Benchmarking our ethnic diversity journey

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Wildlife and Countryside LINK

Benchmarking our ethnic diversity route map journey – 2025 update

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Introduction

The environmental sector is one of the least ethnically diverse in the UK. There are multiple reasons why we need to take action to address this:

- The environmental sector aims to advocate people to change their behaviours to achieve change for the environment. The sector therefore needs to be relevant to the whole of society, or it will miss opportunities and limit its achievements, and risk failing to meet its charitable objectives. Becoming more ethnically diverse will support these aims.
- Further to this, the sector needs to include multiple perspectives and lived experiences to enable it to make the best decisions for nature and communities.
- Issues around climate justice, inequitable access to nature and the need to engage all of society in tackling the nature crisis are closely linked with tackling the inequality and barriers faced by people from minority ethnic groups.
- Social justice is at the heart of the environmental movement. Becoming more representative of the ethnic diversity of the general population is part of being fair and equitable, which is at the heart of social justice, as is addressing racism.
- Creating inclusive cultures and beginning to tackle the systemic and behavioural challenges and racism people of colour face is critical to the wellbeing of people of colour in the sector, and to attracting more minority ethnic people to join.

This benchmarking report explores where organisations in the environment sector have reached in their work to increase ethnic diversity. The report sets out where the sector has made progress, and where challenges and barriers are still being faced. The report makes recommendations for how these barriers can be addressed, so that the sector can build on the work already undertaken and drive meaningful change.

Benchmarking for the sector was last completed in 2023. This report compares the 2023 and 2025 data, exploring how trends have changed over time, and where possible, the impacts of actions taken to date.

In 2025, sector progress remains strongest on the Route Map milestones around 'Embedding Action', particularly in terms of having EDI action plans in place, and reviewing and updating policies. However, a lack of dedicated staff capacity, budget and general resourcing remains a significant barrier. Progress is more mixed on 'Evolving Culture', with learning opportunities being established and the roles of key agents of change now defined across most organisations, but with many struggling to push this work into the implementation phase. The sector appears to be struggling most with progressing actions under 'Addressing Racism and Enabling People of Colour to Progress', with anti-racism and empowerment work needing far greater focus going forwards.

The Route Map Towards Greater Ethnic Diversity in the Environment Sector was first published in October 2022, following two years of research and development with the consultancy Full Colour. In addition to the Route Map, Full Colour produced a supporting guidance manual, to provide organisations with key advice and practical tips to support

delivery of the actions and milestones across the 5-year framework. The number of signatories continues to grow, having reached 53 organisations in 2025.

Benchmarking conducted in 2023 made it clear that smaller organisations were struggling to progress Route Map implementation compared to medium and larger organisations, primarily due to resource and capacity gaps. Therefore, in 2024-2025, Wildlife and Countryside Link worked with Full Colour to deliver our Small eNGO Ethnic Diversity Support Scheme (SEEDS). This was funded by Natural England, and delivered a programme of targeted support for a cohort of 10 small organisations to help give them the knowledge, confidence, and peer networks of support to progress Route Map delivery. To understand the differences between smaller and larger organisations in greater depth, Link is now working with SOS-UK to further analyse data from The RACE Report and explore these trends.

This 2025 benchmarking has been conducted in a period that has proven increasingly challenging for EDI work. Organisations are facing increasing levels of external opposition and reputational risk, and both staff in the sector with lived experience, and staff holding responsibility for EDI work, are under immense pressure. Global events have created uncertainty for EDI work in the UK. For example, a survey conducted by Occupational Health Assessment Ltd in January 2025 reported that 69% of the 140 UK employers surveyed expected the rapid retreat from workplace diversity and inclusion projects in the United States would have at least some impact on the British workplace and existing EDI policies. Research published by Freeths in November 2025 reported that of 250 UK organisations surveyed, 28% had made wholesale changes to or had scrapped initiatives including EDI and environmental sustainability.

Any drop-off in resource, capacity or focus on EDI poses a significant threat not only to the sector's efforts to become more diverse, and therefore our ability to deliver our mission, but also to the health and wellbeing of staff with lived experience and those holding responsibility for EDI work. This must be acknowledged.

Within this context, it is crucial that the Route Map remains an up-to-date and effective tool for bringing the sector together to drive effective change, and that organisations are supported and equipped with the confidence and core skills to contribute to this collective effort. This 2025 benchmarking report sets out six recommendations for next steps to drive this forward, including:

1. Working with Full Colour and the Link EDI Working Group to define specific actions for Years 2-5 of the Route Map.
2. Exploring options for how the SEEDS programme model can be further rolled out across the sector, including for larger organisations.
3. Seeking funding for the further development and rollout of a programme of roundtable workshops for CEOs in the sector.
4. Conducting more detailed analysis of the impacts of Route Map work, in addition to benchmarking progress made in terms of implementing specific actions.

5. Leading with greater focus on anti-racism and empowerment for people of colour already working in the environment sector.
6. Advocating for greater provision of dedicated infrastructure for the sector as a whole to support work on ethnic diversity, and EDI more broadly.

Methodology

The methodology used for benchmarking in 2025 remains the same as in 2023, to ensure consistency and therefore to allow comparison of the sector's progress over time. The survey questions were designed by Link, and covered the major themes within the Route Map, including 'Embedding Action', 'Evolving Culture', and 'Addressing Racism and Enabling People of Colour to Progress'.

The survey was updated to include additional questions to reflect themes raised within Link's EDI Working Group in 2024-2025. This includes exploring how organisations are using the Route Map in 2025, and how organisations are making their own assessments of progress and barriers. The survey consisted of 20 questions, and included both multiple choice selection-style questions, and free-form text response questions. A full list of the 2025 survey questions is included as Appendix A.

The request to complete the benchmarking survey (via Google forms) was shared with Route Map signatories in October 2025, and was discussed at a Wildlife and Countryside Link Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group meeting in November 2025. Respondents were given one month to complete the survey – an initial three-week response period, plus a deadline extension of one week. Reminders were shared throughout the survey response window.

The survey went to all Route Map signatories, a total of 53 organisations. We achieved a participation rate of 38%. Unless otherwise stated, the percentages discussed throughout this report are percentages of the full sample size of 20 respondents. Respondents consist of 4 large to very large organisations with income over £15mn, 9 medium organisations with income between £1mn - £15mn, and 7 small organisations with under £1mn income. As set out in Table 1 below, this means that compared with 2023 data, large and very large organisations are underrepresented in the 2025 data.

Table 1 – A comparison of survey sample characteristics in 2023 and 2025.

2023 data			**2025 data**		
Size	**Number**	**% of sample**	**Size**	**Number**	**% of sample**
Small	8	27%	Small	7	35%
Medium	14	46%	Medium	9	45%
Large/Very Large	8	27%	Large/Very Large	4	20%

This 2025 benchmarking report makes comparisons with the data from our 2023 report. It is important to note that these data sets are not exactly like-for-like. The survey went out to a larger cohort in 2025 compared with 2023, including new signatories who are at an earlier stage of their Route Map journey and who we therefore expect to have made less progress compared with organisations who signed up earlier.

