

Women to Watch and Role Models for Inclusion in Retail Index

The 2023 Edition from Diversity in Retail and The MBS Group



Foreword

It is my great pleasure to introduce our 2023 'Women to Watch and Role Models for Inclusion Index' in partnership with The MBS Group.

I am particularly delighted that this year sees the launch of the inaugural 'Women to Watch' Index in Retail. The 'Women to Watch' Index recognises and celebrates the remarkable achievements of senior women across the industry who have made significant contributions to their respective fields. Their stories serve as a source of inspiration for all of us, especially for the next generation of women leaders. By showcasing their accomplishments, we hope to empower more women to pursue their passions, overcome obstacles, and reach the most senior levels of leadership within our industry.

The Index also sees the second year of our 'Role Models for Inclusion' Index. As we know diversity and inclusivity are essential values that drive progress, innovation, and success within an organisation as well as across our wider society.

In order to maintain momentum and progress we need to continue to celebrate and uplift the stories of individuals who have achieved remarkable success in supporting their organisations in building inclusive cultures where anyone can thrive and reach their potential.

The Index is designed to showcase the stories of these individuals who have made a meaningful impact in promoting the benefits of inclusion. Their stories serve as a source of motivation and we hope they inspire others to drive inclusion, both within their companies as well as wider communities, and help make real change.

We hope that you find the stories in the 2023 Index as inspiring and empowering as we do.

I would also like to thank Elliott Goldstein and all The MBS Team as well as the Diversity in Retail team for creating such an inspiring collection of stories. We will follow everyone featured in the Index and further amplify the great impact each of them will continue to have on their companies and the wider Retail industry.



Tea Colaianni

Founder and Chair
Diversity in Retail

Introduction

At The MBS Group, we know that leaders are shaped by their role models. Having someone to model yourself against can be transformative to a career, providing inspiration and motivation to progress through a chosen field or company.

Role models are therefore critical to D&I. When diverse senior leaders are in place in a sector, women, those from ethnic minority backgrounds, and other diverse candidates are more likely to feel encouraged to enter the industry and advance their careers.

It is for this reason that we are delighted to once again be partnering with Diversity in Retail to present the Women to Watch and Role Models for Inclusion in Retail Index. This publication highlights more than fifty leaders from right across UK retail: inspirational women in the sector, diverse leaders, and senior decision-makers who are driving lasting change on D&I.

It has been such a privilege to bring together this year's report. This is the first year we have highlighted Women to Watch in retail, women leaders who have made an outstanding contribution to their company or to the sector more broadly. And after the success of the inaugural Role Models in Retail Index last year, we're thrilled to once again be showcasing those in our sector who are using their influence to make retail a more inclusive place.

This publication has been a truly inclusive exercise that has encompassed all aspects of diversity including gender, ethnicity, social mobility, nationality,

sexual orientation, age and disability. Inside these pages is a plethora of personal and professional stories, from leaders who reflect the full spectrum of diversity that exists in the industry and the communities it serves. Each of the pages within prove that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to a career in retail.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Tea Colaianni, Jo Aunon and all the team at Diversity in Retail for their continued partnership on this critical issue. We'd also like to acknowledge the team at The MBS Group – our founder, Moira Benigson, Simon Pryde-More, Callum Orr, Imogen Sewell, Mary Baxter and Krystyna Robbins – for their invaluable contribution to the production of this report.

Finally, thank you to all the role models who generously gave up their time to be included in this report. We hope this publication will not only encourage more people to enter and progress through the retail sector, but also inspire action on diversity and inclusion from existing colleagues.



Elliott Goldstein
Managing Partner
The MBS Group



Aelf Hewitson
Director, Retail Practice
The MBS Group



Women to Watch

Inspiring female role models from across the industry

Over the past few months, we have sought nominations for distinguished women from the retail sector. These women were nominated and selected because of their forward-thinking leadership, their genuine commercial impact, their track record of innovation

or their wider contribution to the sector or society at large. This Index is not exhaustive, nor ranked in any way, but instead sheds light on the depth and breadth of female talent that exists in the sector, across all disciplines and functions.



Natasha Adams

Company **Tesco Ireland**

Job Title **CEO, Tesco Ireland & Northern Ireland**

I was appointed as CEO Republic of Ireland in April 2022 having been the Chief People Officer since June 2018, in both roles as part of Tesco Group Executive Committee. As Chief People Officer, I was a Trustee for the Tesco Pension Scheme, sat on the Tesco Cyber Security Committee and Tesco Privacy and Data Committee, advisor to both the Tesco Board and the Remuneration and Nominations & Governance Committees on remuneration, succession planning and recruitment while also being a Steering Group Member for both Movement to Work and the 30% Club.

I am a Companion of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, a trustee for IGD and a Non-Executive Director for Berkeley Holding Group Limited. A Tesco colleague since 1998, I have held several leadership roles in Retail Operations and People functions, always enjoying the pace colleagues, customers and suppliers bring to the retail environment.

What does inclusion and diversity mean to you?

It means that everyone I work with feels like they belong, and that they can get on in whatever way they want to. That people feel like they can fulfil their potential whatever their aspirations.

What motivates you to drive up progress in your organisation?

There are a number of reasons for me. One is that from very early childhood, when I moved from Ireland to the UK, I had a small insight into how it can feel when you don't fit in. But more importantly, I've been very lucky to have a career full of opportunities within retail. And now it's very

important for me as a leader in our business that I seek to give those opportunities to everyone else.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

Because it brings authenticity to the conversation. Stories are such a good leveller, and a reminder that we're all human beings. As leaders, you have to be a role model, and make it safe for people to have real, authentic conversations about who they are, the experiences they've had, the aspirations they've got, and the challenges they're facing. When you do that, you bring a new perspective into the conversation.



What impact have role models had on your career in retail? And who have you role models been?

My biggest role models are my parents, and they always have been. I feel very lucky to have had them in my life.

In my professional life, I've had lots of positive role models. Throughout your career, you meet people who you think 'oh I like the way they do that,' or 'I like your style in that situation'. And I think you piece it all together to create your own aspiration. I've interacted with so many fabulous people who have done great things, and who have influenced me at different stages of my career.



What advice would you give to leaders looking to drive up progress on D&I?

The first thing is do what you say you're doing to do. If you want to increase your focus, increase your focus. Spend time with people in the business who you want to support, and seek to understand their experiences. Seek to learn about the parts of your business that you don't know about, or are perhaps not where you want them to be.

I'd also say share stories. Be real, be authentic around your commitment to D&I.

“I've never seen the retail sector so full of ambition and commitment on D&I, and I'm so proud of what Tesco are doing.”

When it comes to advocating for D&I, is there anything you're doing outside of retail?

One of my biggest roles in advocating D&I outside of work is as a mother, and as an auntie to nineteen nieces and nephews. I'm helping them to see the world from a different perspective, and helping them to understand others.

What do you think the biggest barriers are to D&I?

I've never seen the retail sector so full of ambition and commitment on D&I, and I'm so proud of what Tesco are doing. The only barriers are our ability to make stuff happen quickly. We need to have patience in some areas, but we need to speed it up in others.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

It's part of my ambition to support people in having as many opportunities as I have had. Being a good role model means setting the tone as a leader in the business. And I think it's about providing a hand of friendship and a listening ear. That's hugely important in creating

a culture where everyone feels like they belong.

And what are you doing to ensure D&I remains a priority in your organisation?

As a leader, I sponsor many of the areas in our D&I plan. My team is clear about our commitment to D&I, our commitment to progression, and our commitment to represent the communities we serve. One of my biggest jobs is to ask the right questions, and to challenge our progress and ambition.

What do you think the future holds for the retail sector and what are you most excited about?

I think the future is bright. We work in one of the best sectors there is. It doesn't matter who you are or where you come from, what you believe or who you love. You can absolutely do anything you want to here. It's a real and wonderful sector for helping people create, seek, and fulfil their ambitions.

I'm really excited about the progress we make together, and about continuing to make sure it's a sector that's attractive for everyone.



Claire Andrews

Company **Dunelm Group**
Job Title **Director of Business Finance**

I never planned a career in Finance or in Retail, but I have never looked back! After studying ancient languages, I 'fell into' Finance as a career, and surprisingly found that translating languages and interrogating literature stand you in good stead to interpret numbers and performance, a key skill for any finance person. After working in a couple of different and varied industries, I moved into retail over ten years ago. I love the immediacy and 'reality' of working in retail – and the fact that even in a 'support' function, you can have a big impact on customers. I joined Dunelm in early 2020, in a role leading our finance business partners across the organisation.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Don't worry about what others think of you and don't compare yourself to others. Be compassionate every day with everyone – and with yourself – it is (more than) possible

to be successful in your career and to be a good person. When I was starting out, I felt like I had to have a specific persona at work to be taken seriously. Of course you have to be professional, but most importantly be yourself.

How do you think retail has changed since you've been in the sector? How do you think it will change in the future?

Many of the old hierarchical and formal ways of working have gone, and what it looks like to be a good leader in retail is very different from even ten years ago. Digital and technology is changing this too – with very different ways of doing things in 'physical' and digital retail mixing together. How will it change? Even more focus on the customer and on people – and on how having happy engaged people leads to happy and engaged customers.

What advice would you give to the next generation of women entering the sector?

Retail is an ever moving industry – and it can at times feel hard to keep up without always running fast. Be kind, slow down – (most) things don't need to be perfect, try things and learn from your mistakes. And most of all have fun in what is by far the most fun industry I have worked in!

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you, and mean in your organisation?

To me personally, it means being able to be yourself. Long gone are the days of 'pretending' to be a certain way to fit in. It also very importantly means diversity of thought and experience – without which ideas and dissent wither and businesses die. I am really proud of everything that Dunelm is doing to support diversity and inclusion. From completely revamping recruitment activities to



remove bias to reach broader pools of talent; to the amazing colleague-led networks. These networks are not just an opportunity for colleagues to support each other, but they are actually changing things we are doing across the business, to deliver real step-change in inclusion for colleagues and customers. I feel like I am learning, challenging myself and being challenged by others every day.

What does being a Woman to Watch in Retail mean to you?

I am really proud to have been asked to contribute. I have had times in my career when I have lost my confidence and been unsure of my worth. I have had difficult times as a

mother working a high-pressured job and managing many challenges at home. Throughout it all, I have tried always to do my best (good enough, not perfection!) for my business, for my family, and for my team. I try every day to be a 'human' first and foremost. I would like to thank all the other wonderful women in Retail and other industries who have supported and inspired me on my journey so far. I hope I can do the same for others.

If you were not working in retail, where would you be?

I always wanted to be a pilot – if I wasn't too short and short-sighted! So ideally flying around the world!

“ D&I means being able to be yourself. Long gone are the days of pretending to be a certain way to fit in.



Sadia Ashiq

Company **Asda**
Job Title **Senior Director**

“ Be authentic, be yourself. Take risks and put yourself out there for opportunities to lead.

I am an accomplished and dedicated senior director for Asda leading the South Manchester region. I was recently promoted into the Senior Director role after successfully leading various roles across the business. With little higher education and carrying the family pressure of providing for the family following the death of my father at a young age, I have succeeded in managing a work life balance, that has allowed me to progress working in a fast paced industry ensuring myself and those around me are always applauded, rewarded and recognised for our achievements. Using the skills and experience gained throughout my work and personal life, I have managed to adapt to the ever-changing societal and industry needs, ensuring no stone is ever left unturned and targets are met. I've gained respect across the board, not just within my division, but in the organisation as a whole. Peers have described me as caring, understanding, tenacious and dedicated. I have always gone above and beyond the call of duty and it is this 'can do' attitude, determination and respect that has allowed me to progress. As a proud and loving wife, daughter and sister, words cannot describe how grateful I am for the support I have received from family and friends and colleagues throughout the business.

What does being a Woman to Watch in Retail mean to you?

Women to watch in retail are women who are inspirational to other women across the business, are role models to other women in the sector and who add value and wider contributions to the business.

Why do you think it's important to highlight women leaders in retail?

It's important to highlight women leaders in retail as having female leaders promotes inclusivity and diversity in the workplace. Women can bring different skills, dynamics, and energy to a workplace. When once industry was perceived to be

male-dominated, today this is no longer the case. So it's critical to highlight the value that women can bring to an organisation and industry. Working in retail does come with its challenges, not just mentally but physically as well. By bringing these to the surface we can share our experiences and showcase what can be achieved by women.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Be authentic, be yourself. Always know your worth, never be too hard on yourself and have self-belief. Take risks and put yourself out there for opportunities to lead and play to your strengths. Nobody is perfect, it's all

about learning and growing. I feel it's important to not let yourself ever think, I can't do this. I wouldn't be where I am if I didn't push through.

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you and mean in your organisation?

Diversity is about recognising difference. It's about the traits and characteristics that make people unique. These can be visible – race, gender, age and physical ability – or invisible, like sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic status, education.

Inclusion is where difference is valued, and people can thrive. In the workplace this means that

all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute fully to the organisation's success.

I proudly promote diversity and inclusion in my workplace and I am really proud to be working for a business that promotes diverse workforces and inclusion and treats all individuals fairly.

“ Inclusion is where difference is valued, and people can thrive.





Alessandra Bellini

Company **Tesco**

Job Title **Group Chief Customer Officer & Executive Sponsor for D&I**

I joined Tesco in March 2017, as Group Chief Customer Officer, where I bring together the disciplines of marketing, advertising, innovation and insight to create strong and distinctive brand propositions. I am focused on making sure customers are at the heart of everything at Tesco. My role involves transforming Tesco Clubcard into a future looking platform of engagement, serving customers in a relevant and personal way, as well as an opportunity to engage Supplier Brands to reach their customers more effectively. In 2021, I was appointed President of the Advertising Association. I was also Chair of Teens Unite from 2018 to 2022. Prior to Tesco, I worked for Unilever for over 20 years, holding different board-level positions in marketing and general management in Italy, Central & Eastern Europe and the USA. I started my career in advertising at JWT Milan, as an apprentice straight out of school. I worked in advertising for 12 years in both Italy and the UK. I have two grown up children, live in London and travel around town on a baby-blue Vespa.

What does D&I mean to you?

If I think back to when we began discussing this topic in business, it was all about diversity. Then it became diversity and inclusion. And now at Tesco, we talk about diversity, inclusion and equity. I love the description that a colleague of mine gave me. He said: diversity is our organisation reflecting reality, but inclusion is a cultural choice. And then equity means giving everybody a voice.

I've always believed in giving people the opportunity to bring their whole selves to work. But actually, I think it's bigger than that. We have to give people the chance not only to be themselves in the workplace, but

to contribute, to step up, to shine, and also to voice concerns if they're struggling. Fundamentally, I think of D&I as a lever for performance. The more diverse a company is, the more perspectives you'll be able to include in decision-making.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

It's just an imperative for me. As retailers, it's fundamental that we can represent the communities we serve. How can we be a successful supermarket if we don't represent our customers? Or have enough colleagues in the business who truly understand our customers? So that motivates me. I believe in business, and I believe in people.

In your view why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of D&I?

I think we tend to underestimate the power of sharing our own personal experiences – especially as we get older and step into more senior roles. I've found that being honest – about the negatives as well as the positives – has such an impact on my team. Being open about worries, failures, and challenges allows people to see that the roadblocks they're experiencing aren't unique. And in turn, it gives them permission to ask for help, and to tell you exactly what they need to succeed. So that can only be a good thing for business performance.

I have to consciously remind myself that being more open will help others. I don't want to be seen as some super-leader role model, but instead a normal person who's faced the same challenges as everyone else.

What impact have role models had on your career?

When I started my very first job in an advertising agency, three of the most senior leaders were women. And this was very unusual at the time.

But they all had one thing in common: they all led with what we would now call a "male style". And at that point it was really the only way to succeed, to ignore your instincts and fit into the traditional leadership mold. I remember at the time thinking that these women were not good role models for me, but now – forty years later – I'm in awe of what they achieved. How tough and resilient



and careful they must have been to get to that position. When I was younger it was easy to criticise. But I'm re-evaluating that now.

Elsewhere in my career I've had some amazing leaders over the years. Mostly male, because that was just the way it was. Today, I really admire every one of my female colleagues on the Tesco executive. They're all role models for me.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

I fundamentally believe that the executive team should share responsibility for D&I. It shouldn't be an HR or people issue, it shouldn't be the domain of a standalone D&I expert. You need the leader of the company – the CEO – to own the agenda and make things happen, but sponsorship from the whole executive team is the way forward.

It is so valuable to have each executive team member sponsoring one area of D&I. It makes every senior

leader a bit of an expert in that field, it creates healthy competition, and it forces everyone – whether or not you're part of a diverse community – to think a little differently.

When it comes to advocating for D&I, is there anything that you're doing outside of retail?

Two big things. I'm a member of WACL (Women in Advertising & Communications Leadership), which is celebrating its 100th anniversary at the moment. I'm so happy to know so many amazing women through this network, and to be helping to drive up gender equality in the industry. I'm also President of the Advertising Association, and I've made sure that talent is the core of my agenda. We've just finished the All In Census, which has gathered data from 16,000 people working in UK advertising and marketing. And it's really allowed us to understand what diversity looks like in our industry, and to share key actions backed up by data. The sector is responding so well, so I'm very proud of that.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

It means listening, giving people time, and making sure everyone has a voice. It means advocating passionately. It means being aware of your own biases, and keeping them in check.

“ I've had to consciously remind myself that being more open will help others. I want to be seen as a normal person who's faced the same challenges as everyone else.



Ruth Benford

Company **The Watches of Switzerland Group**
Job Title **Executive Director Marketing**

After graduating with a 1st Class Honors Degree in Business Enterprise, I took a year out to travel round the world (to not only discover the world but a lot about myself!) before starting as a Graduate Trainee in Sainsbury's Store Management. This gave me a passion for retail and a desire to lead diverse teams. I 'fell' into marketing through a seconded project to Homebase and have been in marketing ever since.

I joined privately owned Goldsmiths in 2005 as Head of Marketing and over the last 18 years I have seen the business turn from one retail brand into a stable of six with presence in the UK, EU and North America. The Watches of Switzerland Group (as it is now known) is now a publicly listed company.

My career has spanned several levels of responsibility, from marketing and people leadership, to being the first woman on the Trading Board. I also played a key role in our IPO and lead our internal communications with purpose, values, and inclusion at the heart of our narrative.

“ I was proud to be appointed as the first-ever woman director to the Trading Board. I hope somewhere this has given someone hope.

Why do you feel it's important to highlight women leaders in retail?

For many, having that person to look up to and to identify with is so important. When I joined the business, the senior management team was totally dominated by men, with varying different management styles, yet I was proud to be appointed as the first ever female director to the Trading Board. I hope somewhere this has given hope and inspiration to other women and I am now proud that the same business, 12 years on, has 46% women in leadership positions as verified by FTSE Women Leaders 2023.



How have you seen the I&D agenda develop in your time in retail?

I have always taken the view of 'best person for the job', but it's been interesting to see how inclusion and diversity has developed over time. Whilst I believe that metrics and targets are important to show progress, they don't always capture hearts and minds. At the Watches of Switzerland Group our agenda is to build better awareness of this important topic through emotional connection. I was proud to recently be selected to be an Executive Sponsor to one of our colleagues who is a delegate on the DIR Ethnic

Future Leaders Program – this has given me an important lens into how I can support and champion diversity in Leadership roles.

What challenges have you learnt the most from in your career?

I think Covid was one of the toughest periods we have all faced and at this point I took a key leadership role to drive internal communications. In the early days we had no idea with what we were dealing with other than knowing we had to care for our colleagues whilst also being flexible and dynamic to ensure we could still trade as a business despite our showrooms being closed. It was a tough moment in our history, but it was the catalyst for us being able to really create a sense of belonging, a strong culture and a great workplace community.

How do you think retail has changed since you've been in the sector? How do you think it will change in the future?

In the 20 plus years I have been in retail the sector has changed so much – mainly the rise in online retail and an increased focus on digital and technology. I think consumers are also becoming savvier and more selective in their spending and influenced by so many different factors (ie social media). Now you can buy practically anything from anywhere, I feel the change in the future will all be around the client experience. The emotional experience and connection consumers have with brands and the people within those brands will be more important. Although online is massive, I think if you can position yourself as a destination not just for quality products, but for outstanding experiences delivered through great people, then customers will gravitate towards you.

What advice would you give to the next generation of women entering the sector?

Be curious. Be open minded. Be passionate about retail. Believe you can achieve anything you want as there are no barriers for anyone who is good at what they do. I find retail to be a meritocracy and a sector that is nonjudgmental – anyone can be part of retail, no matter what background or aspirations as it covers such a massive range of skills and offers lots of great opportunities. I believe you can make the opportunity as big or as small as you want it to be. Also take every opportunity you can, personally, the role that I am most proud of is Trustee of The Watches of Switzerland Group Foundation – 20 years ago I wouldn't have thought that would have been part of my role.





Karen Bird (nee McEwan)

Company **McColl's Retail Group**
Job Title **CEO (interim)**

Having spent most of my career at Tesco (finally as UK People Director) in 2016 I moved to McColl's Retail Group as CHRO, where I built the People Strategy, developed the Company Values and cultural transformation plan.

My most significant achievement has been the introduction of our DE&I agenda, enabling the business to transform its leadership, and facilitating the changes to become an open and collaborative culture, where everyone is welcome and has opportunities to progress both internally and externally to the business. I developed and delivered the 'Women at McColl's' programme, which saw almost 100 women develop through structured and participative modules, and which eventually delivered a zero gender pay gap. In its final year, the programme ran as two cohorts due to its popularity with the leadership team and our colleagues. I was asked to step in as CEO when the business was under the threat of liquidation, and I led the successful sale to Morrisons, meaning that our 16,000 colleagues kept their jobs, the lenders were paid in full, and most crucially, the pension fund was saved.

Outside of work, I am owned by an adorable Bassett Hound named Watson, I love travel and yoga, and have just embarked on a fitness mission.

What does being a Woman to Watch in Retail mean to you?

It means a sense of responsibility. There are still too few women in senior leadership roles, and we will only bring through more diverse talent, which is critical to organisational success, if we act as role models for other women. Being nominated as a Woman to Watch has made me proud to be

recognised for the efforts I have made to bring through other women, and to agitate the organisation to become a truly inclusive place to work.

Why do you feel it's important to highlight women leaders?

Great leadership should always be highlighted irrespective of gender. It is particularly important to highlight women leaders, because traditionally

the retail sector has been viewed as a mediocre place to make a career and has been male dominated at Board level.

Programmes and campaigns that select women role models, who exemplify the best leadership qualities, will encourage more women to aspire to come to the sector, or to pursue a serious career route through the sector if they are already here.

Brilliant women leaders help other women to become brilliant leaders, making every effort to share experience and give support and encouragement. It is therefore important to highlight the best women, so others can connect with and learn from them.

What challenges have you learnt the most from in your career?

I have learnt the most from times of adversity or personal challenge: moving into a job where I was not confident, lacked experience, struggled to deliver the standard that others expected of me, and had an unsupportive boss. Being the only woman leader in the function was extremely challenging, dealing with bias, discrimination, and exclusion.

More recently, taking the business over from the outgoing CEO, who had been my boss, was difficult. The outlook was bleak, the path led to insolvency or sale, and I have never felt as alone or as responsible.

My learnings from the first period of difficulty in my career, were what stood me in great stead for the most recent experience in leading the business. Having courage of my own conviction, staying true to my values,

and finally, doing the right thing, no matter what the personal cost.

What advice would you give your younger self?

I would tell my younger self:

- Not to let others put you down.
- Have the confidence to do what you know to be right, and be proud to be your unique self, whatever that means.
- Not to be too eager to please.
- Sometimes, saying no is the right thing to do, however hard that is. Respect for others is critical but respect yourself too. Disagreement is often constructive and helpful.
- You can live and work.
- Do not be defined by your career, invest time in doing what makes you happy, it will make you a better leader.
- Do the jobs no-one else wants to do.
- Be brave and jump in. Those are the roles and experiences that will help you most in the future.

What advice would you give to the next generation of women entering the sector?

For the next generation of women:

- Be proud of who you are. Bring your most unique self to work. Be prepared to disrupt the status quo, and do not listen to anyone who tries to bring you down.
- Have a personal development plan that makes you squirm. The things you need to work on now will be the things that you always need to work on to be your best version of yourself. If it feels uncomfortable, push it even harder. Surround yourself with truth-speakers, it is the only way to see the impact you have.
- Seek out great mentors. Be brave and ask those you admire for help; they will be delighted. Look for people who will give it to you straight, will pick you up when you fall over, and mostly those who are brave enough for you to mentor them back!
- Sponsorship is key. Even in true meritocracies, having someone who will 'shout up' for you, champion your cause, and talk

“ I'd tell the next generation of women to have a personal development plan that makes them squirm.

about your best bits is essential. Push yourself to get involved and get exposure, at the same time, work as hard as you can and deliver all you can deliver.

- Finally, do your utmost to help other women. Whether it's advice, a shoulder, some home-truth giving, it is all support. The best women leaders are those who seek out other women to help, those who regard fellow women as their equals and who do not wait to be asked, but who seek out opportunities to help.
- We all have a responsibility to pay it forward!





Eileen Burbidge MBE

Company **Currys Group**
Job Title **Non-executive Director**



“When things aren't discussed openly, it can be easy to feel that experiences are unique to you, which can be very daunting.”

I am a non-executive director for Currys plc and chair of the ESG Committee for the Board. I am also Director at Fertifa, where I apply my passion for inclusive and accessible reproductive healthcare. I am a Founding Partner at Passion Capital, the pre-eminent early-stage technology venture fund based in London, which led to Fortune Magazine describing me as “The Queen of British VC” and one of London’s most influential venture capitalists. I have extensive operational and investment experience gleaned from roles at tech giants including Yahoo!, Skype and Apple. On behalf of Passion, I serve as non-executive director and board representative on a number of successful companies including Monzo Bank, Marshmallow, Butternut Box and others.

Outside of Passion, I served for 8 years as the UK Treasury’s Special Envoy for Fintech, appointed by the Chancellor; was Tech Ambassador for the Mayor of London’s office; served on UK Prime Minister David Cameron’s Business Advisory Group; and was the Chair of Tech Nation for 5 years. I was awarded an MBE for services to business in the Queen’s Birthday Honours in 2015 and hold a BSc Engineering degree in Computer Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you?

