

Every book matters

# Inclusion and Representation Action Plan 2022

**BONNIER**  
Books UK



# A note from the CEO

Last year we published our inaugural Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan with the aim of increasing representation across our workforce and publishing lists. We commissioned a third-party research agency to undertake a thorough review of our publishing lists and workforce and, based on those results, we put together a comprehensive programme of tangible, concrete actions for positive change.

Ambitious in scope, our action plan identified various ways we could drive progress across the company: from increasing salary levels for interns and introducing a new minimum salary for junior roles, to delivering equality awareness training to all staff, including additional training for hiring managers. Whilst I'm proud of the progress we've made so far, it's fair to say we've learned a lot, too.

To reflect this, we've renamed this report the Bonnier Books UK Inclusion and Representation Action Plan. As an Indian woman from a working-class background, the term 'diversity' has never sat comfortably with me: it can reduce people to statistics and imply that if you simply tick a certain number of boxes your work is done. What has become clear to us is that achieving diversity is not enough: the publishing industry should instead be aiming for a position where it honestly and authentically represents the broadest possible range of people and lived experience.

Of course, achieving true representation is an ambitious task that will take time. But that doesn't mean we can afford to be complacent – we must measure our progress, so that we can learn from both our successes and our failures. This year's report offers all of us at Bonnier Books UK the first opportunity to do just that.

The advances we have seen in terms of improving our representation of multi-ethnic voices across our publishing lists are encouraging and I'm proud of both the team's progress, and the fantastic books they've delivered. Our priority now must be building this momentum and ensuring that we are publishing every author and illustrator to the very best of our abilities, remaining open, curious and focussed on what makes every book we publish unique. We also need to work harder to better represent authors and illustrators outside of London and the South East.

**“What has become clear to us is that achieving diversity is not enough”**

Looking over our workforce and candidates, ethnic representation shows little change from 2020 findings, remaining in line with the UK population overall, however there are signs of progress with fewer candidates than staff identifying as White British (77% staff, 54% candidates). It's clear though that we still have some way to go in improving our representation of staff from non-professional backgrounds and from across the UK.

And whilst we continue to have a healthy balance of gender representation at senior leadership level, we have more male staff at senior management level and this continues to impact our gender pay gap. There is also an imbalance of males vs females in our candidate pool, demonstrating that we need to work harder to attract male candidates across the business at all levels.





Looking ahead, we must acknowledge the emerging cost-of-living crisis. Research has shown that women are likely to be disproportionately affected by rising inflation, along with people from multi-ethnic backgrounds. We must identify how we can support our people through this crisis, or we risk back-tracking on the progress we have made so far.

It's been fantastic to see the positive feedback from our authors, illustrators, and staff on this action plan. However, it's also become clear that – quite rightly, and above all else - they value concrete, tangible action. And so, going forward, we will be conducting this survey and publishing the data once every three years. We believe this is the best way forward to ensure that we continue to track our progress in all areas, whilst prioritising our time and resources on driving meaningful long-term change.

Yours sincerely,



Perminder Mann





# Summary of findings

24% of authors and illustrators surveyed shared their data with us and so it is important to keep in mind that the summary below does not offer us the full picture.



## Our publishing lists

- We have seen an 8% increase in multi-ethnic representation across our publishing lists to 17%, more closely representing UK society (14%). Ongoing reporting and monitoring will demonstrate the extent to which these results are part of a continuing trend towards increased ethnic representation on our publishing lists.
- The majority of our authors and illustrators identify as “middle class” (72%) compared to 16% who identified as “working class” and most (84%) did not have any family members working in the creative industries
- Relating to socioeconomic background, just under half of authors and illustrators surveyed were from a professional background and 11% had attended a fee-paying school, down by half from last year (22%)
- Authors were most likely to have grown up in the South East of England (21%), along with London, the South West, and the West Midlands (14%, 11% and 11% respectively) – and were less likely to have come from the north or east of England. Correspondingly, a third of authors said they were currently living in London and just under a quarter were living in the South East – both higher proportions than amongst the industry benchmark\* (28% and 15% respectively).
- Authors and illustrators are most likely to describe their sexuality as heterosexual (with 80% identifying in this way) and a greater proportion identify as LGBT+ than across the UK population as a whole
- The proportion of authors and illustrators identifying as having a disability and long-term health condition is higher than the industry benchmark\* (12% vs 7%)

\*The Royal Society of Literature, *A Room of My Own: What writers need to work today* report (June, 2019)





# Summary of findings

57% of staff surveyed shared their data with us and so it is important to keep in mind that the summary below offers us only a partial view.



## Our workforce and candidate pool

- The company has a higher representation of staff from multi-ethnic backgrounds at senior leadership (20% vs 8%) and senior management levels (14% vs 6%) compared to the most recent industry benchmark\*, however – overall - the ethnic representation of staff shows little change from 2020 findings, remaining in line with the UK population
- However, there are signs of progress in this area with fewer candidates than staff identifying as White British (77% staff, 54% candidates)
- Loosely reflecting industry benchmarks\*\*, close to two thirds of staff (62% vs 67%) come from professional backgrounds and two thirds of staff identify as “middle class”
- Only 5% of staff members said they had a family member working in the creative industries – down from 12% in 2020, suggesting that the company is increasingly offering opportunities to those without existing family connections in publishing
- We continue to have a healthy balance of gender representation at senior leadership level, however we have more male staff at senior management level and this continues to impact our gender pay gap
- Within our candidate pool, there is a greater imbalance of men vs. women than in our workforce (80% female vs 18% male)
- Reflective of the company’s largest office locations in London and Northampton, staff members were most likely to have grown up in – and currently be living in - the East Midlands, London, and the South East
- Closely reflecting LGBT+ representation across our publishing lists, staff members and recruitment candidates are most likely to describe their sexuality as heterosexual (80%) with a greater proportion identifying as LGBT+ than across the UK population as a whole
- The percentage of respondents identifying as disabled or as having a long-term health condition was highest amongst employees with no management responsibilities and lowest amongst senior leadership

\* The Publishers Association’s *Diversity survey of the publishing workforce*, 2019

\*\*The Publishers Association’s *Diversity survey of the publishing workforce*, 2020





# Insights

## Our workforce and candidate pool



“The first part of the application process was not via CV but made by answering specific questions that only related to relevant skills... I felt this was a good way of avoiding any unconscious bias”

“We can always be doing more to publish those from underrepresented backgrounds, but I think overall the culture is very welcoming and inclusive.”

“I think the company could do more to reach working-class areas, particularly those with low literacy rates and with underfunded, state-run schools.”

“There should be more freedom for staff to voice opinions and be heard by execs across the whole of Bonnier Books UK.”

“I’d like to see the company find a way to attract and work with talent across the UK, outside of the South East. We’re missing out on a lot of talent across the country, and now we know remote working works we should take full advantage.”

“I have never benefited from money or social class and connections that come from money. I am the first generation in my family to own my own house, but I live pay day to pay day.”





