



A BEAUTY INDUSTRY THAT LOOKS LIKE YOU

A REPORT BY THE BRITISH BEAUTY COUNCIL

OCTOBER 2024

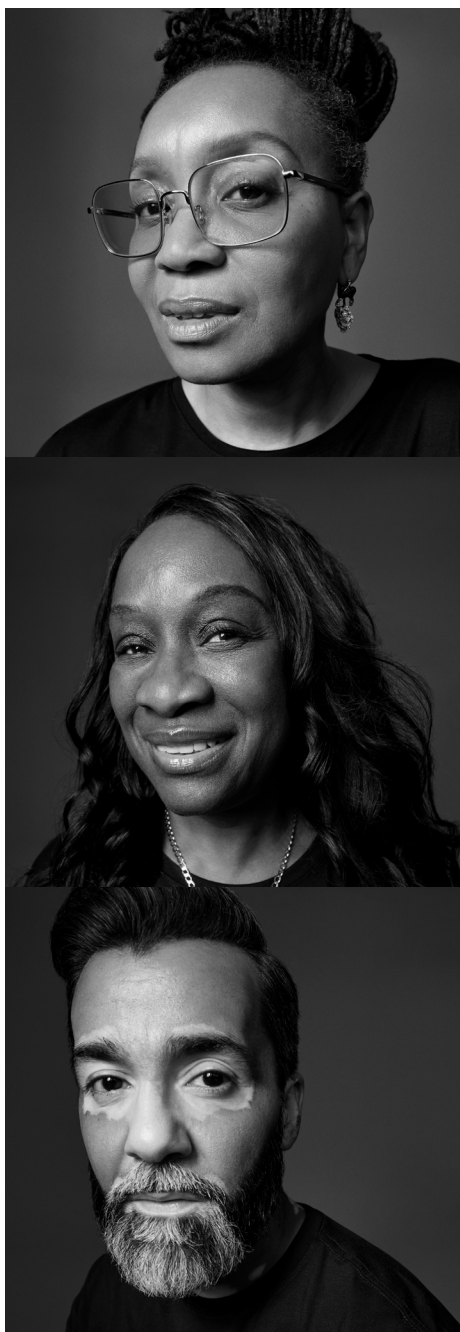
BRITISH BEAUTY COUNCIL

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Foreword

Sharon Lloyd, Associate Professor and Deputy Director of the Centre for Equity and Inclusion



The beauty industry has always been a space of creativity, innovation, and transformation. But as the industry continues to evolve, it is crucial that it reflects the diversity of the people it serves. The intent of ‘A Beauty Industry That Looks Like You’ has arisen from the many conversations and insights garnered from across the British Beauty Council’s Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee, and prompted by the desire to inspire and activate those working in the ‘hidden corners’ of our multi-faceted communities across the UK, whilst also highlighting the personal experiences of both professionals within the field.

Navigating the wide variety of career options in beauty can feel overwhelming, but this report brings a refreshing perspective to the pathways the industry presents. Through the voices of industry workers, we explore everything from product development to marketing, artistry, and retail. Together their stories help to highlight the importance of inclusivity, showing that success is not only possible but also thriving in a space that values diversity and innovation.

This is because a career in beauty can evolve into so much more in addition to providing services or owning a salon. When we expand our minds and allow ourselves to explore our inner creativity, the possibilities become endless. From product formulation to beauty technology, sustainable practices, and even content creation, the industry is filled with exciting and innovative paths that stretch far beyond traditional presentations of what is beauty and who has access to it. This report highlights that beauty is a space where you can build a dynamic career that integrates your passion with cutting-edge trends and evolving consumer needs that can be both open to all and specialist.

One key factor in unlocking these opportunities is education. The value of continuous learning in the beauty industry cannot be overstated. Whether through formal education or Continuing Professional Development (CPD), staying

informed about the latest techniques, trends, and technologies is critical for advancing your career. CPD allows beauty professionals to hone their skills, expand their expertise, and adapt to an ever-changing industry. Investing in education not only improves your personal practice but also opens doors to leadership roles, innovation, and entrepreneurial ventures.

However, despite significant spending across numerous communities, the prospect of equity in the beauty industry, like in so many others, remains elusive. Our analysis shows that the experience of many within the beauty industry is markedly more frustrating for some groups than for others. Diverse consumers, entrepreneurs, and brands often face multiple friction points that non-diverse groups are less likely to encounter. These challenges manifest in representation, access to opportunities, and product inclusivity, creating barriers that must be addressed if the industry is to achieve true equity.

