Understanding Neurodiversity in the Creative Industries

Full Survey Report

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AchieveAbility conducted a survey based on the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's (DDCMS) definition of the Creative Industries and its subsectors in collaboration with EMBED between January and April 2025.

This report provides current themes from the survey data and with which there are comparisons made to other surveys and research including PEC Creatives, Bectu, City & Guilds; all point to the need for accountability and procedures to identify and support staff to call out toxic behaviour.

The impact of the pandemic led to difficulties in identifying risk for colleagues and support for audiences, primarily because of the lack of representation within the workforce.

There needs to be more emphasis on sub-sector responsibility and learning from each other. There is a shared view via The Big Idea within the theatre sector on the need for constructive collaboration through knowledge sharing and challenges to cultural leadership.[1] But to support organisations through challenges such as cancel culture and access to funding, 29 cultural leaders have identified innovation as a key want. This is needed for all staff, but neurodivergent people, in particular with their key strengths of creative thinking and problem solving should have access to agency and support, including in workplace culture, to test innovative ideas, projects and working practice development. Inclusive leadership, true recognition and positive action towards culture change will accomplish this. At Universal Music, for example, there was a call within the music industry: "To flourish within the ever-changing industry is to create a team which truly reflects the incredible diversity of our artist roster and society. This includes (but is not limited to) the diversity of thought".[2]

However, there are specific challenges to neurodivergent people who responded to the survey. This calls for methods which create psychological safety and equitable, accountable action to meet the changing needs of all staff. This includes investment and collaborative practice to ensure good practice is accountable to legislation to attract new generations of creatives to the sector. Below are the summarised survey findings which asked: 'What is it like working within the Creative Industries?' The survey was conducted anonymously and in confidence to support the lived experience of people who are assessed or not assessed as neurodivergent and ends with key recommendations to be implemented from now on.

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[1] Amanda Parker, 'Big ideas come out of sharing knowledge', *Opinion The Stage* May 7, 2025: https://www.thestage.co.uk/opinion/big-ideas-come-out-of-sharing-knowledge-amanda-parker

[2] Creative Industries: A handbook for embracing neurodiversity in the Creative Industries (Universal Music: London, 2020), p.7.

Respondents

Respondents came from most sub-sectors apart from architecture and IT (including computer games). The highest responders came from museums and galleries (47.06%) and performing and visual arts (29.41% each).

Routes into the sectors included secondary school, technical and university education together with specialist schools, including drama conservatoires, apprenticeships, art colleges and schools which show the requirement of formal education to enter within sub-sectors.

Respondents became freelancers for several reasons, including burnout and other reasons such as traditional approaches to employment, i.e. acting and a mixture of permanent and freelance work. Respondent sectors had freelanced within the subsectors for over 10 years.

65.63% of respondents are managers (including supervising volunteers) besides paid staff, of which 28.13% had received training but 65.63% have not received training. Respondents within the comments shared how they research into best practice then take formal management training; other routes were through experience and learning within the role. In February 2025, DCMS updated the skills gaps and shortages in the creative industries. Employer perceptions and actions were key indicators of what subsectors within the Creative Industries required to perform the role. AchieveAbility survey findings are echoed by a recent Bectu survey which stated their respondents felt managers were promoted without the skills necessary to do this effectively.

This included:

- Specialist skills to perform within the role
- The ability to prioritise tasks
- Working skills
- Managing and Motivating staff
- Managing own feelings[3]

There is a need to evaluate current skills and identify key gaps within teams and the workforce with investment of skills such as (but not limited to) project management, basic IT skills and a coaching culture to create empowered organisations with access and inclusion at the heart. Organisations that do this are more able to adapt to change through customer to workforce agency and development and respond to challenge.[4]

McKinsey and Deloitte state the importance of representation within the workforces, understanding key barriers to entry to underrepresented groups. The strong influence of individuals pursuing acting careers and their family connections in accessing financial

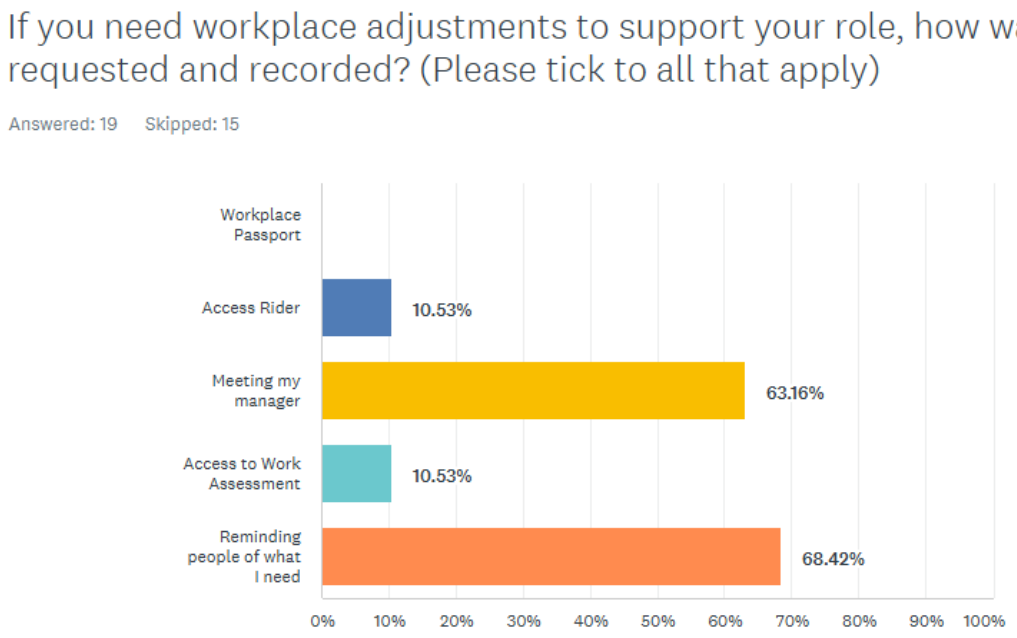
[3] DCMS Official Statistics, 'Skills Gaps and Shortages in the Creative Industries: Employer perceptions and actions, UK', 2022 research report (updated February 2025).
[4] Ron Carucci, 'One More Time Why Diversity Leads to Better Team Performance', *Forbes*, Jan 24, 2024; accessed 07.05.2025.

support creates barriers for those without such resources. Though there have been key conversations, the default setting remains for the person to share their needs first and practice to be negotiated later or sometimes, as responses show, ignored, which again echoes the AchieveAbility survey. There was strong emphasis on this via those places where the neurodivergent person at high risk because of lack of support from employers with workplace cultures of 'quick wins', rather than strategic planning and identifying skill gaps at the heart of organisational development. Meeting and adapting to societal needs, including future pandemics, is essential for organisations.

The responses fell into key themes concerning how workplace adjustments are recorded and supported, the impact of workplace culture, the use of DEIB strategy, impact on mental health and the need for accountability for unwelcome and toxic behaviours.

Theme 1: Workplace Adjustments

When respondents requested workplace adjustments to support their role.