However, such organisations make up a relatively small percentage of the sample. 17 of the 20 responses received in 2025 were from organisations who also responded in 2023, and who therefore have been signed up to the Route Map for a minimum of two years.

Key findings: summary

Sector engagement with the Route Map is changing

- In our 2023 benchmarking survey, there was a participation rate of 70%. In 2025, this participation rate has fallen significantly to just 38% of signatories.

- This is despite the number of organisations officially signed up to support the Route Map increasing steadily over time. In 2023, there were 45 organisations signed up. This has increased to 53 organisations in 2025.

- Whilst more than half of organisations (55%) reported that they still use the Route Map, it is clear that use of this as a core tool for EDI work has decreased.

    - 15% report that they no longer use the Route Map, and 30% did not provide details, answering 'Other'.

    - When asked to share further details about why they no longer use it, key themes were a lack of internal capacity to resource this work, focusing limited resource on commitments under other schemes such as The RACE Report and the Diverse Sustainability Initiative, and preferring to work on EDI as a whole rather than focusing on ethnic diversity in isolation.

The aspiration vs. action gap continues to close

- A key finding in our 2023 benchmarking was that a significant proportion of eNGOs had progressed their organisational readiness on EDI since 2021, with 97% of respondents having taken some action. This trend continues in 2025, with just one respondent reporting that they had yet to take any action on improving ethnic diversity.

- In 2023, 53.4% of organisations were developing or had developed an EDI action plan, up from just 15% in 2021. In 2025, this has increased to 70% of organisations.

Resourcing remains a challenge

- In 2025, 60% of organisations report that they do not have a dedicated budget for action on improving ethnic diversity. This is unchanged from 2023.
    - 71% of respondents who are small organisations do not have a dedicated budget for action on improving ethnic diversity, 89% of medium organisations, and 75% of large and very large organisations.
- The majority of organisations do not have a dedicated staff member to progress work on ethnic diversity. For over 40% of organisations, staff members have been tasked with taking on extra work in this area with no reduction in their existing workload - this is an increase from 2023.
    - 43% of respondents who are small organisations report having staff members tasked with taking on work to progress ethnic diversity with no reduction in their existing workload, 22% of medium organisations, and 75% of large organisations.
- The majority of organisations reporting that they no longer use the Route Map explained that this was due to capacity and resourcing constraints, meaning that this work has been scaled back, or that what limited resource is available is being prioritised elsewhere within broader EDI work.

Senior leaders still need to step up

- Nearly two-thirds of organisations now have a member of SMT holding responsibility on ethnic diversity, and nearly a third have a member of the Board holding responsibility on ethnic diversity. This is positive.
- 72% of organisations now have established roles and responsibilities for leaders, managers and HR practitioners that are built-in to organisational practice, a significant increase compared with just 10% of organisations in 2023.
- Further action is now needed to go beyond defining the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders, to start putting this into practice.
    - Under 40% of organisations have a leader-led vision for ethnic diversity. Of those organisations that do, less than half report that their managers have considered and communicated what this leader-led vision means for

individual teams, or that learning opportunities have been established to support the vision.

- Nearly 75% of organisations do not have an effective structure in place for staff to provide 360° feedback to leaders and managers.

Progress continues on reporting and recruitment

- Reporting and inclusive recruitment practice remain areas where the sector is making good progress, but the data suggests that this may be starting to slow.
    - 80% of respondents are active participants in The RACE Report, increasing from 70% in 2023, and 53.3% in 2022.
    - 80% of organisation report that recruitment and development policies and practices have been reviewed and revised to ensure they are debiased. This is an increase from 56.7% in 2023.
    - Yet just 35% of organisations report that progress on internal diversity is being tracked and assessed regularly, and 40% that there is established regular internal reporting on progress. This is a decrease from 50% in 2023.
- The data suggests that this work is driving positive change. Over 50% of organisations report that they have seen (through tracked data) an increased number/proportion of job applicants who are people of colour. This is an increase from 36.7% of organisations in 2023.
- However, as highlighted in 2023, it is hard to ascertain the impacts of these actions based on the limited information provided through the benchmarking survey alone, and given that the responses are highly variable.

Greater focus is needed on equity, empowerment and anti-racism

- Some aspects of work on anti-racism have significantly progressed since 2023, with 50% of organisations reporting that they have a clear anti-racism policy, up from 16.7%.
- However, the data suggests that organisations are still struggling to progress anti-racism in practice. Only 15% of organisations report that managers are trained in implementing anti-racism reporting structures and supporting staff. Anti-racism is a defined organisational priority for just 20% of respondents – this is unchanged since 2023.

- The sector is also further behind on progressing equity and empowerment actions for people of colour already working within organisations.

    - Just 10.5% of organisations report that people of colour are being supported to identify the role they want to play in driving change.

    - However, 42.5% of organisations report that people of colour are being supported and equipped to take up more senior and leadership level roles. Though still less than half, this marks a significant increase from the 13.3% reported in 2023.

Recommendations

1. Concerted effort is needed to re-secure buy-in to the Route Map if this is to remain a useful tool to help drive and guide sector working to progress ethnic diversity.

- This should include further work with Full Colour and the Link EDI Working Group to agree and define specific actions for Years 2-5. The Route Map document only has actions set out for Year 1, with the intent being to define next steps through reflecting on what progress has been made, and what challenges remain. The defined actions for Years 2-5 should be accompanied by a new or updated guidance manual, to provide the sector with practical advice and support.

- As part of this work, Wildlife and Countryside Link and Full Colour should explore the potential to more explicitly situate the Route Map's work on ethnic diversity within EDI more broadly, reflecting how a large proportion of the sector is currently working.

- Crucially, this work must include (re)affirming the sector's commitment to increasing diversity (including ethnic diversity) and inclusivity, ending prejudice (including racism), and ensuring that we are as representative a sector as possible. In this period of increasing public challenge and pushback against EDI work, there is a risk that organisations will retreat from this work and that as a result both staff with lived experience and those holding responsibility for EDI are left unsupported and overburdened. This commitment must include adequate and protected resourcing, to ensure that ethnic diversity work is not left vulnerable to being deprioritised.

2. Dedicated group support programmes are an effective model for driving change, as demonstrated by the success of SEEDS – this model should be rolled out for further cohorts, including for larger organisations.

- The SEEDS pilot cohort of 10 small and medium-sized organisations was developed in response to a clear trend in the 2023 benchmarking that smaller organisations were

struggling to get off the starting blocks. In 2025, this trend is far less pronounced, and SEEDS participants have reported good progress across the Route Map themes. This suggests that the SEEDS approach of dedicated support through a programme of small group working is an effective model.

- Link should therefore actively explore options for this model to be rolled out for further cohorts across the sector, including for larger organisations. Options may include both Link continuing to hold coordination responsibility, or for this to be passed onto another organisation with greater capacity and therefore the ability to significantly upscale this work.

