Representation of people of colour among children's book creators in the UK (2020–2021)

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About the author

Dr Melanie Ramdarshan Bold is a Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor in Children's and YA Literature Studies at the University of Glasgow. Her research centres on contemporary authorship, publishing and readers, with a focus on inclusive youth literature. She is also an Honorary Associate Professor of Publishing at University College London. Melanie's book *Inclusive Young Adult Fiction: Authors of Colour in the UK* was published by Palgrave in 2019. Cambridge University Press will publish her second book, *YA Anthologies and Activism*, in 2023.

Melanie is the author of two previous BookTrust Represent reports.

Our first report, which provides a benchmark and a timeline between 2007 and 2017, is available here: Representation of people of colour among children's book authors and illustrators (2019).

Our second report, which outlined how representation changed between 2018 and 2019, is available here: Representation of people of colour among children's book authors and illustrators (2020).

Acknowledgements

Foreword

At BookTrust, our mission is to get every child reading regularly and by choice so they can enjoy the lifechanging benefits that reading can have on their wellbeing, learning, creativity and opportunities. We focus our support on reaching children from low-income and vulnerable family backgrounds because reading offers so much towards giving them the best possible start in life.

Research shows that representative and inclusive books not only shape how children view themselves and the world around them, but also affect their motivation to read. There is a clear and urgent need to ensure all children have access to a wide range of high-quality and representative books to choose from so they become lifelong readers.

Throughout the tumultuous period since 2019 when we first published our research into representation among children's book creators, we've seen steady progress. There are more opportunities for creators of colour to publish children's books in the UK, meaning more children can read their brilliant stories and books. There is a community of creators who are sharing experiences and opportunities, and allies across the children's books industry striving to make our sector more inclusive and representative of the modern UK.

However, these improvements are recent. While there is an increased proportion of representative works among newly published books, the UK's body of children's literature overall remains far from representative. Creators of colour still experience barriers. For all children to be able to see themselves and their society in the books they read, the work on representation must continue. If we are to achieve long-term systemic change in the range of books children have access to now and in the future, there is a collective responsibility for ongoing action and long-term investment.

Three years ago, I wrote that 'there is still a way to go before we have a truly representative canon of children's literature'. That is still the case today. For BookTrust, improving representation in the books children have access to remains at the forefront of our work. We will continue to work in partnership with children, families, creators, publishing partners, schools, libraries and more until we get there. We're committed to this, for however long it takes.

Diana Gerald
Chief Executive
BookTrust

"...we just want to be seen as creatives rather than tokens [...] I'm scared of hearing 'The only reason why you've been published is because you're Black.'"

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1. Executive summary

Books that reflect the world we live in help to build children's self-esteem and an understanding and empathy towards others[1]. Inclusive books showcase a diverse range of cultures, histories and voices. They introduce young readers to different perspectives and experiences.

The absence of an inclusive range of characters or creative role models has the potential to deter children from minority backgrounds from reading and experiencing its wide-ranging benefits[2]. In turn, this lack of engagement with reading could deter children of colour from pursuing careers in writing and illustration and further embed the imbalance. We need creators of colour who can create authentic stories and images to engage all children in reading and to serve as role models for aspiring young creators.

This research provides longitudinal statistical evidence on how the people creating children's books in the UK has changed since 2019. This is enriched by interviews with creators of colour who reveal the barriers and enablers they are experiencing in children's publishing today.

While we are seeing a year-on-year increase in books by creators of colour, we are still far from an equitable culture of reading, creating and publishing children's books. In 2020, we set a target for 13% of children's books to be created by authors and illustrators of colour by 2022. Our analysis of a dataset of children's books published in the UK in 2021 reveals that, if recent increases are sustained, the sector could well be on track to reach that target.

Interviews with creators provide some insights into what this means for the books they are producing, and ultimately how this might impact on what children read. Creators we spoke to raise ongoing challenges with being expected to write narratives that reflect their own identities and communities or centre around 'race'. But there are also positive experiences more recently of creators having freedom to write across a variety of genres, which then leads to more variety in the books available to young readers.

In 2021…

11.7%
of children's book creators (322 people) were people of colour and they created

9.1%
of unique titles

4.5%
of children's book creators (125 people) were British people of colour and they created

3.6%
of unique titles

Number of British debut creators of colour:
74

1   Bishop (1990, 1992, 2007, 2012); Wilkins (2014); Thomas (2016)

2   Ramdarshan Bold (2019a))

In 2019, our report 'Representation of people of colour among children's book authors and illustrators' found that the causes for under-representation are complex and embedded in broader social inequalities. While many of these barriers persist – along with new challenges – there are also enablers that are contributing to positive changes.

In this new research, children's book creators of colour spoke to us about several of these enablers:

- **Strong relationships with publishers and long-term investment in careers.**

  Interviewees told us of publishers who are investing in the careers of the creators of colour and mapping out a long-term path for them in publishing. This helps to alleviate some of the fears creators of colour we spoke to have about tokenism and help break the 'glass ceiling'.

- **Genuine allies and advocates in publishing companies.**

  Creators we spoke to said there are individuals within publishing organisations who push for change and action alongside creators of colour. These individuals lighten the burden carried by many of the creators of colour we spoke to.

- **Increased awareness of the issues around representation.**

  Creators told us that ongoing research and conversations increase their awareness of issues and give them the confidence to articulate their experiences.

- **Creators of colour reclaiming the space.**

  Creators of colour are working together, as well as individually, to safeguard their careers and make the most of the opportunities available to them. Informal networks enable creators to connect with each other and bring more transparency to the creating and publishing process.

- **School visits.**

  Interviewees highlight that school visits create opportunities for many creators of colour to interact with pupils. They introduce young people to creative role models. They are also an important source of encouragement for creators of colour.

At the same time, creators of colour also reveal to us several issues which will need addressing to make children's publishing more inclusive. These include:

- **Superficial or opportunistic engagement with diversity and inclusion.**
  Creators we spoke to raise concerns that some publishers are engaging superficially with issues of exclusion and under-representation. They worry that the push to publishing creators of colour has become either a trend or a tick-box exercise and that engagement with representation will not be sustained.

- **Rush publishing and lack of investment in creators of colour.**
  Interviewees highlight systemic issues related to race and inequality within the publishing industry. This includes more recent issues around rushing 'diverse' books to publish without due consideration to quality and longevity, alongside more entrenched issues where investment may be required to put creators of colour on an equal footing.

- **Financial security and equity.**
  Creators also highlight a need for greater financial security and transparency in order to support a diverse range of creators in children's publishing.

- **Experiences of racism and fear of speaking out.**
  Beyond structural inequalities, creators we spoke to share experiences of micro-aggressions. They note feeling unable or reluctant to speak about instances of racism and discrimination openly in the publishing industry.

- **Psychological impact of minoritisation.**
  In their interviews, creators reveal how navigating discrimination, micro-aggressions and other structural issues can take a toll on their mental wellbeing, which detracts from their most important job: creating.

Recommendations: what could be done to make the children's book industry more inclusive?

This research points to a series of opportunities for sustained, transformative representation within UK children's literature, which include:

Maintaining industry wide exploration, reflection and focus for meaningful and sustained change.

As a sector we can work to ensure changes are long term and meaningful through deep engagement with issues central to exclusion and healthy discourse around what good children's literature looks like.

Recognising, taking action on and keeping under review organisational processes that discriminate against creators of colour.

This requires transparency and review of any processes and practices that may discriminate against creators of colour (from organisational culture to business models, and from pay to support structures).

Recognising, connecting and empowering allies and advocates who champion the work of creators of colour.

This study found that positive experiences and outcomes are often associated with allies and advocates championing the creative efforts of creators of colour. Protected spaces where genuine allies and advocates from across publishers can connect could empower and support positive changes.

Supporting children's creators of colour and other disadvantaged creators to connect and raise their voices within the sector.

There are benefits to creators in shaping and maintaining their own protected spaces where they can exchange ideas, share experiences and find mutual support. Several interviewees call for safe spaces for different groups facing challenges to inclusion in children's literature to connect, educate and raise their voices.

2. Introduction

For decades activists and advocates have been vocal about the under-representation of creators of colour in UK children's books and publishing. In 2019 BookTrust published its first report on the representation of creators of colour in children's books. Social, political and literary landscapes and language have changed since then. This new report provides longitudinal statistical evidence on how the people creating children's books in the UK has changed during this period. This is enriched by interviews with creators of colour who reveal the challenges and opportunities they are experiencing in children's publishing today.

2.1. The importance of ensuring children can access inclusive literature

Beginning with the work of early pioneers in the US, research has demonstrated that books that reflect the world we live in help to build children's self-esteem and an understanding and empathy towards others[3]. Inclusive books showcase a diverse range of cultures, histories and voices. They introduce young readers to different perspectives and experiences. This concept is commonly referred to as 'Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors', as described by Dr Rudine Sims Bishop[4]:

"Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of a larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books."[5]

'Mirror' books are those that reflect certain aspects of a person's identity – their ethnicity, religion, cultural heritage, socio-economic status, gender identity, sexuality, family structure. They can show young readers that their lives and stories matter. When children do not see themselves in the literature they read, or if there are inaccuracies or stereotypes related to their social identities, they might believe that their experiences are not worthy, as Bishop warned:

"When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part."[6]

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3   Bishop (1990, 1992, 2007, 2012); Wilkins (2014); Thomas (2016)
4   Dr Rudine Sims Bishop is a Professor Emerita of Education and a pioneering scholar of children's literature, with a focus on multicultural, particularly African American, children's books.
5   Bishop (1990), p.ix
6   Bishop (1990), p.ix

This can lead to these children being disinterested in reading, especially reading for pleasure[7]. The absence of an inclusive range of characters or creative role models has the potential to deter children from minority backgrounds from reading and experiencing its wide-ranging benefits. In turn, this lack of engagement with reading could deter children from pursuing careers in writing and illustrating and further embed the imbalance.

