

## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion challenges in Creative & Cultural Industries

Workforce Integration Network (WIN)

### INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

London's creative industries are an essential pillar of the city's economic and cultural fabric, spanning a diverse range of sectors, including advertising, publishing, music, design, film, television, fashion, and the performing arts. Together, these industries position London as a global leader in innovation and artistry, attracting talent and investment from across the world. The creative industries in London generate substantial economic value. In 2022, the UK's creative sector contributed approximately £116 billion to the economy, with London accounting for a significant share of this output. According to the Creative Industries Council, London's creative economy employs over 1.7 million people and supports thousands of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), freelance professionals, and globally renowned institutions like the British Film Institute (BFI), Tate Modern, and the Royal Opera House.

London is one of the most diverse cities in the world, with over 40% of its population identifying as Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic (BAME). This diversity is reflected in the city's creative outputs, which draw from a rich tapestry of cultures, histories, and perspectives. However, while the city's population is diverse, this representation does not always extend to the creative workforce. Underrepresentation of BAME individuals, women, and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds is a persistent issue. A 2021 Creative Diversity Network report revealed that only 16% of off-screen roles in UK television were held by people from BAME backgrounds, a figure that does not reflect London's population. Similarly, women and disabled individuals remain underrepresented in leadership and technical roles across creative sectors. London's creative industries are not just economic powerhouses; they are cultural engines that shape perceptions and drive innovation. As the sector continues to grow, ensuring it reflects the diversity of the city is vital to sustaining its global relevance and fostering a more equitable future. This can certainly be achieved, in part through targeted initiatives, industry commitment, and continued investment in EDI.

### CHALLENGES

#### Commitment and Collaboration

Despite increased awareness of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) within the creative industries, significant challenges persist in driving impactful change. One barrier is inconsistent leadership commitment. While a lot of creative organisations acknowledge the importance of EDI (Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, 2021), many struggle to prioritise it due to limited resources or competing business goals. For example, smaller organisations often lack the funding to implement robust EDI strategies.

Collaboration across the industry also remains fragmented. Organisations like the British Film Institute (BFI) have developed frameworks such as the Diversity Standards, yet adoption is inconsistent, particularly among independent production companies. This lack of cohesion slows progress toward industry-wide inclusivity. Data collection is another issue; many organisations fail to gather comprehensive diversity metrics. For example, a Creative Diversity Network (CDN) report found only 16% of off-screen roles in UK television were filled by individuals from BAME backgrounds, far below London's 40% BAME population. Case studies highlight successes, such as Channel 4's 360° Diversity Charter, which demonstrates the importance of leadership in setting clear EDI goals. However, replicating such initiatives industry-wide requires a commitment to transparency, accountability, and cross-sector collaboration.

### **Retention & Progression**

Retention and progression within the creative industries are hindered by structural barriers that disproportionately affect underrepresented groups. Research from the Creative Diversity Network (CDN) shows that while strides have been made in increasing diverse hiring, retention remains a challenge. For instance, individuals from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are more likely to leave the industry due to limited progression opportunities, workplace discrimination, and a lack of inclusive support networks.

A major issue lies in biased promotion practices. A 2021 report by the Arts Council England found that women and disabled employees face significant barriers to career advancement, with many reporting being overlooked for leadership roles. This highlights a need for transparent and equitable promotion pathways. Retention and progression challenges are particularly pronounced in the film and television industry, where systemic barriers often hinder the career growth of underrepresented groups. A 2021 report from the Creative Diversity Network (CDN) revealed that only 16% of off-screen roles are filled by individuals from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, and many of these professionals report feeling stuck in junior roles with limited opportunities for progression.

A case study from the British Film Institute (BFI) highlights the industry's challenges. While BFI's Diversity Standards have increased on-screen representation, off-screen progression remains an issue. For example, professionals from underrepresented groups often work on a freelance basis, which provides fewer opportunities for mentoring, training, and leadership development compared to full-time roles.

### **Building an inclusive culture:**

Creating truly inclusive workplace cultures in the creative industries remains a significant challenge, often due to ingrained systemic inequalities and a lack of proactive measures. Inclusive cultures require environments where employees from all backgrounds feel valued, respected, and empowered to thrive. However, research highlights pervasive barriers that hinder progress.

In the publishing sector, for instance, a 2022 Bookseller survey revealed that 89% of respondents from underrepresented backgrounds experienced microaggressions or exclusion in their workplaces.

Many cited the prevalence of “gatekeeping” practices, where decisions about projects, roles, or leadership opportunities are shaped by a homogenous group of decisionmakers. Efforts such as Penguin Random House’s WriteNow initiative have begun to address inclusivity by diversifying talent pipelines and promoting authentic voices. However, these efforts are often undermined by insufficient changes in internal workplace culture. Employees report a lack of diversity in leadership and a reluctance to address unconscious bias, which contributes to feelings of isolation and stagnation.

### **Supplier Diversity:**

The creative industries face significant challenges in embedding Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) principles into their supply chains. Suppliers often reflect the same systemic inequities seen across the industry, with many organisations failing to proactively diversify their procurement processes. This lack of engagement with underrepresented suppliers limits opportunities for smaller, minority-owned businesses to thrive and perpetuates inequalities within the sector. In the advertising industry, for example, a 2021 study by Media For All found that only 4% of supplier contracts were awarded to businesses owned by individuals from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. Additionally, procurement policies often prioritise established firms over newer, smaller suppliers, which disproportionately excludes diverse businesses from opportunities.

### **Engagement & Recruitment:**

Achieving diversity in engagement and recruitment processes within the creative industries remains a complex challenge. While organisations increasingly recognise the importance of diverse hiring, many recruitment practices fail to address systemic barriers. In the fashion sector, for example, the British Fashion Council (BFC) reported in 2022 that only 13% of leadership roles were held by individuals from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, despite London’s population being over 40% BAME. Entry-level opportunities are often limited to unpaid or low-paid internships, which disproportionately exclude candidates from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Despite efforts to drive meaningful change, challenges persist in reaching diverse talent pools. Many creative organisations rely on informal networks for recruitment, which often lack diversity.

Furthermore, job descriptions and advertisements can unintentionally discourage applications by failing to use inclusive language or emphasising unnecessary qualifications. To overcome these barriers, organisations must adopt targeted strategies, such as partnering with minority-focused recruitment agencies like Creative Access, implementing contextual recruitment to consider applicants’ backgrounds, and ensuring all roles are paid at least the London Living Wage. Engaging with local communities and education providers to develop diverse pipelines can also build more equitable access to the industry. These steps are essential for fostering an inclusive workforce that reflects London’s vibrant diversity.

**References and further reading: BBC, Channel 4, Netflix, British Fashion Council, WIN, Creative Access, British Film Institute, GLA, Black Pound Day**