

MBS Intelligence

Tracking progress on diversity and inclusion in UK retail

The third edition of in-depth research and analysis from The MBS Group and BRC



Contents

Foreword	5
At a glance	7
Executive summary	8
Methodology and motivation	10
What is the status of D&I in the retail industry?	13
D&I strategies	14
Women leaders	16
Ethnically diverse leaders	18
Disability	20
Sexual orientation	21
Social mobility	22
Age	23
Thinking broadly	24
The Employee Inclusion Index	27
Industry insights: case studies from retailers	33
About us	43

Foreword

We're sure everyone reading this wants retail to thrive. We want the industry to be the best it can be. Part of this means having a truly inclusive culture where all individuals can flourish. This is not only the right thing to do morally, but vital to commercial success. More inclusive businesses are more innovative businesses that can access a wider talent pool and get better business returns.

Unfortunately, as this report shows, we still have a long road ahead on diversity and inclusion.

For meaningful change, we must measure outcomes and effectiveness of the activities undertaken and identify where we are falling behind. Only then can we look at what more must be done.

This is the third year of this vital report – to track progress, and the barriers in the way. This work is taking place against a challenging economic backdrop. When we published the first edition back in 2021, we were in the midst of the pandemic. In the second, the war in Ukraine and cost-of-living crisis had just begun. This year, we face soaring inflation, additional supply chain pressures, looming regulatory pressures, and labour shortages.

We're delighted to see that there is more action on D&I than ever before despite this backdrop. Dedicated leaders are being appointed to take ownership, more resources are being invested into training for senior leaders, and more budget is being set aside for crucial initiatives.

But significant challenges remain: despite 93% of retailers now having a D&I strategy, other metrics are barely shifting. 30% of boardrooms remain all-white, Black leaders are still disproportionately underrepresented, and we are a long way from seeing equal gender representation in leadership. And, while more businesses are prioritising D&I, our report shows that these efforts are not being felt across the workforce, especially for those with disabilities and certain sexual orientations.

There is a long way to go before equity is embedded into the culture of every retailer. But as each year passes by, the dial is gradually shifting, albeit not as quickly as it needs to.

To create the most innovative, productive and forward-looking retail industry we can, then we need to truly embrace diversity and inclusion. We are confident that with deliberate and urgent action, change will be delivered.

This starts with more companies assessing the effectiveness of their activities rather than merely looking at the number and nature of the activities themselves.

We want to thank our brilliant partners helping us along the way and making this important report possible: the Chairs, CEOs and HRDs who gave up their time to participate in this research, the representatives from the companies in the BRC Charter, and the Retail Trust. Particular acknowledgement must go to Tom Ironside and Luiza Gomes at the BRC, and to Moira Benigson (Founder and Chair), Aelf Hewitson (Director, Retail Practice), Simon Pryde-More, Imogen Sewell, Callum Orr and Krystyna Robbins at MBS. Without you all this research would not have been possible.

We look forward to continuing the journey to creating an even more diverse and thriving retail industry.



Helen Dickinson OBE
Chief Executive
British Retail Consortium



Elliott Goldstein
Managing Partner
The MBS Group



At a glance

This is the third year of research from The MBS Group and BRC, exploring the status of diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the UK retail industry.

This report encapsulates research on leadership diversity from The MBS Group, workforce diversity from the BRC, and an assessment of employee inclusion, based on the Retail Trust's Better You tool.

Executive summary: where are we now?

93%

Retailers with a co-ordinated D&I strategy

17%

Retailers with at least one Disabled senior leader

64%

Retailers with at least one LGBTQ+ senior leader

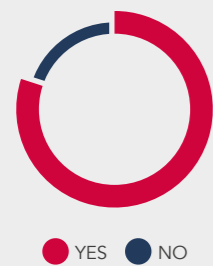
75%

Retailers with at least one senior leader who demonstrates social mobility

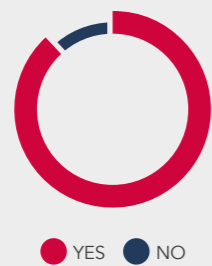
% OF WOMEN AT TOP THREE LEADERSHIP LEVELS			
	2021	2022	2023
Board	32.6	37.5	37.8
Executive Committee	32.0	34.2	36.7
Direct Reports	37.5	34.8	42.8

% OF ETHNIC MINORITY LEADERS AT TOP THREE LEADERSHIP LEVELS			
	2021	2022	2023
Board	4.5	9.6	10.0
Executive Committee	5.8	7.7	9.1
Direct Reports	6.0	10.3	11.3

DISABILITY INCLUDED IN D&I STRATEGY



LGBTQ+ INCLUDED IN D&I STRATEGY



SOCIAL MOBILITY INCLUDED IN D&I STRATEGY



AGE INCLUDED IN D&I STRATEGY



1 There is more D&I activity than ever before

Almost all retailers have a co-ordinated D&I strategy, a comprehensive programme of initiatives, and leaders who are open to discussing progress. This represents significant improvement from the start of our research in 2021, when there was markedly less prioritisation of D&I among leaders.

2 But this isn't translating into meaningful change

While the proportion of women at the top-three leadership levels is gradually increasing, the industry is still a long way off a 50/50 gender split. Ethnic diversity has also improved, but progress has slowed since last year, and is not widespread. Away from gender and ethnicity, the industry lacks visible Disabled role models in senior positions.

3 There is a disconnect between activity at corporate level and feelings in the workforce

In looking at our analysis of inclusion in the Employee Inclusion Index, we see that the impact of initiatives is not being felt across the workforce. Despite increased activity, retail employees reported having low feelings of recognition, having a voice, and overall happiness at work. This is especially true for those with disabilities and LGBTQ+ colleagues.

4 The next part of the journey needs to shift from introducing activities to assessing their impact

Just as with any commercial objective, leaders need to know what is working and tweak the plan accordingly. Businesses should analyse the impact of D&I activity on representation within the business, and on if employees are feeling included. It may be that a "less is more" approach becomes central to this next part of the D&I journey.

Methodology and motivation

About MBS research

Our third year findings are based on data from 200 of our industry's leading businesses, with a focus on the three highest leadership levels: Board, executive committee, and direct reports into the executive committee.

We measured representation of women and leaders from an ethnic minority background at the senior levels of retail businesses, analysed the maturity of policies, and explored how companies are embracing aspects of D&I including LGBTQ+, disability, age, and social mobility.

About BRC research

The BRC D&I Charter was launched alongside the first edition of this report in 2021.

The Charter is one of the BRC's Change Programmes, where participating retailers sign up to six pledges – focused on oversight, recruitment, progression, reporting, inclusivity, and responsibility – and gain exclusive access to a programme of workshops and events, helping them challenge their culture and biases holistically and embed D&I into their business. As part of the Charter commitments, the findings of an accompanying signatory survey are published in this report.

This is the second year this data has been collected from Charter signatories, representing a cross section of the industry. The entire survey sample encompassed 48 of the signatory companies comprising a workforce of more than 1.2 million (almost 40% of the total UK retail workforce). There were 16 more responses than last year so the data covers a wider section of the industry and this makes the results more robust.

About The Employee Inclusion Index

Using the Retail Trust's "Better You" tool, we have created an assessment of inclusion based on the views of 2,000 individuals across different demographic characteristics in retail. The question set was chosen to provide indicators of an individual's perspective and feeling of inclusion: fair treatment; trust/communications; involvement in decision-making; sense of belonging; and feelings of psychological safety.

This is the first year this data has been collated.

Restating the case: why do we need D&I?

As detailed in a PwC report "Diversity is the solution, not a problem to solve", there are five reasons why diverse businesses perform better. Diversity brings:

1. Better outcomes for customers
2. Better business returns
3. Greater innovation and new ideas
4. More attractiveness to employees
5. Improved reputation and brand

There is plenty of evidence for this. Research from McKinsey has shown that executive teams featuring gender diversity are 25% more likely to outperform those that don't, and teams with ethnic diversity are 36% more likely to outperform those without it.

There is also an increasing number of risks associated with not prioritising D&I. Diversity is part of the solution to the war on talent, and retailers which don't embrace D&I risk falling out of favour with the next generation of employees and future senior leaders. Moreover, conversations with businesses have shown that the industry may be facing the next wave of pressure from investors to ensure representation.



What is the status of D&I in the retail industry?

This research is based on leadership data captured by MBS from the 200 biggest retail businesses and insight from conversations with Chairs, CEOs and HRDs, combined with analysis of diversity across the workforce conducted by the BRC.

We've found that while there's more activity than ever before, the dial is not moving fast enough.

D&I strategies: There is more inclusion activity than ever before, but it's time for assessment of impact

93%	82%	47%	66%
Retailers with a co-ordinated D&I strategy	Retailers which are collecting data	Retailers without specific initiatives to drive up D&I	Retailers without specific targets in place

Retailers are taking D&I more seriously now than ever

Conversations with senior leaders have showed that businesses recognise the benefits of diverse organisations, and are investing in initiatives to promote inclusion. A vast majority of retailers have D&I strategies, with most collecting data on diversity in their organisation.

