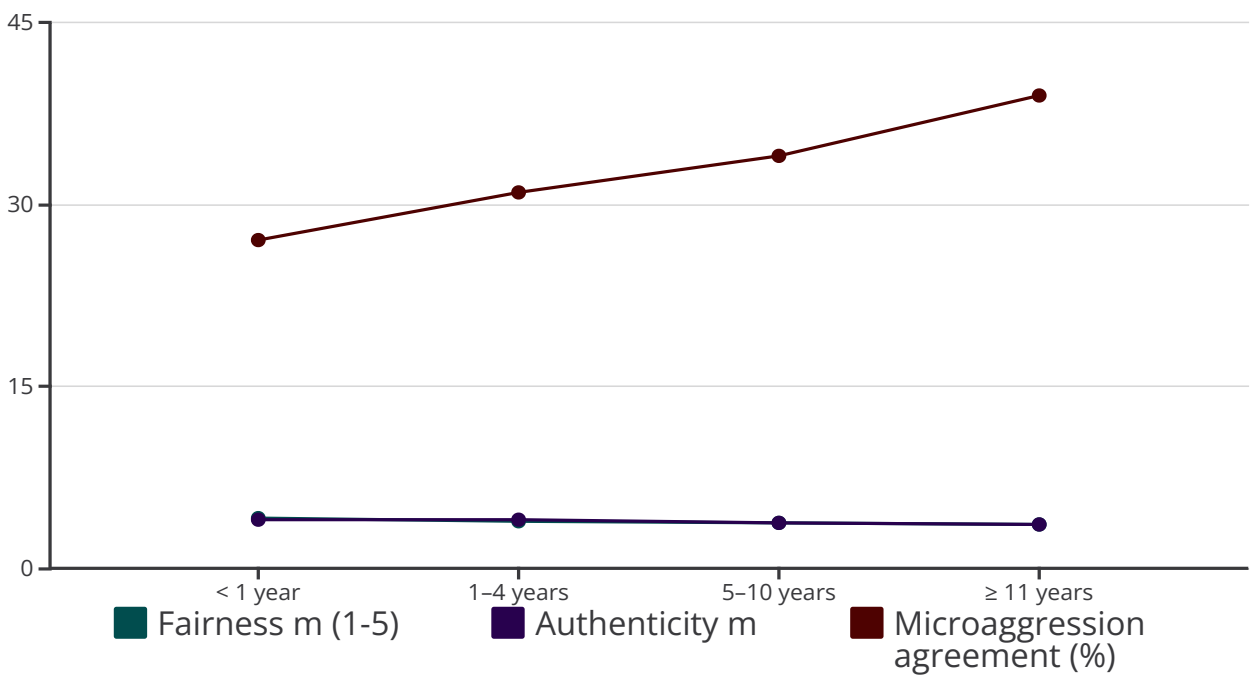
Sector context shapes both the speed and credibility of race-equity progress. Finance demonstrates that ambitious targets alone do not guarantee employee trust, whilst the public sector shows that a bias-reduction climate can coexist with low strategic visibility. Tailoring interventions—whether stronger accountability in Finance or explicit targets in government bodies—will be critical to closing the data-to-outcome gap.

Tenure as a primary determinant

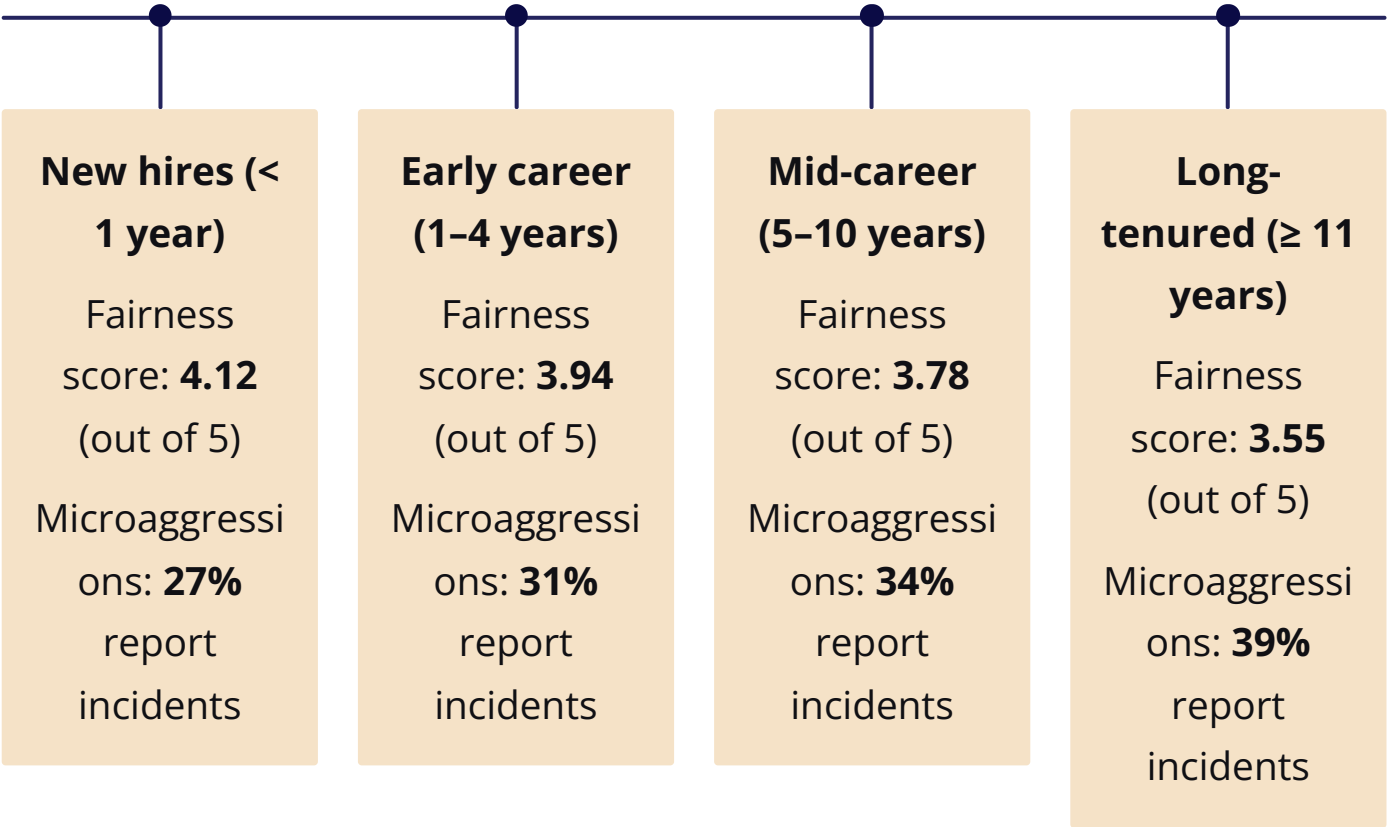
While geographical location has a minimal impact on employee experience, our findings indicate that employee tenure is a more significant determinant. This suggests that efforts to foster inclusive environments should focus on supporting employees throughout their career lifecycle, rather than primarily on geographical factors. Once organisational factors are controlled for, regional differences exhibit limited explanatory power, whereas tenure consistently correlates with a decline in perceived experience. This trend highlights the importance of mid-career sponsorship and clear progression pathways.