# Insights

## Our authors & illustrators

"I was contacted by Bonnier Books to write my book, because they believed it was important to have a disabled voice telling this story. I was massively impressed by this sort of forethought, and think it is an area they have done particularly well. One area for improvement would be to extend this to illustrators, to have a network to call upon depending on the project."

"I feel new to publishing so have little to compare it to, but the inclusion and diversity seems to be good compared to what I've heard of other companies...I like that your work from home policy is now more flexible for your own employees - that's nice to see."

"I feel that surveys such as this are a good step, as long as concrete and decisive action is taken from there."

"I applaud the spirit of what you're trying to do, but I fear that surveys like this reinforce division more than they promote inclusion... Bonnier would do better to focus on encouraging acceptance of everyone rather than highlighting differences."

"In terms of neurodivergence: expecting authors to 'perform' as authors might be something particularly stressful...and it's unclear the extent to which publishing 'successfully' can currently thrive without author involvement until you're of Elena Ferrante stature."

"I'm glad to see a change in publishing as I worked as an editor for many years in a large corporation and felt I was the outsider in a sea of white middle class people who were very Oxbridge!"

17% come from multi-ethnic backgrounds



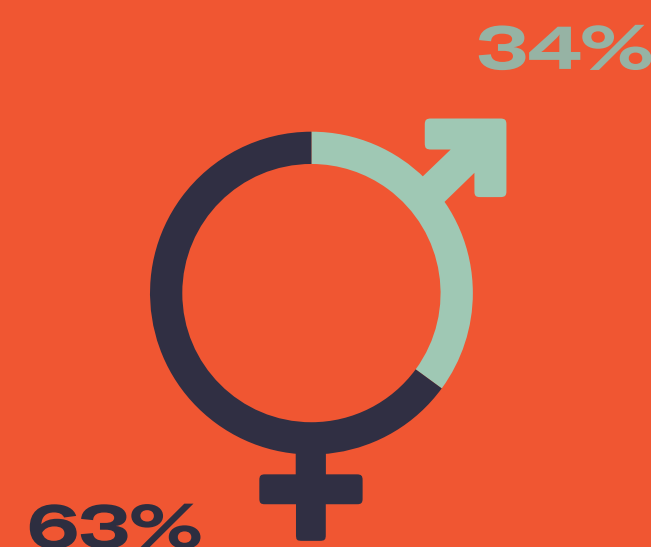
35% of authors live in London and 20% live in the South East



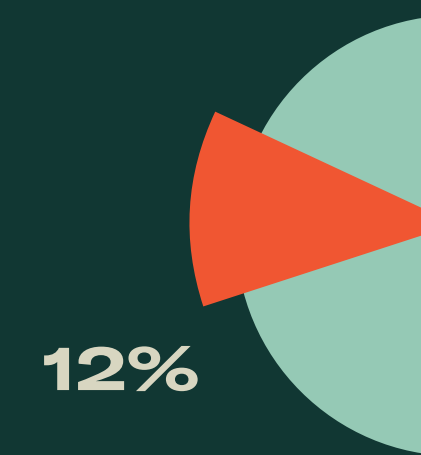
72% middle class, 18% working class



63% female 34% male



12% identify as having a disability or long-term health condition



The majority identify as heterosexual (80%) with 10% describing themselves as bisexual, gay, lesbian or preferring to self-describe their sexuality





# Every book matters



**Kate Parkin**  
Managing Director,  
Adult Publishing

“Over the past year we have made significant progress in widening the representation of our publishing across the adult division. In 2022, 13% of our non-fiction titles are written by authors of colour and/or from working-class backgrounds, including Lord Simon Woolley’s inspirational memoir *Soar*, and Chris Wild’s *The State of It*, an excoriating exposé of the British care system. We are particularly proud that 50% of the authors on our Heligo business and smart-thinking books list – traditionally an area dominated by white middle class men – are women, and 50% are writers of colour, broadening the reach of these books beyond a conventional audience.

Fiction publishing is a slower burn, and we are more dependent on agent submissions. However, 2022 sees us publish Scarlett Brade’s first novel *The Hive*, non-binary author Lex Croucher’s *Infamous*, the follow-up to *Reputation*, a Waterstone’s Book of the Year, and Tasneem Abdur-Rasheed’s modern rom-com *Finding Mr Perfectly Fine*. Looking ahead to 2023 we can already see a more inclusive author base, testament to our company-wide determination to commission a diverse and representative range of voices.”

“We have made significant progress in widening the representation of our publishing across the adult division.”

“Every child should have the opportunity to see themselves and their stories reflected when they reach for the bookshelf. Our children’s editorial teams are committed to commissioning talent and themes that authentically represent the widest possible breadth of lived experience – offering positive narratives that reject cliché and celebrate contemporary life in all its multitudes.

We’re hugely proud of the authors and illustrators that we’ve published over the past year – and encouraged by the steady growth in representation across our lists – but we won’t shy away from our responsibilities and the work that remains.

Over the last year, we’ve seen readers across age groups respond with real enthusiasm to books such as Joya Goffney’s YA romcom *Confessions of an Alleged Good Girl*; Akshaya Raman’s Indian-inspired fantasy *The Ivory Key*; Milly Evans’ LGBTQ-friendly sex ed *Honest*; De Nichols’ pioneering *Art of Protest*; and – of course! – Maisie Chan’s Jhalak Prize and Branford Boase-winning *Danny Chung Does Not Do Maths* (with her latest *Keep Dancing Lizzie Chu* foxtrotting hot on its heels...).

And with upcoming lists that include work from the likes of Nathanael Lessore, Dee Benson, Jordan Ifueko, Ciannon Smart, Patrick Kane, Poonam Mistry, Maggie Li, Rebecca Barrow, Kimberlie Clinthorne-Wong; we’re excited to continue to build on the positive momentum, and ensure we take further steps forward in the year to come.”

“Our children’s editorial teams are committed to commissioning talent and themes that authentically represent the widest possible breadth of lived experience.”



**Helen Wicks**  
Managing Director,  
Children’s Publishing





# Every voice matters



**Anna MacLaren May**  
People Director

“Last year we set ourselves the aim of Black, Asian and multi-ethnic groups representing 20% of our new recruits by 2026. Ethnic underrepresentation has improved at senior management level but overall, ethnic representation below this level shows little change from our 2020 findings. However, there are signs of progress in this area with fewer candidates in our recruitment applicant pool identifying as White British compared to staff who identify as White British. This is likely to be a useful metric to track over time, to see if candidate profiles develop into a pattern of change within our staffing profiles.

We continue to have a balance of gender representation at senior leadership level, however we continue to have fewer men applying for our junior roles.

Class has proved difficult to measure as we changed the questions this year to allow for more emphasis on self-identification. For this reason, we can't accurately compare datasets year-on-year but we can note that we have seen a slight decrease in staff who identify as working class, and this will continue to be a priority area to target for recruitment together with greater geographic representation. Arguably, social mobility data is more indicative here with 16% of staff attending an independent school which is below the industry benchmark (19%). On another promising note, only 5% of staff members said that they had a family connection with somebody in the arts, down from 12% in 2020, suggesting that we are increasingly offering our roles to those without existing family connections in publishing.

