A central illustration features several hands of various colors (yellow, orange, purple, blue, pink, green) reaching upwards from the bottom edge of the page. The hands are layered, with some overlapping others, creating a sense of unity and diversity. The background is white, and the hands are set against a dark blue horizontal bar at the bottom of the illustration area.

# The BA Guide to **Creating Inclusive Bookshops**

A practical guide for booksellers

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## Action points

- Put yourself in the position of a BAME, LGBT+ or disabled customer and ask yourself how they would they feel coming into your bookshop. Would they see themselves represented on your shelves?
- Open up a conversation about diverse authors and titles with your customers, in person or by asking them to fill in a short survey. Ask them what they want to read, but be prepared to challenge their perceptions if necessary.
- Get involved with the BA, share your experiences with other booksellers, read widely and never under-estimate customers' interests in new insights, perspectives and voices – readers are curious.
- Check out ENEI ([www.enei.org.uk](http://www.enei.org.uk)), the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion – the BA is a member of ENEI and BA members have access to some ENEI resources and documents.

The BA is committed to helping booksellers create inclusive bookshops and this guide aims to provide some ideas and practical information, as well as profiles of successful inclusive booksellers to enable you to do that. It may encourage you to make some small changes to your practice, it may inspire you to transform your approach to bookselling, but either way we believe it will help you sell more books.

We've called this a guide to creating inclusive bookshops, but not everyone likes the word 'inclusive'. Some people prefer 'diverse', others use 'representative' and others talk about 'equality'. However, we've decided to use inclusive because, while absolutely acknowledging the importance and power of words and terminology, inclusive does have that sense of drawing people in, which is what all good bookshops do.

Few booksellers would argue with the assertion that bookshops should be welcoming spaces for all who love books and few would dispute the commercial advantage of enlarging their customer base, but what do we actually mean by inclusivity? We acknowledge that it's not necessarily an exhaustive list, but in simple terms what we mean is explicitly welcoming readers, authors and illustrators into our bookshops regardless of their ethnicity, race, heritage or culture, disability, sexuality, gender, gender identity, socio-economic background, age or faith.

Of course, some booksellers may feel that they are already inclusive. Some may feel that in their setting there really is no community beyond the one they already serve and that there is no demand for books other than the type they are already selling, but of course we can all improve and extend the work we are doing, so this guide has been written with the intention of flagging up key issues and pointing to some role models and resources which might help you.



## 2) What is inclusivity?

### Action points

- Plan a window display based on a particular aspect of diversity, but commit to including diverse authors in every window display. The same goes for table displays.
- Organise an author event with a writer from a diverse background who's completely different to the writers you usually host. It could be someone local who will help you tap into a different aspect of your local community.
- Choose a publisher of more diverse titles you've not worked with before and contact them – get their input on titles and possible events you could do together. If you're nervous, ask another bookseller for suggestions first.
- If you run a book club, decide to discuss at least one book by a diverse author. Or could you set up a book club that focuses on, say, novels by BAME writers or LGBT+ YA fiction?

*"For us being inclusive simply means not excluding anybody, not making anyone feel unwelcome."*

Paul Angel, Westbourne Bookshop



For Uli Lenart of Gay's the Word, a lesbian and gay bookshop in central London, "Inclusivity is about making room at your table for everyone and giving them the space to share their stories and contribute to the discussion... It's about empathy, expansiveness and fostering an environment that is welcoming to as many different types of people as possible."



There are probably as many definitions of 'inclusivity' as there are independent booksellers. Carrie Morris is co-owner of the generalist Booka Bookshop in Oswestry, Shropshire. The market town is, she says, "predominantly white", but she adds, "You can't always judge a place by what it looks like on the surface." There are Asian, Bulgarian and Polish communities, it has taken in Syrian refugees, and you hear French, German and Spanish spoken on the streets, not to mention Welsh, as the town is very close to the Welsh border. At its simplest level, being inclusive, she explains, is about being welcoming to everyone.



Paul Angel from the Westbourne Bookshop, a mainstream, family-owned independent in Westbourne, Dorset, expresses it like this: "For us being inclusive simply means not excluding anybody, not making anyone feel unwelcome. In some ways a bookshop is a 'safe space' and we're happy for people to come in and browse."



Tamara Macfarlane of Tales from Moon Lane and Moon Lane Books, children's bookshops in south London, is less comfortable with the word 'inclusivity' because, she says, "Inclusivity highlights 'otherness'. It makes an issue of difference, when it should be about normalising difference." Instead she talks about equality, asking why would you not value every child – and indeed every adult – equally?



## 3) The business case



### The BA Diversity & Inclusiveness Grants Project

In May 2018 the BA launched its Diversity & Inclusiveness Grants (DIG) Project to help booksellers deliver practical initiatives to improve inclusivity in their shops or communities.

The DIG Project is about making a tangible difference and the aim is to help bookshops extend their reach into under-represented and marginalised communities, stimulate creative thinking and build a bank of case studies to inspire others.

A total fund of £50,000 is available over two years (2018–19) and booksellers can apply for any amount between £250 and £1,500. Details of the successful projects were announced at the BA Conference in September 2018. Phase two grants will be announced early in 2019.

See [www.booksellers.org.uk/industryinfo/industryinfo/latestnews/BA-Launches-Innovative-Diversity-Grants](http://www.booksellers.org.uk/industryinfo/industryinfo/latestnews/BA-Launches-Innovative-Diversity-Grants)

### Action points

- Analyse your local community. Which interest groups or demographics are not current customers? Is there a particular ethnic minority outside your immediate catchment area which isn't served by a bookshop?
- Develop a strategy for reaching that group or groups. Are there local community centres or organisations that you could work with? If you have space, could you invite them in? Can you use social media to highlight stock that will appeal to them?
- Use your mailing list or newsletter to highlight some of the diverse titles you have in stock, and promote your events on social media and via Caboodle.

*“As a bookshop we obviously need to sell books to stay in business, but if we didn't have a purpose there wouldn't be a business to believe in.”*

Uli Lenart, *Gay's the Word*



Few would dispute that reading, books and bookshops have a significant cultural and social impact. Most booksellers probably accept that they have a social responsibility and those in the book and publishing trades certainly talk about the 'moral imperative' for inclusivity and diversity.

Uli Lenart notes that the LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender plus, with the plus indicating the inclusion of the whole spectrum of sexuality and gender) community comes from a history of marginalisation, oppression and discrimination, and that *Gay's the Word* was specifically set up to provide a space for people to access gay and lesbian books at a time when mainstream bookshops were reluctant to stock them. He says, "As a bookshop we obviously need to sell books to stay in business, but if we didn't have a purpose there wouldn't be a business to believe in."

So what is the business case for inclusivity? It's difficult to come by hard data, but some of the most compelling analysis available is that produced by Chris McCrudden, who is Director of Strategy & Media Planning at communications company Golin and has worked in the publishing industry (and whose first novel, *Battlestar Suburbia*, was published in 2018).

His day job is to identify an audience who are likely to be receptive to a client's product or service and then quantify the size of the business opportunity, so he decided to look at the size and characteristics of the market for diverse books. He started by defining the audience using Global Web Index, a commonly used planning tool, and crunched the data to see what insights it had to offer.

Chris' presentation is available online. It explains his methodology and reasoning, and is well worth reading in full, but in essence his conclusions were that: readers who are also interested in diversity represent nearly 12 million people in the UK; readers of diverse books are frequent book-buyers and more likely than average to have high disposable incomes; they do most of their reading in print, although are more likely than average to read ebooks; peer recommendations are key to their purchasing

decisions; social media is very important to them, but as a leisure activity not a marketing channel; and if they decide to express an opinion online it will often be about a book or a film.

This analysis is good news for booksellers, because it strongly suggests there is a substantial audience for more diverse titles as well as indicating that social media, which has the merit of being a relatively inexpensive communications channel, is initially a way of reaching that audience and building a dialogue with it. And of course there is the potential to be selling books to those for minority communities who are not currently book-lovers, if you are able to entice them into your shop with appropriate and carefully curated titles which appeal to them.

### Diversity in numbers: sexual identity

According to the Office for National Statistics, estimates from the Annual Population Survey (APS), which covers the whole of the UK, showed that in 2016 2.0% of the population identified themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB).

Around 2.7% of the population in London identified themselves as LGB, the highest proportion of any English region. The North West had the second highest proportion of the population identifying as LGB at 2.3%. In contrast, the East of England had the lowest proportion, with just 1.2% of the population identifying as LGB.



## 4) The publishing industry

### Action points

- In terms of broadening the range of titles you stock, ask publishers' reps for advice and find out from other booksellers which titles, fiction and non-fiction, by diverse authors are selling well for them.
- Put up a notice emphasising that you're happy to order any diverse titles people have heard about elsewhere or highlighting that, for instance, you can obtain dual language children's books (you may need to translate the notice into other languages).
- When you're researching online, explore what independent publishers and presses offer, including companies in the US, and when you're browsing catalogues or reviews actively seek out the unfamiliar and keep an open mind. Take a risk on something new!
- Reach out to publishers of diverse titles you see in other bookshops and see about stocking their books.