Our research found that there is a very high volume of activity around inclusion. Almost all large businesses in the retail industry have active employee resource groups; engage in events like International Women's Day and Pride; and have a calendar of inclusion events, such as guest speakers. This marks a significant evolution since we began our research in 2021.

In that time, the conversation on D&I in retail has also become far more open among senior leaders – who are now enthusiastic to discuss their own progress, but also more honest about missteps and advancements still to make.

In the past year, the most impactful changes to D&I in the industry have been:

- the formalisation of employee resource groups, many of which are now backed up by budgets, action plans, and training;
- the appointment of dedicated D&I leaders; investment in training for senior leaders, including the Board;
- and greater focus on driving up data collection efforts.

However, more could be done to actively build diverse talent pipelines. For example, while 93% of retailers have a D&I strategy, nearly half don't have initiatives in place to drive up representation in specific areas or functions. Moreover, two-thirds have no targets or goals in place, with many citing a lack of data as the reason for not putting in place measurable goals.



Industry insights

"We've found that there's been real power in our networks this year. They've really led the D&I agenda, driving changes to our policies around menopause and parenthood. Each of our employee networks has a budget and an executive sponsor. The key is to make them meaningful – not just have employee resource groups in place as a tick-the-box exercise. They need to have a voice." – HRD, specialist retailer

"Since July 2022, the completion rate on our data collection programmes has increased from 55% to 83%. A big part of that has been designing communication campaigns, and providing training for managers about how to respond to queries from team members." – HRD, grocer

"We've done more in the last three months than we've done in the previous three years – which is almost all down to bringing in our D&I lead." – CEO, fashion retailer

"Part of the strategy this year is actually doing less. Rather than sponsoring a dozen events across the year and trying to gain every accreditation, we're focusing on developing a more consistent approach where every colleague's day-to-day experience will be more inclusive." – D&I lead, grocer

As most retailers have had a D&I strategy in place for several years now, the upcoming period is an opportunity for leaders to assess the impact of their efforts. Have their interventions and initiatives produced the results they were targeting? If so, are they happening fast enough? What has worked, and what hasn't? Just as with any commercial objective, leaders need to know what is working and tweak the plan accordingly.

By measuring and assessing data around returners after parental leave; the appointment, retention and promotion of different demographics; and employee sentiment in engagement surveys, companies can assess which parts of their D&I strategy are having a real, tangible impact.

Retailers must remain focused on holding themselves to account

As the broader ESG agenda evolves, and many retailers grapple with their own current financial performance, CEOs and HR Directors reported in the last year finding themselves under less scrutiny on D&I from their Boards and investors. This is particularly true of retailers which are privately owned or PE-backed, and therefore not included in external reviews such as FTSE Women Leaders and the Parker Review. Against this backdrop, there is a growing need to ensure retailers are held to account on the impact of their D&I initiatives – and not let a high volume of activity be substitute for genuine results. Board members must continue to hold their executives to account on progress on D&I – despite other, possibly more immediate, challenges that Boards need to address in the short term.

Assessing impact of D&I activity is the next critical step

While almost every business is engaging in D&I in some way (even those companies without specific D&I strategies have informal employee resource groups, for example), this is not translating into meaningful change – both in specific areas like representation of women on Boards and on the overall happiness of employees in the industry, as shown in the Employee Inclusion Index.

Women leaders: The dial is not moving fast enough at senior levels, but there is a strengthening pipeline

Only gradual progress has been made on gender diversity

Looking at the industry's leadership, our analysis found that only incremental progress has been made on gender diversity at the most senior levels.

On the Board and Executive Committee, the proportion of women has remained steady, or increased only slightly, since last year.

On the Board, 37.8% of all positions are held by women, compared with 37.5% last year, and 32.6% in 2021. On the executive committee, 36.7% of roles are held by women, up from 34.2% last year and 32.0% in 2021. Change is not happening quickly enough – and more focused efforts will be needed to reach gender parity.

More positively, there is a strengthening pipeline of women leaders

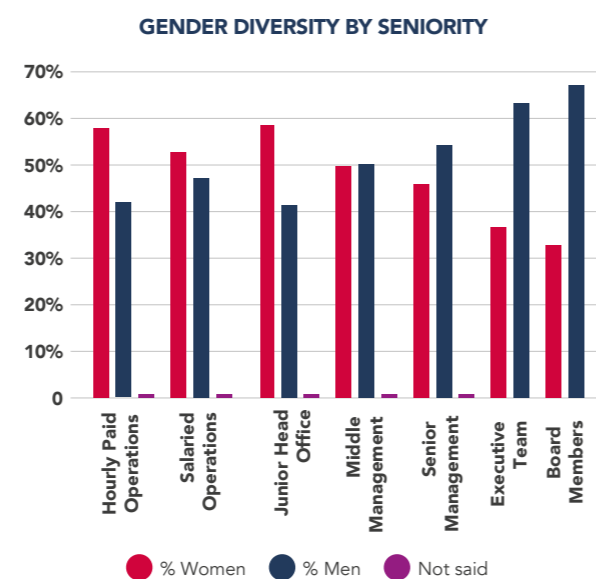
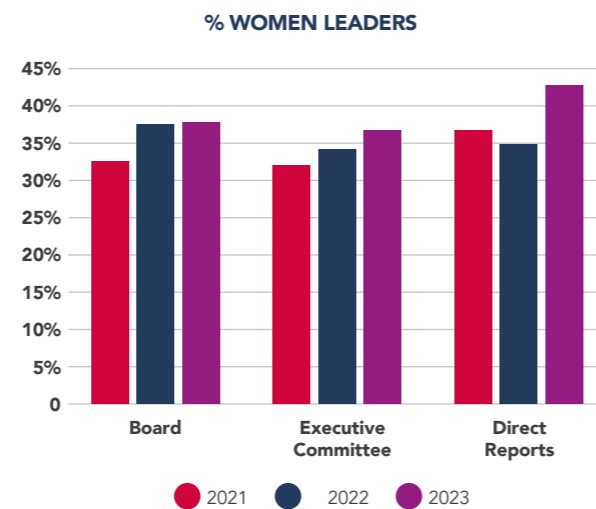
The proportion of women at direct reports level has jumped by 8% from 34.8% to 42.8% in the last year, reversing the backwards step that was made between 2021 and 2022.

When it comes to D&I strategies, the introduction of flexible working was frequently cited as an effective way to drive up gender diversity in the middle levels. Many businesses also reported to have redesigned their policies around parental leave, and brought in support for women experiencing menopause symptoms.

Looking at the wider workforce there is evidence of incremental improvement

Notably, the split between men and women is far less pronounced at senior management and middle management level.

Compared to the previous year's results, representation of women has increased considerably at the junior head office and middle management level, pushing the overall head office gender balance in favour of women. Overall, there is strong representation of women in the retail workforce, who make up 53% of all employees.



Industry insights

"We've now got 21% more women in regional manager roles than four years ago, and 12% more women as directors. We've never had a greater range of talented women at those levels, but it hasn't yet translated to the Board." – CEO, specialist retailer

"We still hear a surprising amount of negative feedback from men about our gender diversity efforts." – HRD, specialist retailer

"A few small changes have really helped increase the proportion of women at the middle levels. Adding flexible working options has made a real difference, as has making operational changes – like removing the requirement in certain stores for heavy furniture to be moved around so often." – HRD, specialist retailer

There is a startling lack of women in the most senior strategic positions. Out of more than 200 businesses, the number of women in Chair, CEO and CFO positions can be easily listed below.¹

Women Retail Chairs

- Alison Brittain – Dunelm
- Annette Court – WH Smith
- Bridget McIntyre – Notcutts
- Carolyn Bradley – The Works
- Debbie Hewitt – White Stuff
- Desiree Bollier – Value Retail
- Helena Feltham – Ted Baker (interim)
- John Lewis – Sharon White
- Kate Hobhouse – Fortnum and Mason
- Kate Swann – Moonpig
- Philomena Clark – Arnold Clark
- Sarah Tremellen – Bravissimo
- Susanne Given – Hush

Women Retail CEOs

- Alison Hands – Lincolnshire Co-op
- Alison Loehnis – Yoox Net-A-Porter (interim)
- Anna Blackburn – Beaverbrooks
- Beth Butterwick – Jigsaw
- Carol Welch – A.F. Blakemore & Son
- Debbie Robinson – Central Co-op
- Gill Smith – The Perfume Shop
- Gwynn Milligan – Jojo Maman Bebe
- Hannah Connolly – New Look
- Hannah Gibson – Ocado Retail
- Jo Jenkins – White Stuff Limited
- Jo Whitfield – Matalan
- Julia Straus – Sweaty Betty
- Julie Abraham – Richer Sounds
- Karen Bird – McColl's (interim)
- Katie Bickerstaffe – M&S (co-CEO)
- Leanne Cahill – Bravissimo
- Leanne Rothwell – Notonthehighstreet
- Louise Hoste – Spar UK
- Lyssa McGowan – Pets at Home
- Manju Malhotra – Harvey Nichols
- Mary Homer – The White Company
- Rachel Osborne – Ted Baker
- Roisin Currie – Greggs
- Sarah Boyd – Sephora UK
- Sarah Miles – Hush
- Shirine Khoury-Haq – The Co-op