3. There is the need for greater buy-in and visibility of senior leaders in this area of work.

- In 2025, Wildlife and Countryside Link has worked with members in the EDI Working Group to develop proposals for a programme of roundtable workshops for CEOs, intended to boost buy-in and to encourage CEOs to take responsibility for specific actions within their organisations. However, for this work to proceed, dedicated resource will be required.

- There are several CEOs doing brilliant work in this EDI and ethnic diversity space. Peer support networks for CEOs and senior leaders should be developed to allow these CEOs who are further along in this work to offer advice, support and inspiration to others, and to ensure that there is collective accountability for this group as key 'agents of change'.

4. In addition to future benchmarking, more detailed analysis is required to better capture and understand the impact of the progress that the sector has made.

- The benchmarking process is focused on how organisations are implementing the Route Map actions and if they are hitting the milestones. Whilst the survey does ask some questions regarding impacts, such as tracked changes in recruitment demographics, this information is very limited.

- Furthermore, as the 2025 data shows, whilst progress is being made across the Route Map themes, the majority of organisations are not yet at the stage of consistently implementing practice and updated policies.

- In future, Wildlife and Countryside Link should explore options for conducting more detailed analysis of the *impacts* of the Route Map, in addition to progress made against actions, to understand if this work is driving meaningful change as intended. Options for greater analysis could include through further collaboration with The RACE Report, and/or further survey work through Link.

5. Anti-racism and empowerment need greater focus in the sector's work on ethnic diversity going forward.

- Work in these areas has not significantly progressed since 2023. The data suggests that this is a sector-wide trend, rather than being limited to just smaller or larger organisations, which suggests that sector-wide support is needed. Lack of progress on anti-racism is also a safeguarding issue, posing risks to staff wellbeing and safety, and therefore requires urgent attention.

- Wildlife and Countryside Link should therefore prioritise action on anti-racism in projects in 2026-2027, including through the EDI Working Group. Opportunities for taking action to provide support for the sector that should be explored include training, webinars, developing shared resources, and better sharing of best practice. Link has fed into the development of an empowerment programme to develop leadership skills and opportunities for people of colour in the sector, and should continue to support this initiative as it develops.

- Wildlife and Countryside Link should reach out to Diverse Sustainability Initiative and The RACE Report to understand if anti-racism is also an area with limited progress within these groups. If so, opportunities for collective action should be explored.

6. More dedicated infrastructure for the sector *as a whole* is needed to help drive progress on ethnic diversity, and on EDI more broadly.

- This should include a user-friendly online portal to provide an effective centralised resource for all organisations, as recommended in our 2023 benchmarking report. This portal should gather learnings and resources from sector-wide initiatives including the Route Map, The RACE Report, and New to Nature, including case studies and practical tips.

- As specifically requested by respondents, resources should be developed when there are gaps – for example, templates for internal assessments of progress made, impact felt, and barriers faced.

Full benchmarking results

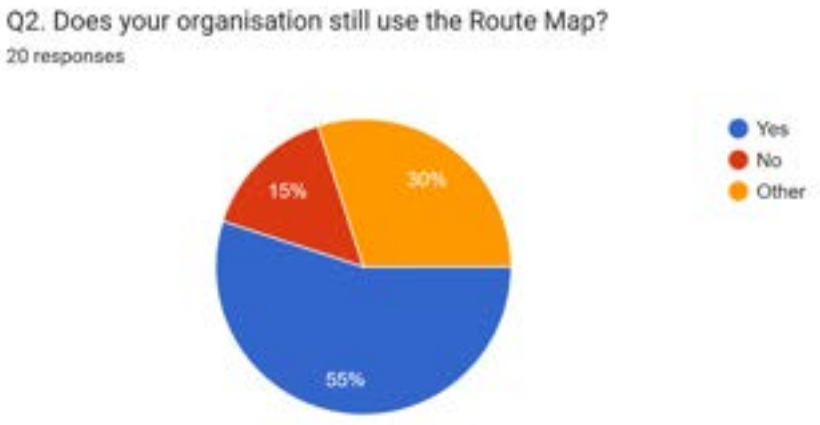
The sector's engagement with EDI is changing

A key difference that has emerged through comparing the 2023 and 2025 benchmarking data is the way the sector is engaging with collective EDI work.

The scale of the challenge facing the sector to improve diversity remains immense. Any drop-off in the sector's commitment to the Route Map work, or EDI more generally, must therefore be taken very seriously. As discussed, failure to drive meaningful change will not only undermine the sector's efforts to protect nature, but also poses a significant safeguarding risk.

Anecdotal information from Link EDI Working Group discussions had suggested that sector buy-in to collective EDI work was becoming less certain, with some organisations unsure about the continuing role and relevance of the Route Map, and attempts to take action collectively. The sector's appetite for network building and spaces for collective discussion and accountability appears to remain high – for example, numbers joining Link EDI Working Group meetings have remained stable, and the 'RACE Summit' event coordinated by SOS-UK has had a successful second year in 2025. The 2025 Benchmarking Survey data shows that 80% of respondents are active participants in The RACE Report.

We therefore included additional questions in the 2025 benchmarking survey to explore whether organisations were still actively using the Route Map, and why this may or may not be the case. 55% of organisations reported that they still use the Route Map, 15% of organisations reported that they no longer use the Route Map, and 30% of organisations responded 'Other'.



Those who responded ‘yes’ were asked to share further details about how they continue to use the Route Map.

A key theme from these responses is that many organisations have integrated the Route Map into their own internal plans. This includes both EDI action plans, and wider ‘people’ and ‘organisational’ strategies. Respondents flagged that they had created these internal plans and strategies around the Route Map, using this as a template, or using the actions as a starting point from which to develop bespoke actions. Some respondents also flagged that the Route Map was useful for understanding ‘what the future trajectory should be’.

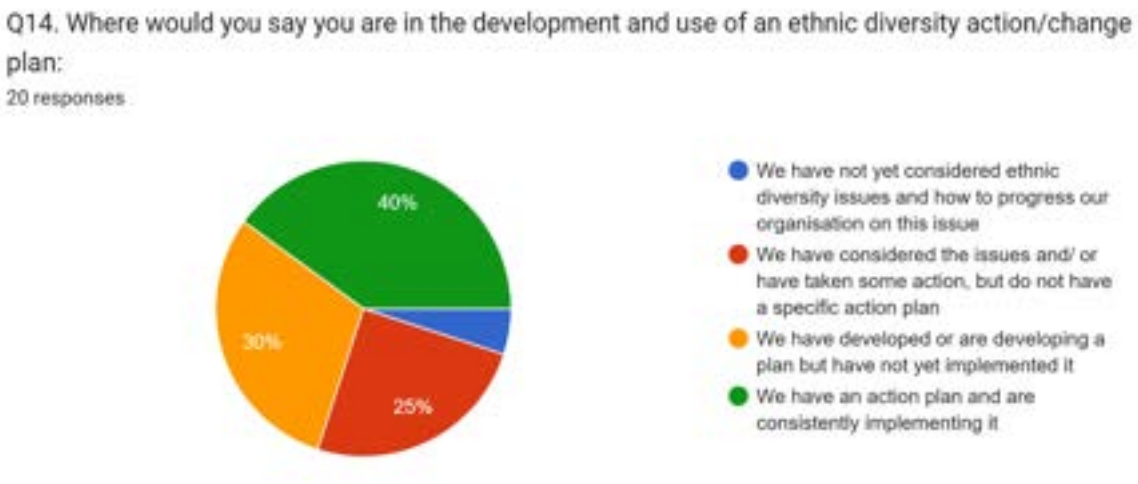
Those who responded ‘no’ were asked to share further details about why they no longer use the Route Map. There were 8 responses to this question, despite only 3 organisations replying ‘no’ to Question 2, implying that those replying ‘Other’ also chose to offer further detail in this space.

