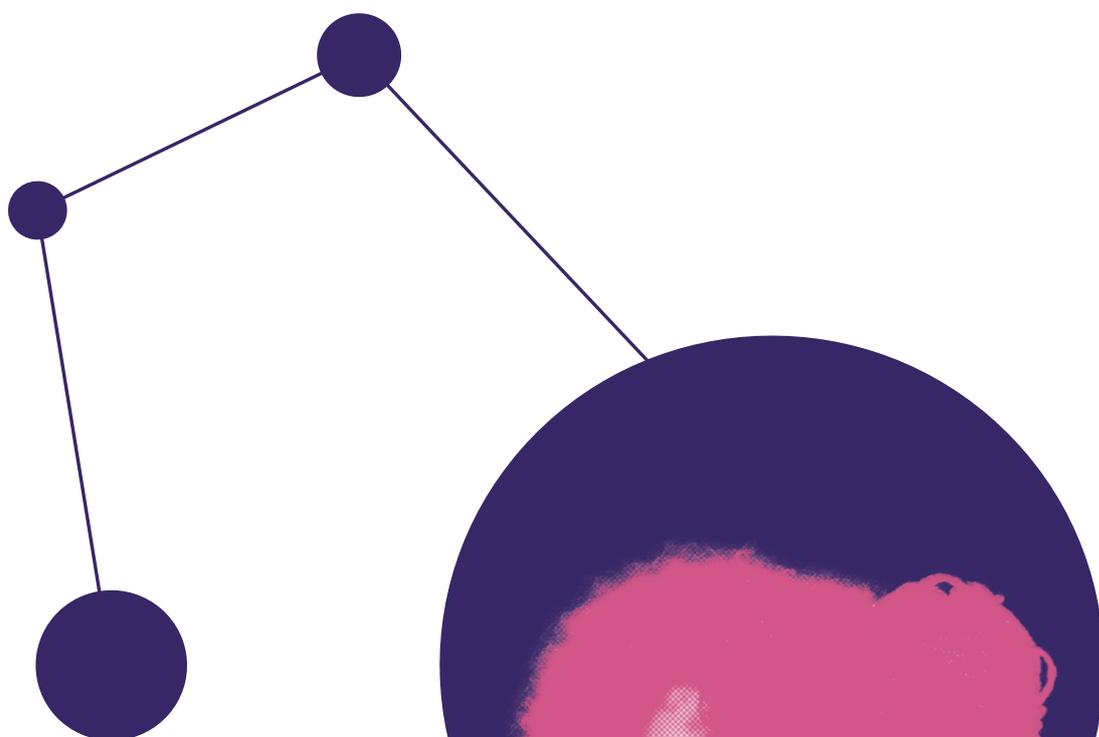


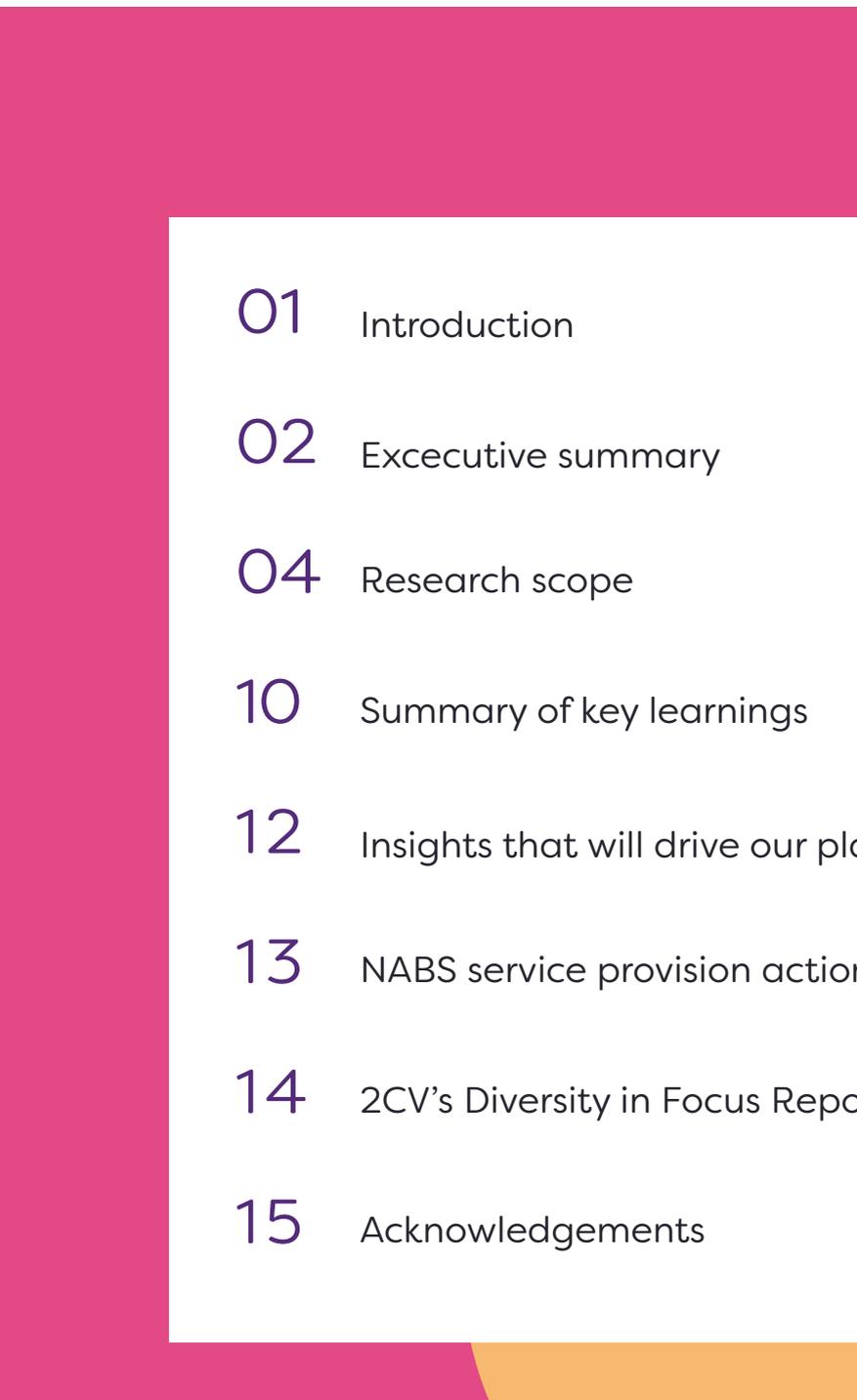
# Diversity in Focus

A research and action  
plan for inclusion by

**N · A · B · S**

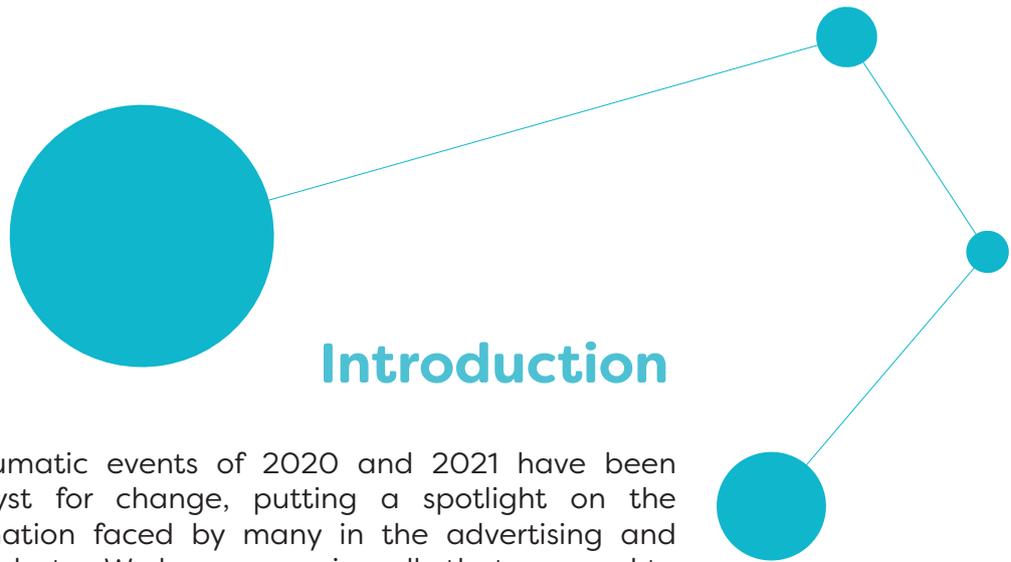


April 2022



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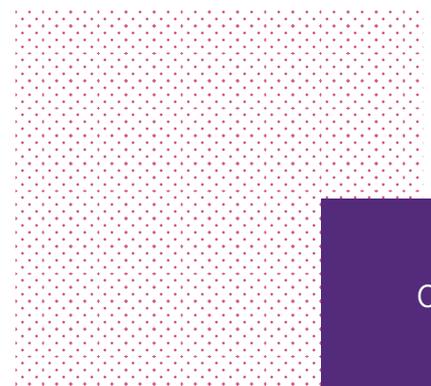


## Introduction

- The traumatic events of 2020 and 2021 have been a catalyst for change, putting a spotlight on the discrimination faced by many in the advertising and media industry. We know unequivocally that we need to do more to create an inclusive industry. Marginalisation is a systemic problem created over the long-term and a meaningful solution to this issue will take time. We must capitalise on our commitment to change in order to create more impactful and positive outcomes for underrepresented individuals working in our industry.
- When the All In Census results were published in June 2021, NABS committed to doing more to support and understand the wellbeing needs of people from marginalised communities working in our industry. We wanted to understand the lived experience behind the shocking stats, particularly for LGBTQ+ individuals and for Black, Asian and those from other minoritised Ethnicities, as well as those looking to join the industry from Brixton Finishing School's ADCademy.