*"Publishing has a very, very strong role in what people see and hear and believe, and it's vital that if it's going to have that role that it's spreading a message of inclusivity."*

Tamara Macfarlane, Moon Lane Books

Booksellers can only sell what publishers publish and there is certainly a strong sense among some booksellers that the titles publishers publish are not inclusive or diverse enough. Moon Lane's Tamara Macfarlane explains why it matters: "The lack of diversity in publishing leads to a singular dominant voice in the cultural conversation. Publishing has a very, very strong role in what people see and hear and believe, and it's vital that if it's going to have that role that it's spreading a message of inclusivity. This narrow conversation is limiting empathy, understanding, integration and social mobility."

Of course, publishers might say they can only publish the authors and books that agents bring them, but leaving that aside, the publishing industry has recently taken steps to address its lack of diversity and in September 2017 the Publishers Association (PA), which represents the interests of UK publishers, announced a ten-point inclusivity action plan. This called on members to develop and embed an inclusivity policy; undertake an internal workforce audit; analyse job descriptions, recruitment strategies and interview practices for hidden biases; and instigate a mentoring scheme for staff from traditionally under-represented groups.

### Publishing industry workforce figures and inclusivity employment targets

	2017	By 2022
Women in senior leadership roles/ Women in executive board roles	49%/ 41%	50% combined
BAME employees	13%	15%

Source: Publishers Association



## 5) Race and ethnicity

With good faith and hard work this plan will eventually deliver. In the meantime, though, booksellers too have an important role to play. To actively put pressure on publishers to publish more diverse titles, Mairi Oliver from Lighthouse Bookshop, a radical bookshop in Edinburgh, writes to them regularly about what their lists are missing. If a publisher gives Sanchita Basu de Sarkar of The Children's Bookshop, a children's bookshop in north London, a proof copy to read, she makes a point of always feeding back to them on diversity issues, because even if it's too late for that particular book it raises awareness and there may be a chance to influence subsequent books in a series.

Vanessa La Rose at New Beacon Books in north London, which specialises in African and Caribbean literature, is nurturing self-publishing authors from her community by running courses for them, and Tamara Macfarlane of Moon Lane has set up Can't Put It Down, an online platform which supports independently published authors and small independent publishers. Tamara is also helping to address the lack of diversity in the UK publishing industry by using her professional contacts to broker publishing company work experience for Year 10 students from a diverse range of backgrounds.



### Action points

- Think about inclusion when you write shelf blurbs or reviews for your customers. You could make a point of picking a title with a theme relating to diversity or maybe you could highlight a particular diverse character or aspect of a book.
- Keep an eye on the authors and books which are shortlisted for and win awards and prizes designed to celebrate diversity, like the Jhalak Prize for British authors of colour.
- It can often be easier to build promotions around a particular national calendar event such as Black History Month (October), LGBT History Month (February) or Feminist Book Fortnight (June).

*"We prioritise stories over best-sellers and have books by black writers on the table not just because they've written on race."*

Mairi Oliver, Lighthouse Bookshop

The narrative is that publishers, and by extension booksellers, don't make books by BAME (black and minority ethnic) authors or authors from other communities available to readers because they don't perceive the audience for them is there – and people don't read those books because they aren't available. In fact, according to a report in *The Bookseller*, of the thousands of titles published in the UK in 2016 only a small minority – fewer than a hundred – were by British authors from a non-white background.

It's complex and there are multiple possible reasons for this state of affairs, but they include narrow preconceptions of what BAME writers should be writing about – they should only write about the experience of being black. Certainly,

Mairi Oliver from Edinburgh’s Lighthouse is well aware of this and takes action to counteract it: “We prioritise stories over best-sellers and have books by black writers on the table not just because they’ve written on race. Customers comment on it positively all the time.”

However, although Sanchita Basu de Sarkar of The Children’s Bookshop agrees that the UK publishing industry has begun to focus on diversity and is appointing more people of colour, she points out that it will be at least a couple of years, if not more, before booksellers and their customers see the results of these initiatives in terms of physical product. Indeed, Reflecting Realities, a recent survey of ethnic representation in UK children’s literature by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE), a charity working with all those involved in teaching literacy in primary schools, underlined just how far there is to go.



Yahya Thadha, a former bookseller who now runs wholesaler Plodit, comes from a BAME background himself and says that a sizeable proportion of his end-readers are

also BAME. He rejects the assertion that people from BAME backgrounds don’t read, highlighting that his company has been very successful selling books through Asian grocery stores, where they’re placed beside the till, “alongside the chapatis”.

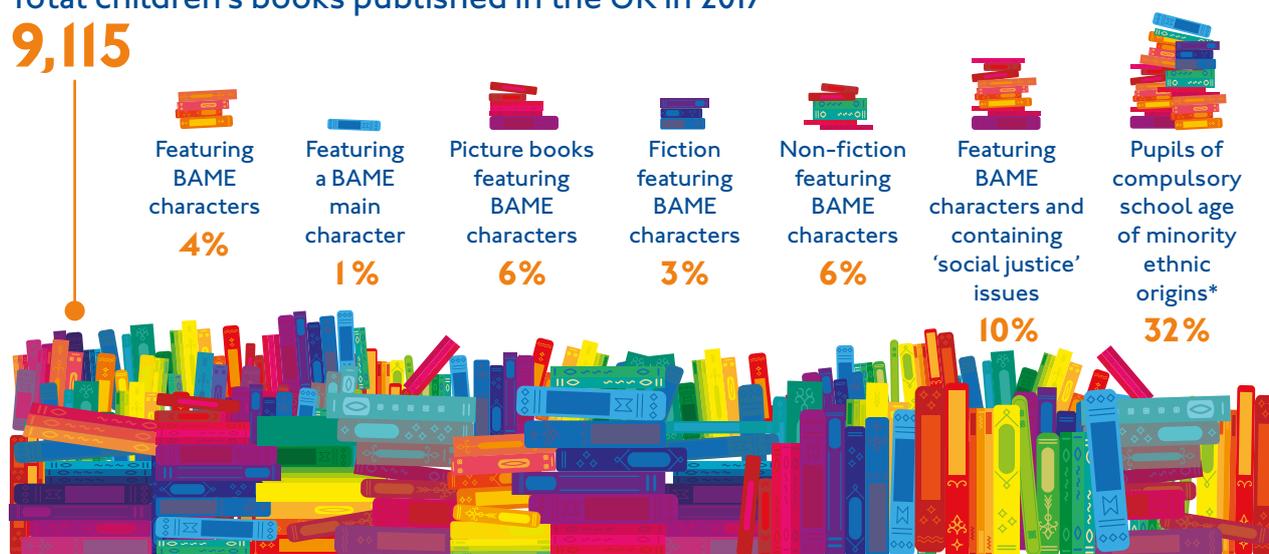
He adds that parents – and indeed grandparents – whose first language isn’t English understand the educational importance of literacy, but aren’t necessarily confident about reading to their children themselves. “Audio books are a way round that and are very popular with my customers. They play them in the car and listen as a family,” he explains.

He is a great advocate of public service – over the years he has served on numerous local and national bodies – as a way of building an understanding of other communities; what their needs are and how you can work with them. He is certainly very committed to his own community in Leicester – “I’ve travelled the world, but there’s nothing like it!” he says – and recommends supporting community events and causes, not just because that’s a good thing to do in itself, but because of the power of word of mouth.

## Diversity in children’s books

Total children’s books published in the UK in 2017

9,115



\*Department of Education figure for 2017

Source: Reflecting Realities: A Survey of Ethnic Representation within UK Children’s Literature, CLPE, 2018

## 6) Addressing disability

### Diversity in numbers: ethnicity

In 2011, when the last national census was taken, the population of England and Wales was 56.1 million, 8% of whom were Asian or Asian British and 3% of whom were black, African, Caribbean or black British.

According to the Scottish Government, the population of Scotland in 2011 was 5.3 million and the minority ethnic population was 4% or just over 200,00 people. Of that, the Asian population was the largest minority ethnic group, consisting of 3% or 141,000 people.

The population of Northern Ireland at the last census was 1.8 million and, according to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, in 2011 1.8 per cent or 32,400 people belonged to minority ethnic groups.

Urban areas are likely to have far more diverse populations than other areas, as is illustrated by the 2011 census figures for London, which show that 18% or 1.5 million of those living in the capital were Asian or Asian British; 13% or 1 million were black, African, Caribbean or black British; and 5% or 405,000 of dual or mixed heritage. The total population of London in 2011 was 8.2 million.

