

Time for Change

Black and minority ethnic representation in
the children's literature sector

November 2019

**Sheffield
Hallam
University**

Centre for
Regional Economic
and Social Research



Time for Change

Black and minority ethnic representation in
the children's literature sector

A report for Arts Council England

November 2019

Authors: Cathy Harris, Bernadette Stiell, David Leather

DOI: [10.7190/cresr.2019.8529879445](https://doi.org/10.7190/cresr.2019.8529879445)

Contact information

Cathy Harris, Centre for Regional Economic and Social
Research (CRESR), Sheffield Hallam University

T: 0114 225 3073

E: cresr@shu.ac.uk

W: www.shu.ac.uk/cresr

Contents

Executive Summary	1
Background and rationale for the research.....	1
Research questions.....	1
Methods and sample	1
Key findings.....	2
Key recommendations	4
Introduction	5
Previous research	5
Rationale	5
Research questions.....	6
Methods and sample	7
Findings.....	8
Recommendations for the sector	30
Workforce and career development.....	30
Cross-sector research and monitoring.....	31
Schools, education and libraries	31
Resources	32
References	34
Appendix A: Methods, sampling and analysis	35
Literature review	35
Online survey.....	35
In-depth telephone interviews	36
Appendix B: Survey of respondents	37
Appendix C: Survey questions	39
Appendix D: Interviewees	50

Executive Summary

Background and rationale for the research

People from black or minority ethnic (BME)¹ backgrounds are poorly represented in the children's literature sector in the UK. Research by Equal Approach in 2018 found that BME people are underrepresented in the workforce of the publishing industry, and a report by Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and the Archives Records Association (ARA) in 2015 showed that this lack of diversity is even more pronounced in the libraries and information services professions. Research commissioned by BookTrust found that only 2% of British children's book creators (i.e. authors or illustrators) published in the UK from 2007-2017 were from a BME background. Furthermore, Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) found that despite 32% of UK school-age children being from a BME background, only 1% of books for 3-11 year olds published in 2017 in the UK featured a BME main character.

Arts Council England commissioned this research in order to more fully understand the factors influencing this lack of representation, and to help bring about positive change as the sector works towards better reflecting the diversity of children in the UK today.

Research questions

The research aimed to address the following questions:

- What does the available literature tell us about the representation of BME authors and illustrators in the UK children's literature sector?

- What is the current position for BME authors and illustrators within the children's literature sector? What do representatives from across the children's literature sector perceive to be the main barriers experienced by BME authors and illustrators? How is the sector supporting and promoting equality and diversity?
- What can Arts Council England and other organisations do to achieve positive change in the representation of BME people in the children's literature sector? What actions and practices could support this?



Methods and sample

The research questions were explored through an online survey, which received 330 responses, and follow-up in-depth interviews with 28 individuals. We received feedback from a range of individuals working in different parts of the sector, including mainstream, independent and specialist publishers, libraries, charities, membership organisations / trade bodies, independent booksellers, authors, illustrators, agents, education providers, campaign or community groups.

¹ Different terms are used across the sector to describe people of minority ethnicities, including people of colour, black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) and Black and minority ethnic (BME). Arts Council England, who commissioned this research, use the term BME so this will be used in this report apart from when direct quoting participants who have used different terms.

Key findings

Participants from all backgrounds provided numerous examples of their experiences of **racism and microaggressions**² in the form of inappropriate, ignorant or stereotypical attitudes, assumptions and behaviours. For people from BME backgrounds, this resulted in feelings of frustration and a sense that they were not welcome or did not belong in the industry. These experiences were widely reported across the publishing sector.

The majority of participants agreed that more needs to be done to address **unconscious bias** in the sector. Nonetheless, there is evidence that large publishers and other organisations are taking steps to improve representation through changes to policies and practices, including recruitment processes and training. Examples of these changes include publishers scrapping unpaid internships, and supporting and using schemes, such as Creative Access, which offer more accessible routes into publishing. Additionally, implementing anonymous recruitment processes and providing diversity training were examples of how some publishers were seeking to combat unconscious bias and improve representation.

Inequality of access to the children's literature sector was reported to be a major barrier to improving representation and diversity, with over half of survey respondents disagreeing that publishing processes were equally challenging for all new authors regardless of their background. Falling incomes for authors was highlighted as a particular issue which made access to the profession prohibitive for those from lower income demographics. Traditional routes into publishing, for example through degrees from Oxbridge, private school education and unpaid internships, resulted in the exclusion of many from opportunities in the sector. The London-centric nature of the industry was also highlighted as a barrier to improving representation; those based elsewhere face practical and financial difficulties in accessing opportunities and roles in the sector.

A lack of role models means that people from BME backgrounds are reported to be less likely to aspire to become writers or illustrators. Similarly, in areas of the sector where representation of

people from BME backgrounds is very low (e.g. public libraries, mainstream publishers), people are less likely to consider careers in these industries. Those that do go on to work in the sector can feel marginalised, which can have implications for their confidence and mental health. Additionally, the lack of representation of people from BME backgrounds at a senior level within many organisations in the sector means that people from BME backgrounds entering the profession report feeling less able to progress in their careers.

Participants from BME backgrounds working in the children's literature sector reported that they are often expected or **pressured to promote or comment on diversity issues** because of their ethnicity, rather than because of a specific professional interest in being involved in this area. This led to resentment, particularly when respondents felt they were being defined by their race. Similarly, many participants felt that diverse books³ were often expected to focus on issues faced by underrepresented groups. Authors reported feeling pressured to write books relating to their ethnic background, rather than being able to tell the stories they wished to write. Having experienced this, some authors reported exploring alternative routes to publishing which afforded them greater creative freedom.

Improvements in the diversity of children's books is constrained by **perceptions of a limited market** for these books in some parts of the sector. There were a number of examples of authors struggling to have their books published by mainstream publishers as a result of perceptions that their appeal would be limited, or that diverse books are a riskier investment. These perceptions often resulted from a **lack of experience or understanding of particular elements of diversity within the industry** and were sometimes perpetuated by a **lack of investment in promotion or marketing** of diverse books that were published.

Whilst publishers and agents acknowledged the importance of reaching out and acquiring new and diverse talent, they often reported receiving a **high volume of submissions** which led to the tendency to rely on this more traditional route for most of their acquisitions. Similarly, heavy workloads often meant that publishers recommissioned authors whom they

² Microaggressions are defined as statements, actions or incidents, which subtly, indirectly or unintentionally discriminate against members of a marginalised group, such as a racial or ethnic minority.

³ We use the term 'diverse books' in this report to refer broadly to books which include BME representation. These include books with main characters from BME backgrounds, illustrations of BME characters, storylines representing the experiences of BME people, as well as books where the BME identity is represented but is not the focus of the storyline or issues covered.

had existing relationships with, who were historically more likely to be white. However, younger people, or those newer to the industry, were perhaps more likely to seek out talent proactively through a range of methods, than those with established client lists.

A lack of communication at various points along the supply chain was also reported to be a barrier to improving diversity and representation in children's books, meaning that diverse books, even if they are available, are not reaching bookshop shelves, and therefore children and families. Misconceptions of the demand for and availability of diverse books across many parts of the sector hinders progress in improving representation.

Authentic representation of diverse characters in children's books is an important but complex issue where authors would benefit from **more guidance and support**. Concerns around cultural sensitivities and ensuring authentic representation of diverse characters could lead to publishers being reluctant to take on submissions which include diverse characters. One author also reported confusion over mixed messages about best practice in terms of who should write about diverse characters, and a level of concern about getting it wrong amongst white authors and illustrators.

Many respondents highlighted the importance of **inspiring children and young people through engagement with schools and libraries** in encouraging all children to aspire to careers in the sector. Schools and libraries were praised for their recognition of the importance of representation and their commitment to providing diverse books

for children. However, budget cuts for schools and public libraries could threaten progress and even have a negative effect on diversity in the children's book market in future, as they are forced to utilise more cost-effective mainstream suppliers, rather than those focusing on diversity, and may have to keep books featuring inappropriate depictions of diversity on their shelves for longer.

A wide range of organisations and initiatives were reported to be doing well in providing **valuable support for people from underrepresented groups** in accessing and progressing in careers in the children's literature sector, e.g. Knights Of⁴ and Spread the Word.⁵ Inclusive Minds⁶ were reported to be particularly supportive in helping authors and publishers to include diverse characters in their publications in an authentic way.

Many interviewees were **cautiously optimistic about the current focus on improving diversity** in the sector and praised the actions taken and commitments made so far. However, concerns were highlighted relating to tokenism in targeted initiatives or role models within the sector, and participants referenced previous periods of focus on diversity which had resulted in short-term progress but failed to achieve lasting change.

Commitment and partnership working across the sector will be crucial in achieving meaningful and lasting changes in diversity, particularly from those with the most power and influence. Interviewees also highlighted the need for a commitment to improving diversity to be fully embedded in the ethos, policies and practices of organisations.

⁴ Knights Of is an independent publisher with a focus on promoting diversity in their workforce and publications.

⁵ Spread the Word is London's writer development agency. Their campaign to ensure that publishing reflects the diversity of the city.

⁶ Inclusive Minds is a collective for people who are passionate about inclusion, diversity, equality and accessibility in children's literature, and are committed to changing the face of children's books.



Meaningful improvements in diversity in the sector will require strategic and collaborative action across the sector. An ongoing focus on diversity is required to ensure positive changes are maintained.

Awareness raising and campaigning by influential organisations with a wide reach is an important method of promoting and supporting diversity in children's literature. Participants highlighted positive work being undertaken by charities and membership organisations, such as BookTrust, CLPE and Pop Up Projects,⁷ in using their platforms and influence to promote diversity through providing advice and support to their members and encouraging and sharing good practice. **Social media** was also reported to have allowed individuals to more effectively come together and raise their voices in support of diversity. However, better representation of people from BME backgrounds in the mainstream media would be beneficial. Embedding good practice, such as ensuring diverse advisory boards and selection panels, was also considered to be helpful in ensuring inclusivity and representation at events, festivals and in prizes and awards.

Small presses and self-publishing have made publishing more accessible for people from underrepresented groups and promote the increased production of diverse books. Whilst potentially affording writers greater creative freedom, drawbacks such as limited print runs and less access to support with the publishing process also exist. Interviewees also highlighted that despite the success of many small or specialist publishers, larger publishers should be doing more to support the publishing of books by diverse authors in order to improve their reach, as they are able to print in larger quantities and customers benefit from lower prices as a result of economies of scale in production.

Interviewees also highlighted the **value of evidence from recent research** on the representation of people from BME backgrounds in children's literature in understanding the scale of the issue. In particular, recent research from both CLPE (2018) and BookTrust (Ramdarshan Bold, 2019) has provided large-scale objective evidence of the underrepresentation of people from BME backgrounds in children's literature. **Continued monitoring of progress and practical actions** based on the evidence will be important in ensuring positive sustainable changes across the sector.

Key recommendations

The findings suggest that different parts of the children's literature sector recognise that they are on a journey towards better representing the racial and ethnic diversity of children's lives in the books, but that there is still a fair distance to go before they get there. The following recommendations are intended to support the continuance of this journey in the right direction.

Recommendations for the sector are underpinned by an understanding of the critical importance of **cross-sector collaboration and long-term commitment** in order to effect meaningful change and sustained improvements in representation and diversity.

The recommendations focus on:

- Addressing unconscious bias and racism in the sector.
- Supporting underrepresented groups at all stages of their career, enabling fairer access and progression.
- Funding further research and monitoring to inform and guide actions.
- Providing guidance and support for including diverse characters in books, promoting authentic representation and encouraging creative freedom and confidence.
- Supporting more role models to inspire children and young people.
- Increasing accessibility to diverse books.

⁷ [Pop Up Projects](#) are a not-for-profit Community Interest Company who facilitate access to literary experiences for children, young people, schools and families, especially in diverse, deprived, isolated or otherwise challenged communities.

Introduction

Previous research

Recent research has found that people from BME backgrounds are poorly represented in the children's literature sector in the UK in terms of:

- The workforce across the sector.
- Published authors and illustrators of children's and young adult (YA)⁸ books.
- Characters in children's and YA books.

Workforce

In a survey involving 42 publishing houses in the UK commissioned by the Publishers Association, 12% of the workforce was reported to be from a BME background. This is lower than the UK population (14%) and much lower than the London population (40%)⁹, where almost two-thirds of respondents were based (Equal Approach, 2018). This lack of ethnic diversity is even more pronounced for professionals in libraries and information services. Research commissioned by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and the Archives Records Association (UK and Ireland) (ARA) in 2015 found that just 3% the UK Information sector workforce was from a BME background.

Authors and illustrators

Research commissioned by BookTrust reviewed children's/YA books published between 2007 and 2017 in the UK. The research found that only 6% of children's book creators whose work was published in 2017 were BME, and only 2% were British and BME – a figure markedly lower than the proportion of BME people in the working age population of

England (16%)¹⁰. The proportion of BME children's authors and illustrators published in the UK has increased only slightly from 4% in 2007 to 6% in 2017 (Ramdarshan Bold, 2019).

Children's book characters

Research by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) in 2018 found that despite 32% of UK school-age children being from a BME background, only 4% of books for 3-11 year olds published in 2017 in the UK featured BME characters, and only 1% had a BME main character. The research found that BME presence was even lower for particular genres and age groups, such as in non-fiction books for older children.

Rationale

Organisations across the sector are taking measures to understand and address the underrepresentation of people from BME backgrounds in the children's literature sector. Arts Council England commissioned this research to more fully understand the factors influencing this lack of representation and the ways in which the sector is progressing towards better reflecting the diversity of children in the UK today. The aim of this research is to help bring about positive change by providing a context in which recommendations for practical and meaningful actions can be made. This project builds on existing evidence by seeking perspectives from individuals and organisations across the wider sector who can influence diversity in children's literature or have experienced barriers and enablers to improving diversity.

⁸ Young adult books are books written for young people aged 12-18 years.

⁹ Source: <http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/london-population/>

¹⁰ Source: Arts Council England (2019).

Research questions

The research aimed to address the following questions:

- What does the available literature tell us about the representation of people from BME backgrounds in the UK's children's literature sector?
- What is the current position for BME authors and illustrators within the children's literature sector? What do representatives from across the children's literature sector perceive to be the main barriers experienced by BME authors and illustrators? How is the sector supporting and promoting equality and diversity?
- What can Arts Council England and other organisations do to achieve positive change in the representation of BME people in the children's literature sector? What actions and practices could support this?



Methods and sample

The research questions were explored through an online survey and follow-up in-depth interviews.

We received feedback from a range of individuals¹¹ working in different parts of the sector, including:

- Publishers (mainstream, independent and specialist)
- Libraries
- Charities
- Membership organisations / trade bodies
- Booksellers (independent)
- Authors and illustrators
- Agents
- Education providers
- Campaign or community groups

Please note: We did not receive feedback from larger mainstream booksellers despite numerous attempts to engage them with the research through various channels.

More information on methods, sampling, respondents and data analysis can be found at [Appendix A](#).