- Diversity, equity and inclusion (D,E&I) is central to every individual's wellbeing. NABS wants to understand people's individual needs in depth in order to support the industry with its services.
- NABS' ambition for this research is to bring true meaning and deep understanding to the terms diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging by speaking directly and at length with individuals whose lived experience and ideas for positive change can be placed at the heart of NABS' long-term support strategy.
- This summary research represents over 70 hours of essential conversations. Our research participants' voices have informed the learnings and insights in this deck and will enhance NABS' service improvements across both our charitable and paid-for training provisions. This research will also form part of our ongoing dialogue with the industry, in which we'll continue to share our recommendations and approaches for best practice and employee care.



I am **constantly misgendered**; it is something I pick and choose my battles with.



# Executive summary

## About Diversity in Focus

Diversity in Focus is a qualitative research report by 2CV, commissioned by NABS that takes a deep dive into the everyday lived experiences of a diverse range of marginalised individuals working in the advertising and media industry. As the wellbeing charity for the industry, NABS knows that D,E&I is central to emotional and mental health. These research findings will be shared with the industry to help deepen their understanding as well as used by NABS to create support services to help create a more inclusive industry culture.

**We acknowledge that many, but not all, underrepresented groups were involved in this research, and we hope to feature more voices in future work.**

## Methodology

NABS partnered with Brixton Finishing School & the ADcademy, Media For All (MEFA) and Outvertising to recruit a broad range of LGBTQ+, Black, Asian and other marginalised individuals for interview. Twenty-five individuals were selected, and research agency 2CV was commissioned to conduct interviews with them.

More than 70 hours of conversations took place. These comprised 'digital diaries', where 25 respondents shared their experiences via an online platform, and follow-up in-depth conversations, where 12 respondents were interviewed via video for 45 minutes each. These interviews explored lived experience, key themes emerging from digital diaries, support needs and hopes for the future.

