CREATIVE FOUNDATION

RESEARCH REPORT & DISCUSSION PAPER

CONSCIOUSNESS, COURAGE & COMMITMENT

Breaking Down the Barriers
to More Inclusive & Diverse UK Creative Industries

CREATIVE FOUNDATION

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◯ BACKGROUND TO THE UK CREATIVE FOUNDATION

The Creative Foundation is a charity that exists to support diverse and under-represented talent, helping them to secure opportunities to work at one of the many creative departments across the UK creative industries. We do this in many ways.

- ◯ Providing introductions to the variety of creative disciplines across the creative sector through the annual careers theatre at the UK Creative Festival.

- ◯ Funding travel and subsistence for the attending aspiring young creatives to the UK Creative Festival careers fair.

- ◯ Running an annual 16 -week creative mentor program with the Creative Mentor Network for 30 aspiring young creatives from different regions.

- ◯ Providing a series of online tutorials to help aspiring young creatives identify the disciplines best suited to their creative abilities.

- ◯ Introducing young creatives to the creative companies to gain work introductions or work experience.

- ◯ Providing young creatives with the support for the course fees and maintenance while attending college.

The Creative Foundation is supported by:

- ◯ The Creative Circle Awards pledging 10% of every award entry fee.

- ◯ The Creative Circle pledging 100% of every membership fee.

- ◯ The Creative Circle pledging 100% of the sponsorship fees.

- ◯ The Creative Festival also pledges to share all profits from the Festival with the Foundation.

- ◯ Leading creative companies also pledge financial support to the foundation's future mentorship scheme.

CREATIVE CIRCLE

CREATIVE FOUNDATION
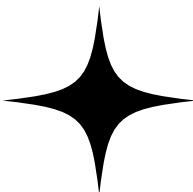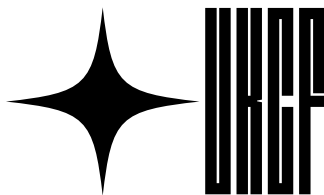
⬤ BACKGROUND TO THE UK CREATIVE FESTIVAL

Now in its third year, the UK Creative Festival is a two-day celebration of creativity, held at the iconic Dreamland in Margate, Kent. The Festival is focused on celebrating the very best of the UK's vibrant creative industries, as well as showcasing the career pathways available for all aspiring young creatives to help bring greater diversity to the creative industries and better career opportunities for underrepresented communities in the UK.

The festival, which includes the UK's first 'free-to-access' creative industries careers fair, consists of an extensive programme of keynotes, talks, workshops, panels, wellness activities and social events, all aimed at encouraging the industry leaders, influencers and businesses to take action to inspire and engage with untapped and diverse creative talent from across the UK.

All profits from the UK Creative Festival go directly to the UK Creative Foundation, the charitable arm of the Creative Circle Awards — Europe's oldest annual advertising awards. Through the Creative Foundation they will be invested in developing and supporting mentoring programmes and other initiatives aimed at enhancing ever greater diversity and inclusion in the UK creative sectors.

MAKE TROUBLE
MAKE MAGIC
MAKE AN ENTRANCE
MAKE YOUR MARK
MAKE FILM
MAKE ART
MAKE ADS
MAKE ANYTHING,
JUST
MAKE WAVES.

RESEARCH RATIONALE

The *CONSCIOUSNESS, COURAGE & COMMITMENT — breaking down the barriers to a more diverse and inclusive UK creative industry Research & Report* interviewed over 50 respondents from across the UK's creative sectors to understand their perspectives on what the creative industries need to do to definitively break down the barriers to entry and career progression for individuals from communities who are underrepresented in the UK's creative industries, to help build more equitable and sustainable career pathways for all aspiring creatives.

The aim of the research is two-fold. The first aim is to intelligently inform the range of topics proposed for the panel discussions, keynotes, workshops and careers fair that will be delivered at the UK Creative Festival in July 2023.

Secondly, we are aware this is 'yet another research report on diversity'; adding to the discussion and the conversation. Words need real action for genuine, discernible change to occur. For this reason, the research report and the recommendations will also form the basis of the strategic plan for The UK Creative Foundation and Festival moving forward, to ensure it underpins the initiatives it launches over the coming years to drive tangible progress and change.

Although limited in its scope and reach this year, this Research & Report is a first crucial step in what is a planned annual research programme for the UK Creative Foundation and UK Creative Festival.

Interviewees for this research were drawn from a wide cross-section of groups underrepresented at multiple levels within the creative sectors. These include gender, ethnicity, LGBTQ+, neuro-diversity, differently abled and disabled as well as senior leaders and academics and organisations that are working tirelessly to break down barriers and open the UK creative industries to the richness of creativity that comes from a more diverse and vibrant talent pool.

METHODOLOGY

The Research has been drawn from a series of more than 50 qualitative interviews, conducted from February to May 2023 with representatives from across the creative industries, including creative industry employees, new entrants into the creative sector, academics, organisations working to increase representation in the creative sectors as well as a range of senior executives, business owners and industry leaders.

While interviewees were drawn from a broad cross-section of the creative industries, there was a weighting towards those in the advertising and marketing sectors, given the heritage and focus of the Creative Foundation itself.

A qualitative research approach was specifically undertaken to more deeply understand the real lived experiences of individuals across the creative industries — the daily experiences that underpin the top line statistics that feature in other research reports. Given the nature of the conversations and the personal experiences discussed, all quotes and references within this research have been anonymised.

At the end of this report, we have included an appendix of organisations who work to break down the barriers to entry and career development in the UK. This is not an exhaustive list but has been provided by many of the participants in this research, as well as the research and network of the Creative Foundation. We encourage those from the creative industries reading this report to engage with these organisations and use their services. Their experience, expertise and knowledge is vast: invest in them and work with them to help drive transformation in your business.

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⬤ PREFACE

The Creative Foundation would like to thank all those who participated in this research for the time, knowledge, wisdom and honesty invested in providing their lived experience of building a career in the creative industries. We have not undertaken this research to deny the progress that has been made thus far or critique the efforts of organisations and individuals who work tirelessly to drive change *(often without the sufficient levels of funding needed)* or criticise the progressive businesses within the creative sectors who are genuinely committed to playing their role in building a more inclusive and representative creative industry.

The research explores, highlights and aims to understand why overall progress on diversity is so persistently slow, disjointed and imbalanced - the net result of which, as the research will attest to, places the UK creative industries both at risk of losing some of the very best young diverse creative talent the UK has to offer, as well as potentially increasing a creative disconnection to the cultural and social trends of the communities the creative industries hope to engage with, professionally and commercially.