**“We continue to have a balance of gender representation at senior leadership level, we continue to have fewer men applying for our junior roles.”**

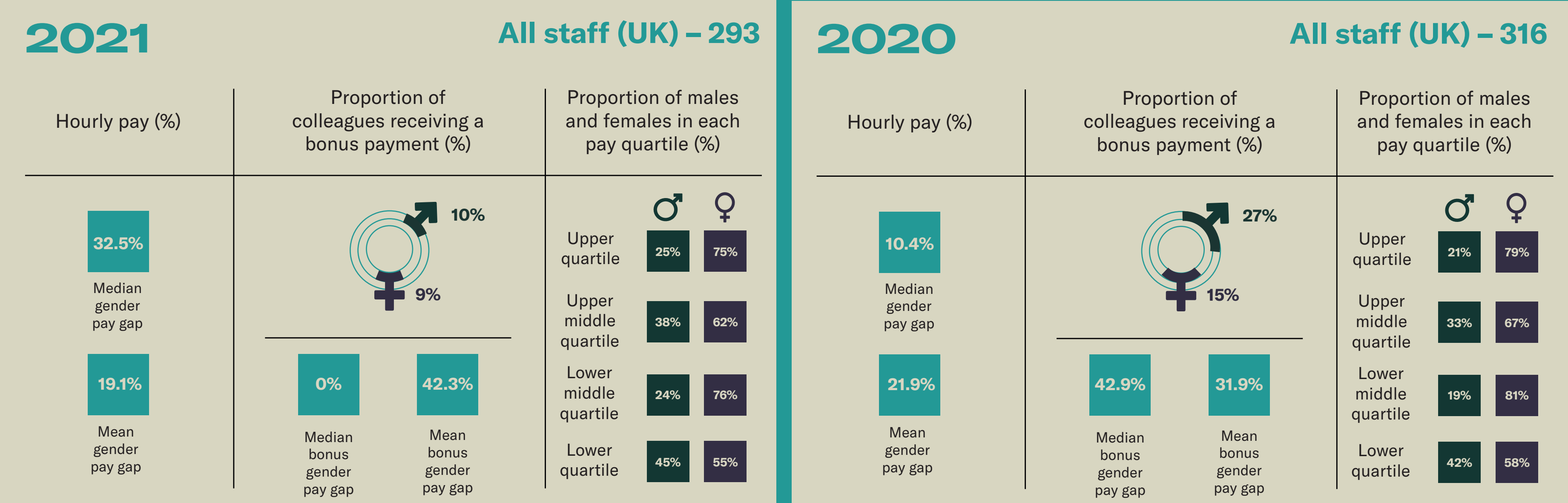
Whilst the majority of staff and our applicant pool did not identify as disabled or as having a long-term health condition, the percentage of staff identifying positively was highest amongst employees with no management responsibilities and lowest amongst senior leadership. Among the small number of staff surveyed who did identify as disabled, two thirds said that every effort had been made to support them in their working life.

Feedback from the survey suggested that the company should drive further awareness of disabilities and the impact these have on individuals, both staff and candidates. It's clear that our job advertisements should better facilitate access to our roles, and this will become a priority within our recruitment policy. Over the next year, we will aim to build our wellbeing programme to improve awareness and drive empathy by introducing staff networks and further training, including mental health first aid training for staff across the business.”





# Our gender pay gap



“We continue to ensure that men and women are paid fairly, consistently, and equally in all like-for-like roles.

We have made some progress in reducing the mean gender pay gap however, the data also indicates that the gap has widened for the median gender pay gap. We continue to have a higher proportion of men, when compared to women, in the upper two quartiles and this year, we have seen a small reduction in the percentage of women in the upper two quartiles, whilst the percentage of men in the upper two quartiles has increased.

Our recruitment and employment policies promote equal opportunities for pay and progression at Bonnier Books UK and aim to ensure fairness and prevent barriers for women. When we examine the data, we can see that the company’s operational roles tend to be carried out by men and, that most of these roles fall within the upper two quartiles, where we have a higher proportion of male staff. Therefore understanding the data is key for establishing tangible aims to reduce the gap, where this is possible. Our challenge as an employer continues to be attracting a higher proportion of female applicants for operational roles and encouraging more male candidates to apply for our junior publishing roles.

It is also important to recognise that the size of our business and the number of roles that we have are significant factors for the gender pay gap results: even a very small number of people leaving the business can have an impact on the gender pay gap and can cause the results to suggest that there is inequality of pay. We believe these to be the key reasons for the widening of the median gender pay gap in 2021.”

**Anna MacLaren May**, People Director





# Action plan

Recent achievements:	What's next:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Editorial inclusion training for all editorial staff</li><li>• Launched new business and smart-thinking imprint, Heligo Press</li><li>• Partnered with pioneering new start-up Footnote Press</li><li>• Acquired Scottish independent publisher, Black &amp; White Publishing, broadening our geographical reach</li><li>• Announced the launch of a new Irish imprint based in Dublin</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Offer practical support and encouragement to aspiring female novelists of all ages and backgrounds, from across the UK and Ireland as Royal Circle Patrons of the Women's Prize for Fiction's Discovery Programme</li><li>• Create and share content to help demystify the publishing industry for new writers and illustrators</li><li>• Broaden mentoring opportunities with Arts Emergency to include aspiring authors</li><li>• Wilbur Smith Unpublished prize to be relaunched with a focus on discovering new voices</li><li>• Inclusion training for all sales, marketing and publicity teams</li></ul>

Our publishing lists





# Action plan

Recent achievements:	New initiatives for 2022:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduced enhanced paternity leave policy for fathers</li> <li>• Increased salary levels for interns and increased minimum salaries for junior roles</li> <li>• Launched @Inside_BBUK Instagram channel to help demystify publishing</li> <li>• Launched Opening Doors, a pioneering paid work experience opportunity in partnership with OWN IT! and Reggie Nelson</li> <li>• Flexible working for all</li> <li>• Equality awareness training for all, including additional training for hiring managers</li> <li>• Commissioned Submit to Love Studios to recreate a selection of the most iconic covers from across our lists, to reflect how important equality and belonging are at Bonnier Books UK. All six designs were sold as limited-edition prints with 100% of the proceeds going to Headway East London</li> <li>• Continued support of Words for Work, the National Literacy Trust’s flagship literacy and employability programme</li> <li>• Introduced an industry-leading policy to support employees through all types of pregnancy loss and formed a partnership with Tommy’s to provide parenting and pregnancy support and training for all staff. Recognised as a Tommy’s Pregnancy and Parenting at Work Champion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equal family leave policy for all new parents, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation or how they became parents. Bonnier Books UK will now offer six months’ fully paid paternity leave</li> <li>• Partner with schools to launch a work experience programme to support 16-18 years students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds</li> <li>• Launch annual sponsorship of a paid work experience programme, in partnership with by BTSB, following the success of the Opening Doors partnership with OWN IT! and Reggie Nelson</li> <li>• Continue to evolve our internship programme in partnership with Creative Access</li> <li>• Broaden inclusion and equality awareness training for all to promote inclusion and belonging</li> <li>• Build-on our recruitment strategies and policy: broaden knowledge of recruitment tools for inclusive language; continue to use positive action to address underrepresentation</li> <li>• Continue to broaden access and demystify publishing for candidates with the relaunch of the new Bonnier Books UK website careers pages, including promoting awareness of benefits and staff networks to encourage under-represented candidates</li> <li>• Continue to expand our use of inclusive job boards</li> <li>• Launch an interview shadowing programme to enable everyone the opportunity to develop interviewing skills and provide candidates with a broader and more insightful interview experience</li> </ul>