¹¹ Due to the nature of the sampling method, and the differences in levels of response from different parts of the sector, the survey results cannot be considered to be representative of the sector as a whole. Differences identified between sub-groups should be interpreted as indicative.

Findings

Experiences of racism and microaggressions within the publishing sector are widespread

Experiences of racism and microaggressions in the publishing sector were widespread amongst participants, and respondents from a range of backgrounds were able to provide numerous examples. A black graduate trainee recounted an incident at a high-profile book launch, when she was working for a large children's publisher. The unconscious assumptions of a well-known media personality about her role highlighted the reasons that people from BME backgrounds often feel they do not belong in professional publishing spaces.

“ There was an author launch party, I’m talking to my peers and [the media personality] comes over to me and tries to give me his coat, because most of the coat attendants there, who were [unlike me] in uniform, were from an ethnic minority. But I was in the middle of a conversation with people and he tried to give me his coat. I didn’t understand straight away, I was like ‘the cloakroom’s over there’ and he was like [confused] and then it dawned on everyone in that moment, including himself, what was going on, which was horrible.”

Interviewee 21, Independent Publisher

A black editorial assistant described her ongoing frustration and exhaustion at dealing with a senior editor who repeatedly expressed outdated and racist attitudes, and used inappropriate language (for example, referring to ‘coloureds’) despite being asked to refrain from doing so.

“ There was a chapter on slavery [she was editing] and she said ‘slavery was bad and everything but I think they would have been a lot worse off if we hadn’t gone there and introduced technology or whatever’. She just says so many ignorant things. Instead

of being sorry when you point it out politely, she’ll just continue to argue with you as if what you’re saying is up for debate. It’s exhausting.”

Interviewee 17, Mainstream Publisher

Examples of racism were not just reported by interviewees from ethnic minorities. A white independent publisher/agent reported recent discussions with members of the sales team from a large publishing house, who she felt held ignorant and stereotypical views.

“ The industry is rotten to its core in terms of the way it sees people of colour and it’s an uphill battle. I’m much freer now I’m working on my own rather than having to sit in meetings where people say ‘I don’t really understand, why have we got this story about these children being driven about in cars in Lagos?’ Well, because that’s what happens, not everybody in Africa is dying of AIDS. And sales people saying ‘we can’t have that jacket with a black character on, can’t you just make her white?’ Well, she’s not white in the book. The astounding things that happen on a day-to-day basis are phenomenal. Publishing as an industry is no different from society as a whole, where you’re constantly coming up against people’s prejudice, assumptions and small-mindedness.”

Interviewee 18, Independent Publisher

Interviewees pointed out that most colleagues were not generally so openly ignorant or racist, as most people are aware of these issues to an extent and are “too afraid of being called out to even voice such opinions; everyone wants to be politically correct” Interviewee 17, Mainstream Publisher.

More needs to be done to address unconscious bias across the sector. Large publishers and other organisations are taking steps to improve representation through changes to policies and practices, including recruitment processes and training.

94% of respondents to the survey agreed that more needs to be done to address unconscious bias in the sector (Fig 1), with 59% strongly agreeing with this statement and a further 35% agreeing. There were marked differences in respondents' answers to this question, depending on their ethnicity. A higher proportion of respondents from a BME background¹² (76%) strongly agreed with the statement than white respondents (53%).¹³

20% of survey respondents said that they promoted diversity through recruitment or training. This was most frequently achieved through community outreach or engagement (57%), but also via the tailoring of advertising materials (39%), targeted programmes or initiatives (35%), targeted apprenticeships or internships (33%), targeted advertising of roles (33%), and recruitment panel training on equality and diversity (31%).

There were mixed responses to the statement: 'My organisation is doing well at addressing underrepresentation' with 40% saying that they neither agreed nor disagreed/didn't know. Nonetheless, 45% of respondents agreed and only 15% disagreed.

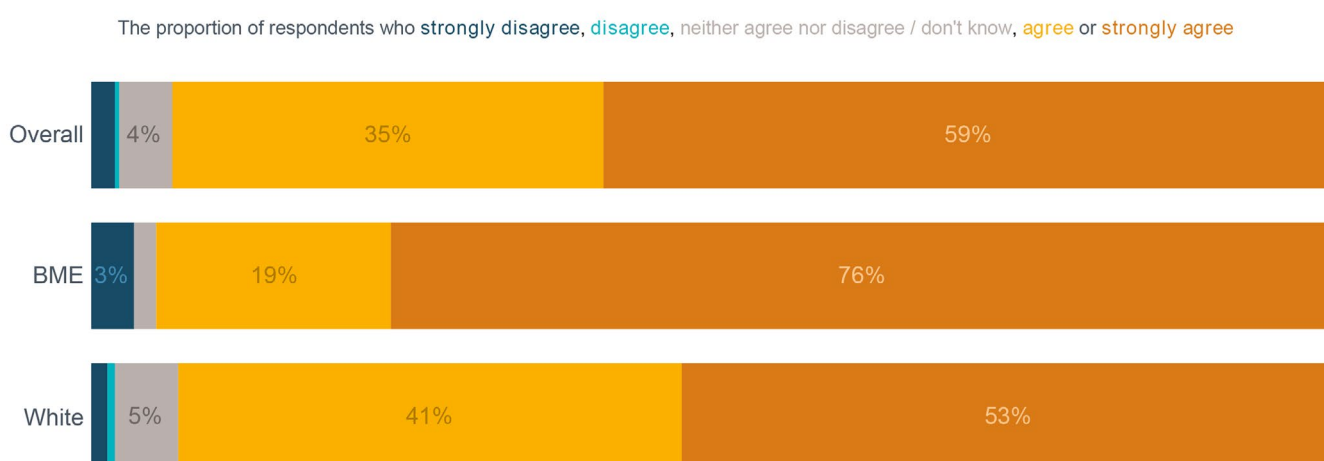
Interviewees pointed to positive examples of larger publishers taking steps to improve representation and combat unconscious bias. In particular, a number highlighted good work being undertaken by Penguin Random House, including initiatives such as Write Now and the Spare Room scheme. Respondents felt Penguin had an important role to play in improving diversity due to their position as the largest publisher in the UK.

“ They have [an employee whose role is] social responsibility [...] so they put the time in and really think about it, and they should because they are the biggest publisher. ”

Interviewee 21, Author/Freelance Agent

Interviewees provided evidence of changes to processes within their own organisations, which aimed to promote inclusivity and accessibility to the sector. For example, some publishers have scrapped unpaid internships, making the sector more accessible for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and from outside of London.

Figure 1: More needs to be done to address unconscious bias in the sector



Base: 217 (58 BME, 159 White)

¹² Due to the relatively lower numbers of respondents from non-white ethnic backgrounds we were not able to analyse and compare responses of each different ethnic group. The term BME refers to participants who identified their ethnicity as Arab, Asian/Asian British, Black/Black British, or mixed ethnic background.

¹³ White respondents were generally more likely to respond 'neither agree nor disagree/don't know' to agree/disagree questions on the survey, perhaps suggesting a lack of awareness or experience, or not feeling well-placed to comment on particular questions.

“ I think there are things to do with publishing being very London-centric. Particularly in the past people have had to do unpaid work experience to get a foot in the door. We’ve recently stopped that [in our organisation] but only within the last year, so we now have a paid three-month internship that we offer. ”

Interviewee 12, Mainstream Publisher

Paid internships, through schemes such as those provided by Creative Access, were welcomed as a positive development, but interviewees also highlighted the limitations of offering short term placements that were still highly competitive, offered piecemeal development of skills and experience and did not necessarily guarantee further support or success. Longer-term, sustained support would require greater commitment and investment, but is likely to enable more meaningful access, and provide stability and continuity for both the intern and the provider. One beneficiary of Creative Access added:

“ ...It’s all very well offering two, three months internships but actually taking the time to teach and nurture someone for a year will put them in better stead for getting a more permanent job. ”

Interviewee 17, Mainstream Publisher

A mainstream publishing house, whose staff took part in the interviews, recognised the need for diversity training to overcome some of these inherent barriers to inclusion and progression of staff, as well as the decisions made across the business. Their approach reflects their belief that issues often relate to lack of awareness rather than deliberate efforts to exclude people of colour or diverse perspectives.

“ The plan is to roll out online unconscious bias [training] across the business and have it as ongoing training. We recognise there needs to be a shift in language, more inclusive language, a more intentional shift in thinking in getting feedback on books, or interview questions that are put etc. It’s multi-layered for everybody, whether that’s Muslim, black, but also for those from a lower socio-economic background. For us it’s about creating an environment that BAME staff would want to stay in and give them an opportunity to grow within those areas. ”

Interviewee 26, Mainstream Publisher

Additionally, those working at larger publishers described the implementation of anonymous recruitment processes which aimed to combat unconscious bias. Job applicants complete generic skills and experience-based application forms, and personal and educational details are not disclosed to people conducting the shortlisting process. This process is followed by telephone interviews and finally face-to-face interviews. These approaches had been successful in improving diversity across the organisation.

“ So we introduced a recruitment process so we never see the CV, the first thing candidates do is complete a questionnaire which is four fairly generic questions which are basically saying ‘Give us the evidence from your experience that you can handle x, y, z situation’ [...] Then the first line of interviews is a telephone interview [...] and then after that stage they meet them for face to face interviews. As a result of that within the first six months 21% of our staffing candidates came from a BAME background. ”

Interviewee 14, Mainstream Publisher

However, an agent interviewed flagged their concerns about potentially not being able to support people from underrepresented backgrounds if they simply received a submission via email without information about a person’s identity, as it could be difficult to ascertain whether they might require additional support.

“ We can only judge the submission on the information that they give us and we also have to compare, make a decision of representation based on the quality of the work at the end of the day. If it’s not suitable for publication, if it’s not of the right level of quality, we can’t take it on [...] Also there’s so many other issues of diversity such as disability or educational background or class that aren’t apparent just from someone’s name. So it means you can’t always easily tell and if you want to give priority to those authors and those submissions, unless they specifically highlight themselves that they feel they fit that category, I worry sometimes that we’re overlooking people or not giving them more consideration because we just don’t know. ”

Interviewee 9, Agent

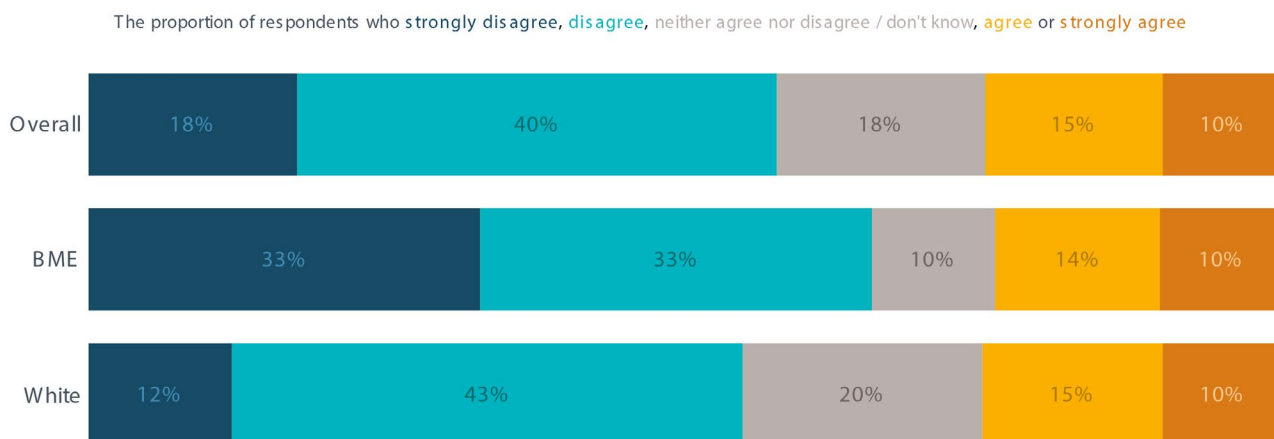
Inequality of access to the sector is another barrier to improving representation and diversity in the children's literature sector. Challenges in accessing the sector relate to factors which may intersect with ethnicity, including socioeconomic, educational, religious and geographical factors.

58% of respondents disagreed with the statement that publishing processes were equally challenging for all new authors regardless of their background (Fig 2). Again, respondents from BME backgrounds were more likely than white respondents to strongly disagree (33% compared with 12%).

Interviewees highlighted inequalities in access to the sector, which were often related to other characteristics that intersect with ethnicity. For

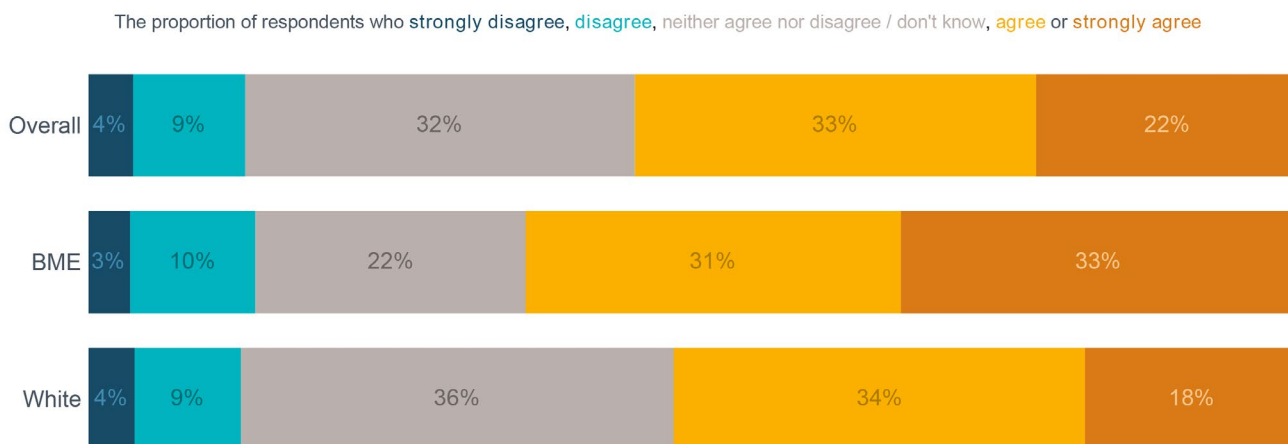
example, socioeconomic factors were described as a barrier to improving diversity in the sector. 55% of survey respondents agreed that people from diverse backgrounds may be put off a career in the sector by concerns about low pay (Fig 3). People from BME backgrounds were more likely to agree with this statement, with 33% strongly agreeing compared with 18% of people from a white background.

Figure 2: Publishing processes are equally challenging for all new authors, regardless of their background



Base: 217 (58 BME, 159 White)

Figure 3: People from diverse backgrounds may be put off a career in the sector by concerns about low pay



Base: 217 (58 BME, 159 White)

Interviewees also highlighted decreasing incomes for writers as a particular issue affecting diversity in the sector. Whilst a small proportion of authors can earn life-changing amounts of money from writing, the majority need to supplement their income through other activities, such as creative writing workshops, journalism, and school visits.