As a final note before moving onto the findings of the research itself, we issue a clarion call to all those reading this Discussion Paper: *don't leave this Report in your download file, in your email, or in your 'to read' folder. Send it to colleagues, disseminate it, draw from it, quote it and use it to help facilitate real change and progress in your sphere of influence. Reach out to the incredible changemakers and organisations cited in the Directory in the appendix of this Report and work with them to help your organisation drive positive and powerful transformation.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Key Report Findings & 20 Recommendations for Action

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION:
A new view on leadership

The senior leadership teams of many creative businesses remain stubbornly uniform. Gender balance has improved, but there is still a significant absence of senior leaders from Black, Asian or other diverse and under-represented communities at the top tables. Young, diverse and ambitious creatives — those who will play a key role in the future of the industry — need to see and believe there is a full career path for them in the creative industries. A diverse leadership talent pool exists in abundance, the opportunity does not.

RECOMMENDATION:
See diversity as the solution, not the problem

Successful creativity relies on fresh, intelligent and culturally engaging perspectives, non-linear ideas and concepts to remain relevant to audiences. The commercial evidence and research are comprehensive and clear — more diversity is the answer to the challenges the creative industries face, not a boardroom agenda problem to be solved.

RECOMMENDATION:
Think Purpose — not Performance

Setting defined expectations and a clear understanding of what the tangible and measurable outcomes look like for your DEI initiatives and programmes, as well as how they fit into the business's strategic plan and culture will help to move initiatives from performative to purpose-led. If the outcomes aren't clear, the performance is!

RECOMMENDATION:
Ask if your organisation is 'cherry picking' diversity

One of the uncomfortable truths when it comes to diversity in employment is an unofficial 'diversity & recruitment hierarchy' within some businesses. Disabled people and differently abled people often sit at the bottom of that unofficial hierarchy due to the physical adjustments and investment sometimes needed to make an office space more accessible. A true commitment to diversity is a commitment to equality in diversity too.

RECOMMENDATION:
Reengage opportunities for social mobility

'Class' sits at the intersection of many marginalised communities that are under-represented in the creative industries — it is a demographic

that appears sometimes lost in the conversation around diversity. Young diverse creatives from many communities within lower socio-economic environments often lack the networks, the confidence, the educational opportunities and the knowledge to know how to start their career in creative sectors.

RECOMMENDATION:
Increase industry representation in education

When combined, the creative industry is one of the largest sectors in the UK and internationally respected for its creative excellence. Its soft power is considerable, yet it struggles to represent itself as effectively as it could at a national, political and educational level. Other industries appear to have a much more co-ordinated and effective approach to finding, developing and hiring those students with the complex problem solving, creativity and critical thinking skills desperately needed by the creative industries. A far more joined-up, consistent and student-first approach is needed rather than ad hoc industry promotion.

RECOMMENDATION:
Don't mistake disconnection for a lack of connection

One of the biggest mistakes leaders of brands, businesses and agencies make is thinking creative industry professionals from under-represented communities don't talk to each other about the disconnection, prejudice, micro-aggressions, discrimination or racism they have experienced in their roles. Professionals from marginalised and under-represented communities know which businesses have toxic cultures, which are tokenistic, or have serious HR issues; or whose espoused values that don't reflect the reality of working conditions. These businesses are all identified, discussed and warned against. And the more marginalised the community, the deeper and more frequent the discussions are.

RECOMMENDATION:
Everything starts and ends with more conscious leadership

Industry and business leaders, purposefully or unconsciously, underestimate the critical role they play in breaking down barriers to change and diversity across the sector. More courage, more commitment and more consciousness with regard to diversity and inclusion from key industry leaders could transform the industry at speed. It is not about evolution and change over time. It is all about a genuine will and intention within leadership to change.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION:
Reimagine the recruitment process

Stop using the same recruitment procedures, entrenched and often 'lazy' recruitment processes and stop engaging the same recruitment agencies and expecting different results. Change the approach, the brief, where you are searching and reconsider or refine location-based and 'brand name plate' searches — they too often serve to deselect underrepresented communities and reinforce a lack of diversity at the start of the application process.

RECOMMENDATION:
Focus on retaining not just recruiting talent

Diversity is increasing at the entry point into the creative industries. However, the retention of diverse talent is the next critical pinch point on the way to creating a truly dynamic and diverse creative industry. High numbers of talented, diverse creatives leave employment prematurely citing a lack of a defined career path, unchecked discrimination or racism or the lack of inclusive culture / prevalence of a toxic one. The focus needs to be as much on equity of experience in role, as the quality of opportunity applying for them.

RECOMMENDATION:
Redesign internship and mentor programmes

The traditional industry model for internship and mentor programmes across many sectors of the creative industries is largely broken and has served to self-select out many young creatives, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who often do not have access to the financial means needed to participate in an internship programme. Creative industry businesses need to rethink their approach to internship and mentor programmes, including the way they're structured and funded, and the financial and professional support and salaries provided to interns.

RECOMMENDATION:
Work with specialist organisations

Creative industry businesses are specialists in creativity, not DEI. There is an extensive range of specialist organisations and DEI experts with the knowledge, network and market intelligence needed to help creative industry businesses make real, discernible and lasting changes within their organisations when it comes to improving diversity and inclusion. Engage their services and invest in their expertise.

○ **RECOMMENDATION:**
Stop fudging the numbers
Increasing the representation of underrepresented and marginalised groups across an organisation is not a mathematical equation. Basing diversity on numbers alone starts from the wrong place — from a point of employee acquisition, not engagement and employment based on talent and skill set. It also enables businesses to window dress diversity and masks the concentration of diverse employees in certain areas of the business, hiding the significant lack of diversity in other areas, such as senior management and leadership.

○ **RECOMMENDATION:**
Work with the changemakers, don't isolate them
The appointing of a DEI executive does not remove the responsibility of an organisation's leadership to play their own key role in delivering diversity and inclusion within their organisation. Senior leaders must work more closely with DEI executives and provide the requisite support, budgets and resources needed to deliver effective change within an organisation.

○ **RECOMMENDATION:**
Check Affinity Bias
Everyone has natural affinities based on their gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, disability / differ-ability or lived experiences; and this affinity bias can play out in hiring and recruitment practices and DEI initiatives. HR, recruitment and DEI executives need to work to ensure inclusivity across these areas is fully inclusive, and not consciously or unconsciously weighted towards those who happen to share a natural affinity or characteristics with executives in HR and DEI positions.

CULTURAL RECOMMENDATIONS

○ **RECOMMENDATION:**
Stop confusing diversity with inclusion
A more diverse workforce is just the start. A more inclusive culture is what is required to ensure all employees believe they have a voice, feel included culturally and can see a clear and coherent direction for their career.
Where is the evidence of processes within your organisation that ensures the building and nurturing of an inclusive culture?

RECOMMENDATION:

Change is a Process not a Project

Improving diversity and inclusion within an organisation over the longer term will not be achieved with campaign-based approaches or the launching of initiatives based on ill-thought through ad-hoc reactions to a cultural moment. A commitment to diversity and inclusion needs to sit at the heart of the organisation's thinking, its culture, processes and strategy — not just its PR agenda.

