



# **Creative Access**

## **Thrive 2024:**

### **DE&I in development**

**Thrive**

**July 2024**

# Contents



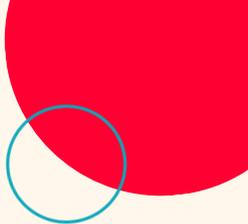
Introduction	3
Trends & challenges	5
Individual snapshot	6
Employer snapshot	8
Who's thriving? Understanding our impact	10
The sector view	13
Retention & wellbeing	18
Elevating mid-career talent	21
Final words	22
Employer & individual recommendations	23

# Introduction

This annual Thrive report by Creative Access examines business sentiment around DE&I with employers and career sentiment amongst individuals from our community, the majority of which **(70%)** come from groups historically under-represented in the creative industries. This study, conducted over a three-week period in May 2024, sets out to compare how far the dial has moved for individuals regarding career progression and what employers are doing to facilitate this. We also looked into whether enough is being done to secure and foster mid to senior diverse talent to thrive in the creative industries, a career level where we've consistently seen industry-wide under-representation.

- For **employees**, we looked at whether they felt they have the necessary tools and resources for career progression, such as a strong network, skills, and knowledge, as well as more intangible factors such as confidence.
- In our research with **employers**, we examined their progress towards putting in the structures needed to support employees and build inclusive business cultures.





# Sample size and composition

A total of 450 respondents participated in the study.

The sample included both individuals and employers, representing a broad spectrum of the creative industries.

## Individual demographics

**57%** Black, Asian or Ethnically Diverse

**44%** Lower SES

**27%** Disabled

## Employer sectors

Industry	Representation
Publishing	28%
Film, TV, radio	25%
Music, theatre, dance, visual arts	23%
PR, marketing	12%

# Trends & challenges – what's the big picture?

This year's Thrive report by Creative Access highlights concerning trends and persistent challenges in the creative industries, particularly for lower socioeconomic status (lower SES) groups, and reveals critical insights into the state of diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I).

**Disability and career optimism:** Since 2022, there has been a significant **13%** dip in career optimism among disabled audiences. This decline suggests that engrained career barriers in the creative industries, combined with a lack of access to industry networks and mechanisms for support, are an increasing hindrance to accessing careers for those from historically under-represented groups.

**Retention and wellbeing:** The report underscores poor investment in employee wellbeing, with **26%** of respondents indicating that their employers provide no support for wellbeing at work. Alarming, the number of organisations **not** offering mental health and wellbeing training has risen from **14%** in 2023 to **24%** in 2024. Factors such as working hours (**19%**), team dynamics (**19%**), and lack of focus on wellbeing (**15%**) were the most commonly cited reasons for work negatively impacting mental health.

**DE&I spending & impact:** Although **35%** of respondents reported an increase in DE&I spending over the last 12 months, this is a significant drop from the **60%** reported last year. Most organisations indicated that their DE&I spending remained unchanged, with **2%** of organisations, and **8%** of larger ones, decreasing spend due to economic uncertainty.

**Data and reporting:** A concerning **41%** of respondents believe their organisation lacks robust data to measure DE&I progress. This indicates that DE&I spending may be plateauing or decreasing for many organisations.

**Mid-senior talent under-representation:** Despite intentions to focus beyond entry-level positions, a significant proportion of employers continue to prioritise entry-level talent. This is despite **81%** of respondents acknowledging the need to address career progression at all stages, particularly for those at mid to senior levels from historically under-represented groups.

This executive summary paints a detailed picture of the current DE&I landscape in the creative industries, highlighting both progress and persistent gaps that need urgent attention.



# Individual snapshot

The challenges faced by individuals from historically under-represented groups in the creative industries aren't disappearing, particularly concerning career progression, DE&I focus and retention. The insights provided here set the stage for targeted recommendations aimed at improving conditions and fostering a more inclusive creative economy.

## Career optimism and progression

Career optimism has seen a notable decline, dropping **12%** year on year. This decrease in optimism is even more pronounced among disabled individuals, who report a **13%** lower optimism rate compared to the overall group average. Contributing factors to this low progression include limited access to industry networks, low confidence and insufficient knowledge and skills.

**66%**

of individuals believe employer DE&I spending is overwhelmingly focused on entry-level talent rather than being distributed across all levels. This misalignment suggests a critical need for DE&I investments to target talent retention and progression at all stages of the career ladder.



## % of individuals optimistic about career progression:

Eligibility category	2022 % Agree	2023 % Agree	2024 % agree, received CA services	2024 agree, not received CA services
All respondents	66	61	49	40
BAED	71	60	55	40
Disabled	64	48	36	23
Lower SES	69	60	56	34

### Retention and wellbeing

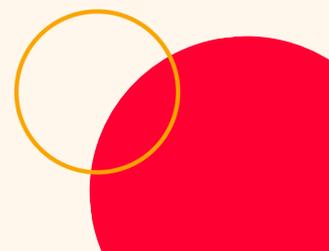
Retention is further compromised by poor wellbeing support. A quarter of respondents (**26%**) reported that their employers provide no support for wellbeing at work, potentially exacerbating the already high turnover rates among those from historically under-represented groups.

