

equity, diversity and inclusion charter for change 2023

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Charter for Change 2023

Introduction

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Jim Coleman, UK Chief Executive Officer

The advertising industry has a responsibility for greater representation, both internally and in the work we do.

Our clients have a significant influence on culture. To operate responsibly, we need to build teams that can partner with our clients to create work that authentically reflects all aspects of society – not just those in the majority consciousness.

This is why, in 2018, we created our first Charter for Change. It was a three-year plan with ambitious goals and objectives, and we have made a lot of progress. But the industry, much like society, has moved on significantly in the last three years.

We now renew our Charter with a fresh set of ambitions, across our People, Culture and Work, building on what's worked or refocusing on things that are still important to us. We do this to ensure we maintain momentum, alongside offering greater transparency and accountability. It also incorporates the actions we're taking to ensure we build a culture at We Are Social that is actively anti-racist.

Front and centre of our Charter in 2023 is the importance of equity and creating a workplace where all of our people have equal access to opportunities and everyone is respected and treated with dignity.

Delivering everything in this Charter is the responsibility of the UK Leadership team, chaired by me. Actions mean more than words, here you will also see an update on where we are now. We will share an annual report on our progress, both internally and publicly.



Jim Coleman

Charter for Change 2023

Our 2023 Charter ambitions:

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1. We commit to diversity, inclusion and equal representation in all departments and at all levels of seniority.
2. Continue to work towards all our people having an equal opportunity to progress, regardless of ethnicity or gender.
3. There are numerous barriers to entry to the creative industries. We will seek to address these through initiatives and support.
4. We will create a culture that promotes a healthy work-life balance and supports mental health.
5. We will create a culture of open dialogue, understanding and respect for different cultural and social values.
6. We will ensure our clients and the suppliers we work with are aware of, and share, our values.
7. We commit to creating work that is progressive, and which represents different cultural and social values in an authentic way.
8. We will ensure that on and off screen talent is diverse and representative within our productions.

Our People

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1. We commit to diversity, inclusion and equal representation in all departments and levels of seniority.

Where are we now?

In November 2022, we reviewed our progress in terms of inclusivity and representation across the agency, via our annual all-staff survey. 79% of our agency participated in the survey.

Across the business, 54% of our team are cisgender women; at a leadership level 46% identify as cisgender women. LGBTQ+ representation in the agency is 21%. This remains consistent with 2021.

Currently, 20% of our team come from multi-ethnic backgrounds, compared to 19% in 2021. We have set ourselves a target to achieve 25% multi-ethnic representation. We didn't achieve this goal in 2022. We are, however, making progress when it comes to inclusive hiring policies and data-gathering approaches. These have included auditing our recruitment process and assessing how we gather our ED&I data to increase the amount of insights we can gather.

We can see that the early adjustments made to our recruitment process have already started to pay off, as 32% of our new joiners in the past year were from multi-ethnic backgrounds; this is an increase from 25% in 2021.

We found that 4% of people in our team have a non-visible disability and no-one identifies as having a physical disability. This remains consistent with 2021. We recognise we have more work to do here, especially around education and our recruitment processes in this area.

We found that 16% of people identified as neurodiverse which has increased from 11% in 2021.

70% of our people say our agency builds teams that are diverse, which is moving in the right direction.

In 2023, we will:

Continue to work towards our target of increasing multi-ethnic representation in the agency from 20% to 25%. As part of this, we will:

- Ensure every hiring manager is trained by our internal recruitment team on our inclusive hiring principles by creating and running inclusive recruitment workshops.
- We will improve our appeal and accessibility by ensuring all job descriptions and adverts have inclusion and accessibility statements. We will also create a recruitment playbook to ensure consistency across the business.
- We will continue to challenge our hiring managers on their biases by mandating attendance to inclusive hiring workshops. We will implement candidate feedback scorecards within our applicant tracking system to ensure that feedback happens promptly for candidates. We will share candidate diversity demographic data with our Heads of Department.
- We will review the makeup of our teams twice per year to ensure we have representation across all areas of our business, at different seniority levels, that accurately reflect the culture and society we live in.

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2. Continue to work towards all our people having an equal opportunity to progress, regardless of ethnicity or gender

Where are we now?

Equity in the opportunities that we are offered, how our performance is evaluated, how we are paid and how we develop are critical elements to a positive sense of belonging at work.

66% of our people said they believed people from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to succeed in our agency; a 9% increase from 2021.

“ 66% of our people said they believed people from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to succeed in our agency.”

In 2023, we will:

- Commit to conducting our gender and ethnicity pay gap analysis and share this with our people.
- Conduct thorough salary benchmarking twice per year.
- Ensuring that everyone understands how to have a constructive review, regular performance conversations and clear goals and feedback.

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3. There are numerous barriers to entry to the creative industries. We will seek to address these through initiatives and support.

Where are we now?

We know that many groups in society are either unaware of the opportunities available in the creative industries, or struggle to access the support they need to progress in a creative career.