2CV offered a £50 Amazon voucher to those who completed the research to thank them for their time, knowledge and sharing their lived experience. Participants were also signposted to NABS' resources to ensure that they could receive more wellbeing support if required.



# Executive summary

## Key findings

Organisations must foster a culture of trust in order to understand what each individual needs to do their best; to thrive. Managers need to tailor their style to each employee, using empathy to build the trust that's essential to a supportive working relationship.

Belonging and inclusion depend on reciprocal actions. Employees who put themselves out there to contribute professionally expect something back in return from their employer and the industry. It's our collective responsibility to ensure that we return their courage and professionalism with active policies and support. Marginalised individuals want and need central sources of industry support and unity.

Those starting their careers are particularly vulnerable to poor wellbeing. Without industry knowledge and experience, as well as role models and networks, they are more susceptible to 'masking', covering who they are, which gradually erodes confidence and mental health blocking a sense of belonging.

## Conclusions

We need clearer progression plans and opportunities to remove discrimination and counter biases.

While work has been done to create a more inviting industry, we need to build on this with continued effort.

## Action plan

NABS will launch a two-pronged solution to help improve inclusion in the industry and marginalised individuals' wellbeing, namely:

- A range of supportive services aimed at those from underrepresented groups.
- A management training programme focusing on empathetic leadership and the use of coaching techniques to create more inclusive teams.
- Further news on these will be released in the summer.
- NABS will continue to consult our partner organisations to ensure that it can authentically provide the best support possible to those from marginalised groups.



I find it **uncomfortable looking at my face** on a screen. It makes me realise I'm the only Asian person.



# Research scope



## Our research covered the following topic areas:

Me, my career, my future: learning about what's important to our participants, what's shaped their career journey to date, their route into the industry and their hopes and dreams for the future.

Impact of the pandemic and global events in 2020 and 2021: the changes in our participants' daily routines and what's changed emotionally and practically in their free time and professional life, their biggest challenges, opportunities and fears for the future, how our participants manage mental health and seek support, and support available from their organisation and industry.

Career in focus: career highlights and low periods, comparing industry journeys with others, unique challenges for these individuals, examining what the ideal company and ideal conversation with your boss would look like, examining trust, belonging, inclusion and wellbeing and what is needed to thrive, what would make these individuals stay on at a company and why our participants may leave.

Barriers, challenges, fears and perception of the industry when looking to enter it and what support is needed here.

What changes would they like to see championed personally and as an industry responsibility and priority.

What career advice would our participants give to others of similar identity to them and what may have helped or changed their experience, advice for their younger self, positive messages to encourage others to join the industry.

What support, training education and advocacy is needed to help them to thrive.

*Due to the sensitive nature of our questioning and possible triggers we decided to offer our participants the choice to complete these tasks in private on a one-to-one basis instead of a traditional focus group with multiple participants. Deeper themes were then followed up in one-to-one video interviews.*

## Topics explored in digital diary tasks and follow-up one-to-one interviews

Digital diaries: 25 participants completed an online daily diary, taking between 20 - 30 minutes across a two-week period.

Follow-up interviews: 12 participants were interviewed at length via video call to gain a deeper insight into the key themes arising from the digital diary entries.