Our workforce and candidate pool





# How we built Heligo

*Our new business and smart-thinking imprint Heligo Books made a splash this year with a launch list that aims to reach audiences and age groups typically underserved by the genre. We spoke to Rik Ubhi, editorial director, about the birth of the imprint and publishing with purpose.*

## **As you worked to create a brand new imprint from scratch, how did you ensure that inclusivity and representation were built into the very fabric of Heligo Books?**

I wanted a more inclusive take on the business and smart-thinking landscapes by both publishing brilliant authors from a range of backgrounds whilst also reaching audiences who may typically have been overlooked. As a publisher, I felt that this was something lacking in the business/smart-thinking market and so this is a natural and necessary step in order to generate new ideas and new perspectives. As a reader, I felt these were the sorts of books I'd like to see on bookshelves and to read myself.

What was important for me was that every single book would have something new, interesting and important to say about the worlds of work and ideas and would stand up on the merit of its content, the lived experiences within and the lessons it offers.

What this all demonstrates to me is that a heterodox approach in publishing is critically important: that having people in any gate-keeping role from a range of different backgrounds, identities, perspectives and preferences opens the door to more representation and inclusivity.

**“This year, in 2022, over half of our list is by writers of colour and we have complete gender parity.”**

## **Heligo Books promises to rethink the business and smart thinking market. How are you looking to reshape the landscape?**

Our tagline is ‘Books for curious young readers and established business leaders’. This idea of reaching as wide a range of ages and experiences is a core to our identity. We are a home for readers expanding their horizons and seeking knowledge, whatever their background, position or identity.

We aim is to publish wider and reach further than other business and smart-thinking imprints: to inspire, energise and encourage a diverse range of readers.

Another core tenet of what we want to achieve is to publish with purpose: to help create positive change in the world around us through what we publish. Examples of this include: a landmark guide to running an environmentally-friendly business; a timely manifesto-cum-memoir of social enterprise; a game-changing manual for ‘atypical’ entrepreneurs taking on the toxic, tech-bro start-up culture; a searingly smart title that asks us to take back control from algorithms – and lots more besides.

## **With your early acquisitions, you’ve actively sought to bring in voices from the margins – how important is it to bring this diversity of thought into the workplace itself?**

It’s important to remember that bringing diversity into the workplace increases performance across that business and results in quantifiable gains in almost all metrics. What’s more, as people, we simply learn better and take in more information when exposed to different perspectives, or to people and things that are new and surprising. It is clear that there are both business - and people-based imperatives for having a representative workplace – it’s not simply ‘the right thing to do’.

## **Why was Bonnier Books UK the place to launch Heligo Books?**

Bonnier Books UK has that attitude when confronted with an apparent obstacle of not asking why something can’t be done but instead asking how can we do it. This can-do approach, coupled with people-first principles and positive purpose, has made it a true pioneer in the publishing world, from trailblazing sustainable practices by going beyond net zero to working with other organisations to amplify change, like the NSPCC and Tommy’s. Indeed, positive change seems embedded into the fabric of the organisation.

What’s more, it is clear that Bonnier champions and encourages talent from wherever it comes, which in turn creates positive role models for aspiring publishers of the future.





## 5 minutes with Vidisha Biswas...

*This year we launched a pioneering partnership with Footnote Press, an independently run, disruptive publisher of literary fiction and narrative non-fiction focused on migration, identity, and marginalised knowledge and experience. Footnote's managing director Vidisha Biswas outlines the press' mission and ambitions for the future.*

Footnote Press' mission, quite simply, is to drive narrative and social change by foregrounding marginalised knowledge and experience. We seek to achieve this by publishing bestselling, prize-winning content, and using cutting-edge digital marketing techniques to get our books on to the radar of as many people as possible and create an engaged, international community of readers, supporters and changemakers.

For every book that comes to us on submission, the first point of consideration is 'how is this a Footnote book, how does it align with our mission.' Much of our inaugural list has also been proactively commissioned - we started by asking ourselves which stories hadn't been told enough, told accurately, or told at all, and then we went and found the best authors to tell them.

Our launch titles include *Map of Hope and Sorrow*, which teams the award-winning journalist Helen Benedict with Syrian writer and refugee, Eyad Awwadawnan, to present the stories of five refugees from the Middle East and Africa who fled violence or persecution; *Between Starshine and Clay* by author and cultural critic Sarah Ladipo Manyika, who takes us on a remarkable journey across contemporary cultural and political landscapes by talking to some of the most distinguished Black thinkers of our times, including Toni Morrison, Wole Soyinka, Michelle Obama, Claudia Rankine and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.; and Natasha Burge's *Drifts* – a strikingly original memoir of autism and transcultural identity.

The reception from the wider publishing industry has been overwhelmingly positive, which isn't surprising given ongoing conversations on the publishing industry's historic failures around inclusion and representation. There's also been an explosion of 'diverse' and previously underrepresented content of late in the wake of recent global events. Which is all great, but the key question is, will it endure. Footnote exists to ensure that it endures, that these marginalised strands are mainstreamed rather than being just a fad.

We're working hard to reach new audiences. As consumer habits and expectations continue to change at an unprecedented pace, the standards of brand engagement and marketing need to rapidly evolve to accommodate these developments.

New digital marketing channels allow for rapid and reactive scaling of any campaign to double-down on success. We will incorporate best-practices around analytics and data-driven decision making from the technology and gaming sectors to drive discoverability, and instead of relying on precedent to build a marketing plan we will use live data to devise the most effective customer conversion strategies and campaigns.

BBUK's own progressive ideals, its ambitious, forward-thinking approach and commitment to inclusion and representation are what most attracted us. And the partnership with BBUK allows us to combine the best of both worlds – the agility and focus of an indie press with the expertise and reach of a world-leading publisher.



**“We started by asking ourselves which stories hadn't been told enough, told accurately, or told at all”**





# Every perspective matters

## Maisie Chan

We caught up with Jhalak Prize-winning author Maisie Chan, whose sparkling Birmingham-set debut novel *Danny Chung Does Not Do Maths* (Piccadilly Press) balanced delicate insights into inter-generational relationships and British Chinese culture with a solid dollop of laugh-out-loud comedy.