### The freelance challenge

A staggering half (**48%**) of freelancers surveyed have experienced a decrease in work volume in the last year. This reduction shows the significant impact of last year's writer's strike on the many freelancers who work in film and TV and overall the challenge freelancers face in the current economic climate.

### Impact of socio-economic landscape

The ongoing economic crisis has reduced opportunities and promotions in the creative industries. The sector's retention rate has fallen from **96%** staying in a role at least two years to **84%**. Respondents cite a lack of opportunities, low pay, high living costs in London, and personal factors like health needs and caring responsibilities as reasons for leaving.



# Employer snapshot

## Employer performance against DE&I targets in the creative industries

Poor DE&I reporting, insufficient focus on mid and senior-level talent and stagnant DE&I spending are critical issues that need immediate attention. By adopting best practices, expanding DE&I initiatives to all career levels and reassessing DE&I budgets, employers can foster a more inclusive and equitable environment that supports the career progression and retention of under-represented individuals.

## Inadequate DE&I reporting

The performance of employers in the creative industries concerning DE&I targets and objectives remains concerning. Notably, 41% of organisations demonstrate poor DE&I reporting practices, with smaller organisations indexing less likely to have robust DE&I reporting. This lack of robust tracking and reporting undermines efforts to promote genuine equity and inclusion.

## Focus on mid/senior talent

Despite previous commitments, progress on advancing mid and senior-level under-represented talent remains insufficient. Employers continue to prioritise entry-level talent, with:

**66%** of employers admitted to focusing their DE&I efforts predominantly at entry level.

**This is despite...**

**81%** acknowledging that DE&I initiatives should encompass all career levels.

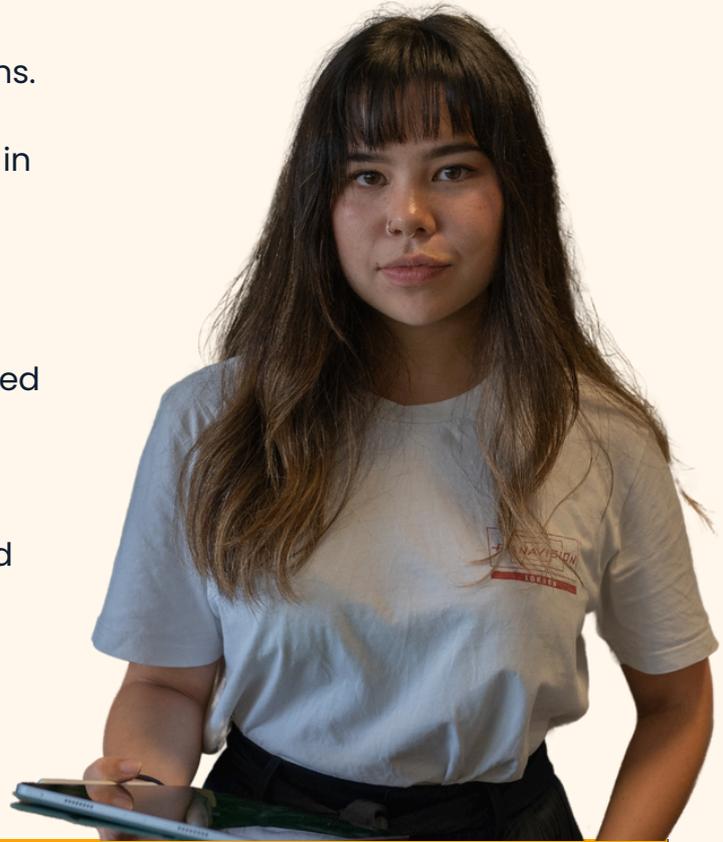


## Stagnant DE&I spending

DE&I spending within the creative industries has remained flat, reflecting broader trends reported in the UK press regarding the reduction of DE&I roles and in-house functions.

This stagnation has contributed to a decline in career optimism among individuals from under-represented groups. Moreover, the decreased retention rates—evident from the drop in individuals remaining in the sector beyond two years—highlight the pressing need for renewed investment in DE&I.

The lack of increased DE&I spending, coupled with diminishing internal DE&I capacities, underscores the necessity for:



- **Reassessing DE&I budgets** to ensure adequate funding for impactful programmes and initiatives
- Prioritising the preservation and expansion of DE&I roles within organisations to **maintain momentum** and accountability
- Encouraging a **culture of continuous improvement** and adaptation in DE&I practices to meet evolving needs

# Who's thriving? Understanding our impact

Our mission is to not only offer individuals from under-represented groups in the creative industries routes into careers, but to give them the tools they need to thrive throughout their careers. However, unlike most recruiters, Creative Access has a holistic approach to inciting change in the creative industries, meaning we know that employers – as well as individuals – also need our expertise and support.

## Individuals

Like last year, individuals not receiving services from CA are less likely to report feeling confident or optimistic, or having the skills, knowledge, contacts and networks they need to progress in their careers. They are also less likely to report working in a supportive and inclusive culture.

