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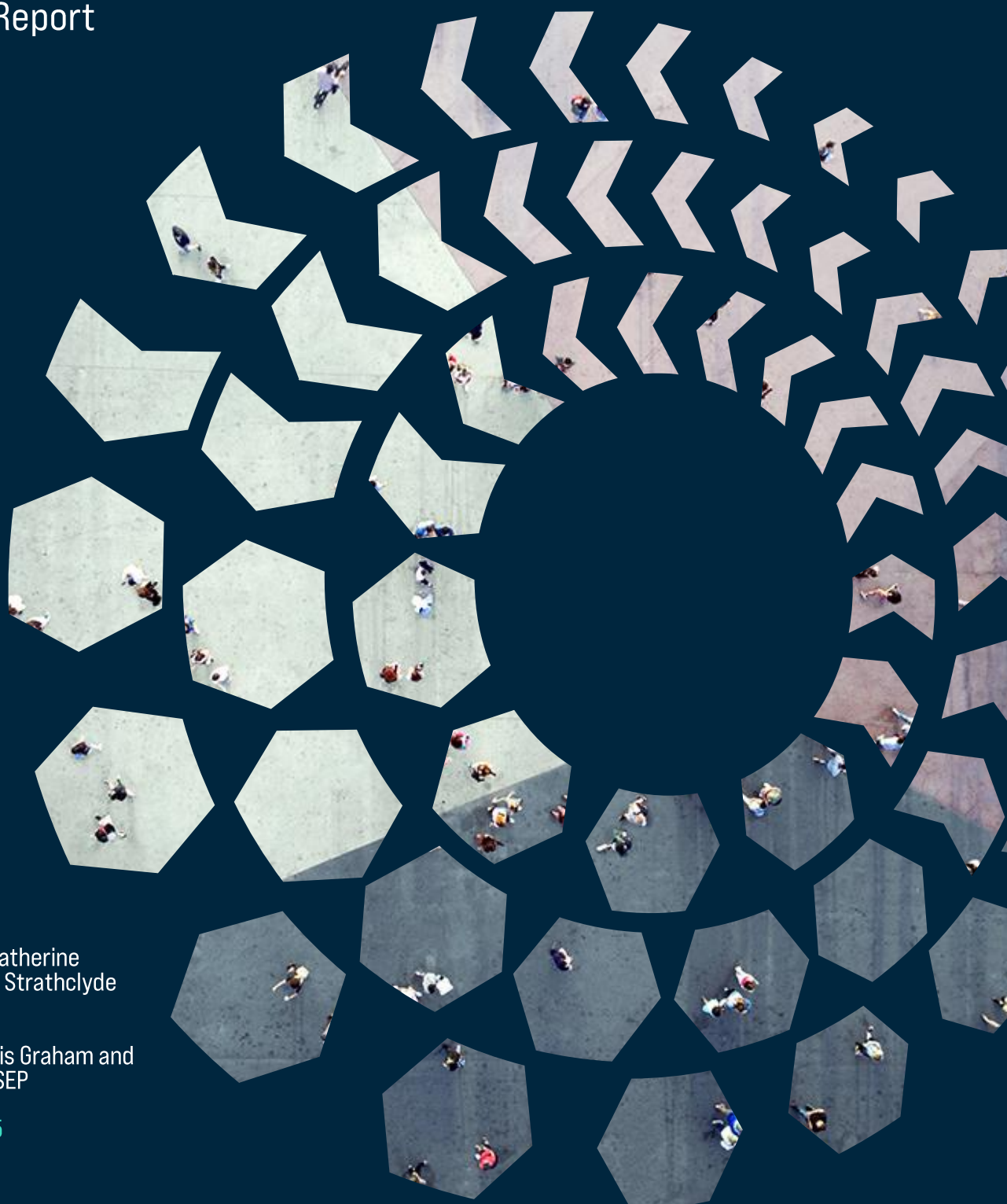
PEOPLE OF COLOUR MENTORING SCHEME