**First things first: huge congratulations on your Jhalak Prize win! Can you tell us a little about the emotions of hearing your name called and the significance of the award?**

Thank you for your congratulations! I had told myself I wasn't going to cry and then I did the opposite! I think when you hear your name it doesn't quite sink in for a moment. And then you feel the many years that you've been trying to be a writer and to be published all comes to a point, and you just have to let it all out! I cried when I had a virtual book launch for *Danny Chung Does Not Do Maths* too. I guess I'm a crier!

I've been following the Jhalak Prize since its inception and it is one of my favourite awards because it's run by volunteers who really care, plus you get money and a unique commissioned piece of art. It's given me a much larger national profile than I had before as I was in the *Guardian* and *Bookseller* and also featured in the newsletter of many book shops nationwide.

**You've talked in the past about the lack of representation and role-models on page and screen for young people of BESEA heritage. To what extent are you motivated to fill that void with your storytelling?**

I think that desire to see more representation (and not just more but good quality representation) gives me an extra impetus to create. The aim is to write a riveting story that children will like but if I can make it as inclusive as I can, then it can reflect the reality of our modern Britain to ourselves and to the rest of the world. I've always been motivated to fill that void and to help others along the way too, so I've mentored British East and Southeast Asian writers and I want to see more stories and more writers out there.

**How important is it that young readers have books in which they can recognise themselves? One of the joys of reading your work is seeing those smaller, everyday moments – sitting down to watch *Strictly*, getting into mischief, etc. – that reflect the British Chinese experience in all its multitudes.**

I think you've nailed it on the head. I'm trying to show that most British Chinese people are pretty regular - we might like fish and chips too or go to the pub at the weekends. Many celebrate Christmas and birthdays like everyone else. It's important for young readers of all kinds to see that British Chinese people are just people and that Chinese culture should also be celebrated. Our society is actually very diverse in terms of culture, religion, nationalities, ethnicities, and class. I want to show that there are different kinds of families too.

**There's a fantastic bit in your new book where Lizzie gently takes Wai Gong to task over the use of the word 'oriental'. Do you feel a responsibility to balance the entertaining with the educational?**

I put that in on purpose. With a couple of sentences, I can teach people that some East Asians, like myself, don't use the word and find it outdated. In the U.S. they don't use it at all. They've known for decades the origin of the word and why it's exoticising to use it, especially when referring to people. I was trying to highlight that and the offensive things that people do to Chinese people like mock their accents or rhyme their names with other words. Some of that happens in the playground, and so I hope that maybe a child will read that and think about whether that could really hurt someone's feelings. And maybe they will think twice about it.

**And how has the response been to your work from readers? Do you have any favourite reader reactions to *Danny* and *Lizzie*?**

Oh, I've had brilliant reviews and a lovely response to both books! I was worried before I released both books - I imagined no-one liking them or wanting to read them. 'Will children like this book?' I kept saying to myself. I've had some lovely responses

from all types of children. I do feel pleased if I've heard a reluctant reader has picked up *Danny Chung*. It seems like they really like that one. *Lizzie Chu* has made people shed tears. I'm sure that's a good thing, right? It means I've written about something emotional or that people care about the characters.





# Every perspective matters

## Chris Wild

Campaigner, charity patron and care home consultant Chris Wild is the author of *The State of It* (John Blake), an urgent examination of the UK's broken care system, drawing on his own experiences to tell the stories of the voiceless and the children being left behind.

**Lemn Sissay described *The State of It* as “the authentic inside track”. How crucial is it that we hear the authentic lived experience of those who have grown up in the care system?**

It's vital. The care sector is on the precipice of collapse and it's imperative that adults with lived experience rally together to speak up and speak out for the next generation. Lemn is motivated to make that change, as we all are, but it helps massively having a profile like Lemn lead the way.

**Your book contains the stories of some of the most vulnerable and voiceless in our society – long under-represented by literature and the wider media. How important was it to you to bring their stories from the margins and into the mainstream consciousness – redressing misconceptions and tackling long-standing stigma?**

I have spent the last twenty years trying to catch up reading everything I can, from Dickens to Hemingway. I was always looking for the answers in books, but nothing really connected, so when I got the opportunity to write my first book, *Damaged*, I wanted to make sure that it was real and authentic.

*Damaged* opened many doors and gave me a platform to advocate for young people in the care sector. It also gave me the opportunity to write a second book, *The State of It*, which I did throughout lockdown 2020. I am not a natural writer, meaning I cannot write like a journalist but that is what makes my work relatable. I start from the heart and finish in my head. Words do not come easily to me so I need to dig deep into my emotional past and drag them to the surface. My books are about hope, and more importantly, they're for the next generation of care leavers to inspire them to chase their dreams and show the world that care experienced children and young people can be successful regardless of their socio-economic background.



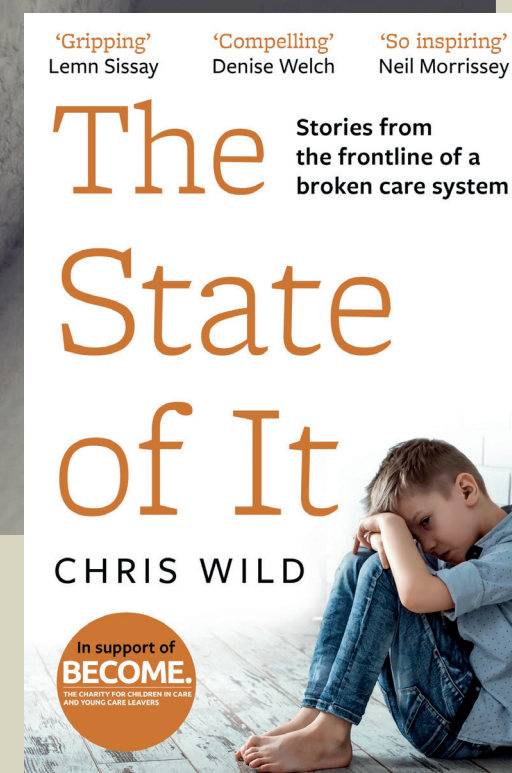
**What are your thoughts on the role of publishing and the wider arts in influencing policy and advocating for tangible social and political change?**

Never underestimate the power of words. There seems to be a revolution right now: lots more care-experienced young people are taking to social media to fight for their future. They're using the arts and other media outlets to express years of oppression within a broken system plagued by systemic abuse. Publishing is spreading information far and wide to the people who don't normally have access to it and it's raising awareness among young people and giving them a voice. I am shocked when I travel the country keynote speaking and young people come up to me with a poem, or piece of writing about political change and reform; the talent is immense. That's why it's so important we keep publishing books in this sector.

**The book was published in support of the charity Become. Can you talk a little about this partnership, and your experience of working with the team at Bonnier Books UK?**

First of all, working with the team at Bonnier changed my life. *Damaged* and *The State of It* catapulted me into a different league. I found myself sitting around a table with government officials handing out advice. The whole team at Bonnier have been like a family to me over the last four years and I owe my career to them. Beth, in particular, who will always have a special place in my heart.