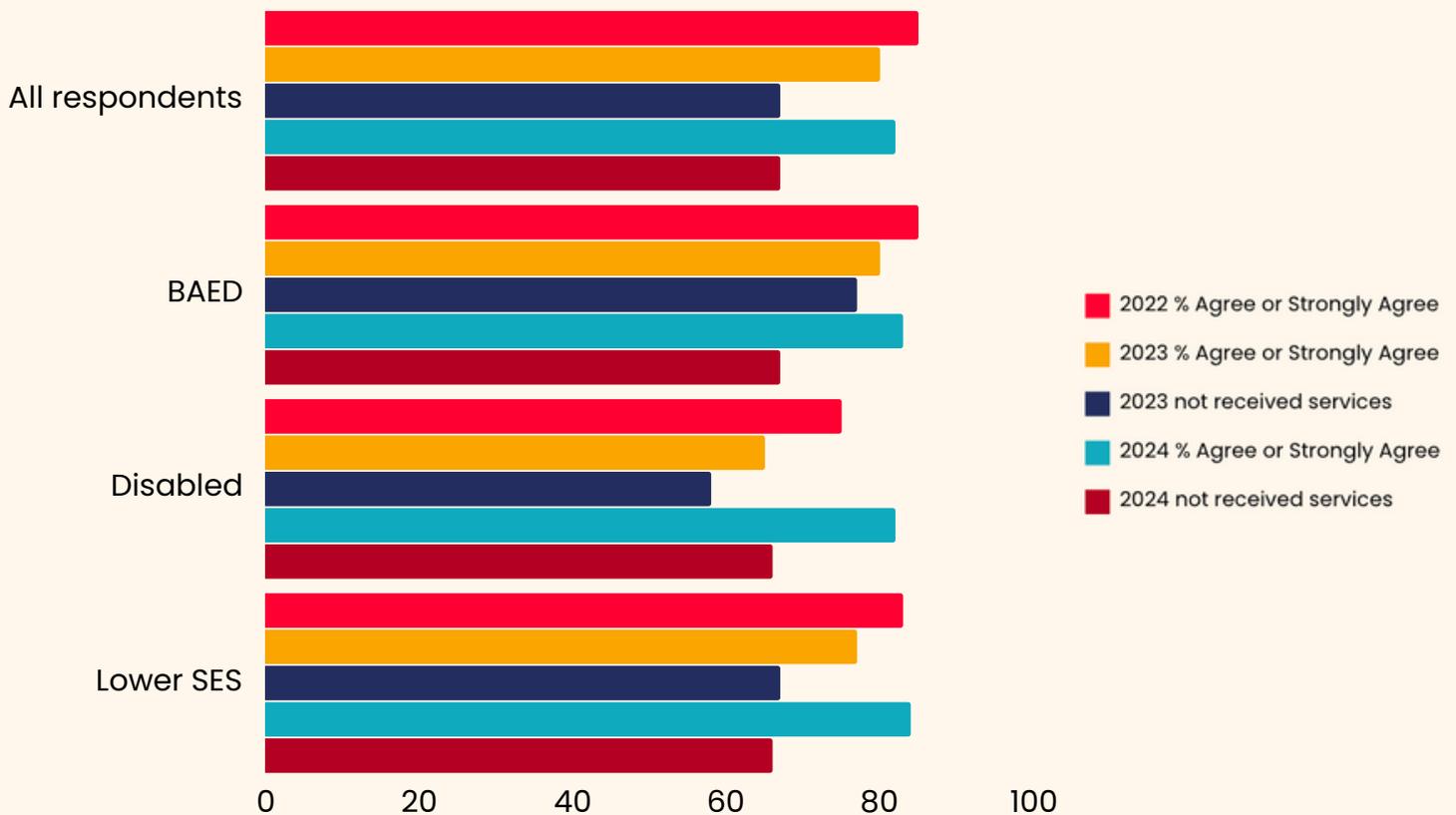
Individuals in receipt of our services appear to be somewhat protected from the wider destabilising effects of industry-wide issues due to the support and opportunities that Creative Access provides, and as a result are thriving more than those not in receipt of services.

It's important to note this through an intersectional lens, for example there was a large increase in disabled individuals who are in receipt of CA services reporting having access to the necessary contacts and networks to progress their career.

In comparison, for disabled and lower SES respondents not in receipt of CA services, there was a significant decrease in accessing networks to enhance their careers.



## % report having the necessary contacts & networks to progress their careers:



- **92%** ranked one area of support from CA as either 'significant' or 'very significant' to the progress of their careers (up from 90%) last year
- **84%** are still in the creative economy 2 years after completing a CA programme
- **61%** of individuals receiving support made progress in their careers in the last 12 months compared to only 37% of the non-services group.