Many respondents flagged capacity challenges as the reason why they no longer use the Route Map. Some explained that this was due to the small number of staff within the organisation and a lack of internal capacity and resource to put into this work. Others flagged that their organisation had gone through a restructure, and that this meant it had not been decided whether Route Map work would continue, or who would hold responsibility for driving it forward.

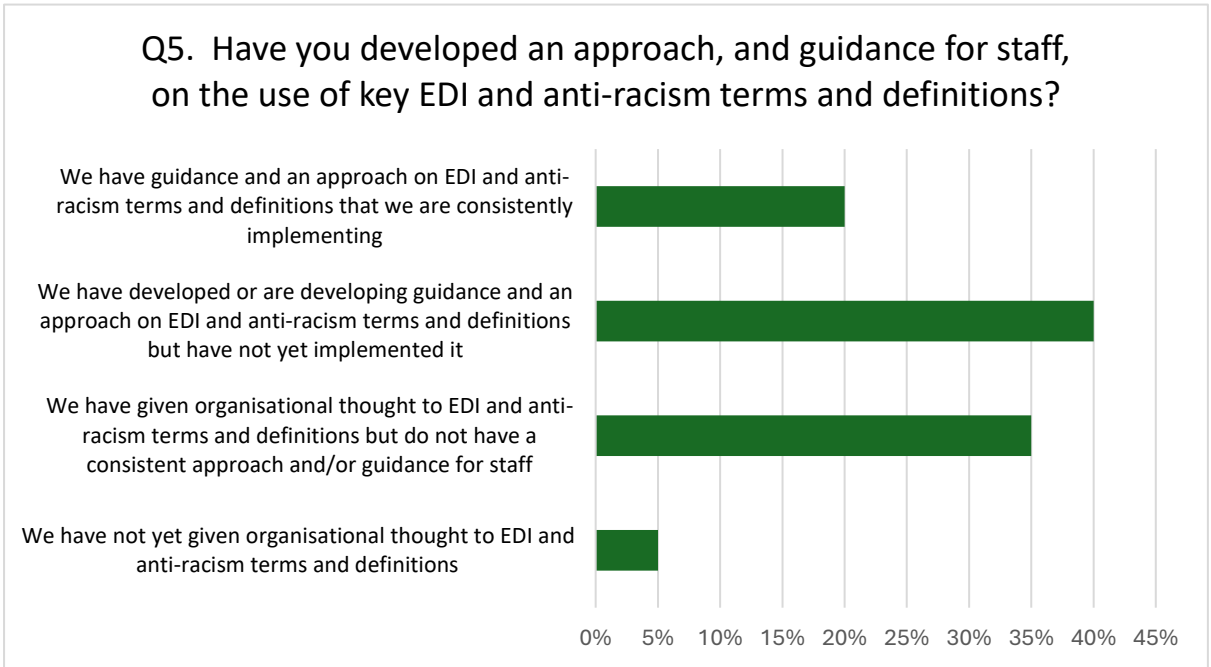
Many responses also flagged that they were no longer using the Route Map because they had decided to use an alternative tool. Alternatives mentioned included The RACE Report, Diverse Sustainability Initiative, and the Diversity and Inclusion Progression Framework. Reasons provided for this include that an alternative tool better aligned to the priorities and desired outcomes of that organisation, or that alternative tools allowed the organisation to work on EDI in the round rather than focusing on ethnic diversity. This desire to work holistically and to take an intersectional approach to EDI was apparent in responses throughout the survey.

Many organisations also flagged that limited capacity meant that they had needed to put their resource and capacity into just one initiative, rather than committing to multiple programmes. Similarly, several organisations flagged that limited resource and capacity meant that they needed to focus efforts on aspects of EDI most relevant to the needs of their current staff – for example, disability and neurodivergence. This theme of reduced capacity remains significant throughout responses to the 2025 benchmarking survey. This was also a major theme in the 2023 data.

Despite this trend of engagement plateauing and, in some cases, beginning to decline, overall progress on the core Route Map actions continues. For example, only one response to the benchmarking survey stated that the organisation had yet to take any action on improving ethnic diversity. The number of organisations who have developed or who are developing an EDI action plan has continued to increase, rising to 70% of organisations in 2025 – this was at 53.4% in 2023 and just 15% in 2021.



Similarly, the majority of organisations now have developed or are developing an approach and guidance to staff on the use of key EDI and anti-racism terms and definitions, with 20% of organisations now consistently implementing this. This is up from just 7% of organisations in 2023.



Comparing small, medium and large organisations: the success of SEEDS

In 2023, the benchmarking data suggested that small organisations were facing the greatest challenge in progressing their ethnic diversity work. Compared with medium and large, small organisations often had the least internal capacity and resource to put behind EDI work, and were reportedly further behind on some of the key first year actions including developing EDI Action Plans. We therefore developed the SEEDS programme in 2024-2025 to give small and medium sized organisations targeted support to develop the skills and knowledge required to get off the starting blocks and implement 'Year One' of the Route Map.

In the 2025 data, this trend of small organisations being further behind in their ethnic diversity work is less clear. As a group, small organisations in the survey sample are in fact reportedly on par with or even slightly further along than medium and large organisations in several areas – for example, in terms of dedicated staff and senior leadership holding responsibility for ethnic diversity work, and for having anti-racism training in place for managers and recruiters. Small organisations as a cohort have made significant progress in some areas since 2023 – for example, 57% of small organisations report that they now have developed an EDI action plan, whereas in 2023 this was just 25%.

Table 2 sets out the differences between small, medium and large organisations across several Route Map themes.

This trend could be due to small organisations being better represented than large and very large organisations in the 2025 data. However, the number of small organisations responding in 2023 and 2025 is relatively unchanged – whereas the number of large organisations has significantly decreased. This could suggest a lack of capacity, therefore supporting survey findings that progress within larger organisations has slowed.

This change in trend could also be a result of the success of the SEEDS programme, in that a cohort of small organisations have had dedicated support on progressing the Route Map between 2023 and 2025. This report does not state how many of the 2025 benchmarking respondents were SEEDS participants, as this would be identifiable data. However, there is a clear trend emerging from respondents who were SEEDS participants that these organisations as a collective are now further ahead with Route Map work compared with organisations of the same size who were not SEEDS participants.