RECOMMENDATION:

Understand what allyship actually means

Whatever your role in in your business, it's not enough to do the DEI training and passively believe in the equality of opportunity, of voice, of inclusivity. Allyship needs action. It requires those who state they believe in equity and equality to call out inequality, racism and discrimination when it happens. To not just express support, but to take action.

RECOMMENDATION:

Prevent the prevalence of network nepotism

The practise of network nepotism — securing a role in a sector or organisation by virtue of your network rather than your skill set or talent — largely continues under the radar throughout the creative industries and was identified as a persistent barrier to opening up the industries to more diversity and a more open and inclusive culture.

RECOMMENDATION:

Foster a memory for institutional change

Lasting change will only occur within an organisation when the values that underpin it support it drive for cultural change. A commitment over time to diversity and inclusion will not work if it is only delivered at an operational level. It requires a fundamental transformation in the organisational values that underpin its culture; what it believes and thinks, not just what it does.

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RESEARCH REPORT DISCUSSION PAPER

A CAMPAIGN OR A COMMITMENT?

"Progress on diversity and inclusion is being made. But it is so, so slow. Deep cultural and systemic change in an industry requires a long-term commitment from its leadership. This long-term commitment is even harder in a creative industry whose thinking processes are almost entirely built around some sort of campaign-based activation."

This quote from one research respondent is a poignant starting point for the analysis of the research conducted, as it so succinctly sums up many of the sentiments expressed by the 50+ participants spoken to over the first five months of 2023.

Sustainable systematic change at any level in any industry requires constant momentum to drive it and embed it; and that momentum requires a conscious commitment to change. And a conscious commitment to change requires courage — to lead, to stay the course, to recognise there are always bumps on the road to achieving transformational and visionary cultural change.

It's for this reason we have titled this Research Report and Discussion Paper:

CONSCIOUSNESS, COMMITMENT & COURAGE

Out of the nearly 1,200 pages of words and transcripts collated and curated through the process of conducting over 50 interviews, the core message was loud and clear: deep transformational change is needed urgently right across the creative industries — to genuinely offer equity of opportunity for everyone irrespective of background, to remove the persistent barriers to greater diversity, to create more inclusive cultures that flourish and to secure the cultural relevance and the commercial future of the industries.

This requires, above all else, industry leaders with a tenacious commitment to change, with a consciousness to understand where the deep-rooted challenges are when it comes to greater diversity and inclusion — within their organisation and the industry in general —and with the courage to take action: not tactical performative action, which is addressed at length in the research findings, but rather long-term, sustained strategic action driven by a firm commitment to diversity and inclusion at the heart of a business's thinking, its purpose and its culture.

"Growth requires innovation. Innovation requires difference. Difference requires diversity. Diversity is not a sideshow. It's not a problem to solve. It's the solution to the problem our industry faces. I don't understand how those dots aren't seen and joined up by more leaders."
UK Creative Industry Business Owner.

THE DESIRE FOR HOPE, THE NEED FOR A PLAN

The general consensus of the interviewees was that the current and up-and-coming generations of diverse creative talent in the UK — whether that diversity is based on ethnicity, gender, disability / diffability, sexual orientation, class or neuro-diversity or other lived experiences — is exceptional. These young talented individuals not only have the creative abilities; they hold the technological knowledge, understand complex social and cultural nuances and possess a spirit of innovation bolstered by their desire and hope for real, purposeful change.

These are the generations for whom an entrepreneurial side-hustle is almost an expectation, and in many cases, a financial necessity. They refuse to be confined or defined by outdated social constructs. And, critically for the future of the creative industries, their ability to blend all of the aforementioned components together sensitively and seamlessly, holds the key to the creative industry's future innovation, its relevance and its success.

So, the question is not whether the UK holds the diverse creative talent it needs. It is here in abundance. The question is whether those who lead the UK creative industries have the consciousness, commitment and courage to match the exceptional talent that is impatiently waiting for the opportunity to help the industry thrive?

> *"I think a lot of things the industry does from a DEI perspective are still very tactical, and campaign based. It is still chasing 'shiny objects' and outward posturing instead of cultural change."*

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RE-ENGAGING EDUCATION

The UK creative industries' relationship — or in the view of some, lack of it — with the UK's primary and secondary education systems was singled out by many respondents as a critical barrier to building out a more diverse and representative creative sector.

To many respondents, the first and perhaps the biggest barrier was the general lack of knowledge and awareness at primary and secondary school level of the extensive and diverse range of roles that exist within the creative sector, with many stating that the industry was generally engaging with students too late: *"If as an industry we not talking to 11 to 13 year-olds or even younger, to let them know all of the possibilities, then that diversity is not going to come through into the industry. This is the message coming through from all of the art colleges that we're working with. It's a very key stage of knowledge and development and I don't think we're doing enough, early enough."*

The efforts of many independent organisations working with the education section on behalf of the creative industries were recognised and applauded, but the general sentiment was that far too often these specialist organisations were underfunded and not supported enough by Government or the industry itself, with too many industry businesses setting up their own (often vanity) schemes and programmes rather than working with the organisations that know the market and, importantly, how to reach students from a diverse range of backgrounds at key junctures in the educational process.

"There needs to be a better connecting of the dots between the industry, the specialist organisations who are working towards bringing young, diverse talent and the schools where that talent is," explained a respondent. When I look at other industries (engineering, management consultancies, technology), we just don't seem to have the same level of co-ordinated or properly funded exchange with school students."

Government policy, over the last decade in particular, also came in for extensive criticism, with many respondents suggesting that Government and successive

"As a creative industry, we work on the basis of the law of attraction, yet we do a pretty average job of attracting and informing young people of the commercial and career opportunities available in the create sectors. Other industries have a much better funded and co-ordinated approach to working with schools. As a result, we miss out on the best diverse talent."

ministers were happy to praise the international success and reputation of the UK's creative sectors, but much less inclined to deliver frameworks or funding that helped to ensure the sector continued to be supported and promoted at a national level.

The Government's recent 'Maths to 18' announcement was cited as an example of how far the education system is moving away from committing to highlighting the value of creativity and arts-based subjects in the educational curriculum, with one respondent saying: *"The fact that we've got a Government that has pretty much stripped out art and design education from the curriculum, means there isn't the same opportunity to open kids up to understanding and explore their creativity, innovation and imagination. We all know the creative industries bring massive GDP to this country. But somehow, we've got a Government that tells us we should be prioritising maths again."*

The need to more clearly demonstrate to students from diverse backgrounds at the earliest possible stage that a career in the creative industries was a viable, respected and well-paid profession was also raised by many of the respondents: *"As an industry we struggle to reach students from diverse backgrounds who may be from cultures and families who believe they should consider more traditional 'highly-skilled' roles (doctors, accountants, lawyers, engineers), rather than go into the 'arts' or creative sectors, as creative sector jobs are often not seen as real jobs."*

The solution to this challenge, proposed by some respondents, was that the industry was too focused on the creativity and not enough on the business opportunities and careers that existed across the sectors. It needs to work much harder and much more intelligently to get the real evidence — the business case for a career in the creative industries — into the hands and minds of young people from diverse backgrounds, much earlier on to start the process of reinforcing the fact that a role in the creative industries is an exciting, aspirational, competitive and financially rewarding career option: *"We know the well-trodden paths for young people coming into the industry. However, the world is now very different. Business leaders need to be asking themselves, Are we doing enough to work out where the gaps are in terms of engaging, young diverse audiences? Do we know where the gaps are and what are we doing about it?"*, stated one respondent.