“ Incomes for writers have been going down and down so it’s only people who are able to support themselves in some other way that it’s feasible for them to write. ”

Interviewee 6, Author

Interviewees suggested that this may deter young people from pursuing a career in the sector, particularly if they do not have other financial support available to them.

“ ...a lot of those kids or adults who would love to follow their dream and write are not going to choose to do so or not going to be able to put the time in to doing so because they have to earn a living and it’s a risky way to earn a living. ”

Interviewee 9, Agent

Furthermore, traditional routes into the sector are prohibitive for people from lower income demographics. Respondents reported that many published authors have Creative Writing Masters degrees, and people employed in the publishing sector often have degrees from Oxford or Cambridge and/or a private school education. Additionally, unpaid internships¹⁴ as a route into publishing are not a realistic option for many, although there is evidence that these are being used less often across the sector.

“ The pool of people that are employed in publishing is restricted to those people who’ve got a degree and then those people who can afford to go and work for virtually no money as interns or what have you in publishing. ”

Interviewee 5, Library Head of Service

One interviewee also remarked that, within the children’s literature sector specifically, attendance at events such as meetings, conferences or panels is often unfunded so may be difficult to access for people with lower incomes.

“ A huge amount of the children’s book world is run on goodwill rather than on being paid, so again if you’re from a lower income demographic, it then becomes difficult for you to have the same kind of opportunities as other people might. ”

Interviewee 3, Librarian / Author

The London-centric nature of the children’s literature sector was also noted to be a barrier to improving representation: those based elsewhere face practical and financial difficulties accessing the sector. One respondent highlighted that, although they invited people from across the country to attend judging meetings for one of their national prizes, these meetings were held in London, which creates barriers for some. Another respondent - an independent bookseller based in the Midlands - had struggled to find an author from a diverse background to come to the area for a school visit despite having contacts in the publishing industry.

“ I contacted several of the publishers that we work with, so we struggled with either availability or the fact that there were just so few people from that background that were willing to come to Shropshire [...] We’re in the middle of nowhere which is a challenge, but we weren’t able to offer that to this school and they had a budget to pay and everything. ”

Interviewee 4, Independent Bookseller

People of different religious backgrounds may also face specific challenges accessing the children’s literature sector. For example, one specialist publisher whose focus is on increasing the level of representation of Muslim children in books described how particular income streams were inaccessible to them as they conflicted with their beliefs. A lack of clarity from funders about available alternative provision¹⁵ was a barrier to these groups in accessing funding.

“ The Arts Council for example, because that’s all National Lottery money, we’re not allowed to use gambling funds which makes it immediately inaccessible. So a lot of these grants that are out there are not faith-sensitive because Muslims can’t access it. So again you’re stuck, and we can’t take interest-based loans and start up loans come with interest. ”

Interviewee 8, Independent/Specialist Publisher

¹⁴ The Arts Council’s website provides best practice Guidance on Fair Pay and Paid Internships with the following links: Fair Pay: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/document/fair-pay-and-project-grants> and Paid Internships: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Apprenticeships_Best_Practice_Guide.PDF

¹⁵ Although Arts Council England do provide alternative funding for groups who cannot access mainstream funding, this is not clearly advertised and more should be done to raise awareness of these options.

A lack of role models, particularly in senior positions means that people from BME backgrounds are less likely to consider a career in the sector. Those that do go on to work in the sector can feel marginalised, which has implications on their confidence and mental health.

75% of survey respondents agreed that a lack of role models meant that not enough people from BME backgrounds aspire to becoming writers/illustrators or working in the sector (Fig 4). Respondents from BME backgrounds were more likely to strongly agree with this statement than respondents from white backgrounds (60% compared with 26%).

Interviewees also highlighted underrepresentation of people from BME backgrounds in the workforce of the children's literature sector, particularly in the publishing and public library parts of the sector, as a barrier to people from BME backgrounds from considering a career in the sector.

One interviewee, an Oxbridge English graduate from a working class BME background, explained that publishing 'wasn't on my radar', due to its low profile and low pay relative to the professions her peer group were considering, until a publisher she had contact with happened to suggest it as a possibility. She commented that non-Oxbridge English graduates, especially those from BME backgrounds, are unlikely to know anyone in, or anything about, publishing:

“ They may consider journalism but not publishing. Publishing is off-putting for BAMEs because people recruit people like them. ”

Interviewee 21, Independent Publisher

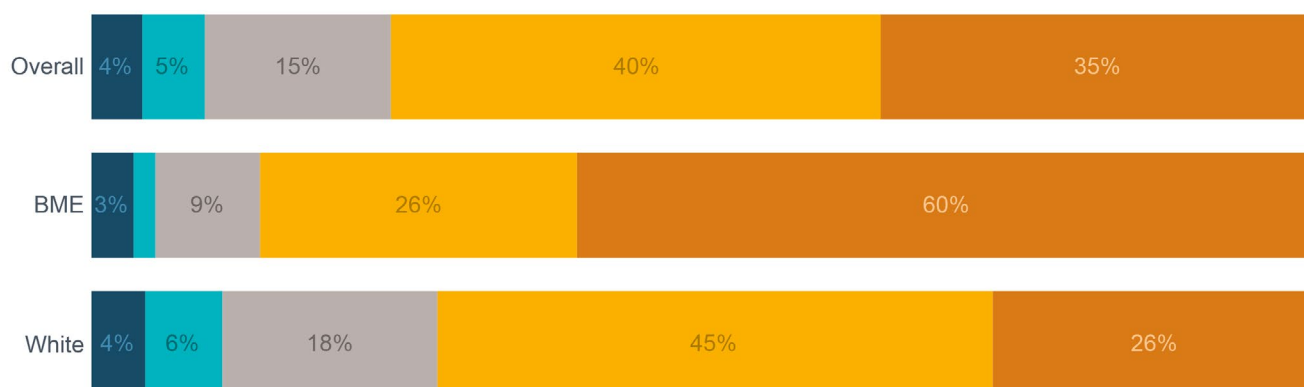
Even in the cases where interviewees from BME backgrounds obtained entry level jobs in publishing, the lack of role models in more senior publishing roles prevented some from seeing themselves progress within the sector:

“ My team have been very welcoming, I've never felt excluded on a personal level, but the only people in the top positions in the areas in publishing that I want to move up in are white, middle class people. Yeah, I've got this editorial assistant job now, but is there much chance of me moving up the ranks? A lot of publishing companies are very willing to hire people of colour for lower roles, but you rarely ever see them progress. ”

Interviewee 17, Mainstream Publisher

Figure 4: A lack of role models means not enough talented BME young people aspire to becoming writers/illustrators or working in the sector

The proportion of respondents who strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree / don't know, agree or strongly agree



Base: 217 (58 BME, 159 White)

This was also acknowledged by a white female interviewee, who described being motivated and inspired by seeing women in senior positions in her workplace. Reflecting on this, she felt that a lack of representation of BME people at senior level could be a barrier to progression for junior colleagues from BME backgrounds.

“ I can remember there being a few women in senior positions that I would look at and think not everyone will make it but a few people will be a woman and get there. I remember feeling I needed to look to those people to think at least I know she’s got there. I can imagine as a BAME person in this company, looking at the board and thinking however hard I work maybe there’s a ceiling for how far I can get, I don’t know. I wonder if they would have those people in those senior positions to look to for progress. ”

Interviewee 12, Mainstream Publisher

Interviewees of colour also described near-constant feelings of imposter syndrome, being ‘othered’, and the isolation and alienation of often being the only ethnic minority person working in their area. Exacerbated by their experiences of microaggressions and racism, these barriers and undermining experiences had implications for their confidence, mental health, resilience and motivation to remain in often subtly hostile and precarious work environments.

“ It’s quite exhausting really, it makes me, for the most part, just a very frustrated and tired person constantly. Not even just doing my job but having to appear to be really enjoying my job so that other people don’t think that I hate it here or that I have an attitude or whatever. I’m constantly aware of how other people perceive my actions, I’m constantly thinking about how people will interpret how I’m acting, it’s quite tiring. ”

Interviewee 17, Mainstream Publisher

Some had felt like giving up the constant struggle at times, but determination to succeed and work much harder than their peers were seen as the key personal traits that enabled them to continue working and progressing in the sector.

An interviewee from a mainstream publisher acknowledged the need for investment in promoting diversity to ensure that underrepresented groups were more likely to reach the point of applying for roles in the sector. This interviewee described a current project they planned to initiate to develop a ‘grassroots plan’ involving outreach and working with children and young people through education settings to promote careers in the sector and support access to these careers.

“ My instinct is that if the industry is seen as white, middle class and a bit closed then it will be difficult, because people won’t be considering us. So [we need to think about] what we can do to get people from all backgrounds to consider that publishing is a place for them. ”

Interviewee 14, Mainstream Publisher

One interviewee suggested that publishers could be more proactive in recruiting for senior roles from outside the sector to help increase diversity in the sector, particularly in more senior roles.

“ I think publishing companies are sometimes a bit snobby about book publishing experience being the only kind of experience that counts, when actually, particularly when you’re talking about things like design jobs or sales jobs, experience in another industry might be good. I wonder whether we would do well to look to other industries and see if there are people who could come across to those more senior roles to provide that kind of pipeline up. ”

Interviewee 12, Mainstream Publisher

People from BME backgrounds working in the children's literature sector are often expected to promote or comment on diversity issues purely because of their ethnicity. Similarly, authors often feel pressured to write books relating to their ethnic background.

Those from BME backgrounds working in the sector reported being expected to become involved in promoting diversity purely because of their ethnicity. For example, one librarian from a BME background highlighted that due to the lack of diversity in their area of the sector, they are often called upon to speak about diversity.

“...because there are so few people of colour in the industry I get called on for the same kind of thing an awful lot. Certainly I often feel that diversity-wise I'm the go-to person for the library sector and that doesn't really feel very diverse a lot of the time, if it's always my voice that's coming through.”

Interviewee 3, Librarian/Author

A black Oxford English graduate also commented that on securing a graduate position with a large publisher, which she enjoyed, she became resentful at being pressured to represent and promote diversity issues:

“...I just wanted to be like everyone else. I didn't want to be labelled as BAME, special or different but I was corralled to be on the Diversity Committee. Initially I was resistant to the idea of being pigeon-holed because of my ethnicity. I was 22 and not brave enough to say I didn't want to be defined by my race.”

Interviewee 21, Independent Publisher

Three-quarters of survey respondents agreed that diverse books are often expected to focus on issues faced by underrepresented groups (Fig 5). People from BME backgrounds agreed with this most strongly, with 59% strongly agreeing compared with only 21% of white respondents.

Interview data supports this, with some respondents saying that there is often an expectation or pressure on people from BME backgrounds to write books relating to their background, or on issues perceived to pertain to their background, rather than anything more universal or nuanced. Diverse authors who took part in the interviews were clear that they just wished to tell stories, rather than represent their entire race.

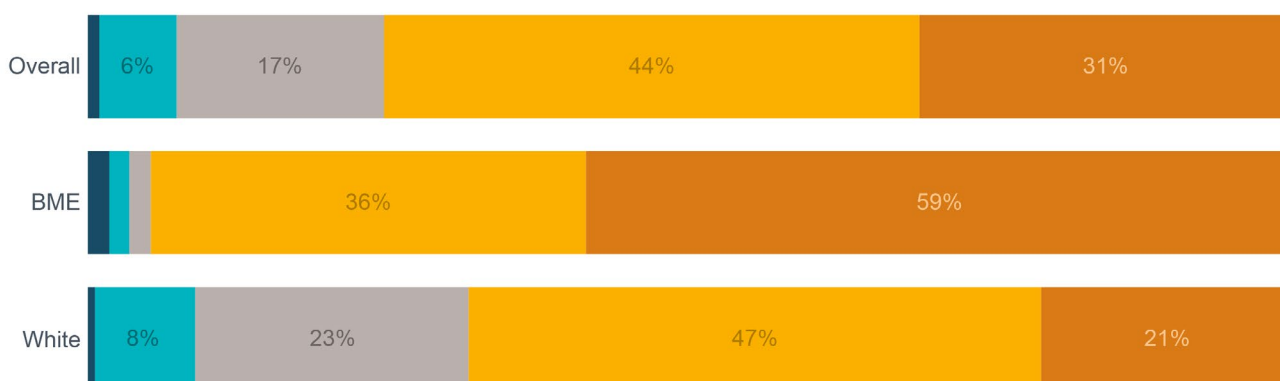
“For me, it's not just about racism, it's about education and privilege and it's not sexy [for publishers]. The black stories they say people are interested in are about slavery, asylum seeking, extremes of culture like spiritualisation, dreadlocks. There's nothing wrong with those things but they're not my story.”

Interviewee 23, Self-Published Author

The frustration that some experienced as a result of these expectations led to them leaving the mainstream and establishing independent publishing houses or self-publishing their works, which afforded them greater freedom to create and innovate. (It should be noted that there are also

Figure 5: Diverse books are often expected to focus on issues faced by underrepresented groups

The proportion of respondents who strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree / don't know, agree or strongly agree



Base: 216 (58 BME, 158 White)

challenges faced by individuals taking this route. These challenges are discussed in more detail in later sections).

For example:

“ [I now have the independence] to develop storylines that are not around angst, pain and deprivation, but children of colour having adventures, with their identity and experiences informing their responses without being the sole focus of the story. ”

Interviewee 21, Independent Publisher

Others, however, were so demoralised by restrictions and rejections, the lack of understanding about the need for diversity of real voices and stories, and prizes for books that excluded diverse experiences, that they gave up publishing for

children, and found other creative avenues for their writing. One former children’s author, describing his frustrations with publishers a decade ago, said:

“ I refused to accept when a publisher says ‘does the character have to do that or say that?’ Yes they do! White privilege kicked in because it was then about the language. We had a vernacular that was speaking to the streets, speaking to the experience of the disaffected. You started to then get the evolution of the literary prize and that separated out and excluded black writers – that’s why a lot of writers at the time went into film and television. So that’s why I thought, why am I bothering with this white elitist profession called publishing. ”

Interviewee 24, Author/Academic

Improvements in diversity in children’s books are constrained by perceptions of a limited market for these books in some parts of the sector.