### Action points

- Brainstorm how you could make your shop more accessible to people with physical disabilities. Obviously maintaining display space is vital, but could you rejig the layout to make it easier for wheelchair users to move around? Is information presented at different eye levels?
- Turn a book by a diverse author or one that features a diverse cast of characters face-forward on the shelf.
- As you start to develop your inclusivity knowledge, make your own reference lists of books with, say, disabled characters or trans characters and keep them by the till, or create book lists online.

*“Children with physical disabilities can and do participate in our book clubs via Skype.”*

Natasha Radford, Chicken and Frog Bookshop

The Equality Act 2010 is the primary legislation governing discrimination in the UK. It's a substantial and complex document, and we're not going to attempt to cover it in any detail here, but in broad terms there is a legal requirement that businesses carry out reasonable adjustments to their premises to make them accessible for disabled shoppers. However, according to the disability charity Scope, three-quarters of disabled people and their families have left a shop because it didn't cater for them properly.



That's a lot of custom to turn away. In fact, Scope, the national disability charity, estimates that high-street businesses miss out on a share of £60 million a day because they're not accessible. Disabled people rate good accessibility and friendly and helpful staff as the most important factors when shopping, issues include a lack of ramps and hearing loops, and what are described as staff 'attitudinal problems'.

Like most independent bookshops, the premises of the Westbourne Bookshop in Dorset are fairly small, but the entrances are on the level and accessible to customers who have difficulty walking, use sticks or a frame, and wheelchair users. Paul Angel from Westbourne explains, "The layout of the shop is designed so that it's accessible. Of course, there are display tables, but they can be moved. It's basically about being aware and knowing that you can't narrow off spaces."



He points out that if you feel you only have a 'minority' of customers with disabilities, by making your shop accessible for them you'll not only find your customer base expands, but you'll automatically make your premises more accessible for customers with buggies or a child under each arm as well. Having a portable card machine to make purchasing easier for those who can't reach the counter and adjusting the height of displays are also innovations you might consider.

Says Natasha Radford of Chicken and Frog Bookshop in Brentwood, Essex, "We're in an old building with steps at the front and although we've installed a handrail, we can't install a slope. Sadly, this means we're unable to accommodate children in wheelchairs. However, children with physical disabilities can and do participate in our book clubs via Skype."



Under the Equality Act 2010, dyslexia is defined as a disability and according to the British Dyslexia Association, a charity which campaigns to enable dyslexic people to reach their full potential, 10% of the UK population are dyslexic. Natasha explains if you're one of those people, a bookshop can be a particularly scary place: "We try to be a welcoming space and we also hold regular dyslexia awareness days for families. I'm not a dyslexia expert, but we signpost people to experts, provide information from dyslexia organisations, set up dyslexia software for children to try and show them dyslexia-friendly books. We sometimes have visits from dyslexic authors to highlight that it doesn't have to be a barrier."



For those who are partially sighted, including the elderly, the Large Print Bookshop ([www.largeprintbookshop.co.uk](http://www.largeprintbookshop.co.uk)) has 25,000 titles available on its website, the majority of which are printed in 16 point, which is

the standard for large print. The Large Print Bookshop also publishes its own large print list and booksellers can order via Rooster Books. Holding large print books in stock can be problematic, but if you're willing to order them in on request, use local networks and organisations to make sure potential customers who are partially sighted know that. Again, audio books can be a way for those who are unable to read conventionally to access books and the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) is also a good source of information ([www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)).

According to the National Autistic Society, a charity which provides information and support for autistic people, around 700,000 people in the UK are on the autism spectrum and may therefore be overwhelmed by the sensory experience of visiting a retail outlet like a bookshop. On the first Saturday of every month, Seven Stories, the national centre for children's books, which is in Newcastle, opens an hour early so that visitors on the autism spectrum and their families can explore the exhibitions and browse in the bookshop before it becomes crowded.



Mairi Oliver from Lighthouse Bookshop in Edinburgh emphasises that it's key to remember people have disabilities that are both visible and invisible. A conversation with a regular customer led to the members of the customer's disability group coming into the store to talk about the types of books they wanted to read, which resulted in a list of recommended titles and how to obtain them. This was one way of fulfilling what Mairi sees as an important aspect of the independent bookseller's role: "To make sure people with disabilities are visible."

### Diversity in numbers: disability

In 2012, the Government's Office for Disability Issues estimated that there were 11.6 million disabled people in England, Scotland and Wales, equivalent to 18% of the UK population, which was then 65.5 million. Of these, 5.7 million were adults of working age, 5.1 million were over state pension age and 0.8 million were children. This estimate covered the number of people with a longstanding illness, disability or infirmity, who had a significant difficulty with day-to-day activities.

In Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency reported that in the 2011 census 21% of the 1.8 million population had a long-term health problem or disability which limited their day-to-day activities.



## 7) Socio-economic disadvantage

### Action points

- Review the affordability of your events. Could you offer any free events or activities to draw in a different audience?
- Alongside books, are there any distinctive products you could sell that would draw customers in and signal that you value diversity?
- Approach a local paper or website about reviewing books to appeal to a part of the community you'd like to encourage to visit your bookshop.
- Link with your local libraries to demonstrate you are there for the whole community – if you appear at library events, you might introduce your bookshop to library users, and you could build an ongoing relationship with the librarian for events

*“if you're going to target the most marginalised communities sometimes you have to take a risk on pricing.”* Yahya Thadha, Plodit

For customers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds price is obviously a very sensitive issue and this can be problematic for bookshops, which are operating on thin margins much of the time and can find it hard to offer discounts. Yahya Thadha of Plodit believes the perception of bookshops as the preserve of the middle classes needs to change and getting the pricing right is key to that. “Books need to be affordable,” he says, “and if you're going to target the most marginalised communities sometimes you have to take a risk on pricing.” This means that supermarkets can often be very useful allies for traditional bookshops, introducing readers to books who might be moved to come to your shop for their next read.

And, as Uli Lenart of Gay's the Word points out, “Some publishers price books exorbitantly on what they perceive to be ‘minority interest’ topics, with ambitions no broader than the academic library market. This severely restricts their readership, saddens me as a bookseller and would infuriate me if I were an author who had devoted years to producing work which was then priced too expensively for many people to be able to access.”

John Newman of the Newham Bookshop, a not-for-profit community bookshop in east London, acknowledges that it's vital to be price-conscious and recommends the Quick Reads series of books by bestselling authors and celebrities, as does Paul Angel of the Westbourne Bookshop. Quick Reads are very accessible in terms of cost and can be helpful for drawing less affluent customers into a store. Run by the Reading Agency, the charity which aims to inspire more people to read more, Quick Reads was recently threatened with closure, but was saved by author Jo-Jo Moyes who provided another three years of funding.

In terms of reaching out to parts of the community which don't perhaps traditionally frequent bookshops, working with schools is very important for Carrie Morris at Booka. She describes World Book Day as a great opportunity to host children who might not otherwise have visited a bookshop and one local school gives books tokens as a reward for 100% attendance. As a result, says Carrie, children they've never seen before come into the shop – and of course those children bring their parents.

Booka also offers a wide-ranging events programme which includes high-profile literary names, but also less well-known authors with appeal to other demographics. Talks and signings by sporting celebrities attract a lot of people who aren't natural bookshop customers. Former professional racing drivers Mark Webber and Damon Hill, and retired superbike racer Carl Fogarty, have all brought in different audiences who come to see their heroes and leave with a book.

## Children's book ownership and literacy

Children who receive free school meals, boys of all ages and teenagers are **most** likely to have



no books of their own at home



Children who own a book are **four times less likely**

to read **below** the level expected for their age



**One in 11**

children and young people do **not** have a book of their own at home



**One in 8**

children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds do **not** have a book of their own at home



Source: Annual Literacy Survey, National Literacy Trust, 2017

## 8) How to be an inclusive employer

### Action points

- If you're in a position to recruit new staff, consider which voices aren't represented in your current team and work out how you can find them. Is there a regular customer whom you might approach?
- Talk to your staff about inclusivity and making your bookshop welcoming to all.
- Are there any existing community events which celebrate diversity that you can get involved with, either by hosting an event or running a pop-up bookshop? You might meet someone you might want to employ in the future.
- Check out ENEI ([www.enei.org](http://www.enei.org)), the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion – the BA is a member of ENEI and booksellers can use some of their materials.

*"Our staff team is strengthened by having many different voices."* Mairi Oliver, Lighthouse Bookshop



Jane Anger of Five Leaves Bookshop in Nottingham is very direct about how to be an inclusive employer. She says, "Pay the living wage." She points out that low pay is one of the obstacles to diversity, and that the arts and retail are both low-paid sectors. "If you're a first-generation or even second-generation immigrant you're not going to go for a low-paid job unless you have to, but Five Leaves pays a living wage and has done from the beginning."