Books can also act as a 'window' through which readers can see worlds, cultures, communities and lives that differ from their own. They provide readers with opportunities to engage with new perspectives and experiences and to develop their understanding and empathy. This is just as important for readers (often from dominant groups) who frequently see themselves in books. Bishop articulated:

"If they only see reflections of themselves, they will grow up with an exaggerated view of their importance and value in the world – a dangerous ethnocentrism."[8]

When we consider children's books and the people who create them through the lens of 'mirrors' and 'windows', we can see their potential for driving social change. There is a clear social and cultural imperative to publish and support books and creators that represent all facets of society.

Representation, inclusion and diversity are at the heart of BookTrust's work to get children reading. We seek to ensure children have access to diverse and inclusive books. We know that representation is one of a series of important mechanisms that can motivate children and families to read. Representation informs how we select and review books, which are a key element of the support we provide to practitioners and families from the earliest moments in children's reading journeys. The BookTrust Represents programme, for example, supports creators of colour to promote their work and reach more readers. It also supports schools to introduce children to diverse role models and provides high-quality books and resources to enable teachers to create a rich learning experience[9].

BookTrust and the author of this report are committed to working in partnership to support representation in children's book publishing so children can access a representative body of children's literature.

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7   Landt (2013); Ramdarshan Bold (2019b)
8   Bishop (1990), p.ix
9   BookTrust (2022)

2.2. Previous research into inclusion and exclusion in publishing

People of colour face structural inequalities that can negatively impact their opportunities across multiple aspects of life. The intersections of a person's social identities, including age, social class[10], sexuality and gender identity, help us understand how inequalities related to race are moderated or magnified[11]. Social class, for example, can be one of the biggest barriers and enablers within creative and cultural occupations . Inequality also applies to social and cultural capital (i.e., access to books, culture and networks, etc.)[13]. Those whose backgrounds do not provide them with such capital can find themselves excluded from the creative and cultural industries[14].

Numerous research projects and reports in the past years have highlighted inequalities and exclusion of people of colour from books and authorship[15]. BookTrust has tracked the representation of creators of colour in the UK since 2017, looking at data going back to 2007. At the same time, the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) has studied the representation of minority ethnic characters in UK children's books.

Between 2007 and 2017 we found fewer than 6% of children's book creators were people of colour and they wrote and illustrated 5% of the unique titles published in the UK. Our second report, published in 2020, started showing some progress. In 2019, 8.7% of children's book creators were people of colour and they created 7.2% of the unique titles published in the UK. CLPE's Reflecting Realities reports have also shown increases in the number of characters of colour in children's books. In 2017, just 1% of the main characters in children's books were from a minority ethnic group, rising steadily to 4% in 2018, 5% in 2019, 8% in 2020 and 9% in 2021[16].

To put these figures in context, in 2021, 13% of the UK population was from a minority ethnic background[17]. This percentage increases significantly if we look at a younger cohort: 34.5% of pupils of school age in England are from a minority ethnic background[18] (the highest percentage in all four UK nations).

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10 Previous studies have used categories such as parents' education or occupation to assess social class; however, Evans et al (2022) argue that "such approaches do not adequately capture the complexity and nuance of class, and they ignore the subjective and social components involved".

11 Crenshaw (1989, 1991)

12 Brook et al (2018, 2020); Shaw (2020)

13 Savage (2000); Savage et al (2013)

14 Brook et al (2018, 2020); Shaw (2020)

15 Ramdarshan Bold (2019a, 2019b, 2020, 2021); So (2020); So and Wezerek (2020); CLPE (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022); Kimura (2019); Saha and Van Lente (2020); Flood (2020)

16 CLPE (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021)

17 Office of National Statistics https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/ (accessed November 2022)

18 34.8% in primary schools and 34.1% in secondary schools (Gov.uk, 2022)

3. Methodology

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data is based on the development and analysis of a corpus of relevant book titles, which were identified and collected through the British Library's British National Bibliography (BNB) database.

Additional information, including demographics of creators and types of publisher, was identified through digital and printed paratextual (mostly epitextual) information (e.g., publishers' and creators' websites, interviews with creators, book covers, etc.) where available.

Creators were segmented by their (self-identified) gender identity, ethnicity (based on ONS terminology) and nationality[19]. The data was then coded and analysed. This approach provided statistical information about the percentage of children's books created by different demographic groups.

The database analysis focused on three main areas: all of the titles published (including the various editions of a unique title); unique titles published (removing all of the different editions of the same title); and individual authors (removing the different titles). Analysis was also conducted for types of publisher (e.g., conglomerate, independent, hybrid, self-publisher, NGO/CHARITY/MUSEUM and university press), and how this related to creator demographics.

The qualitative data is based on interviews with 20 UK-based creators of colour from various backgrounds, demographics and social identities. These took place between February and June 2022. Creators' different, often intersectional, experiences helped us provide insights on issues behind the statistics presented in the tracking element of this report.

Limitations:

There are some limitations to this research.

• It is important to note that creators' experiences are captured qualitatively, so cannot be generalised to the population as a whole. With this qualitative approach we do not attempt to quantify the themes presented within the sample of interviewees, and instead are reporting the full breadth of experiences reported by interviewees.

• The scope of this study is a focus on representation and experiences of creators of colour, not representation in children's literature more broadly.

• The interviews explore the topic from creators' perspectives, but we have not explored the perspectives of the wider sector.

Please see Appendix A for a detailed overview of the methodology.

4. Representation of people of colour among children's book creators in the UK: statistical evidence

This section presents findings from the analysis of a database of children's books published in the UK in 2021. The analysis focused on four main areas:

- All published titles: this includes the various editions of a single title.
- Unique published titles: titles published after removing different editions of the same title.
- Individual creators: each unique author, illustrator or author-illustrator who appears in the database.
- Type of publisher: this differentiates types of publishers into groupings (conglomerate, independent, hybrid, self-publisher, university press and NGO/Charity/Museum).
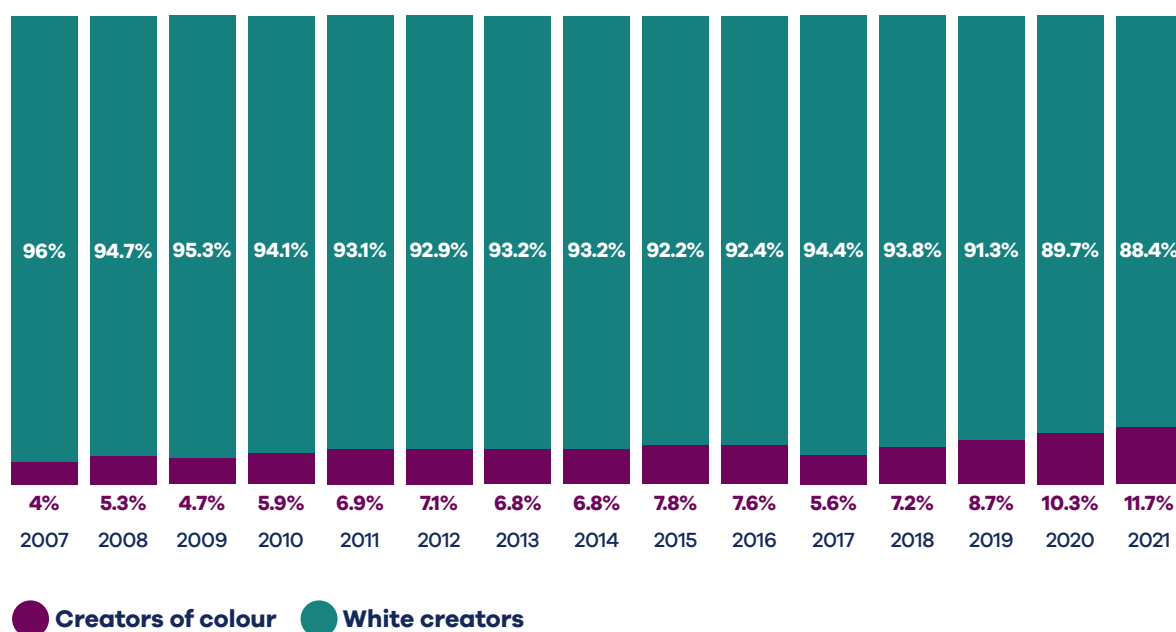
4.1. Who is creating books for children in the UK

Key stats on representation of creators of colour in UK children's books

In 2017…	In 2018…	In 2019…	In 2020…	In 2021…
5.6% of children's book creators (109 people) were people of colour and they created	**7.2%** of children's book creators (137 people) were people of colour and they created	**8.7%** of children's book creators (174 people) were people of colour and they created	**10.3%** of children's book creators (235 people) were people of colour and they created	**11.7%** of children's book creators (322 people) were people of colour and they created
4.0% of unique titles	**5.3%** of unique titles	**7.2%** of unique titles	**8.1%** of unique titles	**9.1%** of unique titles
2.0% of children's book creators (39 people) were British people of colour and they created	**2.1%** of children's book creators (40 people) were British people of colour and they created	**2.9%** of children's book creators (57 people) were British people of colour and they created	**4.2%** of children's book creators (94 people) were British people of colour and they created	**4.5%** of children's book creators (125 people) were British people of colour and they created
1.6% of unique titles	**1.5%** of unique titles	**2.5%** of unique titles	**3.0%** of unique titles	**3.6%** of unique titles
Number of British debut creators of colour: **12**	Number of British debut creators of colour: **17**	Number of British debut creators of colour: **24**	Number of British debut creators of colour: **54**	Number of British debut creators of colour: **74**

2021 is the most representative year for creators of colour published in UK children's literature since we started this tracking:

- In 2021, 11.7% of UK children's book creators were people of colour, compared to 4% in 2007 (see Figure 4.1). In comparison, it is estimated the proportion of people from Black, Asian, Mixed or other ethnic groups in the UK is 13%[20].