Research Report

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September 2025



Introduction

This report evaluates a pilot mentoring scheme designed to support People of Colour in the sustainability and environmental profession. The scheme was delivered in partnership between the University of Strathclyde, with the Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals (ISEP, formerly known as IEMA), and funded by ESRC Impact Accelerator Account. The pilot was developed in recognition of the systemic underrepresentation of People of Colour in the UK's sustainability and environmental workforce. For example, a 2023 survey of 140 UK environmental charities, not-for-profits and funders found only 6% percent of overall staff were PoC. This is compared to an average of 16 percent in UK employment identifying as minority ethnic groups (RACE report, 2025). This pilot aimed to begin addressing structural barriers to career progression and visibility in the field for People of Colour. This mentoring scheme was developed in alignment with ISEP's strategic aims to drive membership growth, create world-class professional standards, harness the expertise of members to catalyse change, and provide world-class working environments and practices. In a 2023 survey of ISEP Fellows, 74% expressed a desire to mentor because this is an impactful way to leave a legacy and shape the profession going forward. As one mentor reflected:

"The way you get ahead in our societies is not meritocracy, it's relationships. Having been an outsider coming into this [profession], I realised that I did not have an old school tie or university network, and so I went about finding [where I could] prove competence and build trust by using professional accreditation."
(ISEP Mentor)

ISEP broadly, and a mentoring scheme, offers a structured and inclusive response to that need, providing a route for knowledge-sharing and career progression for those without access to traditional networks. Diversity is valued by ISEP's Fellows, and many are emphatic about their desire to improve diversity in this area— in response to the above statistics and because:

"We miss out by not having diverse perspectives from everyone. The solutions are wrong, the analysis is wrong if it's built from a tiny perspective." (ISEP Fellow and Mentor)

"We're a diverse country; we're a diverse world. It makes sense to have people who represent the communities and the businesses and the interests and the regions of where we live, in the organisations that we have." (ISEP Fellow and Mentor)

"One of the things that I find incredibly important in sustainability is getting people to think like human beings, rather than think like automatons. [...] Diversity in your employee base is a good way to start, because that allows you to create empathy for a whole lot of different races, creeds, and cultures and everything else." (ISEP Fellow and Mentor)

"[Diversity brings] opportunity. If you have a diverse background of people working in your organisation, you have people who can identify really interesting new products and services or new uses for waste. If you bring someone in who's got a completely different background, who turns around and says, 'what do you mean 'we do it this way?' Why can't we do it that way? We'd make a hell of a lot more money if we did.' I genuinely think that's where the opportunity lies. You can't get the CFO to care about risk, beyond immediate risks. And climate change still feels too long term for businesses, even though it's happening right now." (ISEP Fellow and Mentor)

Pilot structure and participants

The scheme was developed through consultation with other mentoring programmes to identify best practices and select an appropriate platform. This led to a partnership with PLD, chosen for its excellent matching technology and existing resources to guide mentors and mentees through a structured process. Two exploratory workshops were held, attended by over 40 potential mentees who identified the skills and structures they most valued in a mentoring scheme tailored for People of Colour in the sustainability and environmental profession. To keep the pilot manageable, prospective mentees were asked to indicate whether they currently had, or had previously had, access to mentoring. Priority was given to those without any prior access, resulting in a final cohort of 21 mentees (19 completed) and 19 mentors (18 completed). Although some mentors could have supported more than one mentee, demand among ISEP Fellows to mentor was so high that overall a 1:1 matching approach was adopted to ensure no one felt overburdened.

PLD's platform was particularly well suited because it allowed mentees to browse short bios of mentors and initiate contact themselves. The platform refined the list of available mentors based on the skills and qualities mentees identified as important, resulting in a more individualised match. Mentors received a kick-off training session and had access to monthly drop-ins facilitated by a coach with expertise in somatic and cross-cultural communication.. Mentees did not have a formal induction but were offered monthly drop-ins to ask questions or raise concerns. While mandatory training was considered, the pilot instead focused on responding flexibly to the needs of participants as they emerged and gathering insight into what types of support would be most useful in future iterations of the scheme.

Most mentoring pairs met once a month across the six-month period from December 2024 to May 2025. Two-thirds of the mentees were aged 25–35 and in their first two years of working in the profession. Roughly half were of African descent, and many were first- or second-generation immigrants. Mentors were all ISEP Fellows, most with over 20 years of experience and about half over the age of 55. Nearly 80 percent were white, and four mentors were People of Colour.

The findings in this report are based on a mixed-methods evaluation process, including pre- and post-programme interviews with over 50% of participants (representing 66% of mentors and 42% of mentees), an anonymous survey with a 71% response rate, monthly drop-in sessions (which provided space for confidential feedback), and a final presentation where all mentors and mentees were invited to reflect and corroborate the findings. Quotes, where attributed, have been included with the speaker's consent. All other quotes have been anonymised or lightly edited to remove identifying details to protect participant confidentiality.