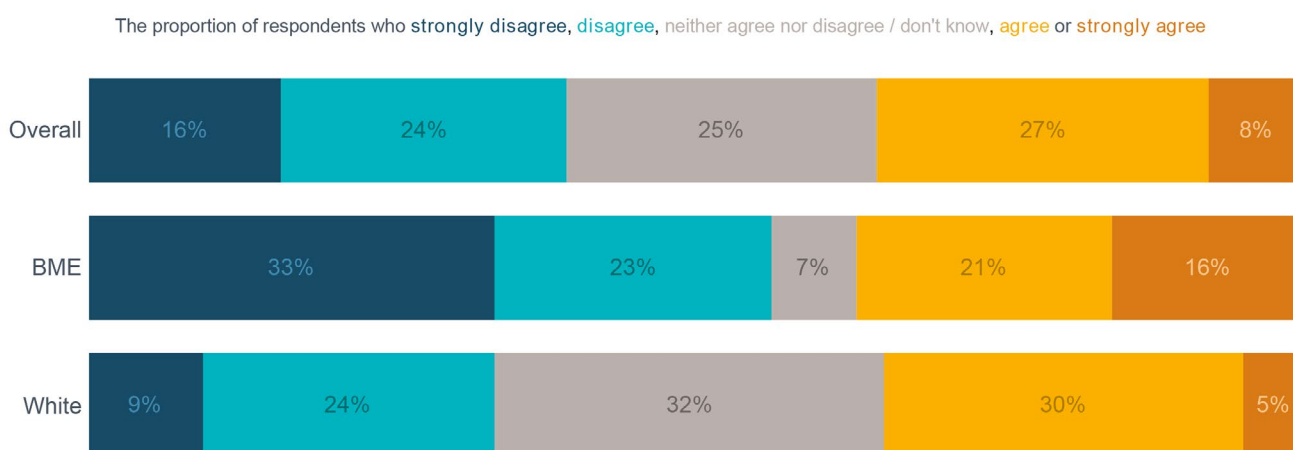
Barriers to progress as a result of this view include:

- **Inertia in acquiring diverse talent**
- **Inexperience and risk aversion related to publishing and marketing diverse books**
- **Miscommunication in the supply chain**
- **Misconceptions of the demand for diverse books**

There were mixed responses from survey respondents to the statement that there are not enough talented BME authors coming forward, with 35% of respondents agreeing with the statement, 40% disagreeing and 25% saying that they

neither agreed nor disagreed/didn’t know. Higher proportions of BME respondents disagreed with this statement (56% compared with 33% of white respondents).

Figure 6: There are not enough talented BME authors and illustrators coming forward



Base: 216 (57 BME, 159 White)

Data from the interviews provide a more nuanced understanding of this finding. For example, interviewees acknowledged the barriers that underrepresented groups may face in getting to the point of making a submission to an agent. A lack of familiarity with, and experience of, the publishing process may make it a daunting prospect, particularly for those who are not coming into the industry via traditional routes.

“ It’s just a question of information and awareness. If authors don’t feel comfortable, they don’t know how to submit to agents, then we don’t see submissions from a diverse background and we can’t represent them. But that is why I think it’s so important for the agents to make the effort and go out and reach out to different groups rather than sitting back and expecting them to come to us, which biases us to people who are already in the know. ”

Interviewee 9, Agent

Publishers also acknowledged the importance of the industry reaching out and finding new talent rather than just acquiring talent through submissions and highlighted the responsibility of the publishing industry to do more in terms of proactively seeking out diverse talent:

“ I think it’s very easy for people in publishing to say agents aren’t submitting this and agents to say the authors aren’t coming to us, but actually in publishing we go out and look for authors to write things all the time [...] there are people out there and there are people writing really good stuff and I think the fact that we haven’t found them ultimately is our fault, it’s all very well blaming other people but actually we need to do better. ”

Interviewee 12, Mainstream Publisher

Agents and publishers often reported receiving a high volume of submissions which could lead to a tendency to rely on these for the majority of their acquisitions.

“ The commissioning editors are on the lookout, so they are going after people too but primarily it is coming through agents. And on a weekly basis we get in dozens and dozens and dozens of submissions so the inbox is huge and of course that’s all going to editors. But, because this has been such a focus for us [we’re looking at] other media [personalities] that could write for children, whether it’s comedians or people, so they’re on the lookout. ”

Interviewee 14, Mainstream Publisher

Publishers noted that heavy workloads often meant that there was a tendency to recommission authors and illustrators with whom they have existing relationships, and whose books have proven to be commercially successful. They acknowledged that improvements in diversity could be held back as a result as previously published authors are much more likely to be from a white background.

“ I know that if I were looking for a new batch of young readers one of the first things I would do would be go back to the authors who have written ones that have done well before and say ‘Have you got any new ideas for this series?’ So if they’re all white, which is likely, I could go back to a load of white people and say ‘Write me another story’, rather than thinking ‘We should diversify this pool of people’. And I think across publishing, companies tend to be trying to make do with not quite enough staff, so if you’re really busy if it’s much quicker for you to just send three emails to three people you already know saying ‘Do you want to do another one of these?’, than it is to write a proper brief for a new person. I can really see how people who aren’t keeping it in the forefront of their mind all the time would end up falling into that trap of just going to the same old faces. ”

Interviewee 12, Mainstream Publisher

One agent highlighted that younger people working in the publishing industry appeared to be more likely to seek out talent proactively and through a range of methods than those who had worked in the industry for a long time, and are likely to have established client lists and be less motivated to proactively look for new talent. Relying on backlists and existing relationships is likely to hinder progress as these authors and illustrators are more likely to be white.

“ I think it often tends to be the younger agents in their 20s and 30s rather than the old guard who have been doing things their way for 30 years or they already have very established client lists and therefore aren’t taking on as many new clients. So there’s less imperative for them to need to go out and find authors that way. ”

Interviewee 9, Agent

Even when authors from BME backgrounds reached the point of having their submissions reviewed by publishers, other barriers were encountered. 59% of respondents to the survey agreed that writers from BME backgrounds are expected to appeal to a fairly narrow audience/market (Fig 7), with over half of respondents from BME backgrounds strongly agreeing with this statement (54%), compared with just 15% of white respondents.

Interview data supported this, and there were several examples of authors struggling to have their books published by mainstream publishers as a result of perceptions of a limited market, or of diverse books as a riskier investment. For example, an author writing for a Muslim audience described encountering barriers to publication due to the publisher’s lack of experience in this area, despite their books addressing a clear gap in the market:

“ I was speaking to a specific person and the Head of Religious Publishing who really liked what I was doing. The barriers came when the rest of the team had to get involved. Like, the sales team felt like they couldn’t sell it cos it wasn’t their market and they didn’t know, didn’t have the experience with stuff like that and obviously it is really expensive

to do so the resource and investment that would go into it [...] I think it was probably just too risky for them, even though it was a really big market, but it was something they’d not done before and for the sales team to have to sell books that they don’t really know much about is quite difficult. ”

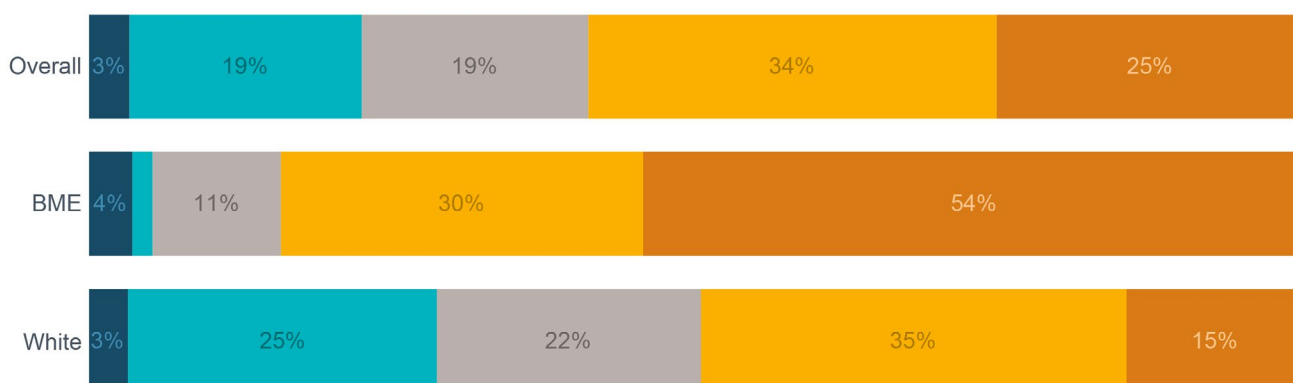
Interviewee 8, Independent Publisher/Author

A white school librarian described how she worked with an established children’s author to develop a story with black girls as the main characters, but struggled to persuade publishers to engage with it. She explained that, even though the book was eventually published, it did not sell well as a result of a lack of promotion from the publishers, which she felt fulfilled and reinforced the initial reservations of the publishers:

“ I was trying to get a publisher to work with an author, she had four or five books by a few different publishers. They were so popular with our girls because they were about black girls. There was nothing in them that wouldn’t relate to other teenage girls but the characters were black. She had another idea for a story and I really wanted her to be able to bring that to be published. She’d come into school so [I thought] ‘Let’s talk to some of the specific publishers and get them to commission something.’ She had an idea and the response I got was ‘This just won’t be popular, it won’t have a wide enough popularity’. Just because the character happens to be black? Really? So I had to send them Amazon reviews of her other books

Figure 7: Writers from BME backgrounds are expected to appeal to a fairly narrow audience/market

The proportion of respondents who strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree / don't know, agree or strongly agree



Base: 216 (57 BME, 159 White)

and get the girls at school to write down how much they enjoyed her books etc. Eventually they did agree to commission her book, it was published. It's not high literary writing but it's a good teenage book, it's just normal teenage girl stuff and it went down really well with the girls at school. ”

Interviewee 22, School Librarian

On searching for an agent or publisher for her book, an author of African heritage was told that her book was good, but that they already had a Nigerian author on their list so they could not take her on.

“ I got to one publisher and this is the reason why I decided not to bother. She said to me they already had one Nigerian author. They liked my book but they had one Nigerian author and she didn't know how that would go down. And I thought to myself, 'well, enough said.' ”

Interviewee 23, Self-Published Author

Another clear theme emerging from interviews was that improvements to diversity and representation may be being hindered by a lack of communication at various points along the supply chain, meaning that diverse books, even if they are available, are not reaching shelves, and therefore children and families.

For example, one interviewee highlighted that a lack of communication between sales representatives and booksellers meant that booksellers believed that diverse books were difficult to source, whilst sales agents assumed that booksellers would not want to purchase diverse books.

“ There is a reason that independent bookshops I go to, they just say it's so difficult to source. They want to sell them, but it's so difficult to source them cos no-one really has the time to reverse the chain. The bookstore manager says she'd have diverse books, but in her day she doesn't have enough time to do research and find that individually and then contact us as a company. So she sees whatever the sales reps put in front of her, and sales reps put in front of her whatever he thinks she will be selling the easiest and the most. So he goes there with a bag of books and reaches his target and walks out of the shop without showing diverse books. ”

Interviewee 1, Independent Publisher

Similarly, one independent publisher described how misconceptions of consumer demand for diverse books meant that they had struggled to sell their books to large booksellers in predominantly white areas. Despite diverse books being sold to and successfully loaned out by public libraries, booksellers in the same geographical area were unconvinced that their customers would buy them.

“ I've done some research and the libraries have five of each of our titles and they all are out, being borrowed, so that encourages me to say 'Amazing, great, so I'm going to contact this bookshop and offer our books, it makes sense'. But in an area that there are three libraries that stock six of each of our titles the bookshop says 'Your books are not for us', and when I asked 'Why do you think our books are not for you?', they just say 'The quality of the story and the illustrations aren't good enough for us to keep on the shelf'. So how come you live in an area where people are always borrowing these books from the library and you don't want to stock it? You don't want to stock it cos you look at your demographic and you think they don't have black children, so they won't sell to our audience. However, it isn't the case, the people of the area are already reading those books. So, I think librarians and teachers are the biggest supporters and book sellers are still not seeing the potential. ”

Interviewee 1, Independent Publisher

An independent bookseller also commented that they had struggled to source books with images of non-white fathers for a Father's Day theme, despite demand from customers.

“ We were contacted by two parents because we'd put a post up and we hadn't been able to find any books that had families other than what appeared to be white dads. When we put the post up we'd been proactive and looked and we couldn't find any. There were dads that were animals and those were the only dads that weren't seen as white dads, but you would find it really hard to identify with a rabbit or a bear. ”

Interviewee 4, Independent Bookseller

Authentic representation of diverse characters in children's books is an important but complex issue where authors would benefit from more guidance and support.

Interviewees also highlighted uncertainty and hesitation around inclusion of diverse characters based on concerns around cultural sensitivities and ensuring representation is authentic. A lack of experience or expertise within mainstream publishers could lead to reluctance to take on or rejection of submissions which include characters from diverse backgrounds. For example, one respondent found that publishers were conscious about ensuring authenticity of diverse characters in books and avoiding tokenism. However, this could result in a reluctance to include diverse characters if it was felt they were there to “tick the diversity box.”

“ One of the characters was British Chinese and that was just a part of their character, it wasn't something that was crucial to the plot, that was just part of their character and how she wanted to represent them and one of the publishers who rejected it made a comment about feeling like the fact that one of the characters was Chinese British felt a bit forced and token and that they didn't like the way he was represented, or they felt it was a bit problematic for whatever reason.”

Interviewee 9, Agent

One author also highlighted that she felt there was a lack of consensus around the inclusion of diverse characters in books.

“ Another issue that I think is quite difficult, there are sort of mixed messages between the conversation in the US and the conversation here. So, in the US it's very much like own voices: if you're Jewish you write about Jewish stories, and if you're black you write about black characters, and if you're white write about white characters, so that's one message that we're getting over here. And then we're also getting the message that no matter what ethnicity you are as an author, you should be including a diverse range of characters in your books. So those two things are directly contradictory and it's very stressful. ”

Interviewee 6, Author

This author also highlighted concerns amongst authors (particularly from white backgrounds) about making mistakes. She described wanting to include diverse characters in the books they created and being encouraged to do so by publishers. However, this author felt that they did not receive enough support from publishers, were unsure of where to go for guidance, and had concerns about backlash and a ‘blame culture’ through blogs and social media if they made mistakes.

One interviewee highlighted the importance of all authors including diverse characters in their books, particularly at a time when most authors are white, in order to improve representation in children's books. However, they also highlighted the importance of striking a balance to ensure aspiring authors from underrepresented groups are not further disadvantaged by this.

“ White British authors or middle class authors have privilege and responsibility to use that in order to effect a change [...] Then over time you hope that would have a knock on effect with authors who are from [BME] backgrounds to feel encouraged that if they write about those kinds of characters they're not going to get the door shut in their face. Obviously the balance then comes with making sure that you're not doing that and just assuming you can solve the problem by encouraging those white, middle class authors to be more diverse in their writing, if in doing so you are turning a blind eye to the diverse authors who already are clamouring at the door. ”

Interviewee 9, Agent

Inspiring children and young people through engagement with schools and libraries is crucial in encouraging all children to aspire to careers in the sector. Schools and libraries are very active in promoting diversity; however, budget cuts could have a detrimental effect on this.

Most survey respondents (72%) said that they supported diversity by inspiring children and young people. This was primarily through encouraging them to read more diverse books (77%), providing access to diverse books (73%), running events or workshops (66%) and highlighting role models (52%).

Interviewees highlighted the particular importance of schools and libraries in supporting and promoting representation in children’s literature, given that they work directly with children. Schools and libraries were praised for their recognition of the importance of representation and their commitment to providing diverse books for children.

“Our biggest buyers are libraries and schools because they know the value of diversity. They are the people that deal with children directly and they see the children being together and how diversity affects them in that sense.”