- In 2021, 9.1% of unique titles of children's books published in the UK were created by people of colour, compared to 2.3% in 2007 (see Figure 4.2).

- Creators of colour had fewer books published on average, but the gap is closing. In 2021, creators of colour had 25% fewer books published compared to white children's book creators (i.e., on average approximately 1.5 books compared to 2 books). This is a slight improvement from 2007–2017, when creators of colour had half as many books published compared to white creators.

- In 2021, there were seven times more debut British creators of colour being published in UK children's literature than in 2007. In particular, the number more than doubled from 24 debut creators of colour in 2019 to 54 in 2020 and tripled to 74 in 2021 (see Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.1: Percentage of creators of colour and white creators in UK's children's book publishing, per year (2007–2021)[21]

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
White creators	96%	94.7%	95.3%	94.1%	93.1%	92.9%	93.2%	93.2%	92.2%	92.4%	94.4%	93.8%	91.3%	89.7%	88.4%
Creators of colour	4%	5.3%	4.7%	5.9%	6.9%	7.1%	6.8%	6.8%	7.8%	7.6%	5.6%	7.2%	8.7%	10.3%	11.7%

● Creators of colour ● White creators

Figure 4.2: Percentage of unique titles by creators of colour and white creators in UK children's book publishing, per year (2007–2021)

Year	White creators	Creators of colour
2007	97.7%	2.3%
2008	96.1%	3.9%
2009	95.8%	4.2%
2010	95.3%	4.7%
2011	95.5%	4.5%
2012	94.6%	5.4%
2013	93.6%	6.4%
2014	95.2%	4.8%
2015	94%	6.0%
2016	94.1%	5.9%
2017	96%	4.0%
2018	94.8%	5.26%
2019	92.9%	7.2%
2020	91.9%	8.1%
2021	91%	9.1%

● Creators of colour ● White creators

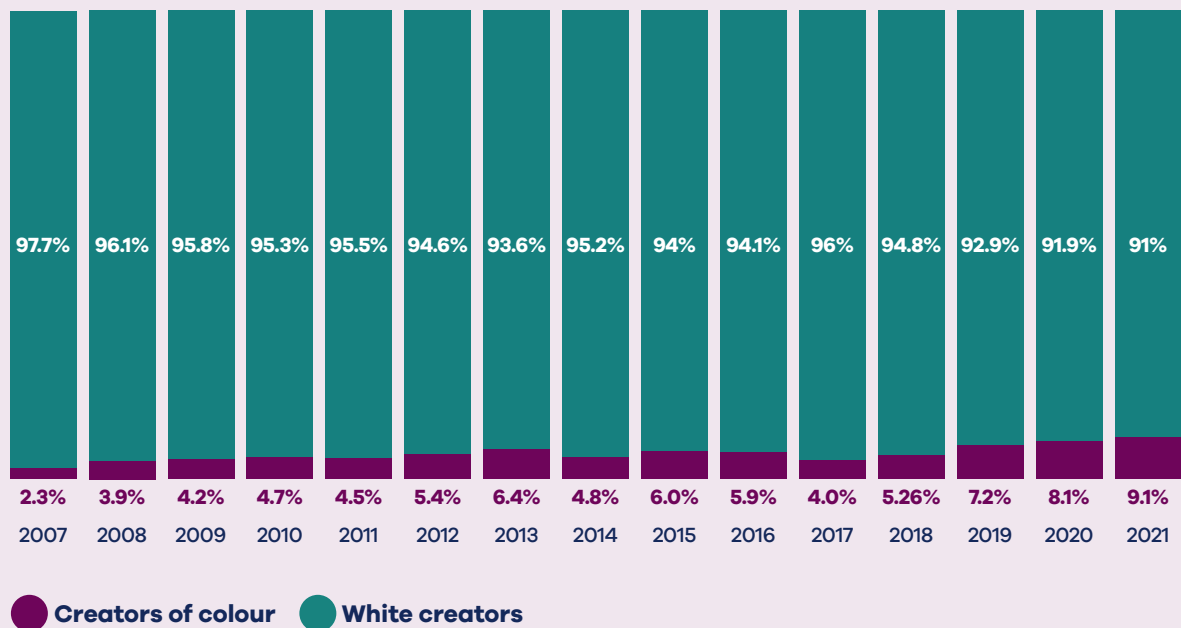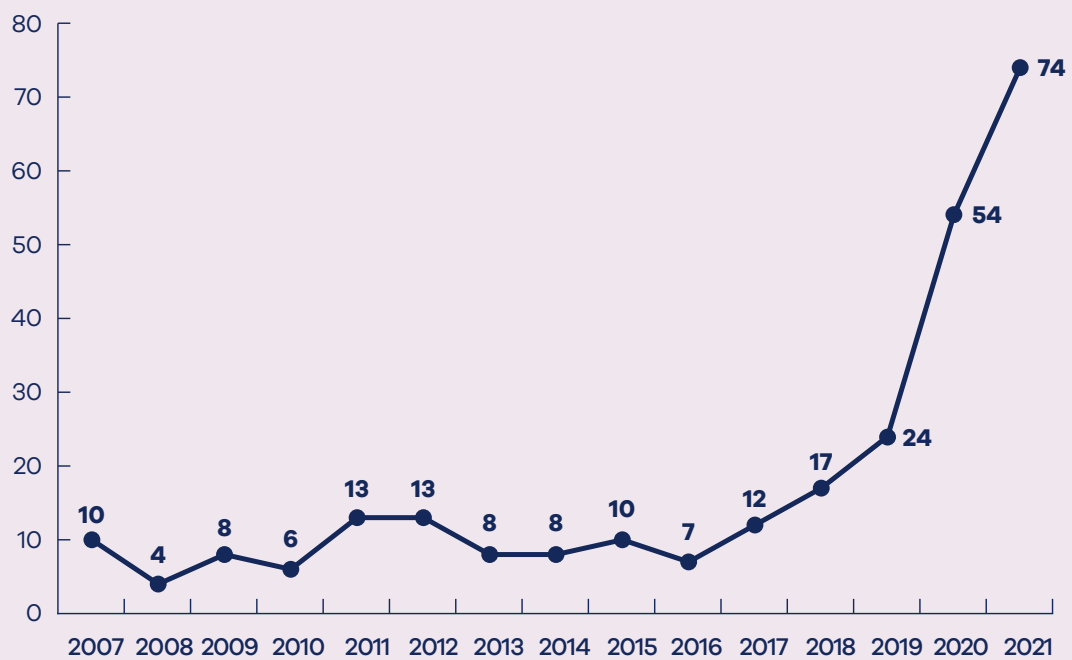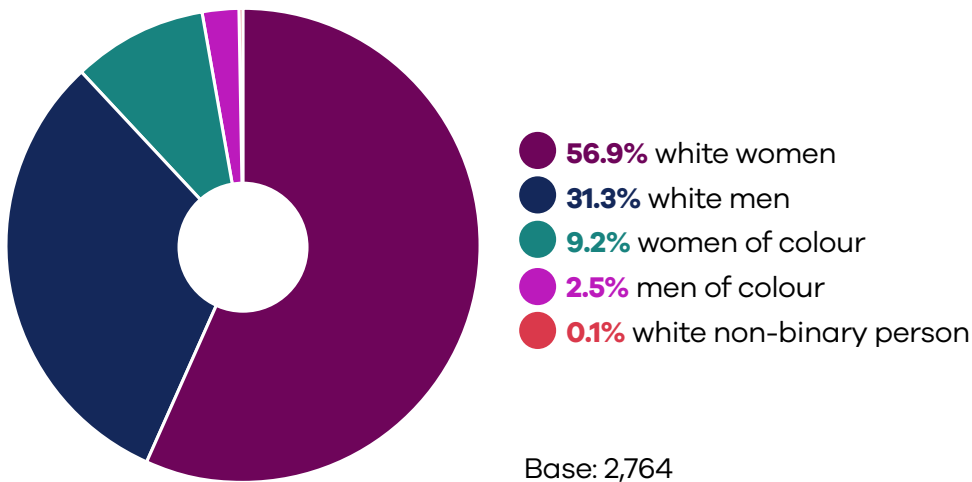**Figure 4.3:** Number of debut British creators of colour in UK children's book publishing, by year (2007–2021)

Year	Number
2007	10
2008	4
2009	8
2010	6
2011	13
2012	13
2013	8
2014	8
2015	10
2016	7
2017	12
2018	17
2019	24
2020	54
2021	74

Ethnicity and gender identity

In the UK, women are more likely to create children's books than men; nearly 7 in 10 creators (66.0%) published in 2021 were women. This gender gap is bigger among creators of colour than among white creators. White women were 1.8 times more likely to be creators of children's books than white men. Women of colour were 3.8 times more likely to be creators of children's books than men of colour (see Figure 4.4). 7.1% of the unique titles published in 2021 were by women of colour and 1.9% were by men of colour. This broadly mirrors the findings from our previous reports.