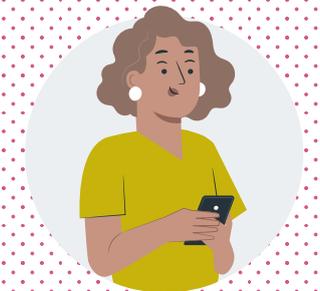
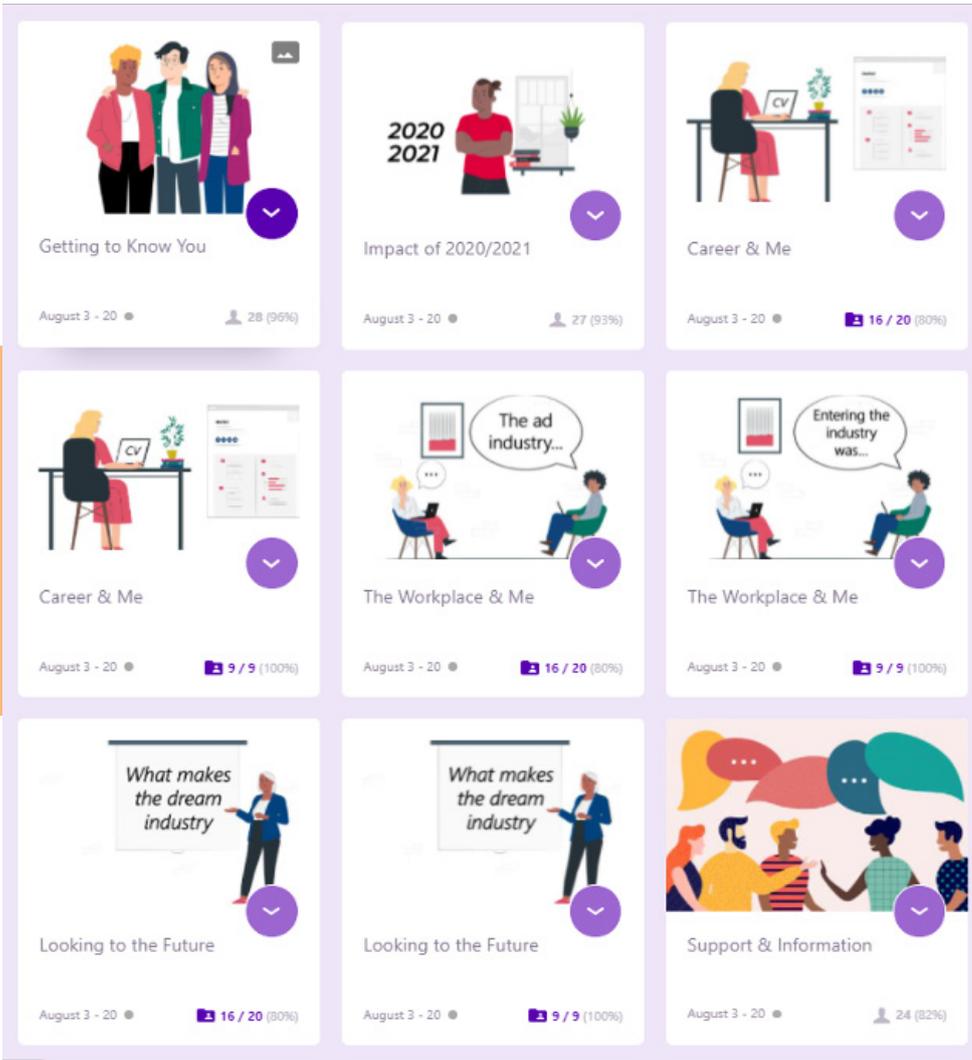


# Methodology | Digital diaries using 2CV Hub

Facilitated through our online platform, 2CV Hub, powered by **Recollective** – equipped with tools for text response, image and video upload, co-creative forums, stim mark-up, closed questions and creative tasks



Me, My Career, My Future ▾



“

I'd say that I have not maximised my career. As an immigrant whose parents had no prior experience in Western culture, **I never had the guidance or template to work from in navigating my career.**

I've chopped and changed jobs, focus and direction too frequently

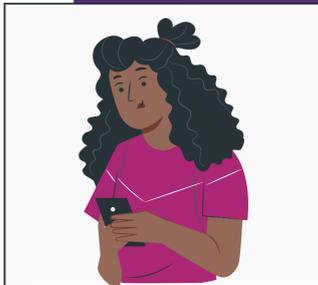
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## Methodology | follow-up depth interviews

12 x 45-min video in-depth interviews with respondents from the digital phase to:

- Deep-dive into experiences and explore work-related issues
- Explore key themes emerging from the digital diaries
- Identify key support needs and hopes for the future to help individuals thrive and feel a sense of belonging in the workplace