To me, D&I means expanding the breadth of the perspectives we hear. And widening out where input comes from. When I think about inclusion, it means ensuring that anyone who wants to and wishes to has access to the conversation, the setting or the opportunity.

Within retail, I would say that diversity and inclusion means ensuring that our offering and our proposition – what’s being sold

in a retail setting – is diverse and appealing to a broad range of individuals. We want to cater to all people within Britain, irrespective of their culture, background, religion, race or ethnicity.

What motivates you to help make the retail sector a more diverse and inclusive place?

My honest answer is for my children. When they grow up, there’ll be assumptions about what they want, and what they should have access to.



I want to help take those assumptions and preconceptions away. For my children, and for future generations, they should be able to indicate what they want, and what they want to have access to.

You’ve been highlighted as a Woman to Watch in Retail. Why do you think highlighting women role models, sharing experiences, and having open conversations is an important part of progress on D&I?

I think there are two reasons really. The first reason is that because when things aren’t discussed openly, it can be easy to feel that experiences are unique to you, which can be very daunting. But when experiences are shared, patterns start to form. It becomes clear that, actually, lots of women feel the same way, or lots of ethnic minority leaders have similar experiences.

The second reason is to open people’s eyes to the disparity in the world. There are obviously a lot of wonderful people from non-underrepresented groups in society who simply don’t see a lot of the discrimination that goes on. So, sharing those experiences can be really critical. It can open people’s eyes to the many injustices in the world, and aid the understanding that inaction is actually a form of

endorsement. It enables prejudice to perpetuate and continue.

Did you have role models in your life?

There are lots of people who I owe for helping to shape the way I think about things and for motivating me to speak up. My parents were really strong influences. But I didn’t have specific role models growing up, there weren’t many people who I thought I could truly model myself against – just roles I aspired to do and I’d have to think “what attributes do they have? How hard do they work? Is that possible for me?”

What advice would you give to leaders looking to drive up the D&I agenda?

My advice would be to listen. I know leaders are busy, but I don’t know how many senior executives really stop to listen to the people around them when it comes to topics like D&I. Listening to people’s experiences makes all the difference in the world.

What do you think is the biggest barrier to progress on D&I in the retail sector today?

I think the cost-of-living crisis is taking its toll actually. You’ve got fewer people coming into stores,

fewer people buying products. So as retailers, we’ve got less exposure and less opportunity to really influence our customer base, and therefore society. And then internally, that means less money available to funnel into ESG and D&I projects. If a leader doesn’t feel that D&I is commercially relevant, it’s going to fall by the wayside.

How are you going to ensure that D&I remains a priority at Currys?

I think by being present. I hope I’m a reminder of D&I every time I’m in a meeting. I’m Chair of the ESG committee, so we’re frequently talking about gender, ethnicity, and inclusion. I’m going to continue turning up and speaking my mind.

What do you think the future holds for retail?

Challenge. I think it holds challenge. But I’m also excited for the future, for greater diversity, more inclusion, and stronger relationships between retailers and their customers.



Beth Butterwick

Company **Jigsaw**
Job Title **CEO**

I have enjoyed a wonderful, varied 30-year retail career. Post a Fashion & Marketing Degree, I joined Marks & Spencer's Graduate Training Scheme, spending 16 years across the Clothing Division. 2005 I joined Gap Inc as VP responsible for delivering our European expansion programme. 2009 I joined MS Mode, Amsterdam as Commercial Director to lead our strategic growth plan, resulting in the acquisition by Excellent Retail Brands. 2011 I joined Bonmarché, leading the successful sale process to Sun Europe; over my 5 years as CEO, I steered the company through a massive turnaround, including a successful 2013 AIM Listing stock market flotation. 2016 I joined Karen Millen, to drive the global business turnaround and eventual sale of Coast and KM to Boohoo. 2019 I joined Jigsaw as an Operating Partner advising the shareholders to oversee the digital-first modernisation programme; 2021 appointed CEO to continue acceleration of our exciting 3 year global plan. It has been an absolute honour to have received the following awards in recognition of my contribution to retail: Draper's Retail Personality of the Year, Barclay's Businesswoman of the Year, a Huddersfield University Honorary Doctorate. Put simply, my passion is 'all things retail'

What does being a Woman to Watch in Retail mean to you?

I have been reflecting on this. Retail is one of the biggest sectors in the UK, contributing just over 5% of the GDP, employing about five million people. If you think about who we touch and the impact we have in our industry, we are very influential. We cater to a hugely diverse sociodemographic group of customers; a broad and wide-reaching employee base and we are in the business of connecting these groups together. So as leaders, we play an important part in bringing

positive impact to people's lives to make things better.

So, in answer to the question, I would say two emotions come to mind: gratitude for being selected, in parallel with feeling a responsibility for everything else we must do. If I am being recognised as a Women to Watch, that means I have a voice, that I can be heard, and that I can galvanize other people to play their part. I take that responsibility very seriously.

Why do you feel it's important to highlight women leaders in retail?

Men and women working together effectively is key and they bring different, complimentary skillsets: men can be operators who get things done and focus on IQ, whilst women can bring EQ. However, even today across the retail sector, women senior leaders – CEOs, CFOs, Chairs – are very much still the minority. So, it is critical that we keep shining a light on those who are in high-level positions, to inspire others to feel they can step up too, to achieve their leadership ambitions.

It is also worth recognizing that many women, have broad responsibilities across their office and household lives, both looking after work colleagues and families. Acknowledging this, brings a valuable perspective to organisations, especially those who have a high proportion of women across their workforce.

How have you seen the D&I agenda develop?

When I started in retail thirty years ago, we didn't really talk about D&I. More recently, there have been some seismic shifts and major evolutions in society; gender diversity, ethnicity, social mobility, to name a few, being firmly represented as part of our business agendas. With that, customer and colleague expectations have shifted. Conversations are happening, and action is being taken. However, there is still much to do, and we are not moving fast enough. I suspect we will know we have come far when we stop talking about it.

What are you doing within your organization to drive up D&I?

Our D&I pulse survey has been a great starting point and a minimum threshold in which to develop a plan. We have updated all our policies, put in place a whistleblowing system, are taking training and development seriously, and a culture committee to actively bring important topics to the table. Everyone in our organisation has a voice. As leaders we need to identify areas where we can move quickly, and those where we need to step back, to go far.

On International Women's Day we introduced a suite of comprehensive policies ranging from enhanced maternity, paternity, IVF, assisted contraception, compassionate leave, menopause, breastfeeding, and monthly cycle policies. The impact was huge and has built positive momentum. Since, we have had so many more colleagues coming forward with great ideas.

In no small part because of these policies, it really feels like D&I is becoming the fabric of our business, which is not only positive for our employees, but a real attraction lever for future talent, too.

What challenges have you learnt the most from in your career?

I came into retail knowing it was my vocation. Our sector has changed immensely, and it is one of those exciting spaces that is constantly evolving.

So, I think what I have learnt is that you cannot stand still. You must be of a curious mindset. You must lean into opportunities, and the challenges as well. You must be quick on your feet otherwise you will fall behind.

As my career has progressed, I have learnt you have to possess a resilience about you. You must be able to take risks and dust yourself down to move on if things go wrong.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Follow your passion, listen to your instincts. I think women can be more hesitant to dive into situations than men, but I would say, trust your gut and go for it. It is satisfying to see how far girls and women of recent generations have come. I have close relationships with many of my friends' daughters, in their twenties and working. I observe, they have a refreshing 'can-do' attitude that is a pleasure to see, and perhaps not so

“ As my career has progressed, I've learnt that you have to have resilience. You must be able to take risks.

common amongst young women in the early days of my career.

I would also say be authentic and be yourself. Do not adapt to being someone you do not feel comfortable with.

Alongside that, I would tell my younger self to find a mentor. I have always felt comfortable asking for advice, and have had amazing people throughout my career who have guided me through situations and been supportive advisors from both a cultural and business acumen perspective.

And lastly, I would say be a perpetual student. The retail sector changes so quickly, so you need to shed past belief systems to really forge forward. This is very applicable when thinking about D&I and what we must achieve.





Carol Campbell

Company **Wickes**
Job Title **Retail Director**

I've invested my 41 years as a 26-year retail generalist, wife to Iain for 19, mum to Finlay for 12, dog servant to Hamish for 4. I'm a qualified coach, mentor, friend, lifelong learner and fan of books, personal development and writing. My career has been squiggly through UK and international grocery retail and now into DIY.

Starting on the shopfloor at 15, I haven't looked back. I worked throughout university to fund my degree and secured an operations graduate job which led to promotions into commercial, central operations and procurement. After 12 years with ALDI, I had an incredible opportunity to move company and continent with Woolworths Australia where I led across store operations and transformation projects. During Covid I studied coaching and ventured abroad again where I led central operations for Walmart Canada. We're delighted to be back home, and I've found my home in Wickes.

Though variety in roles, the connective tissue is always people. I love developing leaders, diverse high performing teams and supporting people to reach whatever is their best.

Why do you feel it's important to highlight women leaders in retail?

Retail has been heavily male dominated at the senior levels and c-suite. Very early in my career, I was told I was 'too nice'. Against a stereotypically masculine culture it was implied skills of compassion and collaboration wouldn't lead to success in the numbers. They were wrong! Retail is a people business, and such skills are essential to connect people, ideas and activate communities around a shared purpose. It's important to highlight stories of women that may inspire

others and demystify what it takes to have success. You have to be able to see what you want to be.

How have you seen the I&D agenda develop in your time in retail?

It's moved from a metrics game, portraying balance, to a deeper agenda for inclusion, to now being more about intersectionality that demands genuine belonging and contribution from a diverse community of leaders.

I see it evolving from acquiring and fixing people, to being about fixing



the environments that have endorsed imbalance, and now about cultivating spaces that enable contribution. There's no point in having diversity if you don't create an inclusive space for those voices to be heard and have impact.

Why do you think more women should consider a career within retail?

The impact of retail stretches beyond the walls of physical stores or online shops. The opportunity to learn and collaborate through inch-wide mile-deep specialisms within commercial, HR or 100 other areas, or the inch-deep mile-wide world of operations where you can impact scale, retail can positively impact the lives of customers, colleagues, their families and communities. I've had opportunities to expand my thinking and experiences personally and professionally in ways that would not have happened in other industries.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

If you want change in your outer world, you have to first make changes on the inner one – I'd like to have sooner realised that thoughts, beliefs and what you say to yourself matters. I wasted a lot of energy trying to control and worry about things that might happen, when the only thing we can ever really control is our response to things that happen.

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you, and mean in your organisation?

Brené Brown best articulates this when she says: true belonging never asks us to change who we are. True belonging requires us to be who we are. Wickes is authentic in our desire to create a place where everyone can feel at home. We are comfortable with being uncomfortable too, facing conversations and new situations with genuine curiosity and enabling challenges from our colleague networks vs a top down corporate agenda. We strive to know where we can be better and continually improve.

How do you think retail has changed since you've been in the sector? How do you think it will change in the future?

Retail was historically hierarchical and action-biased. Success was in metrics, first-in last-out mindset and the people perceived to have answers had the power.

I think it's changed to be more about connection and curiosity. Success comes from connecting people and ideas to create new and different outcomes, through fostering collaborative diverse environments enabling everyone to thrive and contribute in their area of expertise rather than hierarchies. By activating interdependent communities of people around a shared purpose, we can stay agile, provide customers' value and continually learn from each other.

As retail becomes increasingly digitally and data driven, and in an uncertain and complex world, we have to be excessively human. We need to consciously modernise the approach to flexibility that enables attraction, retention and development of future leaders who will ensure the sector continues to evolve.

“ There's no point in having diversity if you don't create an inclusive space for those voices to be heard and have an impact.

What advice would you give to the next generation of women entering the sector?

To lead, you don't need to be anyone other than yourself. And confidence doesn't always equal competence. I've found courage is a more useful skill... think of all the times when there was no way to be certain of an outcome but you did it anyway. Take opportunities that you're not confident in yet, but you have courage in your ability to learn. You grow more from these moments than the ones you wait to be ready for.





Rita Clifton CBE

Company **John Lewis Partnership**

Job Title **Deputy Chair and Non-Executive Director**

I am a portfolio Chair and non-executive board director of a really interesting mix of organisations as well as being a business writer, speaker and mentor. I graduated from Cambridge University and started my career in advertising, becoming Vice Chair and Strategy Director at Saatchi & Saatchi over a very exciting period. I then joined Interbrand, the global brand strategy consultancy, as London CEO and later became Chair for a ten-year term. My current non-executive board roles include Deputy Chair at John Lewis Partnership and Senior Independent at Ascential plc. Previous boards have included ASOS plc, Nationwide Building Society, Bupa, Dixons Retail plc and as Chair of Populus, the opinion pollster and research company. In 2013, I co-founded and chaired the global business consultancy BrandCap, which I later sold on to the management group. My pro bono board roles have included being a Trustee and now Fellow of WWF (Worldwide Fund for Nature), a member of the UK Government’s Sustainable Development Commission, a Trustee of environmental thinktank Green Alliance and as Chair of The Conservation Volunteers. Another recent appointment is as Chair of the global sustainability non-profit Forum for the Future.

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you?

For me, it means being truly open and future thinking, and making the most of all the talents and potential we have in our businesses. And of course, it’s the right thing to do, it’s the human thing to do. But we can also look at the data, which shows that more diverse teams perform better.

D&I means more empathy, more humanity and more connections. And if you don’t have an employee population that in some way, shape, or form reflects what’s going on in the world, and fosters new ideas and fresh thinking, then you’re not doing the right thing for your business.

Why do you think it’s important to highlight women leaders and to celebrate role models?

Role models have had such an impact on my career. I’ve been very lucky at key points in my life when there’s been someone who saw the potential in me, and I’ve believed I can do things because of them. A teacher at school, for example, was a real role model for me – they supported me to go to university when I really hadn’t thought that was an option. And then early in my working life, there were two very senior women – who were quite unusual in their position at the time – who I could aspire to, who had my back, and who guided me through my career.

I’ve seen this play out in the other direction – I’m proud to be told I’ve been a role model to other women. When I was at Saatchi & Saatchi I was the first woman in the company to go



away, have a baby, and come back to work full time. I was running the strategy department and also had two young children. Fairly recently, I had a conversation with a woman who used to be in my team. She had left to have children, came back, and then became CEO of another organisation. She told me: “because I saw you do it, it never even occurred to me that I couldn’t”. And it just goes to show how important role modelling is.

This publication is all about sharing experiences. Why do you think this is important?

I wrote a book on this! My book, Love Your Imposter, was really written because I wanted to share all the experiences that I’ve had. Not just the successes, but the challenges and the vulnerabilities too. By sharing my career, I wanted to show that everyone experiences imposter syndrome – it’s not really a syndrome, it’s just part of what it means to be human.

We need more people from a whole range of backgrounds and experiences to be running

organisations. I wrote my book to try and encourage more people to drive forward in their career – even if they thought the top roles weren’t available to them. As leaders, sharing our experiences provides insight into the skills people need to progress, and sharing our vulnerability should give others the confidence to step up.

“ When I became CEO, I learnt a lot about what it meant to lead in a way that felt suited to me.

Can you share a lesson you’ve learnt in your career?

When I first became CEO, I learnt a lot about what it meant to lead in a way that felt suited to me, rather than adopting the clichéd style of a ‘traditional’ CEO. I didn’t have very many women role models to look up

to, so I learnt to be a bit of a magpie – to pick up bits of insight, tips and ways of leading from other people. Watching how Chairs ran their Boards was very valuable.

And more generally, I’ve learnt that a good leader is someone who wants others to be brilliant. I’ve seen some people who, for whatever reason, feel that to be successful yourself you have to make others feel reduced or small. And that’s not right.

What advice would you give to the next generation of talent entering the sector?

I think there’s a lesson to be learnt from my career. It took a headhunter to call me and suggest that I could be a CEO. I really hadn’t thought about it myself. There’s a lesson – particularly for those in diverse communities – that sometimes other people recognise your potential more clearly than you do. So my advice would be to really make sure you’re putting yourself in a position where others can spot your talent. And what’s more, when people tell you you’re talented – believe them.



Helen Connolly

Company **New Look**
Job Title **CEO**

I started working in retail over 20 years ago. In that time there has been significant transformation across the sector, which has allowed me to have a very exciting and varied career to date.

In the early years of my career, I was a buyer for businesses including Next, before moving into more senior roles at Dorothy Perkins and George at Asda. From there, I progressed further on to executive roles, leading fast-paced, energetic teams focused on delivering commercial success. I've been fortunate enough to work with a range of large and medium-sized organisations and have taken invaluable lessons from my time at each.

Then in 2020, I joined New Look from Bonmarché. In my time as New Look's Chief Commercial Officer, I focused on its Buying, Merchandising and Sourcing capabilities, improving efficiencies across the business, as well as driving partnership and concessions opportunities. To me, having the best product possible is the key for retailers' success, and was something I focused on during my time as CCO.

Now as CEO, I am working with the whole New Look team to deliver long term, sustainable growth for the business, underpinned by our strong omnichannel offer and the success of New Look's ongoing digital transformation. I feel honoured to be in a position where I can lead and inspire my colleagues at New Look, sharing my own real-life experience to support the success of the next generation of leaders.

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you?

Diversity and inclusion is about creating an environment and a culture in which everyone can be the very best, authentic version of themselves.

ED&I isn't something that's switched on and off; it's always on. Building a supportive and empathetic environment, in which everyone has a voice and diverse points of view are encouraged, drives a true sense of belonging at work. Celebrating



everyone for who they are and what they bring, is vitally important for workplace culture and business performance, and it's these diverse points of view which drive innovation and creativity. One of our four values at New Look, is "We are one" and that is what ED&I truly means to me.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

When people feel that they're in a safe and supportive environment they'll happily share their experiences, thoughts, and points of view. This is a true demonstration of an authentically inclusive culture. I've seen firsthand the impact our teams sharing their stories and experiences has had on those around them. The



more conversations that happen, the more we learn from each other, and the better, and more supportive we become.

What impact have role models had on your career in retail?

From the beginning of my career, I have been fortunate enough to have some amazing bosses that proved to be phenomenal role models. Often when I didn't believe in myself, they encouraged me and pushed me forward. They allowed me to gain the experience, have the freedom and gave me the tools to succeed. I am very lucky that this has been a constant throughout my career. I have also been lucky enough to have some wonderful role models in my personal life, particularly successful women who have always encouraged me to believe in myself. Most importantly

“ In retail, you have to trust your instincts and build a strong team around you.

my Mum. She made me who I am today, instilled the right values in me, ensuring I always had respect for people and a strong work ethic. She is not with us today but I still strive to make her proud every day.

I feel that in retail specifically, it's really important that you have a drive and will to succeed and be resilient as the industry has always been tough, now more than ever. You must have a compelling belief, trust your instincts and build a strong team around you.

When it comes to advocating for D&I, is there anything you can share that you're doing outside of retail?

Sharing successes and learning from those around us is important. It's about being involved in the conversations and having a point of view. Our teams are regularly interacting with Inclusion organisations and experts across multiple sectors, sharing what we're doing, and bringing back ideas on topics where we can be better.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

The most important thing is to be my authentic self. I have had to learn and tailor to audiences over the years as

my career has grown but I have always stayed true to who I am. Trust and transparency are my most important values and by leading in that way I believe it is often reciprocated and builds strong foundations. I believe in doing the right thing, whether it be for the business or individual at all times.

What are you doing to ensure D&I remains a priority in your organisation?

We created our People Experience and Inclusion Team 12 months ago to develop and lead our first strategic ED&I Roadmap. We also took all our Senior Leadership Team, Directors and Heads Of through their first ED&I workshop this year to start to further build our knowledge and awareness. ED&I underpins our Strategic Plans and is reviewed within our performance and behavioural leadership framework and our value #weareone is always front of mind. On a personal level, I meet with our Inclusion Team regularly to gain insight and support and champion ED&I across New Look. We also have a Director Sponsor for ED&I.

Our biggest success this year has been building our Inclusion Ally Groups. These are cross functional team members from all levels of the business, and they're passionate about the areas they're focusing on. We have a PRIDE group (LGBTQIA+), Cultural Awareness (Faith and Ethnicity), Men's Health, Women's Health, Accessibility, and our Wellbeing Allies. These groups meet regularly and are helping to inform our ED&I Roadmap, and the actions we're taking.





Sarah Dickins

Company **Central Co-op**

Job Title **Chief Member, Customer and People Officer**

“ We needed to think differently about teams having a sense of belonging, and be more thoughtful about people’s lives outside of work.

I’ve spent my whole career in HR, and in a broad range of sectors for the past thirty-five years – from utilities to retail, to financial services, to hospitality, travel and leisure, and now back to retail. I’ve also had non-executive experience, as NED and Chair of the Remuneration Committee for Marshalls Motors for four years. My current position is Chief Member, Customer and People Officer at Central Co-op, a broad role that makes sure we always put our members, customers and colleagues at the heart of everything we do.

What does being a Woman to Watch in Retail mean to you?

For me, I want to help progress talent through our organisation and through our sector. Role models help us aspire to be better, and to do better. We all have different strengths and opportunities – but role models help us see what we can achieve. So that’s really the driver for me.

Why do you feel it’s important to highlight women leaders in retail?

From an inclusion perspective, role models are really critical. We employ so many women in our retail business, and it’s so important that they have people to look up to as they’re deciding upon and building their own career pathway. By shining a light on women leaders, we show that anyone can progress to whatever level they’d like.

In retail specifically, it’s been great to see more women CEOs in the sector since Covid. It’s a big change – and very helpful for future generations. Within my network, I see women progressing, and we’re no longer working in a space with a huge lack of female leaders. So that’s really promising.

Obviously, there is a lot more to do. If you look at career pathways, there’s room for improvement in the middle management level. That tier is where you find the talent of the future.



How have you seen the D&I agenda develop in your time in retail?

The conversation has changed massively over the years. I’ve been back in retail for eighteen months, and there’s now a huge focus on D&I from a customer and colleague perspective, and all the way across to stakeholder relationships. I think Covid really helped. We needed to think differently about teams having a sense of belonging, and be more thoughtful about people’s lives outside of work.

Now, we’re all learning from each other. An approach we’ve taken at Central Co-op is really looking for the opportunities to learn. Take religious festivals, for example. We’ve got more work to do around educating our employees and designing campaigns around different cultural or religious events – but we’ve seen this as an

exciting opportunity to embrace inclusion within our teams. We want to take colleagues on the journey with us.

When it comes to talent and driving up inclusion, we still have a way to go. We want to make sure that our company culture has inclusion built in – that it comes with an inherent sense of belonging. This means requiring participation from our leaders. We want every senior member of staff to be bought in.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Firstly, not to overthink things! Secondly, to have worked a bit harder to get some breadth. Everyone tells you that you need a solid career plan, but I think breadth is critical too. I really got to know HR, but I wish I’d done something away from HR and then had come back to it.

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you, and mean in your organisation?

Being a cooperative, D&I is especially important. We are owned by our members, and each of our colleagues is a member. We can do things differently because of this structure.

We want inclusivity for everyone: from those who shop with us to those dealing with the loss of a loved one.

We’ve worked very hard on our culture. We want inclusivity to run through everything we do, so we can be the best we can be.

We want to accelerate the agenda in our business, because the more inclusive we are, the better we can serve our members. It’s a virtuous cycle. If we’re a great place to work, we’ll be a great place to shop.





Deborah Dorman

Company **Sainsbury's**
Job Title **Director of Group HR**

An experienced strategic HR leader, I have a passion for engagement and equity; ensuring everyone has a voice and that they can fulfil their potential. In my role as Director of Group HR for Sainsbury's, I am focused on delivering sustainable business value through people, culture and transformation, creating an environment where all 170,000 of our colleagues can be themselves and flourish. I am also a Board Trustee for Shaw Trust, a social purpose organisation challenging inequality and breaking down barriers to enable social mobility.

I have held a variety of HR roles and earlier in my career I was Client Services Director in marketing communications and engagement consultancies, supporting clients in a variety of sectors both in the UK and internationally. Additionally, I have been an Advisory Board Member with Business in the Community Race Equality where I championed the creation of the Youth Advisory Panel, to give young people a greater voice in improving employment and progression for ethnic minorities.



What advice would you give to your younger self?

Be brave and take more risks! I'd tell myself to listen less to my worries about what I 'couldn't do' and more actively tune into my strengths and the difference I could make.

I think one route to that would have been to seek out a mentor earlier in my career as I now recognise the significant positive impact that had on me when I did.

More actively building and using my network would also be something I'd do sooner. What I have discovered is how willing so many people are to make connections, share their perspectives, offer advice and even sponsorship. And the broader your horizon, the more you can open yourself up to what's possible!

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you, and mean in your organisation?

I am keenly aware of how access to education and employment is not a level playing field and so much talent lies untapped and potential unrealised. Enabling people to have better lives through access to meaningful work, regardless of who they are or where they come from, is a core driver for me.

As one of the country's largest employers, Sainsbury's is very often a place where people get their first taste of the world of work. Ensuring that is a positive experience, where people can be themselves, can grow and develop and be treated fairly and with respect, is critical. Not only does this flow through to how we show up for our customers and therefore



to our performance as a business, but is a core part of our social responsibility. We are fortunate to have a mature understanding of this at a leadership level and inclusion is baked into the work of all parts of the business, whether that's our Black owned business sponsorship scheme, Thrive, or our representation targets which form part of the incentive arrangements for our top 1400 leaders.

If you were not working in retail, where would you be?

On the stage! I love communication in all its forms and trying my hand at acting has really helped hone my skills.

A few years ago I joined an amateur dramatics group – taking me out of my comfort zone and doing something very different. It is a great source of energy for me and really stimulates my creativity.

“Retail is such a fast-moving and critical sector with so many different opportunities for people to have a significant impact on millions of customers every week.”

What advice would you give to the next generation of women entering the sector?

I would wholeheartedly encourage the next generation of women to embrace a career in retail. It's such a fast-moving and critical sector with so many different opportunities for people to have a significant impact

on millions of customers every week. The leadership opportunities in retail are also huge, leading large and diverse teams.

We need more women in leadership roles in retail organisations, so I'd encourage women entering the sector to recognise that opportunities are there for the taking. Be bold and ask for what you need to succeed. Learn what your strengths are and exploit them to the full – it's what people will recognise and promote you for. Seek out sponsorship and advocacy within the organisations you work for – it will help you succeed.