She also says that in the same way that publishers need to go out and seek diverse submissions, bookshops need to seek diverse staff. Mairi Oliver of Edinburgh's Lighthouse agrees: "Our staff team is strengthened by having many different voices. We each notice our own absences, so if you have a team that's all the same, you're not spotting the gaps." Even if you're in a city it can require a conscious effort to find those different voices, though. Lighthouse receives three or four CVs a day, and less than a third are from women, with very few from people of colour, but the work that goes into recruitment is worth it, because, says Mairi, "Regular customers can see themselves reflected in our team."

Yahya Thadha is committed to employing local people, but many aren't fluent in English. However, specially developed visually-led software means Plodit employees aren't reliant on their ability to read English – they use the covers rather than titles to recognise stock. Small adaptations like this, he says, not only aid productivity, but make staff feel welcome and valued.

Of course, a lot of bookshops have a very small number of long-standing staff, often family members, and the need to employ new staff rarely if-ever arises. You could, though, consider looking for work experience students beyond your normal cohort or look at offering volunteer hours to those who might be interested if that looks like a way to attract new candidates. However, when it does there are real business benefits to making a strategic appointment that improves the diversity of the team. Gay's the Word was experiencing an influx of younger customers and was in a position to not only respond to, but invest in and nurture, those customers by employing someone with the right specialist knowledge.



Says Uli Lenart, “After decades of functioning with a skeleton crew just to stay afloat financially, we’ve just taken on a new and unnervingly brilliant part-time member of staff, Dr Erica Gillingham. Erica recently completed her PhD in lesbian love stories in young adult literature and graphic memoirs. Needless to say, our YA and graphic novel sections, as well as countless other areas of the bookshop, have been richly improved as a result.”

## Diversity in numbers: religion

In the 2011 census, Christianity was the largest religion in England and Wales, with 59% of the population describing themselves as Christians. Muslims were the next biggest religious group at just under 5%, but 25% stated they had no religion at all.

In terms of the other principal religious groups, 1.5% identified themselves as Hindu, 0.8% as Sikh, 0.5% as Jewish and 0.4% as Buddhist. The same percentage, 0.4%, identified with religions which didn’t fall into any of the main religious categories, the most common being Pagan and Spiritualist.

In Scotland, the 2011 census found 54% of the population were Christian, 1.4% were Muslim and 37% had no religion at all, while in Northern Ireland 73% were Christian, 0.8% belonged to other religions and 17% had or gave no religion.



## 9) Sourcing, stock and shelving

### Action points

- Audit your current stock for diversity. Look at it in terms of both authors from diverse backgrounds and content, so with fiction think about where the diverse characters are and whether they're protagonists or subsidiary characters. This will help you identify the gaps in your stock.
- Set yourself targets for ordering stock from a more diverse range of authors. It's fine to start with just a few titles, but aim to steadily increase that over time. Some booksellers set themselves quotas.
- Follow other bookshops and organisations which promote diversity on Twitter. This can be a good source of ideas for stock and by retweeting you send out a message about your values to potential customers.

*"Don't just stop at names you're familiar with, but evaluate the possibilities of everything."*

Uli Lenart, *Gay's the Word*

In discussions about children's publishers which are strong on inclusivity the same names tend to crop up time and time again. Identifying diverse children's books is also made easier because organisations such as BookTrust ([booktrust.org.uk](http://booktrust.org.uk)) and the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education ([clpe.org.uk](http://clpe.org.uk)) produce lists of recommended titles. When it comes to the adult market, though, it's not necessarily so straightforward and that's where the Internet is your friend.

You could start with the publishers or titles mentioned in passing throughout this guide or those specifically recommended by bookseller colleagues and independent publishers are likely to be a good bet. Twitter is a particularly

good source of leads and if you're looking for YA novels in particular, Sanchita Basu de Sarkar suggests searching on #OwnVoices.

Uli from *Gay's the Word* suggests it's not so much where you look, but how you look. He advises, "When you browse the book review sections of newspapers or leaf your way through *The Bookseller* and publishing catalogues don't just stop at names you're familiar with, but evaluate the possibilities of everything."

As in most stores, at *The Children's Bookshop* inclusive fiction is shelved with other fiction. "It's probably best to mix it up," says Sanchita, "but as a bookseller you know your own stock and how to make it accessible," although she does have shelf on 'sensitive' subjects, such as family breakdown and explaining disability, which is near the till, so that staff can keep an eye on young customers and give support if it's needed.

However, John Newman of the *Newham Bookshop*, which serves a diverse community in east London says, "We've had lots of debates over the years about specialist versus general sections. We were going to get rid of our multi-ethnic section, but we haven't due to customer demand... We did eliminate a women's section, but we've now actually reintroduced a feminist section. That makes sense to me at the moment. It's all about being responsive to our customers."

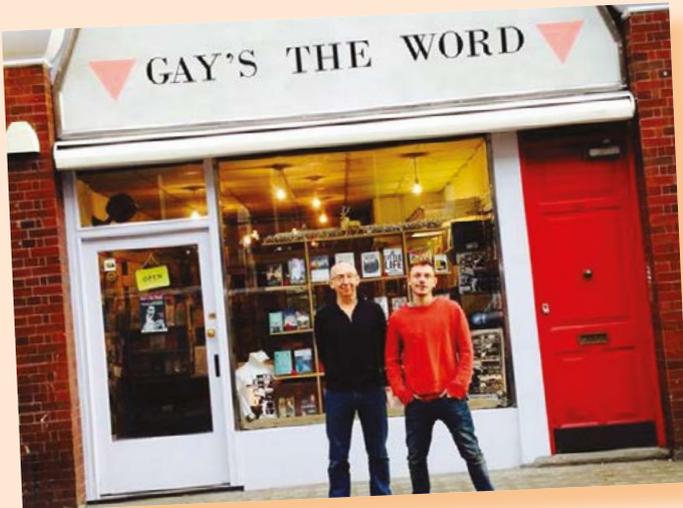
Jane Anger from *Five Leaves* acknowledges the problem and points out that intersectionality means that one title could quite logically be shelved in two or more different places. She says, "Yes, the bookseller's dilemma is always which section does it go in – political biographies are a particularly tricky one for us – but we ask just ourselves which section would it sell from."



## 10) Learning from each other

Booksellers often learn from each other more than from anyone else, so in that spirit we have an extensive list of bookseller interviews, with the intention that they might act as role models and inspiration for you. If you'd like to contact any of the booksellers, check them out on Twitter or email [meryl.halls@booksellers.org.uk](mailto:meryl.halls@booksellers.org.uk) to be put in touch.

### Gay's the Word, London @gaystheword



#### Recommended by Uli Lenart, Gay's the Word

"In terms of publishers, Picador is a personal favourite, as are Granta and Faber. I also love Sort Of Books, particularly for the way they publish Tove Jansson's adult writing. For queer representation look at what Jessica Kingsley, Inkandescent, Team Angelica and Arsenal Pulp Press are doing.

"I think passionate bookselling occurs in all scales and types of bookshop. When we recommend something in Gay's the Word it's because we've read and loved it, and sense that those qualities that beguiled us about it will appeal to you too. We've long been champions of the brilliant Will Eaves, Neil Bartlett and Olivia Laing, for example and, a more recent discovery, Chloe Caldwell for her novella, *Women*. I could hand-sell Ali Smith from dawn till dusk."

*"I understand that bookshops can be limited by space, time and resources, but there is a joy in trying new things and seeing them work."* Uli Lenart, Gay's the Word

The fortunes of Gay's the Word were certainly reinvigorated by featuring in *Pride*, the 2014 film that told the story of the Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners campaign group, which was based at the bookshop in the mid-1980s. Customers visit from near and far and, says manager Uli Lenart, "We have almost become a site of queer pilgrimage for people from all over the world."

There are, he adds, regular instances of customers, many of whom hail from highly repressive cultures and backgrounds, who break down in tears when they first step inside the central London bookshop, moved by the fact that the place they are standing in even exists; that it has stood there, nurturing a community, for almost 40 years. "I hear the words 'I wish we had something like this where I'm from' on a daily basis," he says.

However, although Uli appreciates that many bookshops don't have a specialism and don't end up starring in a movie, he believes there are actions every bookseller can take to improve the visibility of their businesses: "I've been writing book reviews for the LGBT+ press for perhaps more years than I'd like to count, and that has certainly had a positive effect in terms of getting the bookshop name out there. That's something any bookseller can approach their local paper about doing." He also points out that social media is a direct and effective way of reaching new customers.



Over time, one of the ways in which Gay's the Word has expanded its customer base is by extending its stock into new areas, for example sourcing as many well-written books on bisexuality as possible. "It's something of an invisible orientation in the sense that there are fewer books published expressly on that subject, as opposed to gay and lesbian identities," explains Uli. "It's the same thing with asexuality and it's been fantastic to see our trans section grow and grow over recent years. I understand that bookshops can be limited by space, time and resources, but there is a joy in trying new things and seeing them work." Even if you have to go out of your way to, say, open a direct account to source a book, if having it in stock will make someone feel included when they venture into your premises, Uli believes it's worth it.