# Employers

**82%** of employers attributed their organisation's progress against their DE&I goals to working with Creative Access – **this has never dipped below this figure in the past three years.**

Breaking this down we see that:

- **14%** say our services have significant impacted them
- **68%** say Creative Access 'helped us to progress'



**Before creating internships through Creative Access, the company had little to no outward-facing actions towards DEI. Those who have now come through Creative Access have advocated for the company to use more of the available training resources and advertise higher than entry level roles on the site to attract more diverse talent at all levels.**

Employer partner



# The sector view

The last year has seen high inflation and a continuing cost of living crisis in the UK, and each sector faces its own particular set of challenges when it comes to faring the storm. The knock-on effects are real: our data shows that unfortunately optimism about future careers is low. This is especially true in TV & film, which is also compounded by a lack of freelance opportunities and resources available. Journalism is also feeling the impact of reduced opportunities.

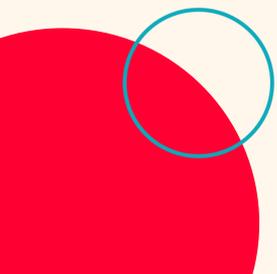
All employers across the sectors report a decrease in representation, especially in PR. Meanwhile, individuals who work in PR were the least impressed out of all the sectors with their organisation's DE&I progress, and the sector also ranked low when it comes to working in an inclusive and supportive work environment.

Publishing though is one industry where things seem to be improving in terms of DE&I. Publishing has been well-aware (perhaps in comparison to other industries) of its reputation as an 'elitist' industry and it could be argued that diversity efforts within the industry are now paying off.

## Individuals

### Freelancers

- Of those freelancing, most (**48%**) said the volume of work available had decreased (**16%** increased and **36%** said the volume was the same).
- This was starkest in TV, film and radio where **61%** said the volume of available work had decreased and there was a **22%** decrease in journalism



## Optimism and DE&I progress across the sectors

Analysed by sector, only **32%** of respondents in television, radio and film felt optimistic about their career prospects, whilst respondents in PR were least impressed with their organisation's DE&I progress.

### % report feeling optimistic about progression in their career

Sector	2024 %
TV, film, radio	32
Books, publishing, journalism	54
Music, theatre, dance, visual arts	59
PR, marketing & advertising	53

### 'My organisation is making progress towards greater diversity, equity and inclusion'

Sector	2024 %
TV, film, radio	65
Books, publishing, journalism	72
Music, theatre, dance, visual arts	66
PR, marketing & advertising	54



TV and film were also behind in terms of how individuals rate career progression: Only **46%** of respondents working in television, film and radio report career progress in the last year, compared to **63%** in music, theatre, dance and visual arts.



**I have not progressed in my career for the last one and a half years, partly due to everything happening in the industry – the pull back in commissioning from the streamers, the strikes and the post Covid backlog of production that happened at the end of 2022.**

TV freelancer

## Employers

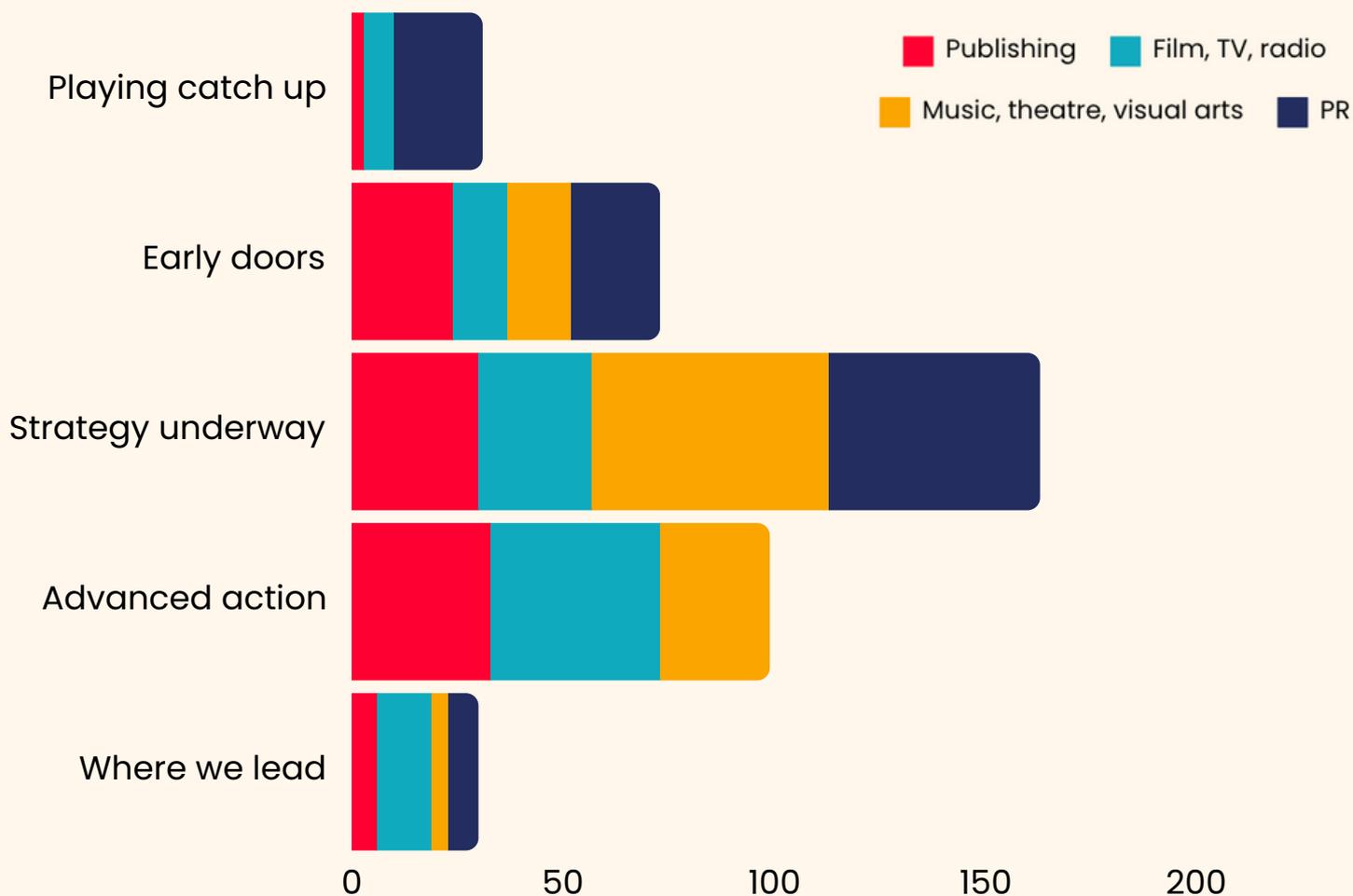
### % reporting an increase in representativeness of workforce