There are so many different career paths to take within retail so be open to trying different things and take advantage of as many opportunities as possible, and don't be afraid to fail sometimes, as long as you are actively learning from the experience. Finally, leave the ladder behind you when you do succeed so the generation of women following you can also fulfil their potential!



Rachael Egerton

Company **QVC**
Job Title **UK People Leader**

I have reached my 26th year with QVC – it still amazes me when I say that! Some of my earlier career choices sat outside of the people function albeit most of my career has been across a variety of roles with HR generalist at their core. My current role is as a UK People leader, business partner to UK CEO, Koreen Fader – without a doubt a Woman to Watch in Retail! As a People Leader I develop and lead the execution of our UK people strategy within a global and International scope inclusive of our UK DE&I strategy. In addition to leading the UK people team, I am also a member of the UK Exec team accountable for leading our UK Commerce and Operations business and teams. I am also a very proud sponsor to our 5 team member resource groups (representing LGBTQ+, Gender Equality, Mental Health, Disability and BR&VE – Backgrounds Represented & Valued Everywhere).

Beyond UK, I am part of the global and international People teams. Working cross culturally has been invaluable for providing a deeper understanding to the broader retail landscape and from a diversity perspective in business and societally. Sharing perspectives in market nuances really ensures we develop people related strategies globally that are meaningful and relatable.

What does being a Woman to Watch in Retail mean to you?

It is a huge honor to be considered as a Woman to Watch in Retail and to be amongst and associated with such a talented group of women – wow! It is certainly something I will not take lightly and do feel a sense of accountability to influence a more gender equal path for others, ensuring I continue to voice and influence the need for change. I commit to ensuring I am accessible

and open with my own experiences and I continue to learn and understand from the experiences of others including the very real challenges that can be present for many women with desires to progress their careers. There are so many roles the retail sector has to offer presenting opportunities for a wide and varied career path. I think it is incredibly important to place a spotlight on the plethora of choice and ensuring

women are represented is incredibly important. We need more women, we need the diversity of perspectives that fuels innovation – the customers we serve deserve and expect that.

What challenges have you learnt the most from in your career?

I've learnt so much from the many challenges that have come my way. I'm sure lots of the challenges I've faced would be familiar to lots of us. They may have stung at the time, made me uncomfortable, and left me questioning my ability, but each of these situations presented an opportunity to learn. Situations that don't go as you expect are the ones which provide the greatest chance to grow as a leader, as a professional and also as a human being! It's when you look back and think "I would have done that differently" that you gain insight into yourself and your values. So I'm grateful for the challenges, and the things that didn't go as planned. Because they've enhanced my personal development and crystallised my career aspirations.

What does D&I mean to you, and mean in your organisation?

D&I is incredibly important to me and the organisation – it lives in the shared principles of how we work together, in our strategic priorities and our associated goals that engage our team members, shape our culture and drive community and business impact. It comes truly alive with the collaborative partnerships we have formed with our Team member resource groups. Being a sponsor of our D&I TMRG groups has been the most satisfying

experience of my career to date. I have learnt so much from individuals who have been so open to share their own experiences, how they have shaped the person they are and how we can move forward together to ensure greater equity and inclusivity. It's of most importance that we create a team member experience where everyone can be their authentic selves. I see my role as a leader and people lead critical to removing any roadblocks that may be in the way of us achieving this and will continue to be tenacious in doing so.

I am incredibly fortunate to work alongside a passionate Sponsor group who also ensure our TMRGs are enabled, have the right level of decision making and accessibility to platforms.

I would urge anyone to get connected to team member resource groups – it has truly broadened my own network, has challenged my own bias and always inspires me to do more and better.

What advice would you give to the next generation of women entering the sector?

Be unashamedly unconstrained with your career aspirations and be intentional about your development and progression.

Don't be passive or place limited on yourself. Nobody benefits from this, least of all you! Be open and curious about opportunities that might be a bit 'off piste'. Take the chances that will stretch you, think about what skills you have to offer, and consider your own weaknesses as opportunities to learn, rather than as areas where you're lacking. Channel your bravery.

Moving to next level role within own area of experience is not the only route forward, consider those lateral moves beyond your areas of experience or expertise!

Find a mentor, in fact find multiple mentors and allies – the experience has been of most value throughout my career.

Most of all – be you!

“ I would urge anyone to get connected to team member resource groups. It has truly broadened my own network, challenged my own bias, and always inspires me to do more and better.





Sharon Flood

Company **Pets at Home**

Job Title **Non-executive Director & Chair of Remuneration**

“ I’d say once you get down to the last few candidates in a process, choose diversity. If each of those people is “appointable”, then pick the person who will bring something different to the table.

Having studied Maths at Bath University, I then trained as a Chartered Management Accountant within the Unilever graduate training scheme. I gained an MBA from INSEAD and then joined OC&C as a strategy consultant, also spending a sabbatical year working in India with Hindustan Lever. My retail career started with Kingfisher where I was head of strategy and then Director of Finance for B&Q, before joining Woolworths Group PLC as Finance Director for their retail business. I then became Finance Director for John Lewis Department stores where I was responsible at various times for finance, strategy, IT and the launch of the John Lewis Financial Services business. Subsequently I worked for Sun European private equity as an operating partner before beginning my non-executive career which has spanned retail/e-commerce, luxury, infrastructure and property. I chaired S T DuPont and Seraphine Group PLC and have chaired the audit committees at Network Rail Ltd, Crest Nicholson PLC, Pets at Home PLC and Cityfibre Ltd as well as Chairing Remuneration at Pets At Home, ESG at Network Rail and Safety and Security at Getlink.

In parallel I have maintained a long interest in not for profit including being a founder member of INDEVOR, the development society at INSEAD, founder and treasurer of KINOE, Kids in Need of Education, Trustee and Chair of Audit at Shelter, Trustee and Chair of Finance at the Science Museum and Trustee of the University of Cambridge.

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you?

For me, it’s about opportunity for everyone. It’s about no group feeling that they’re cut off from opportunity. It’s up to the individual what they do with those opportunities – but everybody has the right to give it a shot.

What is your motivation for driving up D&I in the organisations that you’re a part of?

Well, it’s just the right thing to do. It’s the right thing for the organisation, for the individuals, and for the communities we serve. The bottom line is that the businesses not embracing D&I will get left behind.



In your view, why is sharing experiences so important to making progress on D&I?

Because you find out so much about people that you didn’t know. When I started out in my career, everybody presented such a specific version of themselves at work. And it was easy to think that those personas were real. But as soon as you dig deeper, you find that people are so much richer, so much more varied, and bring so many different experiences to the table. And it’s that which provides inspiration really.

What impact have role models had in shaping your career?

I was really inspired by one person when I was at university. I saw Orna Ni-Chionna speak at a graduate

recruitment event, and I found her so inspiring. She felt so different from all the other people at this event, who tended to fit into a certain mold. Orna was so bright, so capable, and seemed and sounded so different from everybody else there. I’ve since met her, and I’m not sure she knows this about me, but if I had to pinpoint one person who has made me think “I can do this”, it would be Orna.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

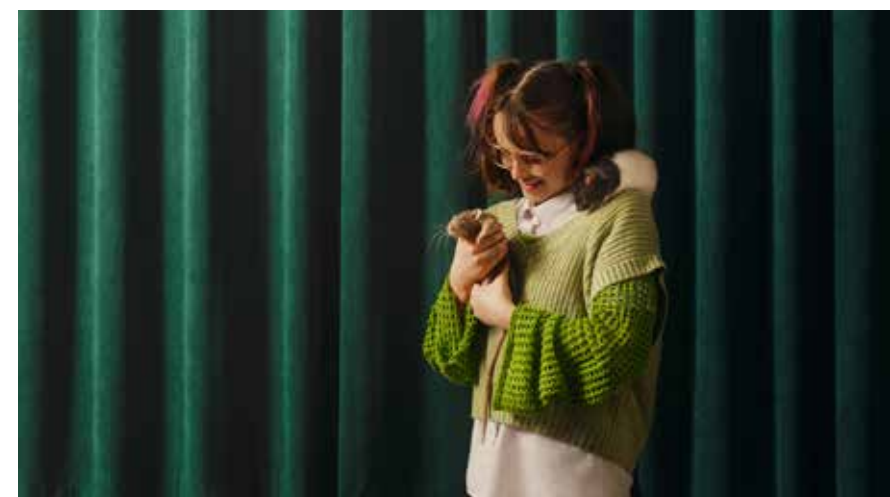
I’d say really think about your employer brand. So when I was at Network Rail, we repositioned the business to really highlight how key ESG was to our strategy. And that opened up our organisation to a

whole new type of leader, and type of employee. Traditionally, Network Rail had been something of an old white man’s business, but this attracted young people, and leaders for whom D&I, sustainability and the environment are priorities.

And secondly, I’d say rethink how you recruit. People might not agree with me here, but I think it can be difficult to actually identify the best candidate in most recruitment processes. You get so many good applicants, and once you’re down to the last few, trying to distinguish who will do best can be futile. You never really know until they’re in the role. So I’d say once you get down to the last few candidates in a process, choose diversity. If each of those people is “appointable”, pick the person who will bring something different to the table.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

For me, it’s about being able to speak to anyone. My mother was a bank clerk, my dad was a lift engineer. So for me it’s about being able to speak to the person you meet in the lift, the person you meet on reception, and being able to operate effectively in the boardroom. It’s working across the whole spectrum of society and adapting your style. If you can offer somebody a point of connection and make them feel empowered, then that’s hugely valuable.





Vanessa Gold

Company **CEO**
Job Title **Ann Summers**

As the CEO of Ann Summers, I'm passionate about my business, and furthering everything it stands for; empowering women, creating a safe space for everyone and continuously striving for the strongest approach to diversity and inclusion for both the workforce and our customers.

Joining the brand in 1986, I worked across various departments, understanding all the intricacies of the business, before reaching the position of Managing Director in 2011, and then CEO in 2022. Throughout my career, I've worked tirelessly to ensure Ann Summers continues to evolve as a brand, sharing my sister Jacqueline's vision for the business.

I'm a mentor a mentor and a public speaker; using my unique knowledge of the industry to recognise and reward others. Outside of work, I'm a keen marathon runner, an avid West Ham supporter, and I love spending time with her husband Nick and their Springer Spaniel

What challenges have you learnt the most from in your career?

During the early days of Ann Summers, the brand was considered controversial, even though all we were ever striving to do was to empower women to have the same levels of pleasure as men have always been allowed. We found that the answer was always 'no' when it came to working with people outside the business. Rather than listening to the nos, and admitting defeat, we learnt to listen very carefully to our customers, what they wanted and needed from us, and, with that knowledge in mind, we found a

way to position the brand so that people would start to say yes. We continue to do that to this day; keep our customers at the core of our decision-making process, knowing that if they are happy, the business is happy. I also surround myself with the best, most passionate colleagues, people who are experts in their field, who always help to navigate challenges, and help me grow too.

Why do you think more women should consider a career within retail?

Retail really can offer so much to

“We're constantly challenging ourselves to do better, listening to people both inside and outside the organisation to figure out where improvements can be made.”

women. For a start, it's a career which really embodies flexibility, allowing women to work around studies, second jobs, and family commitments. There's also a real opportunity to climb the career ladder – we have many examples in Ann Summers of women starting at entry level and rising to senior positions or moving into different functions and learning new skills, for example from the shopfloor into head office. Retail offers the opportunity to nurture a fulfilling career in a really sociable sector that is always developing and changing and offering new opportunities. Fortunately, there are some amazing women in retail who are absolutely inspirational role models. My sister, Jacqueline, was undoubtedly one of those women, who has shown what is possible for women pursuing a career in retail.



What advice would you give to your younger self?

I wish I'd started networking younger, so my advice to anyone I mentor is to build your network. Talk to people across all other businesses, never be afraid to ask questions. Everyone's made mistakes and learnt from them, and networking is the crux of uncovering those lessons. I'd also tell myself to be more confident. Trust in your ability, put yourself forward for things even if you're not 100% convinced you can do it. Believe in yourself and show what you can do. Your self-confidence will inspire confidence in others.

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you, and mean in your organisation?

Diversity has never been a just buzz word or a token gesture for Ann

Summers, rather something we have always intrinsically reached for. Historically, we have worked hard for women to feel empowered and have equality of opportunity, vital to a business that seeks to support the confidence and pleasure of our customers. Nowadays, for me, diversity and inclusion means making sure we reach as wide a range of people as possible and enable our products and services to be more accessible to all. We've extended our sizing ranges, considered people from the LGBTQ+ community in our range and service, extended the skin tone colours of our lingerie offer, worked with a diverse range of models and influencers, and partnered and raised money for organisations like the brilliant Stonewall. Internally, we've reflected that purpose by broadening our policies to be more inclusive, and worked hard to make Ann Summers

a more diverse and inclusive place to work. We're constantly challenging ourselves to do better, listening to people both inside and outside the organisation to figure out where improvements can be made. Being a truly inclusive brand is a vital part of the Ann Summers DNA. It is an ever-evolving and developing challenge, but one we are completely committed to. We're passionate about ensuring we remain leaders within the field.

If you were not working in retail, where would you be?

That's difficult, because it's all I've ever known, and I still love it now as much as when I started. I love the conversations we have with our customers, and so I think whatever I did, it would have to be something where you're working closely with other people, and constantly learning from them.



Lindsay Goldsbrough

Company **Asda**
Job Title **Senior Director, East Yorkshire**

I joined Asda in 1997, part-time as a checkout-operator whilst completing my BA in Business. It wasn't my plan to stay but I became hooked on retail! Asda's Retail Graduate Scheme brought an opportunity for numerous management roles, and I progressed to work centrally with Tony Page (Retail Director), giving me great insight into the wider business.

I joined the General Store Manager's development programme, and was appointed my first store (Billingham). I then had the privilege of leading teams in various stores including a £15million refit/build in the Peterlee store. I'm proud to say that the highlight of my GSM tenure was my appointment into my home store, Boldon (where I started as a colleague), in 2009, which was Walmart's highest turnover store worldwide. I then progressed to South Yorkshire as Regional Operations Manager, subsequently spending four years as Senior Director (North East) before taking up my current role as Senior Director (East Yorkshire). During this time, I've looked after stores and formats from Livings, Supermarkets and Superstores, ranging between 20 to 64 stores. 25 years in and I'm still loving retail!

Personal experience motivates me to support others in their development journey. I lead a female allyship programme, where I mentor, sponsor and support women, and help them accelerate their development. Most recently, I've been working as an external mentor in partnership with WiHTL's Global Female Leadership Programme.

I would describe three key principles of my work. To:

- Give people a reason to believe in themselves and their future, by demonstrating trust and belief in them
- Be aspirational in your expectations of others
- Keep working at being a role model, collectively raising the bar

What does being a Woman to Watch in Retail mean to you?

I'm exceptionally humbled by this nomination. Being a Woman to Watch gives me a huge sense of pride and satisfaction. I've reflected on an amazing journey so far, with achievements to be proud of, milestones to remember and relationships to savour.

I would cite the following as some of the highlights so far.

I work tirelessly trying to be the best leader I can be. Asda has an annual leadership 'We're Listening' survey, which is completed anonymously by your subordinate group. I'm exceptionally proud that both my personal and regional scores are consistently in the top 10% and most recently were both top of the company.

Why do you feel it is important to highlight women leaders in retail?

It's vital to highlight women in retail. Other women need inspirational role models. In my early career, I questioned my own capacity and capability, but now I fully appreciate the importance of inspired mentorship.

I'm privileged to have experienced world-class mentorship on my journey – periods of personal mentoring from Helen Milford (M&S's Retail Director) and Judith McKenna (President, Walmart International) were exceptional influences on me and my career.



“ Being a Woman to Watch in Retail is a memorable milestone which fills me with pride. However, with it comes a responsibility to pay it forward to the next generation.

Commerciality is of utmost importance. I have a proven track record of delivering commercial performance. My region has topped the company retail scorecard on three occasions – most recently in 2021.

When I accepted the challenge of East Yorkshire, the region was lacking commercially, and engagement/morale was flat. However, given the proximity to Leeds, an untapped opportunity existed for the team to work alongside Home Office colleagues, driving and help shape newness/innovation.

We are now the region of choice for trials, regularly trialing new product propositions (Food to Go and Food for Now) whilst also helping shape People and Process innovations.

We're currently trialing examples of new structure, a new replenishment system called LAB, and some of the concept-future systems.

Being a Retail Woman to Watch is a memorable milestone which fills me with pride. However, with it comes a responsibility to pay it forward to the next generation.

How have you seen the D&I agenda develop in your time in retail?

When I joined the sector, change was underway when it came to gender equality. However, women tended to occupy more junior leadership roles. Senior roles, especially GSM up, were male appointments and felt like a 'boys club.'

I've witnessed a significant change in attitude toward women leaders. We're no longer a novelty or simply proof of organisation diversity! As society has become more tolerant and inclusive, the industry has awoken to the value of a diverse workforce and its value to engagement, culture and commercial performance and productivity.

Businesses have modernised policy to remain competitive prospective employers. Progress in pay, maternity and flexible working are examples of benefits that have had to improve significantly to attract and retain the right talent.

As technology has advanced, we've been able to become even more inclusive. Embracing hybrid ways of

working has supported many women to have a better work life balance whilst attracting talent that previously may have ignored us as a prospective employer.

Women in retail have a voice in the industry now, an equal standing and importantly a value.

What challenges have you learnt the most from in your career?

I'd say the biggest challenges have been overcoming self-doubts. Times I've taken challenging feedback personally, felt out of my depth or faced rejection for roles are examples of when I've felt most vulnerable in my career!

My biggest learning has been that it's not about the situation, it's your response to it that's important. Be the solution not the problem. Results aren't what define you, they're simply the byproduct of your mindset.

Due to personal circumstances, my line manager/Vice President recently had a three-month period of absence. I was honoured to 'take the reins' and with it responsibility for ten senior directors and 180 stores. The demands of the all-important first quarter commercial performance, a challenging business-change programme and an unexpected senior personnel change was demand enough. However, continuing 'hands on' with my own role probably brought one of the most demanding periods of my career. Yet, I relished the opportunity.



Hannah Hester

Company **WHSmith**
Job Title **Group Merchandising Director**

I fell into retail straight out of university, not knowing what I wanted to do, I searched for graduate schemes that looked fast paced and numeric. I landed on the WHSmith Graduate Scheme and haven't looked back since. While starting in buying, I was always clear that I wanted to move into a supply chain role so quickly moved over to merchandising.

A couple of internal moves later, I decided I needed to gain a broader skillset and see if there was something outside of merchandising that might be a better fit for my career. I joined Deloitte as Retail Supply Chain Consultant, working with clients such as Penguin Random House, Co-op Food, John Lewis and SABMiller. After 2 years, I missed the buzz and fast-paced world of retail so moved back to WHS where I was eventually promoted to Merchandising Director in 2020 – right during the pandemic.

I've recently had my first child so have had a year out on maternity leave, but am now back in the fold as Group Merchandising Director where I am responsible for the day-to-day operations of the growing International business and leading the shaping of our strategic priorities for the future.



How do you think retail has changed since you've been in the sector? How do you think it will change in the future?

In the last 12 years, retail has moved from being a bricks & mortar industry with large spaces offering customer choice to a convenience, direct-to-consumer, and largely online model. Retailers have had to adapt their offering while optimising their cost base in order to succeed, not an easy task! I think the future of retail will be focused on continuous innovation – whether that be leveraging

“ A senior woman leader once told me that the way to succeed was to only take six weeks maternity leave and have a stay-at-home partner. I now give others the exact opposite advice!

technology to streamline operations or retain customers, providing a launchpad for new products or investing in stores to establish new concepts.

What advice would you give to the next generation of women entering the sector?

One of the first pieces of advice I was given by a very senior woman when I started my career in retail was that the way to succeed was to only take 6 weeks maternity leave and have a stay-at-home partner. This has stuck with me and is now the exact opposite of the advice I give anyone. Give this industry your all, by all means, I certainly have. It is fast paced and demanding, but also take the time to build your family and re-prioritize as you need to. Don't feel scared to ask for the flexible working patterns or time off to raise your child, retail is a very inclusive industry. And



I can promise, I took a year maternity leave and do not have a stay-at-home partner!

Why do you feel it's important to highlight women leaders in retail?

As part of being nominated this year, I was sent a copy of last year's index to read. Wow – I can say that I've never been so inspired. It is sometimes hard to find people to relate or look up to in your own organisation and highlighting female leaders across the industry means finding a cohort of people to network with, be inspired by and relate to.

What challenges have you learnt the most from in your career?

There are always day-to-day challenges which I have learnt from,

but those which stick with me are the moments where I have been most uncomfortable and stretched. The first time I led a large team, the first time I had a very challenging trading meeting, the first big mistake I made as a merchandiser, these are the times when I have really learnt and developed resilience.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Don't be overwhelmed by responsibility – as I was progressing in the businesses, I used to struggle making decisions as I felt I couldn't possibly have the experience behind me to make them. Looking back, I was always in the right place and perfectly capable of making those decisions – I just needed to trust myself, as others did.

If you were not working in retail, where would you be?

As a former athlete and animal lover, I would either be working in sport or with animals in some capacity. Pretty certain I would still be doing something operational as I just can't get away from that buzz!

“ I can say I've never been more inspired than when I was reading last year's index.



Sharlene John

Company **Selfridges & Co**
Job Title **Head of Recruitment**



“ The recognition I have received is having a direct impact on women in my community and with that comes huge responsibility.

I am an award-winning Recruitment and DE&I Leader with experience in luxury retail and the public sector. I began my career in HR recruitment over 20 years ago, juggling full time work whilst being a single mum. I spent many years within the social care sector supporting social services, local authorities and charities across the UK. Within the past six years, I have transitioned into luxury retail and have been able to utilise the best practices and skills I have learnt in my earlier career to shape and design inclusive hiring strategies – including here at Selfridges – revolutionising the way we recruit.

Recently, I was awarded the HR Champion Award at the Burberry British Diversity Awards 2023. This award is given to a leading HR professional who has leveraged their influence to ensure that the values of diversity and fairness are at the heart of their organisation’s HR policies, ensuring there is diverse talent across the workplace. My passion for DE&I extends beyond my day job. I am an active member of my community, supporting local authorities in London by providing career advice to young people and mentoring women to promote empowerment and self-belief.

What does being a Woman to Watch in Retail mean to you?

It is an incredible honour to be recognised as a Woman to Watch in Retail, but more than that, it is the impact that being on such a prestigious list will have on the younger generation and in particular women of colour in our industry that means so much to me. Since being included on the Diversity In Retail Role Model For Inclusion Retail Index 2022 last year and winning the HR Champion Award at the Burberry British Diversity Awards 2023 earlier this year, I have received many

messages from young black and mixed race women telling me how inspired they are and how proud they are to see someone like us being included in the conversation. The recognition I have received is having a direct impact on women in my community and with that comes huge responsibility. It feels incredibly special to be able to show up in this way, leading from the front.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

I have a couple of things I’d say to my younger self – the first being find yourself a good mentor. You will need



someone who can support you on your career journey and there is so much value in having someone who can offer independent coaching and guidance, particularly in the early stages of your career.

Secondly, don’t be afraid to be yourself. Your superpower is being you! Personally, I spent far too much time in my younger days trying to fit in and, typically being the only person of colour in the room, naturally I was different. I wish I’d had more confidence and embraced who I was back then instead of changing my personality and appearance to fit in and be accepted.

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you, and mean in your organisation?

To me, DE&I encompasses so much – from creating inclusive processes and policies to ensure fairness and transparency around financial

reward and benefits, to creating environments that enable our people and teams to grow and be the truest version of ourselves.

Two areas that are incredibly important and to me are representation and belonging. I have first-hand experience of what it’s like to work in an environment where you are the only “one” – whether that is as a woman or as a woman of colour. The strain this can cause on an individual’s mental health is profound. DE&I is NOT just hiring people to tick a box – it is hiring individuals, embracing their intersectionalities, who you commit to supporting, encouraging, and championing, creating an environment where people truly feel they belong. Selfridges is a diverse business with purpose. We are a community where everyone can be their authentic self and discover their potential in an inclusive environment. We believe

everyone should have a meaningful career and achieve balance through wellbeing. Being a diverse and inclusive community where team members can bring their whole self to work absolutely underpins our success.

What advice would you give to the next generation of women entering the sector?

Don’t be afraid to use your voice, even if it shakes and you’re scared you’ll forget what to say. Never be made to feel like your opinion or voice is not important or valid. Remember, as you build your career and experience success, always bring people along with you. There is no point in having a seat at the table if you’re not prepared to pull up a chair for those coming up behind you. Furthermore, if there isn’t a seat for you, go and build your own table!



Kerry Johnson

Company **Sainsbury's**

Job Title **Regional Stores Director**

I have worked for Sainsbury's for 24 years. I am a Regional Stores Director of 22 Supermarket stores and 8 Convenience stores and I'm proud to be the co-chair of our Gender Balance Colleague Network, Inspire. I was the first in my family to go to university where I gained a degree in business. I joined Sainsbury's as a part time student working as a cashier whilst I was at university. After university I became a department manager and I've progressed my career within Sainsbury's in various roles across the business. I am a founding member of Inspire, and I'm hugely passionate about gender equality. I work with the business in my role as co-chair to make real change happen. I am driven by a desire to improve – for myself, my family, my community, and the next generation. Outside of work, I'm the proud mum to my 5-year-old son, who has additional needs, and I am also involved in my son's school PTA, making a difference to the future of the school and the pupil experience, as well as our local church, making a difference to the community I live in.

“ Build your community – I could not be where I am now without a strong network. Take time to develop a network and cultivate it.

see how they can have a fantastic career within retail.

To make meaningful and sustainable progress toward gender equality, it is vital to find resolutions for women's progression limiters and a large part of this is showcasing the possible, through a diverse range of women leaders in retail role models.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

When I think about my journey from university to where I stand today, I wish I could go back in time and give some advice to my younger self. Family and friends have had my back throughout, but all of us need a few words of wisdom from someone who has gone through a similar phase in life. It makes the journey easier knowing that you are not alone. So I'd say: As you navigate through life Kerry, remember that setbacks and failures are just opportunities to learn and grow. Don't be afraid to take risks and pursue your passion, even if it means stepping out of your comfort zone. Cherish the work relationships

Why do you feel it's important to highlight women leaders in retail?