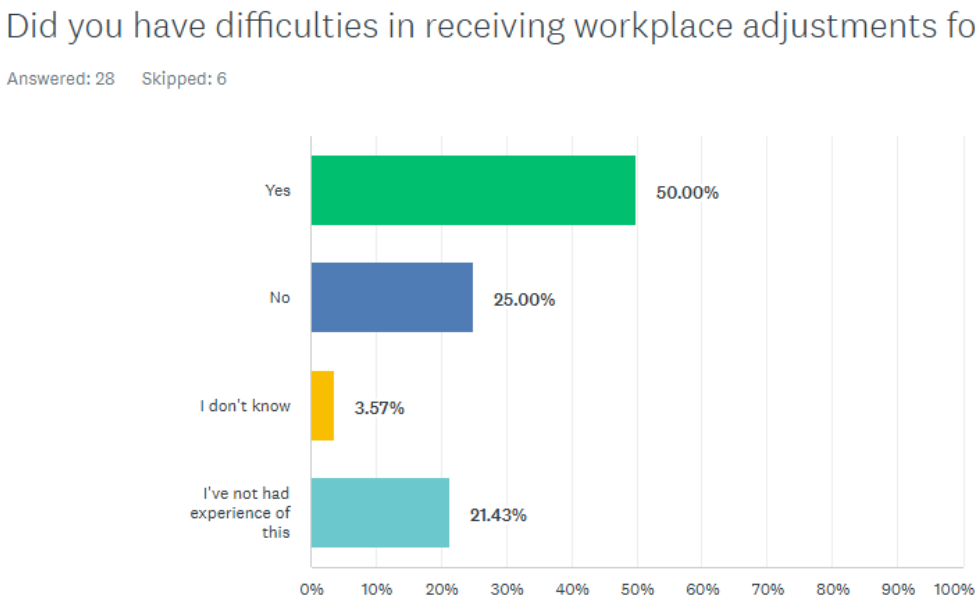
68.42% of respondents had to remind people what they needed, with the primary method of request being via meeting with their line manager at 63.16%.

- Freelancers used Access Riders, which is understandable as they are designed for the gig economy, but had to request a meeting for their paid job (10.53% of respondents).[5]

[5] There is a difference between Workplace Passports and Access Riders. Workplace Passports are a matured tool to support all staff on any workplace adjustments and requirements at point of induction, progress and promotion. They support a

- Others worked with departments such as facilities and IT for support;
- Other respondents showed that they had received adjustments for their interview, but others felt that when expressing adjustments at the interview stage they had repeatedly not gone past the interview stage itself.
- Requests were ignored, with respondents needing to remind colleagues and managers of these adjustments in day-to-day tasks.

When workplace adjustments were requested, 50% of respondents had difficulties putting them in place, 25% of respondents did not.



Responses did not show that this was because of the challenges with Access to Work; instead, the respondents commented how they had campaigned for workplace adjustments:

- People needing to be reminded of particular workplace needs;
- Not feeling able to ask;
- Lack of flexibility, including not being able to work from home because of no policy within the organisation;
- Need for basic administrative support;
- Challenges because of staff shortages;

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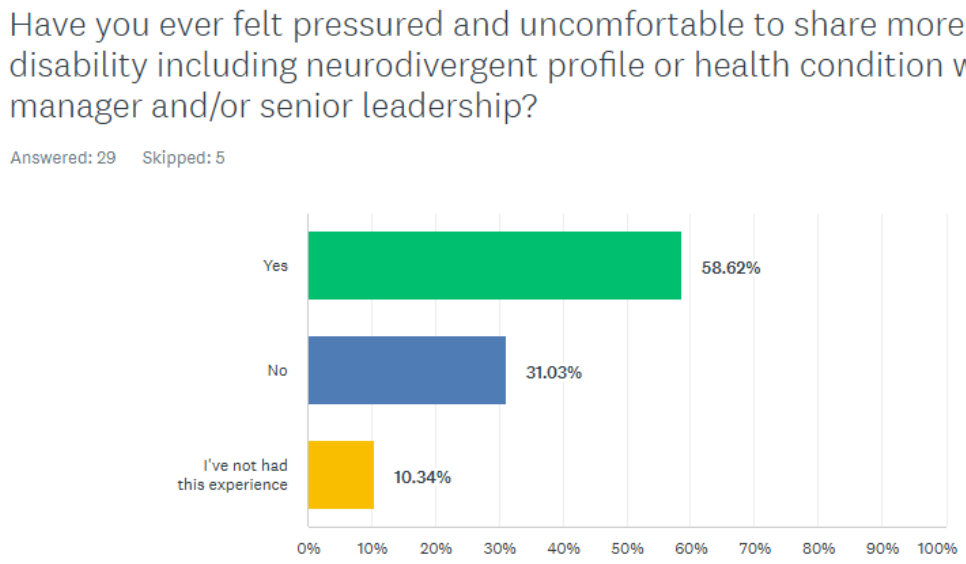
conversation between the employer and employee to identify existing and future resources and support. The gig economy created Access Riders, frequently used by freelancers; staff, fill out a form and submit it to their employer for consideration of any adjustments needed. Organisational Support needs to be in place to implement effective workplace change.

- How procedures can be implemented and are impactful if taken away, such as the need for colleagues to proofread instead of formal approaches (e.g. the use of copy writers).

The survey respondents commented more fully on the difficulties of implementing workplace adjustments, and this included (but not limited to):

- Refusal to engage and ignore workplace adjustments, which has led to discrimination;
- The respondent having to advocate for workplace adjustments when the organisation had not responded after successful application;
- Limited resources and assuming what can and cannot help a person;
- Money not spent on workplace adjustments, though people with disabilities are encouraged to apply;
- Systems needed for tools to be implemented when adjustments are disclosed;
- Workplace culture which processes are inflexible and behaviour such a micromanagement is experienced;
- Funding limited to projects and not wider staff and volunteer skills;
- Respondents felt pushed onto tools they did not require from the workplace assessor.

There is also the feeling of being pressured to share more details which questions psychological safety within the workplace. Psychological safety recognises difference and learning from each other with methods which support equity, learning and engagement.

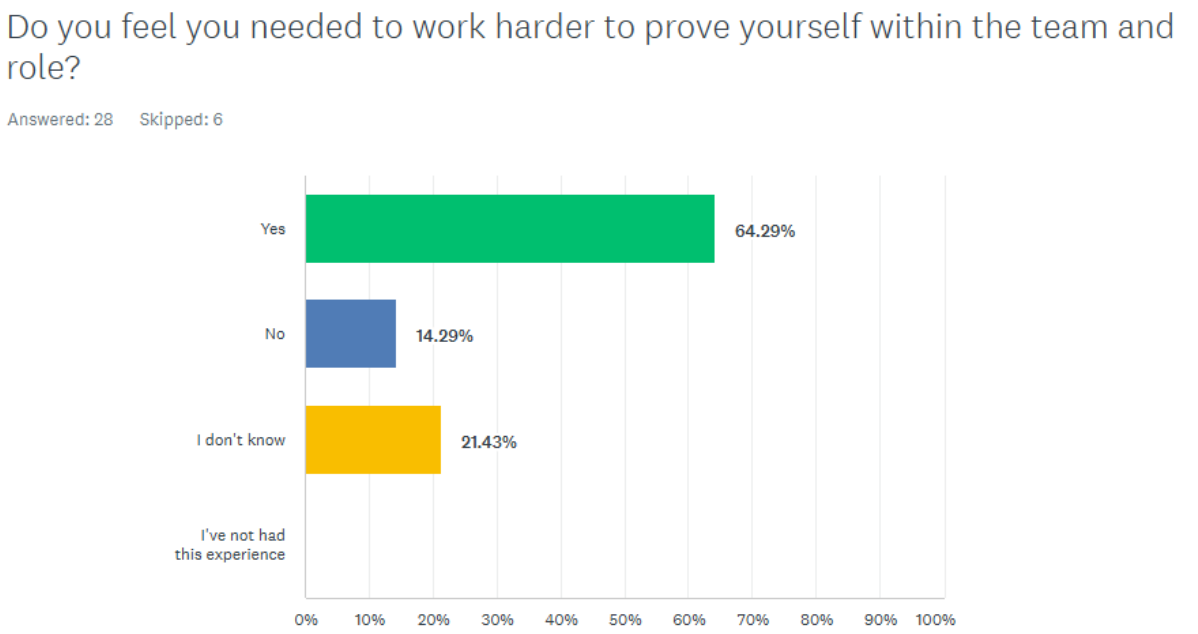


In some subsectors, such as Heritage, messages on access and inclusion are often given to the advocacy of a particular underrepresented group. This is not good practice. Instead, organisations that create more equitable, intersecting people-led practice are more agile and able to retain talent and understand where barriers of representation

need to be removed. This requires further exploration. It is important to reshape conversations on holistic organisational responsibility to create processes and change in which access and inclusion is at the heart of practice and cultures in which people can thrive.