Barriers Faced by People of Colour in the Sustainability and Environmental Profession

Some mentees described the psychological and professional impacts of being one of the few, or only, Person of Colour in their workplace. This lack of visible peers can foster persistent feelings of “otherness” and self-doubt or heighten imposter syndrome. These feelings are often exacerbated by intersectional challenges — for example, being a young professional, a woman, an immigrant, or someone with a non-British accent or educational background. One mentee noted:

“One of the most persistent [barriers] is the feeling of being one of the few, or sometimes only Person of Colour in a professional space, which can lead to a sense of isolation or imposter syndrome.” [ISEP Mentee]

The perceived or real pressure to represent a whole demographic group was another concern, with mentees reflecting on the expectation to speak on behalf of communities they may or may not personally represent. The burden of representation, paired with the absence of similar role models, contributed to an overall sense of precarity and exclusion.

Furthermore, these concerns are compounded by the nature of the sustainability field. Unlike well-established fields such as law or accounting, sustainability is an evolving and highly interdisciplinary field. Mentees described a sense of uncertainty about what qualifications or experiences are valued, and how to navigate the career ladder. This lack of a “clear path” can make it even harder to progress — particularly when combined with systemic barriers. The unfamiliarity and ambiguity of the field itself can deepen the challenges already faced by People of Colour. As many mentees and mentors put it: *“You can’t be what you can’t see.”*

While some challenges, such as working out a career path or building professional confidence are common to many young professionals, they were compounded for mentees in this scheme by additional barriers. Several participants had migrated to the UK, and were simultaneously adjusting to a new professional culture, new visa or regulatory systems, and building a network from scratch. Others were the first in their family to work in this field or enter professional employment in the UK, adding pressure to “get it right” without existing guidance or templates.

However, it’s also important to note that not all participants saw race as a direct barrier:

“I think that there are not many challenges I have faced unique to race specifically, religion and age discrimination, on the other hand, I have had some challenges with.” (ISEP Mentee)

Nonetheless, the mentoring scheme gave any mentee a dedicated forum to reflect on complexities and receive support for their professional development in a sector still grappling with systemic inequalities.

The focus on systemic inequalities is a nod to critical race theory (see [Diverse Sustainability Network on Critical Race Theory](#) or Crenshaw et al., 1995) which emphasises that racism is not about individual bias, but embedded in systems and structures. In relation to differences in career progression and representation, this is like how “old boys’ clubs” work, where it is often normal to prioritise “who you know” and while it is not perhaps intentionally exclusive at an individual level, it can discriminate against certain groups at a sector or role level. Studies for over twenty years have shown how mentoring of all different forms or types disrupts disadvantages for marginalised groups at the individual, organisational, and societal levels (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Murrell et al., 2024; Samari et al., 2022). Indeed, this scheme aimed to disrupt systems by building supportive relationships for People of Colour through enhancing their access to networks and career insights.

This pilot mentoring scheme aimed to address these complex and layered challenges. While ISEP already offers structured professional development pathways through its membership, training and professional standards, mentoring adds a relational and personalised dimension. Through regular one-to-one contact with a mentor that has worked for years in the field, mentees were able to test ideas, get feedback, and gain support in navigating their own goals. This support was not generic. Mentors were matched based on shared interests and encouraged to listen and affirm each mentee’s unique experience.



Impact of the Scheme

The scheme received highly positive feedback: both satisfaction and likelihood of recommending to others averaged 9 out of 10 from both mentee and mentor survey respondents.

Benefits to Mentees

The mentoring scheme delivered a wide range of benefits to mentees, with impacts that extended beyond immediate career support and into broader personal and professional development. According to feedback from participants, the value of the programme could be grouped into four key areas that addressed mentee goals.