Women Retail CFOs

- Amanda James – Next
- Berangere Michel – JLP
- Bláthnaid Bergin – Sainsbury's
- Claire Dines – The Perfume Shop
- Claire Wain – Monsoon Accessorize
- Emma Hillyard – Waterstones
- Jo Hartley – Halfords
- Joanna Goff – Morrisons
- Julie Wirth – Wickes
- Karen Witts – Dunelm
- Kate Ferry – Burberry
- Rachel Izzard – The Co-op
- Rachel Tongue – Games Workshop
- Rebecca Scott – Sephora UK

¹ Index accurate as of 30/05/23

Ethnically diverse leaders: Leadership teams are becoming more diverse, but progress is not widespread

Ethnic diversity has increased markedly since we began our research

At leadership level, the proportion of ethnically diverse leaders on retail Boards has increased to 10%, more than double the 2021 figure. On the executive committee and at direct reports level, the proportion of ethnically diverse leaders has increased to 9.1% and 11.3%, up from 5.8% and 6.0% in 2021.

This should be recognised as significant progress. These figures represent a large jump from when our research began, and they are also close to reflecting the proportion of ethnic diverse leaders across the entire workforce. One in eight (13%) respondents to the employee survey are from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background.

However, there is still a way to go, and progress has slowed significantly since last year

Retail leadership teams do not yet reflect the communities they serve: in the 2021 UK Census, it was found that 18.3% of the population in the England and Wales do not identify as white. Moreover, there is still a large proportion of retail businesses with no ethnic diversity on their Board at all. Just under a third (30%) of retailers in the UK have all-white Boards.

Away from leadership, there is significantly greater Black and mixed representation at both store and head office level than in last year's findings. The findings in relation to ethnicity in this year's survey are likely to be more reliable due to the considerably higher response rates to relevant questions.

There is also evidence of improving employee progression for ethnic minorities: Black and Asian representation improved at middle-management compared to the previous year, and overall representation of ethnic minorities improved in junior head-office roles (at 14%, up from 11%). However, the middle management category saw less overall ethnic diversity than recorded in last year's survey (11%, down from 17%). However, this was skewed by a much greater "other" cohort in last year's survey.

Almost all D&I strategies include ethnic diversity as an area of focus. However, data is not complete, and too few companies are focusing on specific populations, such as Black leaders.

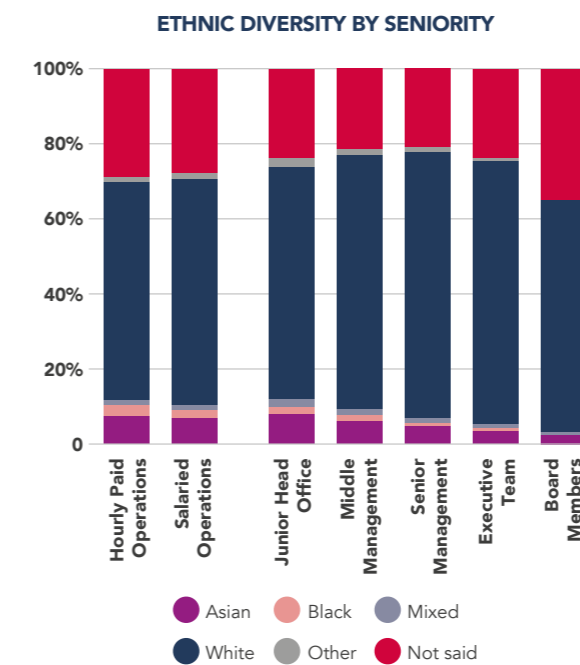
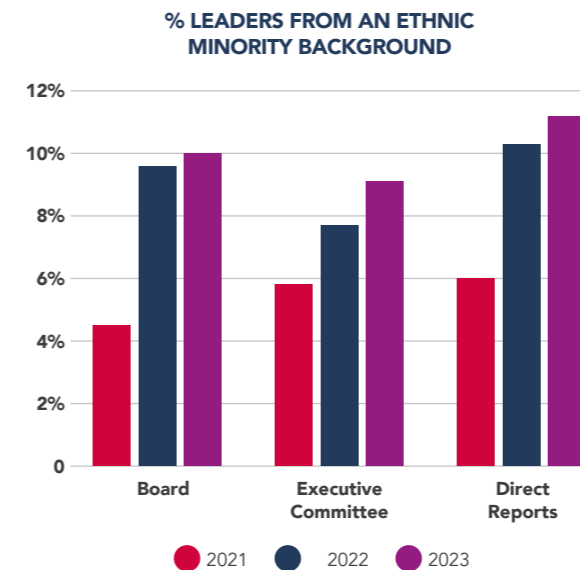
Progress on ethnic diversity is not widespread

Too many businesses still have all-white Boards. Nearly a third (30%) of all retailers have no Board members from an ethnic minority background.

COMPANIES WITH ALL-WHITE BOARDS



All-white Boards



Industry insights

“We have a Race and Ethnicity Advisory Board now. It’s sort of a step up from an employee network. We meet with them on a quarterly basis and they advise us on the work we’re doing on D&I and other areas of the business.” – CEO, specialist retailer

“We’re launching two development programmes for colleagues from minority ethnic backgrounds this year.” – HRD, specialist retailer

“What we’ve got on our strategy this year is a deep-dive of colleague experience. So, we’re reviewing what it feels like for ethnic minority colleagues to work at our business.” – D&I lead, grocer

Disability: The retail industry lacks Disabled role models, and data on Disability

17% Retailers with at least one Disabled senior leader

80% Retailers which include Disability in their D&I strategy

The Disabled community in retail is underrepresented and underserved

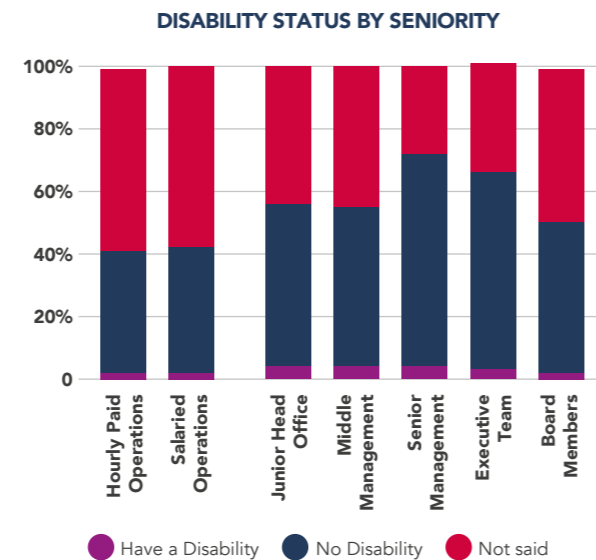
There are very few Disabled role models at a senior level. In 2023, only 17% of retailers could identify a Disabled role model in the top levels of their organisation (slightly up from 15% in 2022). In the overall workforce, 6% of respondents said that they had some form of Disability. Disabled employees are more greatly represented in head-office roles and most likely to occupy either a junior head-office or middle-to senior-management role. However, Disability data typically has a wide margin of error, with a considerable proportion of 'prefer not to say' responses.

Encouragingly, an increasing proportion of businesses are identifying Disability as a specific area of focus within their D&I strategy

Today, 80% of companies have Disability as a specific focus area of their strategy, a significant increase from 2021, when only half included Disability in their strategies. Many retailers have specific initiatives in place to educate colleagues on neurodivergent conditions such as autism.

However, inclusion initiatives are not having a meaningful impact

The number of Disabled senior leaders is still very low (which in turn stalls progress as Disabled employees lack role models), and the Employee Inclusion Index found that Disabled employees have the lowest feelings of inclusion across all characteristics.