Table 2 – A comparison of progress made by small, medium and large organisations in the 2025 benchmarking data.

Percentages given are for percentages of that cohort who have reported that they have completed the action. There are 7 small, 9 medium, and 4 large organisations in the survey sample.

Theme	Action	Small	Medium	Large
Recruitment	Our recruitment and development policies and practices have been reviewed and revised to ensure they are debiased.	71%	78%	100%
	Anti-racism training is conducted for recruiters and managers within the organisation.	29%	11%	0%
	We have seen (through tracked data) an increased number/proportion of job applicants who are people of colour	43%	56%	50%
Equity, empowerment & anti-racism	Development for people of colour who are already working in the sector, to equip them to take up more senior and leadership roles.	29%	44%	50%
	Our organisation has a clear anti-racism policy.	57%	33%	75%
	HR, leaders and managers are actively implementing inclusion and anti-racism practices	43%	66%	50%
Embedding action	We have a staff member(s) working specifically on ethnic diversity as their main responsibility	29%	11%	0%
	We have a member(s) of the Senior Management Team holding responsibility on ethnic diversity	57%	55%	50%
	We have a specific budget for action on improving ethnic diversity.	29%	11%	25%
	Leaders have written a comprehensive organisational vision for ethnic diversity in the organisation and have effectively articulated this organisation-wide	29%	33%	50%

Senior leaders as agents of change

Senior leaders must own, act, and be visible on the issue of increasing ethnic diversity to drive organisational change. For this reason, the Route Map identifies senior leaders as key agents of change and defines specific actions in relation to their roles and responsibilities.

The sector has made some positive progress in this space. 72% of organisations now have established roles and responsibilities for leaders, managers and HR practitioners that are built-in to organisational practice. This marks a significant increase from 2023, when this was at just 10% of organisations. Similarly, over 65% of organisations report in 2025 that leaders, managers and HR/ Learning and Development practitioners have worked together to consider potential areas of culture change that may be needed – in 2023, this was at 46%.

Nearly two-thirds of organisations report that there is a member of the Senior Management Team holding responsibility for work on ethnic diversity, and nearly a third report that a member of the Board is holding responsibility. This information was not collected in 2023 benchmarking, but trends emerging from The RACE Summit in 2024 and ongoing discussions within Link's EDI Working Group flagged that challenges around the role of senior leaders were being felt across the sector.

However, whilst the roles of senior leaders are now better defined, and action is being considered at senior leader level, it is clear that the sector has struggled to progress into a space of *implementation.* This is an area that will require greater focus going forwards.

For example, the number of organisations whose leaders have written a comprehensive vision for ethnic diversity and have effectively articulated this organisation-wide remains very low at just 39% of organisations. Whilst this does represent an increase from the 23% reported in 2023, writing the vision is a core foundational step towards senior leaders actively fulfilling their role as agents of change.

There appears to be a disparity in the survey data, in that 39% of organisations report having a leader-led vision, yet 40% report that they have a change plan for delivering a leader-led vision. This can be explained by the fact that only 18 organisations responded to Q6, which asks about whether a leader-led vision is in place, whereas 19 organisations responded to Q15 which asks whether a change plan to deliver the leader vision is in place. It is therefore quite likely that the true percentage of organisations from the survey sample who have a leader-led vision for ethnic diversity is in place is in fact 42%.

Less than half of organisations who report having a leader-led vision in place state that their managers have considered and communicated what the leaders vision means for their individual teams, and that HR policies and learning opportunities have been established to support this.

Nearly 75% of organisations do not have an effective structure in place for staff to provide 360° feedback to leaders and managers. This is a large step forwards compared with 2023, when not a single organisation reported that they had such a structure in place, but still requires further focus going forward.

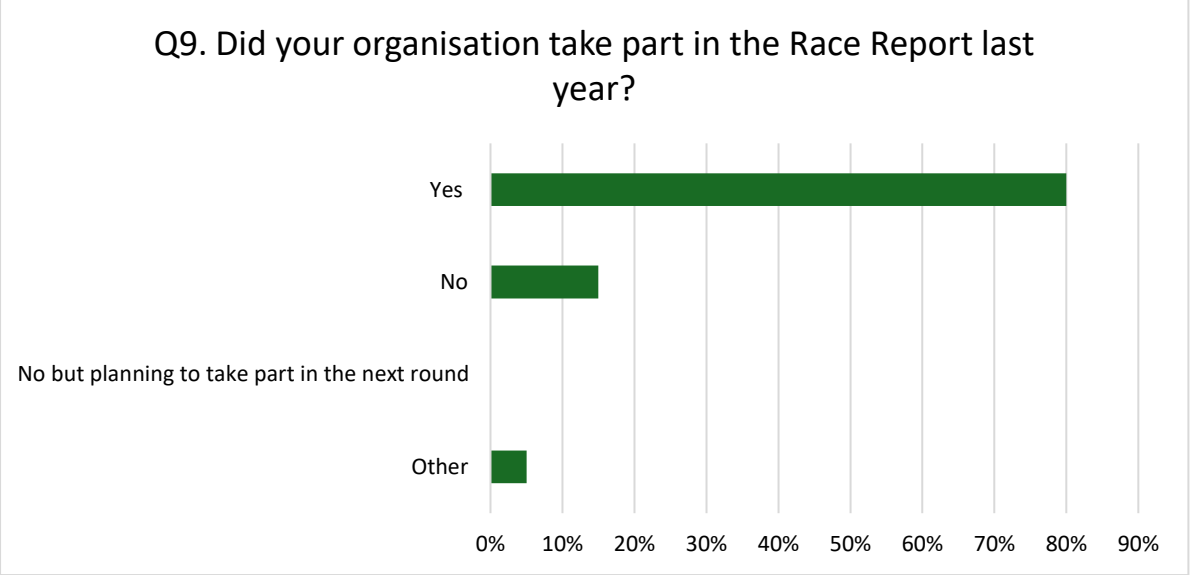
Recruitment and reporting

The 2023 benchmarking report identified that recruitment and reporting had been the initial focus for many organisations across the sector, and therefore that recruitment-related milestones had seen the most progress. In 2025, recruitment remains a strong area in terms of actions taken, and the data suggests that this is starting to have an impact. However, the increase in action taken is less significant than between 2022-2023, and in some areas has in

fact decreased. This suggests that after an initial surge of focus, driven by support and training from programmes such as Race for Nature and New to Nature, activity on recruitment and reporting may be beginning to stabilise.

Over half of organisations report that they have amended policies which most impact their ability to become more ethnically diverse, including inclusive and anti-racist recruitment, development, retention and pay policies and practices. 80% of respondents report that on recruitment and development policies specifically, these have been reviewed and revised to ensure that they are debiased – an increase from 2023, when 56.7% organisations had completed this step.

Progress has also been made on tracking and reporting EDI data, and progress on EDI work. 80% of respondents in 2025 are actively participating in The RACE Report, up from 70% in 2023 and 53.3% in 2022. 40% of organisations report that they have an established system of regular internal reporting on progress, a decrease compared with 50% in 2023.