Just over half of all employers (**51%**) across all industries reported an increase in the overall representativeness of their workforce, a fall against last year (**65%**).

This has fallen most significantly amongst mid-sized organisations, from **66%** in 2023 to **28%** in 2024.

Sector	2022 %	2023 %	2024 %
Books, publishing, journalism	68	78	55
Film, TV, radio	74	68	53
Music, theatre, dance, visual arts	66	72	48
PR, marketing & advertising	68	61	43

## How do employers rate their DE&I progress?

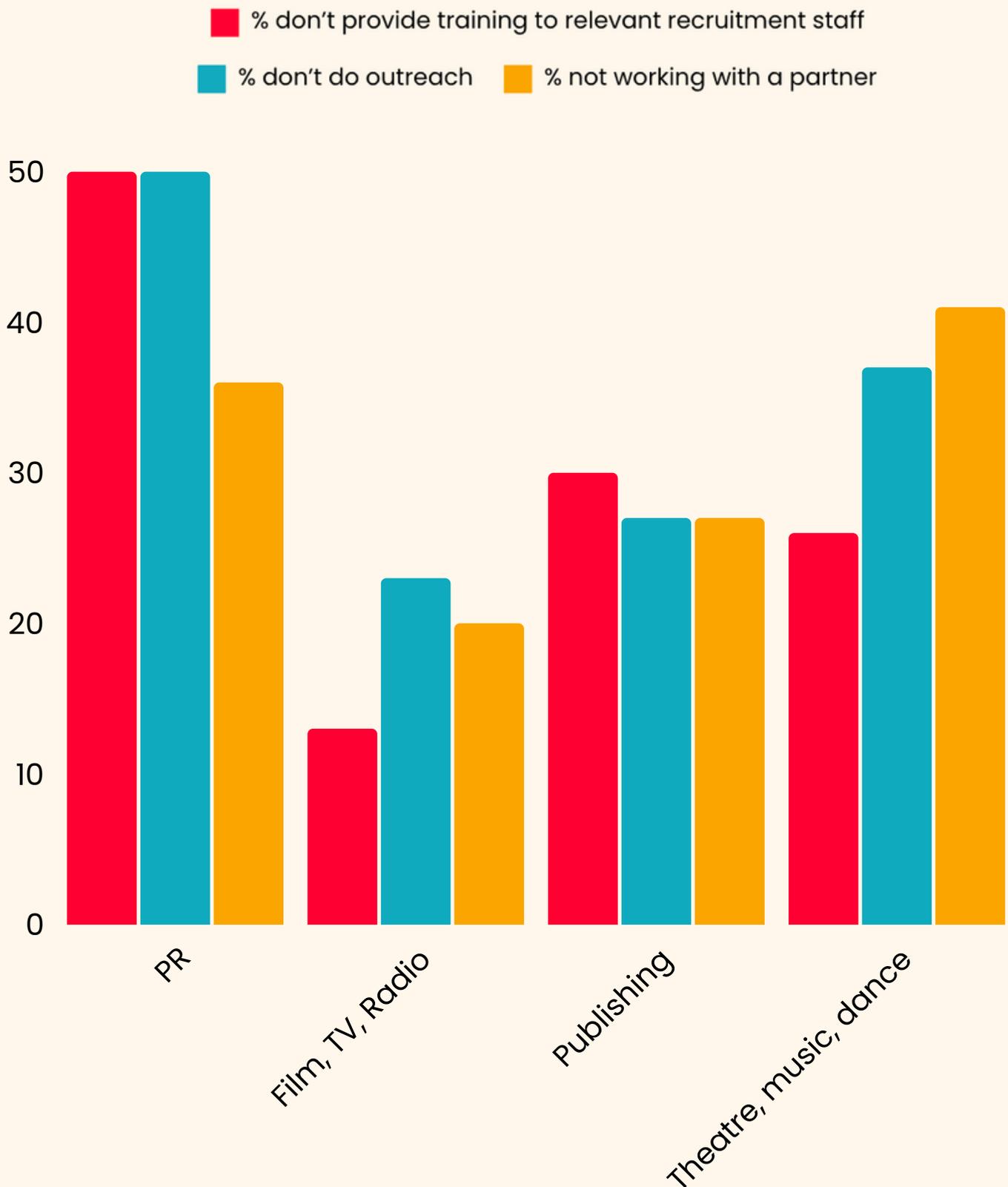


But, how is this progress being measured? 41% of employers do not have robust DE&I reporting practices. But, this varies by sector, with the strongest being music, theatre dance and visual arts (perhaps because of the requirements of funders) and is weakest in film, television and radio.



## How do we bring people in?

Although most employers we asked do provide DE&I training for relevant staff, work with an inclusive recruitment partner, or undertake outreach activities, there are still too many not making use of these services. Here's how it looks across the sectors:



# Retention & wellbeing

## DE&I investment holds

Our data shows that spend on DE&I has remained the same for most organisations and has fallen for a small minority. There's also been a fall in the number of organisations reporting that their organisation has become more equitable (from **34%** in 2023 to **26%** in 2024).

However, we know that an inclusive workplace with good wellbeing practices in place is highly appealing to diverse talent. And at the moment, individuals are not feeling enough support from their employers for their career progression. If organisations want to retain and get the best out of their employees, they need to invest.

## Workplace impact on mental health

Only a quarter of respondents felt that their work had at least some positive impact on their mental health meaning there's a glaring majority that say it's having a negative impact on their mental health. This was most striking amongst disabled people. Here's how people felt about their wellbeing at work:

