



Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard Anti-Racist Interventions Guide

**Supporting local authorities
participating in the SC-WRES
Improvement Programme.**

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Introduction

The SC-WRES Improvement Programme is a 12-month rolling programme that includes access to a data collection metric using nine indicators. It helps to identify issues, measure improvements, and provides evidence on the experiences of staff from Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnic backgrounds. The SC-WRES Improvement Programme supports participants to tackle systemic racism through monthly themed Community of Practice sessions that provide a non-judgmental space for peer-to-peer learning and problem-solving. In addition, participants are supported to develop and implement anti-racist change via annual action plans.

This guide, produced by Skills for Care's SC-WRES team and the SC-WRES learning partner, is designed to support local authorities participating in the SC-WRES Improvement Programme.

We recognise and value the commitment participants are demonstrating – not only through their engagement in the programme itself, but through the practical steps they are taking to address racial inequity in their organisations.

This guide will help you reflect critically on the range and effectiveness of interventions often used to address gaps identified through the SC-WRES. It is intended to help you make informed, evidence-based decisions about which interventions are impactful and to deliver measurable progress on anti-racism.

We recognise that effective action must go beyond surface-level activity. Addressing racial inequality requires attention to the structural and cultural factors that sustain disparities within organisations and systems. By adopting an anti-racist approach, local authorities can deepen their understanding of why inequalities persist and design interventions that are more targeted, proportionate, and sustainable.

In this guide you will find:

- an understanding of anti-racism
- an overview of the types of interventions commonly used to address identified inequalities
- a summary of the current evidence base on what works when designing and implementing anti-racism and equality, equity, diversity and inclusion (EEDI) interventions
- ideas for improving impact.

What is anti-racism?

Understanding the problem of racism

Many organisations have sought to address racism, and important gains have been made. Yet despite these efforts, racism continues to persist.

Part of the reason is that anti-racist activity is often understood and challenged on an individual level rather than at a system or wider society level. It is important to challenge on an individual level but this doesn't get to the heart of the matter: the root causes of racialised thinking. Understanding how racism is reproduced is essential – without this awareness, progress can be fragile and easily undone.

At its foundation, racism is built on a belief in distinct human 'races'. In reality, there is only one human race, though people differ in ethnicity, culture, creed, and lived experience. Journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates captures this insight powerfully in *Between the World and Me* (2015), noting: Race is the child of racism, not the father.

Coates argues that the concept of 'race' was invented to justify exploitation, colonialism, and the supposed hierarchy that comes with them. Racism did not emerge because people were inherently different – it emerged because differences were constructed and used to assign superiority and inferiority, creating systems of advantage and oppression.

Understanding this can help us understand that anti-racist work is not just about addressing individual prejudice but is about dismantling the structures and beliefs that allow inequality to persist.

What do we mean by anti-racism?

Below we provide a starting point for understanding anti-racist practice. Some of these principles (adapted from brap's anti-racist principles), may feel abstract or even a little challenging at first, but the rest of this guide should give you a flavour of what they look like in practice.

Race is a social construct

One of the hardest starting points for people is also the most fundamental: race is not a biological fact; it's a social construct. If we believe race is real in a biological sense, we inevitably begin to build explanations and interventions around supposed differences between groups. But if race is an idea – one that has been repeated, reinforced, and institutionalised over centuries – then the problem shifts. The challenge becomes understanding how that idea continues to shape beliefs, behaviours, and decisions.

Race creates norms nobody notices

Much anti-racism work focuses on those who experience racism. We gather data about them, create programmes for them, and ask them to help design solutions. But this often leaves one crucial part of the system largely untouched. The norms shape who is included, who is trusted and who progresses. Part of anti-racism work is making these invisible norms visible.

This work belongs to everyone

Another persistent assumption in race equality work is that responsibility for change sits primarily with people who experience racism. But if racism is a system – not simply a set of individual prejudices – then it cannot be dismantled by one group alone. Anti-racism requires collective effort. It depends on people with power and resources recognising their role in shaping the system. It depends on people who don't experience racism realising all of us have a stake in creating a future in which racism doesn't shape people's lives.

Racism does not lend itself to simple fixes

Because racism is complex, progress requires curiosity, learning, and collaboration rather than quick solutions. Tackling racism involves changing how people think about their work, their organisations, and the wider world. This cannot be achieved through toolkits and checklists alone. Anti-racism requires reflection, experimentation, and a willingness to try new approaches.