Considering these findings, it is important to compare AchieveAbility's survey with others and assess its alignment with key findings, especially regarding the potentially disproportionate impact on neurodivergent individuals and those with co-occurring conditions and disabilities. The Creative PEC State of the Nation Report in 2024 showed how demonstrable exploitative, employment relations and intensive working patterns characterise highly competitive labour markets, with often disastrous results for the well-being of workers.[6]

Within the AchieveAbility survey findings, respondents felt they needed to work harder to prove themselves within the team and role.

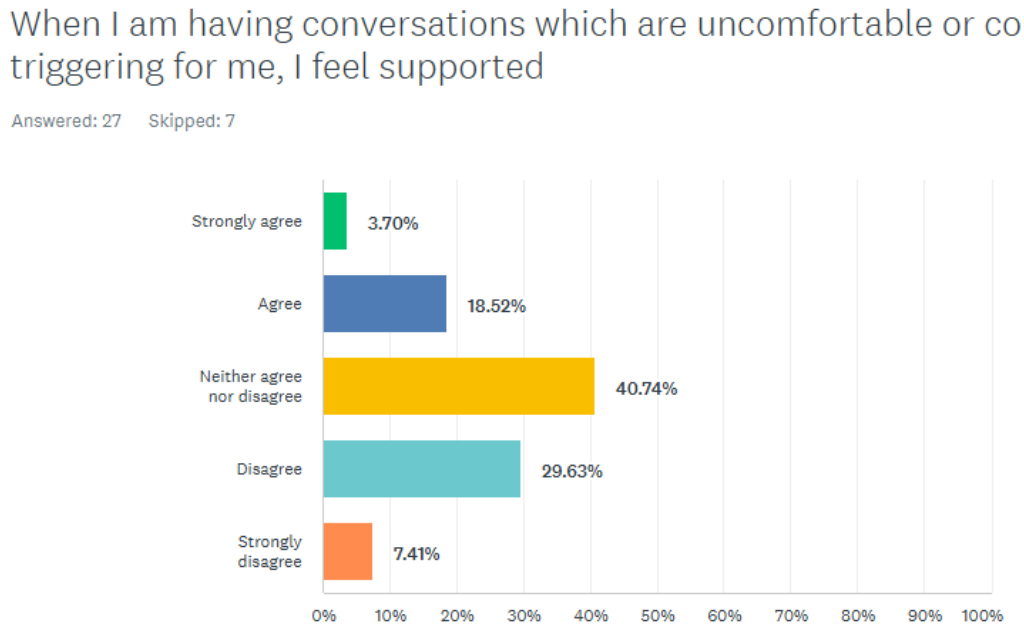


This presents high risk to mental health, burnout, and workplace stress. Neurodivergent people are at greater risk. The 2025 Neurodiversity Index Report reflects how neurodivergent people can experience stress and fatigue, 'strained interpersonal relationships and the need to take annual leave to recover' (City & Guilds Report 2025:18). Further study is required to support how this is implemented within the creative industries, including limited staff skills and precise skills to support neurodivergent people in the workplace.

Our respondents showed a need for counselling, breath work and support to manage being overwhelmed within the workplace. This was further shown by the need for

[6] PEC Creatives: Arts Culture and Heritage Audiences and Workforce Creatives (2024), p. 14.

empathy towards people in dire need, and which risks their own needs not being met. Others comment on how they were not aware of services, and it was on an 'ad hoc basis.' Others responded they do not receive support such as this within the workplace. This needs to be investigated with key specialists and the support available which can positively impact the workforce to reduce risk of burnout and chronic stress. Respondents need support if triggered when working with human stories which may recall previous and present trauma. This identifies the need to shift and adapt practice through clear procedural practice to support clear and equitable actions (examples when this is needed include the recent race riots, polarised societal behaviour, toxicity of social media and other key challenges).



Respondents' comments reflected:

- Their experiences presented challenges when they felt triggered, yet their concerns were dismissed;
- Lack of awareness on how certain behaviours be triggering;[7]
- Knowledge not shared of procedures to reduce pressure and reduce risk of mental health decline;
- Peer support but not from leadership, or dependent on one particular manager.

There are key tools which can provide organisations with structures towards equitable practice, such as the Workplace Passport and Access Riders. There has been an increase in awareness of gig economy tools (i.e. Access Riders) and Workplace Passports to support employers and employees on adjustments. Workplace change needs to be reframed through Access Riders, the Workplace Passport and organisational support to make confident decisions and to share opportunities to uplift

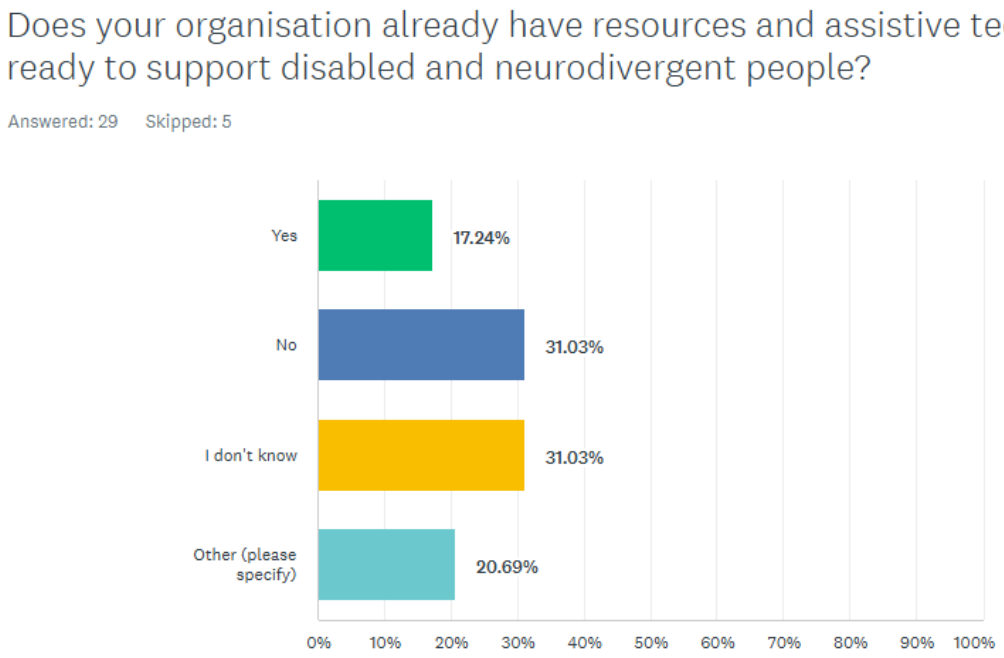
[7] People with ADHD can experience rejection sensitive dysphoria (RSD) which can increase anxiety and the modifying of behaviours to avoid rejection and gain approval from colleagues.

good practice with legislative responsibility. This includes prioritised work on the need for building in skills to support people within the workplace, supporting management skills requirements and developing accountable action.