In 2022, we completed our first year as a partner with the School of Communication Arts (SCA) – the most awarded creative school in the world. A social enterprise, the SCA is committed to increasing the diversity of talent across gender, age, care system, disability, ethnicity and geography. We have provided funding for four students to attend the school for the year. We worked closely with the SCA to help students prepare for a role in the creative industry by providing creative briefs for them to develop their skills, which included presenting work to our clients and having access to mentors for support. This resulted in our first paid placement team who worked with us for two months.

We continued our commitment to BIMA's annual Digital Day which aims to give 11-16 year olds an insight into a world of digital careers. This year, we had six volunteers from the agency who took one day out of work to support 40 students in creating a mock brief which was submitted into a national pool for a chance to win prizes. Through this initiative, we inspired and provided young people with an opportunity to meet with real digital professionals and learn about digital careers.

Once again, we supported the Creative Equals Comeback programme, an initiative that supports female creatives who have been out of the industry for 12 months and are making their return. Through mentoring, and whilst working on live briefs, we helped them develop their skills and confidence to support their return to the industry.

It remains our policy not to offer work experience placements to the personal contacts of staff, clients or others. We believe this helps level the playing field for new talent who are unable to gain experience through personal connections.

In 2023, we will:

- Seek to address the identified barriers to entry to creative industries through initiatives and support.
- Continue our partnership with the School of Communication Arts to bring new talent from diverse backgrounds into the agency and provide paid placements opportunities for their students.
- Continue our partnership with BIMA, including our involvement in its schools and with Digital Day.
- Work with the right partner to introduce apprentices into the agency.
- Introduce a WAS Summer School for 16-18 year olds by offering a week's work experience over the summer to give them an introduction into the industry and inspire them to pursue a future in the creative industry.
- Create partnerships in education, industry and recruitment so that we expand our expertise in 2023. Whilst we are London-based, we believe great talent exists throughout the UK and internationally, so we will be looking for people in all areas.

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4. We will create a culture that promotes a healthy work-life balance and supports mental health.

Where are we now?

In 2022 we delivered a range of projects to support our people’s physical and mental wellbeing. These included:

- Speaking events
- Mental Health Awareness Week
- Summer Hours
- Financial wellbeing sessions
- An enhanced private medical benefit
- An enhanced family-friendly policy

We launched our global WAS Passport programme, enabling our people to work in one of our 17 global offices for up to two weeks a year. So far, 14 London employees have visited 6 markets around the globe, including Paris, New York and Sydney.

We enhanced our Work from Anywhere programme, enabling our people to work anywhere they like for two weeks per year. This year, we have had 58 requests.

We currently have nine fully trained mental health first aiders who offer peer-to-peer support. We have improved our Employee Assistance Programme, providing 24-hour support and free counselling sessions.

Our survey showed an increase in those who felt there is enough awareness and support around mental health in the agency – 59%, up from 56% in 2021. We will be looking to increase our efforts here again in 2023.

We know that a healthy work-life balance has a significant impact on people’s mental wellbeing. We introduced one all-agency day a week, when the whole agency is together. We will be looking to evolve this in 2023.

“We know that a healthy work-life balance has a significant impact on people’s mental wellbeing.”

In 2023, we will:

- Monitor and assess our flexible and blended working approach, in order to help our people balance life with work, create a culture they can thrive in and create an environment that produces the best work.
- Continue to work closely with various partners on training such as helping our management team spot the early signs of poor mental health in their teams and financial coaching for all.
- Create workplace communities that enable our people to get to know each other through sport, hobbies and common interests.
- Continue to focus on events such as mental health awareness week, to maintain the conversation around mental health.

Our Culture

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5. We will create a culture of open dialogue, understanding and respect for different cultural and social values.

Where are we now?

We want to create an agency environment in which everyone feels like they can be themselves; where everyone feels that they belong, and where we can openly talk about our cultural and social differences. In our 2022 Diversity & Inclusion survey, 70% of people said they feel they belong here. 69% feel comfortable talking about race and racism – this is consistent with 2021.

In 2022, we’ve heard from the iconic LGBTQIA+ activist Lisa Power, Black History Walks founder Tony Warner, artist Nicole Chui and anti-racism charity besea.n. We’ve held two internal panels, one with LGBTQIA+ team members and one with Black team members giving them the chance to speak about their experiences and to provide a space for honest and open discussion.

We’ve published several collaborative global blogs that have given a voice to LGBTQIA+ and Black team members. We’ve also showcased the work of Nicole Chui on our Instagram to mark ESEA Heritage Month, whilst also using Instagram Stories to speak about LGBTQIA+ individuals who inspire our team members.

We have a varied syllabus on training throughout the year, which includes:

- Unconscious bias
- Cultural Awareness
- Allyship
- Appropriate Language and Microaggressions
- Neurodiversity for managers
- TimeTo

We invited Ben Hurst from Beyond Equality to talk to us about masculinity at work and Tom Fadden from Purple Reach talk to us about disability in the workplace. We want to continue to open up the conversation further and enable more challenging or uncomfortable topics to be openly discussed in 2023.