> *"My teenage son is just about to go through work experience. He goes to a good school with lots of opportunities. Yet I understand he's the only one in his year (of about 1000 students), who's planning to do work experience in the creative industry. Given how big a part of the economy the creative industries are, that is mind boggling."*

ENTRY, EMPLOYMENT & RETENTION

"In many creative industries there is a long-standing organisational business model that has traditionally suited a specific demographic, but the world is different now and we are still expecting everyone coming into the industry to fit into that old model. But it is no longer fit for purpose."

One of the key components of that organisational business model are the internship programmes that exist across the creative sectors. The broad view of many of the respondents was that the current internship model is largely broken, because it had become, with some notable exceptions, predominantly available for those young aspiring creatives whose parents or network have the means to support them financially while they work in a low paid or, often, unpaid internship for an extended period of time.

This model therefore fails to take account of, or provide access for , young diverse creatives from more financially challenged socio-economic backgrounds. As a result, it serves as a sort of automatic socio-economic deselection process, that further entrenches a lack of diversity in those hoping to enter the creative industries through more traditional means, creating a significant barrier to entry.

"While I think the industry has got a lot better at recognising that it has to pay for internships and the level of brainpower coming in, by offering a guarantee of work or guaranteed jobs at the end of an internship, there is still a big problem with (labour and ideas) exploitation in the industry that no one wants to admit," stated one senior creative leader.

As such, the performative rather than strategic nature of many of the programmes, or the lack of clear and coherent long-term engagement and recruitment strategy on the back of them, were identified as a major barrier to a more sustained and successful approach to increasing representation. As one respondent noted: *"Internships create big expectations, and when there is no strategy behind them it leads to even more disappointment in that young person when there is nothing at the end of that opportunity. We seem to forget that many interns have no doubt found it hard enough to get into that programme in the first place and sacrificed a lot to be there."*

"We need internships and programmes with purpose and further opportunities, not dead ends. You can't overestimate how damaging to industry this is over the longer term."

Frustration was also widespread amongst respondents when it came to the ability of creative businesses to successfully retain diverse talent. This point, along with the stubborn absence of diversity within the leadership teams of many organisations *(discussed later in this document)*, were both cited as the most critical barriers to building a more diverse and inclusive industry over the medium term.

In line with this, the most consistent criticism with regard to how the creative industry improves representation across the board over time was of the often reactionary and seemingly ad hoc and project-based approach businesses take to engaging and employing more diverse creative talent. This was succinctly summed up by one interviewee: *"Sometimes it feels like everyone has just thought: 'Oh my gosh, we need more representation — so where's the low hanging fruit? I know, let's get some junior creatives in.' So we might now have more diversity in the industry, but it's like there's no real planning. Where's the cultural inclusion? The retention plans? The career development opportunities?"*

The result of this lack of planning and absence of an inclusive culture is clear: high numbers of talented, diverse creatives leave their employment prematurely, all too often citing a lack of a defined career path, unchecked discrimination or racism or the prevalence of a toxic culture. In the words of one respondent: *"The culture in some creative businesses hasn't caught up to their ambition to hire more diversely. They haven't yet figured out what it means to create a real sense of belonging for people."*

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges in this regard is that too often improving diversity and inclusivity is seen through the lens of a campaign or a project by creative industries whose business models are based on campaigns or projects. The result is that the campaign-based thinking, so essential for the work creative businesses deliver, invariably leaks into their approach to business strategy as well, where it is far less welcome and much less effective.

As respondents stated, a commitment to literally and figuratively changing the face(s) of the industry requires a much deeper, intelligent and longer-term approach to a company-wide recruitment, retention and career development strategy than currently exists within some organisations, including a much better understanding of how to build a more inclusive cultural environment where everyone feels they have an equitable experience, where they feel they belong, and where they can 'lean in and learn' and see a path to the top of their organisation: *"You have to make some really bold decisions as an organisation: for example, to sit down with your HR department, have a look at your recruitment strategies, and be very honest about how you currently support people when they come into your business. It's not good enough to just start recruiting —you have to make sure people are appropriately supported once they get in there."*

There was also a broadly held view that in the current 'war for talent' many industries are experiencing in the UK, creative agencies and other organisations are conversely sleepwalking into building non-diverse teams, with resource-stretched businesses leaning too heavily on external suppliers and recruitment and headhunting consultancies.

In turn, these are either going to the same places for the same talent continuously or, in some cases, consciously or unconsciously screening out diverse talent early in the recruitment process, thus narrowing the potential for diversity at the first stage of the process and further exacerbating the problem. Which is the antithesis to what the industry needs to secure its future: *"If you're the leader of a creative business, why wouldn't you want to build as diverse a business as possible with the all the valuable cultural insights, market intelligence and knowledge-based experience a diverse team brings? It enriches your creative output and, most importantly, drives your commercial success."*

 "When you consider it in this way, it becomes very compelling. It's not an intuitive argument. It's not an opinion, it's not a 'space thing' anymore. The evidence is clear — when it comes down to it a more diverse workforce will lead to better productivity, creativity and better business performance."

> *"The focus needs to be as much on the equity of experience in role, as the quality of opportunity when applying for a role."*

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YOU HAVE TO SEE THE LEADER TO FOLLOW THE LEADER

Visibility and the lack of diversity in top leadership positions was a major theme of most of the conversations with respondents. The increase in female executives in senior leadership roles across the creative industries over the last decade was widely acknowledged, but so was the slow but positive progress made on reducing the gender pay gap.

However, the real discernible lack of ethnic diversity, in particular, in top leadership roles across the creative industries was consistently cited as one of the major barriers to further progress on building a more inclusive industry. One respondent captured the general sentiment saying: *"Without greater representation at the most senior levels, there is no chance of the kind of deep systemic change that is needed across the creative sector. The lack of diversity at a senior level limits the progress we can make."*

It was also consistently suggested that a failure to deliver and promote more diversity at a senior level in the creative sectors has a profound effect on the next generation of aspiring creatives, with one respondent stating that the creative industry comes up with all the great plans —going into schools, promoting the industry and demonstrating all the opportunities it offers to more diverse audiences, then hiring those diverse creatives...*"but if those same people who enter the industry never get anywhere, are never promoted into senior leadership positions, what's the point?"*

'Number fudging' was another common observation expressed by the respondents, many stating that in terms of diversity, some organisations were guilty of 'diversity washing', with some creative businesses using overall improvements in the diversity of their workforce to 'fudge' the fact that diverse representation was heavily concentrated in more junior or administrative roles, with leadership and senior management positions remaining much less diverse (apart from a perceived improvement in gender balance in leadership roles across some sectors of the industry).