He recommends the simple but revealing exercise of getting out from behind your till and looking at your shop afresh, from the perspective of a customer, but suggests you adapt it and try to see your business from the point of view of a person from a different social or cultural background, or a wheelchair user. What might their experience of your establishment be like? Would they find your store accessible? Would they see themselves represented in a way that makes them feel welcome? And would they feel your bookshop is a place to discover literature that speaks to them?

So what advice would Uli give to more mainstream bookshops who want to be more inclusive? "Trust your instincts and treat people with empathy." To develop your stock he suggests talking to publishers and asking booksellers in other shops what's selling well through them. He concludes, "Cater more dynamically to a diversity of customers and you'll be more likely not only to expand your customer base but expand the minds and range of ideas delighting your existing ones. And if it doesn't work, return the books. You don't have much to lose. Publishers will support your endeavours to experiment and at least you'll be seen as being receptive to innovation."

## New Beacon Books, London @newbeaconbooks

*"If you get people into the shop, once they're here they'll spend... There is an audience out there. You just have to be bold."*

Vanessa La Rose, New Beacon Books



New Beacon Books in north London has a long and illustrious history. When John La Rose arrived from Trinidad in the early 1960s there was nowhere the black community could go for literature or more practical information, so in 1966 he and his partner, Sarah White, founded New Beacon Books. It was the UK's first specialist black bookshop and many ground-breaking political and social projects began there, including the Black Book Fair.

Fast-forward 50 years and the bookselling landscape had undergone some seismic changes. By 2016 the viability of the store was in doubt and permanent closure was a distinct possibility. However, an imaginative crowd-funding campaign raised £12,500 to reconfigure the shop space, upgrade the IT system and build a website. After a refit, the shop reopened in early 2017.

Vanessa La Rose, who is married to John La Rose's grandson and was one of the driving forces behind the shop's rebirth, explains that

although the radical texts are still on the shelves, the stock has been refocused and expanded to include sections you'd find in most bookshops. "You have to look at the community and work out what kind of books people want... We do stock James Baldwin and Maya Angelou, but also lots of other writers and types of book."

*Caribbean Vegan* by Taymer Mason, for instance, has been a big seller and Mark Matara's *Black London* has been popular. A lot of the stock does come from US publishers, because the American publishing industry's output tends to be more diverse than its UK counterpart, but the *Black History Activity Books*, written by Andrew Lindo, published in the UK and designed to educate children about major black figures while entertaining them with puzzles, have sold well and the store also stocks British author Mark Lemon's picture books featuring Otis and Thea, who are mixed race, like his own children.

"We're also open to stocking new writers, including self-published authors," explains Vanessa, although she's adamant that, "if they're not up to standard we won't take them." To help nurture new writers from its communities, particularly those who don't necessarily know how to go about publishing a book, the shop has started running masterclasses.

To date, these have featured big publishing industry names such as the legendary Margaret Busby, founder of Allison & Busby. Courttia Newland tutored a session on creative writing and Verna Wilkins, founder of children's publisher Tamarind, taught a class on writing for children. There are only 12 places available for each course and they have proved extremely popular.

When opportunities are offered, New Beacon Books embraces them. For the last couple of years it has run a very successful bookstall at the British Library's Africa Writes event, it curated a collection of books with non-white characters for a Tate Modern educational project and took part in Feminist Book Fortnight, initiated by fellow independent Five Leaves. However, Vanessa argues that to expand your customer base you need to make your own opportunities

too, so, rather less predictably, New Beacon also exhibited at this year's Afro Hair and Beauty Live Show.

She is well aware that bookselling is tough: "A book isn't like a pint of milk. People don't buy a book a day, but there are also other ways to generate income." To this end the shop hosts a regular African and Caribbean mini-market, and stocks African print wrapping paper and the Nana range of dolls, which are inspired by powerful African women and produced in the UK by MOBO Award-winning Afrobeats star, Fuse ODG. Vanessa's philosophy is, "If you get people into the shop, once they're here they'll spend... There is an audience out there. You just have to be bold."

## The Children's Bookshop, Muswell Hill @childrensbkshop



*"We challenge people's perceptions and make them conscious that there are as many different perspectives as there are people,"* Sanchita Basu de Sarkar,  
The Children's Bookshop



**Recommended by Sanchita Basu de Sarkar,  
The Children's Bookshop**

I love the exquisite editions of children's books produced by Indian publisher, Tara Books, and Walker's *Classic Fairy Tales* illustrated by Jane Ray, which shows that princesses don't have to dress in pink and be blonde-haired and blue-eyed – and white. Other children's publishers I like are Lantana, which almost exclusively publishes BAME authors from the UK and around the world; Cassava Republic, which specialises in African writing; and Tiny Owl, which has a very diverse range of books, including some beautiful picture books from Iranian authors and illustrators. I'm keeping my eye on what new publisher Knights Of does, too.

"Not all children are white," says Sanchita Basu de Sarkar of The Children's Bookshop in Muswell Hill, north London. "It's important that what children read relates to the realities they see around them, so we make an effort to stock books that reflect who our customers are." She argues that if the only books available to them are about white children, some children will stop reading or won't even start in the first place.

"People really appreciate the diversity of our stock, but that all comes out of the conversations we have with customers. We challenge people's perceptions and make them conscious that there are as many different perspectives as there are people," says Sanchita. She points out that although *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* and *For Her* have been big sellers, they're given to girls, when they need to be given to boys as well, and that's where a conversation with a member of staff comes in. "Parents can make the assumption that pink books are for girls not boys and that can happen with race as well," she adds.

She feels that in the last few years publishers have begun to offer more diverse lists and, for example, there are now more picture books available which feature characters of colour. However, there are still numerous gaps in the market: "For instance, there are so many 'silly romances', but where are all the non-binary characters? Young adults are longing for diverse books."

And while gender and race tend to be the most visible signs of inclusivity, Sanchita also looks out for books with disabilities: "In picture books you can see very easily where the opportunity was there and an author could have made a choice to have a character with a disability, so I prioritise books that do that and don't fall into lazy stereotypes." There is always the crucial caveat, though, that the writing and the illustrations have to be good.

Even for Sanchita, though, it can be a challenge when a school asks her to put together a box of 30 inclusive picture books for a nursery class or a collection of diverse fiction for 10- and 11-year-olds. She does it by drawing on the expertise of her staff, all of whom have different specialisms due to who they are or the knowledge they've consciously developed.

Being able to offer this type of service sets The Children's Bookshop apart from most of the standard school suppliers and helps secure education custom in the future. She adds, "Schools also want events that are diverse, to inspire their BAME kids – if you're a child of colour it's really important to see a writer of colour in front of you."

Her advice to other booksellers is, "Embrace that and show it is part of your world, too, but if you're nervous, because being more inclusive isn't something you've done before, just throw yourself into it, like you do with health and safety. You have to make it part of your daily practice and when it becomes part of your daily practice it isn't frightening anymore."



According to the *Guardian*, in 2015 a meagre 1 to 2% of children's fiction available in the UK was in translation. That figure may have crept up, but Sanchita nonetheless champions children's fiction in translation, because, again, she wants children to be exposed to as wide a range of books as possible. She mentions Erich Kästner's *Emil and the Detectives*, Tove Jansson's *Moomins* and the novels of Cornelia Funke, but also highlights lesser known authors such as Tonke Dragt, who wrote the Dutch children's classic *The Letter for the King*, published in English by Pushkin, and singles out Gecko Press, because 85% of the titles it publishes are translations.

Sanchita concludes, "You have to give these books shelf space and give readers the opportunity to discover them. People come to us for the excitement of physical books and for something different. Independent bookshops are at their best when they're reflecting a variety of views – that's how you assemble the best possible bookshop – and if you don't diversify, you're wilfully ignoring customers."



## Booka Bookshop, Oswestry @BookaBookshop

*"It's a very brave bookseller who is insular."* Carrie Morris, Booka Bookshop

"We're not an activist bookshop. We haven't got a political agenda. We're a general bookshop with a strong children's section," says Carrie Morris, co-owner of Booka in Oswestry, Shropshire. "Being welcoming to everyone is our whole ethos. We provide a place where you'll find a book and an environment where you'll feel comfortable. We want people to read for pleasure and we want to make people into readers for life."

Oswestry is a rural market town with a population of just under 20,000, but it serves a wider catchment area of around 45,000 people, including those who are just passing through for one reason or another. There is a small WHSmith in the town, as well as competition from the usual online retailers, and Carrie is constantly trying to expand her customer base and reach new audiences by offering fresh perspectives which not only reflect aspects of the local community, but also open that community up to the rest of the world.

She seeks out stock from smaller, less obvious publishers and by tapping into the work of the Welsh Book Council, a government-backed organisation which promotes reading and literacy in Wales, is experimenting with dual language





English/Welsh titles, particularly children's books (which only makes sense given Oswestry's location just a few miles from the border with Wales).