Fig 1. Mentee's description of scheme in three words

1. Providing Clarity and Direction

For many mentees, especially those early in their careers or transitioning into the UK sustainability profession, the scheme was instrumental in helping them gain clarity about their future direction. Mentors provided tailored guidance on possible career paths, insight into different subfields, and reassurance that uncertainty was a normal part of career development:

"Created a clear career roadmap and the steps required for each." [ISEP Mentee]

“Gained more of a sense of direction that I would like to take my career in; generalist vs specialist, based on areas I am keen to develop from the ISEP Skills Map.” (ISEP Mentee)

Through conversations with more experienced professionals, mentees were able to explore areas they might not have previously considered, understand what opportunities might align with their strengths and interests, and get a clearer picture of how their background could be an asset. For some, this also meant identifying gaps they wanted to fill, such as pursuing a qualification or developing a particular skill and making actionable plans to address these. The mentors often directed mentees to use more resources available through ISEP on key skills and career pathways, in particular the [ISEP Skills Map](#) and [Green Careers Hub](#) were mentioned by multiple participants.

2. Skills Development

Another significant benefit was the development of key professional skills, particularly in communication, confidence, and self-presentation. Mentors supported mentees in refining their CVs and LinkedIn profiles, preparing for interviews, and navigating difficult conversations at work:

“Practice difficult conversations [...] to make sure I can negotiate my KPIs and goals with managers.” (ISEP Mentee)

“Deliver a clear, data-driven proposal to senior executives, effectively manage team projects, and improve my ability to prioritise tasks under tight deadlines.” (ISEP Mentee)

These practical exercises were highly appreciated, especially as they gave mentees the tools to present themselves with greater clarity and confidence. For some, this also involved practising leadership or client-facing communication, especially for those seeking promotion or transition into new roles. Being able to test ideas and receive feedback in a supportive environment helped mentees refine their messaging and develop a more intentional approach to workplace interactions.

3. Career Progression and Networking

Some of the most common goals before taking part related to expanding their networks in the sustainability profession, a reminder of the overall benefit of mentoring to create community in a profession that is relatively new, evolving and highly interdisciplinary field:

“Expand my professional connections within the UK sustainability and environmental Sector.” (ISEP Mentee)

“Build connections with professionals in global consultancies, seek insights and potential referrals.” (ISEP Mentee)

“Attend industry conferences, join sustainability-focused organisations, or collaborate on large-scale ESG projects.” (ISEP Mentee)

In this way, one of the most consistent impacts was that this pilot helped to open doors. Mentors made introductions to peers or contacts in relevant sectors and encouraged mentees to attend professional events. For example, several mentees mentioned attending ISEP regional networking events. This encouragement was especially valuable for mentees who had moved to the UK and lacked established networks. In some instances, mentors also offered insight into how hiring works in their organisation or field, or shared job leads.

4. Personal Growth and Confidence

One of the most consistent themes across feedback was the growth in confidence that mentees reported. For many mentees, just having someone senior in the field affirm their skills and abilities was a huge confidence boost. Mentors helped mentees recognise their own talents and see their value. For some, the mentoring conversations helped reframe challenges as systemic rather than personal shortcomings. For others, the simple act of being heard, respected, and encouraged made a lasting difference in how they viewed themselves and their place in the profession:

*“Having a mentor who understands the unique challenges faced by People of Colour has been invaluable in building my confidence and professional clarity.”
(ISEP Mentee)*

“Through honest conversations with my mentor, I realised many of these feelings were shared by others and rooted in systemic issues, rather than personal shortcomings. This insight was transformative, helping me to reframe my mindset and approach opportunities with renewed confidence.” (ISEP Mentee)

5. Qualifications and Memberships

Some mentees sought to strengthen their professional credibility and employability through certifications and institutional recognition, often as part of a broader career development strategy. Mentors offered strategic advice about which qualifications or experiences might be valued by employers. A few mentees used the mentoring to work on upgrading their ISEP membership:

“Worked to upgrade ISEP membership to PISEP.” (ISEP Mentee)

Having a mentor to support progression through ISEP's membership levels can be especially valuable in a sector where personal relationships and peer networks play a key role because as one mentor stated, *"particularly for people earlier in their career, if people who I respect have got a good opinion of me and what I'm suggesting, then that helps your confidence going forward"* (ISEP Mentor). In this way, mentorship offered a structured way to gain that recognition and share best practices.

Benefits to Mentors

A strong sense of connection, purpose, and satisfaction emerged for mentors. It cannot be stressed enough how genuinely committed mentors were to the programme and how much they valued the opportunity to contribute to a more inclusive sustainability profession.