- **Working hours and team dynamics** were the most commonly cited reasons for poor mental health at work, followed by poor line management and a lack of focus on wellbeing
- **26%** of respondents told us that their employer provides no support for wellbeing at work
- **Disabled and Lower SES individuals cited location as a significant barrier**, ranking second for both, pointing towards factors like the London-centric nature of the creative economy as well as the cost of living in London and the South East

## How does it look across each sector?

Amongst individuals who said their role had a negative (or very negative) impact on their mental health and wellbeing, there were different reasons cited in different sectors:

- In TV, film & radio, **45%** of respondents who found work had a negative impact mentioned working hours, and **39%** mentioned a lack of wellbeing focus at their company.
- In publishing, **50%** cited team dynamics as a factor, and **46%** cited poor line management
- In PR, the reasons cited for the negative impact were spread more evenly across multiple factors (**50%** poor line management, **50%** working hours, **50%** team dynamics and **50%** lack of flexibility)
- Compared to the other sectors, roles in music, dance, theatre and visual arts seemed to have a much more positive impact on an individual's mental health

Organisations not investing more in DE&I could be linked to lack of optimism and stagnating career progression. So, is spend actually going where it'll have the most impact for the retention and wellbeing of employees?



**Due to the downturn in commissioning, we have had fewer roles available for talent and this has been reflected in our DE&I, however, we are working on this.**

Employer partner



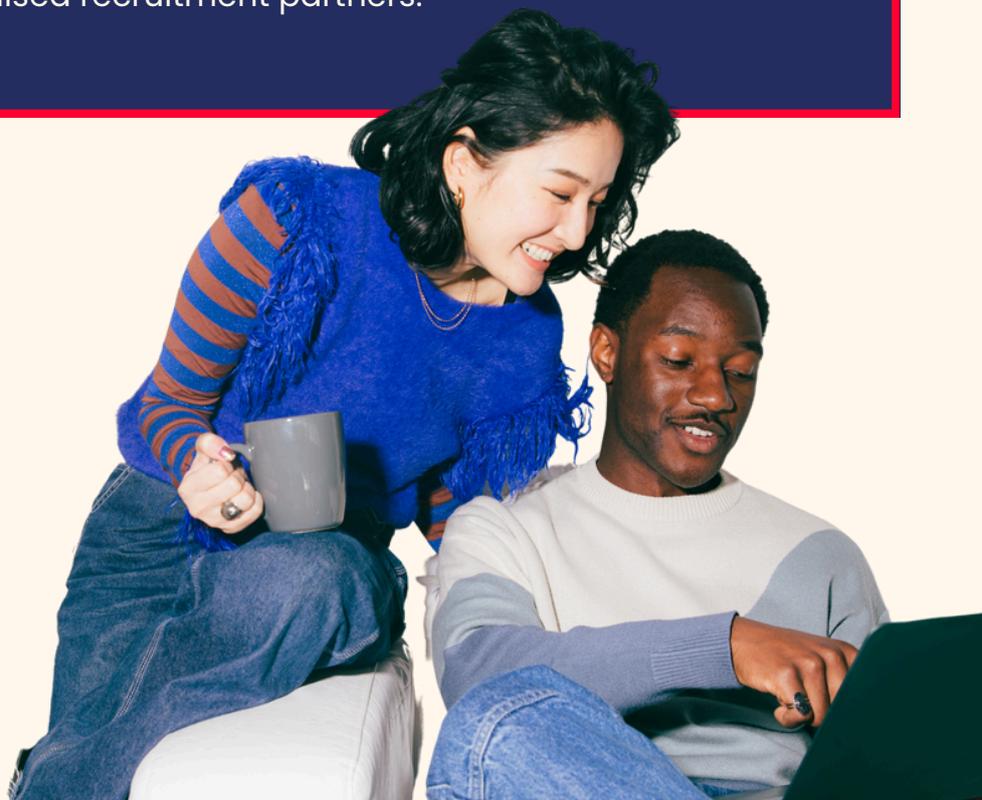
## Do employers still prioritise wellbeing?