Industry insights

"We've found that Disabled employees have inconsistent experiences. If they had good managers, they had fantastic experiences. Poor managers, poor experiences. We're undertaking a comprehensive audit of our Disability practices, to standardise our approach, and improve the workplace for all our Disabled colleagues." – D&I Head, grocer

"We have little data on Disability. So we're starting with education and inclusion, creating an environment in which people feel comfortable disclosing their Disability." – CEO, pharmacy

Sexual orientation: Representation of LGBTQ+ colleagues is high, but inclusion can be improved

64% Retailers with at least one LGBTQ+ senior leader

88% Retailers which include LGBTQ+ in their D&I strategy

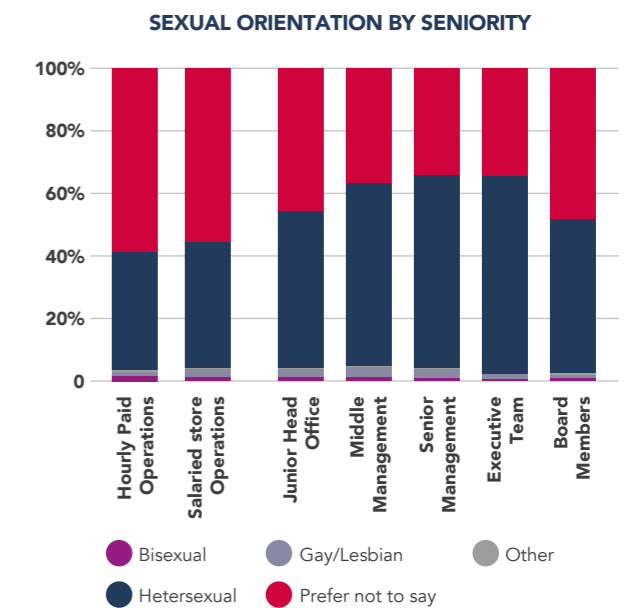
There is lots of LGBTQ+ inclusion activity in retail

Almost all (88%) of D&I strategies have a specific focus on LGBTQ+ inclusion, and senior role models are common in the sector. This year, 64% of businesses could identify at least one senior leader from the LGBTQ+ community, compared with 47% in 2022 and 27% in 2021. Within the area of LGBTQ+, the most advanced retailers have inclusion and educational activities related to gender identity and the transgender community.

The workforce is becoming increasingly more diverse from an LGBTQ+ perspective

Looking to the broader workforce, from those that responded, 8.2% were identified as bisexual, gay or lesbian, and other. This marks an increase on last year, when LGBTQ+ representation was estimated at 7.3%. Moreover, this figure is higher than the reported level of LGBTQ+ representation in the UK population, which is 3.2%, which suggests higher levels of feeling included.

However, these figures have greater uncertainty surrounding them given the relatively lower overall response rates compared to other diversity characteristics in the survey. Looking to the Employee Inclusion Index, LGBTQ+ colleagues gave the most negative answers on feelings of belonging and fair treatment, these sentiments were driven by a lack of recognition and fewer individuals feeling happy at work.



Industry insights

"We've found role models to be incredibly beneficial when it comes to LGBTQ+ inclusion. Having senior people who are from that community breeds a strong culture of inclusion, acceptance and encouragement." – CEO, specialist retailer

"The proportion of employees who tell us that they identify as trans, non-binary, gender-fluid or gender-non-conforming has gone from 2% to 5% this year. People are so much more confident to disclose that kind of information with us than they were a few years ago. Having an open and educational dialogue about LGBTQ+ has made such a difference culturally." – HRD, fashion retailer

"One of the things we've done this year is train every leader in allyship." – HRD, fashion retailer

Social mobility: The industry encourages social mobility

75%

Retailers with at least one senior leader who demonstrates social mobility

65%

Retailers including social mobility in their D&I strategy

Retail is known for being an industry which encourages social mobility

Historically, retail has been seen as an industry in which an employee can progress from the shop floor to the Boardroom. While there are notable examples of leaders for whom this is the case, in the past few decades this has become more of a myth than a reality. Today, progress on social mobility is closely linked to progress on other areas of diversity, especially ethnic diversity.

Since our research began, we've seen a dramatic increase in the proportion of businesses focusing on social mobility

Just 20% of businesses focused on social mobility in 2021. This increased to 59% in 2022, and now 65% in 2023. Our analysis found that there are plenty of senior role models who demonstrate social mobility: three-quarters of respondents could identify at least one leader in the top-three levels who demonstrated social mobility. From a strategies perspective, many businesses are focusing on social mobility through their recruitment, often by partnering with charities, schools or colleges to reach a wider pool of candidates from different socio-economic backgrounds. The retailers with the most mature strategies have apprenticeship schemes in place, and mentoring programmes to support colleagues through their careers.

“”

Industry insights

“Our company feels like a good place for social mobility. More than 85% of our store managers started on the shop floor.” – HRD, specialist retailer

“The area of data that we're really not capturing well at the moment is social mobility. There are so many different ways of measuring it.” – CEO, department store retailer

“We get around 50% answer rate on questions relating to social mobility. This might be good in some businesses, but we're hitting 80% on other areas.” – D&I lead, grocer

“We're asking questions like: What type of school did you go to? Were you eligible for free school meals? What job did your parents do when you were 14? And what level of education did you get to?” – HRD, grocer

However, to ensure that social mobility is carried right the way through the organisation, businesses should analyse the different routes up to the executive committee. While it may be easy to progress from team member to manager in the industry, very few of retail's most senior leaders have operational backgrounds, for example.

Across the industry, the biggest challenge related to driving up social mobility is collecting adequate data. In conversations with leaders, a lack of data was consistently cited as a barrier to progress.

Age: The retail industry is broadly inclusive of all ages

35%

Retailers including age in their D&I strategy

Retail is known for being an industry with a diverse range of ages in the workforce

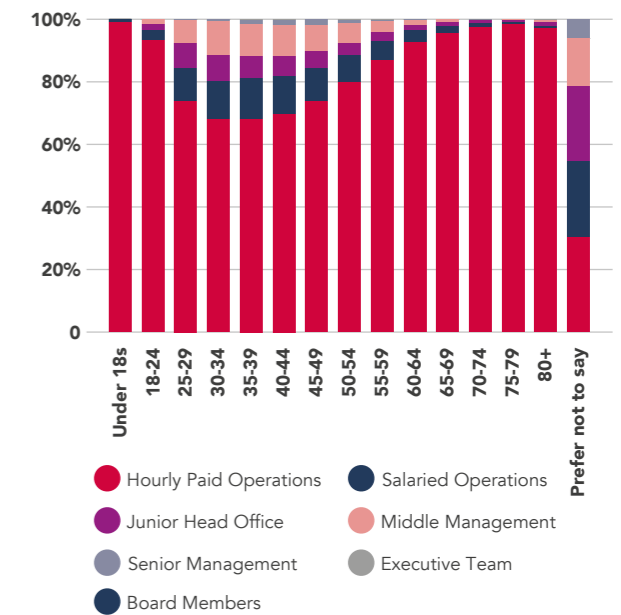
Perhaps because of this, few businesses have age as a specific area of focus – only 35% of companies reported to include age in their D&I strategy.

While a significant proportion of the workforce tends to be younger, all age groups have considerable representation in operational roles. It is clear that retail offers meaningful opportunities for a very broad age range of colleagues. The role of retail as a “gateway” employer is shown by the very significant representation of young people in the retail workforce. At the same time, the opportunities which exist in head office and at senior levels is also clearly demonstrated. There is no evidence that a colleague's age inhibits progression.

Compared to last year's survey, the age distribution and accompanying skew remains very similar. The younger you are, the more likely you are to be in an operational or junior role. The older you are (up to retirement age), the more likely you are to occupy a senior role.

It is worth adding that the age distribution has one main peak and extends further towards higher age groups, hence hourly paid operations roles are greatly represented at both the youngest and oldest age cohorts. The flexible nature of retail means it attracts a variety of people from different backgrounds at different stages of life.

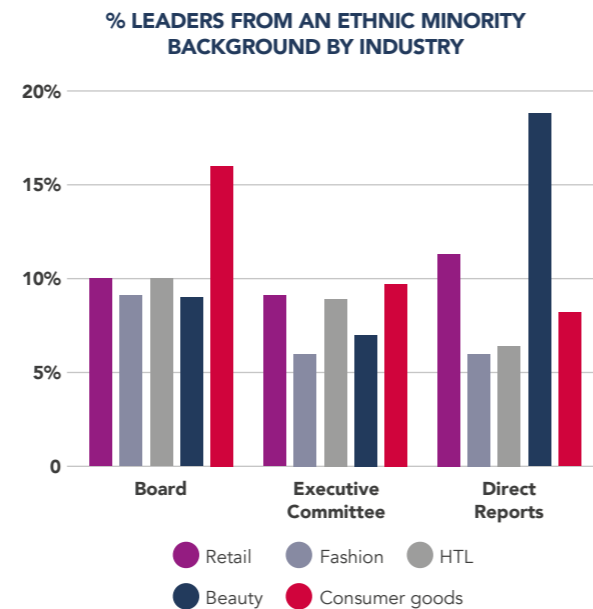
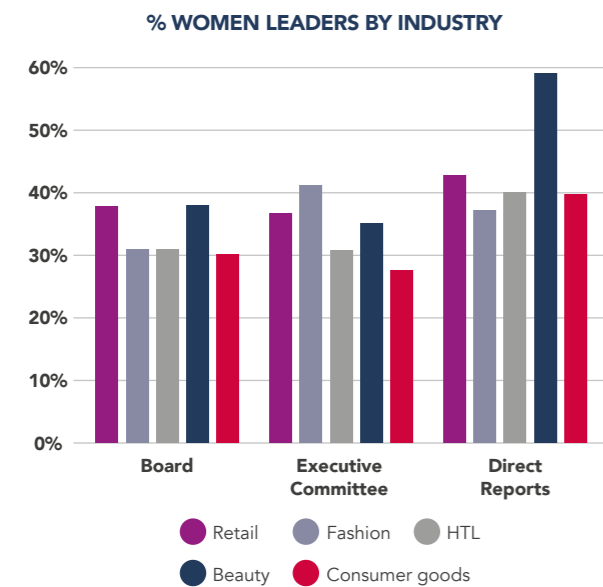
AGE BY SENIORITY



Thinking broadly: diversity across and beyond retail

On gender diversity at the most senior levels, retail is slightly behind the benchmark met by FTSE 350 businesses, with 40% women on Boards (37% of board roles in retail are held by women). On ethnic minority leaders, 30% of companies still have all-white Boards, compared with 4% on the FTSE 100 and 33% on the FTSE 250.