Fig 2. Mentor's description of scheme in three words

Mentors joined for a variety of reasons. Some had a long-standing commitment to anti-racism and wanted to deepen their understanding. Some explicitly wanted to know more about how to support underrepresented groups, including People of Colour. Others saw it as a chance to offer support and 'pay it forward' based on their years of experience in the field and were less interested in the fact that they would be supporting a Person of Colour. Based on the final survey, 67% reported an improvement in their confidence to mentor people from underrepresented backgrounds, 60% found an increased sense of their own leadership and communication skills and 74% had an increased sense of being part of the sustainability community.

While the mentoring scheme was explicitly designed to support People of Colour in the sustainability profession, race was not always a central topic of discussion in the mentoring relationships.

Whether it came up depended on both the mentor's reason for joining the scheme and the mentee's comfort or desire to talk about it.

This variety of motivations meant that some mentors were more prepared or confident in having conversations about race than others. Based on a rough metric, where mentors were asked to self-assess their comfort level when talking about race? (1 = never, 10 = anywhere, with anyone), over half gave themselves scores of 9 or 10 and all ranked themselves above a 5. This is admittedly a rough metric, with the same score given different meanings by different mentors:

"A six, because I'll have a go. But that doesn't mean there's no discomfort. I am mindful that I'm coming from a very specific position of privilege and background. And potentially I may mess up through ignorance, not any ill will or any ill intent." (ISEP Mentor)

"A six, because I don't feel I have the right to talk about it. In many contexts, what you say can be weaponised against you, so it's better not to talk about it." (ISEP Mentor)

"A six, because it definitely depends with whom, and the context. I've had some professional conversations about race within the workplace. But I acknowledge that there is a hesitance to address these issues, a fear of being judged on a touchy topic, and that's not actually without reason, because the risk of misinterpretation is fairly high." (ISEP Mentor)

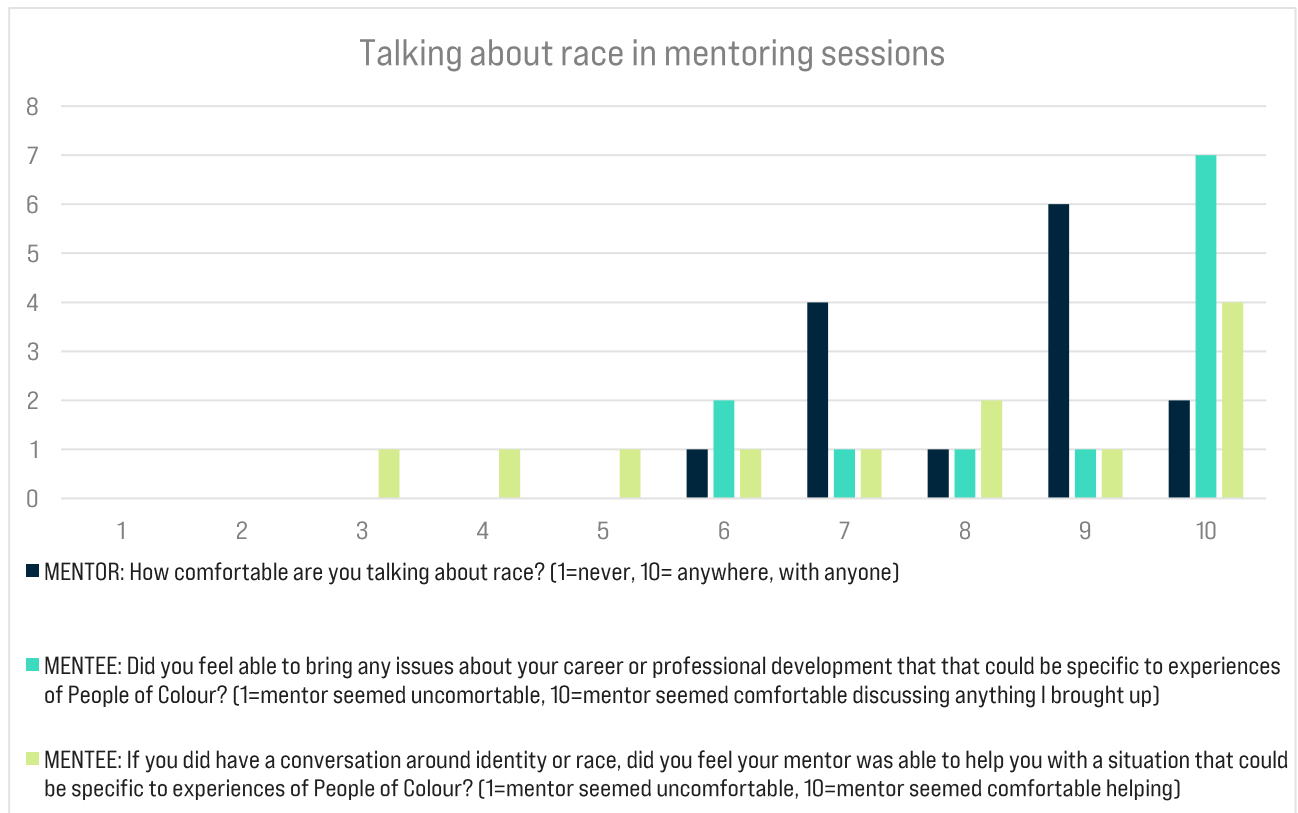
These quotes also reveal that some mentors acknowledged a hesitance to talk about race, not due to unwillingness, but out of fear of being judged or misinterpreted. These responses demonstrate that openness to dialogue does not necessarily equate to confidence or fluency in addressing racial issues: there was also frequent reference to the context and situation affecting the score they would give. Even mentors who rated themselves a 9 or 10 in comfort talking about race recognised that their confidence was context-dependent:

"A 10, within ISEP, and through this mentoring scheme because we've set some guardrails around this is an environment [and said 'this is'] where we want to have this active conversation.' I think I could have a conversation with somebody without offending them, because I just want to learn and understand. But in terms of being able to have a conversation with a stranger, I probably would be far more reserved." (ISEP Mentor)

During the interview, this male mentor demonstrated his level 10 comfort through discussing sensitive topics different from his own lived experience and showed off that curiosity by going into some depth about how he'd learned more about trans rights and menopause. Nevertheless, he also

acknowledged that context-mattered: even the most confident mentors benefited from clear expectations and a safe, intentional space like the mentoring scheme to engage in meaningful conversations about identity and difference.

Mentees were also asked to assess whether they'd felt able to bring any issues about their career that could be specific to experiences of People of Colour during sessions with their mentors (1 = my mentor seemed uncomfortable, 10 = my mentor seemed comfortable). Two-thirds of the mentees gave a score of 9 or 10 and all were ranked above a 5. However, when mentees were asked 'if you did have a conversation around identity or race, did you feel your mentor was able to help you with a situation that could be specific to experiences of People of Colour? (1 = my mentor seemed uncomfortable, 10 = my mentor seemed comfortable)' the scores dropped. With only 42% ranking their mentor's comfort as a 9 or 10, and some mentees giving their interactions with the mentors scores as low as a 3. The pilot did not include any mandatory training on race or identity, and this discrepancy in perception highlights that there is an opportunity for improvement in providing more support for mentors. While mentors expressed openness, and this was acknowledged by matching scores for the first mentee metric about willingness to discuss race-related topics, the lower scores from mentees on how these conversations actually went suggests that mentors may not always recognise the nuances of racialised experiences.



[Figure 3. Comfort talking about race]

Whether race came up was dependent on both the mentee and mentor. Mentoring is a relational process. Across the mentoring pairs, we observed three broad patterns of interaction related to how race was approached. These patterns help illustrate the diversity of experience, and demonstrate that “talking about race” was neither universally expected nor necessary for mentees to gain value from the scheme:

A. Mentor and mentee both wanted to talk about race, and found it affirming

The most common experience in the scheme was that conversations about race were actively encouraged and welcomed by both parties. Based on the final survey, 50% of mentees fell into this category. These were often described as powerful and validating experiences, allowing the mentee to express perspectives that they hadn’t previously felt comfortable sharing in professional contexts:

“My mentor’s openness and willingness to talk about the fact that race and gender play a big part in the sustainability profession has helped because it’s something I’ve always felt but never been able to express with people.” (ISEP Mentee)

In these cases, mentors reported learning more about the diversity of experience of People of Colour and that they were having conversations about race, religion, intersectionality, etc. more often in other contexts:

“I learned how different Caribbean and African experiences are. There’s not just one way to be Black – countries, histories, and cultures shape us differently.” (ISEP Mentor)