Become is a special charity close to my heart. It is the only charity nationally that focuses on the needs of young people in care and care leavers. It was important for the team to be affiliated with a charity for my second book *The State of It*, because it was relevant and important to show solidarity.



**“My books are about hope, and more importantly, they're for the next generation of care leavers to inspire them to chase their dreams”**





# Every perspective matters Lord Simon Woolley

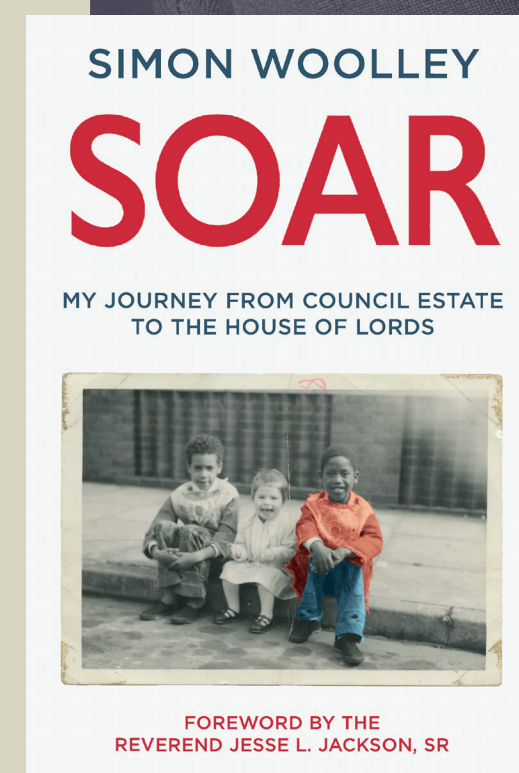
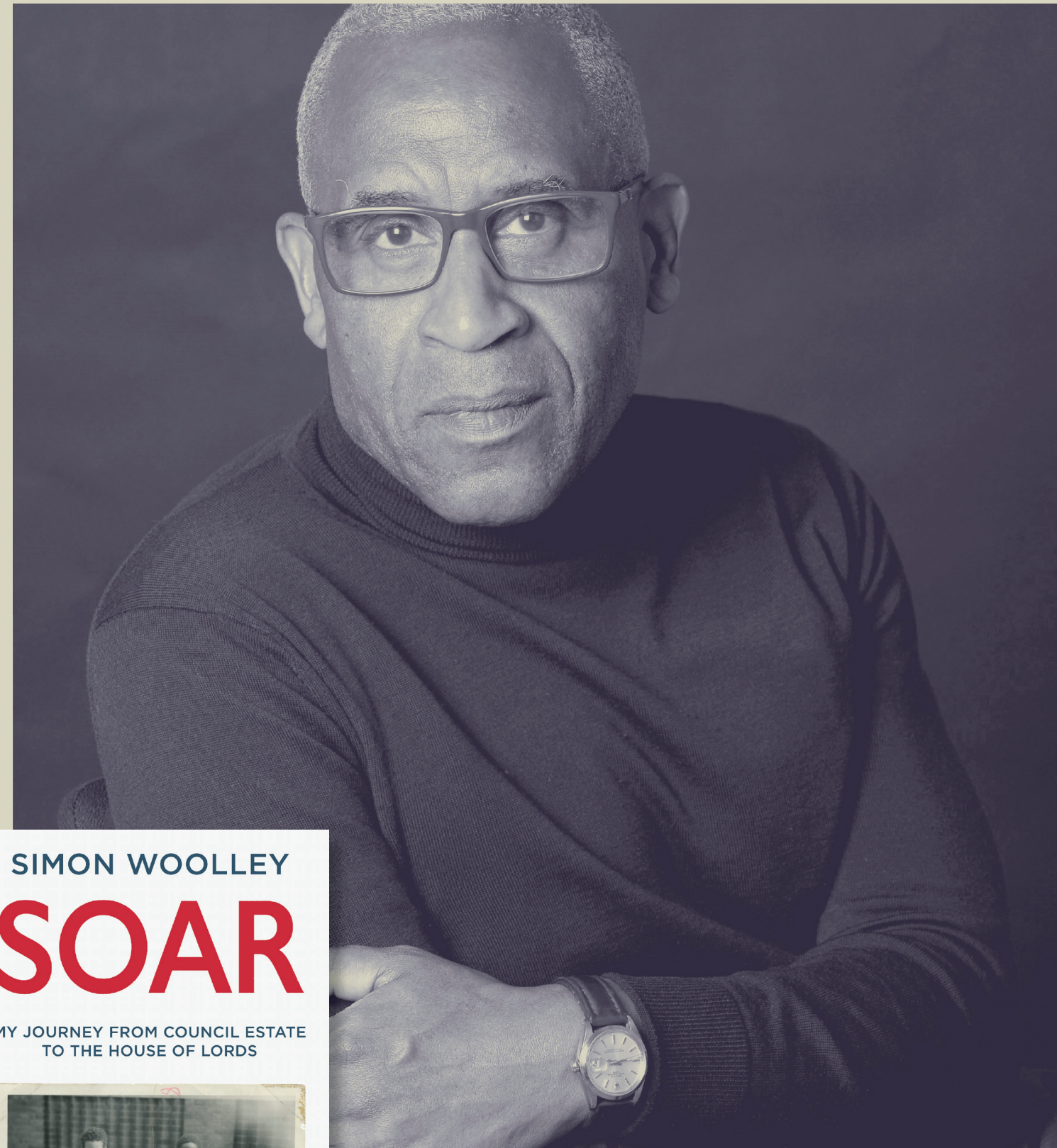
Lord Simon Woolley, co-founder of Operation Black Vote and a changemaker who has 'revolutionised British politics' (Guardian) is the author of *Soar* (Manilla Press). His debut memoir tells the story of his journey from Leicester to the House of Lords, and his life work shaking up the establishment.

**Soar recounts your incredible journey from the St Matthew's estate to the House of Lords. How important is it that stories of Black and working class pride and success are brought to a wider audience?**

The storytelling of rich lived experiences, such as mine, is essential for a multicultural society to know itself. Hopefully, they can entertain, inform and inspire.

**There's a passage in *Soar* where you mention that, though your mum was an avid reader, it took a while for the love of books to rub off on you. To what extent do you believe the publishing industry has a responsibility to reach out to potential young readers – and how do you think it can do better?**

The challenge to get young people to read has never been greater. Social media is instant, punchy, and almost instantly disposable. Engaging with young people, we will have to fight hard to make the case for the investment to read a book, and/or pivot to a style that meets the social media, instant gratification need.



**Throughout your career, you've stressed the necessity of bringing underrepresented voices to the table. Are you seeing progress in this regard in publishing and across the wider popular culture? And what more needs to be done?**

The Black Lives Matter protests - the longest in British history - forced institutions to re-evaluate whose stories were getting told. That has meant many more books have been published. To keep this momentum going publishing houses will need more Black, Asian and minority ethnic editors and senior managers.