The 2025 data suggests that the impact of multiple years of focus on recruitment actions is starting to show. 50% of organisations now report that they have seen through tracked data an increase in the number of job applicants who are people of colour, up from 36.7% in 2023.

However, as with 2023, the data provided through the small benchmarking survey sample alone is not sufficient to fully track and understand the impacts of this work. Organisations were asked under Q10 to share what proportion of their staff identify as people of colour, and what if any increase this represented from the previous year. Responses were highly variable, ranging from a decrease in representation, consistent figures in the range of 10-15%, and an 8.3% increase in representation in just one year. Many organisations were

unable to respond to this question, as due to the risk of individual members of staff being made identifiable through the data.

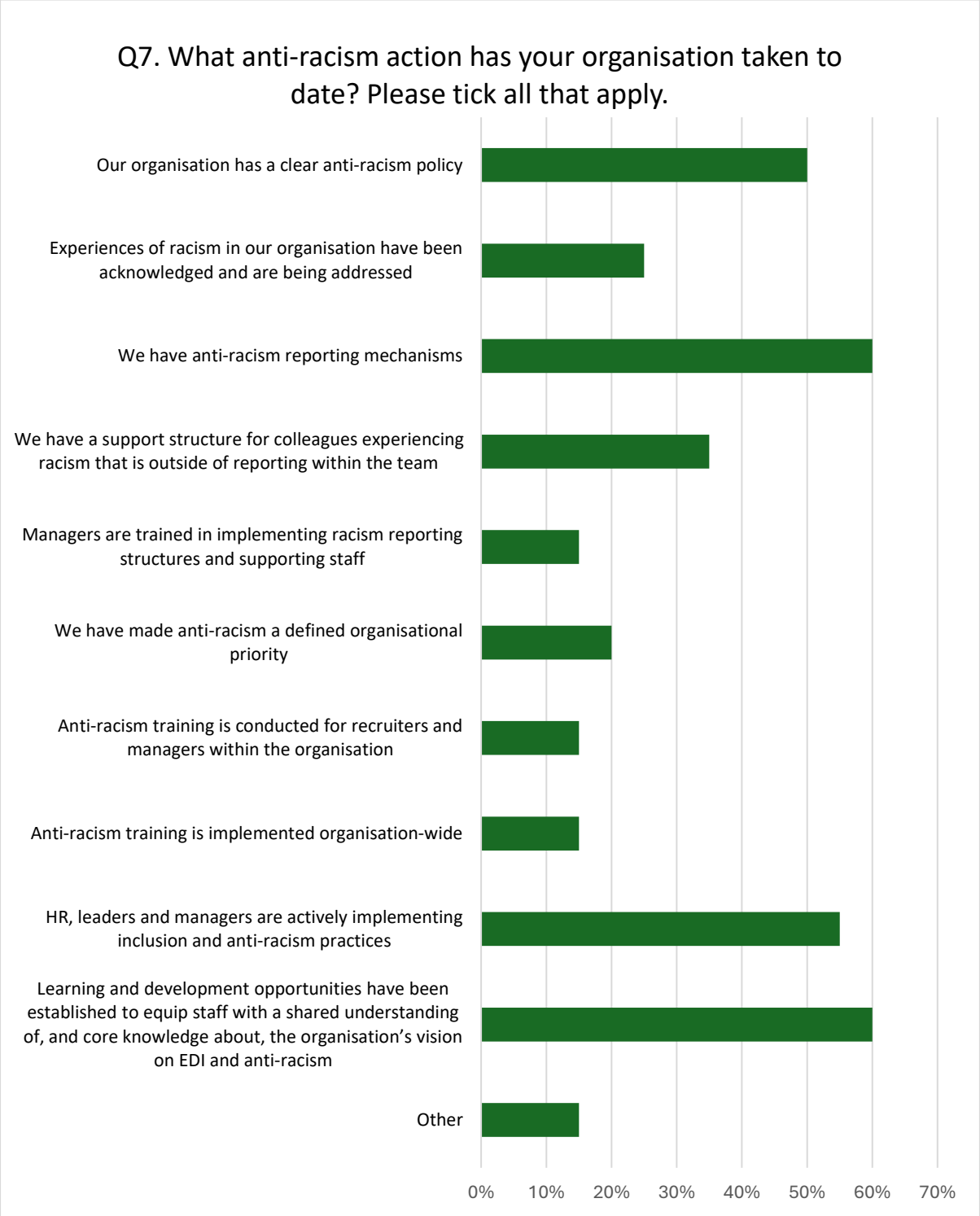
Equity, empowerment and anti-racism

In the 2023 benchmarking report, it was clear that the sector was struggling to make progress on anti-racism, and in terms of actions to support people of colour already working within their organisations. It was also noted that although many organisations reported that actions in relation to anti-racism had been put in place, the vast majority did not have a clear anti-racism policy to coordinate and drive this work effectively.

Positive progress has been made to address this policy gap since 2023, meaning a greater number of organisations now have clearer internal definitions for anti-racism and greater clarity on expectations and procedures. In 2023, just 20% of organisations had a clear anti-racism policy, whereas in 2025 this is now 50%.