*Interviews were conducted via Zoom during September 2021*



## Full sample spread

25 participants fully completed (30 recruited + 29 semi-completed research)

### Gender

- 16 x women
- 11 x men
- 1 x non-binary
- 1 x trans man

### Age

Range of ages from 18+:

- 5 x 18-24
- 19 x 25-34
- 4 x 35-44
- 1 x 45-54

### Religion or belief

- 6 x Christianity
- 5 x Islam
- 1 x Sikhism
- 1 x Buddhism
- 1 x Hinduism
- 2 x from any religious heritage but non-practising
- 10 x no religion
- 2 x prefer not to answer
- 1 x agnostic

### Ethnicity

We aimed for a broad range of ethnic origin to ensure a broad mix of experiences and cultural identities - ensuring at least some people who identify as mixed race within the sample including:

- 6 x English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
- 9 x Asian British
- 1 x Multiple ethnic group - White and Asian
- 3 x Any other mixed / multiple ethnic background
- 5 x Black / African / Caribbean / Black British
- 3 x Other ethnic group
- 2 x Prefer to self-describe (Latina + Arabic)

### Job role and sector

Broad mix of roles from across the industry including

#### Role:

- Mix of: planning / strategy / marketing / insight / PR / account management / digital / social / creative / media buying / sales / HR / talent / ad operations and freelance / consultant

#### Sector:

- Mix of: media agency, advertising agency, media owner / social network, branding & design agency, marketing communications, sole trader, client and CX agency

### Sexual orientation and gender identity

We aimed for as broad a spread as possible - including those identifying as lesbian, gay, bi and trans; remainder to fall out naturally:

- 13 x heterosexual / straight
- 16 LGBTQ+:
- 4 x bisexual
- 5 x gay man
- 3 x gay woman / lesbian
- 1 x pansexual
- 3 x prefer to self-describe (queer + asexual)

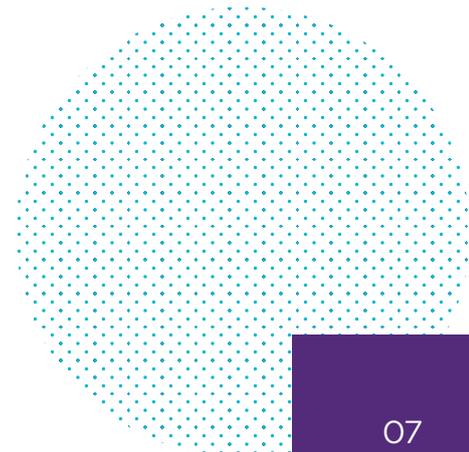
### Years in industry / seniority

- 12 x under 2 years
- 5 x 2-5 years
- 5 x 6-10 years
- 6 x 10-20 years
- 1 x 20 years or more



If you've got money and contacts or your name sounds white things tend to be easier.

One barrier I face right now is being one of a few brown faces at work. I feel lonely all the time.