Interviewee 1, Independent Bookseller

However, budget cuts for schools and public libraries could threaten progress and even have a negative effect on diversity in the children’s book market in future. Interviewees expressed concern about the lack of focus on the decline in this section of the market, which is perhaps masked by the overall buoyancy of the children’s book market. One local authority Library Head of Service explained that due to dwindling budgets they were less able

to use specialist suppliers with a focus on diversity. Using mainstream suppliers was more cost-efficient but meant that they were unable to choose their own books, making it more difficult to ensure they stocked a diverse range of books.

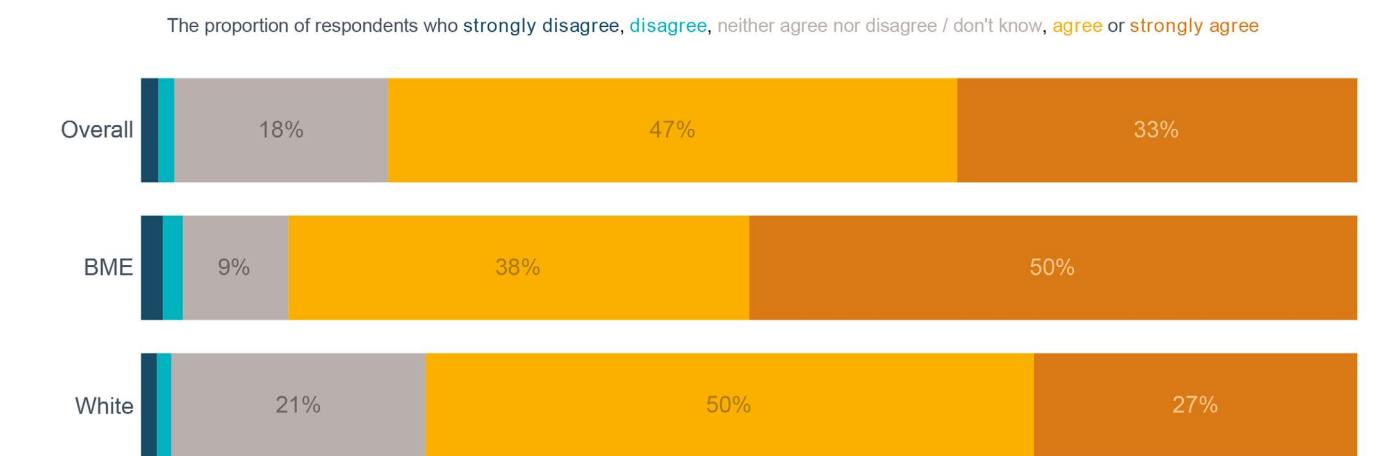
“I think that libraries go out of their way to buy books that are more representative of local communities, and if more libraries close and the amount of money that libraries spend on books continues to decrease [...] the publishers won’t be able to sell as many books into libraries so that will affect the book market.”

Interviewee 5, Library Head of Service

This librarian also expressed concern that dwindling budgets could mean that books featuring inappropriate depictions of diversity are kept on library shelves for longer as libraries do not have the budget available to replace them.

Across the survey and in-depth interviews, engagement with children and young people, particularly those from BME backgrounds, through educational settings was considered to be a key factor in increasing aspirations and encouraging and promoting writing, illustration and publishing as viable careers. 80% of survey respondents agreed that education providers need to better prepare young people from underrepresented groups for careers in the sector (Fig 8). Respondents from BME backgrounds were particularly in agreement

Figure 8: Education providers need to prepare young people from underrepresented groups better for careers in the sector



Base: 217 (58 BME, 159 White)

on this statement, with 50% strongly agreeing compared with 27% of white respondents.

One publisher who was interviewed echoed this, arguing that it was important for education providers to be aware of and promote careers in publishing to the children they engage with.

“ You still need to show what publishing does so... Do career officers talk about publishing? Do they understand the breadth of roles in publishing? Do universities, colleges, sixth form colleges, schools promote and do they understand that it's not just about editorial, it's also about sales, production, marketing, data analysis and the influence and importance of books? ”

Interviewee 14, Mainstream Publisher

This respondent also felt that inspiring a love of books and reading for children and young people from all backgrounds would be helpful.

“ Everybody has their part to play in that whole chain and then culturally that schools are pushing reading for pleasure and through that all children are accessing books, and being read to, becoming readers, and then thinking 'Maybe publishing is for me.' ”

Interviewee 14, Mainstream Publisher

A wide range of organisations and initiatives are providing invaluable support for people from underrepresented groups to support them in accessing and progressing in the children's literature sector. Many smaller organisations, such as specialist publishers, community groups and charities are doing particularly well at promoting diversity.

Many organisations and initiatives are providing valuable support to people underrepresented in the sector, as highlighted throughout this report.¹⁶ 46% of survey respondents said that they supported authors and illustrators from underrepresented groups through their role. They achieved this through a range of methods, including running events and workshops to inspire future authors and illustrators (58%), offering advice and support about the publishing process (45%), targeted programmes or initiatives (44%), advocacy (40%) and mentoring or coaching (35%).

A number of organisations were reported to be successfully supporting people who are underrepresented in the children's literature sector to access and progress in careers in, for example, writing and publishing. Knights Of were often reported to be a very positive example of inclusivity in publishing:

“ I do think what Knights Of are doing is incredible cos they're showing a publishing model which is entirely inclusive. This idea of matching your freelance editor, production manager to somebody less experienced so they can learn more about the process, almost like shadowing, I think is excellent. It's a brilliant way to give more opportunity to people and not say you have to be a pro at everything straight away. ”

Interviewee 10, Membership Body

¹⁶ Please note: The purpose of this research is not to evaluate any organisation or initiative. Organisations or initiatives referenced throughout the report represent a few examples of many highlighted by participants as doing particularly well or having a positive impact on addressing underrepresentation and improving diversity.

Similarly, Spread the Word were cited as a good example of promoting inclusivity and representation in the sector, through their work and focus on providing truly accessible writer development. This is achieved through the provision of targeted funds and additional support for writers who are underrepresented in publishing, including writers from BAME backgrounds, working class backgrounds, those who are LGBTQI, and those who have disabilities.

“ I think initiatives to support affordable, accessible creative writing training are the kind of programmes I know the Arts Council already support with organisations like Spread the Word, I do think they really make a difference. ”

Interviewee 9, Agent

The organisation Inclusive Minds was reported to be particularly supportive in helping authors and publishers to include diverse characters in their publications in an authentic way.

“ The other people we are incredibly inspired by is Inclusive Minds. I think their inclusion ambassador network is amazing and if more publishers took the time to work with them in the early stages of producing books they would be able to make sure they’re representing people authentically cos they’re working with these young people who have experience of these different facets of diversity, and writers as well [...] I do feel they’re a massively positive resource that aren’t as known about as much as they should be. ”

Interviewee 10, Membership Body

Looking back on their careers, some interviewees identified key opportunities, including targeted diversity schemes, which enabled them to gain the vital skills and experience to hone their craft and build their CVs. These were instrumental in enabling access to the sector and their subsequent career progression and success.

One author described her experience on the Megaphone scheme for a group of new writers from BAME backgrounds, as “a massive part of how I’ve become a children’s author”. With funding from the Arts Council and the Publisher’s Association, she was mentored for over a year by an experienced,

successful writer of colour and attended masterclasses with several prominent BAME authors, senior editors, agents and key speakers from the Publishers Association. The funding, camaraderie from those of a similar background and structured support of the programme were key - as was the exposure to high profile role models, access to agents and publishers. The benefits of this programme resulted in the development and publication of her first children’s book, as well as success for the other Megaphone mentees.

“ I’ve been on a lot of diversity projects and they’re usually quite short and then nothing happens afterwards, but this one was brilliant. It was well planned, it was exactly what we needed, we hadn’t written novels before, but it was just kind of magical. We were all brown, we were all new but we just felt so at ease and it was so different from other courses where I’m in a room full of white people. We’re here and not intimidated at all. It was such a different feeling and I think that gave us all confidence as well that we could do this and we were in it together. ”

Interviewee 16, Author

Amongst the interviewees there were also examples of progression from paid internships through Creative Access into other substantive roles in the sector.

“ One of my friends also started as a receptionist through Creative Access. [After that] role she was hired as a full-time receptionist and then promoted to a prizes assistant and then she was promoted to prizes manager. From that she got a job as an editorial assistant, after working at the Society of Authors for two or three years she was able to get the job that she actually wanted. ”

Interviewee 17, Mainstream Publisher

Awareness-raising and campaigning by influential organisations with a wide reach is an important method of promoting and supporting diversity. For example, charities and membership organisations are supporting diversity through providing advice and support to their members and encouraging and sharing good practice. Social media has also allowed individuals to more effectively come together and raise their voices in support of diversity. However, better representation of people from BME backgrounds in the mainstream media would be beneficial.

57% of survey respondents said that they supported diversity through raising awareness or campaigning activities. These tended to involve conversations and communication with peers and professionals (80%), as well as bringing together groups of people with a passion for equality and diversity (54%), advocating for diverse authors and illustrators (54%), and running events or workshops to improve equality and diversity (53%).

Good work being undertaken by charities and membership organisations, such as CLPE, BookTrust and Pop Up Projects, was also highlighted. In particular, respondents felt that these organisations were effective in using their platforms and wide-reaching influence to promote diversity.

A number of interviewees felt that social media had been influential in supporting the current drive for diversity in children's literature by allowing people to have their voices heard and come together to be more influential and lobby for long-lasting change.

“ Certainly at the moment I would say one of the big drivers is probably social media cos it's meant that individuals have been able to connect more, and raise their voice more, and show that there is actually an appetite in a way that perhaps has been much more fragmented in the past.”

Interviewee 3, Librarian/Author

Whilst some organisations with a focus on diversity had been successful in gaining media focus on diversity issues, interviewees felt that it would be helpful if people from BME backgrounds were better represented in mainstream media.

“ I think one of the big areas where more could happen is with regard to the media, although children's books don't get a huge amount of media focus anyway [...] But certainly I think where there is media expectation, whether that be reviewers or on television or on the radio, I think it's really key that we have a diverse range of voices there.”

Interviewee 3, Librarian/Author

However, the recent rise in celebrities from BME backgrounds writing books for children, was seen to be helpful in promoting diversity.

“ I think it's really encouraging that two of the big, celebrity authors of the last few months have been Alesha Dixon and Konnie Huq, I think that's great because there are loads of white men who we've allowed to come across into children's publishing from comedy or TV presenting or whatever and actually it's great that people from minority backgrounds come across as well, it's something that perhaps we could look at doing more.”

Interviewee 14, Mainstream Publisher

Embedding good practice, such as ensuring diverse advisory boards and selection panels, was also considered to be helpful in ensuring inclusivity and representation at events and festivals, and in prizes and awards. Some highlighted CILIP's response to criticism of the lack of diversity across their Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Prize longlist in 2017 as a good example of a whole-organisational commitment to improving diversity. Their work on promoting diversity includes the publication of a new periodical, Pen & Inc, which promotes diversity and inclusion in children's publishing.

“ The Carnegie medal was hugely criticised because they didn't have a representative shortlist at all of the range of writers that are writing really high-quality books in this country. They had to do a massive review of their policy in terms of inclusivity. Fifteen years ago, nobody would have questioned that shortlist, now you are held to account more.”

Interviewee 18, Independent Publisher

“ I know CILIP which is the librarianship professional organisation, they're taking it quite seriously and they started publishing a new magazine about diversity and inclusion in children's books.”

Interviewee 5, Library Head of Service

However, meaningful improvements in diversity in the sector will require strategic and collaborative action across the sector. Ongoing commitment is required to ensure positive changes are maintained. Commitment and partnership working across the sector will be crucial in achieving lasting changes.

Interviewees tended to be cautiously optimistic about the current focus on improving diversity in the sector and praised the actions taken and commitment made so far. However, there were mixed responses to the survey statement that public debate fails to acknowledge positive changes that are happening in the sector to improve diversity. 44% of respondents said they neither agreed nor disagreed/don't know, whilst 29% disagreed with the statement and 27% agreed with the statement (Fig 9). Again, there were differences between respondents with almost half of BME respondents disagreeing with the statement compared with only 19% of white respondents.

Survey results highlight that there is concern that positive changes will not be sustained without strategic and collaborative action across the sector (Fig 10). 55% of survey respondents agreed that positive action initiatives tended to be tokenistic or add-ons that fail to achieve lasting change, with a further 27% saying that they neither agreed nor disagreed/didn't know: only 18% disagreed with this statement. Respondents from a BME background were more likely to strongly agree with the statement than white respondents (34% compared with 9%).

Figure 9: The public debate fails to acknowledge all the positive changes that are happening in the sector to improve diversity

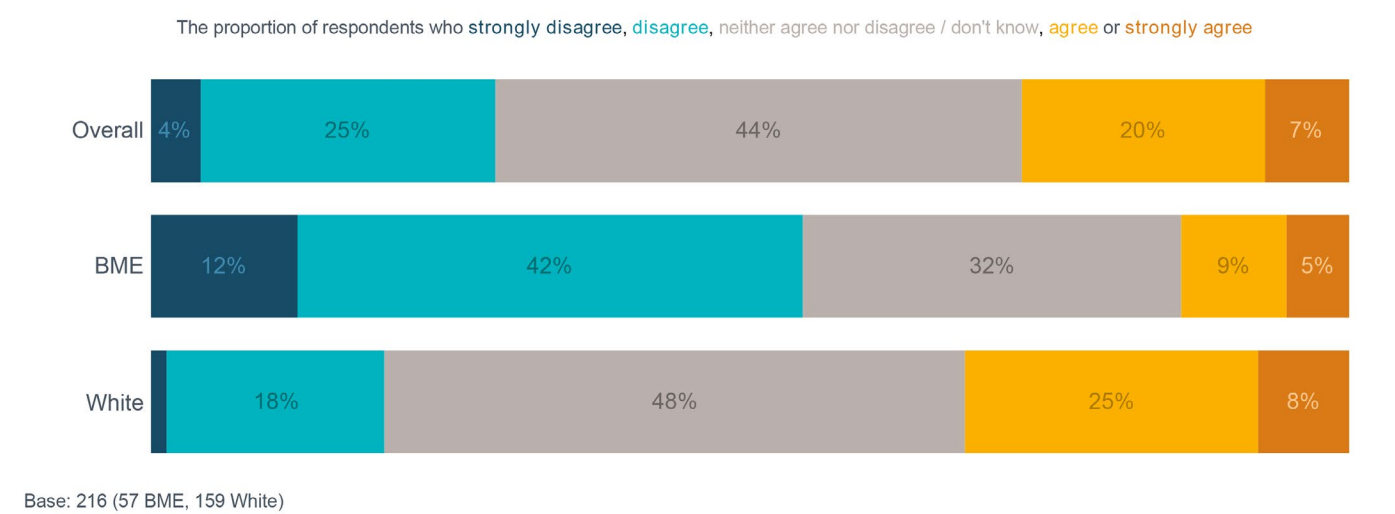
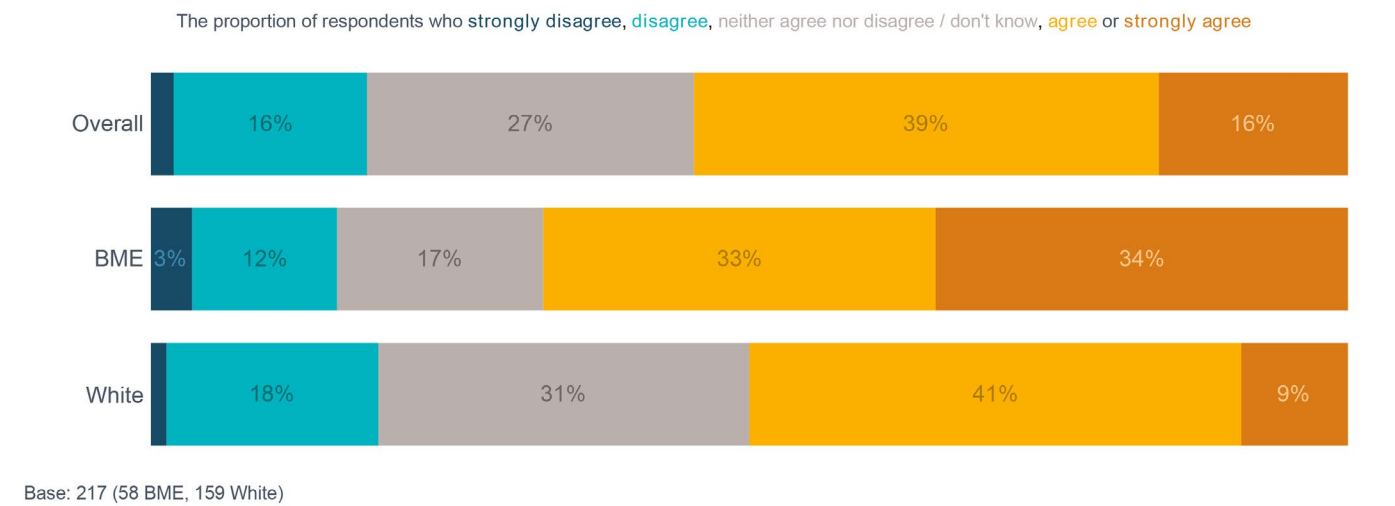