We need to tackle root causes, not isolated behaviours

Much equality work focuses on the visible signs of inequality – representation gaps, staff survey results, complaints or disciplinary patterns. These signals are important, but they are symptoms rather than causes. Anti-racism asks us to look beneath the surface and examine the organisational dynamics that produce these patterns in the first place. Instead of only correcting outcomes, it encourages organisations to ask deeper questions about the processes, assumptions, and decisions that repeatedly generate unequal results.

People forget the power they have

At its heart, anti-racism is concerned with power – how it operates in organisations and whose voices, experiences, and perspectives shape decisions. Power is expressed through culture, procedures, leadership practices and everyday relationships. Anti-racism therefore involves making power visible, questioning how it is used, and ensuring it is shared more fairly. The aim is not to take power from some and give it to others, but to create systems where power is exercised in ways that allow everyone to contribute and thrive.

Understanding the evidence base

Evidence suggests that the most effective approaches to improving organisational equity aligns activities with organisational strategy, purpose, values, and context, takes a systemic view and tackles the root causes of racism, not just the symptoms. Effective approaches challenge existing norms and open up new ways of thinking and acting and builds a continuous and deliberate learning culture that tests, reflects, and adapts over time.

For SC-WRES, this means local authorities need to go beyond implementing familiar activities and instead develop their own practice-based evidence. Many commonly used interventions cannot be relied upon, on their own, to deliver meaningful change. This is not to say they have no value, but that they are unlikely to address systemic racism without being part of a broader, more thoughtful approach.

Strengthening your anti-racist interventions

Here are eight of the most common actions based on an analysis of SC-WRES action plans. For each intervention we have outlined:

- what the research says about how effective different actions are
- ideas for improving impact, based on the available evidence
- questions to consider to help you think about how far each intervention is likely to contribute to meaningful anti-racist change, based on the ideas above.



1. Job design and advertising

Reviewing role criteria and advert language to ensure requirements are proportionate, transparent, and inclusive.

What the research says:

- job advert wording shapes who chooses to apply
 - gender-coded or trait-focused language can discourage qualified candidates from underrepresented groups, even when job requirements are unchanged
 - simply removing overtly gendered terms is insufficient. Subtle signals (such as emphasis on competitiveness, dominance, or 'culture fit') can still communicate who is likely to belong
 - including equality and diversity statements can make organisations more attractive, particularly to minority applicants, but these statements may be viewed as symbolic unless backed by visible action.
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Ideas for improving impact:

- review language systematically: identify gender-coded and exclusionary trait terms
 - check criteria for proportionality: separate essential from desirable requirements
 - signal inclusion credibly: pair EEDI commitments with evidence of action
 - test adverts before release: assess clarity and perceived fit with diverse audiences.
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Questions to consider:

- Are we only improving wording, or are we also tackling the organisational expectations that shape who is seen as suitable for these roles?
- Do our adverts reflect the reality of working here, or could they create expectations that some groups experience differently once inside the organisation?



2. Anonymous/blind recruitment

Removing identifying information from applications at early stages to reduce the influence of bias in shortlisting.

What the research says:

- evidence on anonymising applications is mixed. Some studies find that removing identifying information can reduce disparities at the shortlisting stage. Others show little effect.
 - research also indicates that blind processes may encourage more people to apply. But they do not eliminate bias once candidates' identities become known at interview.
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Ideas for improving impact:

- standardise applications: use structured anonymous forms rather than manually redacted CVs
 - extend beyond the shortlisting phase: use structured questions, with predefined answers
 - track outcomes: monitor shortlisting and hiring rates to assess real impact
 - address bias: ensure hiring managers have bias training.
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Questions to consider:

- Do people understand why anonymised recruitment matters, and are they able to carry that understanding through the whole recruitment process, or is this treated as a procedural step?
- Does anonymising applications risk obscuring how our norms and criteria shape who is selected? Are we doing enough to rethink those norms?



3. Panel diversity

Ensuring selection panels include a mix of backgrounds and perspectives to support balanced and credible decision-making.