Looking at adjacent consumer-facing industries, retail is performing comparatively well on both gender and ethnic diversity.



Within the industry, there is a widening gap between the businesses performing well on D&I and those falling behind. Our research found that, with some notable exceptions, bigger companies with larger budgets have more diverse teams, and undertake a higher number of inclusion activities throughout the year.

By contrast, smaller companies are more greatly constrained by limitations on budget and time. In some retailers, responsibility for D&I falls with one or two individuals.

Industry insights

“D&I is my Saturday job” – HRD, smaller retailer

“In a small company, we find it difficult to create an environment that feels diverse, but also doesn’t exclude certain members of our team.” – CEO, specialist retailer

“We still get push-back. And when you’re not a large business, those voices have a real impact.” – HRD, specialist retailer

The Employee Inclusion Index

There is no strict definition to assess the views of people within a business on how included they feel. But there are sources of data which give us a perspective.

This section looks at if inclusion initiatives are being felt at every level. Using the Retail Trust's Better You tool, we have created an assessment of inclusion based on the views of 2,000 individuals across different demographic characteristics in retail.

It should be noted that those responding to the Better You survey are retail workers who have come to the Retail Trust themselves, rather than a wider sample.

An assessment of inclusion

There are data sources which provide insight on whether retail employees feel there is an inclusive culture. This analysis draws upon:

- The WorkL Workplace Happiness Test, which includes crowdsourced employee experience data on over 300,000 individuals in different industries.
- The Retail Trust Better You happiness assessment, which uses data collected from people within retail, to assess employee wellbeing in the retail industry.

Using the Retail Trust's Better You tool, we have created an assessment of inclusion based on the views of 2,000 individuals across different demographic characteristics in retail.

The question set was chosen to provide indicators of an individual's perspective and feeling of inclusion: fair treatment; trust/communications; involvement in decision-making; sense of belonging; and feelings of psychological safety.

In summary we see:

- Retail is the "unhappiest" industry to work in according to WorkL's most recent Employee Experience Report with employee engagement of 66% compared to closer to 75% in technology and marketing/advertising which hold two of the three top spots;
- Retail Trust's latest Health of Retail report found that 83% of retail employees have experienced a deterioration in their mental health and 54% of managers felt unequipped to deal with their team's mental health issues.
- It also found that nearly a third wanted to leave retail as a career. However this may be indicative of a national trend: six in ten employees are considering changing their job this year, according to data gathered by LinkedIn.
- In looking at our analysis of inclusion indicators specifically, we see that feelings of empowerment and trust and pay score relatively highly whereas recognition, employee voice and an overall feeling of "happiness" in work score the lowest.

And in assessing different diversity characteristics:

- There is strong evidence that some groups have a more positive experience in retail than others.
- Those who reported disabilities and those who describe their sexual orientation as "other" have the lowest feelings of inclusion across all characteristics.
- Across different ethnicity characteristics, there is a wide variation between the highest and lowest. Asian/ Arab/ Black/ African/ and Caribbean cohorts score higher than White/other/prefer not to say counterparts but mixed/multiple ethnic groups score the lowest of all ethnicity groups.
- Across different age ranges, there is less variation. 25-34-year-olds have the most negative assessment of inclusion (fair treatment, belonging, feeling happy at work and involvement in decision making are all issues) whereas older people have the best assessment;
- The gender breakdown suggests women feel slightly more included than males, though both positively assessed their relationship with their manager as well as being trusted to make decisions. However, a significantly lower score was observed in the "other/prefer not to say" cohort, who gave a significantly lower score, particularly for feeling like they belong.

In detail

Across the 12 questions chosen to indicate an assessment of inclusion: fair treatment: trust/communications: involvement in decision-making; sense of belonging; feelings of psychological safety; and two overarching questions, we see a wide variation of 0.8 between the highest and the lowest scores. The respondent gives an assessment between 0 and 10, where 0 is disagree and 10 is agree.

We have created an Index from the average of the answers to enable us to track progress over time. This "Employee Inclusion Index" currently stands at 6.2.

QUESTION	SCORE	INCLUSION THEME
I have a good relationship with my manager	7.0	Overarching
I am trusted to make decisions	6.7	Decision-Making
I have enough information (and training) to do my job well	6.7	Trust/Communication
I am treated with respect	6.5	Psychological Safety
I am fairly paid	6.3	Fair Treatment
I feel proud to work for my organisation	6.3	Overarching
I am happy (and feel safe) with my working environment	6.2	Psychological Safety
My employer cares for my well-being	6.0	Belonging
Information is regularly and openly shared with me	5.9	Trust/Communication
My view are heard at work	5.8	Decision-Making
I am recognised when I do something well	5.7	Fair-Treatment
I feel happy at work	5.6	Belonging
Overall	6.2	

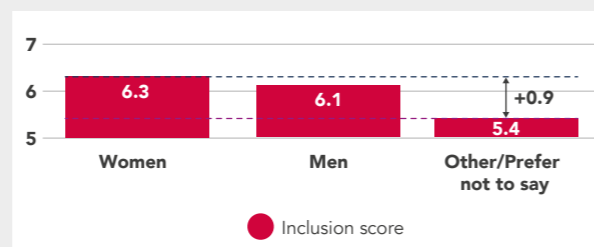
Source: BRC analysis of Retail Trust survey data.

Gender

Inclusion scores split by gender gave the most positive responses in the decision-making (with respondents feeling trusted to make decisions) and overarching themes but lowest in belonging and fair treatment (recognition was scored at a low level).

The cohort of women scored highest, followed closely by males (6.3 and 6.1 respectively). While it is positive that women scored high average scores, there were signs of further improvements needed to better inclusion, with the 'other/prefer not to say' scoring the lowest of all groups.

The women cohort encouragingly rated being trusted to make decisions highly, however they responded less positively on having their views heard at work. The male cohort rated highly having a good relationship with their manager and many also felt they were being recognised sufficiently.

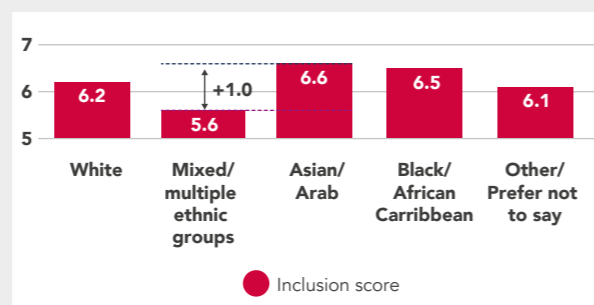


Ethnicity

Inclusion scores were highest responding to the overarching (particularly around good relationships managers) psychological safety questions but lowest in belonging and fair treatment.

The Asian-Arab as well as Black/African/Caribbean cohorts scored most highly, while White and 'other/prefer not to say' cohorts (6.2 and 6.1 respectively) were in the middle of the pack. Whilst positive that certain minority ethnic groups scored more highly, there remain signs of more progress needed, with mixed/multiple ethnic groups scoring the lowest of all groups.

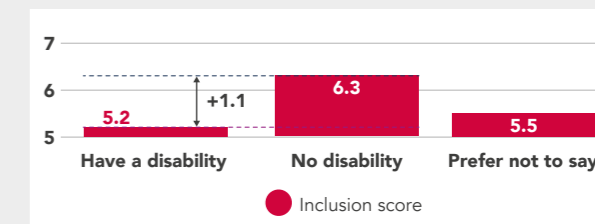
Asian-Arab as well as Black/African/Caribbean cohorts encouragingly rated decision-making quite highly suggesting these groups felt most empowered to give their views and take business decisions.



Disability

Within respondents reporting a disability, the lowest inclusion scores were noted in belonging and involvement in decision-making. Those with disabilities had fewer individuals feeling happy at work and many did not feel their views were heard.

Across the cohort reporting no disability, the highest scores were in the overarching questions and psychological safety.