Figure 4.4: Percentage of creators in UK children's book publishing by ethnicity and gender identity, 2021

- **56.9%** white women
- **31.3%** white men
- **9.2%** women of colour
- **2.5%** men of colour
- **0.1%** white non-binary person

Base: 2,764

Ethnicity and nationality

The percentage of British creators of colour in UK children's literature has increased from 1.0% in 2007 to 4.5% in 2021 (see Figure 4.5). British creators of colour are responsible for 3.6% of unique titles in 2021.

Relative to other nationalities, the proportion of British creators of colour has increased from less than 25% in 2007 to 38.9% in 2021 (see Figure 4.6). Among illustrators, the picture is somewhat different, with 21.1% in 2021 being British.

Figure 4.5: Percentage of British creators of colour in UK children's book publishing, per year (2007–2021)
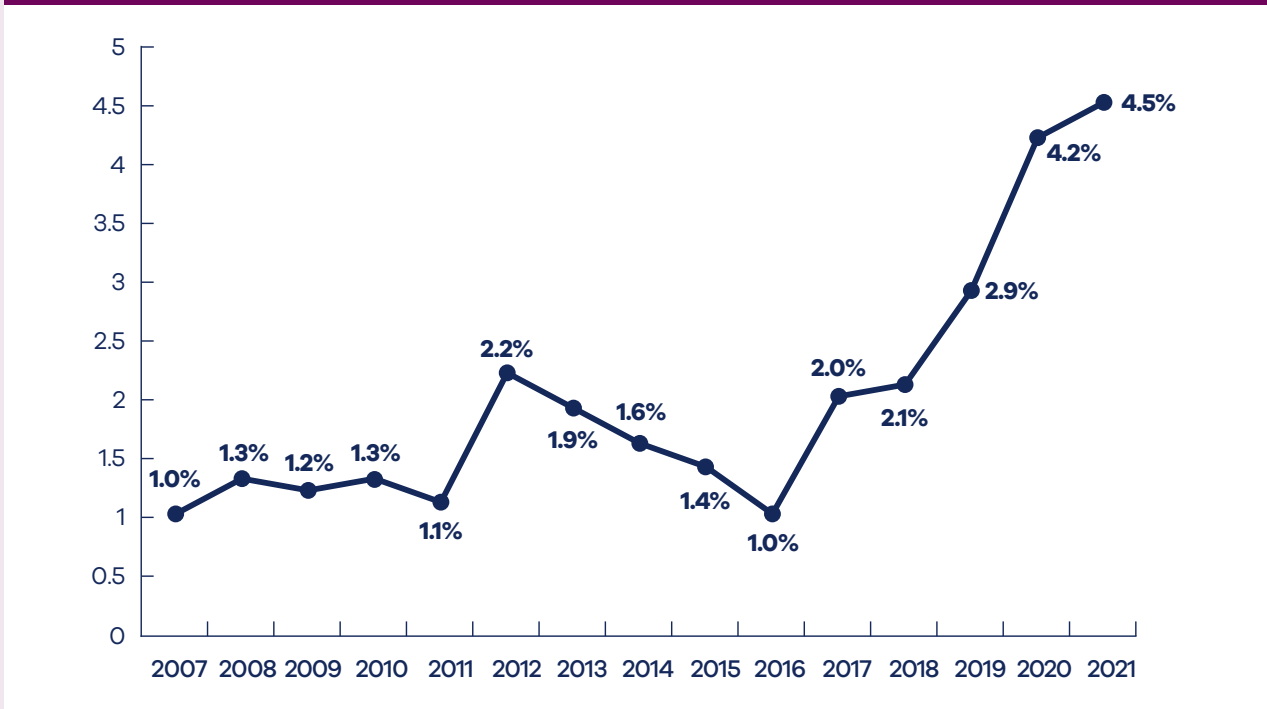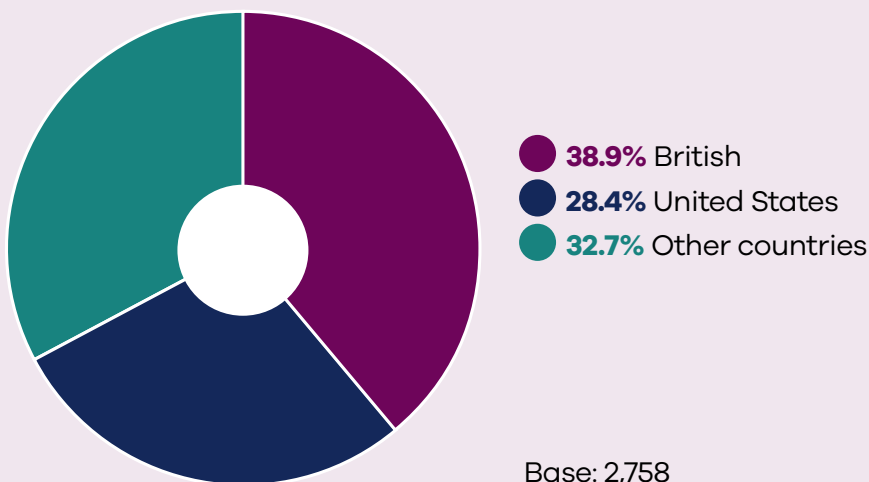

Figure 4.6: Nationality of creators of colour in UK children's book publishing (2021)

- **38.9%** British
- **28.4%** United States
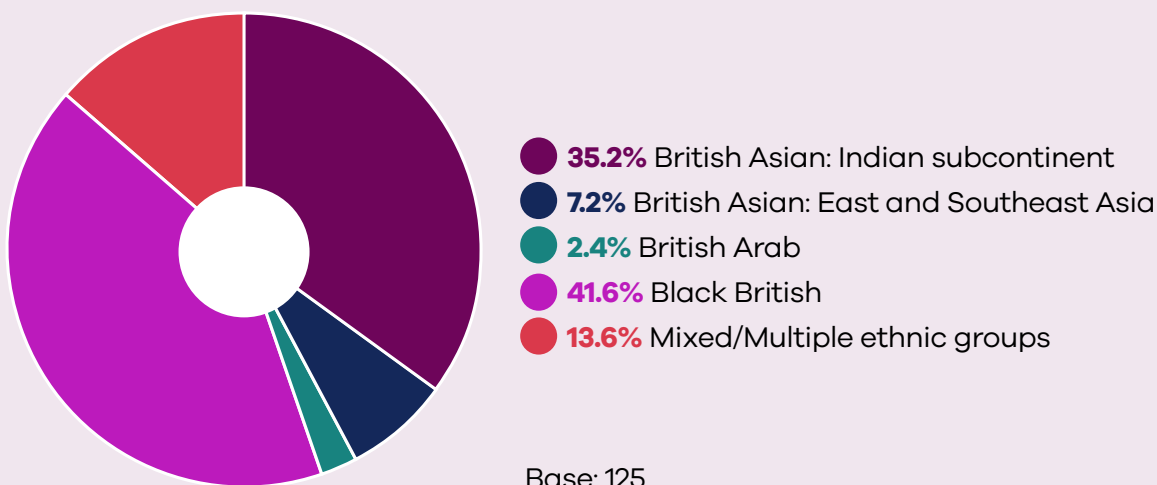- **32.7%** Other countries

Base: 2,758

Ethnicity breakdown of British creators of colour

Our statistics show the percentage of Black British children's book creators being published in the UK reached 41.6% in 2021, making them the largest group within British creators of colour (see Figure 4.7). This is an increase from 35.1% in 2019. Creators we interviewed reported an increase in Black creators being published following the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent global Black Lives Matters protests in 2020.

Among British creators of colour, British East and Southeast Asian creators were the least represented group, alongside British Arab creators. This was also the group that saw the largest decrease between 2007 (when 17.7% of British creators of colour were British East and Southeast Asian) and 2021 (7.2%) (see Figure 4.7). Further research would be required to understand the reasons for this decrease.

Figure 4.7: Ethnicity breakdown of British creators of colour in UK children's book publishing (2021)

- **35.2%** British Asian: Indian subcontinent
- **7.2%** British Asian: East and Southeast Asia
- **2.4%** British Arab
- **41.6%** Black British
- **13.6%** Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups

Base: 125

4.2. Who is publishing creators of colour?

Creators of colour in UK children's publishing were more likely to self-publish or publish with a hybrid publisher[22] than white creators. Self-publishing/being published by a hybrid publisher therefore remains a key route into creatorship for people of colour. It is important to note that one of the characteristics of self-publishing and hybrid publishing is that they have limited or no marketing budgets and so creators promote and distribute the books themselves.

- In 2021, 25.4% of unique titles by creators of colour were self-published or published with a hybrid publisher.

- In comparison, 17.8% of unique titles by white creators were self-published or published with a hybrid publisher.

- Debut British creators of colour were much more likely to self-publish or be published by a hybrid publisher than any other category of publisher. In 2021, 44.6% of unique titles by debut British creators of colour were self-published or published by a hybrid publisher.

There has also been a marked increase in the number of unique titles written/illustrated by creators of colour being published by conglomerates[23]. Conglomerate publishers tend to have substantial marketing budgets and infrastructures, and wider (international and national) distribution networks; thus, the potential to reach a much wider audience. In the interviews, creators highlight the importance of this reach and more mainstream visibility to further improving representation of people of colour among children's creators in the UK.

The tracking analysis reveals that creators of colour were more likely to publish with conglomerates than white creators:

- In 2021, 44.2% of unique titles by creators of colour were published by conglomerates.

- In comparison, 37.9% of unique titles by white creators were published by conglomerates.