Many groups within the industry encounter significant barriers to success. Removing these barriers, can lead to greater opportunities for everyone in the beauty ecosystem. Addressing these challenges will not only promote fairness but will also open the doors to more innovation, creativity, and growth for all involved.

This report also serves as a vital tool for addressing issues such as access to the industry, social mobility, inclusivity, and equity. By gathering data across a broad landscape of beauty professionals and consumers alike, we ensure we have the scope of information needed to propel real change. This data will be instrumental in helping us break down barriers

to entry, foster greater diversity, and ensure that the beauty industry reflects the society it serves.

Alongside survey data, this report showcases personal success stories that illustrate the potential for long-term job security, sustainability, and safety within the industry—qualities that are particularly vital in an unpredictable world. For those looking to invest in their education and embark on a fulfilling career in beauty, we hope this report serves as a guide and eventually a source of encouragement.



Introduction

The British beauty industry stands at a pivotal moment, where diversity, inclusion and empowerment are shaping its future. As we embrace the rich variety of cultures, experiences, and perspectives across Britain, it's vital that the industry reflects this diversity, not just in appearance but in thought as well.

While progress has been made and it's important for us to recognise what we have achieved—brands now celebrate a wider range of skin tones, body types, and gender identities—there's still much more to do. True inclusion means ensuring all voices are heard thus bringing fresh creativity and innovation to the table.

A truly inclusive beauty industry offers a sense of belonging to everyone, encouraging individuality and self-expression. Beauty – in all its forms – can enhance wellbeing, boost self-esteem, and nurture mental health. By empowering individuals to express themselves, we foster confidence and community and break down barriers that have long excluded many.

This report is the result of a survey completed by 4000 people who interact with the beauty industry, either by working within it or by using beauty products and services. Respondents were asked to consider, 'Is this an industry that looks like you?'. They were asked questions to uncover whether they feel represented, seen, heard and if there is a clear pathway for progression.

For the purpose of this first piece of work the British Beauty Council extrapolated data from respondents who worked in industry (approximately 40% of total respondents). The pool represents people who identify as living with multiple diverse characteristics who work in the hair, beauty and wellness industry – from manufacturing facilities and head offices to shop floors and salons.

- Hannah Cook, DEI Committee Co-chair

Key Findings

The findings of the census demonstrated some amazing attributes of the beauty industry: its strong female workforce, the entrepreneurial opportunities it offers and its increased levels of diversity within the industry as a whole compared to the wider economy. The anecdotal evidence highlights that the beauty industry nurtures a widespread sense of belonging for workers and a positive reputation for enabling social mobility.

The census was marketed to both beauty industry professionals and consumers by a comprehensive campaign specifically designed to encourage responses from ‘hidden corners’ of the sector via relatability – imagery can be seen throughout this report. The findings are rich and offer unique insights that will guide the Council’s work in areas of diversity, equity and inclusion for years to come.

At this initial stage of reporting, we have chosen to focus on three key areas; career progression, neurodiversity and disability. Drawing findings from only respondents who work in industry, this analysis highlights areas of focus that we as employers, business leaders and team members must grasp if we are to truly move the dial.



Career Progression

Everyone should feel empowered and able to take deliberate steps and actions to achieve professional goals, develop skills and climb their career ladder. This progression is of significant importance – with more diverse voices reaching higher positions comes a trickle down of increased equity in the workforce and representation externally.

To truly propel career progression for all, opportunities must be offered to typically underrepresented groups and allow those who haven't had access to the same education and resources as their more privileged counterparts to develop.

Enabling people from diverse backgrounds to embody leading roles and become role-models

'Despite a significantly higher proportion of women in the beauty industry, men are still generally paid more'.

'Transgender and non-binary individuals remain significantly underrepresented at senior levels of business'.

is key too. Seeing someone like you progress is motivational and empowers you to believe you can. This further plays into inclusivity – with a strong message that says 'you are allowed to thrive here'.

The British Beauty Council's "Value of Beauty Report 2023" found that employment in the personal care industry accounts for around 1 in every 50 jobs in most local authorities across the UK, totalling at 603,000.

With this figure as context, the anecdotal evidence collected shows that, despite the fact that the industry provides access to entry-level jobs, we face a marked challenge with the promotion of diversity, equity and inclusion in senior level positions.

Historically, barriers such as gender, ethnicity, lack of formal education and hidden or visible differences (neurodiversity, disability, speech and

language challenges) have been identified as lacking in senior roles in beauty, just as they are in most other industries.