Sexual orientation

Across the themes, inclusion scores were again highest in the overarching questions and psychological safety but lowest in belonging. Unsurprising to some degree, with heterosexuals comprising the majority of respondents, though there was a marked difference between the heterosexual and LGBTQ+ cohorts in how many felt proud to work for their organisation.

The LGBTQ+ cohort recorded higher scores in the trust/communications and overarching questions, particularly around feeling they had 'enough information (and training) to do my job well' and having 'a good relationship with my manager'. This group scored feeling of belonging and fair treatment most negatively. Motivating these sentiments were a lack of recognition and fewer individuals feeling happy at work.

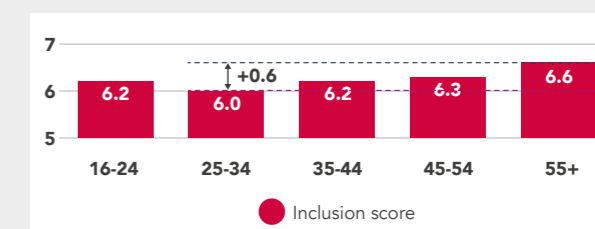


Age

25-34-year-olds had the most negative assessment of inclusion whereas older people the best:

The 55+ cohort recorded the highest scores in the trust/communications and in two overarching questions. Respondents were particularly positive about having 'enough information (and training) to do my job well' and having 'a good relationship with my manager'. However, this cohort recorded the lowest scores under decision-making and fair treatment.

The 25-34 cohort scored highest in the overarching and decision-making questions, noting having good relations with management and feeling that they are trusted to make decisions. However, lower inclusion scores were registered under the themes of fair treatment and belonging, similarly citing a lack of recognition, and scoring 'feeling happy at work' low.





Industry insights: case studies from retailers

Examples of best practice can be found right across the industry, in companies of all sizes and scopes. In the case studies over the next few pages, businesses at different stages of their D&I journey share insight on how they are driving up diversity and promoting inclusion in their organisation. From harnessing employee networks to leveraging data, these case studies provide practical examples of effective ways to increase representation and foster an inclusive environment in retail.



Zahoor Ahmad

Head of Social Mobility, Inclusion and Belonging

You joined Co-op around a year ago. What have been your priorities for the diversity and inclusion agenda?

Fundamentally, my mission is to eliminate any unfairness at the Co-op and support the creation of an environment where you have a diverse mix of people, and that diversity is thriving. Since I've been in role, I've been evaluating our D&I foundations, and looking at our strategy through an intersectional lens – which includes everything from race and gender to social class.

We've got a handful of priorities, around gathering more robust data, developing the recruitment pipeline to be more diverse, and also looking at how to tackle the pockets of poor behaviour that happen in any organisation.

How are you developing your recruitment strategy to promote diversity?

Our recruitment strategy covers everything from how we advertise roles through to considering the exit rates of different groups – it's the entire colleague journey.

Our starting point was looking at areas of the business where we had underrepresentation in applications,

and then taking a very targeted approach to progress. So, in funeral care, for example, we have comparatively few applications from young people, and underrepresentation of colleagues from a minority ethnic background. We looked specifically at how we could increase the diversity of applications to our funeral care business. We began that process last year, and we've now seen a small but significant step-change in the number of applications from candidates in those groups. This is really positive – showing that the targeted approach works.

We're also building a whole new set of recruitment interventions, to stamp out unconscious bias and put in place checks and balances. So, for example, if there are nine women and one man on a shortlist and the man gets the role, that could be fine once – the decision must always be based on merit. But if it happens again and again, we need to be able to scrutinise the decision-making and make sure that biases aren't taking control.

If our recruitment pipeline strategy is fair, then we should see proportional rates of people from different characteristics joining our organisation at different levels. That's where I want our focus to be, and that's what I'm measuring quarter on quarter. It's interesting stuff!

What is your strategy for analysing diversity data at Co-op?

There are two things I'm looking for when it comes to data. The first is where I've got underrepresentation of different groups. And the second is where groups are having a disproportionate impact in the organisation. If you can look at both those areas through an intersectional lens, you can see how different groups are experiencing our systems and processes in different ways. That's the space we're in now.

We've heard from many retail leaders that bad behaviour from a minority of colleagues is still common in the sector. How are you addressing this at Co-op?

It's one of our core priorities. When I joined, one of the things I wanted to build was an understanding of how problematic behaviour can be normalised, and then escalate to harassment. Once teams understand that, they can spot it and eliminate it.

So we've introduced a colleague code of conduct, which will be rolled out across the entire business, including our retail and logistics units.

We've also begun to develop what we're calling 'speak up guardians' – who are people that colleagues can speak with on the phone if they've experienced, or witnessed, bad behaviour. We want people to be able to have those conversations in a psychologically safe, non-pressured way.

The example I give is around eliminating sexual harassment. Imagine if you're a young woman working in retail, and you're being made to feel uncomfortable by your male manager. Who do you actually talk to? Inevitably, what's happened in the past is that no-one says anything until it becomes an overt case of sexual harassment. Essentially, the business has failed that individual because they've not been provided the tools to speak up. So our 'speak up guardians' programme is designed to give people a safe and secure communication channel to voice any concerns, or share their experiences, before a situation escalates.

We know that D&I strategies work best when they're owned by leaders at the very top of the organisation. Is this the case at Co-op?

Absolutely. And we've built it into our processes. Every member of our executive committee – our operating Board – has objectives associated with diversity and inclusion, to support reaching our goals relating to

recruitment and eliminating bad behaviour. Their compensation and bonuses are linked to those targets.

The executive committee also plays a big role in encouraging our colleagues to give their data. Our most senior leaders have to be fluent in explaining why we're gathering personal information, and what we're going to do with it. If they're uncertain, then that uncertainty will inevitably trickle down. I did a very thorough briefing with our executive committee to make sure they could confidently articulate our data strategy.

A key theme from this year's research is the need to evaluate the impact of D&I activity. What does this look like at Co-op?

I'm really keen that we don't have motion without progress. You often see businesses pump a lot of money into high-profile D&I events and speakers, but it doesn't move the dial – largely because companies don't know the problem they're trying to solve.

We're aware of what we're trying to change, and what progress looks like. So every quarter, I go back to the operating Board and I'm able to tell them exactly what progress we've made, backed up by data. This is very important.

A model for measuring maturity is a good way to understand how you're doing. We've been working on one internally, and I've working with various different standards and models over the years. I'm relatively new in retail, so I am keen to see what others are using so we can begin benchmarking ourselves as a sector. The diversity of organisations and organisational models within the sector makes that a difficult task if it is going to be really meaningful for everyone. It is always useful to identify a number of key measures that can act as indicators of maturity, such as diverse representation, but the cultural dimension is harder to measure and of equal importance and probably quite nuanced in many ways to the organisation and its history. That is where the individual organisational challenge lies.



Roisin Currie
Chief Executive

How has the D&I agenda evolved at Greggs?

We have made huge progress in recent years in D&I at Greggs – so this last period has been about really pushing them further. We started small, but a fire was ignited throughout the business, and our D&I agenda and programmes are just getting bigger and bigger.

Only half of retailers have specific programmes in place to drive up representation. Do you have initiatives like this at Greggs?

Our Women’s Development Programme has probably been our biggest success. When we launched the programme, it was all about potential. It was about identifying those who were demonstrating that they’d be great leaders. Now, it’s much broader. We’re looking for people who might not be demonstrating those kinds of behaviours – because of a lack of confidence, a lack of belief in themselves – and giving them the encouragement and support they need. I always use the phrase “putting our hand in the small of someone’s back and helping to push them forward.”

Through this programme, they can gain mentorship, hear from other senior role models, and learn that the roadblocks they might be experiencing have been felt by others, too. It’s been so powerful – and we’ve really noticed the impact of the programme on our promotion pipeline, and on the number of women stepping up to more senior roles.

We’re just about to apply what we’ve learnt with the women’s programme to the ethnicity space, and bring people together to share their experiences.

Employee networks play an important role in driving D&I. How does this play out at Greggs?

We’ve got diversity networks set up across the business: our women’s network, an ethnicity network, a disability inclusion network and an LGBTQ+ group. We’ve got Board sponsors on each of those networks, and also an overall diversity steering group, whose role it is to take the common threads which come out of the networks and tie them together to come up with solutions.

Networks are open to anyone in the business – so you might identify as part of that community, or you might just be interested in learning more or helping to drive progress in that area.

The groups have absolute freedom, and as they’ve each got Board-level sponsors, they can make a real impact. Thanks to our ethnicity group, for example, every Greggs shop now has a poster explaining that we’ve got a zero-tolerance policy on harassment. Shop workers can face real abuse across the sector, but that was something we hadn’t actively tackled until our ethnicity group pushed it and it’s had a really positive impact on our shop teams who tell us it helps them to feel heard and supported.

How do you design the networks to be most effective?