One of my best loved quotes is "you can't be what you can't see" and time and time again I hear from brilliant women who are struggling to see a career within retail for themselves, as there are just not enough women in senior positions across retail (yet!).

Often, women tell me their self-confidence or self-belief limits what they think they can achieve, or that challenges some women face limits them, including returning from family leave and balancing work and home, experiencing the menopause and the associated symptoms, or having caring responsibilities, and this in turn often means that women just don't



that bring you joy and surround yourself with people (women and men) who support and uplift you. Above all, be kind to yourself and trust the journey. You are capable of achieving great things.

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you, and mean in your organisation?

Inclusion to me means that everyone has a voice and feels welcome when they work or shop with us. Diversity to me means that there is difference, and that difference is recognised and celebrated. At Sainsbury's we want to be a truly inclusive retailer, where all our colleagues can fulfil their potential and where every single one of our customers feels welcome when they shop with us. In order for us to fulfil this aim, it's so important that we have diversity and that everyone feels like they belong.

What advice would you give to the next generation of women entering the sector?

Build your community – I could not be where I am now without a strong network. Take the time to develop a network and cultivate it. Most importantly, use it! You can't do it all

and you can't do it alone (and no one expects you to).

Remain curious and willing to learn – listen to others views, ask other people what they think, and you will make a much more informed decision. Keep learning, the sector is changing constantly.

Use your authenticity as your power – vulnerability is a superpower and builds trust. Share moments of challenge, frustration, and pride with your team. Tell them when you're struggling, celebrate your passions, and be generous with praise and gratitude.

Be bold – be willing to take risks and don't be afraid to make mistakes. To be bold will mean sometimes you fail, that's okay. Fail fast, take the learnings and move on.

Be you – most of all, be you. We need even more women to join our sector, women who empower, women with emotional intelligence, women with a strong vision and sense of purpose, women who are risk-takers, women who are resilient, women like you! In return, you'll be part of an amazing sector – a sector that supports you to balance your work life with your homelife, whilst having a superb career.





Anna Lloyd

Company **WHSmith UK Travel**

Job Title **Commercial Director Food & Drink**

I have been working in retail for over 20 years since graduating from university. Having started out on the front line in a busy London supermarket I discovered a love of product and brands and quickly moved into a buying career. My early years were spent at Sainsbury's followed by a long stint at Waitrose moving my way up the buying ranks.

3 years ago I joined WHSmith Travel making the leap from supermarket to travel retail just as the travel industry was at an all time low at the depths of a global pandemic! I am super proud to have been leading the commercial and marketing team through this period and all that we have achieved with some brilliant products and activations along the way, including delivering the biggest ever summer trading period last year as travelling recovered strongly, and aiming even higher through setting us up for a brilliant summer this year.

What challenges have you learnt the most from in your career?

With a full time demanding job my biggest challenge has been balancing my work with being a great mum to my two young girls. There have been times that I haven't got the balance quite right so I have worked really hard to ensure that I am able to do both and am passionate that women can progress through their career and be present at home for their families. I am fortunate to have a fantastic team behind me who I can trust implicitly to get the job done and in turn I am able to support them in getting the balance right too. I want more young women believing they can do both and get to the very top of an organisation with the right support to ensure we have diversity at all levels.



“ As a woman in retail at each stage of my career I've always looked for role models.

what makes you successful. Be brave in all that you do and don't be afraid to speak up even if you are a sole voice at times. I have found having a great support network both within the organization and externally has really helped me to do this. It is important to be able to confide in others and never feel you are facing challenges alone.

backgrounds and experiences. It is brilliant that WHSmith sees the importance of having many different perspectives and I like to think that I am really helping to drive this change.

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you, and mean in your organisation?

For me diversity is about having a wide variety of types of people in an organisation. It is not necessarily about the male vs female ratios but about diverse thinking and ensuring that different styles of leadership are able to succeed in one organisation. I am passionate about helping WHSmith to become more diverse in its thinking by building a team of people from a range of different

What advice would you give to the next generation of women entering the sector?

Always be authentic – I pride myself in being honest and transparent and ensuring I am true to my values and beliefs. I have worked in businesses with very different cultures and have found that regardless of this you can always maintain that authenticity. The next generation of women need to ensure they do just this and be confident not to conform or adapt your style too much that you lose

Why do you feel it's important to highlight women leaders in retail?

As a woman in retail at each stage of my career I have always looked for role models. Highlighting women leaders is a brilliant way to share insight from a diverse group of women who have successfully navigated their careers through different life stages. For me personally it is about seeing examples of leaders who have delivered fantastic results through their teams in an authentic way but are also brilliant mums outside of work. The more role models we can share the more chance we have of younger women believing they too can reach their full potential.



Alison Loehnis

Company **YOOX NET-A-PORTER**
Job Title **Interim CEO**

I was appointed ad interim CEO of YOOX NET-A-PORTER in 2022 and continue to drive the company to create an unparalleled online experience for our customers and brand partners.

I first joined NET-A-PORTER in 2007 as Vice President of Sales & Marketing, before becoming President of NET-A-PORTER in 2011. In 2015, I became President of NET-A-PORTER, MR PORTER and THE OUTNET. Throughout my 15-year career here, I have been passionate about driving customer engagement and expansion, via new markets, new brands and new product categories. I am deeply invested in our sustainability strategy, Infinity, and spearhead a host of commitments we have made to 2030. Alongside this, I am a strong advocate for female leadership and representation and am proud that over half of our Senior Leadership Team are women. I am particularly invested in our many industry-leading impact initiatives, such as The Vanguard, NET-A-PORTER's designer mentorship programme, and NET SUSTAIN, the online store's curated platform for more sustainable luxury, as well as MR PORTER's long-standing Health in Mind fundraising initiative for men's mental health, to name a few.

Previously, I have held roles at Saatchi & Saatchi, Hachette Filipacchi Magazines, The Walt Disney Company and LVMH. I graduated from Brown University with a BA in History of Art.

What does inclusion and diversity mean to you?

Creating a welcoming culture, encouraging open conversations, and promoting advocacy for people to voice their views – all of these are essential to me. Establishing safe forums for people to speak candidly and listen to one another is critical to bringing diversity and inclusion to

life. It's so important that every single member of our internal community feels empowered and is able to thrive.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

It's incredibly motivating to see how a diverse and inclusive culture can fuel sustainable progress for our business and as individuals. I've seen

powerful ideas come to life when different working styles, creativity and perspectives combine with values of openness and collaboration – it is how unexpected connections and new innovations are born. With over 4,000 talented employees from over 100 nationalities at YOOX NET-A-PORTER, the opportunities are vast.

I love how our teams are motivated to give back to our communities. From providing opportunities to emerging talent through our designer mentorship programmes, to supporting underserved groups through charity partnerships and employee volunteering, these initiatives instil a positive mindset and sense of pride in our employees; and it's very important to me that as a company we're creating opportunities to give back to the communities we serve.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

Without listening, we wouldn't be able to identify where progress needs to be made and how to focus our efforts for change. Encouraging honest conversations about DEI and celebrating our uniqueness are critical to deepening our understanding and addressing blind spots. At YOOX NET-A-PORTER this is largely driven by our DEI Council and Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), which enable our people to form support networks, share lived experiences and have their voices heard.

Through our DEI Council, I get to hear first-hand about the ambitions and achievements of our Employee



Resource Groups – and give them the licence to keep moving the needle. One of our newly founded groups is our Parents and Caregivers ERG. Casting my mind back to when I had my own children, having this kind of network and connection to others in the workplace who understood the juggle would have made a world of difference to me. I am proud to see our teams across the world supporting each other. It reflects a broader mindset shift: organisations and employees are seeing value in listening to the needs of different groups to help everyone succeed.

“ I cannot overemphasise the importance of team and community.

What impact have role models had on your career in retail?

Mentorship has been a gamechanger in my career. Establishing trust with mentors has benefitted my trajectory and profoundly influenced my own leadership style. In turn, I strive to give back that same generosity of time to the talented people in my own teams and the wider industry. The power of learning through observation and osmosis is often

underestimated; breaking down hierarchies and barriers that could limit learning potential, and inviting people into the room, is a big benefit for talent development.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

Successful leadership is not a solo mission. I cannot overemphasise the importance of team and community. By taking time to understand our employees' experiences and encouraging a culture of connection, we can bring people up with us. My aim is for my teams to be curious, unafraid to ask questions, and inspired to challenge the status quo.

When it comes to advocating for D&I, is there anything you can share that you're doing outside of retail?

I am particularly passionate about giving back to the community. Personally, I support initiatives focused on women and children and the arts. In recent years I have served as a founding ambassador for The Prince's Trust's Women Supporting Women initiative, which provides employment, education, and training support to young women facing adversity, am a member of V&A's Business Advisory Council, have sat on several fundraising committees for Great Ormond Street Hospital, sit on

the Advisory Committee of the BFC Foundation, and previously served as a senior business mentor for the British Fashion Council. Giving back within and going beyond the industry to lend a hand and support change – is incredibly rewarding.

What are you doing to ensure D&I remains a priority in your organisation?

When I became ad interim CEO, I saw an opportunity to reinvigorate our internal DEI efforts and involve everyone who wants to play a role in this journey. The first step was relaunching our Employee Resource Groups and DEI Council, which have since received incredible engagement; our number of active ERGs has more than doubled. The first Council session was attended by over 10% of our global population, demonstrating that DEI is a priority not only for me, but for so many in our organisation.

Effective positive change can only be made if we reflect our internal DEI ambitions externally too. Our online stores must represent our diverse society, and this year we are doubling down on efforts to improve the pipeline of diverse industry talent through education and our mentorship programmes. I'm looking forward to being able to amplify the work of new prospective talent to our global audiences.



Vicki Mains

Company **Asda**
Job Title **Senior Director**

I'm a passionate and empowering people leader, as well as a full time mam. Being brave is my superpower and saying yes to opportunities is what has led me here today. I started my career in fast food whilst completing my A levels. At 21 I was promoted to store manager, and at 26 I joined the exciting world of food retail. I've worked for 3 big retailers and experienced various roles across the UK, with every role I have seen the opportunity to grow as a leader and help others to do the same. What connects who I am to all these roles is being able to lead and encourage people to be their best selves. Unlocking potential is what drives me and seeing someone break down barriers inspires me. I'm now leading 4,000 colleagues across a very diverse region, together we are striving for greatness. I see everyone is unique and, regardless of starting points, I will help them be their very best. I refuel my energy though running, I volunteer as a school governor and I've spent many hours as a football mam at the side of the pitch, supporting my son and his dreams.

What does being a Woman to Watch in Retail mean to you?

It is such an honour and privilege to be nominated; I believe I have a personal responsibility to help and support women across the retail sector and this nomination deepens my sense of responsibility to help others thrive in their careers. Being associated as a Woman to Watch in Retail passionately supports my message; you can achieve your ambitions and aspirations regardless of your background and where you started out. Seeing is believing and if I can do it, anyone can. I genuinely believe that being brave and hardworking, and finding the passion and determination to do my best every day, has been the key to everything I've achieved so far. This is only the start; I will continue to support everyone I work with to keep learning and I will also show them that it can be done and inspire them to find their courage to fulfil their own career ambitions.

How do you think retail has changed since you've been in the sector? How do you think it will change in the future?

I entered an environment where I was surrounded with experienced, senior men. As I progressed in my career, I was always the only or first woman in the room and frustratingly, this can often still be the case. I have experienced exclusion and discrimination far too much, but I kept going. 15 years after I started my own retail career, I'm energised by working with many more female peers and inspiring female leaders. I'm in a business where everyone



is allowed a voice and encouraged to speak. We have openminded leaders who are curious, we all want to learn and help others develop who may have different experiences to our own. We now have various networks and can be allies to those centred around ethnicity, pride, youth, caring and single parenting, to name a few. We have leaders who want to make a difference and are also being educated on how to make a difference in creating a fairer and more inclusive society, myself included. I firmly believe that focusing on inclusion and diversity is key to creating an equitable future for hundreds of thousands of colleagues working in retail.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

You are who you are, and you should be proud. Don't hide from your upbringing, your accent, and your home location. You just need to be you and you will get the happiness you want and deserve. Make sure your first leadership book is on resilience and tackling imposter syndrome, you will learn a lot about yourself and quickly. Even when

you may doubt yourself, remember you're being brave enough to push yourself forward so keep seeking out those who support you to succeed. Continue to learn from your mistakes (we do all make them!), don't lose the fun-loving side of you as you will need that as you get older and remember to be kind to yourself – you've got many great years and exciting opportunities ahead of you.

What advice would you give to the next generation of women entering the sector?

This is an exciting environment to be a part of, you have an opportunity to change how you lead and inspire thousands of people, every day. You can truly make a difference with colleagues and customers in your community. You can show kindness and respect, inspire others, and achieve more together by connecting those with shared interests. In the retail sector, you can influence how customers shop based on your leadership behaviour. You have a unique opportunity to drive a progressive agenda, communities can become better places to be based on the spirit

“ I firmly believe that focusing on inclusion and diversity is key to creating an equitable future for hundreds of thousands of colleagues working in retail.

of those organisations who are based there and the people who work in them. Retail is an inclusive sector where leaders can create a really strong sense of belonging and be passionate about everyone being themselves. Entering this sector as a woman means you are supporting and continuing the positive movement of inclusion and diversity in the workplace and you can experience an exciting, purposeful and rewarding career.



Nicola Marshall

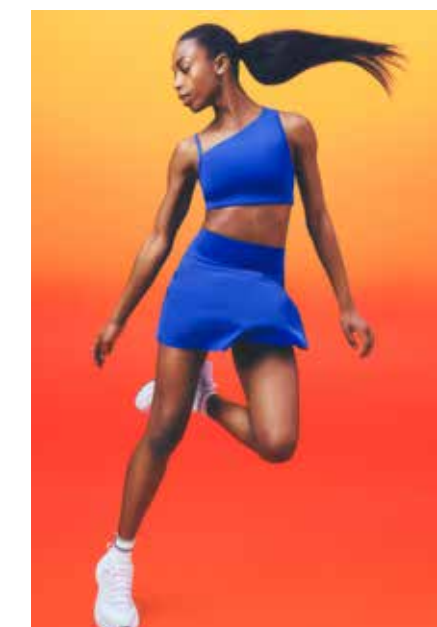
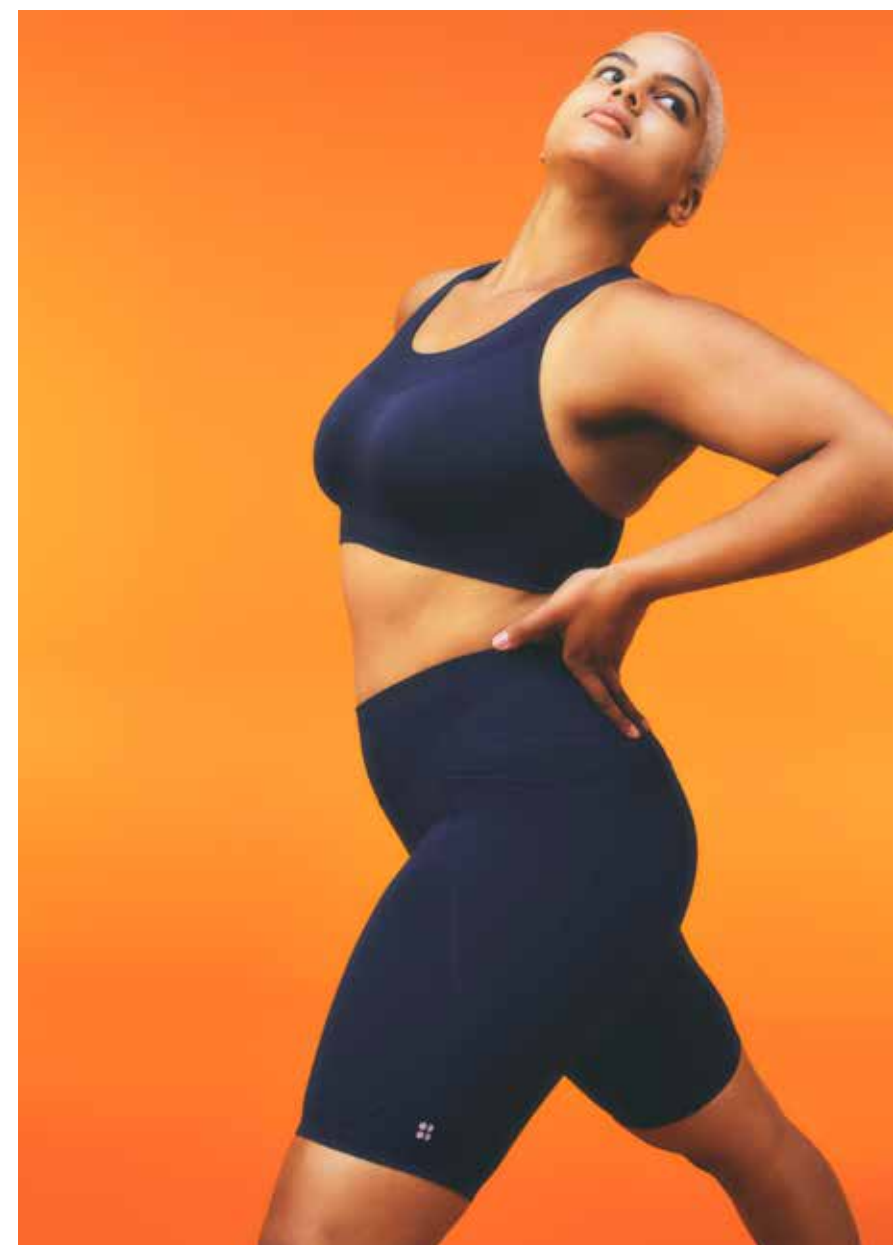
Company **Sweaty Betty Foundation**
Job Title **Director**

I joined Sweaty Betty in January 2021 to set up the Sweaty Betty Foundation, an independent charity funded and supported by Sweaty Betty. I now lead the Foundation and our mission to empower teenage girls from every background to get active, and stay active, for life. We work closely with Sweaty Betty and especially their brilliant retail teams to raise funds for our mission, design new products for girls, and get the word out to customers and other brands about the support girls need.

Previously I held a range of senior roles in the charity sector including with Cycling UK and Save the Children.

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you, and mean in your organisation?

The entire mission of the Sweaty Betty Foundation is to ensure girls from every background can be active. We especially focus on girls from low income families and Black girls and girls from South Asian heritage backgrounds as we want them to have more opportunities to be active. Everything we do is designed to include and empower them to be their best.



“ I would tell women entering the sector to really appreciate the value of your own experience and background, and to bring that to work with you everyday.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

To spend time with people from backgrounds other than my own so I can really understand their perspectives and design my projects to meet their needs

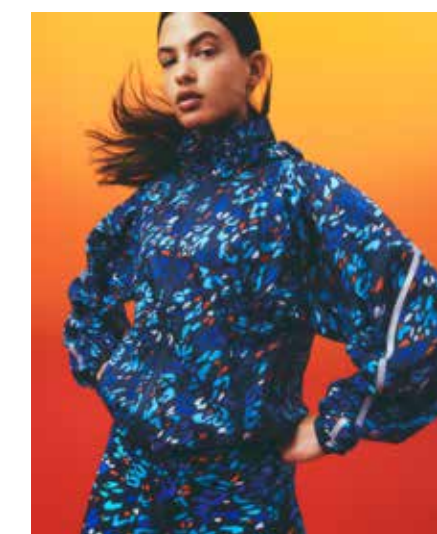
What challenges have you learnt the most from in your career?

I have often started jobs in completely different sectors, like retail, and had to quickly learn all the new terminology and ways of working. I have needed to appear confident and knowledgeable, but at the same

time never afraid to ask questions so I can learn and develop – and not worry about looking stupid!

What advice would you give to the next generation of women entering the sector?

I would say to women entering any sector to really appreciate the value of your own experience and background and to bring that to work with you every day. You can help your organizations grow and learn from your own experiences which will make them not just more successful but more inclusive.





Lisa Miao

Company **Pets at Home**
Job Title **Chief Operating Officer**

I have over 25 years of experience in retail and I joined Pets at Home as Commercial Director in 2015 having previously held senior positions at several well-known retailers – and stepped onto the Executive Committee, running our retail business, last year.

Prior to joining Pets at Home, I spent 15 years at Asda Walmart leading the trading divisions of the business, then moved to Morrisons for five years as the Commercial Director for Food and General Merchandise. I'm a focused, people-driven leader and continue to enjoy operating in fast-growing markets as well as mature categories.

How have role models impacted your career?

Role models have been incredibly important, especially from a gender perspective. I've been in this industry for 25 years, and in the early days it was pretty rare to see women in senior positions. And especially, to see women leaders really being their authentic selves. So when you did see that, it made a huge impact. When I moved to Morrisons, for example, I was the only woman in the Boardroom, and while those around me adapted and changed their style, it came as a shock and was fairly challenging.



Comparing that to where I am now feels like a huge shift. At Pets at Home, I sit on the Executive Committee with more women than men. Throughout the organisation, we support gender diversity and women are strongly represented in senior roles. Away from gender, the business is also very inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community who are well-represented amongst colleagues. Role models have played a big part here – if you see people at a senior level who are like you, it cascades down to the rest of the organisation.

Pets at Home is known for having a very inclusive culture. What does D&I mean in the organisation?

D&I has always been central here. So much of our business is centred around our purpose, which attracts people who share our values of inclusion. Interestingly, I think there's something to be said for being a pet business. Our colleagues love pets, even if they don't own one themselves. Pets don't see creed, they don't see colour, they don't discriminate. Our stores have always been a place where everyone is accepted and valued for their differences.

But actually, part of our D&I journey as a business has been about recognising that this isn't enough and doesn't automatically make us diverse and inclusive. We need to be more proactive to ensure that we are providing opportunities to people from diverse backgrounds and that we

benefit from the different perspectives, skills and experiences they can bring.

For example, we have more work to do on driving up ethnic diversity. We've got a clear strategy with ambitious goals in place to reflect our local communities when it comes to ethnic minority representation. By 2028 our aim is to achieve an average of 12% representation of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This is led by our CEO Lyssa McGowan, but everyone in the business is behind it and enthusiastic about meeting our goals.

One of our values is that 'we're proud of what we do together' and we acknowledge that we'll only become more diverse and inclusive if we work together to achieve this, and we need every one of our colleagues to contribute. We ask all of our leaders and teams to incorporate actions to increase progress on diversity and inclusion into their objectives.

What does being a role model mean to you?

It feels very comfortable, actually. I feel very lucky to be somewhere like Pets at Home, where I'm not in the minority as a senior woman leader.

It is having such a positive impact on our business. I can't tell you how many comments I receive from young women in the levels below, who tell me how amazing it is for them to see a senior leadership team which includes so many women.

What advice would you give your younger self?

I'm not sure I'd do anything differently. I'd tell myself to make sure I was being my true self in the workplace. You see too many people coming to work in a mask, trying to hide something about themselves or adopt an inauthentic style. But it just doesn't work – people see through it, and your leadership capability can suffer. It's amazing to see people move from an environment in which they felt they couldn't be themselves to a place they can drop the mask and really thrive.

Another piece of advice I'd give myself is to not worry about not having a clear career plan in mind. This isn't the case for everyone, of course, but I never would have imagined I'd be in this position today. I think in most cases, having a good network, being a great leader of people and delivering the results, will get you recognised.

What would you say the main roadblocks are to seeing progress on D&I in the retail sector?

I'd say the main blocker is the temptation to surround yourself with likeminded people who come from the same background as you.

With that in mind, it's so important that businesses make a real conscious effort to remove bias from the recruitment process. In previous roles I've been hiring for, I've been very clear about the requirement for a diverse shortlist. Sometimes you hear "there's no diverse talent" in a certain area or function. This is absolutely not true – you just have to look in the right places and with an open mind.

“ It's so important that businesses make a real conscious effort to remove bias from the recruitment process.



Sarah Miles

Company **Hush**
Job Title **CEO**



I was appointed as CEO of Hush in January 2023, having previously been chief executive of beauty e-commerce platform Feelunique since 2019.

With 25 years of experience driving growth in major UK-based and global retailers, I have worked for some of the largest retailers in the sector. I spent five years at Amazon, including three as apparel and private brands director. I also held multiple roles during a 12-year stint at drinks manufacturer Diageo, including Managing Director of Diageo Wines Europe and Managing Director of reserve brands, carrying responsibility for global brands such as Guinness, Baileys, Smirnoff and Johnnie Walker. My expertise are in general management, digital, strategy, innovation and marketing and commercial.

“ You learn the most from failure. That’s easy to say, and much harder to experience. Pushing yourself, and being brave, and seizing opportunities that feel stretching can be so valuable.

What does being a Woman to Watch in Retail mean to you?

It’s an honour to be nominated, and to be highlighted as someone who’s put a lot into diversity initiatives within the industry. We all have different starting points and I’ve worked across a number of different sectors, and I’ve been lucky to have the support and guidance of mentors and leaders throughout that time. I hope my inclusion in this Index can play a part in helping and inspiring others in the same way.

Why do you feel it’s important to highlight women leaders in retail?

Retail is a great industry with a lot of female representation, but not as much as we need in the most senior roles. Diversity of all types matters morally and commercially and we know that being able to see people

like yourself, and receiving mentoring and sponsorship are key drivers. I hope profiling people like me (and also everyone else in this Index) allows others to access role models and to scope out their own career trajectories within the sector.

In your time in retail, how have you seen the D&I agenda evolve?

I feel like we are making progress, but not quickly enough. In fact, I was really struck by a piece of research that came out a couple of years ago, which found that the perception from senior leaders about how retail was addressing D&I did not match up with the employee experience. While senior leaders were pleased with the progress, employees were not feeling the impact of initiatives, or feeling like retail was an inclusive place to work. As leaders we need to continue



to hold ourselves to account, really listen to our teams and ensure we are not falling into the trap of lots of initiatives that don’t drive real change.

What sort of challenges have you learnt the most from in your career?

You learn the most from failure. That’s easy to say, and much harder to experience. Pushing yourself, and being brave, and seizing opportunities that feel stretching can be so valuable. Sometimes these scenarios go amazingly, but other times you trip up and make mistakes. And it’s in those moments of tripping up and not quite pulling things off that you learn the most.