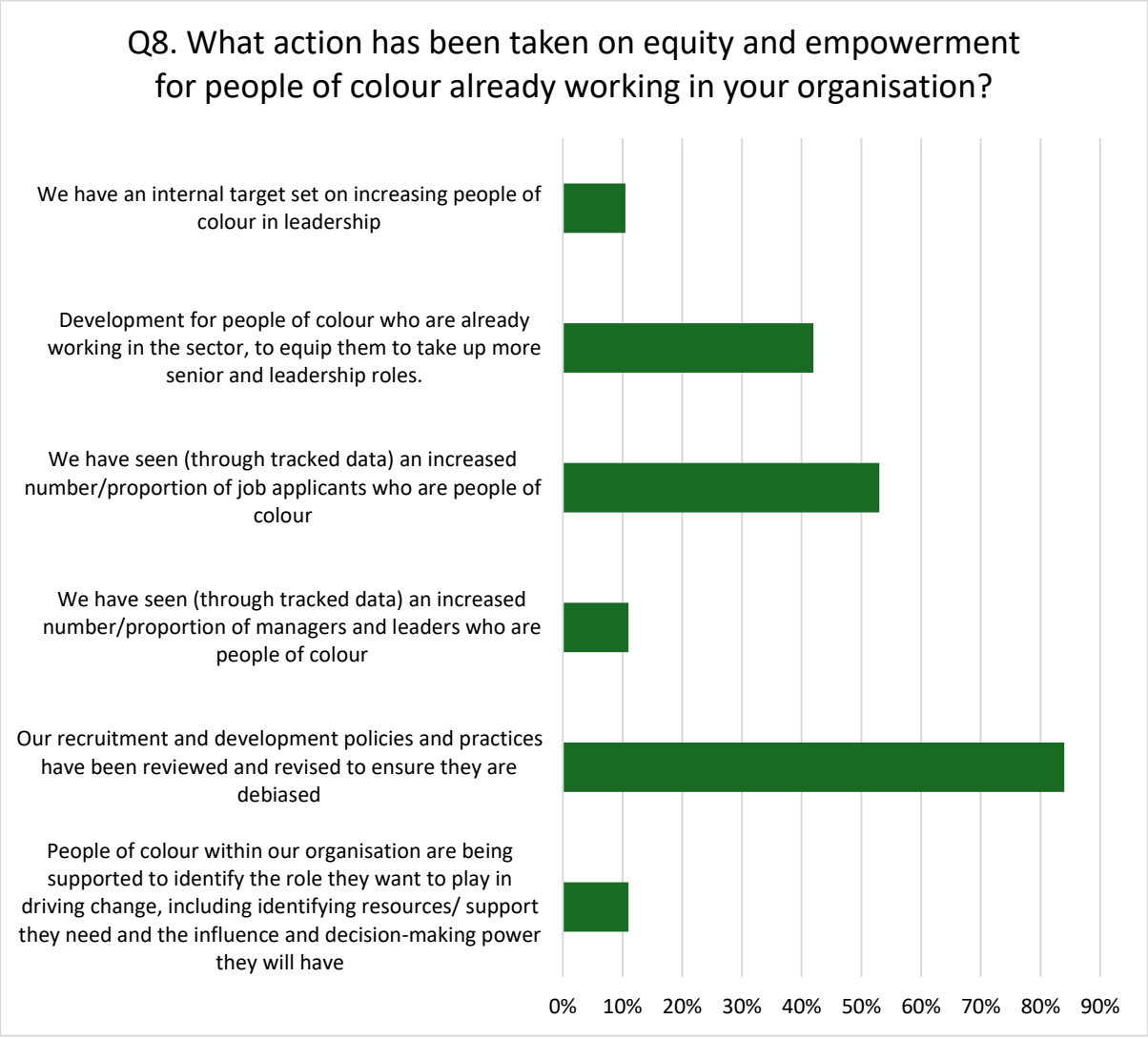
Similarly, 60% of organisations now have anti-racism reporting mechanisms in place – up from 40% in 2023 – and 60% have established learning and development opportunities to equip staff with shared understand and core knowledge of the EDI and anti-racism vision. 55% of organisations report that their HR, leaders and managers are actively implementing inclusion and anti-racism practices. This has increased from 36% in 2023.

However, progress on all other Route Map actions in relation to anti-racism has remained limited. Just 15% organisations have mangers trained in implementing racism reporting structures and supporting staff. Similarly, anti-racism training is taking place in just 15% of organisations – this includes training both for recruiters and managers specifically, and more broadly for the whole organisation. As Table 2 shows, this trend appears relatively consistent across small, medium and large organisations, suggesting that the barriers preventing this work from progressing are sector-wide.


Q7. What anti-racism action has your organisation taken to date? Please tick all that apply.
Our organisation has a clear anti-racism policy
Experiences of racism in our organisation have been acknowledged and are being addressed
We have anti-racism reporting mechanisms
We have a support structure for colleagues experiencing racism that is outside of reporting within the team
Managers are trained in implementing racism reporting structures and supporting staff
We have made anti-racism a defined organisational priority
Anti-racism training is conducted for recruiters and managers within the organisation
Anti-racism training is implemented organisation-wide
HR, leaders and managers are actively implementing inclusion and anti-racism practices
Learning and development opportunities have been established to equip staff with a shared understanding of, and core knowledge about, the organisation's vision on EDI and anti-racism
Other
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%

A similar trend is apparent regarding actions on equity and empowerment for people of colour already working in the sector. 42% of organisations state that development is in place to support people of colour to take up more senior and leadership roles, up from 13% in 2023. However, just 10% of organisations report that people of colour are being supported to identify the role they want to play in driving change, including identifying the support and resources needed, and the role in decision-making that they will have.

Only 10% of organisations state that they have set an internal target for increasing the number of people of colour in leadership. Indeed, the majority of organisations have reported that they have not set any internal targets on becoming a more ethnically diverse organisation. Reasons shared for this include the small size of the organisation, and that setting numerical targets can feel tokenistic. A number of organisations explained that rather than setting specific numerical targets, they compare themselves against data from the RACE Report or UK and/or local demographic data and use this as a benchmark.

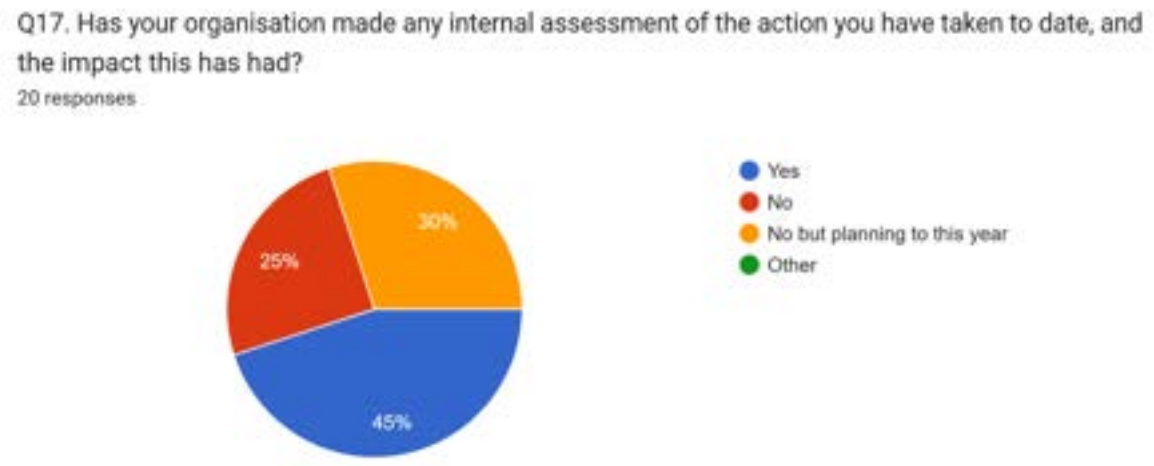


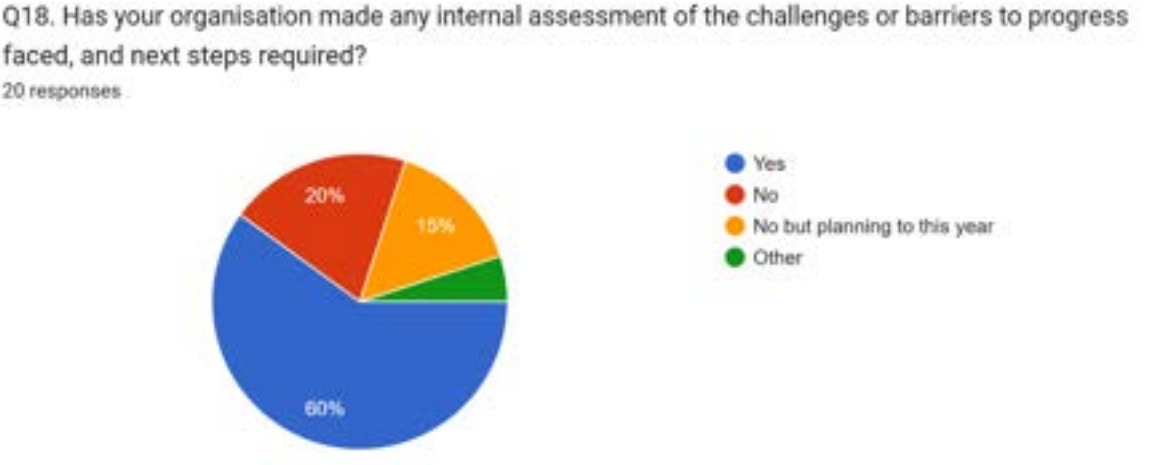
Assessing progress and understanding barriers