Funding needs to be considered for existing staff, besides embedded funding programmes, to reflect the need as previously referenced by the DDCMS.

Existing resources, which could be workplace adjustments, are limited where the respondents felt that there were no resources available or they did not know about them.

- 17.24% of respondents felt that there were resources available, and some commented this was available on request;
- This reflected earlier findings that resources and tools were available but then taken away (e.g. Grammarly);
- Other respondents commented on long awaited Access to Work tools;
- Another respondent commented that there was limited knowledge, but if asked, they may get adjustments; there was also a comment on how workplace adjustments can be very basic.



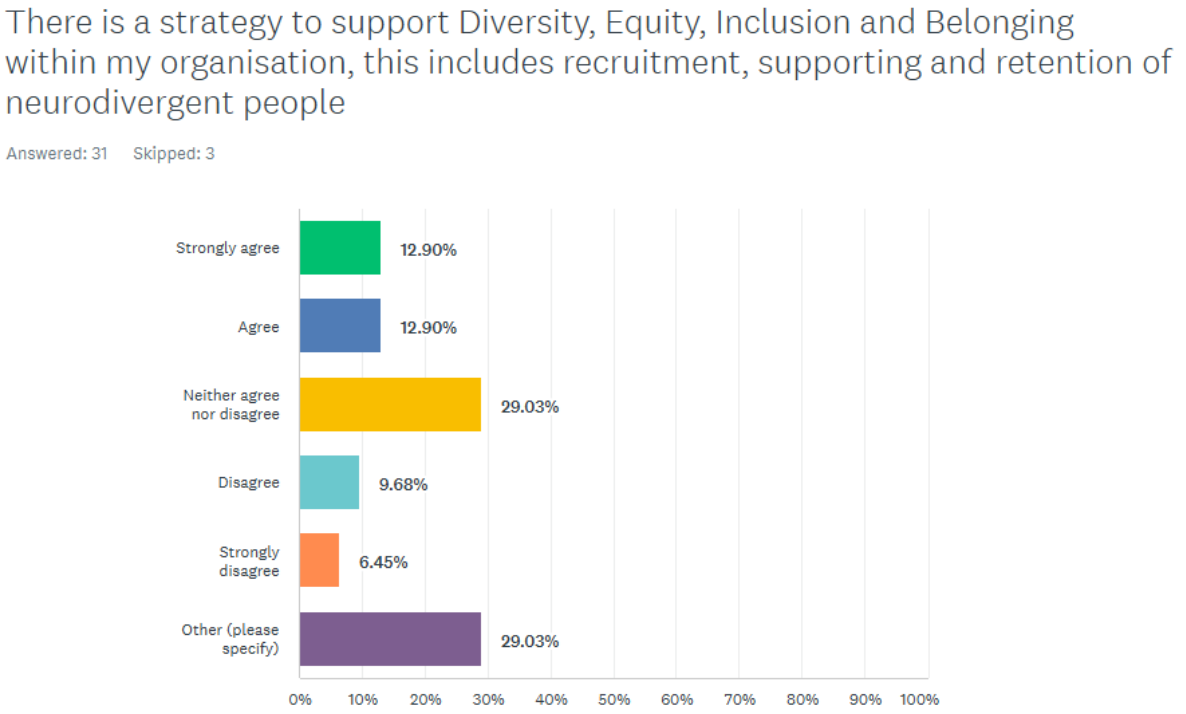
Cash-strapped organisations may have existing resources which can be workplace adjustments. There is an identified urgent need for planning and identifying software which meets procedures for cyber and network security with the requirements of staff, particularly if awaiting Access to Work. The release in 2022 of the PAS6463 by British Standards – to support the design, creation or management of more inclusive environments for neurodivergent people within the built environment – is, at the time of writing – available cost-free. However, there needs to be research into why some organisations are not using these, particularly Workplace Passports which can support

people across the nine Protective Characteristics and support conversations regarding changing needs, current resources, the need for auditing and support for staff.

Theme 2: Workplace Culture

There is a call from these findings on how DEIB strategies are developed and implemented within organisations and as subsectors which needs further investigation.

- Respondents commented on how there are strategies, but people do not know what they are or how to use them;
- Strategies are developed for recruitment but not for retaining staff;
- Some organisations have strategies, but others do not;
- Policies are used but not in developing strategy;
- Work is in progress in some organisations, but others do not have a written strategy.



Recognition and praise for work supports people to feel valued and as belonging within their organisation and sector. It helps them become champions in the wider communication of what it is like to work within each organisation and subsectors of the Creative Industries.

- Comments reflected how pay or promotion would be beneficial;
- Recognition and praise itself are very limited.

In the last month, have you received recognition or praise for doing good work

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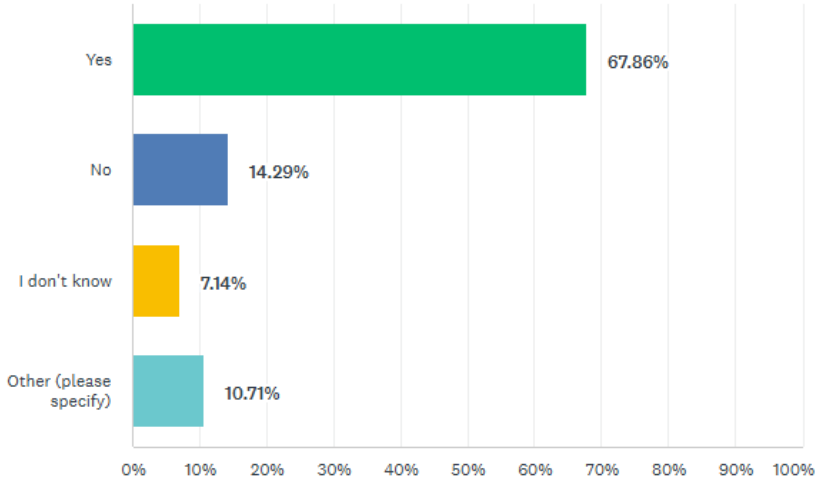

57.15% of respondents felt that their identities, backgrounds, cultures, and working styles were valued and respected, while 17.86% disagreed. From the comments, this can depend on the work environment and also needs further investigation.

62.96% of respondents felt comfortable sharing their own insights to support informing policy.

I am comfortable in sharing personal insights of my own characteristics and culture to support informing policy and developing working practice at my organisation

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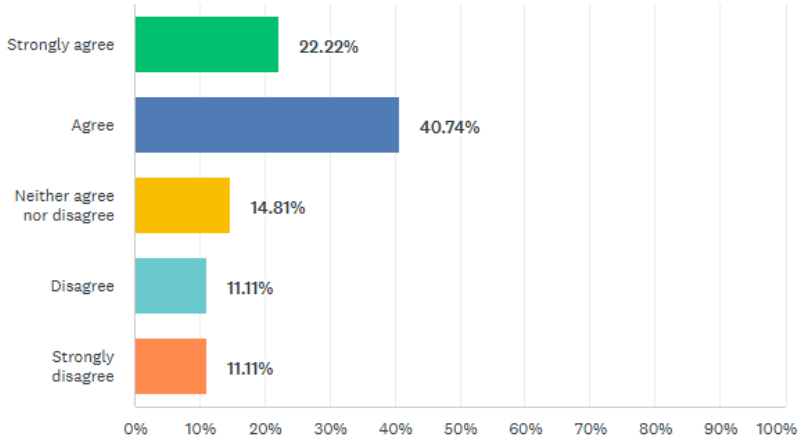


Offering insights based on personal experiences of characteristics and culture to support informing policy and developing working practice is a critical tool to understand how policy and processes work within the organisations, and particularly how people can be disproportionately affected by change, cuts, and funding. There are missed opportunities for innovative thinking and problem solving to support people and teams with their strengths.