During my career I have made loads of mistakes. I try to be authentic and not hide that. Actually, I’m really proud of those as they have always made me better at my job and/or a better person. Being brave and taking on new challenges is so great for development.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

I have a poster in my office that says “work hard and be nice to people”. My advice would be to work hard and focus on being a great colleague, a great support to others, and helping people develop along the way. Be prepared that there’ll be some great times and some tougher times, but you’ll learn the most from the periods that feel more challenging.

I would also say to really embrace that everyone has a different starting point with more or less challenges and opportunities. Truly try to listen, learn and understand that so that you can become a more inclusive colleague.

What does D&I mean to you? How does it feature in your organisation?

It’s really important. We’ve all seen the data that shows that companies which are more diverse perform

better. It is so true. No organisation I’ve ever worked in has been perfect, but the businesses with more diversity – across race, culture, gender, social background, religion, for example – have been more vibrant. They’ve been more interesting, more innovative, they’ve brought a greater understanding of the customer.

In every company I’ve worked in, I’ve strived to make diversity a focus. I’ve looked to build up a diverse workforce, and build an inclusive culture that celebrates a broad range of characteristics. It has to be truly led from the top-down.

It’s particularly important to drive up diversity at the most senior levels. It’s not easy. You can have dozens of initiatives – mentoring, recruitment interventions, selective talent pools – and still find your organisation hasn’t really moved. As a leader, I think it’s so important to hold yourself to account.



Hawa Newell-Sydique

Company **Selfridges & Co.**

Job Title **Director of Talent and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion**

Hawa is a Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion who has developed her knowledge and experience globally and across a variety of industries including Retail, Finance, International Development and Higher Education. She currently leads the Selfridges strategy for Talent and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion.

With a real passion for DE&I, she strives for fairness and equity in the workplace and has a proven track record of delivering positive cultural change in complex and challenging environments, ensuring this is delivered at a systematic level. This includes the transformation of traditional HR processes such as Performance & Development and Succession Management.

After graduating with a degree in Computer Science, Hawa embarked on a lifelong relationship with learning and development. She did a research project on DE&I as part of her MBA and went on to work at Goldman Sachs, where she put her research into practice.

A highlight of her career has been working in International Development with women in East Africa where she mentored business startups and delivered Financial Education training. Later, as Head of Enterprising Women, the UK's largest network of female entrepreneurs, she mentored and coached women business owners in the UK.

Hawa is also a special advisor for the charity ACE (Autism Centre of Excellence) and is a School Governor.

What does being a Woman to Watch in Retail mean to you?

It's wonderful to have the recognition, and it's nice to have your name there with other incredibly talented women

within the sector. But of course, there are lots of other talented women out there that aren't on the list, and it's important that as senior women, we continue to remember and support our more junior colleagues to help

“ I've worked in finance, I've worked in tech, I've worked in higher education, but none of them have stuck with me like retail.

them develop and get the recognition they deserve.

Why do you feel it's important to highlight women leaders in retail?

I have experience in various industries, and something that surprised me coming into retail is that it is lagging behind in the DE&I space.

It's traditionally an industry which is super diverse at more junior levels, and it absolutely should be much more representative at more senior levels. So I see it as an opportunity - if we can highlight women that are really leading in this space - I hope it can have a real knock-on effect very quickly in terms of how we move the dial forward in retail, because we've got a lot of work to do.

How have you seen the D&I agenda develop?

What's been great is that it's moved away from being a litigious activity and how it might affect a business reputationally. Now, it's becoming a key element that supports a business's strategy.



We've also moved a long way from just talking about diversity, to now talking about inclusion and belonging. Once we employ people, we need to ensure that employees are able to perform at their best and feel their most comfortable and authentic selves.

Why do you think that more women should consider a career within retail?

There is a real breadth of career options within the retail industry. Coming from a finance and technology background it refreshing to experience that. It's interesting, it's diverse, and I think the opportunities are endless.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Trust your instincts. You're never too young to trust your instincts, and you're never too old to trust your instincts either. Your instincts are probably telling you your truth and what you need to do next.

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you, and mean in your organisation?

It's one of our strategic business priorities. We know we have to get this right, not only for our team members but truly for everyone that walks through our stores, and everyone that shops with us online.

If you were not working in retail, where would you be?

I can't imagine leaving retail! It's a fascinating industry where you can have a variety of careers. I really feel like I get it - and of course working for Selfridges is a dream come true.

What advice would you give to the next generation of women entering the sector?

Be bold. At times you have to take risks in your career. Grasp opportunities when they're handed to you. But mostly, just enjoy your career. The moment you stop enjoying what you're doing, then perhaps it's time to consider whether or not you need a new challenge. We spend most of our time at work, it has to be something that you enjoy doing and that motivates you.



Helen Quinn

Company **QVC**

Job Title **Director, People Lead QVC International (based in London)**

As People Lead, aligned to QVC's International business, my focus is across three key areas:

Organisational Development: overseeing the evolution of how we are organised as a business, to best serve our customer, enable our vision and the success of our strategic initiatives.

Talent Management: building and implementing a strategy that ensures a sustainable, engaged and proactive focus on talent. Investing in roles that drive continued value, and talent and capabilities that will accelerate our progress.

Business Partnering: responsible for supporting senior leaders and their teams across a number of functions in our International markets

Prior to joining QVC in 2016, I spent the majority of my career in financial services in HR, coaching, strategy, and project management roles, spanning the London Stock Exchange Group, Merrill Lynch, JP Morgan and Deutsche Bank. In recent years, as my career has evolved, I've increased my focus on the topic of gender equality. As Co-sponsor of Gender-Equality @Q, our UK Gender Equality Team Member Resource Group and as lead for the QVC International Female Leadership Strategy, I continue to be fascinated by all that I learn. A huge amount of curiosity has been sparked; a strong passion to understand more and better; to help shape how we as an organisation can better empower all women who want to progress their career at QVC; and as a Mum of two girls, wanting equal opportunities for them, no matter the direction they choose to take.

What does being a Woman to Watch in Retail mean to you?

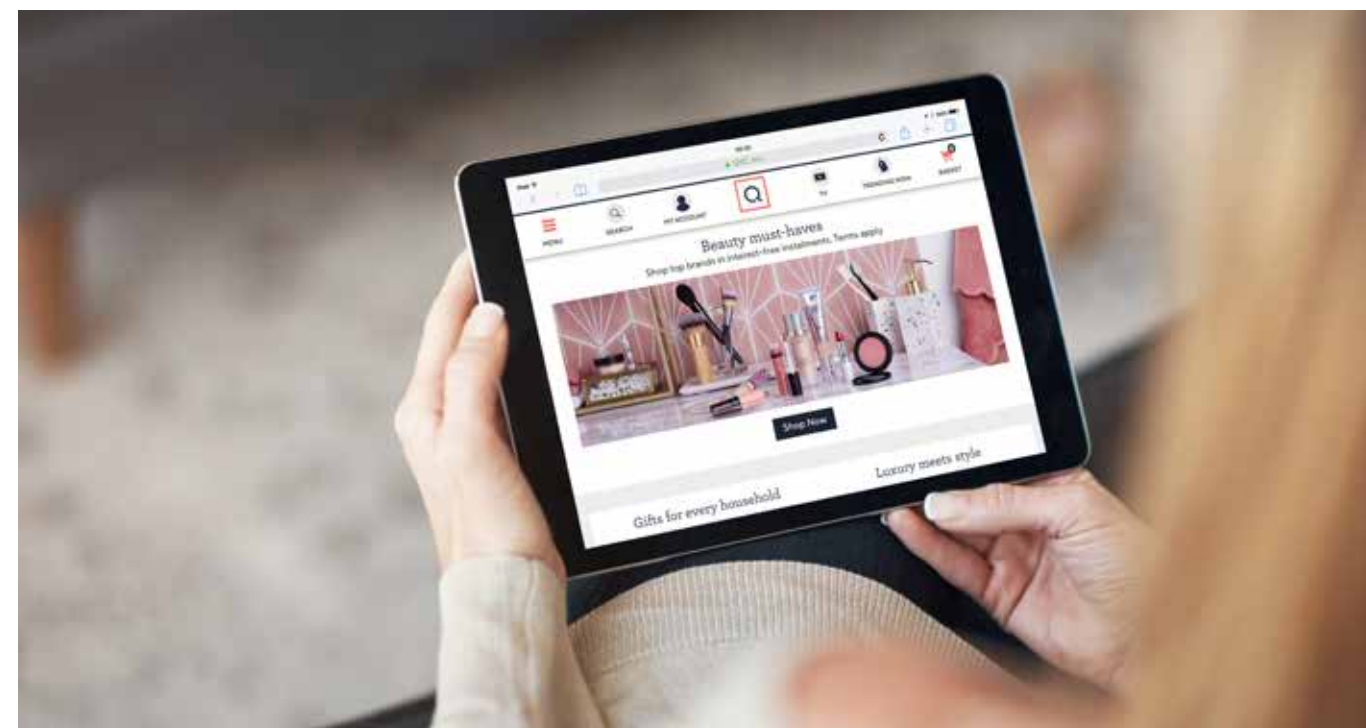
Being recognized as a Woman to Watch in Retail is incredibly meaningful to me. As I increase and deepen my focus on gender diversity at QVC, I hope to reach a more widespread audience; to help others be inspired by female leadership and to understand the challenges that exist; and to be part of a bigger community of like-minded leaders.

Why do you feel it's important to highlight women leaders in retail?

The power of knowing and understanding customer behaviour is critical to business success. UK research tells us that women tend to have a greater influence over household spending than men. Understanding customers deeply, is more effective with a diverse workforce who can empathise and understand their needs.

Despite this, when we look at gender diversity in senior roles within UK retailers, progress has been slow.

Fortunately the spotlight on gender diversity is growing. Highlighting women leaders in retail is a powerful way to bring attention to those who have progressed to leadership positions. Shining a light on diverse leaders, sharing their stories and learnings along the way, may inspire and reinforce what's possible for those who hope to progress in a similar way; as well as help others understand some of the perceived and real barriers that may have got (or continue to get) in the way.



What does diversity and inclusion mean to you, and mean in your organisation?

Diversity and inclusion to me, is a hugely important topic. It is about understanding others. Putting ourselves to one side; taking the time to be curious, explore others' experiences and lives that we may not be aware of or have seen before. This helps us to empathise with and understand each other, be a better human being and to grow intellectually and emotionally.

I am fortunate to work in an organisation that prioritises this work and expects and exposes us to many conversations and experiences that help us continue to learn more. For me personally, I have a specific focus on female leadership within my role at QVC:

- A key part of the Talent Management work I lead, is our focus on female leadership and achieving a greater gender balance amongst our leadership team. This is underpinned by an ambitious aspiration of: *A 'female' leadership strategy is no longer required; we have created an environment where all leaders can thrive.*

- After nurturing a pool of upcoming female talent, understanding internal and external insights and subsequent strategy building, we will discuss this topic more broadly with the business in the coming months, alongside the support of a number of leaders, our International President and some educational events. Education is our focus. Sparking curiosity; a desire to know and understand more; is the bedrock of our work right now. I cannot wait to progress this work; staying curious myself, to understand others' perceptions and reality to inform our future direction.

What advice would you give to the next generation of women entering the sector?

When I think about how the world of work continues to evolve, and how the shape of retail continues to change so quickly, curiosity, resilience and humility will be important qualities.

Curiosity sparks a desire to learn – we need to constantly evolve alongside our ever-changing world of work, standing still doesn't support our progress. More specifically for

“ Resilience to pause, understand, speak up and adjust, enables us to carry on and choose our next best step.

women, being curious to understand how we might be perceived, how we may be viewed differently to other genders, and to better understand those around us is vital.

Resilience – there will be knocks for all, all genders and all backgrounds. Resilience to pause, understand, speak up and adjust, enables us to carry on and choose our next best step.

Humility for me is also key. It helps us to consider others' beliefs, show compassion and empathy. Humility is critically important as a leader, humility fosters an environment of trust and respect, shows a spirit of generosity and by taking ourselves out of the equation, empowers others to be their best.



Emma Smyth

Company **WHSmith High Street**
Job Title **Commercial Director**

On leaving University with a Biochemistry degree, I was lucky enough to secure a place on the Andersen Graduate scheme and gained my Chartered Accountancy qualification. My thirst for business quickly drove me to move into industry and I joined Asda within the finance department. However, the trading department excited me from day 1! Seeing all the buyers running around, negotiating with suppliers and getting to see their hard work physically land in stores meant that it wasn't long before I made the move from finance to trading. I have bought a variety of categories throughout my career from toiletries to pet food, baby products to toilet rolls.

Feeling the need for a change, I moved from grocery into the high street, and joined Superdrug as Head of Commercial Healthcare trading through Covid-19, which was great development for me. The Commercial Director role at WHSmith High Street came along a year ago and I've never looked back.



What advice would you give your younger self?

Don't be afraid to show vulnerability and imperfections. I used to be obsessed with my colleagues needing to think that I was perfect, when no one is. Once I admitted my mistakes and brought my true authentic self to work, I became less defensive, a better leader and all my relationships improved.

I'd also tell myself to "pick your battles", that it's not essential to win every time and to put your energy into the big wins and don't sweat the small stuff.

How do you think retail has changed and how do you think it will change in the future?

Customer shopping attitudes, habits and behaviours have changed beyond recognition during my time in retail. The days of weekly grocery shops, milk being delivered by the milkman and a monthly health and beauty shop are long gone.

Customers are a lot more promiscuous, shopping around for great deals – the rise of the discounters has been phenomenal and game changing along with online shopping too.

As for the future of retail, I'm a firm believer that the high street isn't dead and that it will recover, consolidation of retailers will continue, the use of drones for deliveries will become common place and AI will play a key role in what customers buy and from where.



If you were not working in retail, where would you be?

Travelling the world for pleasure if I've won the lottery, or hosting a travel show if I've not! I love visiting new places, learning about different countries and cultures and I'm a firm believer that travel is a great education. Either that or running an outdoors bounds center as I love the outdoors and adrenalin fueled activities.

What challenges have you learnt the most from in your career?

I think the majority of people will vouch that you develop most in your career when you're faced with the largest challenges and really put out of your comfort zone.

In my days at Asda with the onset of the Aldi and Lidl charge, having to completely rethink trading propositions and alter strategies as we were competing against a new and unknown retailer, taught me the importance of key strategic supplier relationships, agility, acting at pace and resilience.

Trading through the pandemic was a whole new world to everyone! Juggling supplier and product shortages, leading teams from home

and illness, I learnt the importance of personal wellbeing for both myself and my team and using the power of the team to find solutions to new problems that we'd never faced before. I am also incredibly proud that at Superdrug we were the first high street pharmacy to deliver the Covid-19 vaccine – the power of team work at its best.

“ You develop the most in your career when you're faced with the biggest challenges.

Why do you feel it's important to highlight women leaders in retail?

I am not a fan of positive discrimination but there are far fewer women in leadership within retail than there are men. In general and in my experience, women tend to not have the same level of self-belief than men, with women having to be encouraged more to apply for promotions/larger roles and men being more inclined to

naturally have that self-belief. Women also sometimes need more flexibility than men and therefore require more support as they progress through their career.

Also, the impact that the menopause can have on women is becoming better understood. Some women have even left their jobs as they go through this life stage as their workplaces haven't supported them, which is such a waste of great experience and skills.





Sandra Vallow

Company **QVC**

Job Title **Director of Merchandising - Beauty**

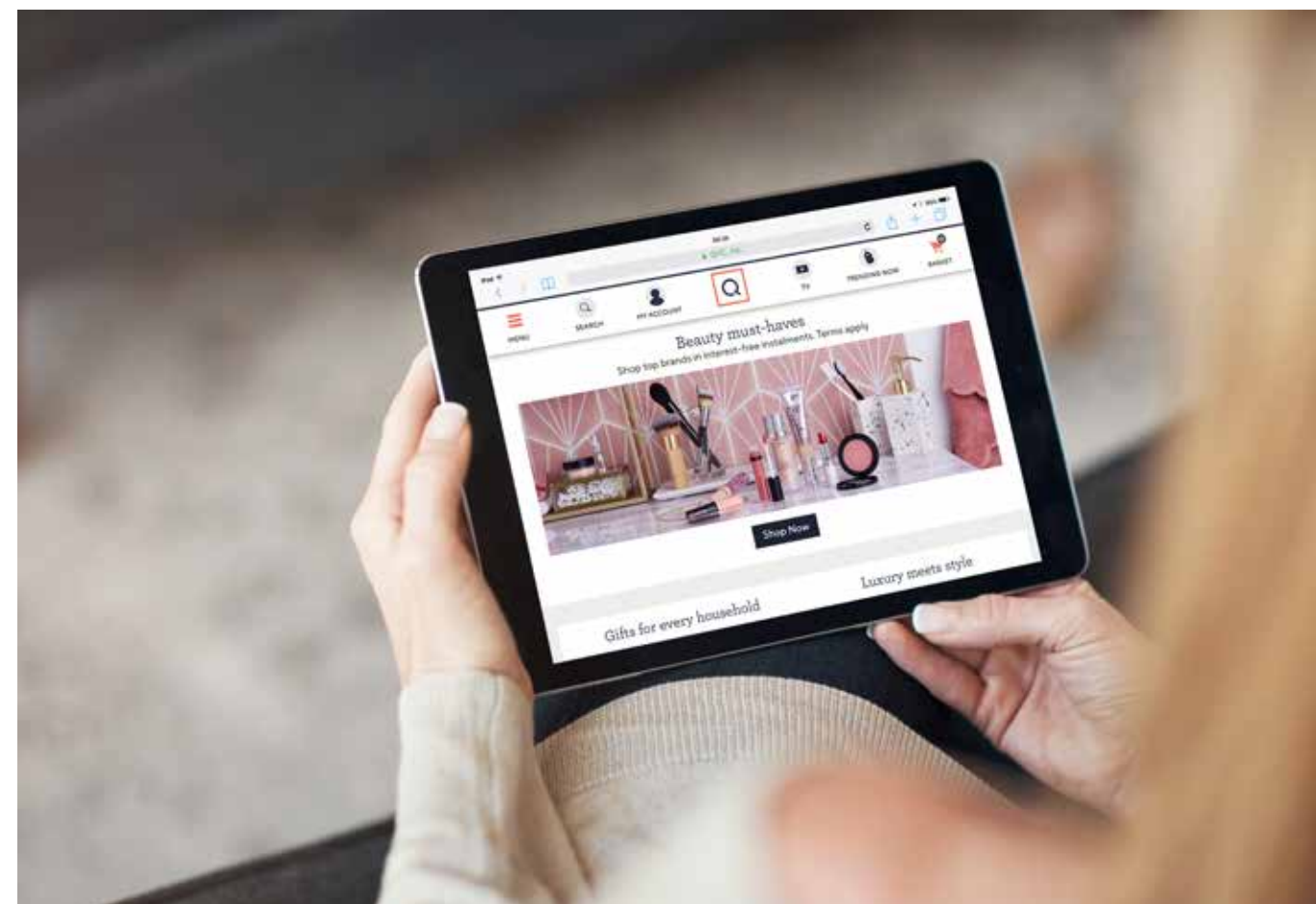
I started my career as a Graduate Trainee at Fenwick Ltd based in their flagship store in Newcastle upon Tyne. Here I worked my way through most of the departments being promoted to Buyer on Ladies Fashion. My introduction to the world of beauty started here when one day the MD called me asked me to take over beauty. Being the 4th largest Beauty Hall in the country at the time, it was such an exciting opportunity and at 25 I found myself running a team of 200 FTE and buying for the biggest department in the store. I moved to QVC back in 2009, to drive my career. Initially taking the role of Cosmetics Buyer and then quickly promoted to Senior Buyer, before working my way up to my current position of Director of Merchandising for Beauty.

What challenges have you learnt the most from in your career?

When it came to thinking about university and what to study that could lead to a career that excited me, I tried to think about what I was good at. Turning to my parents at the time, they fed back that I was very good at spending money! So, there it was and I decided to study Economics at university with the aspiration of becoming a Buyer one day. This is where I came across the first challenge of my career. Buying was not a preferred option for an Economics graduate to pursue. A degree in Economics opened doors in accounting, finance and management consultancy and as I sat with my tutor, he seemed extremely disappointed when I shared my vision of being a Buyer. Now 20 years into my career I am so pleased I was not swayed. I learnt that you make your own career path, don't be frightened to do what you think is right for you. Be confident in your own decision making. Trusting in my own opinions and believing in myself has been something I have taken with me throughout my career. We all face challenges throughout our careers but having faith in yourself, will really help you through.

If you were not working in retail, where would you be?

You could say I am retail through and through. As a child I spent my spare time creating product catalogues with drawings and personal designs all with recommended retail prices! So, it is a tricky question to ask what I would be doing if retail was not an



option. It would have to be something that involves spending money and trying out product but I am not sure shopping is classed as a career!

How do you think retail has changed since you've been in the sector? How do you think it will change in the future?

Successful retailers today have a sophisticated 360 degree approach to talking to and educating their customers. Gone are the days where a product on shelf and a magazine advert were enough to win over the customer. Customers now are highly educated and want to understand more about products: their heritage, the ingredients, the unique componentry, the delivery techniques. Customers expect more from retailers and this will not change it will evolve in the future so, as retailers, we need to be on our toes. We need to keep the customer engaged, excite them and keep them loyal. Whether she

is buying her new lipstick on the metaverse, shade matching her new foundation with a personal online experience or just going in store the customer has to remain at the heart of every retailer's decision making.

Why do you think more women should consider a career within retail?

You know what it is like, you're at a dinner party and people are talking about what they do for a living. When someone asks, what do you do? My 6 year old daughter explains quite simply, 'She Buys Lipstick'! Of course, she is right, I like to think there is a bit more to it than that! But, at the end of the day, who would not want to buy product for a living?! The excitement of finding a new innovative product never leaves you in this career and the first time you see that item sell, the buzz really is something quite special. Retail is ever changing, it keeps you on your toes, it is creative and

“ Retail is ever changing, it keeps you on your toes, it is creative and innovative whilst at the same time being analytical and detailed.

innovative whilst at the same time as being analytical and detailed. We do everything from working with startup companies and helping influence product and strategy to dealing with corporate giants. All with the customer at the heart of what we do. Quite simply retail is fun and work is so much of your life, you have to have a little fun along the way!





Helen Webb OBE

Company **WHSmith**
Job Title **Chief People Officer**

I am a retailer and have worked in the sector for more than thirty years in senior HR and operational roles. I have worked for Morrisons, Asda, Aviva, Marks and Spencer, Sainsbury's and The Co-op before joining WHSmith in the Global People role in April 2023. Throughout my career I have focussed on transformational change and business turnaround through a people and process lens. I currently hold non-executive positions for two charities. These are Housing for Women, a London based housing and supported housing organisation and, Battersea Cats and Dogs home.

I have a passion for DE&I that has grown from personal experiences and work opportunities such as devising the first Global Diversity Strategy for Aviva and creating supported work placement opportunities for Women leaving prison. I am currently an advisor to Leeds Business School.

What impact have role models had in your career?

I worked at Asda in the nineties, and the impact that Archie Norman and Allen Leighton had on the business, and on the wider retail sector, has been very well recorded. But when you read the case studies, not much is made of how they also really championed diversity. They supported their women leaders and people from ethnic minority backgrounds all the way through the organisation. They were open about discussing what it means to be a senior woman in the business. And to me, that's fabulous, and a real example of clear role modelling.

The support I received as a woman with a young family was outstanding, and it made such a difference to me as a woman starting out my career. When I joined the organisation, I had a two-year-old son. I was working part-time, I'd sometimes have to leave early to get to nursery, and I was still promoted after just three months. I remember they told me they saw my potential. They were judging me on my output, not the number of hours I put in. I'm not sure there are even many companies today that would do that, and in the nineties it was incredibly enlightened. Back then, there was none of the legislation around parental leave, so they were really going above and beyond. Many leaders would have told me to wait until my kids were at school to properly think about accelerating my career. I can't tell you what an impact their support had on me as a young woman starting a career in retail.



You've joined an organisation that has many senior leaders at the top. What impact do you think this has on others in your business, and in the sector?

If you look at our Board, we have four women, and a female Chair, Annette Court. This is still a real rarity in the sector, and I think it makes a huge impact. We're saying to all women: there's a space for you at the top. There's been so much research that demonstrates that when you look up and see someone who looks like you, it gives you confidence to know that your career will be supported. If you

I'd say to my younger self, and to any other young professional, to have the confidence to ask advice of others.

can't see anyone you can relate to, or you feel you can model yourself against, then you might start to think you're in the wrong organisation.

We've also got so many great women one, two, and three levels down. So I do hope that we can continue in this vein, and that young women entering our organisation know they will be supported.

In your mind, how is the retail sector performing on D&I? What are the main challenges?

Some of the big businesses in our sector are really at the forefront of this agenda. Top to bottom, you've got representation, you've got role models, and you've got career pathways in place to pull high-potential diverse candidates through the business.

Retail encourages social mobility in a way that other sectors don't. If the conditions are right, you really can go from the shopfloor to the Boardroom. And in some businesses, we can see this happening.

But there are still some major hurdles. Flexible working is one. I can't fathom why some organisations still

Retail encourages social mobility in a way that other sectors don't. If the conditions are right, you really can go from the shopfloor to the Boardroom.

don't allow for flexible and part-time roles, for example. And I think really focusing on ethnic diversity is another priority. We must get better at identifying and supporting our ethnically diverse colleagues into the most senior positions. I'm not sure why this isn't happening, as at workforce level we're very representative of society when it comes to ethnic diversity.

What advice would you give your younger self?

It's a bit clichéd to say have more confidence, and it's also hard to achieve. So I'd say to my younger self, and to any other young professional, to have the confidence to ask advice of others. Use senior leaders for guidance and support, and don't be tempted to think that they won't be bothered. Everyone likes to pull good people through, and people give advice freely. Mentorship can be pivotal to your career when you're starting out. Jean Tomlin was the most fantastic mentor to me, and I'm still calling her up for advice twenty years later!

Is there anyone who you are mentoring?

I still have lots of mentees at the Co-op, and people who have left the Co-op who are still in touch. I've got a huge network of people who ring me for support and advice. I love it.