Figure 4.8: Unique titles by creators in UK children's book publishing: publisher type (2021) year

Base: White creators = 4,592; Creators of colour = 457

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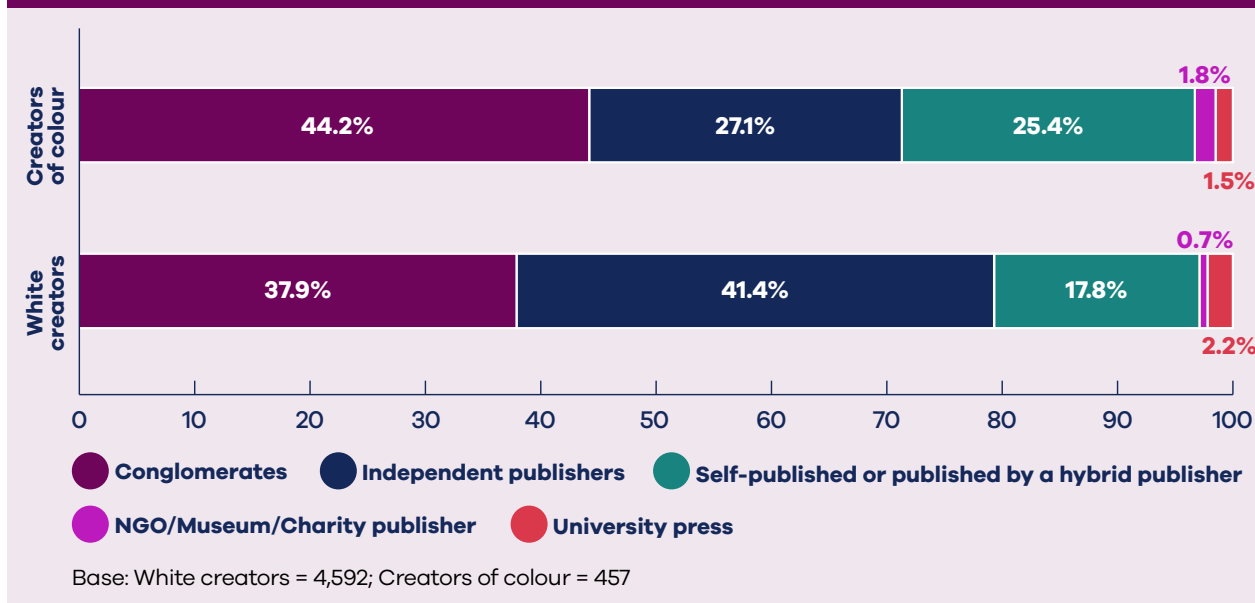
22 Hybrid publishers combine different features of both traditional publishing and self-publishing, often for an upfront fee.
23 Conglomerate publishing is when publishing companies are subsidiaries of a much larger, often multi-national and multi-industry, parent company.

5. Insights from creators of colour

The following section of the report focuses on insights from interviews with 20 children's book creators of colour. This provides their perspectives on the changes in recent years, as well as the progress still to be made. We saw a range of experiences based on interviewees' demographics[24], career types[25], and career stages[26]. It is important to note that newer authors had, for the most part, more positive and optimistic attitudes towards publishing.

Many of the quotes are attributed, but there are some issues where creators were not comfortable speaking out openly and chose to keep their contributions anonymous.

5.1. Behind the increase in numbers of creators of colour: what does this mean for the books children read

The tracking statistics have shown encouraging progress in representation of creators of colour in UK children's book publishing. Interviews with creators have provided some insights into what this means for the books they are producing, and ultimately how this might impact on what children read.

Authentic narratives across multiple genres

We learned from speaking with creators of colour back in 2019 that they were often expected to write within a narrow selection of genres; typically, realistic fiction that centred on characters who share their identities. In this research, many creators noted how they have seen increased freedom to experiment with a wider range of genre and content.

"It can be science-fiction, it can be fantasy, it can be mystery, it can be funny, it can be anything... It's really nice to see, and it definitely has improved since I was published." (Serena Patel)

Some creators told us they had been able to publish more stories that contributed to challenging race-based stereotypes. For example, Sharna Jackson revealed she was aiming to "show the other side of council estate experience" with her *High Rise Mystery* series, the first Black detective stories for children in the UK. With *Fight Back*, A. M. Dassu said she wanted to counter negative depictions of Muslims in the right-wing media:

"I wanted to show people of colour and Muslims as normal people who do normal things, who are just like everybody else – not anything like the villains portrayed in the news."

Some creators we spoke to also felt they were more able to produce stories that were relevant to children growing up in the UK. As Dean Atta noted,

"[...] it's the Black Britishness which is different to the African American experience. [...] It's not just about us taking what comes from America and making do with that, because we need our own representation as well."

A focus on 'race'

Despite describing this positive change, creators we spoke to also raised ongoing challenges with being expected to write narratives that reflected their own identities and communities or centred around 'race':

"The publishers wanted me to write another book, but it somehow had to deal with race or racism, which I just didn't want." (anonymous)

Creators we spoke to sometimes found the expectations placed on them to be problematic. They explain that no one is an expert on 'race' simply on the basis of their skin colour, nor can a single author represent all the experiences, backgrounds and perspectives that make up a community or culture. As the following quotes illuminate:

"My upbringing was very white, working-class background [...] I always felt very working-class more than Chinese [...] but people want me to talk about being Chinese [...] I've only got so much experience of being Chinese." (Maisie Chan)

"Every time you write a character who is underrepresented, there is so much pressure. The burden of representation feels so heavy. I think the reason is because there aren't that many stories out there. You worry that this is the story that people hone in on to educate them about an entire culture, which would never happen with a white kid in a story, because you would know that there are so many different family set ups, so many different pieces to their life." (Rashmi Sirdeshpande)

Creators expressed concerns that pressure to write stories around their ethnicity or heritage could stop them from exploring a full breadth of narratives, as these books may be judged through a stereotyped lens: **"I think it's really dangerous because it means that there is a reluctance to publish stories that might be difficult stories, because people make the assumption that it's a reflection on the race of that person, when of course, it's not. It's just a story, and we need stories like everyone else that show good times and bad times, and show difficult characters, and show villains as well as heroes."** (anonymous)

Related to this focus on race, many of the interviewed creators felt there was a rise of white creators writing/illustrating Black and Brown characters, which some felt was problematic. Some creators felt particularly uneasy when characters of colour were added onto the cover without being properly considered in the story.

Maisie Chan outlined the small and less obvious ways in which creators of colour can bring authenticity to characters of colour, without the book explicitly being about 'race' or racism:

"[...] pretty much every kid of colour has experienced something, and they [white writers] don't put that in the book [...] You don't even have to write a book about racism, but the way that we have to navigate the world is different. So, I think they [white writers] fall short there."

A future vision for children's books

From the insights creators raised in their interviews, there emerged a vision for what true representation of people of colour could look like in children's publishing in the UK – where creators and their books were not limited or defined by a label of diversity.

Creators noted in their interviews that once categorised as 'diverse', the label often followed the books and creators into bookshops, schools and other places, rather than categorisation being based on the content within the books. Increasing freedom for creators of colour means the potential for more genres and forms being created, and a wider readership.

"I want creators of colour to feel free enough to write what they want. I just want stories where Black people, Brown people are just being, just existing, without constantly having to be defined by their difference. I just want some regular tales." (Sharna Jackson)

As one creator put it:

"What does it mean to normalise the presence of diverse books and diverse authors? [...] When we can write about anything." (anonymous)

5.2. Enablers that have helped creators of colour in UK children's publishing

This section looks at how the creators of colour we spoke to have gained more freedom to create, achieved their successes and contributed to creating positive changes. In many cases, it came down to the changing publishing environment that creators now find themselves in, with newer creators having more positive experiences.

Key enablers included:

- Strong relationships with publishers and long-term investment in careers.

- Genuine allies and advocates in publishing companies.

- Increased awareness of issues around representation.

- Creators of colour reclaiming the space.

- School visits.

Strong relationships with publishers and long-term investment in careers

Several newer authors shared their positive experiences of being supported by their publishers. Where there was a strong partnership between creators and publishers and a shared goal of long-term career development, creators felt a sense of equality and security. These creators told us they had benefited from regular and open communications with their publishers and being made to feel part of a team within publishing companies.

"At Usborne, [...] it's very, very collaborative and I feel like that's been a huge reason why my experience has been so positive, because it is always a two-way conversation. I always feel like it's a team effort." (Serena Patel)

"My editors don't talk about one book, we talk about the long run. We talk about where we want to go in the future. That makes me feel more comfortable [...] We're a team. We're a partnership." (Rashmi Sirdeshpande)

More established creators have also experienced supportive relationships:

"Working with Knights Of, I just love being part of their team [...] I'm important to them, they're important to me. It feels there's an equality there and [...] that relationship feels really strong." (Polly Ho-Yen)

Creators tell us that with the right support, creators have a much better chance to 'make it', as Dean Atta noted in his case:

"It's about breaking that glass ceiling that so many people are hitting, and I've done it, you've got to push these books beyond."

Genuine allies and advocates within publishing companies

Creators we interviewed highlighted the positive experiences they have had with individuals within publishing companies who were their genuine allies and advocates, supporting and championing their work. They saw these allies and advocates at the forefront of change.

"I think there are good people pushing for that change within organisations. I think that's how the change is going to come about, through those good people who will keep pushing, purchasing and developing these books." (Serena Patel)

As a creator revealed, when an ally moved on, the removal of this support could have a big impact:

"When the editor who acquired my first book left and [...] they were my champion within my publishing company [...] Now, in my publisher, there are lots of promises about things that would happen, and things just didn't happen. Launches of books that were supposed be arranged that weren't arranged." (anonymous)

For this reason, some creators were concerned real change would not happen despite individual allies' and advocates' best efforts, unless the whole industry followed suit:

"I think there are good people within publishing houses that are willing to [take a chance and try something different] [...] But it's like anywhere that's been doing something the same way for a long time [...] It has to come from the top really for anything significant to happen doesn't it?" (anonymous)

Increased awareness of issues around representation

Creators told us that ongoing research and conversations about inclusion and exclusion have increased awareness of these issues. Catherine Johnson, who has been writing children's books for decades, saw the difference compared to when she first started:

"If you're a new author I think these days, hopefully, you're going to listen to Patrice [Lawrence] and Dapo [Adeola] talking about what it's really like. You're going to be aware of things like #PublishingPaidMe, which I wasn't."