However, there are comments which suggest:

- Spaces are not inviting for sharing and respondents would do so in a safe environment;
- There were some challenges in how another respondent felt how one person's lived experience should not inform workplace policy.
    - This feels more like a representation issue. Good practice suggests that equitable spaces of different lived experiences across the nine Protected Characteristics help to understand commonalities and differences. Employees feel able to share safely with equity and acknowledgement, leading towards accountable action.
- Other comments reflected concerns about being autistic and raising challenges with mental health which may lead to institutionalisation;
- Others felt ignored when raising challenges to working practice;
- Others offered their challenges for better working practice, including their own personal stories of assessment.

There can be limited agency to constructively challenge working practice to support colleagues positively and constructively with changing societal needs and expectations. However:

- 35.72% supported this and felt able to constructively challenge.
- 25% disagreed with this.
- 28.57% neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 10.71% commented on how they felt it was part of their role.
- 53.57% of neurodivergent respondents felt they were treated fairly, while 21.43% felt otherwise.
- 7.14% noted that freelancer status did not equate to fair treatment, but working independently had positive aspects for both groups.

This extended to whether people needed to mask within their organisation, which 28.57% responded that they did. Some felt able to be themselves within their organisation but not within the wider industry, which was 'exhausting', particularly 'networking, fear of over-sharing and imposter syndrome.' They felt fear in case it undermines their role.

Theme 3: Addressing Behaviours, Workplace Bullying and Discrimination

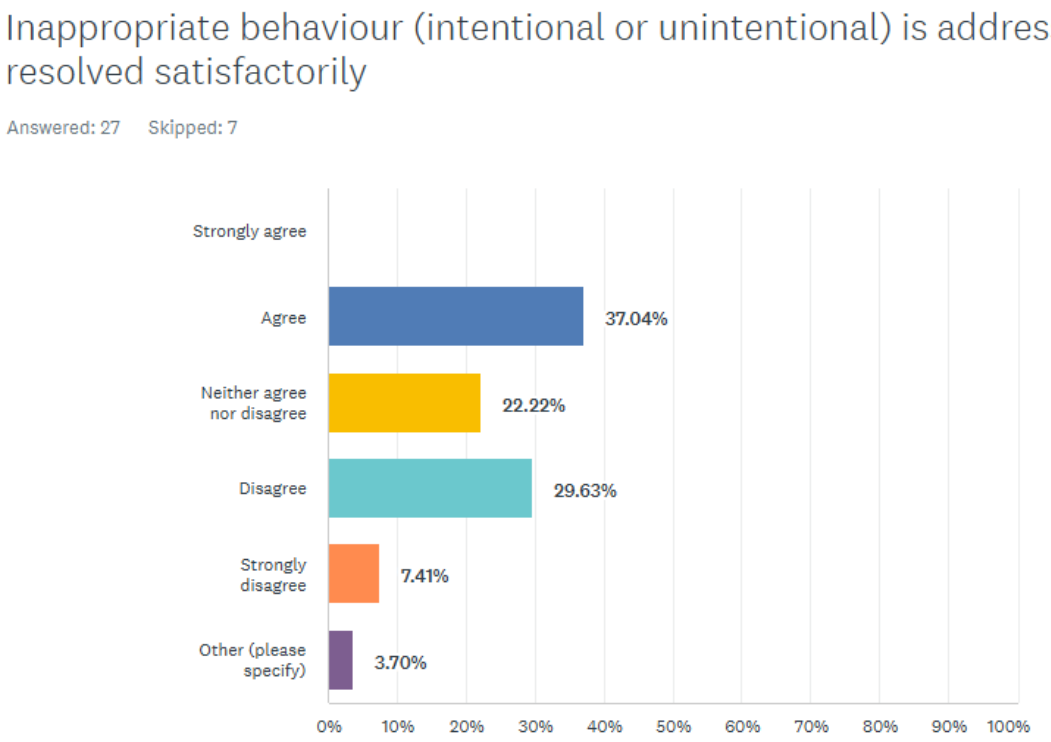
Workplace toxic behaviours include, but are not limited to, unwelcome behaviour, exclusion, passive-aggressive actions (like shouting or humiliating a team member), and micromanagement.

ACAS defines bullying and harassment as: 'unwanted behaviour from a person or group, which is:

- Offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting;
- An abuse or misuse of power that undermines, humiliates, or causes physical or emotional harm to someone.'

It is important that all organisations (whether in the Creative Industries or not) have policies and procedures where staff know and recognise toxic behaviours and can call this out safely with investigation and action. This has implications for how confident people feel in calling out unwelcomed behaviour if supported by processes which make them feel safe to do so. Reducing the risk of micro-validating unacceptable behaviour is vital for workplace practice.

Satisfactory resolution of unwelcome behaviours was achieved for 37.04% of respondents, but 37.04% disagreed, with 22.22% remaining neutral. One comment emphasises that effective leadership, embodied by role models, includes apologising to staff and fostering behavioural change.



Bullying and Harassment

The Museums Association stated that, within Heritage, bullying because of a protected characteristic was 25%, but 53% of people experienced bullying from a direct line manager and 27% from a senior line manager.

We also know how Bectu's recent survey on bullying stated that 93% of the Film and TV sector had experienced bullying. The recent City & Guilds Neurodiversity Index Report (2025) shows how people face stigma and discrimination which can be caused by 'psychological barriers, and influences change in jobs and places which people feel accepted'.[8] People feel targeted and marginalised by bullying behaviours which have a negative impact on mental health.

It is critical that organisations are aware of policies and procedures and of how they work within sub-sectors to reduce the risk of toxic behaviour.

42.31% of respondents felt their organisation has zero tolerance to bullying and harassment. However, 15.38% neither agreed nor disagreed and 19.23% disagreed; 7.69% did not know. Procedures were associated with a formal grievance which few wished to take. Interestingly, there were no further indicators of other action to reduce the risk of escalation.

Because of recent reported behaviours by theatre audiences, 1,222 Bectu members state they had reported experiences of or been witness to behaviours by audiences which were 'general disorderly/loud unsafe intoxicated, lewd and antisocial behaviour'. 45% of respondents within this Bectu survey considered leaving the sector.[9]

In recognition of this, is there evidence that any breaches caused by members of the public are addressed promptly. 40.74% of respondents stated they neither agreed nor disagreed; 25.92% of respondents disagreed; with 14.81% agreeing. Others (7.41%) commented that they did not know as it has never happened within their organisation or they did not work in a public-facing role.

A suggestion would be to consider whether people within public-facing roles have training on de-escalation and being an active bystander. Organisations could be reviewed for training in risk assessments to support staff facing challenges at work, including violence/antisocial behaviour.