Figure 10: Positive action initiatives tend to be tokenistic or add-ons that fail to achieve lasting change



The growing number of BME role models among authors, illustrators and publishers was seen by many as a sign of progress – albeit slow – which was very much welcomed across the sector. However, many also expressed caution. One author, describing how inspirational it was for her to meet the first black British publisher of a major publishing house, said:

“ After meeting her I felt like so excited about the future of publishing and I thought if she can do it, then I can too. But even though I still really admire what she’s doing, I think she’s trail blazing, she is just one person but I’m worried that she might be hailed as this tokenistic figure. Other publishers will think she’s done it - there’s no need to continue, it’s already been done, we’ve fixed the diversity problem. ”

Interviewee 17, Mainstream Publisher

“ I think people are more aware, but I do worry about tokenism, I think we have to be very careful that we don’t do that. I still worry about encounters like the one I had this week when an author was asked [by another editor] to make one of her characters white because they were all black. No! It’s not going to happen! But authors have more permission to push back now. In the past they wouldn’t have sold their book if they didn’t agree to that, but now they can say no. ”

Interviewee 18, Independent Publisher

Interviewees also highlighted previous periods of focus on diversity in the sector which had resulted in short-term progress but failed to achieve lasting change. Respondents stressed that a focus on improving diversity should be seen as an ongoing commitment and not something that was ‘solved’ once initial progress is made.

“ We had a panel event talking about diversity that I went to a couple of years ago, I think it was one hosted by the AAA [the Association of Authors’ Agents] and one children’s author from a diverse background was saying ‘I remember having this conversation 20 years ago’ [...] So there’s a degree to which the conversation risks being cyclical rather than permanent change. ”

Interviewee 9, Agent

Similarly, there was praise for the work of organisations that had brought media attention to underrepresentation of people from BME backgrounds in children’s literature, but there were concerns that coverage of diversity and representation in the mainstream media is often related to a particular issue or news story, rather than engaging in long-term positive change.

“ It’s just an entertainment for [the media] because there was this report and then these people started shouting. Next year the fashion will be on another subject and we’ll be forgetting this subject. ”

Interviewee 1, Independent Publisher

Interviewees warned that diversity should not be seen as a trend that could then fade away. Diverse characters should be represented across all books rather than being seen as a category.

“ I also think there is a risk that people start thinking of diverse books as a trend rather than just something that’s part of everything, I really dislike the tendency to categorise them as a separate thing rather than just this one’s historical fiction and this one’s sci-fi and this one’s a mystery, cos I worry that people will start to say the diverse books trend is slowing down or whatever. ”

Interviewee 12, Mainstream Publisher

Many interviewees stated the importance of commitment and collaboration across the sector in order to achieve meaningful and lasting changes in diversity and representation, particularly from those with the most power and influence. Interviewees also highlighted the need for changes and commitment to improving diversity to be fully embedded in the ethos, policies and practices of organisations, rather than being the responsibility or priority of individuals. Furthermore, interviewees highlighted the importance of a concerted strategic approach, with the whole sector maintaining a focus on diversity to ensure continued progress.

“ Although there is good work happening, I think every aspect of the industry as a whole needs to be continuing to think about this. I think society moves so quickly that we can’t really be complacent and it has to be an ongoing thing and not a tick box exercise. ”

Interviewee 3, Librarian/Author

Similarly, one author/academic pointed out that organisations and individuals across the sector would all need to take on responsibility for improving diversity in order to ensure lasting improvements happen.

“ What’s happened in publishing is that distributors, producers, illustrators have all colluded to ensure that there’s no accountability for diversity. Because the argument is [...] an illustrator will say ‘well I’m just illustrating the book, what I’ve been told to do’. A distributor will say ‘well I’m just distributing the material I’ve been given’. Bookshops will say ‘I’m only stocking the books that we’ve been given’. ”

Interviewee 24, Author/Academic

Interviewees felt that representation of people from BME backgrounds in children’s books could be improved by closer partnership working across the sector to develop strategies and joint initiatives. For example, more engagement between independent/specialist publishers and larger publishers could be beneficial in improving diversity. Specialist publishers sharing their specific cultural knowledge and connections would allow larger publishers to feel more confident about publishing diverse books, and this in turn would allow greater quantities of diverse books to be published.

“ [Large publishers] need to get the right people on board, they need to build a team, they need to get consulting with all of us who are already doing it and different grass roots networks [...] People might have a really good story but we’re too small to publish it for them, but actually some of these guys might be really interested. So yeah I think a lot more engagement with a genuine outcome or giving something, creating a forum where people can talk would be good. ”

Interviewee 8, Specialist Publisher

Small presses and self-publishing have made publishing more accessible for people from underrepresented groups and promote the increased production of diverse books. Whilst potentially affording writers greater creative freedom, drawbacks such as limited print runs and less access to support with the publishing process also exist.

38% of survey respondents said that they supported diversity through the creation of diverse books. The main ways they did this was by creating BME main characters (81%), including BME supporting characters (69%), ensuring that characters are representative of the UK population (69%), creating books where the BME identity is not the focus of the storyline or issues covered (69%), creating storylines representing the experiences of BME people and other diverse groups (63%) and including illustrations of BME characters (58%).

62% of survey respondents said that they supported diversity through promoting the publishing of and/or access to diverse books. Of these, the majority of survey respondents were supporting access to diverse books by sourcing books which have BME characters (67%) or sourcing books from BME authors and illustrators (62%). However, others were achieving this through targeted programmes or initiatives (38%), advocacy (37%) or blogging or writing articles (37%).

45% of survey respondents agreed that small presses and self-publishing offered effective alternatives for underrepresented authors and illustrators (Fig 11); however, respondents from BME backgrounds were more likely to agree with this statement than respondents from white backgrounds (60% compared with 40%).

Interviewees agreed that print-on-demand had made publishing more accessible and had given people from underrepresented groups more confidence to have a go.

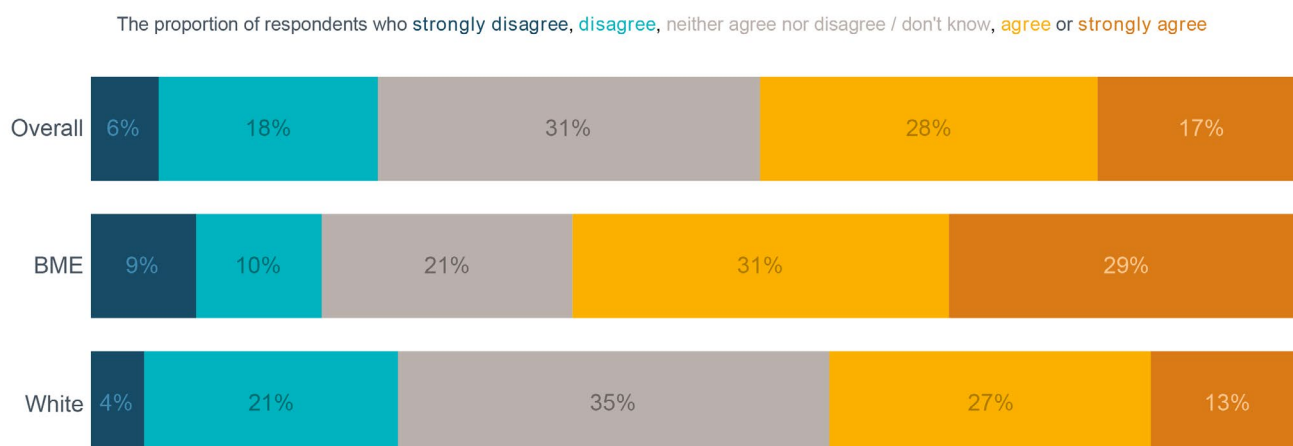
“ I think more and more people will keep publishing because print-on-demand is relatively risk-free, so I do think it’ll continue to increase. People are getting braver to write more and do something with their ambitions and not just sit there. I think people feel a lot more encouraged with the stuff that’s coming out as well, that they want to have a go, which is good. ”

Interviewee 8, Specialist Publisher

Publishing through smaller independent publishers or self-publishing was also perceived to afford greater creative freedom to authors and illustrators (of all backgrounds) as they are less focused than bigger publishers on trends and large-scale commercial profit.

However, self-publishing has drawbacks in that the process is slower, the author is required to take on responsibility for the publishing process (e.g. marketing and financial management), and they have less access to editorial support.

Figure 11: Small-presses and self-publishing offer effective alternatives for underrepresented authors and illustrators



Base: 216 (58 BME, 158 White)

Despite the success of many small or specialist publishers, interviewees highlighted that larger publishers should do more to support the publishing of books by diverse authors in order to improve their reach, as they are able to print in larger quantities and customers benefit from lower prices as result of economies of scale in production.

“ I think it just needs to be on a much bigger scale cos the market is there and I think with those guys doing it they’ll get the price points down and it makes things affordable as well. Our stuff is quite expensive because we’re not printing masses. ”

Interviewee 8, Specialist Publisher

Recent research on the representation of people from BME backgrounds in children’s literature has provided importance evidence in understanding the scale of the issue. Continued monitoring of progress and practical actions based on the evidence will be important in ensuring positive sustainable changes across the sector.

Interviewees also highlighted the value of recent research in understanding the scale of the issue. In particular, recent research from CLPE and BookTrust has provided large-scale objective evidence of the underrepresentation of people from BME backgrounds in children’s literature. It was seen to be useful to have high quality research which could be used to evidence and support work on promoting diversity.

“ I think the CLPE is really good cos they’ve done their Reflecting Realities report which has highlighted it and I think that’s been good cos it’s been a really useful, high quality source of research that you can go to that informs you. ”

Interviewee 4, Independent Bookseller

Interviewees also felt that BookTrust’s and CLPE’s research projects would help to continue driving change and promote action from the sector more widely. The CLPE research provides a baseline against which they plan to continue monitoring every other year. BookTrust’s research is underpinned by a long-term action plan which will help bring together people across the sector to bring about change in a sustainable and strategic way.

“ I think what’s really positive, particularly about the Book Trust Represents is the whole research is underpinned as well by a long-term action plan and I think that’s probably what we’ve never really had in the past. We’ve had ‘these are the issues, we need to do something about it’, and people organically have tried to develop their own initiatives, but there’s not been a strategic push I suppose. ”

Interviewee 3, Librarian/Author

Survey respondents also felt that data highlighting the economic potential of more diverse books in terms of sales and appeal would be helpful. More research on this could dispel views that diverse books are likely to sell less well. Research and monitoring of representation across the sector could also drive change, especially if targets and success measures are outlined, e.g. targets of BME representation at management levels in the workplace.

Recommendations for the sector

Drawing on the literature, survey and interview findings, several key themes and areas for action have emerged from this research. There are signs that the parts of the sector are on a purposeful journey, moving in the right direction with pockets of innovative practice emerging that are gaining attention and momentum. However, these need to extend and embed more systematically across all parts of the children's literature sector for sustained, meaningful change to occur so that children's literature as a whole is truly reflective of the ethnic diversity and reality of children's lives.

The cross-sector aspect of these recommendations is critical in ensuring that all parts of the sector are progressing at a pace that enables coordinated and coherent change. These recommendations build on the existing evidence base and on the initiatives already underway to address the lack of ethnic diversity and representation in the children's literature sector. They require action from publishers, booksellers, agents, suppliers, editors, authors and illustrators, public and private sector funders and commissioners, lobby groups, charities, libraries, schools, educators, researchers and policy makers. These stakeholders need to come together with a commitment to tackle these issues collectively as well as within their own organisations.

Workforce and career development

Addressing unconscious bias and racism in the sector

- **Mandatory training on diversity and inclusion, including anti-racist practice and unconscious bias training** bespoke to the children's literature sector for all employees, prioritising those in key decision-making roles,

to address the limited understanding and awareness of these issues

Supporting underrepresented groups at all stages of their career, enabling fairer access and progression

- **Recruiting for diversity** via training and employment providers, such as Creative Access or adopting competencies-based recruitment approaches, e.g. identifying potential and transferable skills alongside offering support and training, rather than privileging specific experience and backgrounds.
- **Providing sector-specific guidance and toolkits** for inclusive recruitment processes and ongoing career development/support for HR and line managers to support inclusive practice.
- **Promoting organisation-led working groups / task forces** to set and monitor diversity targets at every stage/area of activity (e.g. for training, recruitment, career development, product development, promotions, marketing, sales).
- **Funding accessible, multi-stage, inclusive programmes** that are medium and longer-term; provision to remove and address multiple barriers to access e.g. regional locations, cost of travel, funding streams accessible to all religious beliefs; 'Creative Progression' programmes that support underrepresented groups beyond access/internships.
- **Developing sponsorship, mentoring, networking** opportunities for underrepresented groups to meet key stakeholders, peers and allies.