New questions were added to the 2025 benchmarking report to build a better understanding of how the sector is assessing the impact of their EDI and ethnic diversity work, and the challenges that organisations are facing.

Whilst sector-wide initiatives such as Link's benchmarking work, the DSI partner programme, and The RACE Report's annual survey and transparency cards do encourage assessment of progress and impact, it is important that organisations are also conducting these assessments internally in order to inform their EDI work. The 20 organisations in this benchmarking survey sample all have unique staff demographics and will need to understand which actions and targets are most suited to their needs.

It is positive therefore that the majority of organisations have or will have by the end of this year made an assessment of the action they have taken thus far, and the barriers faced in doing so.





Organisations were asked to share further detail about these assessment processes. It is clear that approaches taken vary from highly structured – for example, examining progress against internal diversity metrics via an annual reporting process, or a review conducted by an internal EDI committee – through to more informal, such as raising headline trends for consideration at Board meetings. Under this question, it was also flagged that a shared template for conducting assessments would be very helpful.

Conclusions

The environment sector continues to make progress on delivering the aims and actions of the Route Map Towards Greater Ethnic Diversity, and therefore to drive meaningful change. This is particularly evident in the significant increase in organisations that now have a strong foundation for this work in place, for example having developed an EDI action plan, having clear policies in place, and defining the roles and responsibilities of agents of change including leaders, managers and HR practitioners.

The positive impact of Wildlife and Countryside Link's SEEDS programme is evident throughout the data, with trends suggesting that the gap between small, medium and large organisation is far less significant in 2025 than in 2023.

However, the scale of the challenge remains immense. As in 2023, progress has not been consistent across the Route Map themes. Whilst core actions such as EDI plans and policies have now been developed across most of the sector, there is far greater variation in terms of implementation. Anti-racism and empowerment for people of colour already working within the sector stand out in the 2025 data as areas where the sector has not progressed. Action relating to senior leadership is also further behind, with organisations struggling to make the next step from defining roles and setting visions through to putting this into practice.

Furthermore, critical challenges around resource and capacity have not meaningfully diminished since 2023. It is clear that the way that organisations engage with EDI and collective cross-sector action is changing, with many struggling to find time and financial resource to put behind multiple initiatives and programmes. This potential drop-off in dedicated work on ethnic diversity – or indeed, EDI more broadly - poses a significant risk to both the effectiveness of the sector, and to the health and wellbeing of staff.

Analysis of the 2025 benchmarking data suggests that the following next steps should be prioritised in Link's work:

1. Working with Full Colour and the Link EDI Working Group to define specific actions for Years 2-5 of the Route Map, and to develop additional guidance to accompany these actions. This process should aim to not only ensure that the Route Map remains a useful, up-to-date tool, but should re-secure sector buy-in for collective working. It should also explore options for more explicitly situating Route Map work within broader EDI.

2. Exploring options for how the SEEDS programme model can be further rolled out across the sector, including for larger organisations.

3. Seeking funding for the further development and rollout of a programme of roundtable workshops for CEOs in the sector, to increase buy-in at the senior leadership level, and to build a network of peer support and collective accountability.

4. Conducting more detailed analysis of the impacts of Route Map work, in addition to benchmarking progress made in terms of implementing specific actions. This should include exploring possibilities for greater collaboration with The RACE Report.

5. Leading with greater focus on anti-racism and empowerment for people of colour already working in the environment sector, including prioritising these Route Map themes in any actions and project work in the 2026-2027 period.

6. Advocating for greater provision of dedicated infrastructure for the sector as a whole to support work on ethnic diversity, and EDI more broadly. This should include exploring options a user-friendly online portal to collate resources.

Appendix

Appendix A – the full list of survey questions from the 2025 benchmarking:

Question	Response format
Q1. When did your organisation sign up to the Route Map, and which year of Route Map delivery is your organisation currently on? E.g. Signed up in 2023, completed all Year 1 milestones, half-way through Year 2	Free text box
Q2. Does your organisation still use the Route Map?	Checkboxes – select one option
Q3. If your organisation does use the Route Map, please briefly share details about how you use it.	Free text box
Q4. If your organisation does not use the Route Map, please briefly share details about why you no longer use it.	Free text box
Q5. Have you developed an approach, and guidance for staff, on the use of key EDI and anti-racism terms and definitions?	Checkboxes - select one option
Q6. Which of the following actions have been undertaken to help leaders, managers and HR practitioners to be 'agents of change' for greater ethnic diversity within your organisation?	Checkboxes - select all that apply
Q7. What anti-racism action has your organisation taken to date? Please tick all that apply.	Checkboxes - select all that apply
Q8. What action has been taken on equity and empowerment for people of colour already working in your organisation?	Checkboxes - select all that apply
Q9. Did your organisation take part in the Race Report last year?	Checkboxes – select one option
Q10. If yes, what proportion of your staff have you reported as being people of colour and what increase (if any) does this represent from the previous year?	Free text box
Q11. Have you set any internal targets around becoming a more ethnically diverse organisation? If yes, please detail targets here.	Free text box
Q12. Do you have a specific budget for action on improving ethnic diversity?	Checkboxes – select one option
Q13. Have you created dedicated capacity internally to facilitate change on ethnic diversity?	Checkboxes – select one option
Q14. Where would you say you are in the development and use of an ethnic diversity action/change plan?	Checkboxes – select one option
Q15. Which of the following actions have you undertaken to deliver and report on change?	Checkboxes - select all that apply
Q16. Do you have additional detail on your progress on the above actions and milestones, or additional measures that you would like to share?	Free text box

Q17. Has your organisation made any internal assessment of the action you have taken to date, and the impact this has had?	Checkboxes – select one option
Q18. Has your organisation made any internal assessment of the challenges or barriers to progress faced, and next steps required?	Checkboxes – select one option
Q19. Do you have any additional detail regarding impact assessment that you would like to share?	Free text box
Q20. Do you have any additional detail regarding challenges and barriers faced that you would like to share? This could include examples of challenges faced and planned next steps, or ideas for sector-wide work required to help address them.	Free text box