Carol Welch

Company **A. F. Blakemore & Son**
Job Title **CEO**



In early 2023, I became CEO of AF Blakemore and Sons, one of the UK's largest privately owned businesses retailing and distributing food and drink. We are one of the owners of the Spar convenience brand in UK which means I sit on the Spar UK board and audit committee. Alongside Spar, Blakemore's also own Philpotts, and we are franchise and distribution partners for Greggs, Subway, Moto, Marston's, and many independent retailers. I've also been non-executive director at Hammerson plc, for 4.5 years. A FTSE REIT, they own iconic retail locations including Bull Ring, Cabot Circus and Dundrum. I sit on their RemCo, NomCo and I'm NED for colleague engagement.

Before this, I spent 6.5 years at ODEON Cinemas Group as Managing Director UK & Ireland, and Commercial Officer for Europe, transforming their business and overseeing revenue growth across nine markets, sitting on the boards of Digital Cinema Media and the UK Cinema Association. Before joining ODEON, I was a Global Board Director at Costa Coffee, having previously built significant depth and breadth of experience in branded consumer goods holding senior Commercial and Marketing positions at Associated British Foods, Cadbury-Schweppes, and PepsiCo. Home is Bedfordshire with my husband, two sons and dog. I love running and food.

“D&I is a journey not a destination. We're making huge, generational shifts, and it won't happen overnight.”

What does being a Woman to Watch in Retail mean to you?

I'm thrilled to be a Woman to Watch! Firstly, I feel privileged to be amongst so many talented female leaders, and secondly, having recently joined the retail sector, I'm honored to be included.

This Index is a great reminder of the responsibility we all have as retail leaders to create inclusive

environments where diversity can thrive, and everyone can be at their best no matter what level.

As a leader new to the sector, how does D&I in retail compare to other industries?

We are all on the same journey and coming from hospitality, and a member of WiHTL, it's been very helpful to be able to compare where

we are in retail and be able to apply best practice from other sectors. There are some great initiatives across the retail sector, and Diversity in Retail (DiR) provides the perfect forum to share and learn from each other. It also struck me that, working with a huge diversity of talented business leaders in the independent retail sector, there is so much we can learn about how diversity of thinking and backgrounds can help drive brilliant business solutions.

Why do you think that highlighting women role models is important to making progress on D&I?

D&I is a journey not a destination. We're making huge, generational shifts, and it won't happen overnight, so it's important we stay the journey!

Role models are critical to that journey. You can be an ambitious person, but it helps to be able to look up and see people in senior positions that are like you. It provides people with confidence to be able to think "well they made it and so can I." Recently, I was talking to a former colleague who told me that when I became Managing Director at ODEON, it was the first time she believed that, as a woman, she could

make it to senior leadership in the business. She's now a director, with lots of future potential.

As role models, it's important to be authentic and honest. It's not always an easy journey, and we must be open about that, and support each other. It's also important not to change your leadership style and personality.

Some women step into senior roles and adopt the mannerisms of their male counterparts, because they believe that's the only way they can survive, but that doesn't work for those who aspire to the same journey. You must be authentic to allow people to truly be inspired by you.

Having women in senior positions also lays the groundwork for more inclusive leadership in the future. I have seen first-hand that men who have been led by women are more inclusive leaders themselves.

What are you doing in your organisation to drive up the D&I agenda?

It's early days for me at Blakemore, but due to strong purpose and values, the foundations are there. We've got groups focused on race, disability, and a women's support

network; reverse mentoring programs and we've done lots of work to understand unconscious bias across the business. There is so much more we can do to make sure that D&I is embedded into the business, and we aspire to develop a more diverse set of talent into our senior leadership positions.

Can you share a little about what you did on D&I as MD at ODEON?

When I joined ODEON, I was the only woman on the UK and Ireland leadership team. By the time I left, 60% of roles were held by women. One of the most impactful decisions I made was to promote a director into my leadership team, just as she was going on parental leave. It created a ripple effect in the business, as people realised that you could have a family as well as holding a senior position.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Be more confident about what you can achieve. If you're the only woman in the room, talk first, don't wait for someone else to go. Never undervalue what you bring to a business, a discussion, or a meeting.





Sarah Welsh

Company **N Brown Group**
Job Title **CEO of Retail**



I joined N Brown Group in April 2020 as CEO of Retail, having spent almost 17 years at Oasis where I served as Managing Director. Whilst at N Brown, I have led the team in creating a more compelling and refreshed product and customer proposition for Simply Be, Jacamo and JD Williams, the three main investment brands within the group portfolio, by creating clearly defined brand perspectives to attract an audience who is traditionally underserved.

With almost 30 years of Retail and Brand Experience across the UK high street, I have worked across multiple formats including digital, wholesale, franchise and multichannel. I take huge pleasure in creating clear and differentiated customer propositions and consistently strive to create an environment which embraces learning and development opportunities for young people, currently serving as the N Brown ambassador for social mobility, alongside my valued role within the business' ESG committee, ensuring that N Brown delivers the pledges it has made in terms of the wider environment. I am an ambassador for the Retail Trust, where I passionately support their work in caring for and protecting the lives of people working in retail. I am also a proud supporter of The Prince's Trust. Currently living in Manchester, I divide my time between the North of England and the capital.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

Be deliberate and purposeful. Without leaders advocating D&I, taking responsibility, and ensuring there is meaningful change that our colleagues and customers can see, there's a risk that D&I will remain a buzzword and a box-tick exercise. For example, we have placed particular focus on increasing our

socioeconomic diversity; a topic I'm extremely passionate about. We're a business that serves the underserved, therefore greater socioeconomic diversity enables us to make better decisions for our customers, give us the opportunity to make a difference in the communities we serve and is vital in helping us attract the next generation of talent. I'm proud to have facilitated this change by supporting the

increase of school and college leaver apprenticeship opportunities in our business from just four in March 2022, to 18 today.

When it comes to advocating for D&I, is there anything you can share that you're doing outside of retail?

We're doing a substantial amount when it comes to mentoring young people in our local communities. We've worked with the Prince's Trust to introduce a mentoring programme where our colleagues mentor young people in the community who would benefit from having their aspirations raised and having support in building key life skills such as communication and confidence.

We're also introducing a leadership mentoring programme in partnership with Inspiration For All, which focuses on bringing school and business leaders together in partnership to advance social mobility.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

I think it's important to be someone that everyone of all ages, backgrounds and abilities can approach. I try to be as visible as possible within the business and talk to as many colleagues as I can.

I believe one of the greatest qualities in a person is being genuine, and that this also means standing up for what you believe in, when sometimes it might be the harder option, and to continuously drive for positive change.

Having real passion also sets you apart as someone others will naturally look up to. I've been extremely fortunate to have worked for and with many wonderful women who I've looked up to and who have

“ Having a real passion sets you apart as someone who others will naturally look up to.



championed me, which in turn inspires me to do the same, and I'm therefore truly honoured to be seen as a role model for others.

I'm fascinated by the idea of what this change will bring, with the only thing we can be sure of is that change will bring exciting opportunities.

What do you think the future holds for the retail sector? What are you most excited about?

One of the things which I love the most about the retail sector is its inclusive culture and openness to everyone – as long as you are curious, driven and are passionate about serving your customers in the best possible way – there are no boundaries within retail.

With new ways of thinking, introducing fresh skills through apprenticeships, and the need for change with more sustainable ways of working, I'm most excited by the prospect of the amount of change that will happen and where this will lead in the future.





Jo Whitfield CBE

Company **Matalan**
Job Title **CEO**

I am CEO of Matalan and until recently Chief Executive of Food for The Co-operative Group (Co-op).

A qualified accountant, my career began with EY, before broadening my experience in finance with companies such as Northern Foods, Matalan and Asda. I strengthened my knowledge of Clothing retail at George, taking on key roles spanning Operations, e-Commerce & Strategy across the International business. Latterly, I led the commercial, buying and merchandising teams for Asda Money, Asda Mobile and General Merchandise. It's great to be back at Matalan to build on everything I have learned in my time away.

Outside of my executive role, my activities are mainly focused around inclusivity, mentoring and networking. I have pioneered a new network for the grocery industry, and launched Grocery Girls, a trailblazing initiative that has drawn support from major retailers and suppliers, bringing women together to share experiences, career journeys and inspiration. I sponsored the Co-Op Respect network for LGBTQ+ colleagues, having previously led the Aspire network for women in the business. I am also a serving member of the Women's Business Council and a Non-Executive Director for Factory International. I was honoured to be appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the 2021 New Year honours for services in feeding the nation during the Covid pandemic and had previously been awarded the prestigious Veuve Cliquot Businesswoman of the Year prize.

What does being a Woman to Watch in Retail mean to you?

It's a great honour. I'm very conscious that I'm in a fantastic peer group, a cohort highlighted in this Index who have all been called out for doing great things. It also comes with a real

sense of responsibility. We have to show up and speak out for the people who are just starting out in their careers, and play a part in ensuring they can achieve their aspirations. So it's an honour, that comes with personal satisfaction and a good deal of responsibility.

“ The more visible women leaders we have, the more other women will see that they too can build a path to success.

Why do you feel it's important to highlight women leaders?

It's so critical to have visible role models in any industry, to enable people to understand the different routes to success. Everyone takes different paths and it can feel an insurmountable challenge to get to senior leadership. By highlighting female leaders, you are highlighting multiple stories. And that can really empower and motivate others to make the same choices for themselves.

We've not reached gender balance yet in retail, but the more visible women leaders we have, the more other women will see that they too can build a path to success.

How has the D&I agenda evolved in your career?

I've seen it completely transformed! When I started more than 20 years ago, gender diversity was discussed with no real clarity, as a problem to solve. It was then that we began seeing the need for diverse talent pipelines, and building in leadership programmes.

But there's been a real move in the



industry. Now, businesses recognise that it's imperative to represent your communities, to represent your customers, and for your leadership teams to reflect society. We now have research which shows that more diverse companies perform better.

As such, businesses are proactive about making that a reality, and D&I is baked in to the talent agenda, and in lots of cases overall business strategy. It's critical to talent attraction. To bring in the right people, you've got to show that you're a company where diversity of thought can thrive. As employers, your colleagues and customers expect it of you.

What have you learnt the most from in your career?

I've learnt the most about myself in the times when I've felt most stretched. Any role that's required me to shift into a different space, or to learn about an entirely new part of a business – those moments have really taught me things about myself.

For example, when I moved away from finance and into operations, I had a team who were experts. They had built entire careers in stores and online, whereas my understanding was much more limited, and far more focused on executive level, rather

than bottom up. In these scenarios, it's fantastic to learn through your people, but to lean on your own intrinsic personal strengths, too. You can learn about yourself in new ways as you become more accomplished in different roles.

What advice would you give to the next generation of women entering the sector?

I'd say believe in yourself and have confidence in what you can bring. So often younger women have

a sense that everyone else has it figured out and everyone is further down road than they are. This is not true! Everyone navigates their own uncertainties.

I'd say that being brave and taking opportunities when they arise is the fastest route to unlocking career progression. Rely on yourself, know what your strengths are, and trust that you'll learn the rest.

What does D&I mean to you, and mean in your organisation?

It comes down to fairness, to equality, and to doing the right thing. That means enabling everyone to seize opportunities in their career, and to accomplish what they're capable of. Sometimes, people need a bit more support to see the opportunities, and be pulled through an organisation.

From a business perspective, being steadfast on D&I is just the right thing to do. Having a diverse team powers companies through periods of change and high growth. If you want to go on that journey, you have to have a really strong talent pool that feels engaged, included and rewarded.

It's very early days here at Matalan but there's a real sense that everyone recognises the business benefits of D&I, and is keen to commit to going on the journey.





Role Models for Inclusion in Retail

Leaders who are driving change on D&I

We have identified a group of leaders who are striving to foster a culture of inclusion and belonging within their organisation. These leaders are passionate about promoting diversity,

through being vocal advocates for change, chairing internal D&I groups or actively supporting external initiatives.



Lucy Bains

Company **Pets at Home**

Job Title **Regional Operations Director**

I have worked in leadership roles since the age of 16 within specialist retailers, from supervisor positions through to my current role as Operations Director at Pets at Home. My career at Pets has been an incredibly humbling one. Working alongside the most inspirational and inspiring leadership teams where bringing the best version of your unique self is celebrated and everyone is supported to make a difference. Having joined as an area manager in 2018, I have since worked within various business areas including grooming services, new format propositions, and most recently within our consumer leadership team as Head of Pet Care Center Experience. I look forward to a long career in this incredible business.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

Working in a business with a strong purpose alongside colleagues who care makes a huge difference. It is important to me to give everyone opportunities regardless of their background, personal situation, or beliefs. At Pets, everyone is focused on creating those opportunities. This is led by our CEO and encompassed through all colleagues, reflective of our values.



In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

Conversations enable ongoing education around issues that matter. Sharing experiences drives togetherness and acts as a reminder that we are all in this together and that there are many opportunities to make progress towards a better world.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

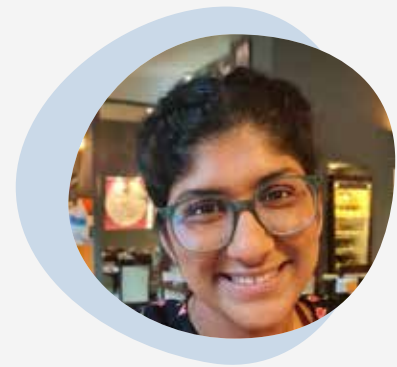
Take the time to listen, seek to understand and lead a culture that

celebrates unique differences. Be consistent through every part of your strategy to ensure that D&I is centric to your business strategy. A business can only be successful with colleagues who have varied experiences, views, and opinions, and have mutual respect for each other.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

It means being true to yourself, always taking the time to listen and taking every opportunity to drive positive change. Being a role model comes with responsibility to challenge convention, do the right thing, and celebrate every win, together.

“ Being a role model means being true to yourself, taking the time to listen and taking every opportunity to drive positive change.



Sainika Bharj

Company **John Lewis Partnership**

Job Title **Operations Development Manager, Development & Optimisation, Supply Chain**

I started my education at an all girls private school in Windsor, as a family we then spent 2 years living in Portugal where I was introduced to a mixed gender school. It was an interesting change for a young girl to experience. My career to date follows a similar pattern as I've spent time in roles surrounded predominately by women but also men. I've spent 10 years with the John Lewis Partnership; I've had the opportunity to start my journey in a John Lewis Branch to then move over to Head Office. My roles have varied significantly throughout my career, but the one that stands out the most for me is the role I currently hold. I'm an Operations Development Manager within the JLP Supply Chain & I lead on Data, Analytics & Comms within the Project I'm working on. I personally feel this role has allowed me to grow very quickly as an individual but also enabled me to be one whole person. Alongside this I also hold two additional positions: Supply Chain D&I Lead & Partnership Gender Equality Network Co-Lead. Looking back at my career journey, both these elements are incredibly important to me and I never thought I'd have the opportunity to influence the Partnership & Leaders on the strategy.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

I care immensely about D&I for the Partnership, but even more so for Supply Chain. I have, unfortunately, been on the wrong end of poor behaviour over the last few years so I can sympathise and understand, first hand, what it can feel like. My main objective is to ensure no other Partner in our Business experiences what I went through and to make sure that the Supply Chain stops being considered a "boys club".

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

I experienced, first hand, that people are incredibly worried to begin discussing D&I as they fear they may say the wrong thing, however an open conversation enables those individuals to ask questions in a judgement free environment and this itself is so powerful. It's a 'simple' way to allow a natural form of communication to occur on sensitive topics without causing offense. It allows everyone to learn from each other as it breaks down stereotypes and thus creating a more inclusive culture.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

I would suggest that leaders should set their expectations on D&I clearly from the beginning with their respective teams. This allows



“Open conversations enable individuals to ask questions in a judgement-free environment and this is so powerful.

everyone to appreciate that it is important. Follow this up by starting the conversation in a relaxed and judgement free environment. This is the fundamental point in my journey where I saw real change. That is the first stepping stone to embedding D&I into the culture the leader expects from their team. Lastly, work with others to share best practices and action what may come up as challenges and continue to keep D&I intertwined into the day-to-day.

What are the biggest barriers to progress on D&I in the retail sector in 2023?

In my opinion, the biggest barriers would be lack of diversity in leadership roles across retail. If a leadership team is not diverse, it can be difficult for others to respect the efforts being made for D&I. Along with this, I'd say lack of commitment and accountability from leaders in retail also hinders progress as any individual in the given business won't trust that D&I is forming part of their annual strategy.

What are you doing to ensure D&I remains a priority in your organisation?

My journey with D&I started a few years ago when I challenged the Leadership within the team I work in as I had experienced some uncomfortable situations. I wanted to and was successful in making a difference as I felt I couldn't keep quiet. This drive then progressed into

taking on the responsibility of leading on D&I for the John Lewis Partnership Supply Chain so that no other individual has to experience what I did. Alongside this, I also witnessed a large amount of gender inequality in my roles which encouraged me to co-lead the strategy for Gender Equality Network for the Partnership.

What impact have role models had on your career in retail?

I am fortunate enough to have Dame Sharon White as my role model in my career. One conversation with Sharon in 2021 empowered me to start my journey with trying to improve D&I for Supply Chain so that others didn't have to experience what I did. I can also look up into our Partnership hierarchy and see an individual, our Chairman, who looks like me. Having that as a constant reminder that "that could be me one day" or "there's nothing stopping me from progressing" is incredibly powerful for a woman, in my opinion.



Kiran Kaur Bhogal

Company **Central Co-op**

Job Title **Senior Funeral Operations Manager**

I am the daughter of, first- and second-generation immigrants to the UK (from East Africa and India). I was privileged enough to complete a short time in Central Co-op Funeralcare, Stirchley at the age of 19 doing work experience. My career started in 1993 as an embalmer (the first Indian embalmer in the UK) for a large corporate company.

I progressed to becoming a Funeral Director in 1998 for Central Co-op and worked hard in the role to then become a Senior Funeral Director in Birmingham 2011 followed by 2 secondments in an Area Manager role during 2020 in both Birmingham and then subsequently in 2021 Derby, Derbyshire and Staffordshire.

I currently hold the position of a Senior Funeral Operations Manager in our North trading area (Derby, Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Wolverhampton).

What does inclusion and diversity mean to you?

Inclusion and diversity, to me, means that there is a fair representation of people, circumstances and backgrounds – making it real!

We should celebrate our differences and enhance the qualities of every single individual. Always empowering and always encouraging.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

It is important to share experiences and have open conversations to see the progress on D&I as this then becomes the 'norm'. No one should be made to feel inferior.



What does being a good role model mean to you?

A good role model displays behaviours that they and others feel proud of, they should be an ambassador for their employer and believe in personal values.

They should believe in their core values and not be ashamed to stand by them.

What do you think the future holds for the funeral sector? What are you most excited about?

I think the future will be more inclusive and diverse at every level. This will be powerful for colleagues to see that we can reflect our communities in an impactful way!

I am excited to see that we are beginning to embrace individual identity and recognise achievements.

We promote using initiative and encourage self-belief.

“ Inclusion and diversity means that there is fair representation of people, circumstances and backgrounds. ”



Amit Chitnis

Company **Tesco**
Job Title **Grocery Category Director**

I grew up in India, but over the last 15 years I have lived in a few different places including China, Singapore, France, New York and now London. My early career was with the Tata Group focused on very hands-on commercial roles. I then went to INSEAD for my MBA and joined Bain & Co. as a management consultant. Bain was where my interest in retail solidified, and this took me to Tesco in 2014.

I've had an interesting path within Tesco – I started in Group strategy, went on to run stores, and have then stayed in commercial. I currently look after Tesco's UK Grocery business which is fantastic. It is humbling to be a part of shaping food security and affordability in UK through events like Covid-19, inflation, cost of living crisis. Each day I learn something new! I am keen on people development and DE&I. At work, helping people reach their potential is the most fulfilling part of the job. Having lived through racism, championing the DE&I movement is quite personal to me.



What does inclusion and diversity mean to you?

One of our core values at Tesco is "Everyone is welcome at Tesco" which I think is a really good starting point for D&I. It is important to embrace 'diversity' in its broadest form. There are many different lenses to privilege, and genuine diversity includes a wide spectrum of opinions, background, identities, and life experiences.

Inclusion for me means that we celebrate (not just accommodate) the diversity described above.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

Everyone's D&I journey is unique. Even with the best intent, it is very difficult for any of us to truly 'put ourselves in someone else's shoes'. So the starting point has to be active listening with an open mind – to the stories and life experiences of those who have experienced the same world in a different way. This is the path to be a genuine ally. And this is greatly helped by people speaking up – sharing their experiences to create awareness and therefore empathy. For the longest time I was reluctant to share my personal stories of experiencing racism (thankfully never at work). I used to think 'why bother people' or 'I don't want to play the victim and ask for sympathy'. But that was me missing the point. Sharing my stories and more importantly listening to others creates the environment needed for genuine D&I debates and allows us to move forward.

“ Words and thoughts alone don't change the world. So action is paramount.”

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

Three words sum it up for me: Believe, Learn, Act.

Believe: I feel any D&I effort only works if it comes from a place of authenticity. The core has to be a belief in wanting to make our world (not just our jobs) a fairer, kinder place.

Learn: We can't change what we don't understand. We can all learn through listening, asking, observing and questioning. I was a part of a workshop where we did this group exercise of taking a step forward for every privilege we had enjoyed

(e.g., education) or a step back for the lack of (e.g., parents who were separated). The spectrum of prompts for privilege were so broad and varied in that exercise, it really opened my eyes. For example, I come from a very financially modest background, but I had not appreciated the privilege I had growing up in house full of books.

Act: Words and thoughts alone don't change the world. So action is paramount. I ask myself and those around me what am I going to do differently to break my own bias and to be more inclusive? How am I making sure someone isn't excluding themselves from a role because they assume they can't do it because of a disability or their home location (both true examples of really talented colleagues who almost didn't apply for a role they were brilliantly qualified for). Action includes challenging the status quo and calling out wrong behavior. But it also is about inspiring more people around you to act as well. Together we can truly make a difference.

When it comes to advocating for D&I, is there anything you can share that you're doing outside of retail?

I try and do what I can outside of my day job to support people development and D&I.

In the recent past I was a trustee at First Rung which is a London based charity providing young people with high quality vocational learning and employment opportunities. As the Chairman of the board, I worked closely with other board members and the CEO, to together improve lives of young people aged 14 – 23, many of whom are from underprivileged backgrounds.

I currently am a part of the "Diversity in Grocery Mentorship program". This is industry's largest D&I community led by the charity Grocery Aid. Through this programme I mentor talented, motivated individuals in other organisations to develop their career and in the case of my current mentee – help her to champion D&I in her own company.





Richard Davies

Company **QVC**
Job Title **Vice President Information Security**

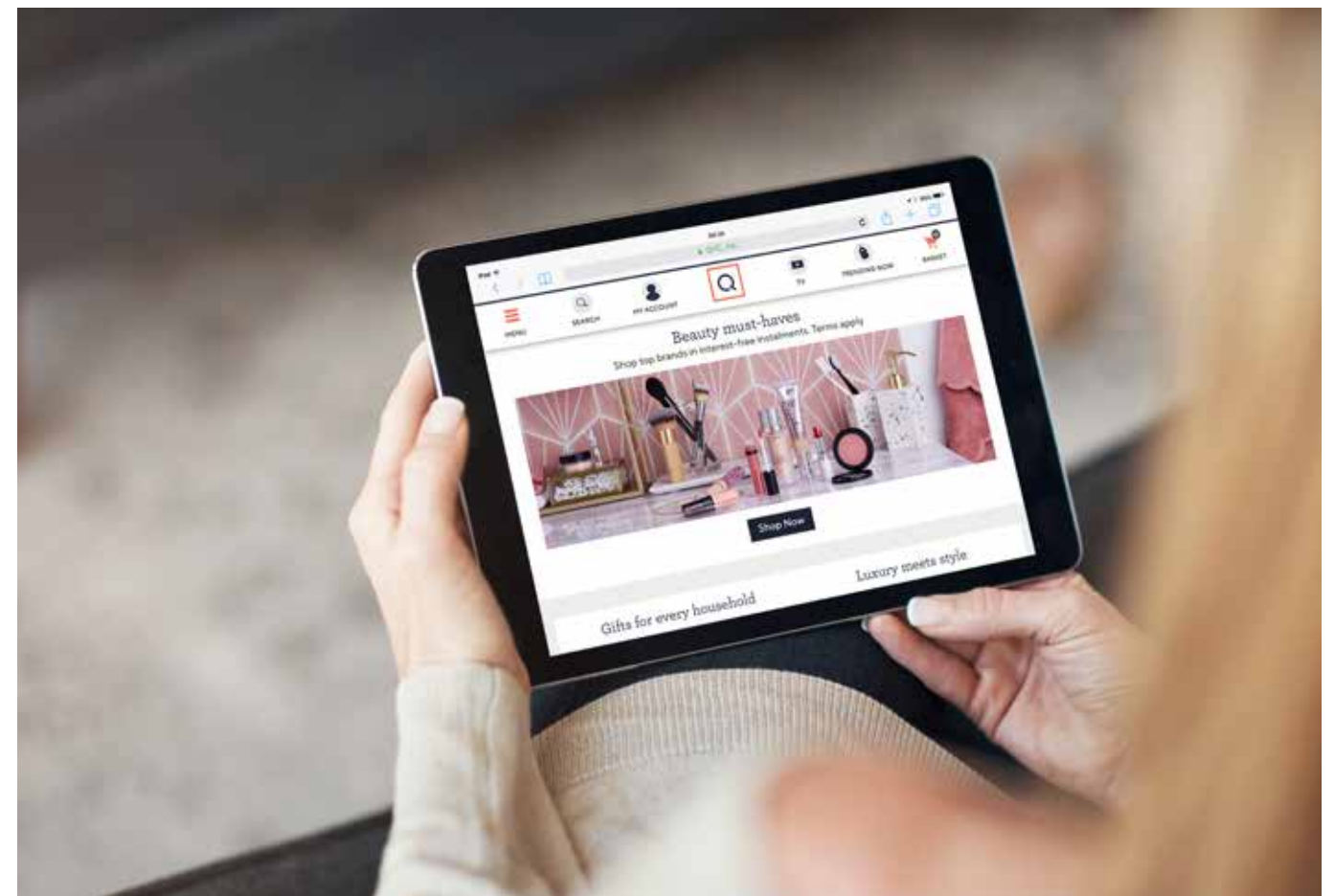
I am Vice President for Global Information Security at Qurate Retail Group, the parent company of QVC, HSN, Zulily and the Cornerstone Brands. In a career spanning 30 years, I have worked with retailers such as Iceland Foods, Booker Cash and Carry and Woodward Foodservices in a variety of technology focused roles, and have first-hand experience building and leading diverse local and international teams. I currently sponsor QVC UK's Women in Tech Partnerships, Graduate Technology Hiring program, and the "Accessibility Allies", a team member resource group focused on supporting team members with both visible and hidden disabilities. I'm a passionate advocate for diversity and inclusion and offer male allyship and mentoring opportunities to support women as their careers develop. Based in North Wales UK, I'm a dad to two boys and a keen runner and guitar player.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

Two things provide my main motivation. 1. Over the years I came to realise that as a white male, I've been in a privileged position and have had career opportunities that were not necessarily available equally to everyone, particularly women. I've seen how there are relatively few women leaders in technology roles and those who are there have typically had to work harder than their male counterparts and have had less support. As a result of my privileged position, I feel I need to pay it forward and try to help others. 2. My youngest son has been diagnosed with autism and experiences the world differently to others. He's an incredible child with lots to offer, and I want to help build a future where neurodivergent people like him are supported in the workplace and given the same opportunities to progress as others.