Our data reinforces this – when it comes to respondents from director, CEO and board level roles, only two characteristics increased in percentage when it came to representation: men and those with white ethnicity. Representation in relation to all other identified characteristics – women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+, disability, neurodiversity – all decreased compared to their overall representation across the industry, meaning that more found themselves in junior roles where decision-making power is lacking.

Whilst some improvements have been made, the level of diverse representation within beauty businesses continues to decrease when it comes to senior level positions, as outlined here:

Characteristic	Overall Representation	Board Room Representation
White	66 per cent	70 per cent
Black, Latin or Hispanic, South Asian, East Asian or mixed / multiple ethnic group	34 per cent	30 per cent
Male	5 per cent	13 per cent
Female	93 per cent	86 per cent
Physical disability	8 per cent	5 per cent
Hidden disability	10 per cent	5 per cent
Visible hair, skin or facial difference	16 per cent	8 per cent
Neurodivergent	19 per cent	8 per cent

Whilst these figures speak for themselves, more opinion-led data from respondents paints an increasingly important picture when it comes to opportunities to progress and thrive. Almost half of ethnic minority respondents (45 per cent), 37 per cent of people living with physical disabilities and more than a third of women (35 per cent) do not believe they are given the same opportunities in the workplace as those with differing characteristics.



These findings clearly point towards the importance of proactive inclusion strategies (such as mentorship programmes, tailored leadership development and the formation of policies to combat discrimination) for ensuring that individuals with diverse characteristics have equitable opportunities to rise to senior leadership positions.

Progression is not limited to the development of careers within business, it also has an important role in entrepreneurship. It stands for developing unique skills, knowledge and ability to go out on your own – this is an area where the evidence suggests our industry is uniquely progressive.

More than a third of those living with physical disabilities (36 per cent) identified as business owners, founders, or entrepreneurs. This is significantly higher than the overall national figure of 25 per cent.

Respondents identifying as neurodivergent (having a brain that works differently from the average or “neurotypical” person) were second most likely to be entrepreneurs at 35 per cent. This is closely followed by those with hidden disabilities at 30 per cent, respondents with hair, skin or facial differences at 29 per cent and a quarter of sexual and gender minority (SGM) respondents (26 per cent).

This data is a positive indication that the beauty industry provides opportunities and resources to people of all characteristics to propel their entrepreneurial aspirations and build a business.

• Career opportunities and social mobility

On top of providing entrepreneurial opportunities to those with diverse characteristics, the personal care industry plays an active role in providing opportunities and creating supportive environments in underprivileged areas. In fact, almost half (45 per cent) of personal care industry jobs represented in local authorities with the highest levels of unemployment, demonstrating the industry’s role as a vehicle for positive upward social mobility.

What’s more, research from Oxford Economics in 2023 found that individuals working in the personal care industry are more likely to be business owners or managers than those working in other industries. It also suggests that those educated to below degree-level are more likely to be managers or business owners in the personal care industry than similar individuals in other industries.

The Council has championed this through initiatives including the Future Talent Programme, which aims to uncover the unique opportunities in beauty to all via online resources that are easily accessible and open-source. It challenges people to aim higher and seek out aspirational job roles. It has reached five thousand students nationally to date.

Representation from Within

Millie Kendall OBE, CEO

The British Beauty Council has been proactive in pushing for greater inclusivity within the industry. The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity (DEI) Committee has been working on identifying and addressing barriers within industry. One key milestone was the successful amending of the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Hairdressing to ensure that professionals are trained to work with all hair types, particularly afro and textured hair, which was historically neglected in mainstream beauty education.

Historically, the beauty industry has been denounced for its lack of inclusivity, with critics citing a lack of diverse representation at a senior level as often leading to brands failing to offer a wide range of products catering to different levels of accessibility, skin types and skin tones. Although progress has been made, with more brands now offering a diverse range of products and improved representation in advertising, the shift towards genuine inclusivity is still evolving and can sometimes be characterised as tokenistic.

A lack of acknowledgement and consideration for those who look or feel differently is a common theme when it comes to perceptions of representation.

The 'A Beauty Industry That Looks Like You' survey findings clearly highlight that – although the industry is increasingly welcoming of those with diverse characteristics – there is a clear lack of representation and barriers to progression for those living outside of the parameters of 'traditionally' heteronormative, westernised, physically able norms. The industry must, therefore, work hard to increase opportunities for these identified underrepresented groups.