Cross-sector research and monitoring

Funding further research and monitoring to inform and guide actions

- **Market research** to better understand the demand and market for more diverse books, from BME groups and the wider ‘mainstream market’, to challenge outdated assumptions and build the economic case for diversity across the sector.
- **Monitoring progress** via ongoing diversity monitoring of the workforce, books and authors/illustrators e.g. based on CLPE’s research and annual reporting; setting appropriate targets and success measures in each area, workforce/leadership and artistic programming that is inclusive and representative of the local population and of the audiences the organisation serves.
- **Commissioned research** - to further investigate attitudes, actions and barriers, particularly for mainstream booksellers and publishers who have the most influence and where there is currently limited research insight and evidence.

Providing guidance and support for including diverse characters in books, promoting authentic representation and encouraging creative freedom and confidence:

- **Building connections/networks** – supporting peer networks for diverse creators, networks of diversity advisers, grassroots specialists, people with diversity experience, sensitivity readers, opportunities for cultural exchange, etc to advise and guide the sector. Creating opportunities for facilitating collaboration, sharing good practice and developing new ideas and projects.
- **Encouraging more creative freedom** - identifying creativity gaps in children’s books and commissioning titles based on this; encouraging diverse creators to write beyond narrow issues and stereotypical characters; continuing debates on authenticity, voice and appropriation where diverse contributions are welcomed.
- **Developing advice and guidance** – based on evidence and good inclusive practice across all parts of the sector, including case studies,

toolkits and links to resources and further sources of expertise.

Schools, education and libraries

Supporting more role models to inspire children and young people:

- **Partnerships with schools** – more direct engagement between different parts of the sector and children/families through primary and secondary schools, to increase awareness of diverse audiences, as well as pupils’ awareness of the publishing process and careers in the sector.
- **Guidance and support for teachers and librarians** – developed in partnership with exam boards, charities, DfE and universities to introduce more diverse authors and texts and schemes of work in English and other areas of the curriculum (e.g. history and science) where there is a dearth of diverse British titles and topics.
- **Developing funded programmes to support author visits for schools and libraries** – e.g. promoting the Breaking New Ground catalogue of diverse authors and performers, as a route for schools to discover more diverse books and creators to inspire children.

Increasing accessibility to diverse books:

- **Funding/grants for schools and libraries** to ensure inclusion of new diverse books.
- **Support and funding opportunities** for specialist publishers and organisations to develop and support new diverse creators with new titles, with supported outreach to schools and communities.
- **Supporting different routes to market**, e.g. using social media, events and festivals in community venues to promote diverse books.

Resources

Listed below are some of the key resources, research reports and programmes focused on improving diversity in children's literature

BookTrust Represents – a three-year project, created by the children's reading charity BookTrust, to promote children's authors and illustrators of colour through support, subsidies, training and mentoring. The project is informed by BookTrust's research into representation of people of colour among children's book authors and illustrators.

Breaking New Ground - a brochure celebrating the contribution of over 100 established and up-and-coming British authors and artists of colour who are producing innovative work for children and young people. Funded by Arts Council England as part of [Speaking Volumes](#) long-term Breaking Ground project.

Creative Access - a recruitment and training provider for under-represented group entering the creative industries. Services include support for employers, traineeships, paid internships and opportunities and job listings.

Creative Careers Programme – a cross sector and government initiative, delivered by the Creative Industries Federation, ScreenSkills and Creative & Cultural Skills, to raise awareness of opportunities for work across the creative industries.

Creative Case for Diversity – Arts Council England's way of exploring how arts and cultural organisations and artists can enrich the work they do by embracing a wide range of influences and practices. Funded organisations are expected to show how they contribute to the Creative Case for Diversity through the work they produce, present and collect.

Creative & Cultural Skills – an independent charity and Sector Skills Council providing careers advice and guidance, promoting apprenticeships and delivering activities for young people to work and learn in the creative industries.

Culture Change toolkit - Arts Council England's diverse recruitment toolkit contains case studies and best practice guides for the arts and culture sector and beyond, focused on recruiting and supporting diverse talent in an organisation, and collecting and effectively using diversity data.

EQUIP - Publishing Equalities Charter - EQUIP is a membership organisation hosted and funded by The Publishers Association and the Independent Publishers Guild, aiming to promote equality across UK publishing, bookselling and agenting. The Publishing Equalities Charter aims to create a network of businesses with a commitment to equality and diversity in publishing.

Pen & Inc – CILIP's magazine and listings guide to celebrate diversity and inclusion in Children's Publishing. Pen & Inc aims to make it as easy as possible for library professionals to identify and stock great books, featuring a range of characters from diverse creators.

Pathways into Children's Publishing - a two-year training and mentoring programme (2019-2021) for artists from diverse backgrounds who aspire to be children's illustrators. Delivered by Pop Up Projects and House of Illustration, in partnership with universities and publishers and funded by Arts Council England.

Recruitment and Workforce Development toolkit

– a partnership between Arts Council England and The Clear Company. The toolkit aims to help arts and cultural organisations to foster inclusive workplaces and recruit and retain diverse talent, so that they fully reflect the communities they serve.

Reflecting Realities – funded by Arts Council England and published by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE), this research quantified and evaluated the extent and quality of ethnic representation and diversity in children’s publishing in the UK. The first report in 2018 has been followed up with a second report published in September 2019.

Socio-Economic Diversity and Inclusion in the Arts: A Toolkit for Employers

– Jerwood Arts and the Bridge Group have developed a toolkit for employers to support long-term change across the arts sector. Designed to share knowledge, provide expert support, with an intersectional approach to equality, diversity and inclusion.



References

Arts Council England (2019) Equality, diversity and the creative case: a data report 2017–2018. Manchester: Arts Council England. Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/equality-diversity-and-creative-case-data-report-2017-2018>

CILIP and the Archives Records Association (ARA) (2015) A study of the UK information workforce Mapping the Library, Archives, Records, Information Management and Knowledge Management and related professions. Accessed online at: <https://www.archives.org.uk/images/Workforce/20151124WorkforceSurveyExecutiveSummaryA4WEB.pdf>

CLPE (2018) Reflecting Realities - Ethnic Diversity in UK Children's Books. Accessed online at: <https://clpe.org.uk/library-and-resources/research/reflecting-realities-survey-ethnic-representation-within-uk-children>

Equal Approach (2018) Publishing Industry Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Survey 2018. Equal Approach/Publishers Association. Accessed online at: <https://www.publishers.org.uk/news/releases/2019/diversity-of-uk-publishing-workforce-detailed-in-extensive-survey/>

Ramdarshan Bold, M. (2019) Representation of people of colour among children's book authors and illustrators BookTrust Represents report. Accessed online at: <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/globalassets/resources/represents/booktrust-represents-diversity-childrens-authors-illustrators-report.pdf>



Appendix A: Methods, sampling and analysis

The research included three strands of work which aimed to interrogate the research questions.

Literature review

A full review of the recent literature was conducted as part of this project. It consolidates recent evidence and identifies some of the possible barriers and enablers to improving diversity and the representation of people from BME backgrounds across the sector.

Scope

We undertook a broad search of available sources, and key evidence included comes from sector-based research and evaluation as well as from academic journals. Data from the last 10 years only was considered in order to ensure the most relevant and current evidence was presented.

This strand of activity informed the focus of the next strands of the research (an online survey and in-depth telephone interviews). Some evidence from the literature review is incorporated into this report, however the full review can be accessed here: www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/diversity-children's-literature-literature-review

Online survey

We conducted an online survey with representatives from across the sector to explore the research questions. A copy of the survey questions is included at [Appendix C](#).

Sampling

Sampling of participants for the online survey was undertaken through a range of methods, in order to ensure representation from across the sector (including publishers, booksellers, libraries, education providers, charities, membership organisations, and agents):

- **Scoping of relevant organisations.** We conducted an online search for organisations across the relevant sectors and emailed the link to the survey to these organisations directly. We also contacted membership organisations requesting that they promote the survey with their members, in order to ensure as many organisations as possible were invited to participate.
- **Discussions with Arts Council England.** The Arts Council provided guidance and suggestions on potential participants and contacts, and promoted the survey with named contacts across the sector.
- **Liaising with existing contacts.** We contacted organisations and individuals across the sector with whom we have existing relationships to help identify and recruit relevant representatives across the sector.
- **Snowball sampling.** We encouraged organisations identified via the methods above to complete the survey but also to promote it with other relevant contacts throughout the sector. We provided a link to the survey along with templates for emails or social media allowing the survey to be easily shared.
- **Social media.** The survey was promoted through Twitter by Sheffield Hallam University and the Arts Council's national and regional teams.

The survey was open for approximately 7 weeks during April and May 2019. There were a total of 330 responses. Information on the characteristics of survey respondents can be found at [Appendix B](#).

Analysis

The survey was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Responses from individuals working in different areas of the sector, and respondents of different ethnicities, were compared where appropriate.

In-depth telephone interviews

Following the survey, we conducted 28 in-depth telephone interviews with individuals from across the sector to explore the themes emerging from the survey in more detail and allow more qualitative nuanced data to be captured.

Sampling

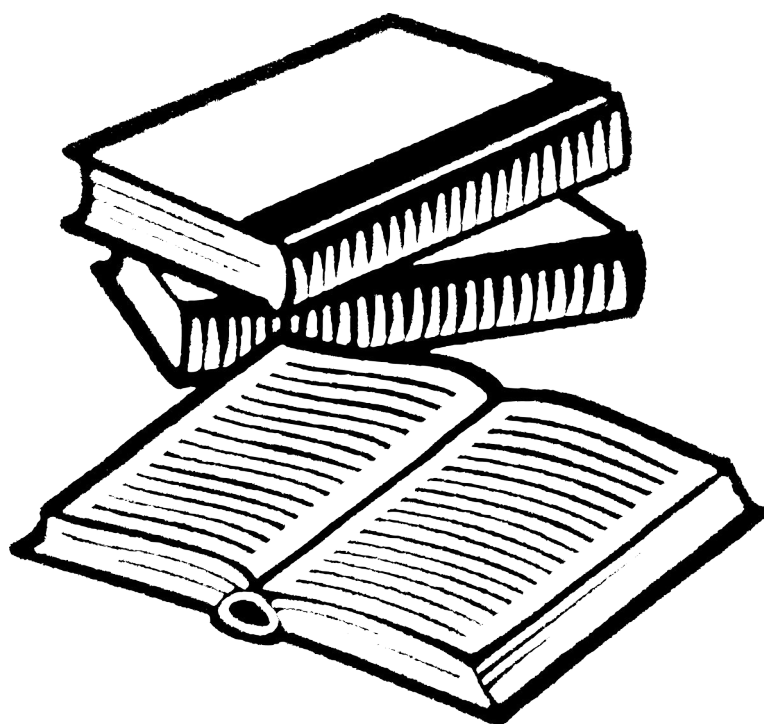
Survey respondents were asked if they would be willing to be contacted about participating in a follow-up phone call. 38% of respondents agreed to be contacted (126 out of 330 respondents). We

created a shortlist of individuals to be contacted based on their survey responses. We ensured there was representation from: each part of the sector; different levels of seniority; different sizes of organisation; different lengths of service in the sector; different ethnic backgrounds.

A table containing non-identifying information about participants can be found at [Appendix D](#).

Analysis

Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Interviews were audio recorded with permission to ensure accuracy of analysis. The majority of interviews were transcribed. Interviews were analysed thematically and verbatim quotes were drawn out to illustrate themes. Any quotes are attributed via area of the sector rather than personal details to ensure anonymity.



Appendix B: Survey of respondents

We received a total of 330 responses to the online survey. These represented a range of individuals and organisations across the children's literature sector. 60% of respondents were working for or involved with an organisation within the children's literature sector, while 40% of responses came from individuals who had influence or involvement in the sector.

Survey responses came from across the sector including:

- Authors and illustrators (28%)
- Charities/membership organisations/government departments (24%)
- Libraries (22%)
- Schools/universities/education providers (22%)
- Independent/specialist publishers (15%)

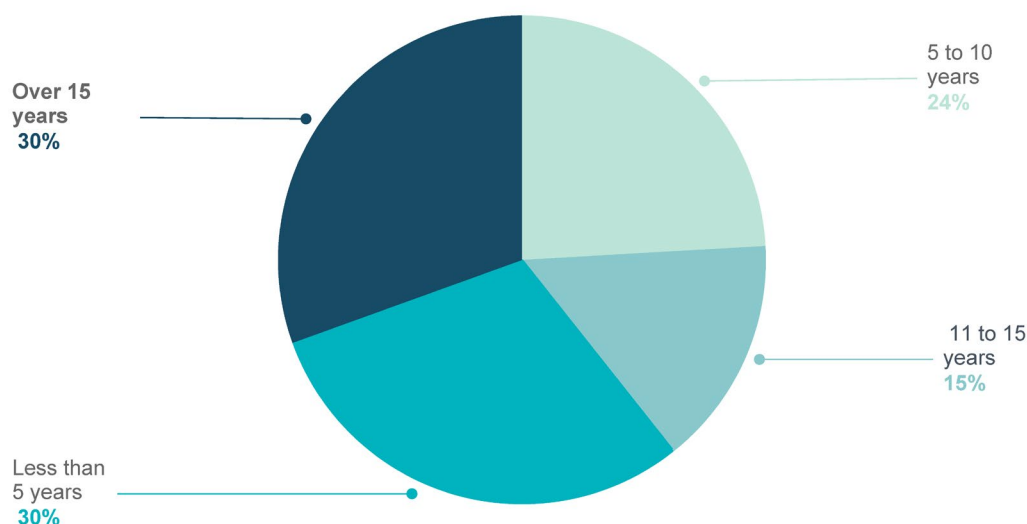
- Advocacy/campaign/community groups (10%)
- Independent booksellers (6%)
- Mainstream publishers (6%)

However, it should be noted that there were no responses from mainstream booksellers.

Respondents' day-to-day roles included a range of activities, with the most frequently reported being project or programme management/coordination (47%), event management/coordination (39%), writing (39%), teaching/education (39%), administration (32%) and marketing (31%).

Respondents had a range of levels of experience in the children's literature sector (Fig 12) with 30% having been involved with the sector for less than 5 years, 40% involved in the sector for 5-15 years, and 30% involved in the sector for more than 15 years.

Figure 12: How long have you been involved in the sector?