"Too many businesses are fudging the numbers when it comes to diversity," *stated one respondent. "They are taking on diverse people in entry-level or administrative roles to make the numbers look good, but when you get inside that organisation, there is no representation at the top. No one for younger creatives to look up to."*

There were also a number of conversations around the language used when an executive from an underrepresented or marginalised group or community is appointed to a senior role. Respondents commented that the primary focus of media announcements of these new executive appointments too often focuses

on the appointee's ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation for example, not their professional skills, experience and qualifications — all of which they also bring to the role.

 The view was that this both unnecessarily demeans the credibility and extensive value the executive brings to the role, and also leads others to wrongly question why the person was appointed, putting the newly-appointed executive in the position of having to potentially validate their appointment from the outset or respond to criticism, rather than celebrating the appointment and focusing on setting out their ambitions for the role and the business.

> *"Much work has been done on blending the bottom of the pyramid — bringing people into the industry — but there is still much more to helping people climb the steps of the pyramid. And why, at the very top, is there never any real change?"*

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CUTURE, CONNECTIONS & COMMUNITIES

"One of the biggest mistakes brands, businesses and agencies make is they seem to think professionals within an under-represented community don't talk to each other. But we do! We all know the businesses that have a toxic culture when it comes to diversity and inclusion, we all know when the values a brand espouses don't reflect the reality of working conditions. And the more marginalised you are, the more differing layers of identity you carry, the more you talk to each other."

This quote from one of the respondents reflects a consistent theme across many of the interviews. It is clarion call to creative industry leaders to more forensically analyse the culture and the policies that underpin their businesses and how both can, and too often do, contribute to an exclusionary or toxic environment and create barriers to career progression for those from underrepresented or diverse communities.

It is a poignant and powerful warning signal to leaders within the creative industries who confuse, wilfully or naively, diversity with inclusion; or those who through a mix of arrogance or ignorance, believe that a passive or active culture of toxicity can exist within an organisation, with the knowledge of it confined only to that organisation.

> *"Everybody's dirty laundry is known. We all know the agencies that are in trouble. We know the agencies that are being tokenistic and box- ticking, the ones that have some serious HR issues, that don't promote people.*

⬤ MOST OF THE RESPONSIBILITY, FEW OF THE RESOURCES

There was extensive commentary and discussion around the role of DEI director, officer and manager roles within the creative industries. The consensus was the creation and appointment of DEI roles within creative organisations represented progress; however, the reality for many holding those roles was somewhat more nuanced.

A common viewpoint held amongst the respondents was that some leadership teams within creative organisations viewed the appointment of a DEI executive as the 'DEI problem now solved', effectively absolving themselves of the responsibility they also have to play an ongoing role in working with and supporting the DEI executive in delivering a more open, diverse and inclusive culture within the organisation they lead.

In the words of one respondent: *"The DEI executive too often ends up being solely responsible for dealing with the racism or discrimination within an organisation, when they're also so often the victim of it. They didn't 'call racism' in the first place, but they're responsible for fixing the problem — often by themselves. The responsibility lies with everyone in the organisation, including the leadership team, not just the DEI lead."*

Another common theme for many of the respondents when it came delivering DEI within an organisation was the 'mission creep' many DEI executives experienced, being initially appointed to deliver a DEI programme within the organisation, but ending up being a 'catch-all', overloaded with additional responsibilities, from sustainability initiatives to SDGs (the UN's Sustainable Development Goals) or ERGs (Employee Resource Groups) for example, but most often, in the experience of the respondents, with little or no additional resource or budget to match the additional responsibilities. This was leading to both burnout and an inability to fully deliver on the core role of improving DEI across an organisation.

Said one respondent: *"I've been told I now have responsibility for other initiatives within the business, which takes over 20 percent of my time at work. But I still have to perform my DEI role, which already takes 100 percent of the time. So I'm having to do more than 120% of my job. And my manager is questioning the amount of work I'm doing on the ERG because it's getting in the way of doing my DEI job. It's just not sustainable."*

A number of respondents also highlighted the isolation that is frequently experienced by DEI executives due to the often-solitary nature of the role, and the additional challenges this poses in terms of rolling out effective DEI initiatives. One respondent stated: *"It's very easy to get into silos and get into echo*

chambers. Even within the D&I space, you can end up speaking to the same people who champion the same people over and over. That is a big issue, I think. We all need to think about how we break out of our own silos, and actively look for new voices within all of the different communities and all of the different spaces."

"DEI executives also have to work hard to remove some of their own conscious and unconscious bias. We all have natural affinities based on our gender, ethnicity, sexuality, lived experiences, so we have to ensure DEI is truly inclusive, not just inclusive of those we have our own affinity with."

⏺ THE ABILITY BUT NOT THE OPPPORTUNITY

Interviews on the barriers to entry to the creative sector were also conducted with a small cohort of disabled people and people with diffabilities to understand their perspective on the specific challenges and barriers they also faced in the creative industries.

The general tone of the discussions was succinctly summed up by the statement of one physically- disabled respondent who highlighted the 'diversity hierarchy' when it comes to employment: *"Disability is at the bottom of the table when it comes to opportunity. If a brand wants to address diversity and comes at it purely from a 'numbers perspective' — a desire to make the business look more diverse, then those with a disability, especially with a physical disability, become problematic because of the potential investment needed to make changes to the environment."*

With approximately 20 percent of the population identified as disabled according to the UK government's own statistics, the UK's creative industries are not only ignoring a sizeable talent pool of creatives, but also the value of the lived experiences and perspectives disabled people are able to bring to table to ensure creative industry businesses and their clients do not neglect one-fifth of the UK's population.

This was a point supported by another respondent who said: *"I think one of the reasons why the lack of disability representation is still stubbornly high in the UK creative industries is because it's very complex. And, the industry can't seem to deal with that - it wants a one-size-fits-all. But the industry just needs to just engage with the disabled community, listen and educate itself. There is so much talent, but the time is not taken to understand it and develop it."*

"There are many hidden glass ceilings for disabled people in business," added another respondent. *"That's why so many physically disabled people, and others, start their own companies. In my experience, it's very challenging for a disabled person to make progress to the highest levels in a business."*

Concerns were also expressed about the exploitive nature of the working relationship between some creative businesses and freelance disabled creative professionals contracting into those business. *"I do get approached by agencies because of the knowledge I have on disabled communities, but then there is no budget available for that knowledge, it's not valued,"* said one respondent. *"It's just exploiting disabled people, almost saying that we should work for free because we're disabled! It's really frustrating."*

The power of creative collaboration was also discussed, and the critical perspective and role disabled people can help play in facilitating this within an often more hybrid creative environment. Stated one respondent: *"Many disabled*

people really understand collaboration in all forms, because it's so sacred to us. We understand the true power of interdependence and collaboration, because it's part of our lives every day."