- There's been a fall in the number of organisations reporting that their organisation has become more equitable, from 34% in 2023 to 26% in 2024
- Organisations not providing staff training around mental health and wellbeing has risen from **14%** in 2023 to **24%** in 2024
- Just over half of responding employers report an increase in the overall representativeness of the workforce, a noticeable fall since last year (51% against **65%**). Amongst mid-sized organisations, the number reporting an increase in representativeness over the last 12 months has fallen sharply, from **66%** in 2023 to **28%** in 2024.
- A considerable minority of employers do not yet provide DE&I training for relevant staff, work with an inclusive recruitment partner, or undertake outreach activities

In positive news, the overall number of organisations employing inclusive recruitment practices and working towards inclusive cultures continues to rise (albeit slowly).

Most employers also report that they do have a strategy in hand (**39%**). And, the number of employers who feel confident that they are at an advanced stage in DE&I has gone up from **16%** in 2023 to **28%** in 2024, indicating some progress.

However, these practices must be paired with more investment in services such as training and specialised recruitment partners.



# Elevating mid-career talent

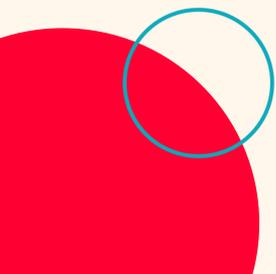
Efforts to support under-represented talent in the creative industries have yet to fully expand beyond entry-level positions. Data shows that the current DE&I focus remains heavily skewed towards internships or more junior roles, with **52%** of employers highlighting this emphasis, up from **46%** last year. This persistent focus occurs despite the clear intention to broaden support across all career levels.

Individuals within the industry have also noticed this discrepancy. Many report a lack of mentoring and career champions, which they identify as significant barriers to progression. It is particularly important for mentors and career champions to come from similar backgrounds to those they are supporting, fostering a sense of shared experience and understanding.

Some individuals from under-represented communities highlight difficulty in progressing:



**I would love some mid-level support, there still aren't many Black people in my field at my level. I recently discovered that if I manage to make it into my chosen field as a content commissioner I will be one of the first Black women to do that! And so any further support to break that barrier would be appreciated.**



# Final words

The creative industries stand at a pivotal moment in their DE&I journey. Despite intentions to widen support beyond entry-level roles, data tells a different story. Most DE&I efforts remain focused on entry-level positions, with 67% of organisations failing to track equity progression and rewards. This has led to a dip in career optimism among individuals from under-represented groups, particularly those with disabilities, and freelancers facing a shrinking market.

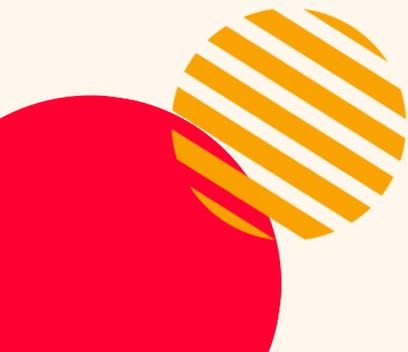
To break this cycle and foster genuine inclusivity, the industry must take bold steps to support talent at all career stages. Implementing bespoke career development programmes that pair employees with mentors sharing their experiences is crucial. Introducing mid-level positive action traineeships and actively elevating the profiles of mid and senior-level under-represented employees are also key strategies.

Freelancers, vital to the creative sector, need robust support. Offering flexible work opportunities and mental health resources can help alleviate their unique pressures.

The creative industries must transition from intentions to decisive action. By adopting comprehensive and inclusive DE&I strategies, organisations can boost career optimism among under-represented groups and enrich the creative landscape with diverse perspectives. The time to act is now, promising a more vibrant, inclusive, and forward-thinking industry.

**Josie Dobrin**

**Founder and executive chair, Creative Access**



# Employer recommendations

## 1. DE&I reporting not hitting the mark

To improve DE&I reporting, organisations can adopt best practices from leading third-party recommendations. These include:

- Establishing clear, measurable DE&I goals and regularly tracking progress against these objectives. Or finding a knowledgeable partner to help you establish your attention on the most impactful activities.
- Implementing comprehensive DE&I dashboards to monitor key metrics from the recruitment stage – engagement with desired audience – through to hiring, promotions and retention rates of under-represented groups.
- Engaging in transparent reporting either individually or feeding into an industry body by publishing DE&I data and progress in annual reports to stakeholders where appropriate.