"We have eight members of staff and they all read widely and in different areas, but we're self-auditing all the time," she says. The aim is to present customers with a range of books featuring a range of different characters from a range of different authors but, she emphasises, the product itself is vitally important. "As booksellers we've actually got to like the books. They've got to earn their place on the shelves."

Booka runs four book clubs for adults and seven book clubs for children and young people. Staff pick the titles for the latter clubs and ensure there is that range and diversity, although Carrie is aware that parents can be quite "sensitive" about, for example, some of the themes currently prevalent in YA fiction – she specifically references sexuality, mental health and disability. However, in the same way as when young people or their parents ask for advice on what to read, staff always respond with sensitivity themselves. "We treat every interaction as it happens," she explains. That, after all, is the essence of responsive customer service.

In terms of advice to colleagues on promoting inclusivity, Carrie says, "You've got to get out of the four walls of your shop. Attending the annual BA conference, for example, is a huge opportunity to look at what you're doing." She also finds that national campaigns can provide a very useful focus and mentions Empathy Day, first piloted in June 2017 and now an annual event centred on books as a tool for challenging prejudice and building connections.

"It's a very brave bookseller who is insular," concludes Carrie, but despite her firm commitment to inclusivity, she acknowledges that it can be challenging and is clear that, "We're not a library, we're a commercial business. We showcase a range of different books which give people different perspectives, but the demand does have to be there and it can be a difficult balance."



## Chicken and Frog Bookshop @chickenandfrog

Recommended by Natasha Radford,  
Chicken and Frog Bookshop

"Our go-to publishers are Badger Publishing, whose titles are always accessible, or Barrington Stoke, which publishes books for children with dyslexia, or Mantra Lingua, which publishes dual language versions of, say, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, in English and Arabic, Bengali, Gujarati, Panjabi, Urdu, Somali – what in British publishing are called 'minority' languages, even though they're spoken by large numbers of people throughout the world!"

*"Word of mouth is so important and some communities are quite tight-knit, which means one family might recommend the bookshop to another."*

Natasha Radford, Chicken and Frog Bookshop

Natasha Radford, who, with her husband Jim, runs Chicken and Frog, a children's bookshop in Brentwood, Essex, knows her community well: "Although it's still predominantly white and middle class, Brentwood is changing and becoming more diverse. Families are increasingly being relocated here and there are growing pockets of other groups. Yes, it's essentially a pretty affluent place, but our customers aren't particularly affluent. Hardbacks don't do well for us, for instance, because our customers will always wait for the paperback."

Natasha and Jim also do all they can to make sure Chicken and Frog is right at the heart of that community. The shop runs free rhythm and rhyme activities – Natasha takes the mix of families these attract as a sign that they’re doing something right – and it offers small-group lessons in its tuition centre. These could be booster classes or confidence-building sessions. There are regular handwriting classes, but Natasha makes it fun by getting out the Play-Doh and shaving foam. As an ex-teacher who used to teach in the London borough of Newham she knows what she’s doing, but she points out that you don’t need a teaching qualification to run a book club.

The classes only cost £5 and ticket prices for events are kept as low as possible, with many costing nothing to attend. Chicken and Frog run the town’s annual children’s literary festival, but charge just £3 for most author sessions and, again, they always ensure that some are free. “We have a policy of being affordable in response to our community,” says Natasha, “so over the years we’ve refined our charging model and learned to be adaptable.”

Natasha and Jim have also shown their adaptability by, when faced with a 50% surprise rent rise, opening a café in a corner of the shop. They didn’t want it to feel like a café with a few books, but have managed to remodel without losing any space for stock, although sadly the much-cherished Elmer sofa had to go. They sell drinks and cakes, but to show everyone one is welcome and ensure they’re inclusive they’ve considered all the details, so the marshmallows are vegetarian for Muslim families, there is soya milk for vegan families, and the coffee and hot chocolate pods are fully recyclable for, well, the planet. The affordable pricing policy applies to the café, too, so a gluten-free brownie is just £1.50, as is a cup of tea, and a coffee is £2. So far the café has had a positive impact and book sales are up.

Brentwood is, of course, a competitive retail environment. There’s a WHSmiths, a Sainsbury’s which stocks all the best-sellers and a Waterstones, which Chicken and Frog has a good, mutually supportive relationship with. Natasha says, “Like any independent business,

we can’t compete price-wise, and we got a lot of flak when we made the decision not to stock David Walliams’ books at all, but we’re genuinely interested in our customers.

“A Polish woman who’s married to an Urdu speaker recently came in wanting something in Urdu so her partner could read with her child. We listen to what customers want and are always happy to order dual language books. If you offer that kind of service, customers will continue to buy from you. Word of mouth is so important and some communities are quite tight-knit, which means one family might recommend the bookshop to another. You do have to know your community and be prepared to try things to see what will and won’t work, but we’re very lucky to be part of this community.”

## Five Leaves Bookshop @FiveLeavesBooks

Recommended by Jane Anger,  
Five Leaves Bookshop

“We like the reprint house Persephone, political publishers including Verso and Freedom, poetry publishers such as Carcanet and Bloodaxe, translation houses including Pierene and Pushkin Press, and the landscape publisher Little Toller. Five Leaves Bookshop stock is orientated towards independent presses, but we have a good representation of major publishing houses too. There is no conflict in this – a good book is a good book, regardless of the publisher.”

*“Talk to publishers’ reps about what they have, take risks on books, get behind a book and show people something they haven’t come across before.”*

Jane Anger, Five Leaves Bookshop

In 2018, Five Leaves Bookshop in Nottingham became the first radical bookshop to win the Independent Bookshop of the Year



Award at the British Book Awards. The judges commended its distinct identity, which stems from its emphasis on political and social issues, and its passion for diversity.



The shop, which grew out of a publishing operation and opened in 2013, has a strong local customer base, but also draws customers from across the East Midlands, including Derby and Leicester. When Labour's Shadow Attorney General, Shami Chakrabarti, came to speak, the event was co-promoted by the Labour Party and people came from as far away as Lincolnshire, but there are also loyal customers who visit on the couple of occasions a year when they're in Nottingham.

Events are very much at the centre of what Five Leaves does and last year around 6,000 people attended its substantial programme. In fact, it runs upwards of 80 events annually, sometimes two per night. There is a core team of five, including one full-timer, so it draws on a pool of regulars to help staff these. The events are so successful, explains the bookshop's Jane Anger, because, "People are curious. People want to explore different literature and discuss different ideas and, across the generations, we make opportunities for them to do that."

The events are planned thematically, which means the shop doesn't necessarily take authors who are on tour as a matter of course. Jane is

clear that publishers and publicists need to be much more willing to send a range of authors to bookshops outside London, Edinburgh, Manchester, Bristol and the major literary festivals. "They need to take a punt on events in smaller bookshops," she says, "and the whole industry needs to be open to a wider range of books and authors."

Taking a punt is something Five Leaves does well. In 2018, it launched Feminist Book Fortnight, which took place at the end of June. Aware that sales of feminist books have been rising for the last couple of years, the shop held a one-day seminar on feminist publishing and the idea of the fortnight came out of that, as a way of keeping the conversation going.

Five Leaves created the logo, the poster and the website for the initiative so that it was easy for other bookshops to get involved. Thirty signed up as soon as the fortnight was announced and a varied programme of talks and discussions based around feminist books took place across the UK. "It's easier to broaden your stock if you've got something to hang it on," she says.

Five Leaves' own stock ranges from LGBT to poetry and mind/body to city planning as well as diverse children's books – what Jane characterises as "different voices in every sense" – and when it comes to developing your stock, her advice is, "Talk to publishers' reps about what they have, take risks on books, get behind a book and show people something they haven't come across before."

Other bookshops might not have taken Reni Eddo-Lodge's *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* when it was first published, but it sold well in hardback for Five Leaves and became a national bestseller in paperback, which, Jane says, suggests it's worth taking a risk and that there is an audience for more diverse books. To other bookshops she would say, "Be brave and try something different."



## Lighthouse Bookshop @Lighthousebks

*"I don't see it as losing or removing things, but as including other things and that makes the range of books far more exciting."* Mairi Oliver,  
Lighthouse Bookshop

"We are a left-leaning, political bookshop and we exist because we want the world to be a better place. If we can't walk the walk, what's the point?" That's Mairi Oliver from Lighthouse Bookshop in Edinburgh, who is very clear about her approach to bookselling. She continues, "We live in multi-cultural Britain, so we actively reflect that diversity."



To ensure your stock is diverse, Mairi advises doing an audit to make yourself aware of what you're ordering. When you set up a display, consciously ask yourself the question 'Is everyone looking back at me a white man?' If you decide to focus on, say, nature-writing, make sure you include at least one writer of colour in that selection and pull out the book that you perhaps wouldn't normally highlight.

She says, "What's on our shelves reflects the world outside our door. If half the world are women, then half the books on our shelves should be by women. If 15% of the population are BAME, then 15% of the books in our displays should be by BAME authors. The same goes for LGBTQ authors. It's old-fashioned quotas, but it works."