I think it’s important that you don’t constrain them too much. Because what they’re really doing is bringing us ideas for a better business. They might be starting with a D&I lens, but every single person is benefitting from their ideas. If you let the groups act without constraints, then their influence will bubble through up the organisation.

What partnerships do you have in place to provide support on D&I?

Third-party partnerships are so important to us. We often reach out to different external bodies,

looking for support and subject matter expertise on different areas of D&I – I think there are many areas where businesses just can’t do it all on their own.

On disability inclusion for example, we’ve got a few partners whom we work with on areas like physical disability, neurodiversity and deaf awareness. WorkFit is the Down’s Syndrome Association’s employment programme, and we’ve had a really excellent experience with them. In Cardiff, we have a retail colleague with Down’s Syndrome who’s been with us for about five years. When he joined, WorkFit provided one-to-one support with him, showing him what to do alongside our retail colleagues, until he was ready for work. And now he’s such a core member of the team, bringing his talents to the job in a different way. And that’s really the beauty of partnerships: they’ve got the skills to start the journey, and then they pass the baton onto us.

We’ve also worked for a long time with the National Equality Standard, and in 2022 we achieved accreditation. They come in, audit our entire company, hold listening groups, undertake surveys and scrutinise our policies and processes. They point out where we’re doing well, but also highlight things we may have overlooked. They’ll look at a job advertisement, for example, and say “your language there doesn’t work. It will switch people off.” Having an external lens on your business is so valuable. You need someone that’s going to hold your feet to the fire.





Andy Moat
People Director

B&Q is now a few years into its new D&I strategy. What progress have you made – and what do you still need to address?

We're three years into our work on D&I. We started with a 10-point action plan in year one, then a five-point action plan in year two that we've refreshed for year three. So far, we've delivered all the basics such as reverse mentoring, inclusion networks and inclusive leadership training. This year, we're putting a big emphasis on allyship – sharing more on what's not acceptable, when to speak up and ultimately helping colleagues to understand how they can be an ally. We're doing this through education, raising awareness and empowerment. Our leaders set the tone in creating an inclusive environment and it's important that every colleague knows what's expected of them when it comes to being part of the team.

I think this year will be the last year of catching up on the fundamentals. Looking ahead, it'll be about continuing the work and ensuring inclusive day-to-day leadership. We need to make sure we're making the right decisions at every level, all the time.

I'm pleased with the progress we are making. Lots of people in our business are talking about D&I now. We all understand it, and we're having conversations we've never had before, which feels progressive. It no longer feels like a side project and it's becoming more integrated into our business-as-usual work.

Leading from the top is central to successful strategies. How are you doing this at B&Q?

D&I is one of the areas I lead most visibly on. It's really important to me. I'd say I probably spend up to 40% of my time on the D&I agenda, and it's the work I'm most proud of. Over the past few years, we've achieved significant change.

As part of that, it's important to lead by example – and that means admitting mistakes. We had a leadership conference last year, in which I invited a Muslim colleague onto the stage to accept an award. We presented him with a bottle of champagne but, of course, he doesn't drink. That was wrong.

At this year's conference, I invited him back up onto the stage and I apologised to him in public in front of our 500 leaders. We had an open conversation in front of the audience about how it had made him feel and how we can all be more aware and sensitive to others. We also discussed Ramadan and ways that managers can support their colleagues who are fasting. It felt like a complete transformation from the year before and a huge shift for us culturally, demonstrating how we are developing our cultural intelligence.

We know that data and reporting is critical to progress on D&I. How are you collecting and sharing information about diversity at B&Q?

We've made some real strides in the past year or so. Our first data collection campaign 'Power of You' launched towards the end of 2022. This is our way of capturing information from colleagues to find out more about our workforce and to better understand diversity. It's all collected on a voluntary basis and in a way that is GDPR compliant. A key part of the process up to this point has been educating colleagues around why we're collecting the data and how we're using it to help them make an informed decision as to whether they'd like to share their personal information with us.

We're also producing our first-ever workforce insight report which we're going to publish this summer. In this, we cover a range of demographics including race & ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion & belief and

self-identified gender. This report provides us with a strong baseline that we can measure against as we move forward.

How are you embracing D&I in your recruitment?

Following an end-to-end recruitment review that we carried out last year, we're doing a few things. Our role profiles have been refreshed to prevent us using gender bias language. We're also posting all vacancies, making them more visible than before and giving internal colleagues the chance to apply. This has been a huge unlock for us with colleagues securing roles that they could've potentially missed out on before.

We're also trialling diverse interview panels - to make sure every panel has good representation and to challenge ourselves on making more inclusive recruitment decisions such as hiring colleagues that add to our culture as opposed to whether they're seen as a culture fit.

You've increased the proportion of women at key levels like regional manager and store manager. Is there anything in particular that you feel has enabled this progress?

I think it's the overall cultural proposition that B&Q is taking. 'Care' is a critical pillar of our leadership signature, but this doesn't mean it's about looking at things purely from a wellbeing perspective. We all recognise that care is important but it's more than that. We want our leaders to feel that they have the flexibility, trust and empowerment to take care of themselves, their teams, and our brand.

You don't find this in many retailers, and it's really motivating people to join and progress within B&Q. With 'care' being such a significant part of what we do, it's allowing us to tap into a talent pool of excellent women leaders and many have shared that the way they're asked to lead at B&Q is different from other retailers or places they've worked before.

What advice would you give to leaders looking to drive-up the D&I agenda in their business?

I think one of the things that's worked well in B&Q has been boldly sharing our plan and updating on progress. Doing this over the last few years has built trust with our leaders and colleagues because they have the confidence that we're delivering against what we've committed to and they're very supportive of the agenda. I'm really keen to listen too, and this has been so helpful throughout our D&I work. It's only when you connect with lots of people to understand their lived experiences and perspectives that you can truly appreciate the opportunity we all have to make a difference in this space.

It's no secret that having a strong commitment to D&I has so many benefits to a business. From recognising the potential of your people and increasing colleague engagement, to improving customer relations and how you're perceived as a brand. And, it undoubtedly makes a difference to the bottom line. Looking back, when businesses started to focus on sustainability they didn't just do it because it's the right thing to do but because it made sound business sense. It's the same for D&I - if you're not pushing ahead to create significant change, you're simply not doing enough and in today's world I don't think any organization can win, thrive and grow in the long term without embracing this.



Lucy Clough
Group People Director

ScS is fairly early on its diversity and inclusion journey. What are your main priorities as you increase focus on D&I?

I'm in my second year as People Director at ScS, and D&I is a big part of my three-year plan. I want to support and retain the talent we do have, and bring new demographics into our workforce.

It's not only the right thing to do, but it's good for the business. The best teams I've ever worked in have been the ones with a mixture of thought processes, belief systems, and cultural backgrounds.

So at ScS, my focus is on key initiatives like D&I training at senior leadership and middle management level, and looking how we can change our operational processes on the ground to really make ScS a more inclusive place to work. I'm also thinking carefully about how we can move the organisation forward from a cultural perspective – I really want this to be a family-friendly, flexible place to work, for example. It's exciting. Small steps, but we're beginning to see small changes, too.

As you kick off your D&I strategy, have you got support from the Board?

I'm pleased to say that we do. At the very top level, we're having really open conversations and debate about how we look after our people from an inclusion standpoint, and also how we drive up representation. I'm really being challenged, especially around supporting and retaining our female talent.

What are the biggest challenges you face?

We've had to disassemble mechanisms that were inadvertently stalling progress. For example, there used to be a policy in place which required furniture to be moved around a store very regularly. As a result, we hired more men than we did women, as men were typically more comfortable shifting heavy furniture. So, we're really having to rethink our policies and processes.

What steps have you already taken?

We're encouraging a much wider take-up of flexible working options, which we've never done before. We're aiming for two colleagues working flexibly per store, which will hopefully encourage more women and those with other caring responsibilities to apply.

We've also got a few leadership programmes – our 'Moving on Up' scheme, and a Business Management Programme. Thanks to these schemes, we're really beginning to see more women leaders coming through our organisation which is fantastic.

Across the sector, we've seen many businesses invest in senior leadership training this year. Is this something you've embraced at ScS?

Yes! We'd never before invested in leadership development – it just wasn't a priority before. But now, we're introducing training and support for our senior leaders and middle management how exactly we can

create the right culture to support our workforce. How do we talk about people's cultures? How do we address different religions and beliefs? How do we really make sure we're inclusive of everybody? Our CEO, Steve Carson, really leads this agenda.

What lessons have you learnt in ensuring that D&I is a priority in your organisation?

It is about analysing statistics and consistently measuring and reviewing progress. Having the topic on the agenda, and understanding progress maybe take some time, but any forward steps are good thing and should be embraced. It's also remembering change is a marathon and not a sprint.

What advice would you give to other businesses looking to kickstart their D&I journey?

Start somewhere, even small. Have the data to understand your starting point and build from there. Role models are key to helping people believe that barriers can break down, and helping to support personal growth is key.