Several cited research by organisations such as CLPE and BookTrust as having informed creators of colour of the extent of under-representation and helped them to develop the language and the confidence to articulate their experiences and grievances:

"I don't have the time to make the books and do the research and then also fix the problem. Your research equips me with the language to talk about these things. I know them, and I'm thinking them, but to articulate them is a whole other thing." (Dapo Adeola)

Research reports had also contributed to keeping the issue of representation alive in public consciousness within the sector:

"We want to keep publishing amazing stories with all kinds of characters in them. I think [...] having regular reports into what's going on, looking at the figures, talking to people, having discussions, it all helps. It keeps the conversation going. It keeps it at the top of people's agenda." (Serena Patel)

Creators of colour reclaiming the space

As conversations around 'diversity' grow in the UK, creators of colour have been given a bigger platform than ever before. In our interviews many creators of colour talked about using this platform to express themselves and support other creators of colour to ensure that inclusion and representation could grow.

"We can use this 'trend' to our advantage and make it sustainable. I think that we do need to push for this to be the norm. [...] Britain is going to become [...] more multi-cultural. So different voices are going to be needed 100%." (Onyinye Iwu)

"Sometimes I totally know I am [a token]. Then I'm like, 'I'm going to use it, it's my platform now. I'm going to talk about these things.'" (anonymous)

A few authors had chosen to self-publish, to claim creative control over the content and appearance of their books. As Casey Elisha and Jessica Wilson put it:

"[T]his is my way of putting my work into the world on my terms [...] There's no one telling me you can't do this, or you have to do that and all the rest of it." (Casey Elisha)

"The [self-publishing] process was very empowering [...] in terms of giving a platform or spotlighting unheard voices [...] I think that if we approach publishing and writing from a powerless perspective, the end product will be such." (Jessica Wilson)

School visits

Our previous research[27] identified school visits as an important way to nurture the next generation of creators of colour. Exposure to visible role models can inspire and challenge how children see themselves and careers in the creative industry. In our interviews, creators continued to value school visits.

"We all ask the question 'what does an illustrator look like?' [...] If you're walking down the street and you see me and we start a conversation, illustrator is not the first thing that's going to come to your mind." (Dapo Adeola)

The importance of creative role models is well established, and its impact on children of colour was something creators who visited schools got to experience first-hand:

"There were some Chinese students in some of the classes, and you can just see [...] the way they look at you [...] About four or five of the kids came up to me and went, 'I'm Chinese too.' [...] I think this idea of what a children's author looks like can be revolutionary." (Maisie Chan)

5.3. Barriers to inclusive UK children's publishing

In our first report[28], many creators raised how 'diversity' felt like a buzzword within the publishing industry, with panels and initiatives launched to discuss the issue without much action to follow.

While acknowledging that representation is improving in numbers, many creators we spoke to expressed an overarching sense of distrust around the motivations behind this improvement and its sustainability. This had a detrimental impact on creators' mental health and wellbeing, and their trust in the industry. This section explores some of the deep-rooted barriers to inclusion which many creators still experienced, and new challenges created by the rising demand for 'diverse' books.

These barriers included:

- Superficial or opportunistic engagement with diversity and inclusion.

- Rush publishing and lack of investment in creators of colour.

- Financial security and equity.

- Experiences of racism and fear of speaking out.

- The psychological impact of minoritisation.

27 Ramdarshan Bold, 2019a
28 Ramdarshan Bold, 2019a

Superficial or opportunistic engagement with diversity and inclusion

Some interviewees were concerned about transactional relationships with some publishers, where creators of colour were felt to be published to capitalise on a trend or to appear inclusive:

"I don't think it's very genuine. I think it's a good business decision, and when it becomes no longer a good business decision, I think people will start quietly being dropped or not published as much." (Sharna Jackson)

Reflecting on the push to publish Black creators that followed Black Lives Matter, many creators we spoke to were concerned that this was fuelled by commercial possibility. There was a sense that tokenistic engagement, driven by commercial opportunity, could, in fact, be detrimental to real change.

"As soon as I see a press release or anything that talks about 'in the wake of Black Lives Matter', I'm like you've lost me because that's not the only reason to publish books by Black writers. I think that always makes me feel a bit suspicious of everyone's intentions and motivations when I hear that phrase." (Dean Atta)

Several of the creators interviewed felt they were being used to showcase how 'diverse' their publishers were:

"I sometimes think I have been used as a badge, personally, because I'm cheap. You can put me on and take me off." (Catherine Johnson)

Even some of the creators who had very positive experiences of publishing were concerned about the potential implications of their books and careers being held up as examples of publisher's successes:

"I'm really happy with my publishers but the problem with people like me is that it's really easy for a publisher to hold me and creators like me up as an example [...] I don't want to be that example that stops the [publishing] industry from working harder." (Rashmi Sirdeshpande)

Others raised strong concerns about some publishers who advocated for 'diversity' and equality while also publishing books by people who openly discriminate against socially marginalised groups.

"In most cases publishers have stood behind and provided support to their authors and illustrators when they have faced harassment and personal attacks on social media. But the voices who are stoking this hate are also published by mainstream publishers, sometimes another imprint within the same publisher of the author facing harassment." (anonymous)

Our first report (2019) highlighted concerns about 'diversity panels' on the basis that creators of colour were sometimes encouraged to focus on issues of under-representation rather than their work or writing process. Creators in these interviews told us that this practice has improved in recent years, but some of the concerns previously reported persist.

One creator noted:

"I think people have realised that diversity panels are not the way to go, so they call it something else." (anonymous)

Across the interviews creators discussed challenges associated with practices or interventions set up within the publishing sector around improving diversity. A term that cropped up numerous times in the interviews was 'white saviourism'[29]. Creators told us these issues could manifest in different ways. Some felt the support offered to creators of colour was patronising when it implied charity, while others felt initiatives were not targeting the root cause of the issues.

"When they start going [...] 'We'll take a loss on it, but it means we're doing good,' and then we become charity cases. That's even more patronising and more condescending than anything else [...] It becomes a white saviour thing almost. 'We're doing so much to save these Black and Brown people.'" (Bali Rai)

"One of the things that can be annoying is when you talk about 'we need more diverse books', people say, 'We'll set up a mentoring scheme.' As if the problem lies in skillset instead of access. As if the problem lies in the author, not in the industry. I don't like the fact that it's the first thing that people turn to. It's just that feeling that 'we've got to teach them how to be as good as we are.'" (anonymous)

However, creators emphasised that there remains, for now, a place for the right kind of targeted initiative. Allen Fatimaharan suggested that dedicated prizes and schemes could be helpful to improve access for creators facing class and racial disadvantage:

"Alongside a focus on racial diversity, there should be a focus on improving access to voices from poorer socio-economic backgrounds [...] I feel that schemes and prizes could be set up with the aim of finding underrepresented voices from lower socio-economic backgrounds."

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29 White saviourism complex is a pattern of behaviour when a white person attempts (either consciously or unconsciously) to help or rescue a person of colour or a racially marginalised community. This is done with the underlying belief that the white person is in a position of superiority and thus has the knowledge or skillset that the person of colour (or communities of colour) does/do not have (Dabiri, 2021).

Rush publishing and lack of investment in creators of colour

Creators of all ethnicities are writing and illustrating in a fast-paced publishing arena. On the one hand, creators told us about the importance of having publishers who nurtured them, invested in their careers over time and allowed them to develop at a constructive pace. On the other hand, interviewees raised concerns that some publishers were 'rush publishing' creators of colour in order to capitalise on the popularity of and demand for 'diverse' books. This was seen as detrimental to the quality and longevity of representation.

"We're getting a lot of what I call cookie cutter books. Filler books that are rushed out, just to fill up shelf space and tick boxes. They'll come out, they'll tick a box, we have this book [...] about diversity." (Dapo Adeola)

"Since George Floyd, it's been better in terms of publishers wanting input and books from Black creators [...] But I'm not sure the time, effort and money – specifically marketing spend – is also put in. Often the process feels rushed – clearly to 'capitalise' on a moment or movement. I understand that from a business point of view, but how is this helping long term?" (E.L. Norry)

Many creators we spoke to believed that a book wouldn't succeed without publishers' investment in creators and their publicity and marketing campaigns. However, some observed that creators of colour remained less likely than white creators to receive such investment.

"What we need publishers to do is spend money and spend that money on marketing equally. We need an equal footing – that's when we can accurately assess whether a book did well or not, and whether it's profitable or not." (A.M. Dassu)

Some creators flagged how the lack of investment was exacerbated for midlist creators of colour. A.M. Dassu explained:

"In terms of diversifying our industry and our books, publishers don't make it easy [...] They're always looking for the next new thing [...] once you've got two or three books out, nobody cares, you're on your own pretty much, and even some people that I know that are people of colour – prolific, award-winning authors – have had no marketing or support from their publishers. Yes, they've got that contract, but they do nothing for their books to succeed."