What impact have role models had on your career in retail?

I don't think I would have lasted in retail technology without strong role models. I remember being given a chance by my first manager, when he helped me to begin my IT career straight from school. He believed in me and had time to listen and help me find my way as the youngest member of an established team. Another role model was a male CIO in the US who encouraged me to take my current role when I had doubts if I could live up to it. He supported me at every turn and helped build my confidence. My biggest role model though is my Mum, who has so much energy, drive and empathy it's unreal.



She spent her career supporting people who are deaf/blind and has always pushed me to challenge what is possible, to do the right thing and to act with empathy in every situation. I think a shortage of visible female role models in the technology industry is holding back women from pursuing careers in tech and this is something the industry needs to address. There is a great opportunity for women to fill skills gaps and to develop very successful careers, but the shortage of role models means women are not hearing about the possibilities in tech and that is a shame.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

For me, as a VP in the company I recognize there are a lot of eyes on me. I'm very aware of the shadow I cast for my team and strongly believe the way I achieve my results is just as important as what I achieve. I have a strong sense of fairness and am

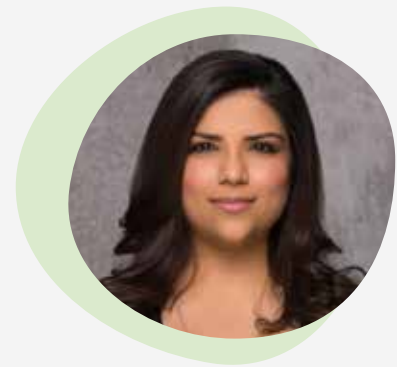
very uncomfortable when something happens that runs contrary to that and will call it out. I try to avoid being the loudest voice in the room, and I work hard to listen encouraging all team members, especially junior ones, to speak up and express their views. I strive to be approachable and accessible for anyone at any time. I provide mentorship and allyship for several team members and look to identify growth opportunities wherever I can.

What are you doing to ensure D&I remains a priority in your organisation?

We are on a journey at QVC that has helped us learn about the importance and benefits of creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for everyone. Whether it's recruiting mental health first aiders, providing onsite work experience for SENDS students, speaking up for women in tech, achieving disability confident employer status level 2 or supporting customers through

“ I think a shortage of visible female role models in the technology industry is holding back women from pursuing careers in tech.

the menopause, there is so much to be proud of, but we've only just scratched the surface. As a member of the senior management team, I'm determined to keep our momentum up and am always looking for opportunities to provide allyship, sponsorship and to represent our company externally on these topics, particularly in accessibility and women's tech careers.



Chami Dhillon

Company **Kingfisher**
Job Title **Group Head of Inclusion & Diversity**

I lead the I&D Centre of Expertise at Kingfisher, working with the home improvement brands at Kingfisher Group (B&Q, Screwfix, Castorama & Brico Depot) to make our culture even more inclusive for our 80,000 colleagues across over 1,900 stores.

I grew up in a thriving British-Indian community in Southall, West London and from a young age had a passion for community action and volunteering. I read English at the University of Nottingham (Study abroad: University of Auckland). After graduating I undertook a leadership programme with Read International, culminating in a placement in Tanzania. I credit these early experiences of studying and working abroad with shaping my intersectional approach to I&D, with a strong focus on LGBTQIA+ advocacy.

Returning to the UK, I joined AkzoNobel's HR Accelerator Programme and immediately started to positively disrupt the approach to inclusion whilst undertaking rotations across HR. This laid the foundations for a decade of work in DEI that has defined my career – including shaping Global DEI strategies, designing award-winning social mobility programmes and harnessing the power of Agile HR for inclusion across a range of culture initiatives at AkzoNobel, Experian and most recently Kingfisher.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

I am driven by a fundamental belief that we have more in common than separates us. I choose to always assume positive intent and approach people non-judgmentally – it amazes me how people open up when given this platform. I have seen time and

time again, when people speak their truth authentically, it is difficult for others to ignore what they hear.

Recognizing that we all have diversity (both invisible and visible) and having safe spaces to speak about the advantages and disadvantages that diversity has had on our success (however you seek to define that) is critical to uncovering the key action that will support everyone to thrive.

“ We cannot address decades or even centuries of societal inequality overnight.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

I am constantly motivated by the power of community, when acting together our impact is amplified. The energy and dynamism of colleagues, connections, friends and family inspires and uplifts me daily.

In my organisations, data is what keeps me going. Finding ways to measure the CoE's impact, both big and small helps to show the constant progress, however incremental.

Whatever your personal driver, it is important to remember that we cannot address decades or even centuries of societal inequity overnight. A healthy dose of realism reminds me that this topic is bigger than I or any one person's individual impact, but we can be part of a change for the better.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

1. Take the time to know, understand and reflect on your privilege and bias. I guarantee your team know this about you already
2. It's okay not to have all the answers, but ensure you diversify your network so that you are at least aware of your blindspots

3. If you do not feel safe to be vulnerable with your team then it is likely others in your team feel the same. Only you can change that as a leader
4. Whether you acknowledge it or not, your actions and words carry weight so be intentional with them, especially when you frame what's important behaviorally
5. Ask yourself often “when was the last time I took a specific action to make someone feel more included?” – this will ensure you are active in fostering inclusion
6. Speak to your peers; much of being an inclusive leader is just being a great leader so learn from role models around you

What are you doing to ensure D&I remains a priority in your organisation?

For too long D&I has been the focus of under-represented or marginalized groups. If it were within the power of these groups to subvert the dynamics and norms that exclude or disadvantage them – they would have fixed it already.

At Kingfisher, we are seeking to make inclusion everyone's priority through running a group-wide allyship campaign. Designed by colleagues, for colleagues and with practical application. It is critical that every colleague understands the specific role they play in building a culture where everyone has the opportunities to build the career they want.

Alongside this, we have improved our data to support measurement of our impact on employee sentiment and movement through the organisation.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

When I think about the role models I have admired and learned from the most in my career, it is always the “imperfect” ones that left a lasting impression on me. Someone who is willing to share where they made a mistake and learned from it; the last time they heard a term and did not know what it meant; when they last felt overwhelmed by everything and how they lifted themselves back up. Humility, empathy, kindness, curiosity and the courage to share those things



through great stories. Knowing not only when they should speak, but also when they should listen intently. Beyond what role models say and share, it is about what they do. Showing up consistently and using their voice and platform for the benefit of others, even when it is hard. Investing their time, resources, patience – in places that others may not. Introspecting often, learning always and finding ways to mobilize others.





Josie Dickinson

Company **Dunelm Group**

Job Title **Senior Belonging and Engagement Manager**

I'm a passionate, supportive and approachable person with a focus on creating a workplace where colleagues feel like they belong. I have spent most of my career trying to make a better colleague experience. I truly believe that if you put your people first, the business becomes better for it. Without our people, we wouldn't be where we are today, so we need to look after and support them. I've used my passion to help create and implement a mental health strategy, launched colleague networks, new and updated policies, and educated our leaders on belonging, to name a few things. One of my proudest moments has been creating and launching a domestic abuse support strategy. This has literally changed lives for colleagues in our business. I've then been able to take our learnings and share our story with other businesses to really make change. These have all been amazing to be involved with, and I'm energised by the positive changes I have been able to make so far. There is still so much opportunity, and I will make sure that people continue to be at the heart of everything I do.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

I'm so motivated and inspired by the colleagues we have in Dunelm, especially our networks. I have the privilege of hearing their stories and experiences and feel a real sense of responsibility to learn from them, and action change where we can. We have had stories and feedback from colleagues where they have shared how we have been able to help them. That could be from policy changes, quality of the communications with their line manager or some of the celebration events we have had that shows their culture and what makes them who they are. All of these different things really do make a difference to our colleagues' lives.

After seeing the progress that generations before me have created in the world is so inspiring. There has been an incredible amount of passion, effort and time to get us to where we are currently. We now need to ensure that work continues for our future generations of colleagues as well as those that are here with us now.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

Don't be afraid of where you're starting from, take the first step. Start by listening to your colleagues at all levels, in all areas of your business as those voices and experiences will help shape your plans. There are so many people in this space who will help you and are passionate about this so find those that can help you.



“ Being a good role model means being brave and using your voice to challenge people, or to share stories to inspire others.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

Being brave and using your voice to challenge people or to share stories to inspire others. It means not being afraid to be the only one who speaks up as the ripple effect and change that it can bring can literally change lives. It means constantly learning and growing. There is so much we can learn from others so taking that time to learn about a different culture or experience is only a positive thing. Being a role model to me, means being a genuine and kin human being. Stripping everything back and really taking the time to listen and learn from others. Trying to take other people along with you, some will be ahead of you, some people are behind you so it's being able to adapt to each person's needs and take them on the journey with you.

What are you doing to ensure D&I remains a priority in your organisation?

I'm just going to keep on talking about the importance of being an organisation where colleagues feel they belong and the actions that make that happen. Education is a huge part of continuing to change as an organisation so we will continue to do that through blogs, panel talks and training. We also will continue to give our colleagues a platform to share their experiences and use their voices. We need to keep doing this so our leaders can understand the reality of working at Dunelm and what we can do to continue to grow. We have Exec sponsors on each of our colleague networks so having them use their voices to support our wider messaging is really important as well as them educating their teams on how we can create belonging at Dunelm.



Hazel Fenton

Company **Tesco**
Job Title **Distribution Centre Manager**

I joined Tesco working on clothing when I was 16 years old. After graduating from the University of Leeds, I achieved a place on the Tesco retail graduate scheme where I worked in several management roles within a store. I spent a few years being a Lead Manager in several different locations, before being appointed to a Store Manager position and running several stores around Manchester. After four years as a Store Manager, I moved over to our Convenience format as an Area Manager where I led a group of thirty-six stores. After two successful years in this role, I moved over to my current role – Distribution Centre Manager. In this position, I am responsible for leading and developing a large team of colleagues to deliver operational excellence and create a brilliant colleague experience.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

We've all had the sense of feeling excluded at some time in our lives and it can be an awful experience. For myself, and many people, this is a rare experience but I can imagine how hard it must feel when you experience this on a regular basis for no other reason than who you are, which drives me to want to do whatever I can to stop people experiencing this. A feeling of inclusion, particularly in the workplace, is one that enables everyone to aspire to achieve their goals, whatever they may be, and encourages everyone to be at their best.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

I think it's really important for people to share their experiences of D&I and have honest conversations because it inspires others to speak out when they see or feel something that isn't right. Seeing people highlight their own experiences, good and bad, helps people to understand how they should treat people that are different to them and enables them to learn what they can do in the future to create a more inclusive environment. As chair of the Parents and Carers colleague network for Tesco, we have focused on sharing stories of some of our amazing colleagues from across the business that have thrived whilst working for Tesco but have at times had to deal with real adversity; including baby loss, caring for relatives and having difficulties



with IVF and adoption. By facing into some of these difficult topics we've seen an amazing response from more and more colleagues from around the business who have been inspired to share their own stories and this has helped Line Managers to feel far more educated and better be able to support their teams going through personal difficulties.

When it comes to advocating for D&I, is there anything you can share that you're doing outside of retail?

As a mum of a young daughter, I have a real passion for supporting gender equality, inside and outside of the business. I have spent the last few years supporting an external organisation that connects role models with young girls in high schools to show them the possibilities of having successful careers and how they can gain more self-confidence and self-belief. After overcoming the inevitable 'do I get free food working at Tesco?' question, we discuss how

to approach building a career plan that you can own, how to display confidence in your own abilities and anything else that they may feel could get in the way of them having a successful career when they've finished their education.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

A good role model to me is someone that is completely authentic in who they are and recognises what they are great at, but also where they could improve. To me, people that can naturally share where they've got things wrong and what they have learnt from these times are people that I learn from so much more than people that appear to be amazing at every single thing they do. When people are completely authentic in who they are and you can easily see their personal values in everything that they do, it inspires me to be myself more which is what a role model is to me. Seeing people who,

“ Seeing people who, at times, need to be super brave to just be themselves is really inspiring to me.

at times, need to be super brave to just be themselves is really inspiring to me. I also think a great role model is someone that goes out of their way to help and support others, particularly those that are different to themselves. Being a role model to someone who has the same experiences as you is really helpful, but being a great ally and recognising how you can make someone that you don't naturally relate to feel more comfortable to be themselves is what a truly great role model is to me.



Job-share

Chloe Fletcher

Company **Asda**

Job Title **Senior Director Finance Transformation (Job Share)**



I joined Asda in 2012 after spending the early part of my career at Cadbury. My career in Asda has been varied, with the vast majority of my time in Commercial Finance. I have worked part time since having my first child in 2014 and was really proud to be promoted to Senior Director whilst working 4 days. In January 2022, I started job sharing with Laura Walker; firstly sharing the role of Senior Director Finance Shared Services before moving to lead Asda's Finance Transformation programme. It is a flexible pattern that is allowing me to thrive in and outside of work, enabling me to follow my dream of training to become an Executive coach whilst pursuing a senior, high profile, fast paced role in retail.

Since having children, I've been really passionate about making flexibility work for everyone in the workplace and launched 'Free Range Finance' for the Asda Finance team, shifting the way we viewed flexibility to be output based, rather than hours at the desk.

Laura and I are passionate leaders of the Asda Finance EDI programme and believe that all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances should be able to thrive in our team.

What does inclusion and diversity mean to you?

For me, inclusion and diversity centres around belonging and being able to bring your whole self to work. It's creating a culture that celebrates individuals who all bring something different to the party.

For me, it's really important to create equity – levelling up the playing field and giving everyone the same shot at success. Creating a sense of belonging is imperative, so that individuals, no matter their background or characteristics, feel comfortable to firstly join our organisation but thereafter be their whole selves at work and ultimately thrive and progress.

We want to bring all voices to the table, then stimulate the right discussions and make representative decisions. Diversity of thought and different opinions and perspectives are so critical to rounded decision making. How can we make customer centric decisions, if our workforce is not representative of our customer's views? We want to empower our teams, allow them to have a voice and use it to drive change.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

We're hugely motivated by seeing progress. It might be something relatively small – like a colleague who lacked confidence standing up for themselves or achieving a goal they didn't think possible. Or it might be big – like launching a big EDI event – but progress and stepping things forward really keeps me motivated.

The EDI space sometimes feels

overwhelming – there is so much progress to make and so much more left to do. But recognising that we're moving forward, that things are getting better gives us the energy to go again and keep trying.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

My advice would be to embrace the mantra 'progress over perfection'. It's amazing what a difference you can make with small steps and a brilliant group of passionate colleagues.

Be clear about what you are trying to achieve and why – it needs to be authentic. Connect with those who have a fire in their belly to help you and then empower them to help you make a difference.

We only stood up our EDI group just over a year ago and in that time, the team have established a Muslim Voices network, multiple coaching circles and now run a series of events and talks on topics ranging from Men's mental health to religious festivals, with a plan this year to look at structurally what we can do within the business to support EDI.

It's really important to continue to

educate yourself and keep learning and then understand where your support can really drive things forward. Be open and vulnerable. Widen your networks, broaden your perspectives, ask for advice and act on it.

Act with pace and urgency – but be guided by what your colleagues need rather than box ticking.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

I truly believe in the statement 'if you can see if you can be it' and that is at the heart of what I want to do as a role model within our business.

Firstly, I want to show others through my behaviours and actions that you can be true to yourself in our business and not adapt yourself to fit a 'typical' mold. Laura and I always talk about the importance of belonging and bringing your true self to work. If I can't role model that, then how can I inspire others to follow my leadership?

I am also really proud of the way Laura and I are role modelling flexibility through our successful job share. It's a different way of doing things and one that is not common.

“ I am also really proud of the way Laura and I are role modelling flexibility through our successful job share.

By successfully job sharing such a senior role within our organisation, we are able to inspire others and help them see an alternative path to balancing commitments inside and outside of work and ultimately thriving.

However, as well as role modelling, we then need to enable others to follow a similar path. Our work in inspiring others needs to be backed up with helping them achieve their needs. This is where our work in leading the EDI team comes in. Through our involvement, we need to ensure we help create the mechanisms for individuals to thrive and succeed in the business.





Job-share

Laura Walker

Company **Asda**

Job Title **Senior Director Finance Transformation (Job Share)**

I joined Asda after training as an Accountant at Deloitte. I have worked in a variety of roles across Finance and I became very interested in D&I when leading the Shared Service function. This was an amazing team, made up of colleagues from a diverse range of backgrounds, and working in this team made me committed to make sure all colleagues can thrive.

I'm really passionate about flexible working – and proving that job-sharing and other forms of flex are a great way to retain talent in an organisation. We have some amazing talent in Asda we're passionate about making sure that people can shine, regardless of their background or personal characteristics.



In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

To drive D&I forward, we really need to create a culture of allyship – which means people in positions of influence supporting people from marginalized groups. This starts to promote a culture of inclusion as if people feel supported to bring their whole selves to work, it creates an environment of belonging.

To create a true network of allies, we need to be open and share experiences. Those with more privilege may not understand the struggles of those who are marginalized or the barriers that others face. Sometimes these conversations can feel confronting and hard, but they are needed to move forward. To enable these conversations, we need to create safe, inclusive environments. People and stories help to inspire others to change their behaviors. Having an open conversation creates curiosity and people wanting to explore topics further. It's a catalyst for change. This is where the power of sharing experiences and stories comes in.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

My advice would be learn, listen, act. Firstly – be open to learning. There are so many great resources out there, so many network groups across the industry that can open your mind and help you think about the issues. Embrace them and be really curious about the topic.



Secondly, listen to your colleagues – understand different perspectives and, importantly, understand what groups aren't represented within your organisation.

Thirdly, I'd adopt the mantra of 'think big, start small and scale fast' – you don't need to tackle everything straight away. Once you've listened to your team, understand your data and identify a few things to start with. As you learn things that work, think about how you can amplify their impact. Don't wait – small steps can make a massive difference!

What does being a good role model mean to you?

Early in our careers, I was fortunate to be inspired by some outstanding role models – some of whom are now doing amazing things inside our business and some have moved on across the sector or globally. We see it as our obligation to pay this forward and act, where we can, as role models for us.

But it's important to show that we're not perfect – leadership can show up in lots of different ways and we try to demonstrate that you don't have

to fit a certain mold to do get on in finance or retail. We don't always get everything right, but we try to foster a culture of learning, asking questions, seeking to understand.

What are the biggest barriers to progress on D&I in the retail sector in 2023?

I think the challenge is making it a priority. It's much easier to maintain the status quo than change – but our industry is changing fast and we need to see D&I as an integral part of that. We need to see diversity as an enabler to business growth, better decision making and stronger business outcomes. That's hard when we're facing unprecedented economic times – but innovation and creativity are fueled by diversity of thought and that's what driving D&I forward will enable.

What impact have role models had on your career in retail?

A huge impact! One of the reasons I left professional services was because I looked up and I couldn't see anyone like me. Then I came to Asda and the leadership group were so inspiring and that gave me

“ We need to see diversity as an enabler to business growth, better decision making and stronger business outcomes.

belief that if they could do it, I had a fighting chance.

I think role models are so powerful – if you can't see it, you can't be it! That's why we try to hard to shine a light on the many ways leadership shows up in our organisation. But role models are only one part of the equation – we passionately believe that it's not enough to just be showing it's possible – we have to throw the ladder back down and create mechanisms and processes to make sure other people can succeed, regardless of their background or characteristics. So whilst role models are fantastic, we also need hard work and effort to turn the dial.



Tanya Hamilton

Company **IKEA**

Job Title **Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Manager UK&IE**

I take great pride in having worked at IKEA for almost 20 years, in a career that has always centered me around driving business through our people. As well as time in Sales and Customer Relations, my passion has always been in the People & Culture function, having held different leadership roles at unit and market area level. Being a leader at IKEA for me comes with great freedom as well as responsibility and I am delighted, along with my 12,500 colleagues to lead the ED&I agenda in the UK&IE. We have an ambition to create a more equal everyday for our co-workers, customers and society, and show up as true ambassadors for inclusion.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

What a great question! I have many leaders that I work with that don't always feel confident or comfortable on the topics of diversity and specifically equity. It's true that what makes us different, the ambiguous, can be daunting as leaders, yet we have proven time and again, that we are good at navigating the unknown, building resilience and finding solutions together when it comes to business priorities, so D&I is no exception.

My advice is to lean in with curiosity and a positive intent to want to learn something new, everyday. Accept that you will make mistakes, but, how wonderful is it that we as leaders don't have all the answers or the lived experiences in our toolkits. Focus on uniqueness rather than differences.

Start to create a strong listening culture with your co-workers to understand what inclusion truly means to them, then use the privilege we have in more senior roles and as leaders, to commit and act to improving that experience – not only for your colleagues but ultimately for our many customers and communities in which we live.

What are you doing to ensure D&I remains a priority in your organisation?

I would say that inclusion has always been a priority for us at IKEA, we may have called in something different in the past – our values, our culture, our uniqueness, our living spirit – but our vision 'to create an equal everyday



for the many' signifies our intent and focus as an organisation.

We have seen where concentration of energy, working towards the same goal with meaningful purpose can produce results, such as the gender balance split we have achieved at IKEA.

Today, we take a more integrated approach to ensure that 'equal everyday' is threaded into all aspects of our co-worker experience journey, so that D&I priorities are not a standalone focus.

We believe that we have been able to raise the D&I agenda by centering it around leadership and accountability and as an intrinsic part of our business planning processes. Whilst our culture encourages all co-workers to take the lead, with D&I, it is essential it is part of the language and ambassadorship from our most senior leaders at the top. This is key in creating responsibility and setting individual goals that help to create a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

In supporting our leaders and co-workers, we deliver comprehensive training/development programmes, employ tactics to ensure the talent pipeline is diverse and representative of our communities, set clear goals and ambitions and measure as we go.

What do you think the future holds for the retail sector? What are you most excited about?

I believe that it is happening now, the future is here.

“ My advice to leaders is to lean in with curiosity and positive intent to want to learn something new every day.

to drive equity. We will continue to invest in new competences, skills and tools to better meet our many customers, wherever and whenever they choose to be with us and continue to put the physical, financial, and mental wellbeing of our co-workers at the centre of everything we do.

As our founder Ingvar Kamprad once said, "Most things remain to be done... what a glorious future!"

What impact have role models had on your career in retail?

I have been fortunate enough to be inspired by some great role models, both women and men who lead by example and use their authenticity and vulnerability as strengths.

Retail is demanding and having balance between my work and personal life is not only healthy, but essential. I have had talking partners and mentors who have helped me to make more informed and conscious decisions that enable me to be the best mum, partner, friend, or daughter that I can be, whilst also being a strong manager and leader at IKEA.

When you find a good role model zoom in on the two or three qualities that you like about them, it will also help you recognise those behaviours, values, or attitudes of the not so good role models, that we sometimes meet, and give you the energy needed to continue to create the path for those that will follow behind you.





Leila Hampson

Company **Boohoo Group**

Job Title **Head of Talent Development**

Hello there, I'm Leila from Boohoo Group. I have worked across people teams since leaving university. I feel really lucky that my roles have allowed me to work and travel all over the world – I've got plenty of funny stories to tell if we ever get talking. Working in different countries has been a real catalyst in my passion for D&I and it's shone a light on how much we can learn by opening our minds and hearts to different cultures. My people mission is centered around building my team's self-esteem to help them give their best and most authentic selves in their careers. It always sounds like such a cliché but getting to work with teams at this deeper level still feels like the ultimate privilege to me.

In work, creativity and empathy are my two super strengths and they go hand in hand to help me produce people experiences that are unexpected or run of the mill. Something I now also love to celebrate is my Dyslexia. At school it never felt exactly like a gift but right now I would never want my brain to work quite like everyone else's – apart from when it comes to working out the bill in a restaurant! Having Dyslexia really does help me see my map of the world differently and encourage other people to embrace their uniqueness.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

My advice is really simple, when you get started with this stuff it feels like a huge mountain to climb. Switch your focus from creating fancy presentations and getting your strategy spot on to simply caring deeply and you'll be off to a great start. Don't worry too much about what you need to implement and think instead about what you can do to level up on the great stuff you already do and it will seem a lot less daunting. It's easy to get caught up in the noise and just jump on the latest trend but if you really zone in to what you care about you can't go too far wrong.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

I'm all about authenticity and really think that's the key to making great role models in this space. You need to connect with your "Why" and that's going to ensure you're always a true role model without any effort at all.

In practical terms I like to flip the concept of micro aggressions and think micro inclusions instead as someone who is striving to be a better human. It's all about the small things and paying attention to the little behaviours that make people feel they can truly show up as the real them.

Also everyone gets things wrong from time to time but real role models always learn from their mistakes and don't ever let them stop them giving things another try.



“ In my career I have seen a complete shift in businesses rethinking what makes a great place to work and what ultimately makes a better workforce.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

My motivation comes from seeing how far we have come as an industry already. In my career I have seen a complete

shift in businesses rethinking what makes a great place to work and what ultimately makes a better workforce. Now that I have seen that change first hand I really want to be part of the next evolution of D&I and play a part in its culture. The conversations we are having in 2023 across retail are thought-provoking, insightful and sometimes tough but... we like it that way. The inclusion movement has added a whole new spectrum and depth of topics to our everyday working life and that's what makes this a very special moment to be part of.