She accepts that if you ensure 50% of the books on your shelves are by women writers it can feel like a lot, but points out that's only in comparison to what people are used to. She also acknowledges that, because she and her staff go out of their way to make room for other titles, Lighthouse's shelves do look different, but she regards that as positive differentiator. She says, "I don't see it as losing or removing things, but as including other things and that makes the range of books far more exciting. People aren't seeing what they see a lot of elsewhere, because the stock is more interesting."

However, she also takes issue with the way books by women writers are often packaged – with pastel colours and roses on the cover. She comments, "If it's got a supermarket jacket, customers will dismiss it as frivolous. I often say to publishers' reps, 'I respect my customers too much to give them this and it's a shame.'" She has been known to append orange stickers with the legend 'Don't judge this book by its cover' to some titles.

"Most publishers' lists are still full of white men, but we always ask ourselves the question, 'Whose is the best book on that topic?' Take feminism in the Middle East. We find Arab and Muslim women writers, because they're going to have their own perspective." Likewise, although Mairi agrees that some excellent books on the suffragettes were published to mark the centenary of women getting the vote, she felt a lot of the titles were very similar and that the voices of women of colour and working-class women were absent. However, Lighthouse staff looked and found those women being given a voice by small publishers. "It's what independent bookshops do," she says. "We find those books."

However, if Mairi can't find anything to plug a particular gap on the shelves, she might ask for recommendations on Twitter, although she's careful not to ask for, say, a YA book by a black writer. Instead she might tweet, "Loved Angie Thomas' 'The Hate U Give' – can anyone suggest more like it?" This avoids crude categorisation and also signals what kind of bookshop it is, helping to create a dialogue with readers and draw in customers.



Does Mairi believe there is a market for diversity? “Yes, there is. Nikesh Shukla’s *The Good Immigrant* proved that. Is it financially worthwhile? Yes, it is, if you put it out there and publish it well. If we want to survive, we can’t afford not to reach out to those communities and it’s why being a bookseller is so much fun, because it allows you to go down into that rabbit warren and find something different. It’s exciting!”

## Moon Lane Books @talesonmoonlane



Recommended by Tamara Macfarlane,  
Moon Lane Books

“I’d urge booksellers to read more diverse books, do your own research and be respectful. If you want to understand current thinking on the issues around diversity and ethnicity I’d recommend *Diversify* by June Sarpong, sub-titled ‘Six degrees of integration – because the world is separate enough’, as well as *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race* by Reni Eddo-Lodge. *The Good Immigrant*, edited by Nikesh Shukla, is a collection of essays by black, Asian and minority ethnic writers about what it means to be a person of colour in Britain today.”

“For me bookselling has always been about community and about access to books regardless of background, socio-economic group or ethnicity.”

Tamara Macfarlane, Moon Lane Books

Tamara Macfarlane recently opened her second children’s bookshop, Moon Lane Books, in a prominent but somewhat unprepossessing location on London’s South Circular. The setting contrasts with that of Tamara’s first children’s bookshop, Tales On Moon Lane, which has been going for 15 years and is situated less than four miles away in the kind of leafy, more affluent area where you certainly wouldn’t be surprised to find a children’s bookshop.

However, the new premises, which were formerly a benefits office and, fittingly, a library, have upstairs space, five primary schools virtually on the doorstep and, says Tamara, “The community is a wonderful mix of people and brilliantly representative of London’s multi-ethnic society. For me bookselling has always been about community and about access to books regardless of background, socio-economic group or ethnicity.”

Tamara is – and there’s no other word for it – passionate about equality, particularly in terms of representation in books. She says, “Real representation is about allowing people to tell their own stories. Most books that are published only reflect the publishing industry, not the wider world, and the cycle needs breaking.” She points out that more diverse families – single sex parents, single fathers, children who are picked up from school by carers – are all rare in children’s books and even though there are plenty of women writing for children, there is still a stark lack of female protagonists.

“Part of what we’re doing here is showing there’s a market, that certain titles do resonate, and people are genuinely moved to see themselves represented, perhaps for the first time,” she says. For example, in the first six weeks after Moon Lane Books opened, it sold at least a hundred



copies of *Young Gifted and Black: Meet 52 Black Heroes from Past and Present* by Jamia Wilson, illustrated by Andrea Pippins.

Tamara has no shortage of projects on the go, including a community interest company, developed with support from Cambridge Social Ventures, part of Cambridge University's Judge Business School. Called Moon Lane Ink, it runs enterprise days in schools. In primaries teams of Year 6 pupils plan, pitch and compete to run a real pop-up bookshop, selling the actual books they have picked from a genuinely diverse range offered by Moon Lane. The school keeps the profits to use for buying books. In secondary schools the model is very similar, but the students keep the profits.

The enterprise days work so well because they're cross-curricular and create an enthusiasm for books among students who might not otherwise engage with them. Going into a bookshop can be intimidating if you've never done it before, so the pop-up bookshops can help break down barriers for parents, too, particularly at primary level.

Tamara acknowledges that there aren't necessarily any easy answers, but, she concludes, "People do want new, fresh perspectives and my advice is to read as widely as you can and when you find a great book by an author from a different background or with a different point of view, then really shout about it."

*For a modest administration fee, other bookshops can use the Moon Lane Ink model to run their own pop-up bookshop enterprise day. Contact Tamara via [info@moonlaneink.co.uk](mailto:info@moonlaneink.co.uk) for details.*



## Westbourne Bookshop @westbournebooks

*"Bookselling is people-facing. It's natural to be welcoming and as a bookshop you simply can't afford to be insular."*

Paul Angel, Westbourne Bookshop

Although situated between Bournemouth and Poole, the 'urban village' of Westbourne in Dorset very much has its own identity. It's filled with cafes, restaurants and independent shops, including the Westbourne Bookshop. Says Paul Angel, whose family bought the bookshop in 2015 and who also runs another Dorset bookshop, Gullivers in Wimborne, "Westbourne is a distinctive community. Although it's essentially a wealthy place with lots of expensive flats, there are also a lot of bedsits and there is a big divide between the two, but it still has a strong community feel and people are proud of their area."

If there's something going on locally, Westbourne Books joins in. Bournemouth is in a Coastal Business Improvement District and at Easter the shop took part in the Love Bournemouth Bunnies competition. People could win shopping vouchers by downloading an app and finding the hundred bunnies hidden around the area. Some were virtual, some weren't, and the store had a rabbit secreted in its window display.

Earlier this year a couple of local people decided to start a book festival, called the Westbourne





Book Binge, and again Westbourne Books got involved. A local historian led a walking tour to the former home of Robert Louis Stevenson, who wrote *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *Kidnapped* and part of *Treasure Island* while a Westbourne resident; the independent cinema had a 'books on film' season; there were author events; and Paul ran a pop-up bookshop. He says, "It's important to support activities that are going on locally, because we want there to be a culture of reading and books in our community, but we haven't got the capacity to do this type of festival alone."

When the bookshop does run its own events, it's mostly families and older customers who attend, but a very different crowd turned up for a recent signing event with Shaine Singer, who has learning difficulties, starred in the Channel 4 series *Undateables* and charmed viewers with his poetry. "We're always trying out new things, because we want to reach out and build our customer base," says Paul, "and Shaine brought in a completely different audience to, for example, someone who writes locally set crime fiction."

Paul's wife, Vicky, works as a full-time dyslexia specialist and, in part as a result, the shop has a dedicated section for dyslexics and reluctant readers. This doesn't just contain titles from specialist publishers such as Barrington Stokes, but books like the Tom Gates series, which, due to their broken-up text, illustrations and humour, appeal to children who find reading more difficult. Paul says, "I'm a vegan, so why would I want to go into a butcher's shop? It's similar for dyslexics and bookshops. It's really hard. We can't replace dyslexia specialists, but a lot of services have been cut and we want to support parents and children, and make the shop as accessible as possible for dyslexics."

Paul explains that although Westbourne and Bournemouth are, as a whole, relatively monocultural, there are a lot of language schools in the area and foreign students frequently come into the shop. "Obviously their English isn't very fluent so helping them can be quite challenging," he says, "but we're often asked to recommend English novels, so we came up with a list. Italian students are always keen to read Harry Potter and

don't mind that they're children's books, while Saudi teenage boys definitely want books for grown-ups!"

Paul insists that the Westbourne Bookshop doesn't do anything particularly special and he's keen not to be held up as an exemplar of inclusivity. He stresses that they're 'just' an ordinary bookshop that works hard within their setting to expand their customer base and draw in all sections of their local community. He concludes, "Bookselling is people-facing. It's natural to be welcoming and as a bookshop you simply can't afford to be insular."

## Bookshops featured in this guide

Many thanks to the booksellers featured in this guide, both those who were interviewed and those who appear as profiles.