It was clear from the conversations, the barriers to diversity and inclusion are amplified when it comes to disabled people and those with different abilities. Physical accessibility to an office or other workspace and the resistance by some businesses to invest in the changes that might be necessary play a major role in limiting both job opportunities and increasing isolation.

Old and erroneous socially constructed perceptions that a physical disability also means an individual may not be able to manage the intellectual challenges of a high-pressure professional career continue to play a significant role in closing down opportunities for disabled people as well as reinforcing highly negative and destructive stereotypes. Perhaps most critical of all for the industry is the need to urgently redress the lack of commercial value placed on the contributions made by disabled people to campaigns, projects and programmes, to ensure those disabled people who are sought after for the strength of their creative abilities and sector knowledge are also fairly and respectfully remunerated for their work.

"Sometimes it difficult for people to comprehend that a disability can happen to anybody at any time. There needs to be much more education to help people understand that just because someone has a physical disability for example, it doesn't mean that they don't function perfectly well, with some support."

⬤ THINKING ABOUT NEURO-DIVERSITY

A small cohort of respondents with lived or professional experience of neuro-diversity were also asked their views on how successful the creative industries have been in opening up opportunities to neuro-diverse individuals and what the barriers to progression were once neuro-diverse employees were in the creative industry: *"In my experience over many years in the industry, smaller agencies tend to be more flexible, and more available and willing to accept people with neuro-diverse thinking, I just don't think the big agencies are set up for it. In my view, that's because big agencies have so many processes and HR departments. The 'enemy of neuro-diversity' is HR — there is still a lot of unconscious bias in HR when it comes to neuro-diversity. I know HR professionals don't want to hear this, but in my experience it's true."*

And, this respondent believed it was in part because of a fundamental challenge with the definition of neuro-diversity itself: *"I think that one of the big problems is the term 'neuro-diversity' — it is all very nice and tidy, but sometimes it's more of a curse than it is a benefit. Because it sticks everybody under one title and we are by the very definition, diverse, yet the industry still wants a tidy box to put us into."*

Respondents believed the rapid development and deployment of a range of highly disruptive AI programmes over the last six months in particular, placed neuro-diverse thinkers in a very interesting position in the creative industries: *"I think our industry is going to be hugely challenged by AI. But I actually think it's like the Macintosh when it first launched all those years ago — good in the right hands, and bad in the wrong hands. What's exciting is with AI, you need people who are big picture thinkers, who connect the dots in different ways, spatial thinkers, original thinkers. It needs neuro-diverse thinkers — when you combine AI with these thinkers, you'll get amazing results."*

One of the biggest barriers expressed by respondents was that the creative industries want the highly creative, non-linear thinking of neuro-diverse people, but aren't always also prepared to provide the right conditions to also help a neuro-diverse thrive as professionals: *"We have huge abilities in creative terms — imagination, design, storytelling, making connections, seeing the bigger picture. But businesses just keep seeing a problem — 'I've got to create an environment. I've got to allow for this. I've got to get software or a computer that has a spellcheck programme on it.' You know, it's all quite patronizing."*

> *"I'd really like you to value me as a colleague and an employee, rather than just seeing the business potential of my ideas."*

Finally, there was also a common view that while neuro-diversity was prized at a creative level in the creative industries , there were once again significant barriers to career progression when it came to leadership, with neuro-diverse professionals sometimes have to 'subdue' or hide their neuro-diversity to progress up the management chain and into leadership, which one neuro-diverse respondent found very ironic. *"We can take a chaotic client brief then turn it into a single headline that sells — it's an enormous skill. We take chaos and create comprehension rather than the other way around. Yet, we are often judged to 'chaotic' in our thinking for management by linear thinking leaders."*

"The danger is that dyslexia and neuro-diversity generally has fallen into the 'tick box' agenda. There's nothing worse than being a 'tick box token' because it comes from a place of negativity. But the industry needs to see the talent, the exceptional ability, not see it as a problem."

⬤ MENTAL HEALTH TO MENTAL WEALTH

Those interviewees who felt comfortable or informed enough to respond to the questions on the barriers to improving the employment conditions and the work environment, to encourage those with mental health challenges or conditions to see the creative sector as a supportive and inviting industry, generally believed there is now both more positive recognition of mental health conditions and better provision of mental health support services by businesses across the creative industries.

However, the perception was that while there has been a general improvement in recognition, support and services for mental health; success in improving the employment conditions some sectors of the creative industries have become notorious for, and which can contribute to burnout and a greater need for mental health services, have improved little, if at all.

As one respondent stated: *"I think the creative industries, because they are probably under the spotlight more than many, have had to practice what they preach. So there seems to be a lot more conversations, a lot more willingness to want to change and be better."*

"However, the challenge with addressing mental health in the creative industries is that it is exacerbated by long-held industry belief that you need a bit of anxiety, stress and pain to facilitate creativity. It's hard to know where that line tips over into burnout and mental health challenges for people, because everyone is different."

A number of views were also expressed on the gulf between the official mental health policies within an organisation and the proactive promotion and regular and effective use of those policies. Some respondents suggest some organisations seem to focus more on the announcement of mental health and welfare schemes and rather less on the active implementation of those programmes — for example, ensuring they were working, employees were using and gaining benefit from using them when they did — which led some to question the motivation behind some mental health support services in businesses: *"Some organisations bundle their mental health programmes as part of their employee 'perks package' — things like mental health days, massages and so on. However, mental health is an employee welfare issue, not an employee perk. It's fundamental to performance and to well-being, it almost feels diminished and not taken as seriously if it's considered a perk — it sets a tone for how seriously the business takes it in my view."*

Again, leadership by example came to the fore, with one respondent describing the role their CEO played in creating a cultural environment that was much more conducive to potential employees with mental health conditions, stating: "A new CEO came in and he was very open about his own mental health issues, which I was also struggling with at the time. I felt a sort of alignment. There was someone in a very powerful position of leadership within a company being quite vulnerable and talking about their own mental health challenges."

A CLASS ACTION

A key barrier to diversity that was raised by many respondents was socio-economic status / 'class' — something that appears sometimes lost in the conversation around diversity yet sits at the intersection of creative industry accessibility for many underrepresented communities, as highlighted by the aforementioned issues surrounding industry internship programmes and their adverse effect on many aspiring creatives from working class or lower-income families.

As one interviewee highlighted, personal or self-confidence can often be the first victim of growing up in a lower income household. In their words: *"It's so often just about survival — your parents literally keeping a roof over your head, being able to put food on the table, and just getting through. It's Maslow's high basic hierarchy of needs and it really impacts a whole lot of things in terms of accessibility when it comes to trying to find a job and believing you can have a career in a highly competitive environment like the creative industries."*

An aversion to the financial risk associated with internships, due to no financial backstop; the lack of an established network among wider family and friends; no or few connections between your school and the creative sectors; no industry role models and general lack of knowledge of what the career possibilities are — all these were cited as barriers from a socio-economic perspective.