What the research says:

- Panel diversity can widen perspectives and enhance perceptions of fairness, but evidence shows it does not consistently reduce bias on its own.
 - Studies indicate that diverse panels can improve the quality of discussions and challenge unexamined judgments. But these benefits depend on active participation and the use of structured criteria. Without clear scoring frameworks, biased decisions can persist regardless of who sits on the panel.
 - Workplace cultures and weak decision processes can be reproduced by panel members of any background. While panel diversity can help surface biases, this occurs mainly when members feel able and supported to question assumptions.
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Ideas for improving impact:

- structure decisions: combine panel diversity with clear scoring criteria and agreed answers
 - clarify authority: do all panel members have equal say – or does the final decision rest with the manager?
 - balance participation: ensure all panel members have equal voice and prevent dominance by senior or confident members
 - challenge ‘fit’ language: require evidence-based justifications for ratings and avoid vague cultural alignment claims
 - track outcomes: monitor shortlisting and hiring data to assess whether panel diversity is changing results.
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Questions to consider:

- Are we assuming that panel members represent fixed racial or ethnic perspectives, and what might this overlook about how race is socially constructed?
- Does this intervention risk implying that fairness depends on diversity alone, rather than on all panel members – including white colleagues – taking responsibility for equitable decision-making? Have we done enough to make recruiters – of all backgrounds – aware of how racism plays into the decision-making process?

4. Unconscious bias training

Structured learning to increase awareness of bias and strengthen fair, evidence-based decision practices.

What the research says:

- Evidence on unconscious bias training is mixed. Reviews show that one-off awareness sessions often have limited long-term behavioural impact, particularly if they just focus on raising awareness that people have biases. Interventions grounded in behavioural science, particularly habit-change approaches, show more promising results.
 - Training is most effective when embedded within structured decision-making systems (e.g. recruitment processes, performance frameworks) rather than delivered as a standalone activity. Framing bias as learned and socially embedded, rather than as a personal failing, can reduce defensiveness.
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Ideas for improving impact:

- ground in behavioural science: use tested models (e.g. habit-breaking, bias interruption) rather than awareness-only sessions
 - prioritise skills: teach practical tools for structured decision-making, challenging assumptions, and interrupt bias in real time
 - embed in systems: align training with recruitment, appraisal, and accountability processes
 - reinforce over time: provide follow-up and reflection; one-off sessions fade.
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Questions to consider:

- Is this training a one-off intervention or is it part of a wider, ongoing effort to address a complex and evolving problem?
- How will participants be supported to put into practice what they have learnt? Remember progress depends on avoiding simplistic solutions and committing to ongoing learning and change.



5. Sponsorship programmes

Senior leaders actively advocating for and opening doors for high-potential individuals from underrepresented groups.

What the research says:

- Sponsorship, where a leader actively advocates for an individual is different to mentoring, which focuses more on guidance.
 - Research suggests sponsors tend to choose people from their existing networks or those similar to themselves. This can reinforce inequality unless deliberately managed.
 - The overall evidence base is limited: most research is observational, and there is little rigorous evaluation of formal sponsorship programmes or their long-term effects on equity.
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Ideas for improving impact:

- define sponsorship clearly: emphasise active advocacy and access to opportunities, not general mentoring
 - undertake development: ensure the sponsor and person being sponsored are trained to understand their relationship, expectations and approach
 - increase transparency: clarify how high-visibility roles and advancement opportunities are allocated
 - mitigate affinity bias: encourage leaders to sponsor beyond familiar networks
 - evaluate impact: assess promotion, leadership representation, and retention rates over time.
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Questions to consider:

- Does this programme redistribute access to power, or risk reinforcing it through informal relationships?
- Are we making progression opportunities more transparent, or relying on individual advocacy to navigate opaque systems?



6. Clarifying career pathways

Making progression routes, expectations, and promotion criteria explicit and accessible to all staff.

What the research says:

- Clear, transparent criteria for career success are linked to better employment outcomes, including stronger career confidence, greater perceptions of fairness, and higher satisfaction.
 - When expectations or advancement pathways are unclear, those with access to informal networks, sponsorship, or insider knowledge tend to benefit.
 - By making standards explicit, organisations can reduce discretion and informal gatekeeping.
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Ideas for improving impact:

- define criteria clearly: document promotion benchmarks, competencies, and evidence requirements in writing
 - standardise decisions: use structured evaluation frameworks and recorded rationales to limit discretion
 - expose informal allocation: track how high-visibility work, stretch roles, and sponsorship opportunities are allocated.
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Questions to consider:

- What informal knowledge or unwritten rules currently shape progression, and who has access to them?
- Does making criteria explicit challenge existing norms of success, or simply formalise them?



7. Leadership programmes

Targeted development initiatives designed to prepare underrepresented staff for senior or strategic roles.