This realisation was echoed by others, who gained a deeper appreciation for the vast diversity within the term ‘People of Colour’. Mentors reflected on how experiences vary not only between regions (e.g., Caribbean and Africa), but also between British-born People of Colour and those who have migrated to the UK. Conversations within the scheme highlighted how factors like nationality, accent, immigration status, and professional background lead to distinct challenges and that no single narrative can fully capture the lived experiences of racially minoritised professionals. There were also Mentors who, at the start of the scheme, had made statements like “I don’t see colour,” but through ongoing conversations began to reflect more critically on their own reactions and assumptions and to better understand how such statements can feel dismissive to People of Colour. For example, one mentor explained how during the mentoring scheme they had started to have more conversations about race beyond the scheme and were surprised to hear how a Person of Colour dealt with the burden of being perceived as a threat:

“The nicest, nicest Caribbean person you could ever meet, and I was like, ‘nobody could ever think you were a terrorist. That’s ridiculous!’ It hadn’t occurred to me that people are having to spend their life worrying that other people will feel threatened by them.”

This exchange prompted deeper reflection on how unspoken fears and the emotional labour of being racially ‘read’ in negative ways can shape the everyday experiences of People of Colour, realities that may remain invisible without open dialogue.

B. Mentor was open, but mentee didn’t want or need to talk about race

The second most common dynamic, 34% of mentees reported this interaction in the final survey, was where mentors were open to discussing race, but the mentee didn’t feel the need to explore it. These relationships were often constructive in other ways, focusing on career development, confidence, and navigating the sector more generally. As noted in the Barriers section, some mentees did not see race as being a major barrier for their career progression and thus did not seek out discussing it. In other cases, mentees noted that they would have liked to have a mentor who was a Person of Colour and could empathise more easily with their lived experiences, rather than them having to spend their time explaining to their mentor:

“My mentor and I had a very brief discussion on race in our first session, but it wasn’t brought up again. I didn’t particularly want or need it to be brought up again.”

“My mentor is white (male), I don’t think he would have lived experiences of race and identity in the workplace. We did not bring up the topic of race although he is open to talk about anything that I wanted to talk about.”

In some cases, the mentor advised why a situation was not about race, and the mentee agreed.

“[My mentor advised I] see ‘people as people.’ Don’t see anyone as anything, just people as people and treat everyone as you would treat everyone. I think over time that’s been working for me.” [ISEP Mentee]

This shows that race wasn’t always at the centre of a mentoring relationship for it to be impactful, while for others this presented opportunities to improve the scheme going forward.

C. Race was discussed, but the mentee felt dismissed or invalidated

For a smaller number of mentees, 16% reported in the final survey, conversations about race had been difficult, not because they didn't want to talk about it, but because they felt the mentor didn't fully understand or respond supportively when they brought the topic up. This could result in the mentee withdrawing from further conversation on the topic:

"As the systemic issues associated with the sustainability profession were a key focus of this mentoring scheme, I appreciated the opportunity to be open and vulnerable about my experiences to date. As my mentor is not a Person of Colour, [they weren't] always able to empathise with me, causing me to feel invalidated or dismissed at times. I was therefore reluctant to be more vulnerable due to fear of feeling the above further." (ISEP Mentee)

"He's had a lot of privileges that have come with that, and that's enabled him to do certain things in his career. And I think sometimes I have felt like when we've had discussions, that privilege has kind of not been factored into." (ISEP Mentee)

In these cases, however, mentees were quick to stress how they could see a compromise or knew their mentor meant well, even as they felt their perspective was not being fully understood. In these situations, the mentees emphasised that the mentoring relationship was still valuable and worthwhile, reinforcing that the benefits of mentoring extended beyond the race-related dynamics.

These three patterns show that race was not uniformly addressed, but without training on racism or privilege as part of the pilot this is perhaps unsurprising. Overall, the high rating of the scheme reflects the diversity of mentees' preferences. For some, explicit conversations about race were transformative. For others, the value came from being seen, heard, and supported, even without naming race directly.

What Worked Well

Feedback from both mentors and mentees suggests that this pilot scheme was well-received. While experiences varied, several elements stood out as core strengths of the programme:

1. Matching

One of the most celebrated aspects of the scheme was the **matching process**, which allowed mentees to select their mentor from a curated list of ISEP Fellows based on their background and expertise. Many participants reported that their match felt like finding their needle in a haystack and gave mentees a sense of **autonomy and confidence** from the outset.