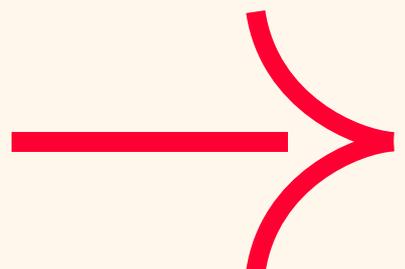
## 2. Transparency

### Salary transparency

Posting a salary (or salary bracket) is mandatory on our platform; and [research shows](#) it increases your applications by 40%. We ask all our employer partners to follow our best practice [inclusive recruitment principles](#), proven to improve application rates from candidates from under-represented groups.

### Transparency of your DE&I goals or intentions

Your desired talent pool might opt for other organisations with more transparent diversity and inclusion practices if they believe your company hinders their potential.



### 3. Entry-level talent focus vs. all levels

This misalignment indicates a critical gap between employer intentions and actions. To address this, employers must:

- Expand DE&I programmes to include targeted initiatives for mid and senior-level talent.
- Develop mentorship and sponsorship programmes aimed at supporting the – still present – economic disparities facing career progression of under-represented employees at all levels. For example: Support with relocation or moving costs and subsistence around attendance at events.
- Invest in leadership development programmes specifically tailored to prepare under-represented employees for senior roles.

### 4. Language is everything

The language you use is so important – Creative Access' team of copywriters take each job listing and make sure it uses inclusive language, reflects the most current terminology in DE&I and is as clear as possible. Consider the following:

- We try to avoid ableist terms and requirements that imply physicality and strength are needed for the role.
- You should also think about heavily gendered language for certain roles. Naturally some terms get associated with masculine or feminine staff.
- Terms like “You’ll be crazy to miss this opportunity” or “if you’re a news junkie, this is for you”, are examples of common phrases that could be received differently by people who may have experienced mental health difficulties or addictions respectively.
- Avoid switching the term ‘ethnic minorities’ with ‘racially and ethnically diverse’ people. You could even consider terms like the global majority.
- Avoiding jargon and corporate language – especially on entry-level roles
- Highlighting words in bold (rather than italics) for accessible reading



In our advertising, we have been removing requirements for e.g. undergraduate degrees, trying to remove language that reinforces age biases and standardised the format of our job adverts. We advertise all of our entry and mid level roles with Creative Access. We attend local school careers fairs and partner with a local school to provide structured work experience placements for their sixth-form students. We are overhauling our recruitment processes and policy and will include DEI training for all hiring managers as part of this.

**Employer partner**

# Individual recommendations

## How do you get your organisation to better support your professional development?

Ask your employer to support you via one of our career development programmes whether you're just starting out in your career, or you've progressed to mid or senior level status. [Read our advice](#), or get in touch with us at [info@creativeaccess.org.uk](mailto:info@creativeaccess.org.uk) to request a template for making your case.

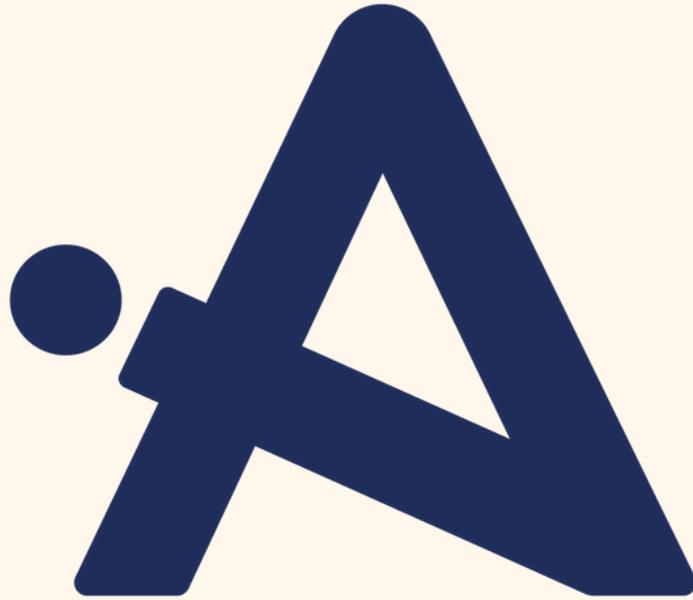
## What else?

Sign up to our [jobs and opportunities board](#) for entry to mid and senior roles. You'll be the first to hear about: The hottest new live roles and opportunities in the creative industries, plus bursary application launch timings, free masterclasses & networking evenings.

### Useful organisations:

- [BECTU](#)
- [JournoResources](#)
- [Creative Lives In Progress](#)
- [I Like Networking](#)
- [Common People](#)
- [People Like Us](#)
- [UK Black Comms Network](#)
- [We Are Black Journos](#)





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