What the research says:

- Leadership programmes can strengthen confidence, networks, and readiness for advancement.
 - However, evidence shows they more reliably improve individual outcomes than organisational change, unless workplace structures and norms also evolve.
 - Although evaluation is improving, the evidence base remains uneven. Many programmes rely on short-term, self-reported outcomes with limited comparison groups or long-term tracking.
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Ideas for improving impact:

- clarify intended outcomes: define whether the programme is designed to build confidence, improve progression rates, shift organisational practices, or contribute to all three
 - link learning to real opportunity: ensure participation connects to stretch roles, acting-up positions, sponsorship, and high-visibility projects
 - address structural barriers in parallel: align programmes with transparent promotion criteria, fair workload allocation, and consistent evaluation processes
 - enable practical participation: secure managerial support, protected time, and role cover so access does not depend on informal goodwill
 - evaluate substantive outcomes: track progression, retention, pay, and access to opportunity over time, rather than relying on participant feedback or satisfaction measures.
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Questions to consider:

- Is the desire to deliver a leadership programme a recognition that there are barriers to senior roles for underrepresented groups? If so, are we changing those barriers or expecting individuals to adapt to them?
- Do we have a strong understanding of the barriers underrepresented groups face? To what extent are these linked to assumptions about 'fit' or what leadership looks like, and how are we challenging those norms?
- Who actually needs the training?

8. Coaching and mentoring

Structured developmental relationships that aim to support individual growth and increase senior leaders' understanding of lived experience.

What the research says:

- While formal workplace coaching has been linked to a greater sense of meaning at work, evidence of longer-term impact is partial.
 - Mentoring is associated with positive career outcomes, though effects are generally small. Benefits tend to be individual (e.g., confidence, satisfaction, network access) rather than structural.
 - There is evidence reverse mentoring can increase senior leaders' understanding of marginalised experiences and prompt reflection. However, benefits are often uneven: senior participants may gain insight and reputational value, but junior or marginalised mentors can incur emotional labour costs.
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Ideas for improving impact:

- clarify purpose and scope: define what the intervention is (and is not) intended to address; do not position individual development as a substitute for structural reform
 - avoid deficit framing: frame participation around growth and institutional learning, not remediation of marginalised individuals
 - ensure preparation and structure: provide training, clear expectations, and psychological safety; structured approaches show stronger and safer outcomes
 - distribute labour fairly: recognise and compensate the emotional and cognitive labour often carried by junior or marginalised participants
 - embed accountability: link insights to concrete organisational action, not only individual reflection
 - monitor equity outcomes: track access, progression, retention, and representation alongside attitudinal measures.
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Questions to consider:

- Precisely what knowledge or insight is the junior partner expected to share, and how widely applicable is this? Does this risk treating their experience as representative of a wider racial or ethnic group?
- In what ways is mentoring leading to more equitable sharing of power across the organisation? Can we capture through evaluation how this is changing who influences decisions or how decisions are made?