i The subsequent sections will examine the notable differences in employee experience across various tenure groups, emphasising its importance relative to geographical location.

Perceived fairness and tenure exhibit a declining trend



Employee experience decline by tenure





Initial employee perceptions

Employees with shorter tenure report the highest fairness and lowest bias, indicating initial positive experiences.



Decline in perceptions

Perceived fairness and microaggression rates show a notable decline after five years, coinciding with typical career progression inflection points.



Challenges for long-tenured staff

Long-tenured staff (eleven-plus years) report the highest microaggression rates and lower authentication scores, aligning with open-text themes of 'stalled progression' and 'invisible ceiling.'

Appendix D — detailed literature cross-reference

#	Source	Year / range	Key data point or theme we draw on
1	Macpherson Inquiry (Stephen Lawrence)	1999	Coined institutional racism; identified as a benchmark for subsequent progress.
2	McGregor-Smith review	2017	£24 bn annual cost of talent loss; highlighted concerns regarding the early career pipeline.
3	Parker review (series)	2017-25	Boards with ≥ 1 minority director: 47 $\rightarrow$ 95; new 13-15% senior-management target by 2027.
4	Lammy review	2017	Identified diminished trust in contexts of unequal outcomes.
5	Commission on race & ethnic disparities (CRED)	2021	Asserted the UK is not institutionally racist.
6	Inclusive Britain action plan	2023	74 commitments including ethnicity-data standards.
7	Ethnicity pay-gap guidance (Gov UK)	2023	Voluntary methodology; adoption remains inconsistent.
8	Standards for ethnicity data	2023	Framework for consistent data capture.

9	Baroness Casey review	2025	Data-to-action gaps in public bodies.
10	FRC ethnicity reporting review	2020	>50% FTSE-250 lacked measurable targets.
11	Market tracker trend report (BoardAgenda)	2020	Sparse ethnicity disclosure in annual reports.
12	CIPD race inclusion series	2021	Strong dialogue; less prevalent sense of belonging.
13	Race at work charter – scorecards	2015-23	74% of signatories set targets.
14	McKinsey – DEI in corporate Britain	2024	27% profitability advantage; positive impact on retention attributed to role models.
15	BITC race at work progress	Annual	Increased transparency; limited accountability progress.
16	Culture Amp UK DEI report	2024	Observed decline in inclusion experience during mid-career stages.
17	NMC workforce race equality standard	2024	27.5% ethnicity pay gap; delayed progress in leadership representation.
18	BVCA & Level 20 diversity reports	2023 & 2025	10% ethnic-minority senior roles in PE/VC.

20	Practicus DEI report	2024	Tech recruitment vs national benchmarks; turnover risk.
21	Diversity Economics Institute – colour of success	2024	<5% minority CEOs in FTSE 350.
22	Prospect magazine – DEI flashpoint	2020	Raised concerns about performative pledges.
23	BoardAgenda diversity series	2021-25	Investor scrutiny improves disclosure cadence.
24	Board Intelligence – race equity in UK boards	2023	Presence of two minority directors correlates with higher engagement.
25	Dentons – ethnic diversity in the labour market	2022	Diversity linked to resilience in downturns.
26	Kingsley Napley – race equality in pay & senior roles	2022	Pay-gap litigation risk.

How to read this table: Numeric alignment indicates that our survey numbers align with the range or trend of the cited source; pattern alignment indicates that qualitative themes correspond to those identified (e.g., accountability gaps). When a report presents findings that differ from our data (e.g., CRED 2021), the discrepancy is noted in the text.