**Why was now the time to tell your life story? And why was Bonnier Books UK the right home for it?**

I had just closed a 25-year chapter being the CEO of Operation Black Vote, and was beginning a new one as Head of Homerton College. As a globally facing publisher with stories to tell from multicultural UK, Bonnier was ready for a dynamic story that would, hopefully, be entertaining but also have something to say.

**“The storytelling of rich lived experiences, such as mine, is essential for a multicultural society to know itself.”**



A day in the life of...

## Erika Van Aken

*From blind hiring to pioneering paid work experience initiatives, a commitment to inclusion and representation is woven into every step of the recruitment process at Bonnier Books UK. HR and people operation lead Erika Van Aken walks us through her working day.*



### **I'm responsible for...**

Managing the operational employee lifecycle and making the HR function and processes as efficient and effective as possible.

### **My typical day...**

My typical day takes many forms, but a key part of my role is managing the end-to-end recruitment process and ensuring that the best people are selected for our roles. We operate a blind hiring recruitment policy as we continue to build on being an inclusive organisation. Blind hiring involves removing identifiable characteristics from a CV or application that are not related to the job itself. By removing certain characteristics like age, gender, ethnicity, or level of education, you can help mitigate different biases that may creep up when reading an application. Ultimately, blind hiring eliminates initial preconceived notions that we might have and helps us focus solely on the applicant's qualifications and skills.

### **The first email I receive...**

A message from my contact at Creative Access is often top of my inbox first thing in the morning. Creative Access is a leading and progressive recruiter at entry, junior and mid-levels for the creative industry in the UK. In 2019, we launched an internship programme in partnership with Creative Access, and this summer we successfully launched the Open Doors initiative, a new fully paid work experience programme. These programmes aim to open doors to candidates from underrepresented backgrounds and help them take their first steps to a career in publishing.

### **The tools of my trade...**

We're continuously exploring new initiatives and looking at ways in which we can be more inclusive and accessible as an employer. We've recently taken advantage of a new tool BookMachine has given us access to via Umbrella Data, designed to help publishers improve the ads they post on job boards. The tool gives a job posting an accessibility and inclusivity rating, and suggests improvements to the language used to help improve its readability for prospective job applicants. We've been running our ads through the software recently to help widen the pool of prospective candidates.

### **I'm currently working on...**

The roll out of another work experience programme aimed at 16-to-18-year-olds, which will be available over the summer months. We're working on a school partnership aimed at opening up opportunities for students from under-represented groups and will be offering one-week placements with travel expenses covered.

### **Something you might not know...**

Those on our intern programmes are always paid the equivalent to the London Living Wage.





# Meet Blanche Carballo

## Inclusion & Representation Network Chair

*Audience development lead Blanche Carballo is stepping up to chair Bonnier Books UK's Inclusion and Representation Network this autumn. Here she outlines her ambitions for the network, and the ways in which our people can get involved.*



### **Congratulations on your appointment. Can you tell us about what the role means to you, and the approach you'll be taking as chair this year?**

My main goals will be to ensure the network aligns with the business and that we recruit more members across all levels of seniority. My mission will be to create a sense of togetherness internally which we can then radiate outwards. I'm very excited to get started!

### **What is the purpose of the network?**

Put simply I believe its purpose is to eradicate the idea of the 'other'. Throughout human history the 'other' or 'otherness' has bred fear and misunderstanding, and I believe it's the duty of our network to provide safe spaces for conversation and to ask questions, debunk myths and celebrate otherness. I want to create allyship and empowerment amongst our members and the company, and of course we also want to hit our business goals and I&R targets.

### **How will the I&R Network work alongside the rest of the business?**

We'll be creating breakout groups within the network, each focused on a specific target set out in our action plan. Each breakout group will focus on a given area to come up ideas, which will be fed back to the senior leadership team to help move the dial. We want to become more active and visible within company, and hopefully everyone will see the value of the network and want to be a part of it.

### **What are your focus areas for the coming twelve months?**

I've introduced a new mission statement to help guide our activity and we're now organising the different breakout groups and getting to work. I still want to incorporate a sense of fun – and we'll be celebrating the key events in the calendar, setting up 'Every perspective matters' talks, and introducing a newsletter to be shared across the business and space on the website for us to showcase our successes, failures, fun facts, etc. to celebrate the Network and our value. So, lots of exciting things to come!

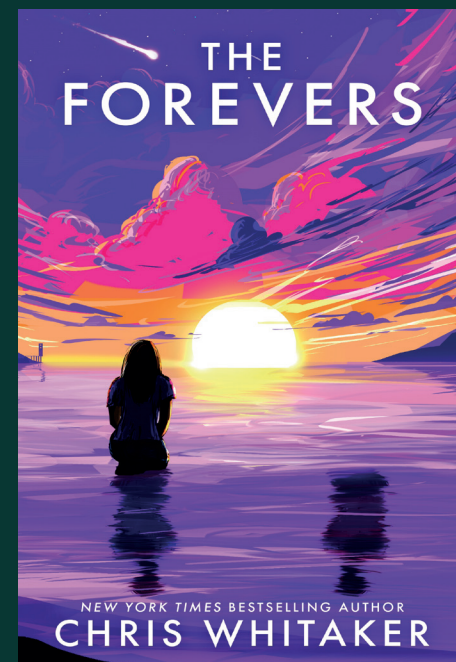






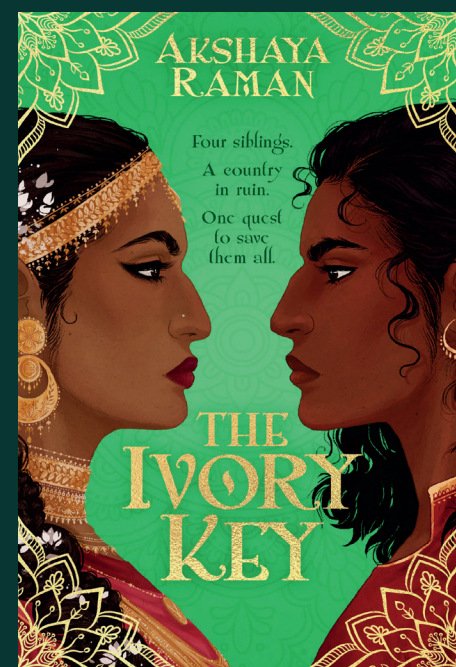
# Sophie McDonnell talks inclusive design

By approaching illustrators directly through social media, designer Sophie McDonnell has helped level the playing field and remove barriers of access for underrepresented talent. It's a method that circumvents traditional industry gatekeepers and has resulted in several artists gaining their first publishing commission. Here she talks us through a few recent covers, and the illustrators that brought them to life.