In 2023, we will:

- Continue with our anti-racism education programme, with internal and external speakers from different cultural and social groups.
- Continue to use our blog and our social channels to give more diverse voices a platform in the creative industry.
- Pay for every employee to attend industry events and talks that are promoting diversity, supporting Black creators and raising awareness of diversity issues.
- Allow any We Are Social employee who wishes to join peaceful anti-racist marches and demonstrations the opportunity to do so without it affecting their annual leave.
- Ensure we continue to evolve our training syllabus and work with new partners that help us learn about challenging topics.
- Introduce an Employee Resource Group (ERG) that represents different groups in the agency to help inform, deliver and evolve the ambitions in the Charter.

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6. We will ensure our clients and the suppliers we work with are aware of, and share, our values.

Where are we now?

In 2021, we launched an Anti-Discrimination Code of Conduct which clearly defined the key behaviours that we expect from those we deal with across every part of our business. This has been shared with all our existing clients and suppliers, and has been included in all RFI responses and new business pitch presentation documents.

The Code of Conduct has been positively received by clients and suppliers. It has helped to ensure an environment where we work only with businesses that operate with integrity and decency.

The key principles of this code remain:

- We expect all personnel to be treated with dignity and respect.
- We will not tolerate discrimination on the grounds of age, race, racial group, colour, ethnic or national origins, gender, pregnancy, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief.
- All allegations of discrimination will be taken seriously and the appropriate action taken.

- We expect that our suppliers and third parties can demonstrate diversity within their own workforces and within their supply chain, or will show a commitment and action plan towards this.
- No brief that encourages or incites discrimination, racism or racial segregation will be accepted.
- There will be no association with any organisation that promotes hate or funds supremacist activity.

In 2023, we will:

- Continue to actively promote our Code of Conduct when pitching for new business.
- Always share the Code of Conduct with all new clients and suppliers, and have inclusive conversations with both new and existing parties.
- Discuss the Code of Conduct at internal quarterly client business reviews.

Our Work

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7. We commit to creating work that is progressive, and which represents different cultural and social values in an authentic way.

Where are we now?

We know that having a team that represents the diversity of our audiences will help us create more progressive and inclusive work, and this continues to be a key aspect of recruitment. Our teams have also worked closely with our clients to ensure everyone involved understands this.

We have helped our clients respond to challenges of diversity and representation with their audiences and communities. In 2022, some of our most high profile projects carried diversity and inclusion at their heart, including Queens of the Metaverse – our work with Meta that brought up and coming, non-binary designers together with three stars of the UK drag community, to explore the boundless creative potential of VR and AR technologies.

We maintain ongoing conversation and education within our team to keep the importance of creating representative work front of mind. Although we heard from some excellent external speakers (including Jay-Ann Lopez of Black Girl Gamers and artist Nicole Chui during ESEA Heritage Month), we also received feedback that education could be focused on helping us make work for diverse audiences, rather than just having an improved personal understanding. We also didn't provide the spotlight on disability and marketing that we'd hoped to, and therefore endeavour to keep disability front of mind when creating work going forward.

We continue to gather insights from representatives of communities that feature in Our Work, and it's clear that we need to find ways for more projects to benefit from such research.

Through the partnership with the SCA, we were able to bring in, mentor and work with a placement team that greatly contributed to our creative output. The placement team worked on live briefs and had influential client contact over the course of their time at WAS.

In 2023, we will:

- Continue to partner with organisations and community groups to help gain deeper insights into the needs and motivations of diverse audiences, with an emphasis on creating representative work.
- Gather and share our internal expertise on understanding diverse audiences – and developing creative work that champions diversity and inclusion – to help educate teams on approaches and methodologies used.
- Through our partnership with the SCA, we will work with up and coming creative talent on selected client briefs.
- Invest in research that helps us, and our clients, better understand how to create progressive and inclusive work.

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8. We will ensure that on and off screen talent is diverse and representative within our productions.

Where are we now?

Equality and representation is not just about talent and casting – it’s also important behind the scenes. Along with our dedicated production division, We Are Social Studios, we seek to provide equal opportunities to underrepresented groups both in front of and behind the camera. Fair representation is also very important to us when we look at our team of producers, and who is best placed to produce a certain campaign. We support organisations and initiatives such as Free The Work, Where are the Black Designers and Bid Black, to continually expand our talent database. We often reach out to talent directly, especially the ones with no agent or rep.

In 2022, 30% of the directors that worked on our projects were female, this is slightly down from 45% in 2021. When approaching directors we take into considerations the audience and campaign, for one campaign that was focused on female empowerment, we created a production with its first all female crew.

We continue to ensure multi-ethnic representation both in front of and behind the camera, and have cast talent with visible disabilities.

“We continue to ensure multi-ethnic representation both in front of and behind the camera.”

In 2023, we will:

- Ensure that at least 1 in 3 directors on our projects are from an underrepresented group.
- Ensure fair representation of talent both on and off screen from different ethnicities, sexual orientations, cultural backgrounds, and people with disabilities.
- Continue partnerships with talent representatives/creative communities to ensure we are up to date with the latest industry initiatives and tools to ensure an inclusive and fair production, and to give opportunity to emerging talent.
- Enable and encourage our producers to mentor aspiring, underrepresented talent.