Bali Rai argues that to reach children, books by creators of colour need marketing to enter mainstream and become available in outlets such as supermarkets:

"We have to give those books [by creators of colour] the space for their parents, and grandparents, and uncles, and aunts, whatever, to go and pick those books up or find them on Amazon, wherever they buy their books, and give them to the kids."

Financial security and equity

Several creators argued that financial security of creators and transparency around money were important to supporting a diverse range of creators in children's publishing.

"It's no joke getting published. It's a real indulgence. You have to have a full-time job while keeping up with the writing. I don't make money at all. I couldn't possibly support my kids on the books I've written, however many awards I get shortlisted for." (anonymous)

While financial insecurity may not be unique to creators of colour, creators we spoke to highlighted increasing awareness of an ethnicity pay gap between creators of colour and white authors.

"I know for a fact that I get paid less, or have been paid less, for contracts than my white counterparts. I know that for a fact because I talk to some of my white counterparts, one or two of them I'm very close to, and they're very honest about it. It's not about, again, individual publishers. This is across the board." (Bali Rai)

Dapo Adeola described how issues around financial security may be compounded for illustrators and in turn be a barrier to diversity:

"[…] illustrators, for example, get the raw end of the stick in terms of the platforms that they're given when books are being advertised and promoted. […] It's part of the reason why certain pay structures exist […] It's also part of the reason why the lack of diversity exists as well."

Experiences of racism and fear of speaking out

Some creators reported that micro-aggressions towards creators of colour persist within publishing spaces such as book events.

"I've experienced some micro-aggressions definitely. Everything from the really big to the tiny." (E.L. Norry)

"I went to my first [children's literature event]. I walked into the room and there was this elderly author there. He goes, 'Oh, you're from [country of origin/heritage]. Did you used to be a cleaner?' He said, 'I'm just joking.' What kind of a joke is that?" (anonymous)

Furthermore, some creators we spoke to noted they felt unable or reluctant to speak openly about instances of racism and discrimination in the publishing industry. Their reasons included fatigue at dealing with defensiveness and a fear of repercussions.

"You know, there's that thing about when you decide as a person of colour to say something comes across […] a bit racist to you, and all you end up with is a defensive explanation about why you're wrong." (anonymous)

Some creators of colour expressed fears that speaking out could lead to them losing work. Rashmi Sirdeshpande disclosed that she was cautioned by other writers of colour against speaking up:

"When I started speaking up, my friends, writers of colour, said to me privately, 'Don't do it. They'll drop you.'"

Bali Rai, who has been outspoken about issues of exclusion for two decades, felt like it had a negative impact on his career:

"I'm very much of the opinion that if you have something to say, you shouldn't hide it […] but sadly, we're in an industry where people don't feel that way. I'm not sure being honest and open has benefited me in any way in this industry in the last 20 years."

The psychological impact of minoritisation

Interviewees reported an emotional and mental toll to their experiences of tokenism, lack of investment, hostility and fear. Many creators we spoke to had been left feeling marginalised, stressed and devalued. Some creators discussed feeling insecure about their place in the publishing industry.

"No matter how many books you publish, no matter how many big awards you're shortlisted for or win, that niggling doubt remains, 'Am I here because I'm Brown? Is this success really mine?'" (Rashmi Sirdeshpande)

"It's such a shame to worry that you're just ticking a box. You can't ever really enjoy any success or feel proud when you're doubting yourself in this way." (E.L. Norry)

Concerns about the sustainability of their careers could leave creators feeling powerless, as Sharna Jackson described:

"Who knows how long it's going to be cool, so you might as well really ride it out and make the most of an opportunity [...] Maybe white authors have more opportunity to fail or their books can sell not well, and then they will still get another deal. I feel like us minorities have this one-shot mentality."

Creators we spoke to felt extra pressure of needing to work harder to prove themselves and achieve success, or expend mental and emotional effort to conform to the expectations and rules of others to 'fit in'.

"You feel like you then have to work extra hard to prove that I can keep up with everyone else." (anonymous)

"I think maybe it is being a Black woman. It's making sure that you're always humble. Humbling yourself because you don't want to be too much." (Sharna Jackson)

5.4. Representation beyond ethnicity: social class disadvantage

In our interviews, creators of colour from working-class backgrounds told us they faced additional challenges by virtue of their social class and ethnicity intersectionality. This had a magnifying effect on some of the barriers discussed earlier, including the psychological impact of minoritisation and financial insecurity. Lack of access to cultural capital and social networks was also a barrier.

Bali Rai explains:

"I'm from a very working-class background [...] I didn't have the same kind of exposure to classic literature, for example, when I was growing up [...] Both [...] the working-class background and ethnicity [...] have held me back."

E.L. Norry pointed out how creative writing degrees were not financially viable for her, which meant she didn't have the same opportunities for training and networking as more affluent creators:

"I'm not in a position where I've been fortunate enough to do an MA in creative writing for children [...] that many people who get published have. Many of them know each other, network, work for publishers or agents, and it often feels exclusionary." (E.L. Norry)

There was also the lack of confidence and sense of belonging that some creators from working-class backgrounds experienced while navigating publishing spaces.

"There are too many unspoken rules of how to conduct oneself. There is a certain amount of self-confidence that comes with class and privilege. If you are not used to it, it's very confusing." (E.L. Norry)

"I remember the first day [of a writing course] I went to. I cried when I got home because I was like, 'I don't read the Guardian.' There were all these middle-class people that have written novels. Then there was me [...] Just feeling that I didn't belong there." (Maisie Chan)

5.5. Creators' concluding remarks: working together and investing to redress the balance

The creators we spoke to acknowledged improving representation is challenging and complex, and that real progress takes time and requires long-term commitment to address deep-seated inequalities.

"The system is not broken: the system is designed the way it's designed and it needs to be changed. [...] I would like to see more change in the industry, but I don't know if it's possible in the way that it's structured now." (Sharna Jackson)

There was a strong sense that personal responsibility and collective action are required to break down the barriers to inclusive children's publishing and provide children with books that genuinely represent their experiences and British society.

"The thing is, people in children's books really are nice people. They are good people who really care about the thing that they do, and they want to do it right. But they all feel that the problem is everybody else's. They have not internalised that they are part of the problem." (anonymous)

"The only way the problem can be solved is if all the publishing houses are in cahoots trying to solve it together without one person or one particular publishing house trying to claim the merit for solving the diversity issue." (Dapo Adeola)

Some interviewees highlighted a need for institutional investment and support to develop the pipeline of new creators of colour. Others suggested publishers could share marketing budgets across different creators, instead of focusing on a handful of high-profile authors.

"If you say you want diverse stories, you need to be able to facilitate the people from those areas of life to tell you their stories. [...] because up until this point, those particular people haven't had those opportunities. It's not enough to just say, 'OK, we want diverse stories. What have you got?' It's not enough to do that because up until this point, you've been denying access for so long that it's taken its toll on people's ability to even envision themselves as authors or illustrators." (Dapo Adeola)

"[...] go spend that, every year, in a good amount, promoting a voice that hasn't been heard from before, promoting a voice that is underheard, is underrepresented, and actually do it." (Bali Rai)

In the last few years, a number of creators of colour have triumphed in various literary and book awards. Overall, creators shared their vision for a future where they will be recognised as creators, not 'diverse' creators, and write books, not 'diverse' books, and where all children will have access to their stories.

"My dream is just to be known as an illustrator rather than a diverse creator. I'd rather my books to be read by all children, not [just] Black children [...] That's the aim of the game." (Onyinye Iwu)

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Our research shows a complex picture of inclusion and exclusion in the publishing industry. Many people, organisations and networks in the sector have worked hard to improve the representation and the experiences of creators of colour in UK children's literature. There are now more professional development opportunities for creators of colour[30], more communities and more creative networks that enhance transparency and raise awareness around inequalities. Creators of colour now feature more regularly at literary festivals and other book events. We celebrate these achievements.

The tracking element of this research shows significant progress in the percentage of children's creators of colour published in the UK from 5.6% in 2017 to 11.7% in 2021. In 2020, we set a target for 13% of children's books to be created by authors and illustrators of colour by 2022. The analysis for this study reveals that, if recent increases are sustained, the sector could well be on track to reach that target.

However, there is still much work to be done. There are systemic barriers in wider society and in publishing that affect the way creators of colour access opportunities and succeed in contributing to more representative children's literature in the UK.

Tackling issues of under-representation in children's publishing has and will continue to require commitment from a range of stakeholders over a sustained period of time. As part of BookTrust's ongoing commitment to support representation in children's literature and to ensure all children can engage with a wide range of books, this research aims to serve as a springboard for future action for BookTrust and the wider sector. We hope it will help to guide conversations, initiatives and investment to increase the representation of children's book creators of colour.

30 Find some of these opportunities listed at https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/programmes-and-campaigns/booktrust-represents/support-for-authors-and-illustrators-of-colour/opportunities-for-writers-or-illustrators-of-colour/.

Recommendations: what could be done to make the children's book industry more inclusive?

This research points to a series of opportunities for sustained, transformative representation within UK children's literature, which include:

1. Maintaining sector-wide exploration, reflection and focus for meaningful and sustained change

An increase in the quantity of titles or debut creators of colour will not automatically lead to a sustained, equitable children's literature sector. Creators of colour we interviewed shared serious concerns about tokenism and whether positive changes would be sustained. As a sector we can work to ensure changes are long term and meaningful through:

- Deep and ongoing reflection and engagement with issues central to exclusion, including the roots of inequality within the sector.

- Healthy discourse across the sector around what good children's literature looks like (in terms of books selected for publishing and promotion, how literary prizes are judged, and how this might reflect diversity within children's book consumer audiences).