**The Forevers**  
cover illustrated by Muhammad Nafay

Muhammad Nafay lives in Pakistan and I found him by quite literally typing in #sunsetillustration on Instagram... As soon as I saw his work I knew I wanted him for the project. His style is so fresh, unique and evoking that it made him perfect for a vibrant YA title like *The Forevers*. Muhammad had very limited book design experience – most of his artwork was used for EPs or computer games. But this actually added to his appeal as it meant he could create a cover that had never really been seen in the market. The result was a work of art that wouldn't look out of place framed and hung in a gallery.



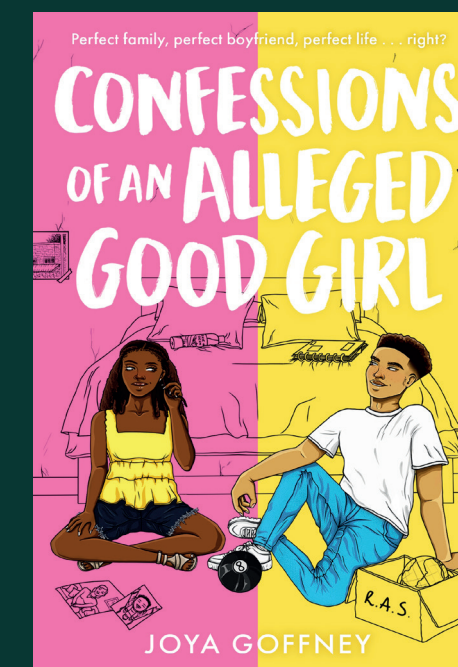
**The Ivory Key**  
cover illustrated by Jade Deo

This pan-Indian inspired fantasy story gave me the opportunity to put brown Asian female characters at the forefront of the design – something not often seen on fantasy covers. Finding the right illustrator to do these characters and the author's story justice was very important to me. I found Jade through searching a multitude of hashtags, including #desiartist and #southasianart. She was still at college when I contacted her and had never worked on a book cover project before, which always makes it twice as exciting to commission. Jade was able to bring certain features to the characters by drawing on her own Desi culture, which I think really added to the authenticity and beauty of these characters.



**Bear Woman**  
cover illustrated by Gank Pansuay

Gank Pansuay is a Thai painter that I have admired for years and when the *Bear Woman* brief came up I knew it would be the perfect opportunity to commission his talents! I first became aware of Gank through Instagram and his art has been showcased in exhibitions around the world. Working with a traditional painter meant that the design process was slightly different to the norm: we had to find a model reference image for him to interpret and then simply trust in the process and his talents, as the artwork couldn't be amended in the way that digital art can. The resulting portrait is truly stunning – a cover that is quite literally a piece of art.



**Confessions of an Alleged Good Girl**  
cover illustrated by Rebecca Hope

Being a story by a Black author that centres around Black love and Black joy, having a Black illustrator – and, for our edition, a Black British illustrator – was non-negotiable. I found Rebecca Hope through Instagram and this was her first-ever book cover commission. We worked together closely on pose and layout before finalising expressions, hairstyles and adding those small details readers would notice and enjoy later on. Having a dark-complexioned female character front and centre is so important for readers, not only to see themselves represented physically, but also to have themselves reflected and centred in stories of love, joy and YA romance. I fully trusted Rebecca to bring the authors' characters to life and she absolutely delivered.





## Background and research objectives

Bonnier Books UK (BBUK) would like to ensure the organisation is inclusive and diverse in terms of its staff, publishing list, and candidate pool when recruiting. This report presents the results of the inclusion and representation survey, carried out over December 2021-January 2022, in conjunction with The Audience Agency (TAA). This is the second such audit conducted by Bonnier Books UK, following on from the research conducted in autumn 2020. The aims of this research are to:

- Measure diversity, compared to sector and popular benchmarks
- Investigate differences in experience between different demographic groups
- Review findings against the benchmarks produced in the first round of research in 2020, to monitor changes over time

### Defining diversity

For the purposes of this audit, diversity is considered in terms of:

- Gender
- Ethnic origin
- Age
- Disability
- Sexual orientation
- Class background
- Religion (staff only)
- Place of residence and regional diversity

### Methodology

Primary research: Staff and author/illustrator surveys

Data relating to the current staff and publishing list was collected via an e-survey. The survey was designed by The Audience Agency in conjunction with Bonnier Books UK staff. Where possible (excepting where recommendations had been made about changes to questions in last year's report), the same questions were used as during the first audit in autumn 2020, to support comparisons and reflect where changes had been made. In addition, as far as possible, questions were aligned with relevant benchmark data, including population data from the 2011 Census and sector data from the 2019 Publishers Association Diversity Survey, to enable comparisons. Additional context questions were also included, such as team, imprint, office location, seniority and length of employment, to enable comparisons with local benchmarks and to monitor how representative the sample was of the organisation as a whole.

The staff e-survey was distributed by TAA (with follow-up reminders sent by BBUK colleagues) to contracted staff members and was open from 2 December 2021 – 23 January 2022. The publishing list e-survey was distributed by BBUK. In a change from last year, this was sent to all authors & illustrators who had been commissioned or published in the last 12 months (in 2020, only those who had been published in the last 12 months were surveyed) and was open from 2 December 2021 – 23 January 2022

In a further change from last year, to align with data protection regulations, the scope of this research was limited to staff members and authors/illustrators currently living in the UK. Respondents were asked at the beginning of the survey whether they consented to take part in the research and if they were resident in the UK; those who responded that they were not UK residents were then screened from the survey. In total, 3 staff members and 3 authors/illustrators who clicked on the survey link said they would prefer not to participate; whilst 4 staff members and 15 authors/illustrators did not take part due to living outside of the UK.

### Secondary analysis: Recruitment data

In addition to the surveys, secondary analysis of existing recruitment diversity monitoring forms collected from September 2020-21 was analysed, to develop understanding of the candidate pool when recruiting.

### Benchmarks

Where possible, the survey findings have been compared to those from the last audit, to draw comparisons and monitor changes over time. This is the case except where changes have been made to the survey for this year, in response to feedback or to refine the research.

Where relevant, findings have been compared to previous research carried out by the Publishers Association into the diversity of the publishing workforce in 2019(1) and 2020(2), and the Royal Society of Literature's 'A Room of My Own' survey of UK writers in 2019[2], to act as benchmarks for the sector. Comparisons with population benchmarks from the 2011 Census and other data from the Office of National Statistics[3], at national and regional level, have also been included.

[1] <https://www.publishers.org.uk/publications/diversity-survey-of-the-publishing-workforce-2019/>

[2] <https://www.publishers.org.uk/publications/diversity-survey-of-the-publishing-workforce-2020/>

[3] <https://rsliterature.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/RSL-A-Room-of-My-Own-Report-19-June-2019.pdf>

[4] <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2018>





## Participation

24% of authors and illustrators surveyed shared their data with us, giving an overall margin of error of +8%. 57% of staff surveyed shared their data with us, giving us an overall margin of error of +4%. Whilst the staff survey sample in 2021 was consistent with the previous year, fewer responses were collected for the publishing list survey this year. To align with data protection regulations, we only surveyed authors and illustrators based in the UK. It is worth noting that this may have impacted the number of responses from the publishing list survey.