★ PRET A MANGER ★



Sarah Bohn

Head of Global Talent, DEI, Wellbeing

Please provide an overview of what D&I looks like at Pret?

At Pret, we have a Diversity, Equity and Belonging (DEB) strategy to 2026 in place, informed by an external inclusion audit of our people policies, practices and culture by Wiser and Arieli in 2020/2021 respectively; and shaped by DEB Forums in each of our markets, as well as our Belonging Groups (ERGs). A focus on continual listening, diversity data driving our decisions, and an ongoing commitment to education, and positive, meaningful action.

The social mobility pillar is particularly advanced at Pret. Why do you feel social mobility is critical to the D&I agenda?

Culturally, welcoming everyone, regardless of background, is in the DNA of Pret. Whether that is supporting people experiencing homelessness, ex-offenders, school leavers or refugees to diversify our talent attraction, or tracking and monitoring progression (86% and increasing to 90% in our operations teams, started on the shop floor); it's pivotal that we create brilliant career opportunities that progress and retain our people.

What initiatives or programmes do you have in place to make Pret more inclusive from a social mobility perspective?

The Ukraine employment programme has seen us recruit over 300 Ukrainian refugees into Pret shops; providing additional English language tuition, community meet-ups and financial support to help with stability. Here we've seen the emotional pride of teams 'doing the right thing', as well as retention three times stronger than our wider population, so it's good for business too.

Our Rising Stars programme supports people experiencing homelessness, with a 12 week development plan as a Team Member in our shops; with additional expenses covered, counselling support and coaching via the Pret Foundation.

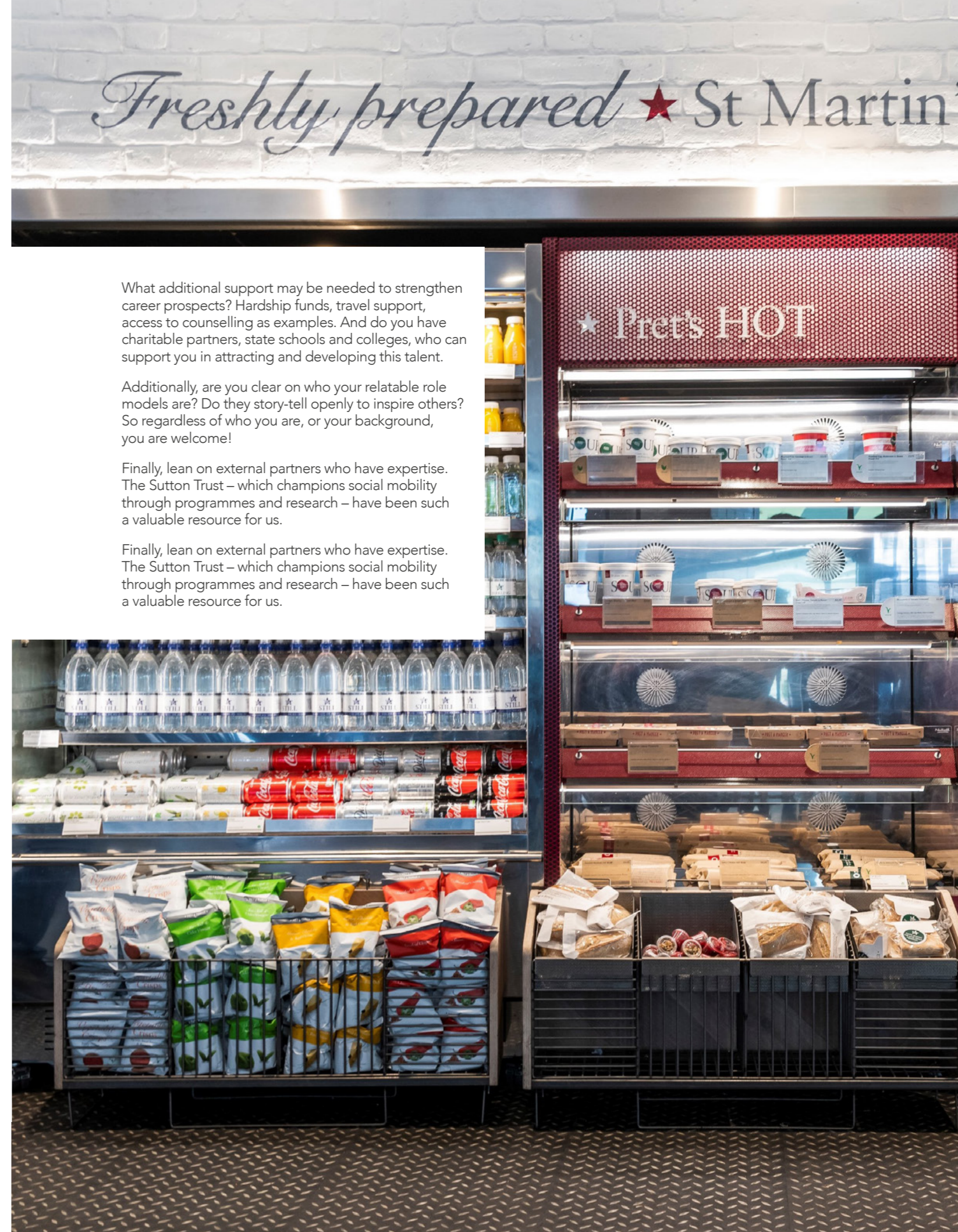
Progressing from Team Member to General Manager has clearly defined learning pathways, to support internal progression; further supported by an apprenticeship offer up to degree level.

We know that role models are important to improving feelings of inclusion. How does this play out at Pret?

The stories we tell make a huge difference to strengthening our culture—our own CEO, Pano Christou, started his career at McDonalds, and then as an Assistant Manager in our shops. There are many other examples of people within our leadership team who started their career in our shop teams. We're proud of the mobility and progression we offer. It's really what makes Pret, Pret.

We know many retailers are keen to drive-up their focus on social mobility, but they don't know where to start. What advice would you give?

I'd start by asking a few questions: Where are you currently? Are you clear on your Team Member to Manager /Support Centre progression rates? I'm also aware some businesses are tracking other data points such as 'the occupation of the main household earner when you were aged approximately 14,' it's making us reflect on how we use stronger data that monitors mobility.



What additional support may be needed to strengthen career prospects? Hardship funds, travel support, access to counselling as examples. And do you have charitable partners, state schools and colleges, who can support you in attracting and developing this talent.

Additionally, are you clear on who your relatable role models are? Do they story-tell openly to inspire others? So regardless of who you are, or your background, you are welcome!

Finally, lean on external partners who have expertise. The Sutton Trust – which champions social mobility through programmes and research – have been such a valuable resource for us.

Finally, lean on external partners who have expertise. The Sutton Trust – which champions social mobility through programmes and research – have been such a valuable resource for us.

About Us

About the British Retail Consortium

The BRC's purpose is to make a positive difference to the retail industry and the customers it serves, today and in the future. Retail is an exciting, dynamic and diverse industry which is going through a period of profound change. The BRC is committed to ensuring the industry thrives through this period of transformation. We tell the story of retail, work with our members to drive positive change and use our expertise and influence to create an economic and policy environment that enables retail businesses to thrive and consumers to benefit. Our membership comprises over 5,000 businesses delivering £180bn of retail sales and employing over one and half million employees. For more information, visit: www.brc.org.uk

About the BRC D&I Charter

The BRC D&I Charter set out six clear commitments, focusing on oversight, recruitment, progression, reporting, inclusivity and responsibility. They are designed to help retailers challenge their culture and biases holistically and embed D&I into every aspect of their business. Logos of signatories to the BRC D&I Charter are below.

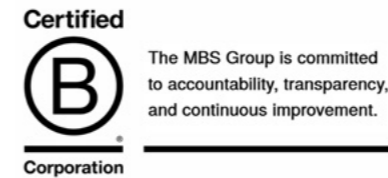


About The MBS Group

For more than 30 years, The MBS Group has been a leading sector-specialist executive search firm advising all consumer-facing industries, with a particular focus on the retail sector. In 2023, MBS gained B Corp accreditation. Clients consider us to be the partner of choice when searching for critical leadership roles that make a difference. We work at board level and on executive positions across all functions of strategic importance. For more information, visit www.thembsgroup.co.uk

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank and acknowledge the Chairs, CEOs and HRDs who participated in this research for so generously giving up their time. We are especially grateful to Helen Dickinson, Tom Ironside and Luiza Gomes at the BRC for their commitment to this project and to moving the dial in the retail industry. Lastly, we would like to thank our team at The MBS Group – Moira Benigson (Chair and Founder), Elliott Goldstein (Managing Partner), Aelf Hewitson, Simon Pryde-More, Imogen Sewell, Callum Orr, Miske Ali and Krystyna Robbins.



The MBS Group

3 Primrose Mews
Off Sharpleshall Street
London, NW1 8YW

+44 (0) 20 7722 1221
info@thembsgroup.co.uk

www.thembsgroup.co.uk