[8] City & Guilds 'Neurodiversity Index Report 2025', pp. 22-23; accessed 07.05.2025: https://77f20764.flowpaper.com/CityandGuildsNeurodiversityIndexReport2025/#page=22

[9] Bectu Audience Behaviours Survey Summary (Feb 2023); accessed 07.05.2025: bectu-audience-behaviours-survey-summary-feb-2023.pdf 'A high level of concern amongst Theatre Workers

Any breeches of bullying and harassment policies by members of the public is addressed promptly

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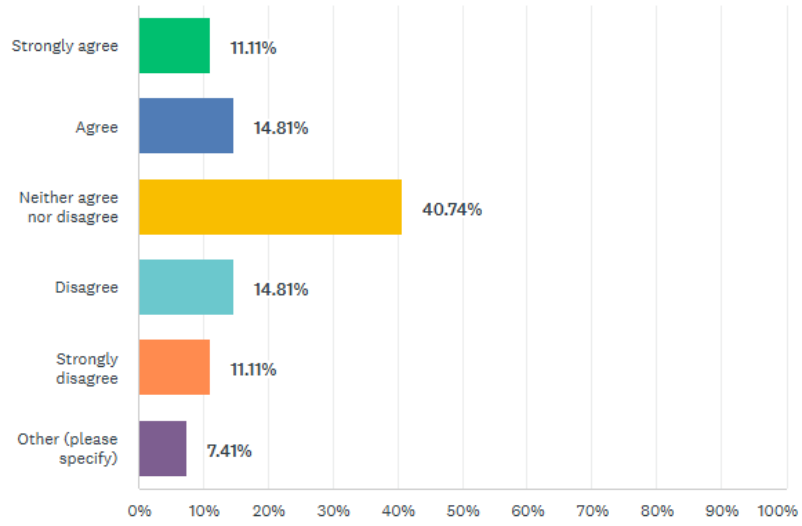

Similar could be said for bullying and harassment breeches by staff and senior leadership.

Any breeches of bullying and harassment policies by staff and senior leadership is addressed promptly

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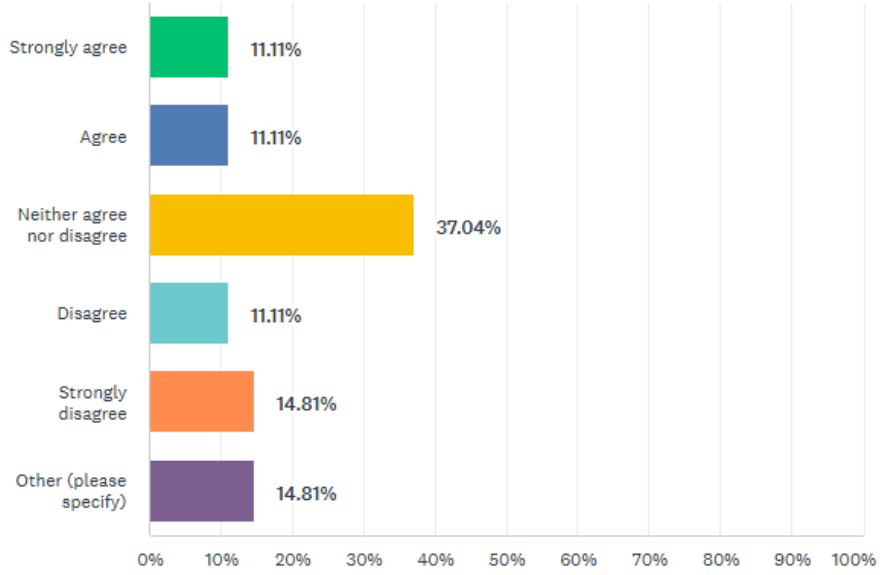


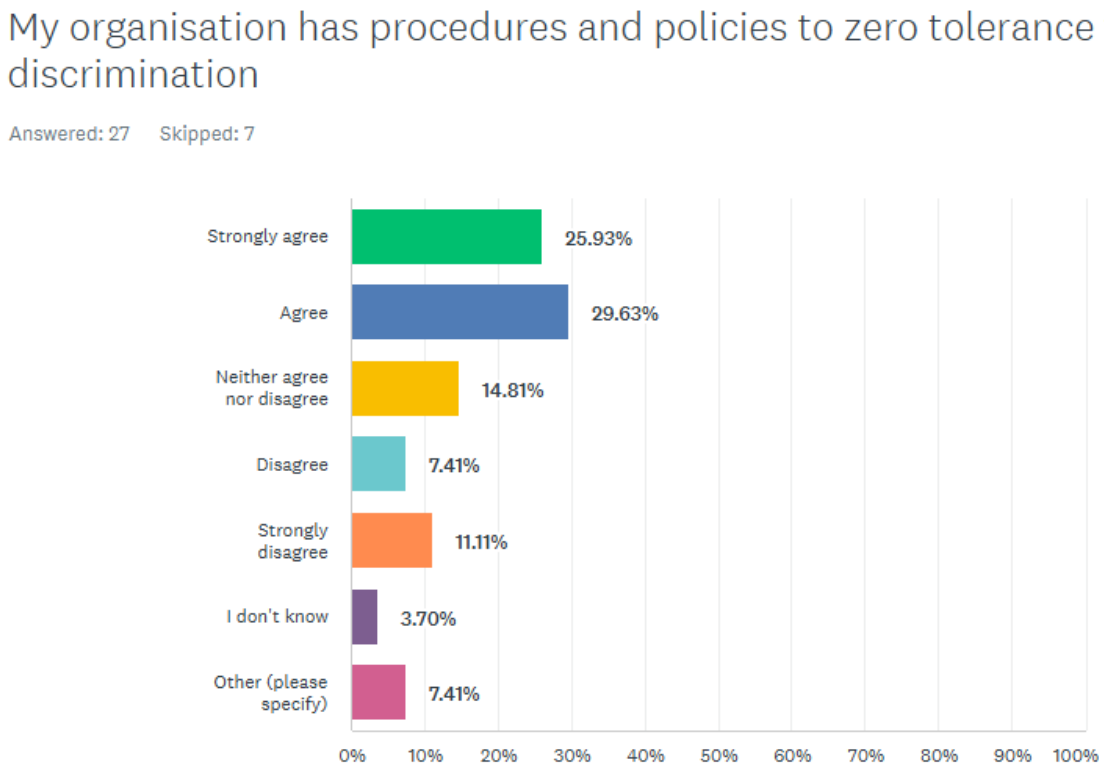
- 37.04% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement.
- 25.92% of respondents disagreed.
- 22.22% strongly agreed/agreed.

- 14.81% provided other comments which reflected on bullying being felt as not taken seriously and on how treatment at work felt like 'masked bullying'; some did not identify this as it has not been applicable since taking on a role.

Discrimination

Discrimination can be direct or indirect. Direct discrimination is defined as treating someone less favourably than others. Indirect discrimination occurs when practice is for everyone but disfavourably affects people from a protected characteristic from an unfair disadvantage (Gov UK).[10]

55.56% of respondents strongly agree and agreed that their organisation has procedures and policies for zero tolerance to discrimination, with 18.52% disagreeing, 14.81% neither agreeing nor disagreeing and 3.70% replying don't know.



Concerning breaches of policies and procedures on discrimination being addressed and resolved satisfactorily showed how 33.33% of respondents strongly agree/agreed, but 29.63% neither agreed nor disagreed with 22.22% of respondents disagreeing. 7.41% of respondents stated they did not know, and other respondents provided comments such as not witnessing discrimination but noting they are not receiving requested access needs.

[10] Gov UK Discrimination Your Rights: https://www.gov.uk/discrimination-your-rights/how-you-can-be-discriminated.