The confluence of all or some of these challenges often results in a self-deselection process with the loss of great diverse creative talent to the industry. And if an individual does break those barriers, they are then faced with entrenched cultural challenge: *"As a woman of colour and working class, when I first entered the industry, I didn't feel like I belonged. I lacked skills to network; I didn't think that I was able to connect with people in a way that they would understand. And I felt that deeply. There were just conversations I just didn't understand, and I couldn't get involved in, because I just didn't have the spending power some of my peers and colleagues had."*

COLLECTING AWARDS OR DRIVING CHANGE?

Research interviewees were also asked whether they believed Industry DEI Awards were a good positive step forward in principle, or whether they gave businesses within the creative sectors the opportunity to deliver at performative level when it comes to DEI, rather than undertake the deep structural changes needed to embed core values that underpin diversity and inclusivity in a business.

There was a general consensus amongst participants who answered this question that while DEI Awards did, broadly speaking, play a positive role in raising awareness and creating a level of momentum and progress and 'keeping the conversation going', the reality of what they delivered overall and contributed to in terms of progress was much more nuanced.

In the words of one respondent: *"As an industry, we love a hero, a heroine, a star. And I think from a DEI perspective, we sometimes put someone up on a pedestal when they've really not done that much — they've just done the basics, what businesses and leaders should be doing. I think that is one of the biggest challenges: finding and celebrating those who have undertaken real, deep systemic change."*

Agreeing with this, a culture & diversity consultant who works across many sectors of the creative industries added: *"I would suggest you test the real intention of a DEI Awards event by looking at who the judges are. That is always a good indication of where the motivation comes from and how open the award entries will be to genuine scrutiny. If DEI Award entries are being judged just by industry peers and not also by independent and experienced DEI specialists, then I question how deep the judging is going be and how meaningful it really is?"*

A number of respondents also recounted their own anecdotes of the contrast between the accolades and reality, with a number of respondents stating while there are some incredible people doing incredible work right across the industry, in previous years they had seen brands with well-known toxic cultures winning DEI awards, which only served to discredit the DEI Awards process. One respondent stated: *"It would be great if some brands put as much work into delivering DEI in their business every day as they do to developing their Award entries!"*

Suggesting that while DEI Awards are fine in themselves, they are not a substitute for the hard work needed to ensure there is an ongoing commitment to DEI. *"We need to take the 'cult of the personality' out of some of these awards and demonstrate real change."*

"Yes, okay let's recognise people who have had an outstanding year. But let's also recognise people who have been delivering on DEI repeatedly — the people who have been making real tangible changes to their business, not just their award entries."

⬤ WE'LL CREATE IT OURSELVES!

There was a broad consensus across the interviewees, with only a few exceptions, that the creative industries, or at least many of the agencies and businesses that make up the industries, are potentially on the edge of an existential talent crisis, and this may be one of the biggest barriers to the future success of the creative industries.

An increasing number of talented, young diverse creatives recognise that the more traditional creative sectors are no longer the only 'game in town' and an increasing number of them, armed with a potent mix of easily accessible technology, social platforms, entrepreneurial spirit and a clear purpose, are finding new and more direct avenues to express their creativity — setting up new agencies, social channels, businesses, systems and commercial models to deliver on that creativity.

Long hours, low pay at entry level, a perceived lack of genuine social impact and purpose, narrow career development prospects and, ultimately, limited scope to actually use the creativity they were hired for, are turning some young diverse creatives away from the more traditional creative businesses and business models in the Creator Economy. In the words of an agency owner from the advertising sector: *"Sometimes I think we have the best young creative minds in the business just chasing IP addresses around the internet. Where is the creativity in that? It's not good for the future of the industry and it's not inspiring those who are looking at the possibility of a career in the industry."*

In the words of another respondent: *"Young creatives are looking around for creative businesses and agencies delivering with real impact and purpose and can't find them. So they're finding alternatives, they're creating new things and collectives, building their own studios. But that doesn't really address the issue of the lack of diversity in our industry. It's a big cultural problem that is developing."*

Culture is evolving at lightspeed and many of these younger, more nimble creative consultancies, social channels and influencers are not just much closer to cultural and fashion trends, social movements and new music genres, but are actually actively participating in them; meaning they often have the creative edge on larger incumbent creative organisations that by nature of their size and business models are slower to adapt, embrace and absorb new creative and social trends.

 "If you're a young musician in the UK and from a diverse background, you don't need to go through the A&R anymore, knocking on doors and trying get a record deal. You set up a YouTube channel. You bring it to the audience. You make your own decisions on your creativity. You don't have to get moulded into what the music companies want, you can go wild with your own creativity." Music sector business owner.

So, the biggest barrier to more diverse, connected and creative industries over the next decade may not be one created by the industries themselves, but rather by young, talented and diverse creatives who have looked at an outdated creative model or unwelcome creative culture and decided to go their own way, create their own industries in the Creative Economy, with their own definition of creative purpose and commercial ambition.

"There's a tension within the advertising industry. With so many agencies now owned by big groups, young people are asking if they are truly creative? Whether they are entering a creative industry or entering a bank with a spreadsheet?

CREATING AN INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY FOR CHANGE

"True change at scale will only come in this industry when business cultures change, when behaviours change, not just actions. We have to start from a point of celebrating diversity. We have to create an institutional memory for that change."

This statement from one senior creative leader highlighted a common thread that ran through almost all the conversations conducted for this research. It's the key challenge the creative industries have with performative tactics versus the strategic and behavioural thinking that needs to be embedded into a culture for there to be a true commitment to DEI — for an institutional memory for that change to be created.

Many respondents expressed their frustrations at the fact that despite there being an extensive network of specialist DEI organisations who have the requisite insights, experience, frameworks and knowledge of the most effective ways to bring diverse talent into the industry and nurture them through their career and into senior leadership roles, too many creative sector businesses continued to launch their own programmes. These programmes were too often tactical and performative, not strategically considered, and often underfunded; rendering a large proportion of them largely ineffectual and unscalable from the outset.

The usual mix and attractiveness of 'shiny new things', so common across the creative industries, was also cited as a major influence on diminishing interest in current projects, which invariably led to budget constraints and inability of a programme to deliver on promised expectations. In the view of the respondents, this was too often because, in line with the performative point above, the initial focus of an initiative was too heavily weighted towards the announcement of it, and not the frameworks, content, investment or the outcomes needed to deliver on its promise.

However, as one interviewee commented: *"This is what happens when you don't have diverse, inclusive representation at most senior levels. There is no-one in that boardroom with the context and understanding to identify the potential issues with an initiative. Creative businesses just need to take a step back, breathe and work with organisations that are specialists in a given field, and stop trying to just be the first to announce something."*

"Stop launching initiatives to show how good you are and just do the right thing. If you see somebody in a meeting being talked down, stand up with them and stand up for them. Include people, engage them, involve them, learn to understand them."