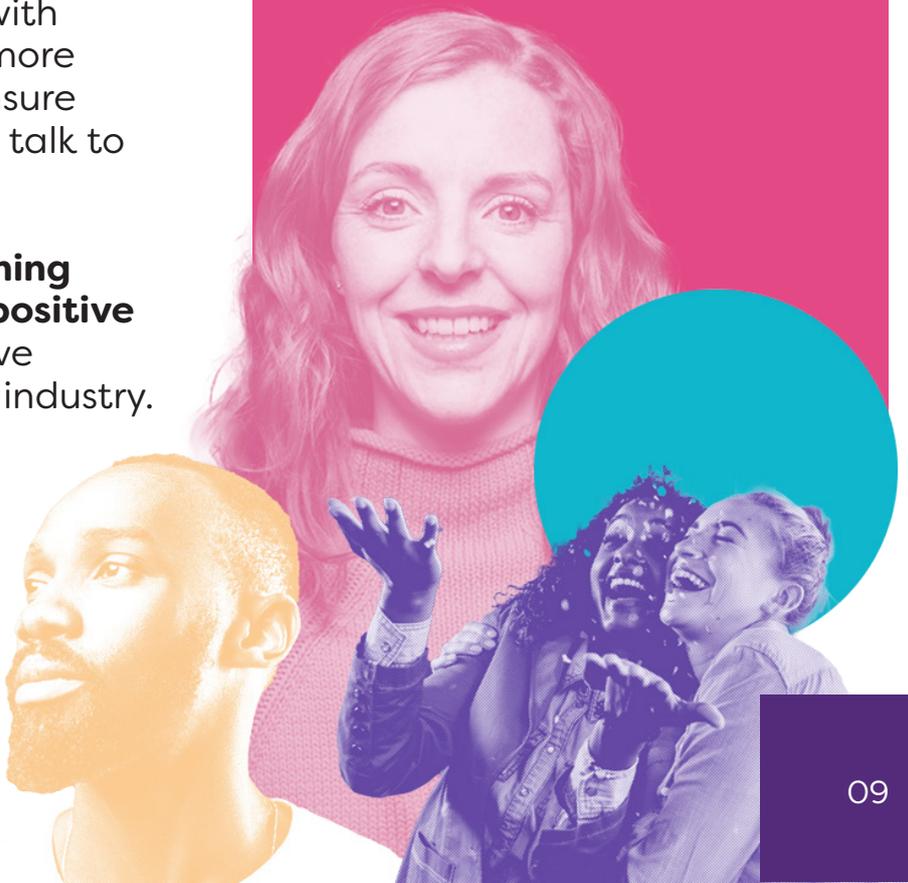
## Key considerations

- NABS wanted to understand more about how marginalised individuals feel about entering the industry and working in it.
- This research represents the views of a group of 25 individuals and does not represent the views of all marginalised communities, just the individuals.
- NABS aims to use this research to inform its service provision as well as to share with the rest of the industry the challenges faced by marginalised communities in our industry.
- The learnings summarised next have been selected by NABS (from the full report produced by 2CV) as areas where we can have the most impact while balancing resources, provision and our remit as a charity for people working in advertising and media. The report however also points to many other recommendations and learnings for organisations and the wider industry network at large.

## Mutual exchange

*It was important for NABS to ensure this experience was positive and mutually beneficial.*

- **Participant payment incentive:** 2CV offered a £50 Amazon voucher to each of the participants who completed the research to thank them for giving up their time and sharing their knowledge and lived experience.
- **Supported research process:** Throughout the research, the team at 2CV offered guidance to participants to ensure their experience was as supported as possible.
- **NABS' support and additional signposting:** NABS' resources and support links were shared with all participants alongside more specialist signposting to ensure participants had people to talk to if necessary.
- **NABS' commitment to turning participants' insight into positive action** and provision to drive wellbeing for all across the industry.



# Key research findings

*Led by 2CV's qualitative research expertise to uncover key learnings to drive NABS' direction and industry change for good*

## Key learnings to support marginalised individuals

### 01 Sharing stories is a critical tool for driving positive change

- Whilst stats and measures are essential, they don't build enough education and understanding.
- There is strong desire to change the narrative and re-frame the conversation by amplifying the voices of those who have been historically misunderstood, silenced and undermined.
- Genuine change for good needs celebrating to encourage others to adopt best practice methods to support marginalised individuals further. More noise is needed.

### 02 Belonging is much more than a feeling, it's an industry responsibility

- Belonging is about who I am and what I can bring to the table, both personally and professionally.
- Belonging and inclusion, in its fullest, most rewarding sense, depends on reciprocal actions. When an employee puts themselves out there to be accepted and contribute professionally, they expect something back from the company and industry.
- Understanding and embracing who the individual is and putting the right structures and behaviors in place to support them is key.
- Good industry access, policy, support and structures all support belonging and inclusion. Barriers of any type ultimately end of 'othering' individuals, which is the opposite of inclusion.