Any breaches of policies and procedures on discrimination are addressed and resolved satisfactorily

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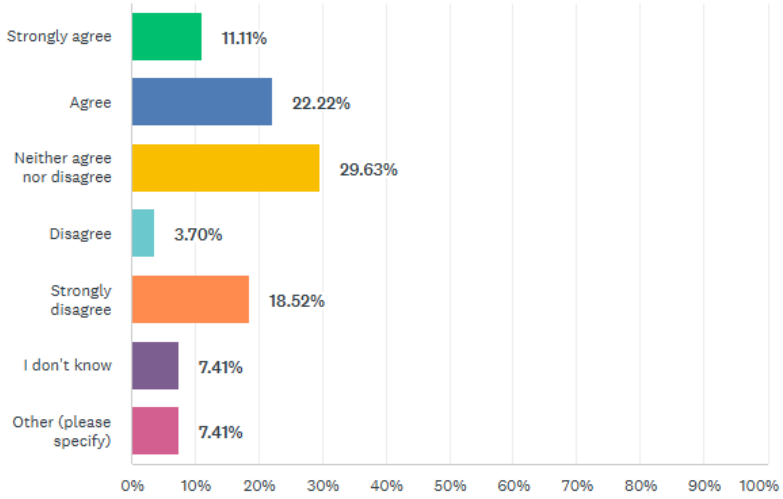

The following questions reflected frustration and lack of action by the Creative Industries. Comments also reflected the need to identify what good practice and success looks like across the subsectors based on their strengths, shared strengths with other subsectors and specified areas of priority with clear accountable actions. This can support moving subsectors forward based on organisational requirements and legislative responsibilities from leadership.

Respondents for the questions below showed that current working practices are managing a fragile system of advocacy and behaviour which, if given a change of management or reduced funding, could easily become challenging. Whereas accountability and procedures which reflect this, including safe spaces to feel able to talk, are a key priority.

What works well to reduce the risk of bullying, harassment, and discrimination?

Culture of support and getting on well with people

- Support of middle managers who support their staff;
- Colleagues working closely together;
- Alertness;
- Holistic awareness across all teams and departments;
- Working with a wide range of community groups which has been valuable as all staff are exposed to people from different backgrounds regularly; this, supported by training. has helped;;
- ‘We are small. We generally get on well as people’;
- ‘A very informal, open culture, where difference is celebrated, and managers have regular check ins with staff’;
- Greater awareness.

Use of training and development of policies

- ‘Recent mandatory online training on these issues’; ‘Senior Management updates on what is being done to address wider policy relating to these issues [bullying, harassment, and discrimination]’.
- ‘It was addressed early on; some activities were planned around awareness and the organisation then invested in a working together agreement with a third-party consultant’.
- ‘We have policies/procedures in place, but that only goes so far. However, overall, I would say my experience of the organisation is one that has a strong ethos of inclusion and support, and generally, discrimination is not tolerated. However, I am also privileged by my position and so others may have different experience’.
- ‘Transparent communication is getting better’.

Does anything work well?

Some respondents clearly stated no, and this is an important opportunity to consider how to positively challenge, providing ways in which people feel valued and processes to support people, particularly when facing challenges in the workplace.

What do you think needs to improve to reduce the risk of bullying, harassment, and discrimination at your organisation?

There are clear indicators from the respondents’ comments on the importance of confident leadership that implement practice and change. This includes providing support to managers who may be experiencing bullying from stakeholders.

Need for accountability

- Robust laws that effect tangible consequences for discrimination.
- Need to stop EDI becoming tokenism in practice where it needs to be focused on equity and justice.

Policy development needed

- Support and understanding of micro-aggressions within the workplace.
- Need for procedures for safe whistle-blowing, including alternative channels of communication other than the line manager.
- Discipline procedures and awareness of poor behaviour, and what this looks like to challenge.
- Ensuring that temporary, zero-hours and visiting staff have access to the same resources, training, and support as full-time staff.
- Ensure that policies recognise freelancer staff.
- Policies which work with Principles, Values and Ethics framework which could support decision making.
- Policies and procedures need to be reviewed as they feel outdated.

- Better understanding of employing and working with disabled staff.

Constructive support

- Leadership confidence in decision-making.
- Continuing awareness.
- Encouraging people to share.
- People feel comfortable and able to speak out about issues within the workplace.
- Support for staff
- 360-degree evaluation so staff also evaluate (not just managers).
- People providing kind, constructive criticism without people feeling attacked.
- Training and posters.
- Working smarter with time and resources to support teams and reduce need to be so busy.
- Need for alternative funding available if projects are disbanded, particularly on mental health and support.

As a neurodivergent person working/volunteering in the Creative Industries, what good practice has supported you?

There were some respondents who commented on how there feels to be more awareness of neurodiversity, but wider conversations need to happen individually on peer support, such as recognising traits relating to anxiety and mutual support. There was also a call for mental health support which is practical for people's needs.

Senior Leadership

- Training which is thorough and impactful.

Supportive Managers

- Others suggested it was a supportive management with enabled the respondent to be themselves. However, this could change if the manager left.
- Managers being supportive and understanding.
- Managers advocating on behalf of people.

Practice

- Using networks, structured training, and guidance on accessible communications;
- Equitable recruitment and interviewing with opportunities for career professional development;
- Flexible/hybrid working – having the option to work from home;
- Use and access to technology and reasonable adjustments;
- Use of Grammarly;
- Communication;

- Simplified recruitment practice to support applications in different formats and questions in advance for interviews;
- Open, facilitated feedback sessions which were followed up with meaningful action;
- Catching up outside work when it becomes 'rowdy';
- Acknowledgement of emotional dysregulation, what this is and how it manifests with changes in workplace practice to support the person so it does not affect the office and perceptions of the person;
- Clear understanding of where a person needs support but also how they bring added value to the organisation – learning ultra-fast and doing an excellent job at the 'big stuff';
- Being treated as an adult and with respect, not a nuisance or burden;
- Understanding when neurodiversity can impact on way of thinking but not being treated differently or making assumptions on abilities when they have a 'clear experience like anyone else';
- Flexible and hybrid working enabled, and finding tools which support productive work;
- Respecting sensory needs;
- Admin support on time management;
- Small things such as (the ability to ask which task should be done next) that are not weaponised or used 'to crush' the person;
- Colleagues as allies, e.g. during rehearsals colleagues as allies working collaboratively with the person to manage what priorities and decisions are needed to be made with key verbalisation of responses from the person to reduce risk of the build-up of feeling overwhelmed;
- Clear expectations, creating safe relationships and the space to ask questions or show vulnerability if something is not understood;
- Debrief time booked in where the rule is anything which was said in 10 minutes was not taken 'literally or seriously'; it's a buffer time which enables the person to feel fully present in rehearsals;
- Managers who want to discuss additional needs and adjustments more personally than policy;
- Teamwork.

Other

- Good practice through an individual person leading the project but not holistically recognised as a good practice within the organisation itself
- Other responded that there was not any support.

What do you think needs to positively change for neurodivergent people in the Creative Industries?

There are a range of responses which call out the need for the Creative Industries to recognise and develop structures to support equitable practice which recognises and

respects cognitive difference and people's differences. There was a call to support changes in language and culture where neurodiversity should be respected and not seen as a negative which is vital to enable people to feel psychologically safe, to be themselves and create equitable change.

Respect for differences through understanding equity

- Respecting people's differences, particularly that not everyone is creative in the same way; some neurodivergent people can be critical, but creative, thinkers and ideation specialists.
- Basic support can change things; What is a problem? What needs support? Why [does a person] struggle?
- Most people in the cultural industry are neurodiverse, including those 'very high up.'
- Negative stereotypes and attributes need to stop.
- More championing of [neurodivergent attributes] such as hyper-focus, and consider:
    - Data analytical work;
    - Productivity at work;
    - Sensitivity to subjects which can bring process and negotiations;
    - Insight on knowledge gained from specialist interests;
    - Change of mindset from negative to positive.