Base: 328

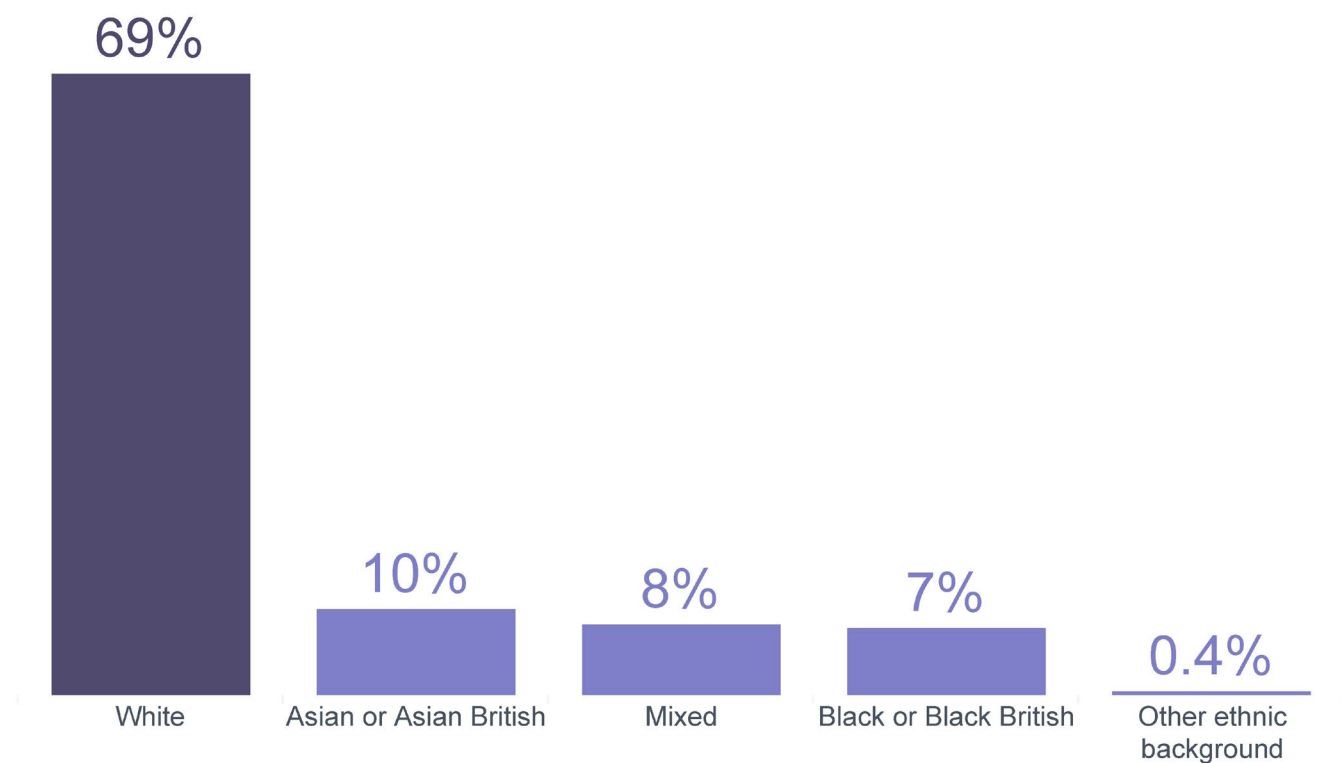
Just over a third of respondents worked at organisations with 1-9 employees (37%) or 50 to 249 employees (38%). A fifth of respondents worked at organisations employing 250 or more people. Only 35% of respondents said that people from BME backgrounds were represented at senior management level in their organisation.

The majority of respondents to the survey were white (69%), while 10% were Asian/Asian British, 8% were of a mixed ethnic background, 7% were Black/Black British, and 0.4% were from an Arab background. 4% opted not to disclose their ethnicity, and 2% selected 'none of the above' (Fig 13).

89% of responses were residents in England, 5% were from Wales, 3% were from Scotland and 2% were from outside the UK. Within England, almost half of responses came from people living in London (47%).

The majority of respondents did not consider themselves to have a disability (88%).

Figure 13: Ethnicity of survey respondents



Base: 231

Appendix C: Survey questions



Diversity in Children's Literature survey

Background information

Which of these best describes you?

- ☐ I work for or am involved with an organisation within the children's literature sector
- ☐ I am an individual with influence or involvement in the children's literature sector
- ☐ Neither of the above

If you are happy to, please let us know the name of the organisation or group that you work for:

Approximately how many people are employed at the organisation?

- ☐ 1-9
- ☐ 10-49
- ☐ 50-249
- ☐ More than 250
- ☐ Don't know

How long have you been involved with the children's literature sector?

- ☐ Less than 5 years
- ☐ 5-10 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ Over 15 years

Which of the following best describes how you are involved in the sector? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Independent bookseller
- ☐ Mainstream bookseller
- ☐ Mainstream publisher
- ☐ Independent publisher
- ☐ Specialist publisher (i.e. with a focus on a particular genre or audience)
- ☐ Charity / not-for-profit organisation
- ☐ Government department
- ☐ Membership organisation
- ☐ Agent / agency
- ☐ Author
- ☐ Illustrator
- ☐ Designer
- ☐ Library
- ☐ School / education provider
- ☐ University
- ☐ Advocacy / campaign group
- ☐ PR / marketing
- ☐ Community group / project
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify...

Which of the following do you undertake in your day-to-day role? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Project or programme management / coordination
- ☐ Event management / coordination
- ☐ Recruitment or training
- ☐ Administration
- ☐ Marketing
- ☐ Press / PR
- ☐ Policy
- ☐ Research / evaluation
- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Sales
- ☐ Commissioning / programming
- ☐ Editing
- ☐ Purchasing
- ☐ Operations
- ☐ Communications / Advocacy
- ☐ Writing
- ☐ Illustrating
- ☐ Designing
- ☐ Teaching / education
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify...

Diversity and your role

Does any part of your role involve promoting or supporting diversity?

As described above, this research is primarily focused on diversity in terms of ethnicity, however we are aware that other protected characteristics may be relevant in this context.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How do you promote or support diversity through your role? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Supporting aspiring authors and illustrators from underrepresented groups
- ☐ Promoting the publishing of and/or access to diverse books
- ☐ Inspiring children and young people
- ☐ Raising awareness / campaigning for equality and diversity
- ☐ Recruitment or training
- ☐ Creating diverse books for children
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify...

How do you support aspiring authors and illustrators from underrepresented groups? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Targeted programmes / initiatives
- ☐ Mentoring or coaching
- ☐ Advice and support about the publishing process
- ☐ Running events or workshops to inspire future authors or illustrators
- ☐ Advocacy
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify...

How do you promote the publishing of and/or access to diverse books? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Advocacy
- ☐ Targeted programmes / initiatives
- ☐ Commissioning books by BME authors or illustrators
- ☐ Commissioning books which include BME characters
- ☐ Advice and support for authors or illustrators
- ☐ Sourcing books from BME authors and illustrators
- ☐ Sourcing books which have BME characters
- ☐ Campaigns and marketing
- ☐ Blogging or writing articles
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify...

How do you inspire children and young people? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Encouraging them to read more diverse books
- ☐ Providing access to diverse books
- ☐ Providing support with writing / illustration
- ☐ Providing support and experience with the publishing process
- ☐ Highlighting role models
- ☐ Providing mentors
- ☐ Running events or workshops
- ☐ Prizes and awards
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify...

How do you raise awareness / campaign for equality and diversity? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ External marketing and communications
- ☐ Targeted programmes / initiatives
- ☐ Advocacy for diverse authors and illustrators
- ☐ Bringing together groups of people with a passion for equality and diversity
- ☐ Developing strategies to improve equality, accessibility and diversity
- ☐ Running events or workshops to improve equality and diversity
- ☐ Prizes and awards
- ☐ Conversations and communication with peers and professionals
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify...

How do you promote diversity through recruitment or training? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Targeted apprenticeships / internships
- ☐ Targeted programmes / initiatives
- ☐ Targeted advertising of roles
- ☐ Community outreach / engagement
- ☐ Tailoring of advertising materials (wording and/or imagery)
- ☐ Recruitment panel training on equality and diversity
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify...

How do you promote or support diversity through the books that you create? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Creating BME main characters
- ☐ Including BME supporting characters
- ☐ Including illustrations of BME characters
- ☐ Ensuring characters are representative of the UK population
- ☐ Creating storylines representing the experiences of BME people and other diverse groups
- ☐ Creating books where the BME identity is not the focus of the storyline or issues covered
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify...

We would like to hear about any examples of success you have experienced in terms of promoting diversity in children's literature in your role. What factors do you think influenced this and what could others learn from this?

We would also like to hear about any instances where barriers have caused a negative impact, or where attempts at improving diversity have not been successful. What factors do you think influenced this and what could others learn from this?

Diversity within your organisation

Are people from BME backgrounds represented at senior management level in your organisation?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

Diversity across the sector

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
People from diverse backgrounds may be put off a career in the sector by concerns about low pay	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A lack of role models means not enough talented BME young people aspire to becoming writers/illustrators or working in the sector	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Publishing processes are equally challenging for all new authors, regardless of their background	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The public debate fails to acknowledge all the positive changes that are happening in the sector to improve diversity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There are not enough talented BME authors and illustrators coming forward	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My organisation is doing well at addressing underrepresentation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
More needs to be done to address unconscious bias in the sector	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Positive action initiatives tend to be tokenistic or add-ons that fail to achieve lasting change	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Education providers need to prepare young people from underrepresented groups better for careers in the sector	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writers from BME backgrounds are expected to appeal to a fairly narrow audience/market	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Diverse books are often expected to focus on issues faced by underrepresented groups.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Small-presses and self-publishing offer effective alternatives for underrepresented authors and illustrators	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Addressing underrepresentation of BME authors and illustrators in children's literature

What do you think would be most helpful in addressing the underrepresentation of BME authors, illustrators and characters in books? Please select up to three answers

- ☐ Publishing books with a wider range of diverse characters, storylines and experiences reflective of the UK population
- ☐ Increasing the availability and visibility of diverse books (e.g. in shops, libraries, schools, websites)
- ☐ Encouraging and supporting diversification of the workforce to increase supply (e.g. booksellers, event organisers, selection panels)
- ☐ Developing more community engagement and outreach projects to identify and develop aspiring authors and illustrators from BME backgrounds
- ☐ Increasing the representation of diverse people in adverts, publications and media promotions
- ☐ Increasing the availability of data highlighting the economic potential of diverse books in terms of sales and appeal

What do you think would be most helpful in increasing aspirations and accessibility to careers in the sector? Please select up to three answers

- ☐ Working more closely with schools, libraries, colleges and universities with diverse cohorts to encourage and promote writing, illustration and publishing as a viable career
- ☐ Investing in targeted programmes and initiatives to recruit and support people from underrepresented groups into careers in the sector
- ☐ Investing in mentoring and development programmes in all areas of the sector to support development and progression for people from BME and underrepresented backgrounds
- ☐ Making unconscious bias training mandatory for agents, commissioners, editors, publishers, marketing and sales representatives, and recruitment panels
- ☐ Embedding good practice e.g. diverse advisory boards and selection panels, to ensure that literary events, festivals and prizes/awards are inclusive and representative.
- ☐ Encouraging and supporting more diverse role models for aspiring authors and illustrators across the sector (e.g. in the publishing and bookselling workforce)
- ☐ Working with children and young people from all backgrounds to inspire a love of books and reading

What do you think would be most helpful in encouraging sustainable careers for BME authors and illustrators? Please select up to three answers

- ☐ Increasing the number of events, prizes/awards and festivals targeted to promote and celebrate diverse authors/illustrators and books.
- ☐ Improving the representation and profile of diverse authors/illustrators at mainstream festivals and events.
- ☐ Including more diverse authors and illustrators on mainstream prize or award shortlists
- ☐ Improving communication and sharing of ideas, good practice and success in promoting diversity across the sector
- ☐ Improving the incentives and financial support for authors and illustrators (e.g. funded places for training courses, paid internships)
- ☐ Mentoring and support for the career progression of underrepresented groups within the sector
- ☐ Support to increase awareness and access to creative careers e.g. through closer working with careers advisers in education settings
- ☐ Targeted support for underrepresented groups with the writing and publishing process

What do you think would be most helpful for the sector to reach new, diverse markets? Please select up to two answers

- ☐ Exploring alternative approaches to marketing diverse books to wider audiences and markets (e.g. alternative community venues/events, features in community press, social media and targeted websites)
- ☐ Closer partnership working across the sector to develop strategies and joint initiatives and engagement between smaller specialist organisations and larger public and private sector organisations (e.g. national government, charities, publishers, libraries and booksellers)
- ☐ Engagement with children and young people through education settings (e.g. author / illustrator visits, careers advice, work experience partnerships)

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about how you think diversity in children's literature could be improved?

Background information

Please complete the following background information. This will help us to ensure that we receive responses from a range of people, and will help us to identify any differences in views and experiences between different groups. You can choose not to answer any of these questions.

What is your age?

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-60
- ☐ 60+
- ☐ Prefer not to say

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other term preferred
- ☐ Prefer not to say

If other term preferred, please specify if you wish...

How would you describe your ethnicity?

- ☐ Arab
- ☐ Asian / Asian British: Bangladeshi
- ☐ Asian / Asian British: Chinese
- ☐ Asian / Asian British: Indian
- ☐ Asian / Asian British: Pakistani
- ☐ Asian / Asian British: Any other Asian background
- ☐ Black / Black British: African
- ☐ Black / Black British: Caribbean
- ☐ Black / Black British: Any other Black background
- ☐ Mixed: White and Asian
- ☐ Mixed: White and Black African
- ☐ Mixed: White and Black Caribbean
- ☐ Mixed: Any other Mixed background
- ☐ White: British
- ☐ White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- ☐ White: Irish
- ☐ White: Any other White background
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ None of the above

If none of the above, please specify...

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Where do you live?

- ☐ England
- ☐ Northern Ireland
- ☐ Scotland
- ☐ Wales
- ☐ Not in the UK
- ☐ Prefer not to say

If not in the UK, please specify...

What is your government region?

- ☐ East Midlands
- ☐ East of England
- ☐ North East
- ☐ North West
- ☐ London
- ☐ South East
- ☐ South West
- ☐ West Midlands
- ☐ Yorkshire and the Humber

Appendix D: Interviewees

Interviewee number	Area of sector	Ethnicity
1	Independent publisher	White: Any other White background
2	Librarian (local authority)	Mixed: White and Black Caribbean
3	Librarian / author	Asian / Asian British: Any other Asian background
4	Independent bookseller	White: British
5	Librarian (local authority)	White: British
6	Author	White: Any other White background
7	Charity	White: British
8	Independent / specialist publisher	Asian / Asian British: Pakistani
9	Agent	White: British
10	Membership organisation	White: British
11	Mainstream publisher	White: British
12	Mainstream publisher	White: British
13	Independent bookseller / publisher	Asian / Asian British: Indian
14	Mainstream publisher	White: British
15	Charity	White: Any other White background
16	Author	Asian / Asian British: Chinese
17	Mainstream publisher	Black / Black British: African
18	Independent publisher	White: British
19	Charity / education provider	White: British
20	Independent publisher	White: Irish
21	Independent publisher	Black / Black British: Caribbean
22	Library (school)	White: British
23	Self-published author	Black / Black British: African
24	Author / academic	Mixed: White and Black Caribbean
25	Mainstream publisher	White: British
26	Mainstream publisher	Asian / Asian British: Indian
27	Mainstream publisher	White: British
28	Membership organisation	White: British



**Sheffield
Hallam
University** | Centre for
Regional Economic
and Social Research