This sentiment was supported by another senior industry executive who commented: *"As leaders, we need to get our mindsets into a position where we can give space within our organisations to new creative voices at all levels. This is a beautiful industry and it's full of very creative and clever people. But it sometimes acts as though it's scared of itself. It's scared to step aside and let someone else have a voice. This has to change if the industry is to evolve, survive and thrive."*

There was also a view held amongst some respondents that businesses and leaders within creative industries are sometimes their own worst enemies in this regard, with one respondent stating, when discussing the advertising industry specifically: *"The thing about the advertising industry is that it's full of contrarians — that's the very nature of it. So if everybody's telling a contrarian to do something, they'll do the opposite. Even if it sometimes works against them in the long run. So, I think for some, DEI needs to be positioned in a different way — focusing on the commercial advantages."*

And the commercial value diversity brings to the creative industries is very evident, with extensive research, including a series of reports from McKinsey & Company, Brixton Finishing School, the All In Census as well as many others, highlighting the significant commercial advantage diversity and inclusion offers an industry. As stated by another respondent *"Diversity just makes good business sense. A cognitively and culturally diverse team is much better at understanding the wider context of a problem, then driving the innovative solutions needed to solve it."*

There is therefore a paradox at the heart of the creative industries when it comes to maintaining and growing an institutional memory for change when it comes to DEI: the creative sectors have always prided themselves on taking a lead on societal, cultural, consumer or technological change; and, in the case of the marketing and advertising sectors specifically, also playing a highly active and influential role in making the emotional case for that change. This commitment to change and progress is a core characteristic of the creative sector, but as a number of respondents argued to varying degrees, a paradox emerges when it comes to diversity and inclusion as the drive to lead positive and powerful change in this regard has been much slower and muted.

> *"Social justice movements like Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ+ and transgender rights for example, have made leaders and businesses think 'we must do better', but far too often the response is so reactionary, short-term and not thought through, it can create further issues."*

However, what was clear from the research conversations is this change is now a business-critical imperative — culturally, operationally, commercially, with *"some of big creative consultancies are actually getting pushed along by their employees because the workforce itself is so driven by DEI, so the whole business is all having to change"*, as one respondent stated.

If creative industry leaders are unable to rapidly embrace diversity at every level of their business and enable it to be more representative of broader society itself — the same society it ultimately relies on for its revenue — there is little doubt in the minds of many interviewees that these businesses will soon experience a cultural disconnect, become obsolete and overtaken by newer, agile creative businesses that have woven diversity and inclusion into the fabric of their thinking and their strategic approach.

> *"When farmers are trying to grow crops, they spend a lot of time trying to understand the soil composition and that's what allows the things to grow. Leaders have to spend much more time understanding the 'soil composition' of their organisation, what needs to change to help people to grow, what cultural changes are needed."*

◯ 'THINK', 'FEEL', BUT MOST OF ALL 'DO'

Ultimately, for the creative industries to firmly set themselves on the path to transformative change, the work has to start with the leaders of those industries themselves: the way they think, the assumptions they make, the biases that frame those assumptions, the context and life experiences that inform the bias. And this change firstly requires an astute recognition from leaders of what actually needs to change — a level of consciousness in a leader to recognise, accept and drive positive change.

Training — whether anti-racist, unconscious bias, diversity or inclusivity training programmes — will of course help to inform a leader's thinking, but these in themselves will not transform a leader's thinking or their actions, without the leader also doing the work themselves to more deeply and consciously understand both themselves, their motivations and the impact of their thinking and actions on the organisations that lead.

In short, if a leader genuinely believes in the tremendous value diversity brings to their organisation, if they believe in a more inclusive approach to their organisation's culture and believe that barriers to entry exist, even if they are not always evident to them as a result of the position they hold and they lived experience they have had; then deep, consistent and considered change will occur at pace. If the belief, empathy and understanding are not there, change will be slower, consciously or unconsciously obstructed, and resented.

Change is uncomfortable, however positive it is. So, the most visionary leaders are those who do the work on themselves first, who are prepared to be uncomfortable and recognise their own biases on work on these. One of the main roles of a good leader and a strong ally is to create and facilitate a culture of inclusivity, where all employees feel they belong, where voices are heard and understood, their views respected and their creativity and contribution acknowledged; all underpinned by a set of values and common belief in a vision. In the words of one respondent: *"Why is this so hard to achieve? It's just basic respect and humanity."*

> *"I just don't think there is enough courageous leadership when it comes to D&I,"* commented one creative professional. *"In too many businesses there are just senior managers in leadership positions. They need to be real leaders, not managers. What we really need is more courageous leadership."*

The pandemic and lockdown demonstrated that dramatic and rapid shifts in culture are achievable if there is a sense of urgency, and a genuine intention and determined will to change, to shift culture, to move at pace.

The evidence for change is abundant. The need for change is clear. The question is whether each one of us has the consciousness, the courage and the commitment to change?

BARRIER BREAKERS & CHANGE MAKERS DIRECTORY

CREATIVE FOUNDATION

⬤ BARRIER BREAKERS & CHANGE MAKERS DIRECTORY

The following organisations have been recommended by research participants and the Creative Foundation. The list is a representative, not exhaustive list of the many organisations that work tirelessly across the UK creative industries to break down the barriers to entry and drive positive and transformational change.

If you would like to add your organisation to this list or recommend other organisations, please email info@creativefoundation.co.uk and it will be added to the online version on the new Creative Foundation & UK Creative Festival websites.

UK Creative Festival	ION (Institute of Neurodiversity)
UK Creative Foundation	Joined Up Thinking
1000 Black Interns	Kerning The Gap
African PhD Scholars Network	LBS Incubator Programme
Autism Plus	Legacy Zone
Ambitious about Autism	Lexxic
Asian Creatives Index	Lollipop Mentoring
Baton Of Hope	Looks like me
Beyond Autism	Made by Dyslexia
Black and Brilliant Advocacy Network	Media Trust
Black Business Initiative	Mosaic Trust
Black British Network	Neurodiversity in Business
Black Disabled Creatives	School of Communications Arts
Brand Advance	Social Ark
Brixton Finishing School	Socially Mobile
CALM	Speakers for Schools
Creative Lives in Progress	Stroke Association
Creative Mentor Network	Talk Club
Commercial Break	Token Man Consulting
Creative Access	The Book of Man
Creative Conscience	The Careers & Enterprise Company
Creative Equals	The Education People
Curious Minds	The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design
Daydream Believers	The Jordan Legacy
Design Diversity	UKBFTOG
Disabled List	Unequal Stories
Diversifying Illustration	Unlimited
Diversity in Design	Urban Synergy
Dreamland	We Are Stripes
Exceptional Individuals	We are Utopia
Hire Black Female Creatives	Women Folk
Iconic Steps	Working Class Creatives Database
Ideas College	Young Creatives Council
Ideas Foundation	

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