The census proves that it's time for brands to actively seek out the voices and perspectives of diverse communities, not just in advertising but also in the boardroom and throughout the entire product development process. A failure to do so not only stifles innovation but also limits the ability of companies to authentically connect with broader, more diverse consumer bases.

In order to address this disparity, the beauty industry must create leadership teams that reflect the diversity of its consumers. This includes taking concrete steps to increase inclusivity at decision-making levels, not just in advertising or front-facing roles. By promoting diverse voices in leadership, beauty brands can better understand and serve all communities whilst also fostering greater trust and loyalty.



Neurodivergence

The understanding and diagnosis of neurodivergent conditions such as ADHD, autism and dyslexia have significantly improved in the UK over the last decade. Growing awareness, improved diagnostic tools, and societal acceptance of neurodiversity are cited as the motives behind this.

Interestingly, the British Beauty Council census found that almost **20 per cent of its workforce identify as being neurodivergent – 4 per cent higher than the national average**. This evidence suggests that the beauty industry is bucking trends identified in government data that suggests higher levels of unemployment for neurodivergent people.¹

1 in 5 respondents to the census identified as neurodivergent. The number rose to 30 per cent in the 18-24 year old category of respondents and almost a quarter amongst 25-34 year olds (24 per cent), dropping to 6 per cent or lower for those aged 55 or older.

Positively, neurodivergent respondents were most likely to be business owners, founders or entrepreneurs (35 per cent). With the data highlighting that those living with neurodivergence feel most able to be their true selves working in the beauty industry.

Most choose to work in direct public-facing roles, with 62 per cent working in either the hair,

beauty or wellness services sector (45 per cent) or in retail services (17 per cent). This suggests that the beauty industry performs well in providing access to jobs that nurture those with neurodivergence.

That said, when it comes to neurodivergent representation at senior level figures more than half. This proves that, whilst overall access to jobs is good, professional development opportunities and general representation in overall decision-making roles needs attention.

The beauty industry clearly offers a home to people living with neurodivergence. This is in contrast to the wider experiences often faced by these individuals in relation to their socioeconomic status, with studies finding that a significant proportion experience higher rates of unemployment and underemployment in disadvantaged areas, further compounding the challenges they face.

With this knowledge for context, it's clear that the beauty industry has a unique opportunity to consider alternate routes to recruitment into the sector and accessible education opportunities. The Council believes that a review and reestablishment of the current 'fit-for-purpose' education and training methods will be essential to adequately cater to the needs of those with neurodivergence. This will ensure that these people have the same opportunities for success and inclusion as their neurotypical peers.

¹ Commons Library Research Briefing, 8 April 2024

'Neurodivergence amongst respondents was 19%'

‘Those with neurodiversity are more likely to earn a below average wage with only 43% earning within the national average band or higher’.

Health conditions, disabilities or impairments

The final challenge presenting itself from the data is a lack of representation and inclusion for those living with physical disabilities.

More than a third of those working in the beauty industry and living with physical disabilities (36 per cent) are business owners, founders, or entrepreneurs - way above the overall national figure of 25 per cent. On the one hand, this could point positively towards the upward mobility of people with disabilities; however it could also point towards the lack of accommodation or opportunity offered to disabled people thus pushing them towards creating their own spaces to thrive.

If we are to support more disabled people to enter into our industry and progress, we must address significant barriers to entry including: balancing health needs, unnecessarily complex

processes to access support and finance, and inaccessibly designed services. This is increasingly significant when considering that 30 per cent of respondents with a physical disability also defined themselves as having a hidden disability. This highlights how common it is for people with disabilities to have to manage multiple issues when it comes to health and wellbeing.

External data indicates a significant intersection between poverty, disability, and ethnic minority in the UK. This research shows that higher levels of disability are prevalent in poorer areas – in 2021, 24 per cent of individuals in the most deprived regions reported disabilities, compared to 18 per cent in the least deprived areas.¹

The lack of promotion and progression for those with a disability to more senior, higher-paying roles can be seen most starkly when evaluating salary levels of respondents to the British Beauty Council survey. Those with a hidden disability are most likely to earn less than the UK average

¹ Office for National Statistics, Research Briefings, 2021.

The beauty industry provides a more positive environment for individuals with physical or hidden disabilities that have entrepreneurial aspirations

with 61 per cent of those earning below this wage band. This cohort also witnesses an almost 50 per cent decrease in representation at senior levels compared to their overall representation across industry. What's plain to see is people with disabilities' specific experiences, wants and needs are currently not adequately discussed or considered in the workplace due to a stark lack of representation at key senior decision-making levels.