### **Booka Bookshop, Oswestry**

@BookaBookshop

### **Chicken & Frog, Brentwood**

@chickenandfrog

### **Children's Bookshop, Muswell Hill, London**

@childrensbks

### **Five Leaves Bookshop, Nottingham**

@FiveLeavesBooks

### **Gay's the Word, Bloomsbury, London**

@gaystheword

### **Lighthouse Bookshop, Edinburgh**

@Lighthousebks

### **Moon Lane Books, Herne Hill, Forest Hill, London (Tales on Moon Lane)**

@talesonmoonlane

### **New Beacon Books, Finsbury Park, London**

@newbeaconbooks

### **Newham Bookshop, Newham, London**

@newhambookshop

### **Plodit**

www.plodit.com

### **Westbourne Bookshop, Westbourne, Bournemouth**

@westbournebooks

## II) Further resources

### **Booksellers Association – creating inclusive bookshops**

[www.booksellers.org.uk/industryinfo/industryinfo/Creating-Inclusive-Bookshops](http://www.booksellers.org.uk/industryinfo/industryinfo/Creating-Inclusive-Bookshops)

Collection of material related to creating inclusive bookshops, which the BA is adding to over time

### **Booksellers Association Diversity & Inclusiveness Grant Project**

[www.booksellers.org.uk/industryinfo/industryinfo/latestnews/BA-Launches-Innovative-Diversity-Grants](http://www.booksellers.org.uk/industryinfo/industryinfo/latestnews/BA-Launches-Innovative-Diversity-Grants)

Background on the BA's scheme offering grants to improve inclusivity in your bookshop or community

### **Bookmark**

[www.booktrust.org.uk/books/bookmark/](http://www.booktrust.org.uk/books/bookmark/)

Information on disability and children's books from BookTrust

### **Bookseller 2016 diversity issue**

[www.thebookseller.com/diversity-issue](http://www.thebookseller.com/diversity-issue)

A freely available special edition of the Bookseller featuring essays by people of colour working in the publishing industry

### **BookTrust**

[www.booktrust.org.uk](http://www.booktrust.org.uk)

Children's literacy charity which provides book lists on themes such as books about refugees and asylum seekers

### **British Dyslexia Association**

[www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/)

National charity which supports people with dyslexia

### **Centre for Literacy in Primary Education**

[www.clpe.org.uk](http://www.clpe.org.uk)

Children's literacy charity which provides articles and recommendations for children's books, and conducts research on diversity in children's literature

### **Creative Access**

[www.creativeaccess.org.uk](http://www.creativeaccess.org.uk)

An organisation recruiting BAME talent to the creative industries

### **Diverse Voices – 50 of the Best Children's Books**

[www.sevenstories.org.uk/news/latestnews/diverse-voice-top-50](http://www.sevenstories.org.uk/news/latestnews/diverse-voice-top-50)

2014 list compiled by Seven Stories, the national centre for children's books

### **Diversity In Publishing: Who are the readers interested in diverse books?**

[www.booksellers.org.uk/getattachment/industryinfo/industryinfo/Creating-Inclusive-Bookshops/economic-case-for-diversity-in-publishing.pdf.aspx?lang=en-GB](http://www.booksellers.org.uk/getattachment/industryinfo/industryinfo/Creating-Inclusive-Bookshops/economic-case-for-diversity-in-publishing.pdf.aspx?lang=en-GB)

Chris McCrudden's analysis of the potential market for diverse books

### **Empathy Day**

[www.empathylab.uk/empathy-day](http://www.empathylab.uk/empathy-day)

An annual event for sharing empathy-boosting books

### **Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion (ENEI)**

[www.enei.org.uk](http://www.enei.org.uk)

The BA belongs to ENEI and BA members can access its resources for help and advice

### **gal-dem**

[www.gal-dem.com](http://www.gal-dem.com)

Magazine covering diversity in literature and culture, produced by a collective of women and non-binary people of colour

### **Inclusive Minds**

[www.inclusiveminds.com](http://www.inclusiveminds.com)

Collective which works to promote inclusion, diversity, equality and accessibility in children's literature

### **Large Print Bookshop**

[www.largeprintbookshop.co.uk](http://www.largeprintbookshop.co.uk)

Sells, and publishes its own, large print books

### **Megaphone**

[www.megaphonewrite.com](http://www.megaphonewrite.com)

Organisation supporting BAME children's writers

### **Mostly Lit**

[www.mostly-lit.com](http://www.mostly-lit.com)

Podcast presented by three twentysomethings which seeks to bridge the gap between black British pop culture and literature

### **National Autistic Society**

[www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

National charity providing information and support, including book recommendations, for people with autism

### **#OwnVoices: Why we need diverse authors in children's literature**

[www.readbrightly.com/why-we-need-diverse-authors-in-kids-ya-lit/](http://www.readbrightly.com/why-we-need-diverse-authors-in-kids-ya-lit/)

Includes recommended YA novels with characters who have disabilities

### **Penguin Random House**

[www.penguinrandomhouse.co.uk/creative-responsibility/inclusion/](http://www.penguinrandomhouse.co.uk/creative-responsibility/inclusion/)

The publisher's commitment to inclusion

### **Publishers Association**

[www.publishers.org.uk/activities/inclusivity/](http://www.publishers.org.uk/activities/inclusivity/)

Details of the PA's activities around promoting inclusivity in the publishing industry

### **Read Diverse Books**

[www.readdiversebooks.com](http://www.readdiversebooks.com)

Blog reviewing books written by and about people of colour and other marginalised voices

### **Reflecting Realities**

[www.clpe.org.uk/library-and-resources/research/reflecting-realities-survey-ethnic-representation-within-uk-children](http://www.clpe.org.uk/library-and-resources/research/reflecting-realities-survey-ethnic-representation-within-uk-children)

A 2018 CLPE survey of ethnic representation in UK children's literature

### **Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)**

[www.rnib.org.uk/](http://www.rnib.org.uk/)

National charity for the blind and partially sighted

### **Scope**

[www.scope.org.uk](http://www.scope.org.uk)

National disability charity

### **The Good Journal**

[www.thegoodjournal.co.uk/](http://www.thegoodjournal.co.uk/)

Quarterly literary journal showcasing the best work by writers and illustrators of colour

### **Vida Count**

[www.vidaweb.org/category/the-count/](http://www.vidaweb.org/category/the-count/)

US feminist organisation which highlights gender imbalances in publishing by tallying genre, book reviewers, books reviewed and journalist by-lines

### **Welsh Book Council**

[www.cllc.org.uk](http://www.cllc.org.uk)

Funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, this provides a focus for the publishing industry in Wales

### **Where Are All The Working Class Writers?**

[www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09fzmjt](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09fzmjt)

Radio 4 documentary with Kit de Waal available on iPlayer

## Contact us

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### Online:

[www.booksellers.org.uk](http://www.booksellers.org.uk)  
[www.nationalbooktokens.co.uk](http://www.nationalbooktokens.co.uk)  
[www.batch.co.uk](http://www.batch.co.uk)  
[www.facebook.com/thebooksellersassociation](https://www.facebook.com/thebooksellersassociation)  
[www.twitter.com/BAbooksellers](https://www.twitter.com/BAbooksellers)  
[www.twitter.com/IndieBound\\_uk](https://www.twitter.com/IndieBound_uk)  
[www.linkedin.com/company/the-booksellers-association](https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-booksellers-association)

# Booksellers Association Diversity & Inclusion Policy

The BA is committed to improving diversity and inclusiveness in the bookselling sector, both in the workplace, and in the range of books on bookshop shelves.

The BA is committed to helping booksellers to create diverse and inclusive workplaces, to serve diverse and minority communities with relevant book titles, help and information and to foster a welcoming environment for all customers, regardless of ethnicity, gender, disability, sexuality, socio-economic background, age or faith. Bookshops should be welcoming spaces for all who love books and offering welcome to all creates a richer environment for all.

Moreover, the BA is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace of its own, and to always consider matters of diversity in all our public and trade facing activities, including (but not limited to) appointing booksellers to our own governing bodies, appointing speakers on panels, using photographs on print and online materials and in the language we use in our communications.

We understand the wide-ranging nature of the term diversity as including:

- Ethnicity
- Race/heritage/culture
- Disability
- Sexuality
- Gender
- Gender Identity
- Socio-economic background
- Age
- Faith

## Acronyms and terms

The acronyms and terms associated with inclusivity are always evolving and can mean different things to different people, but here are a few of the more common ones. Not everyone will be familiar with them all and there's no shame if you aren't.

**BAME** = black, Asian and minority ethnic

**Intersectionality** = the understanding that people can hold multiple marginalised identities

**LGBT+** = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender plus, with the plus indicating the inclusion of the whole spectrum of sexuality and gender

**Self-identification** = the assigning of a particular characteristic or categorisation to oneself, as opposed to being labelled by others

**Unconscious biases** = social stereotypes about certain groups that people form without being consciously aware of it and which can lead them to make prejudicial or discriminatory judgements