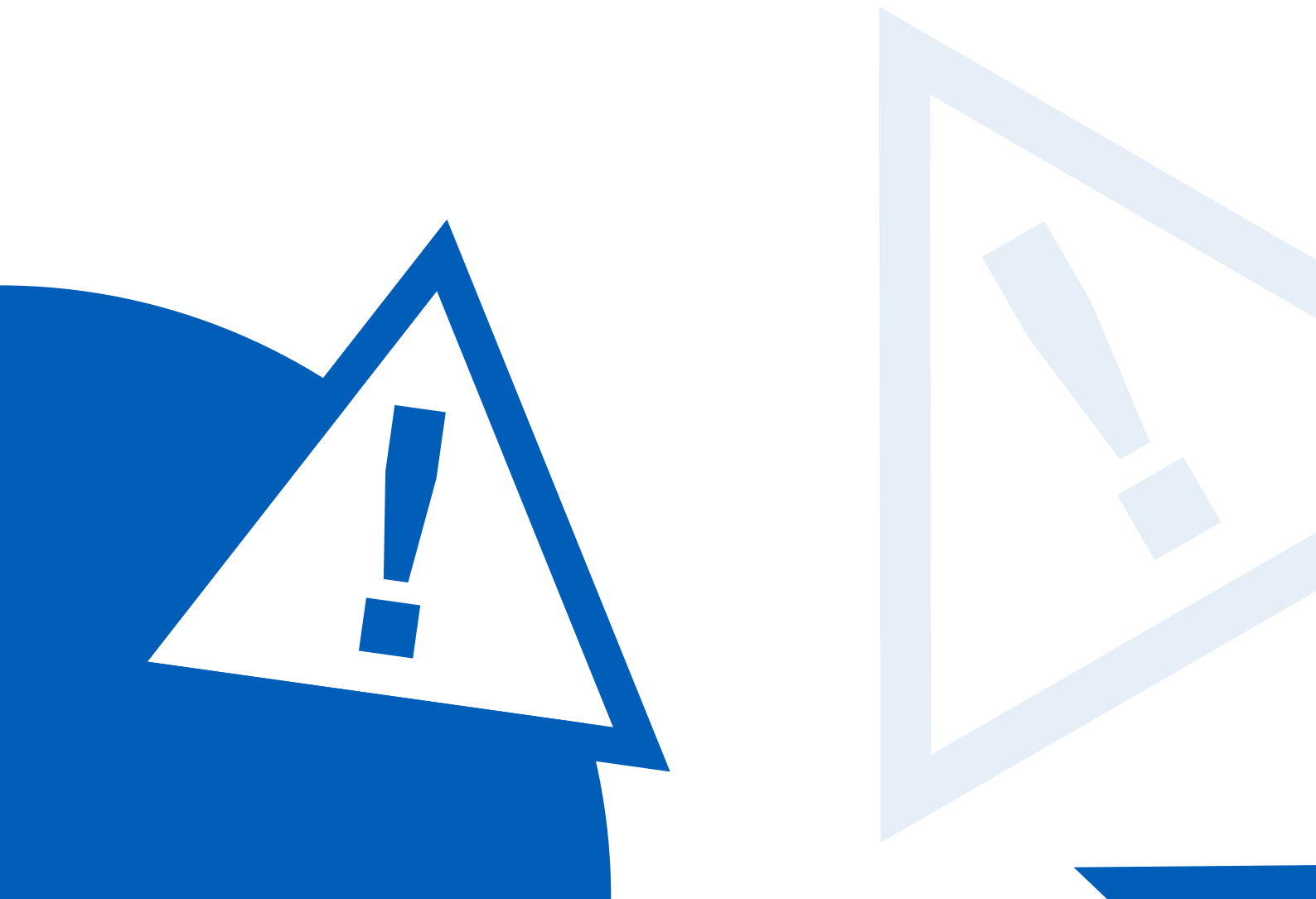
Common pitfalls in implementing anti-racist initiatives

As we have seen, SC-WRES action plans include many examples of local authorities taking action to promote anti-racism.

Alongside understanding what works, though, it is equally important to reflect on some of the challenges organisations can face when putting these interventions into practice.

The following examples are all based on SC-WRES action plans:

- not gathering or building on learning about what has worked in the past
- choosing popular interventions without thinking through what this is a solution to and the evidence for whether this will work in their setting
- making linear assumptions that the intervention will achieve what they hope and not testing these out
- limited consideration to the organisational supports and culture changes needed to embed the intervention
- thinking too narrowly about specific actions rather than how they interlinked and will work together
- not thinking broadly enough about the range of levers that are important to harness in a systemic approach.



Other interventions

There are other activities that research suggests may be useful in tackling race inequality, but which show up less in SC-WRES action plans. We offer them here as food for thought.

Outreach and attraction of diverse communities:

- Proactive engagement with underrepresented communities and networks can widen the pool of people who see and apply for opportunities.
 - The evidence suggests proactive outreach with local communities can increase the diversity of applicant pools, but this alone does not lead to more equitable outcomes, as structural barriers and subjective decision-making processes still shape selection.
 - Ideas for improvement:
 - build pathways: offer pre-application workshops, portfolio reviews or mock interviews
 - commit long term: one-off campaigns rarely shift outcomes.
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Shortlisting scrutiny protocol:

- A formal review of shortlists to check that criteria have been applied consistently and that patterns of exclusion are examined before decisions are finalised.
 - The evidence suggests requiring decision-makers to justify choices against pre-defined criteria can improve consistency and reduce biased reasoning. Pre-decision review creates a structured pause, encouraging more deliberate and transparent application of standards.
 - Ideas for improvement:
 - anchor to criteria: require written justification against agreed competencies.
 - examine aggregate patterns: assess shortlisting outcomes by group, not only individual cases.
 - use independent oversight where feasible: involve a reviewer not part of the original decision.
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Secondment and acting-up opportunities:

- These are things like time-limited stretch roles that provide development experience and visibility beyond an individual's substantive post.
- The evidence suggests secondments can build individual capability and support knowledge transfer, particularly when there is strong senior support and clear objectives, but their wider organisational impact is less clear.
- Ideas for improvement:
 - secure senior support: ensure active sponsorship from both host and home managers
 - manage workload: protect time and clarify responsibilities to avoid dual-role strain
 - plan re-entry: agree how new skills will be used on return to prevent disengagement.

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