2. Recognising, taking action on and keeping under review processes and practices that discriminate against creators of colour

All organisations in the sector have a role to play in supporting creators of colour to contribute to inclusive and representative children's literature. This includes recognising, addressing and keeping under review all processes or practices that contribute to maintaining inequality in the industry including:

- Ensuring sustained and equitable financial and support structures are in place for creators of colour including for pay, marketing budgets and support from publisher staff.

- Ensuring transparency in any process and practice that may discriminate against creators of colour (from organisational culture to business models).

- Considering barriers facing creators of colour through multiple, intersectional lenses.

3. Recognising, connecting and empowering allies and advocates who champion the work of creators of colour within the sector and individual organisations

In our interviews we found positive experiences and outcomes were often associated with allies and advocates championing the creative efforts of creators of colour. This research highlights opportunities for the sector and organisations within it for:

• Protected spaces for genuine allies and advocates to connect.

• (Where organisations have yet to establish fully inclusive organisational cultures) Empowering those individuals or small teams working to change organisational culture.

• (In larger organisations) Considering the potential for cross-organisational champions to support positive changes on themes addressed in this and other research.

4. Supporting children's creators of colour and other disadvantaged creators to connect and raise their voices within the sector

Many creators of colour work continuously to advocate for inclusion, diversity and representation in children's literature. This work has had a positive impact on the publishing industry, but as interviewees point out, it is important this work does not fall on isolated individuals. Interviewees emphasise that there are benefits to creators in shaping and maintaining their own protected spaces where they can exchange ideas, share experiences and find mutual support. Examples exist in the Black Writers' Guild and the Scottish BPOC Writers Network, and interviewees feel the sector has benefited from informal networks – and social media campaigns such as #PublishingPaidMe – in educating and connecting those traditionally excluded from publishing.

Several interviewees call for safe spaces for different groups facing challenges to inclusion in children's literature to connect, educate and raise their voices.

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Appendix A:

Methodology

Approach

This report employed a mixed-method approach. The quantitative findings are based on the development and analysis of a corpus of relevant titles, which were identified and collected through the [British Library's British National Bibliography (BNB) database:](#)

- The metadata team at the British Library provided a database of all books tagged with the phrase 'Children's literature', 'Children's stories' and 'Board books' published between January 2020 and December 2021.

- This research focuses on print/volume titles only: so other formats (e.g., online resources and audio books) were removed, but these titles were, typically, available in print format too.

- This database contained 15,629 records for 2020 and 2021 combined: this was reduced to 10,267 after the names of editors, academic authors writing about children's literature, non-print/volume formats, books with no named authors (e.g., books about sub-literary commodities such as Peppa Pig) and multi-authored anthologies, etc., were removed.

- The metadata did not include information such as creator sex/gender identity, ethnicity and nationality, or the type of publisher (i.e., conglomerate, independent, self-published, hybrid, NGO/Museum/Charity, university presses).

- This additional information was identified through digital and printed paratextual, mostly epitextual, information (e.g., publisher and creator websites, creator interviews in print and online media, creator information on book covers, etc.).

- Creators were segmented by their (self-identified) sex/gender identity, ethnicity (based on ONS terminology)[31] and nationality. The data was then coded and analysed. This provided statistical information about what percentage of publishing output in this sector was created by different demographics.

Missing data

Demographic information, particularly about ethnicity, is missing for 83 creators (1.6% of the creators) published in 2020 and 103 creators (2.0% of the creators) in 2021. Missing data is a ubiquitous problem for large quantitative datasets, especially for longitudinal studies such as this one[32]. Extensive searches were undertaken to identify this information; however, it was not readily available.

The missing creators list was analysed to see if any patterns emerged as to why this data is missing and how it is distributed. One main pattern did emerge: many of these creators wrote and/or illustrated under pseudonyms or as collaborative projects. The biggest proportion of the missing creators were self-published or published by a hybrid publisher (59.0% in 2020 and 59.2% in 2021).

The analysis strategy selected to yield the least biased estimates was to conduct a complete case analysis (where the creators with missing data are removed from the dataset) so that the data across the database is comparable. Although this means that the statistical power is reduced somewhat since not all of the original data will be used, the report is based on around 98% of the creators published in 2020 and 2021, so strong conclusions can be drawn.

There were 2,273 creators in the sample in 2020 and 2,764 in 2021 (when talking about ethnicity); the titles by creators where ethnicity could not be identified were removed from the sample.

Interviewees: UK-based creators of colour

There were 125 British creators of colour published in 2021. To augment the statistical evidence, 19 of these British creators of colour and one UK-based Filipino creator of colour were interviewed. The recommendations of this report are based on the experiences of these creators and the results of other academic and industry research.

Selecting interviewees for this research was easier than in the first iteration of the work (for the 2007–2017 report), simply because there were more creators to choose from. It is for this reason that we decided to include a non-British creator into the sample, to help understand the experiences of creators of colours from other countries who live and publish in the UK.

The purposive sample of interviewees was selected. The researcher worked with BookTrust to identify and recruit potential interviewees. Knowledge and judgement was used to select creators who represent different ethnic and social backgrounds, stages in their careers, ages, experiences with publishers and locations within the UK.

Fifteen women and five men were interviewed between February 2022 and June 2022.

32 Hedeker and Gibbons (2006)

Appendix B: Further contextual information

The UK children's publishing industry

The market for children's books in the UK is thriving. Sales of children's books in the UK (across all formats) reached a high of £425 million in 202[33]. An estimated one in every three books sold is a children's book[34]. Children's books also feature prominently in the UK bestseller lists: eight of the twenty bestselling titles in the UK in 2021 were books for young people.

- Overall, including reprints and new editions, 4,722 children's books were published in 2020 and 5,545 children's books were published in 2021.[35]

- In 2021, 2,867 authors, author-illustrators and illustrators (creators) wrote or illustrated 5,197 unique titles. An increase from 2020 when 2,356 authors, author-illustrators and illustrators (creators) wrote and/or illustrated 4,433 unique titles.[36]

- Authors accounted for 83.6% of creators in 2020 and 85.7% of this list in 2021.

Since 2015 the number of **all titles, unique titles and number of creators** has been in decline. There was a slight rise in the numbers of creators published in 2020 to 2021, however this was still lower than in the peak period of 2014–15.
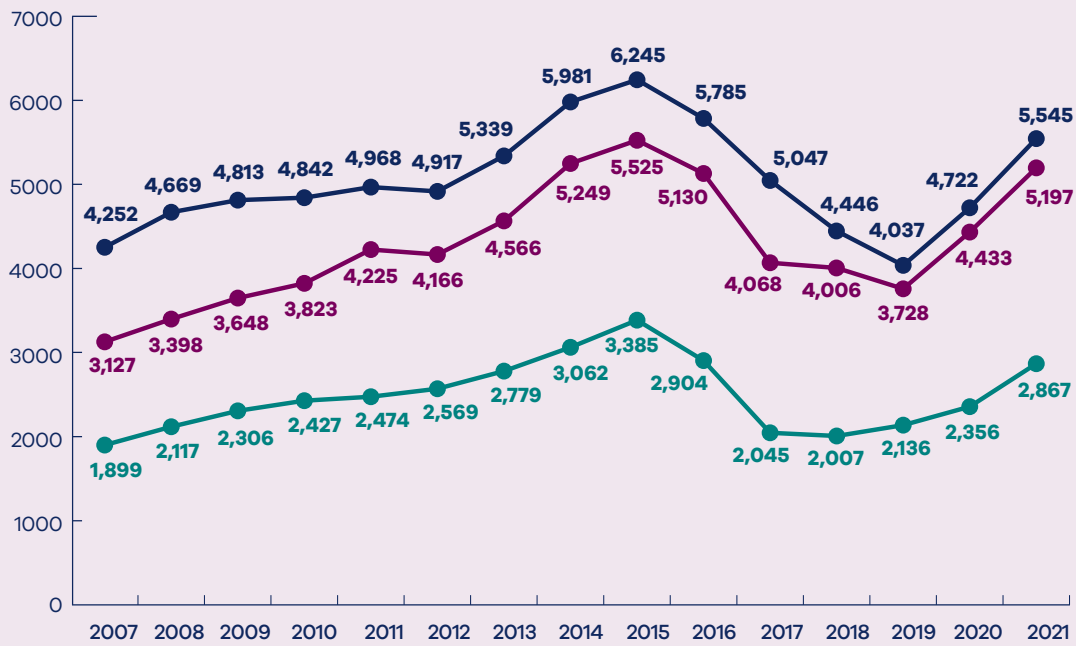
33 Publishers Association (2021)

34 Publishers Association (2021)

35 The metadata team at the British Library provided a database of all books tagged with the phrase 'Children's literature', 'Children's stories' and 'Board books' published between January 2020 and December 2021.

36 The database analysis focused on three main areas: all the titles published (including the various editions of a unique title); unique titles published (removing all of the different editions); and individual creators (removing the different titles).

Total number of titles, unique titles and creators of children's books between 2007 and 2021*

Year	Total (navy)	Unique (magenta)	Creators (teal)
2007	4,252	3,127	1,899
2008	4,669	3,398	2,117
2009	4,813	3,648	2,306
2010	4,842	3,823	2,427
2011	4,968	4,225	2,474
2012	4,917	4,166	2,569
2013	5,339	4,566	2,779
2014	5,981	5,249	3,062
2015	6,245	5,525	3,385
2016	5,785	5,130	2,904
2017	5,047	4,068	2,045
2018	4,446	4,006	2,007
2019	4,037	3,728	2,136
2020	4,722	4,433	2,356
2021	5,545	5,197	2,867

*This graph includes all the titles, unique titles and creators of children's books published between 2007 and 2021, irrespective of whether demographic information was available.

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