### 03 Various experiences in the workplace means maintaining good levels of wellbeing and mental health is significantly harder for marginalised individuals

- The individuals we spoke to are acutely aware of being treated differently and often find themselves 'othered.'
- Performative DE&I initiatives are seen to do more damage than having no DE&I policies at all.
- The prevalence of bias remains one of the biggest challenges for the industry to address.
- For some, working from home has created a further divide between themselves, their company and colleagues, increasing feelings of isolation further.



## 04 Signposting to mental health support is essential

- Changing aspects of who you are to 'fit in' which depletes self-worth. 'Masking' at work to 'fit in'. This can be a significant factor in eroding mental health, leaving marginalised individuals at greater risk of poor wellbeing.
- Feeling ashamed of your identity, internalising racism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination.
- Not feeling enough as their authentic self.
- Being overly aware of the male gaze.

## 05 The industry is not inviting, and promotion is unclear

- Access issues mean that the industry is seen as homogenous. It still feels like it's about who you know, not what you know.
- Jargon is off-putting and uninviting.
- Being the 'diversity hire' is felt strongly.
- Clearer progression plans and opportunities are needed to remove chances of discrimination.
- Policy and practice need to sync. Modelling the way and relatable line managers are key.
- Representation is imperative/crucial to helping employees feel like they belong.

## 06 Central sources of industry support and unity are essential

- Mentoring and independent central networks are seen as essential for marginalised individuals to thrive.
- Central sources of best practice, advice and support will help to raise standards.
- Independent, impartial support alongside the support from the company; should work hand-in-hand.
- Individuals are looking for honest and relevant support about the practical problems they are facing.
- Participants placed emphasis on the need for one-to-one individual mental health support

# Insights driving NABS' action in 2022

## **A better start can make a big difference to longer term outcomes for marginalised individuals**

- Careers are punctuated by three moments where belonging is cemented or diminished: pre-career, junior and senior.
- New starters and junior to mid-level employees (working towards their first promotions) are particularly vulnerable and need far greater levels of support than is currently in place.
- Being new and starting out in a land is particularly daunting for marginalised individuals.
- The first promotion opportunity is a milestone and confidence and can make or break motivation.

## **Management need to focus on building greater levels of trust and empathy to enhance belonging**

- When marginalised individuals experience lower levels of mental health, they are at higher risk of illness and more likely to leave the industry.
- Authentic inclusion requires a deeper understanding of individuals' needs and views. Individuals will only share this information with their managers if they fully trust the outcome / person / company / industry.

# NABS service provision action plan

*NABS action for marginalised individuals in adland  
For consultation with NABS teams for agreement*

## **Managing the industry for marginalised individuals**

### *Progression programme for marginalised individuals*

- Development and therapy grants.
- Tailored masterclass.
- One-to-one success coaching packages – goal-setting, identifying network supports and signposting.
- NABS will continue to consult our partner organisations throughout the development of our services to ensure that we are authentically able to provide the best support possible to those from marginalised groups.
- We acknowledge that this research is not encompassing of all marginalised communities, but we endeavour to take an intersectional approach to our service development and plan to expand the scope of our research in future.

## **Managing more inclusively**

### *Inclusive leadership programme: paid-for training product*

- Designed to help managers identify individuals' strengths.
- Build increased levels of self-awareness, empathy and trust for deeper understanding
- Develop more inclusive management techniques based on deeper connections with individuals.
- Diversity partner references toolkits.

# Diversity In Focus Report by 2CV

Read the full research  
report [here](#)



**N A B S**

## Acknowledgements

**Thank you** to our brilliant research participants for giving up their time and sharing their lived experience to help support NABS' continuous improvement and the wider industry's understanding.

**Thank you** to our trusted industry partners: Brixton Finishing School & the ADcademy, MEFA and Outvertising. These partner organisations provided excellent support to NABS throughout this research process, from advising around the scripting of questions and areas of focus to the research participant recruitment.

**Thank you** to our research partners 2CV for the expertise across the research development, analysis and conclusions alongside their commitment to offering participants support throughout the exercises and incentivisation.