Regardless of identifying characteristics, every community that completed the census – from ethnic groups to disability, sexual identity or gender – cited sight, speech and hearing impairments as the most poorly represented characteristics.

There is a longstanding lack of representation of people with physical disabilities in beauty media and imagery. By promoting and ensuring progression of these people the industry will not only become a more equitable environment to work within it will also be an industry that consumers can see themselves in.

The census findings present an overwhelming picture that more can, and should, be done to support people living with physical disabilities. businesses must do more to create accessible spaces and resources whilst also developing a deeper understanding for those living with often complex and chronic health conditions. Only by doing so can they truly ensure that the presence and voice of those with disabilities are seen and heard.





‘55% of women felt they were given the same opportunities as colleagues with different characteristics’.

‘80% of neurodivergent people felt their company provides an environment where their career can thrive’.

‘69% of LGB+ people felt they were able to be their true selves at work’.

Conclusion

This analysis highlights that specific focus is needed to address lack of support and barriers to entry for those living with neurodivergence and disabilities. The growing awareness and improved diagnosis of neurodivergent conditions such as ADHD, autism, and dyslexia have led to an increased representation of neurodivergent individuals in certain sectors, particularly in creative and service-oriented industries like beauty and wellness. This suggests that while neurodivergent individuals may face educational barriers, our industry provides spaces that accommodate and nurture diverse talents. Nonetheless, ongoing efforts are required to remove the educational and employment barriers that still disproportionately affect these individuals, ensuring they have the same opportunities for success and inclusion.

It is clear that individuals with physical, hidden, or sensory impairments face unique challenges that can impact professional opportunities and personal wellbeing. Despite these barriers, there are positive indications that the beauty industry offers unique opportunities for individuals with disabilities with many finding pathways to success, particularly in entrepreneurship. This trend suggests that while traditional employment barriers remain, many individuals in these groups are carving their own paths. The intersectionality of these conditions with other identity factors, such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, further compounds the challenges faced by these individuals.

The census findings underscore the need for businesses and organisations to prioritise

more inclusive practices, ensuring that health needs are met and that the workplace is a supportive environment for all – particularly for those navigating multiple forms of discrimination. We recommend that greater education and understanding in this space should be initiated at executive level and filtered down and throughout companies.

Overall, while the personal care industry shows promise in supporting marginalised communities there remains a significant gap in equitable career progression, income parity, and senior-level representation. We are calling on industry to address the underrepresentation of disabled, neurodivergent, and ethnically diverse individuals in leadership roles and will continue to promote better practice in this area via cross-collaboration with our stakeholders.

Over the coming year, with the support of its DEI Committee, the British Beauty Council will share and report more of its findings from the census to help businesses make change and take decisive action. We will spotlight the clear areas of discrimination and aid industry in creating a truly diverse, representative and inclusive space for everyone who interacts with beauty.

Only then, can we truly become ‘a beauty industry that looks like you’.



Acknowledgements

The British Beauty Council would like to thank:

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee for its steadfast work on the collection of data for this research:

Aarti P	Millie Flemington- Clare
Antoinette Ale	Nicole Scott
Ateh Jewel	Pooja Shah
Beth Dolecki	Rob Czapka
Candice Gardner	Roxanne McKenzie
Claire Green	Sabina Harris-Hercules
Deborah Johnson	Sam Marshall
Dianna Tieu	Shane Carnell-Xu
Dija Ayodele	Sharon Lloyd
Emily Ross	Susan Allen Augustin
Fiona Greenhow	Waheeda Hales
Gianne Doherty	Lauren Wolfe

Further thanks to:

Liz Collins (all imagery)
Victoria Green (report design)
Jamie Gill and Gemma Juviler, The Outsiders Perspective (consultation)
Rich Miles and Alex Gabbutt, The Diversity Standards Collective (consultation)
Spring Studios (creative strategy)
JCDecaux (campaign amplification)

Aarti P
Antoinette Ale
Ateh Jewel
Beth Dolecki
Candice Gardner
Claire Green
Deborah Johnson
Dianna Tieu
Dija Ayodele
Emily Ross
Fiona Greenhow
Gianne Doherty
Hannah Cook
Helen Sinicola
Jack Oliver
Jake Xu
Jasmin Hundal
Jo Cooke
Joseph Harwood
Kelly Richards
Keri Blue
Kirpal Bhogal
Laura Winson
Laura Mathias
Lauren Wolfe
Lianna Soffe
Lisa Potter
Marie Loney
Mary Haddock-Staniland
Matilda Lansdown