2. Activities that addressed goals:

- **CV reviews and mock interviews**, giving mentees a space to refine how they present themselves professionally.
- **Job advert analysis**, to help mentees understand industry expectations and reflect on their transferable skills.
- **Updating LinkedIn profiles**
- **Coaching on networking**, including how to approach people at events, reach out for informational interviews, or offering direct introductions. Some mentees used the scheme as encouragement to attend **ISEP regional events**.

3. Drop-in Sessions

Although not everyone attended, those who did found the optional **drop-in sessions** helpful in building a **sense of community**. For some, these were moments to check in with programme organisers, share progress, and troubleshoot any emerging issues. For others, it simply helped to know the support was there if needed. These spaces also provided an informal channel for feedback, allowing the team to pick up on any participants who may have disengaged or encountered issues with the platform.

Improvements for the Future

The success of this pilot mentoring scheme has generated momentum, not only in the lives and careers of participants, but in the wider conversations about equity, access, and belonging in the sustainability sector. As we look ahead, there is both a strong foundation to build upon and a clear demand for growth and continued support.

1. Platform and Launch

One of the most consistent pieces of feedback was that while the mentoring relationships themselves were highly valued, some aspects of the **onboarding and digital platform** experience could be improved. Many mentees shared that they wanted more time to build rapport with their mentor before setting formal goals, and some found the requirement to input goals after the first meeting too soon. We heard that **mentorship is built on trust**, and rushing into goal-setting can limit the depth of that relationship. Future iterations of the scheme could adapt the platform to **allow a “getting to know you” phase** before goal documentation.

There were also calls to **simplify communications and materials**. Rather than relying solely on the platform for updates and resources, several participants said they would have appreciated **more regular and direct email communications** that shared tips, reminders, and mentoring prompts. The platform worked well for matching, but less so for ongoing engagement.

2. Training and Synchronous Events

Many mentors requested more structured training, not just on mentoring skills, but specifically on **systemic racism and working across lines of identity and privilege**. Even those who felt confident in their ability to mentor welcomed the idea of deepening their understanding and broadening their toolkit. There is an appetite for **shared learning environments**, where mentors and mentees can come together to reflect, network, and grow. Structured (mandatory) workshops and webinars could be offered throughout the scheme to foster peer support and build a sense of community, which was something many mentees and mentors expressed they valued and would have liked more of. A starting point could be to organise workshops around the question: “How can you support talented young people, who are coming from all around the world, to carry on ISEP’s mission for the next 25 years?”

[What’s race got to do with sustainability? | Diverse Sustainability Initiative](#)

[Empowering Change: DSI Face-to-face event 05/03 | Diverse Sustainability Initiative](#)

3. Expanding the Mentor Pool

While this pilot drew from the ISEP Fellows, feedback suggests that **a more diverse mentor pool would strengthen future schemes**. Not all mentees wanted to be matched with someone of the same racial or ethnic background, but many said that it helped build trust and understanding. Others noted the value of mentors who were just a few steps ahead in their career journey (e.g., someone with fresh experience of navigating job transitions, interviews, or sector shifts). Future rounds will explore **broadening mentor recruitment** to include mid-career professionals and People of Colour with recent experience navigating the very challenges mentees face.

Summary and Next Steps

This pilot has demonstrated that there is both need and appetite for mentoring schemes tailored to support People of Colour in the sustainability sector. ISEP’s [Diverse Sustainability Initiative](#) and wider Equity, Diversity and Inclusion commitments provide a natural platform for growth, enabling us to extend this model to other underrepresented groups. ISEP has set up a LinkedIn group for all current and future mentors and mentees to continue connections and not lose momentum. ISEP will be considering longer mentoring relationships (e.g., 12 months instead of 6), to allow for more meaningful progress, especially for those juggling busy workloads or entering the scheme at key transition points in their careers. This scheme was not only about supporting individual mentees, but it was also about disrupting systemic inequalities by building relationships, creating networks, and changing what leadership in this field looks like. With the right support, future schemes will aim to embed this approach across disciplines, geographies, and sectors, reaching more people at critical moments in their careers and demonstrating how a profession committed to sustainability must also be committed to inclusion, equality, and diversity.

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Acknowledgements

This pilot research project was made possible by the University of Strathclyde and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funding to enable the development and completion of this study.

Thanks go to the research lead, Dr Katherine Ellsworth-Krebs and her team have provided guidance and support to ensure this pilot captured detailed insights that will benefit the wider professional community. Thanks also to the Diverse Sustainability Initiative and in particular the People of Colour Network.