Having open conversations

- More open conversations about neurodiversity and making it more visible, casual and talked about, making it part of people's general understanding that is not based on outdated stereotypes.
    - The Creative Industries confidently and informedly talks about Global Majority persons/experiences and gender (it also has a way to go on these issues); the same should be applied for disability and neurodiversity. It is seen very much as a taboo topic – people do not know what language to use to discuss/embed into workplace culture.
- More open conversations about neurodivergence; there is the sense that it is a lot more prevalent in the Creative Industries than is currently acknowledged.
    - 'There are many people I have met who are neurodivergent but do not often want to discuss or disclose it in relation to their creative jobs'.
    - 'There needs to also be a reframing of neurodivergence away from only talking about how it can be an asset to companies and organisations, but also how neurodivergent people can be supported properly so that they can thrive in their careers without burning out because the industry is only interested in what "superpowers" they can provide'.
    - 'From my experience, there is a general misunderstanding of neurodivergence and its variety - lots of people assume it only refers to autism'.

    - ‘There is also an associated feeling that it’s taboo to talk about neurodivergence openly in the workplace, which makes it difficult to feel comfortable to disclose it to managers, but also to colleagues’.
- It needs to be discussed and celebrated.
    - ‘I have a hard time with concentration and focus over long periods of time’.
    - ‘Little things can stress me out and trigger my anxiety, but mentioning it to others always feels like they take it as an excuse’.

Culture Change

- ‘I think you need to build a strong/ kind environment with intention.’
- ‘It is shattering to all of our thinking functions, most of all neurodivergent people but also neurotypical people. They’re just typically not so aware of it. Dial down corporate working styles’!
- ‘Organisations attend a workshop and say they are neurodiverse trained and then turning round when something bad happens and not addressing it:
    - They only want neurodiversity to work when it suits their agenda – pointless
    - It needs to be borne in mind when neurodiverse issues arise so that what they learnt in the workshop they can apply, not just to look good’.

Greater understanding

- ‘Better understanding of what it means to be neurodivergent - so you can feel less shame about what you can’t do.’
- ‘Heightened awareness.’
- ‘Greater understanding of basics and enhanced support for both those who need them and those who don’t’.

Support for change

- ‘Recruitment procedures - as part of a council these are really rigid and one size fits all
    - Recognising people’s strengths and not expecting them to do tasks they are likely to fail at - because it helps no-one’.
- ‘Less talk more action, compulsory access audits’.
- ‘Better support during transitions.’, e.g. FE/School to Uni - Uni to employment.
- Support for freelancers (over 1/3rd creative workforce freelance, probably over 50% ND creatives freelance); support in making a transition between job.

Adjustments

- ‘More transparency on what Access Riders look like, freely available examples from people with a variety of conditions’
    - Awareness raising.

- ‘More awareness of masking, less emphasis on the ND person doing all the work to bridge the gap: most adjustments would help a wide range of people.’

Having uncomfortable conversations

- ‘Feeling supported to have the uncomfortable ‘confrontations’ with individuals who DON’T actively support neurodivergent people.’

Recruitment

- ‘Recruitment practices must change’!

Job security

- ‘I feel that the fact that many museum jobs are either part-time, casual, and/or fixed-term contracts does not promote job security and work-life balance and can lead to burnout. This is bad for everyone but may be particularly off-putting for neurodivergent people considering a career in the heritage sector.’
    - Having a (compared to equivalent in other sectors) relatively low-paid job based around a passion or special interest may also be a particular issue for neurodivergent people in terms of avoiding exploitation and making sensible career choices.

There are a number of key recommendations which can support the subsectors of the Creative Industries based on this survey and other published research to support the representation of neurodivergent people (20-50% of the Creative Industries) to be recruited, thrive and develop within the Creative Industries.

Key Recommendations

The need to collaborate and understand different subsectors’ strengths and areas of improvement is critical to support and identify ways forward. Within subsectors, it is important to consider the role of activism and the call for change and how conversations now need to lead into positive, collaborative, and authentic action which is also meaningful to people. Using singular style methods to support everyone including neurodivergent people is a missed opportunity to develop more equitable practice for workforces to reach out to audiences and visitors.

Authentic Representation in Policy and Practice

- Creating collaborative and clear, transparent processes that enable free structures of communication and agency on what is being discussed at national level and hearing directly from colleagues from different roles. This includes practices that are not working and recognition of good practice concerning the representation and retention of neurodivergent people and other underrepresented groups within the Creative Industries.
- Ensuring that any collaborative and processes concerning lived experiences are informed and supported by neurodivergent people within the Creative Industries.

- Supporting staff to ensure organisations check existing policies are up-to-date and work within the organisation itself and for its people:
    - Ensuring that organisations are encouraged to review existing policy and practice which support neurodivergent people within the workplace;
    - Considering how freelancers can be supported within different organisations, including any challenges and toxic behaviours
- Funding at national level to create skills programmes within the Creative Industries.
- Creating an annual survey (similar to PEC Creatives) on the progress of practice and change within the different subsectors with key reported actions and progress on the workforce, including recognition of intersectional inclusion.
- Enabling exit interviews on why people leave the Creative Industries.

Culture

- Alongside the current CIISA standards, review existing procedures, workplace culture and accountability within the Creative Industries.
- Create actions to reduce workplace bullying and unwelcome behaviour in which the individual does not have to advocate for change but focus more on organisational risk and responsibility.
- Fund support for staff skills and coaching to create confident, empowered teams when working with change and challenge.

Workplace Adjustments

- Ensure that managers and staff are aware of a selection of tools (i.e. Workplace Passport, Access Rider) and practices and where to get help to embed them within the organisation to reduce the need to charge towards one particular answer and base support on organisational needs.
- Review recruitment practice with key action on supporting and retaining staff.
- Collate and inform regular updates on software and technology to support workplace adjustments and reduce pressure for the neurodivergent person whilst awaiting Access to Work assessment.

The key thing is, what happens next? Conversations must be openly and constructively challenged concerning the role of people within competitive sectors, particularly from underrepresented groups, which are called upon to advocate for change when it is a whole sector, organisation and all of us that needs to take collective responsibility and support sustainable organisations. As someone who is neurodivergent and works with the Creative Industries, it is easy to simply restate repetitive messages concerning the need for criticism or advocacy. These, however, are suggestions based on the lived experience and opinions of neurodivergent people working within the Creative Industries and current research available from key groups on working practice. They provide a start on positive and accountable action.

Dedication:

Thank you to everyone who responded to the survey and to people who circulated it on our behalf.

Glossary

Diversity

Human difference, including but not limited to:

- The 9 Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 (i.e., age, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, marital status, disability, age, class).
- Can include educational attainment, social and economic, culture, class, geography and ethics

Access

- The opportunity to gain knowledge and information
- Approach, circulate, enter and exit buildings in a way that supports different requirements of people
- Facilities which meet the different requirements of people

Equity

- Understanding equity supports fair access to opportunities, agency and resources, with understanding the causes of social inequality

Inclusion

- Creating processes and procedures, opportunities and resources where people feel respected and are acknowledged

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Included are key reports and articles from DCMS, Bectu, City & Guilds, PEC Creatives, Museums Association, and academic insights relevant to neurodiversity, workplace culture, and disability rights within the Creative Industries.

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