What are the biggest barriers to progress on D&I in the retail sector in 2023?

I think the obvious one I want to call out is us holding ourselves account

to impossibly high standards when it comes to making change happen.

As a result of our busy retail climate we sometimes don't give ourselves time to step back and reflect on what's really important to our teams. We can end up trying to do too much and that can sometimes feel inauthentic to our people.

Our lack of reflection also causes us to breeze over all the mini milestones we are achieving and not take stock of just how far we have come on our journey.

Change takes time and is never linear, it comes with progression and even some deadends but if it's in pursuit of something important you will always make it happen.



Colette Jackson

Company **The Very Group**

Job Title **Governance Partner – Technology**

I am a highly skilled risk and governance professional, with considerable experience working in the technology and FS functional areas. As well as an in-depth range of subject-matter expertise, I recognise that as part of my DNA, I also have the 'superpower' of being a thriving neurodivergent (dyslexia & ADHD) too.

I optimise my visual and 'out of the box' thinking to ensure my approach to risk and governance is complete and non-lateral, for a comprehensive approach to management of risk within The Very Group (TVG) Technology. After 20+ years of building my knowledge of retail and FS at The Very Group, I have finally found my vocation and it is to deliver the best risk management for Technology aligned to the group's strategy, policy, and control (Governance, Risk and Compliance).

Recently, I have played a major part with the set-up and co-chairing of The Very Group D&I Neurodiversity network 'Think' programme. I share my lived experiences, offer support, and drive change for others who may experience unique neurodiverse characteristics and challenges that I face daily. I can say, I am immensely proud to be intrinsic to this initiative and roadmap of the organisation.



“ Role models to me are individuals who live and breathe the change they want to see.

What does inclusion and diversity mean to you?

For me, inclusion would mean living in a world where neurological differences are recognised and respected. Within The Very Group I am working with the wider D&I networks to remove labelling of people. Within The Very Group we are striving for this through lived and shared values, by providing informative and educational materials with the aspiration to remove words such as 'deficits' or 'disorders' and empower those who are neurodivergent, and those who are inquisitive, to fulfil their potential.

Diversity for neurodivergent people comes in all forms as we often find some things incredibly easy, while other things difficult. My aim is to provide the right tools, support, and environments to enable neurodivergent people to flourish at The Very Group, maximising their strengths to overcome challenges.

Overall, diversity and inclusion means we can all operate in an environment that is enabled for all different types of minds. It means we can celebrate our differences and collaborate effectively to achieve our full potential and build a future that is better for all.



What motivates you to help drive up progress within your organisation?

When I was identified as neurodivergent at school, I was strongly advised to hide my differences. I had a good IQ, the ability to mask and compensate, and a high capability, so I was told my differences were too difficult to quantify. I was told that being open would put me at a disadvantage when I entered university and the workplace.

I landed at The Very Group in 1999. It's always been an organisation that is celebrated for its original proposition, and was then a family-owned business. I fit right in.

Over the years The Very Group has embraced diversity and strived for inclusion, with the development of our Wave Network (Women and Very), our Rave Network (Race and Very), and the LGBTQ+ Network, we are striving to create an environment that embraces the culture of our heritage. So I am motivated to enable change

in our recruitment, and to provide education around neurodiversity. We need to attract and include the types of diverse minds and skills that we need for the future.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

Role models to me are individuals who live and breathe the change they want to see, they are open and honest and strive to deliver a better environment for everyone.

For me, this means revealing my true self, being vulnerable and exposing my differences to help individuals, groups, the business, and anyone who is curious around D&I and in particular neurodiversity and neurodivergent people.

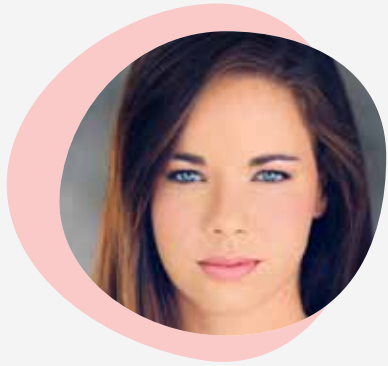
My aim is to build a better environment, and an open and accepting curious culture, where people can be open, honest and true. It will always be important for people to develop their individual coping strategies for operating in a neuro typical environment, but I want

to enable the best environment for people to thrive. I never ever want anyone to have to suffer the arduous mental strain of 'pretending' or 'masking' their true self in the way that I have in the past.

When it comes to advocating for D&I, is there anything you can share that you're doing outside of retail?

We are partnering with Liverpool University's newly-formed Disability Student Coaches Group, a group of second and third year mentors who give their time to assist fellow students around applications and CV writing.

We are developing networking opportunities and mentoring programmes, and providing exposure to The Very Group for students, with the hope to close the gap between the expectation and reality of the working world. I really hope this partnership continues to go from strength to strength and we can bring in the next generation of talent to The Very Group.



Lauren Jacob

Company **Monica Vinader**

Job Title **Director of Wholesale, North America**

Like many of us who have landed a life in retail, my career path has been full of twists and turns. I completed my undergraduate degree in Opera Performance and spent years singing my way across the world. 7 years ago, I went back to school for my master's degree and had 4 part-time jobs in between classes and rehearsals to make ends meet. One of those jobs was for a UK-based jewelry brand making their first splash in the US – they needed an Engraving Technician... Did I have any engraving experience? Definitely not. Had I ever worked a day in retail? Not one. What I did have to offer was curiosity, creativity, kindness, and integrity – and that was enough for them to take a chance on me.

That chance changed my life. More specifically, the people who took that chance changed my life – and I still work alongside those leaders to this day.

After 7 years with the company, I'm proud to be a co-chair on the DEI committee, championing diversity and inclusion in the workplace. I know firsthand how being in an environment that champions authenticity is critical to thoughtful innovation and growth because it allows you to have the psychological security to be vulnerable and create. I'm passionate about making people feel comfortable and accepted for who they are and seeing how that positively impacts their personal and professional lives.

I am constantly in awe of the amazing team I get to work with every day, and I am grateful for the opportunities and support that Monica Vinader has provided me throughout my career. I am committed to doing my part to create a workplace where everyone feels valued and empowered to be themselves, and I am honored to be a part of an organisation that shares that vision.



What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

By promoting diversity and inclusion, we can create a workplace culture that celebrates intersectionality and individual perspectives, recognises the unique contributions of all employees, and fosters a sense of belonging and connection. I believe that promoting diversity and inclusion is not just a moral imperative, but also a strategic one. A diverse and inclusive workplace can foster innovation, creativity, and collaboration, leading to better outcomes for our customers and stakeholders. As an organisation, we have a responsibility to ensure that we are leveraging the full range of talents and perspectives available to us to best serve our team and our community.

“ I've made a commitment to myself to always choose a path that surrounds me with people who inspire me to grow.

What impact have role models had on your career in retail?

In my career and in my life, I've made a commitment to myself to always choose the path that surrounds me with people who inspire me to grow. In that regard, role models have been everything. When I think about my role models today, I was first drawn to them because even if we were different, they made me feel like

I belong. In retrospect, they did that by being undeniably themselves.

With a career in retail, I believe it is not similarity that's the key to connection, but authenticity. That authenticity allows us to connect with customers in a way that celebrates them as individuals and invites them to join us without having to change a thing.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

Listen first and commit unconditionally. There will always be more to learn and there will forever be more perspectives and voices to listen to. This space is constantly evolving and is perfectly imperfect – it's about taking the journey with a fearless, open mind and being brave enough to lean into the challenges, uncertainties, and potential missteps in a relentless pursuit of conscious inclusion and belonging.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

In my view, a safe and inclusive platform that fosters the sharing of experiences and open conversations can have profound impact on both the sharers and the listeners. Sharing experiences in a space without judgement can allow individuals to be heard and understood, maybe for the first time. Open conversations also allow us to gain insights into different perspectives and experiences, which can help to create the context to challenge biases and stereotypes that we may not have even been aware exist. By encouraging open dialogue, we create an environment where everyone can learn from each other and grow together. It also helps to break down barriers that may exist between different groups within an organization and creates a more cohesive and supportive team.





Laura Joseph

Company **Post Office**

Job Title **Customer Experience, Marketing & Digital Director**

As Director of Customer Experience Digital and Marketing at the Post Office, I oversee all aspects of the customer journey, including marketing campaigns, customer support, and operational delivery. My focus is on delivering exceptional experiences that foster engagement, loyalty, and revenue growth. With a track record of delivering outstanding customer experiences and business results, I am passionate about building and leading high-performing teams. I prioritise coaching and development, and build a culture of trust, collaboration, and integrity.

Prior to joining the Post Office, I spent 6 years at Barclays, most recently as Senior Digital Director for Barclays Business Bank. During my tenure, I led delivery of the Bounce Back Loan Scheme in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Before that, I spent 15 years in the telecommunications industry, where I developed innovative products for consumer, business, and wholesale markets. I am an advocate for equality, diversity, and inclusion, co-chairing the Post Office EDI Council and co-founding Barclays Digital Women. In addition, I have coached for Teach First and St John's College, Oxford Springboard programme. I hold Masters degrees in Classics and Computer Science. In my free time, I enjoy gardening, baking, reading, and spending time with my three children and dog.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

I believe that creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace is not only the right thing to do, but also essential for business success. Diverse teams are more creative and better able to solve complex problems. By cultivating a culture of inclusivity, we can tap into a wide range of

perspectives that drive innovation, improve decision making, and lead to better outcomes for colleagues and customers.

At the same time, creating a workplace that is more representative of the communities we serve means we can build stronger relationships with customers and stakeholders, and gain a competitive edge.

Beyond these practical considerations, I am motivated by a deep sense of personal and social responsibility. I believe that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, and it is our duty to create environments where everyone can thrive. By driving progress on diversity and inclusion, we can break down barriers, challenge stereotypes and biases, and promote greater understanding and empathy between people of different backgrounds. In working together to create more inclusive and equitable workplaces, we can build a better future for ourselves, our organisations, and our communities.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

Since the dawn of time, humans have told stories to communicate and share ideas. More recently,



“ Sharing personal narratives is a powerful way to build inclusion, establish trust and develop a supportive culture.

commercial institutions have used the same tools to build corporate identity and create loyalty. Sharing personal narratives is a powerful way to build inclusion, establish trust and develop a supportive culture sensitive to issues faced by different groups. They can help unlock direct change in an organisation by highlighting problems, making it easier to build consensus for progress.

Personal stories can challenge deeply held assumptions and enable the audience to experience a different perspective. They invite the audience to stand in someone's shoes and imagine what it feels like to live their experience. We can use these moments to kick-start open conversations which address unconscious biases, stereotypes, or prejudices that may exist in the workplace.

These conversations all help build connections, foster understanding, and create a sense of community where everyone feels valued, heard, and respected.



What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

I believe a proactive approach is crucial in creating a workplace culture that embraces diversity and inclusion. Set clear goals and priorities and communicate them effectively to all colleagues, and remember that small changes have real impact.

Leaders need to listen and learn from their employees and take steps to address any concerns or challenges that may arise. This may involve creating opportunities for open conversations about diversity and inclusion or investing in training.

In addition, leaders should ensure that hiring and promotion processes are fair and transparent, and that they actively seek out and support candidates from diverse backgrounds. They should challenge biases or stereotypes that exist within their organization, and work to create an environment where everyone feels respected and valued.

Creating a diverse and inclusive workplace requires ongoing effort and commitment. By taking the time to listen, learn, and act, leaders

can create a culture that is more equitable, supportive, and successful.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

I believe role modelling means a focus on values such as integrity, authenticity, empathy, and inclusivity. It means leading by example, visibly encouraging a positive and respectful workplace culture, advocating for D&I at every opportunity, confronting and dismantling gender biases, and advocating for fair compensation for all.

Diversity and inclusivity play an important role in how I recruit and develop my teams. I actively seek diverse perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds, whilst developing a culture of respect and collaboration. Above all, I believe it is very hard to be what you can't see: I take opportunities to speak up about my own experience and encourage others to do the same.

Ultimately, being a good role model requires a commitment to continuous learning, growth, and improvement. It means being open to feedback, striving to do better, and inspiring others to do the same.



Tonbara Joses

Company **QVC**
Job Title **Studio Director**

In 2008 I graduated from Ravensbourne College of Design and Communications with a degree in Broadcast Operations and Production. Just before graduation I commenced my employment with QVC as a Director's Assistant and in 2012, I developed into the Studio Director's role. As a Studio Director I'm involved in the show preparation and execution; I direct, and vision mix our live shows as well as creating multi-channel content. I direct presenters, floor managers and technical crew working closely with producers to create live output and a smooth and clear customer/viewing experience.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

I am a first-generation British citizen and I have memories as a child of always having to conform to what I perceived was acceptable social behaviour. I made every effort to 'fit' in and adopt British culture, often at the expense of my own heritage.

I hid my background and culture from my peers so I could be accepted and not seen as different; from the way I chemically straightened my Afro 4c hair to my accent and pronunciation of words.

I remember a pressure from society that encouraged this mindset and reinforced an ideology and social

casting that I vehemently began to challenge as I matured as a young woman.

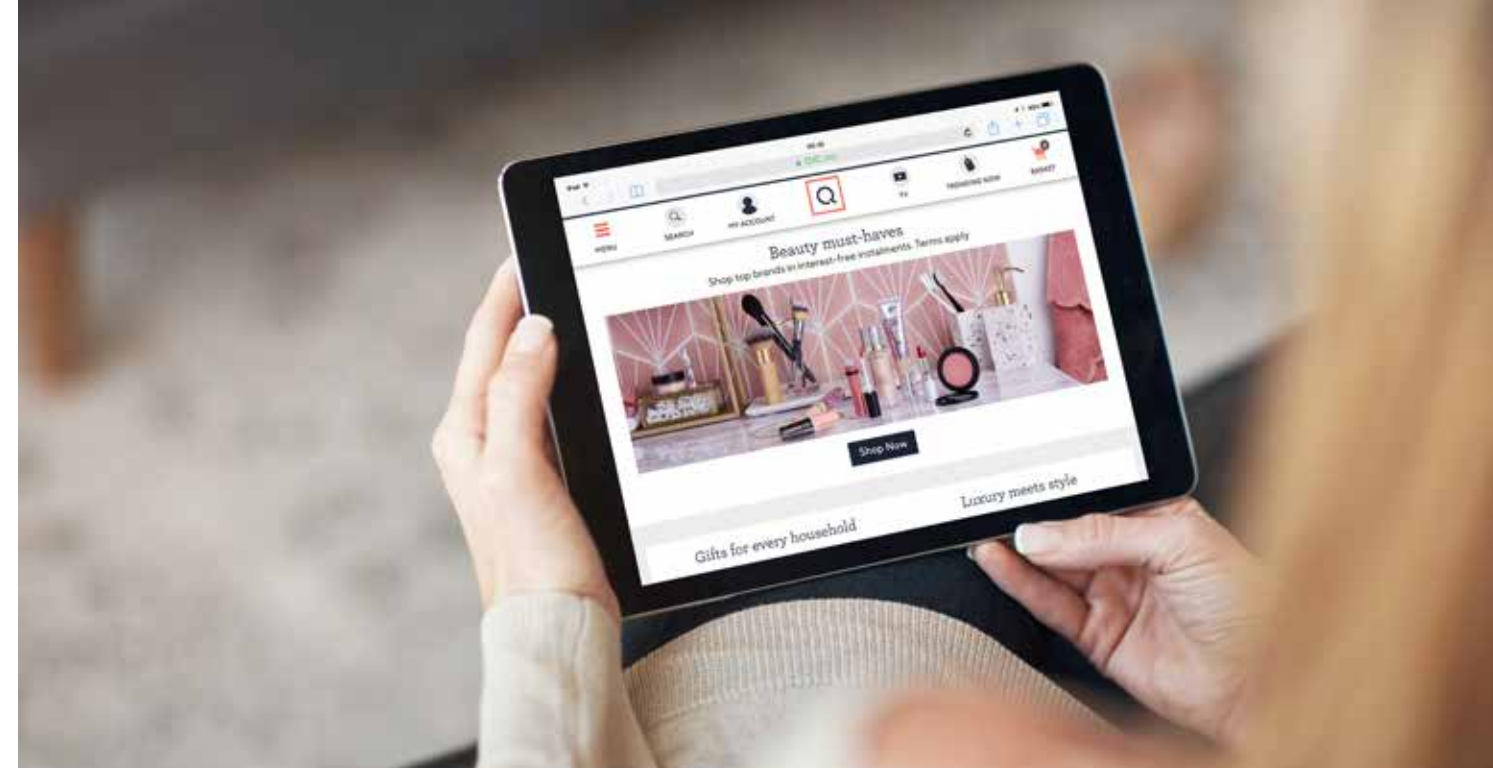
Inspired by protests and the events that took place in 2020 relating to George Floyd, I have strong personal values relating to equality, equity and representation.

I had an overwhelming desire to be proactive and try to use my influence to advocate the change I want to see in this world. I have worked in my organisation for so long and it is a big part of my life, I want to make sure my personal values are aligned with the company I dedicate and champion.

I hold a unique position as a black woman and Studio director at QVC. However, from a customer's point of view I can attest to the inequalities and the lack of variety and representation for women of colour, especially within the beauty sector of the retail industry. I see these inequalities first-hand and I sometimes find that I am not being catered to or represented as a customer.

This perspective inspires me to volunteer and Chair QVC's Team member's Resource Group for race and ethnicity so I can share my own experience. In two short years I have been overwhelmed with the amount of support from colleagues and allies who want to drive progress and champion diversity. However the most powerful feedback we continue to receive is the lack of awareness or education from colleagues who were unaware of the inequalities or microaggressions we discuss.

This lack of awareness unfortunately is prevalent in society and is a huge



motive why I want to drive progress in my organisation and beyond.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

Sharing experiences and having open conversations is of utmost importance because people relate to people. It is much harder to relate to words especially if it is not your experience or reach; it is far more relatable if the experience is personified.

In my TMRG we have provided safe platforms for colleagues to share experiences (first person articles on our Intranet site, team member video recordings and fireside chats amongst others). We have found it most impactful when team members have shared their personal stories and have received such positive feedback. It encourages employees to be their authentic selves and advocates a space for acceptance and understanding.

It is evident that team members have been impacted by these conversations and experiences – it has provoked concepts and ideas that have previously been unexplored; one of which has seen QVC launch a Modest Fashion collection with hijab wearing models represented on all platforms.

This was a collaborative team effort that I inspired through conversations

“ Go into every conversation believing you have something to learn.

and presentations. I can attest first-hand to the power and influence conversations have in contributing to the progress in diversity and inclusion.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

One of the best pieces of advice I've heard is 'Assume that the person you are listening to might know something you don't.'

If you go into every conversation believing that you have something to learn and let the other person speak freely, you can gain great insight and invaluable learnings.

I think this is great advice especially when concerning leaders who want to increase their focus on D&I.

Reverse mentoring can play a key role in crossing generational and cultural divides. Not only does it encourage communication across diverse workforces, but it can also help to break down harmful stereotypes, support diverse and generational

inclusivity, and increase employment engagement.

I believe leaders will benefit tremendously by adopting this approach and would help to reunite the workforce by recognising differences and a broader range of skills and perspectives.

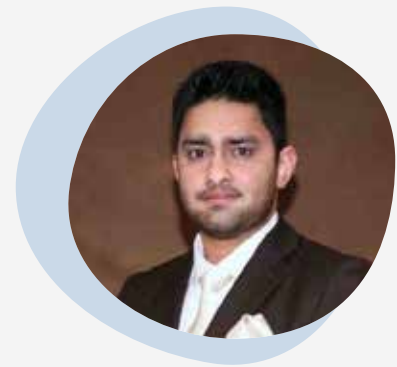
What does being a good role model mean to you?

To me, a good role model should be someone who has a clear set of morals and values and has the ability to inspire others and overcome obstacles.

It is less about being 'perfect' and more about a willingness to learn about the differences in people with an acceptance of others and a commitment to community.

Being a good role model is important to me because it is the sincerest way for me to 'pay it forward' and inspire others. I consider myself fortunate because I have great role models in my life in the form of family, friends, and colleagues. I continue to be inspired by their teachings and values as it helps me navigate my way through life and be accountable to the person I want to be.

I consider it a great honour to be considered a role model and the responsibility encourages me to uphold my values and beliefs with integrity and pride.



Syed Kazmi

Company **Card Factory**
Job Title **Executive Director Business Development**

After graduating from university, I joined Tesco on their graduate programme, which was a great initiation into retail and gave me a solid foundation to build upon. As far as I can remember, I always had the urge to experience the unfamiliar with the benefit of gaining more skills or knowledge, and in my early twenties I made the biggest career decision of my life at the time by relocating to Dubai, UAE. I had joined Landmark Group, a major conglomerate in the region, where I spent the next few years expanding international brands across the MENA region as Head of Retail. Living in Dubai was a great experience both professionally and personally, with the city being a melting pot of cultural diversity with over 200 nationalities.

I then relocated back to Europe, with my first senior leadership role at Hamleys as International Director operating 25 markets across the globe, and then at HEMA, as International Business Director with a global expansion remit. I joined cardfactory in 2021 as Executive Director leading its global growth strategy via partnerships and M&A. The opportunity to travel the world, live in different countries and experience diverse cultures through my work has truly been a privilege.

What does inclusion and diversity mean to you?

To me, this is about including everyone in the conversation and ensuring the same opportunities are provided to all to level the playing field. It's about developing a culture where everyone can feel valued, engaged and respected for what they do.

What motivates you to help drive progress in your organisation?

At Card Factory our philosophy is customers and colleagues first, and we are always looking at ways we can better serve. A key driver is ensuring we create the right and welcoming environment both for our customers in our ecosystem and for colleagues across the business. Being



self-motivated in this area, I focus on my commitment to continuous improvement, and my willingness to learn, accept feedback, and listen to the concerns of those around me. This allows me to feedback and prompt dialogue between senior leaders in the business and our D&I colleague network groups to help drive the right change.

What impact have role models had on your career in retail?

Role models have had a significant impact in shaping my career. This was especially important for me, belonging to an under-represented group where often a lack of representation in the workplace can lead to feeling isolated and lacking



in confidence. The role models I had, in particular when I was a fresh graduate with limited experience in retail, allowed me to believe in my own abilities. As my career has progressed, they have provided me with a template for success, helping me to visualise my longer-term goals. From a D&I perspective the biggest learning I have applied is appreciating that one's starting point and experiences in life are not the same as others, thus the importance of being an active ally for all areas of inclusion.

What are you doing to ensure D&I remains a priority in your organisation?

Being fortunate to have a seat at the table as a senior leader, I am able to influence and support Card Factory in ensuring D&I remains a priority. We aim to embed this into everything we do, whether this is for our 7,000+ colleagues through every step of their journey at Card Factory, or every customer from any background, with any need, that visits us to celebrate all of life's special moments. We have also recently launched D&I as a key pillar of our values to ensure this remains a commitment and focus with all colleagues and senior leaders, ensuring we attract, welcome and retain the best people.

“ The role models I had, in particular when I was a fresh graduate with limited experience in retail, allowed me to believe in my own abilities.



Tolani Ladejo

Company **Sainsbury's**
Job Title **Store Manager**

I've worked for Sainsbury's for the last 10 years; however, prior to Sainsbury's I worked for/with (she says 'for' I say 'with') my mum running her African fabric business in Petitcoat Lane market, East London and it was here that I got the retail bug!

After graduating I got married in 2011 and had my daughter in 2012. Growing up with a mother who worked 7 days a week I was adamant that I would be a stay-at-home mum; this lasted all of 6 months! I joined Sainsbury's in October 2012 as a colleague working 16 hours a week, I quite quickly realised I could do more and in 2013 I successfully applied for a trainee manager role. From 2013 until now I have done a variety of roles within Sainsbury's that have allowed me to work alongside some great people and develop myself as a leader within the retail industry.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

In my opinion, this is one of the most important aspects when it comes to driving D&I in the workplace. We can only grow in our understanding of diversity by sharing our experiences; both good and bad. By having open and honest conversations we often realise that we are not alone in what we are going through and therefore by sharing our stories we are helping others on their journey. Having open conversations is a huge part in gaining allies, sponsors and stakeholders – often people don't understand journeys that differ to their own, so by having these open conversations in the right spaces, we



are often influencing people who have the ability to have a positive impact on progressing D&I.

What impact have role models had on your career in retail?

My biggest role model is my mum. She came over to England from Nigeria and has managed to build a successful business for herself and has always led me to believe that I am capable to do whatever it is I put my mind to. When I started out in Sainsbury's there wasn't anyone who looked like me in the positions I wanted to be in; without my mum as a role model I know I wouldn't have understood the art of the possible, this is why I think it's very important that those progressing in the retail sector are able to see people like myself in senior positions because if I can do so can they.

“ When I started out, there wasn't anyone who looked like me in the positions I wanted to be in.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

Firstly, for me this means doing a great day job – often people forget why they are seen as a role model in the first place and at times we see these people lose focus on what made them great to begin with. Secondly, I think it is important as a role model you keep the D & I

discussions firmly on the agenda in whatever room you find yourself in. Lastly, I believe a good role model inspires those around them to be a better version of themselves by being actively supportive of others.

What does inclusion and diversity mean to you?

To me diversity and inclusion means ensuring that the environment that you are in is reflective of the environment that you serve. That people of all backgrounds are recognised and appreciated for their talents and the uniqueness they bring to the table. It's about making a conscious effort to have a variety of opinions from people who ordinarily wouldn't be in the same place having the same conversation.



Vaishali Meswani

Company **Post Office**
Job Title **Research & Insight Manager**

I have spent most of my career in research agencies and consultancies, working with a range of clients, using research to solve business problems. I started working at the Post Office in 2020 – it’s my first non-agency role, my first role in retail, and I love it! I also co-chair the disability and mental wellbeing network at Post Office Limited and am a founding member of the Market Research Society’s disability network ‘MRS Unlimited’.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

DE&I is my passion. It’s something I do on the side of my desk, but I’m never too tired for it. If anything, it brings me focus and energy, even after a long day. For things to work and improve, you need people to just get stuck in. Oftentimes, we can tell ourselves that someone else should be pulling their finger out to make things happen, but

when you want to see change badly enough, you find the energy to go beyond the job role, to work a few extra hours, to slowly move towards the change you want to see.

As someone who is visually impaired, I entered the world of work with c.1000 chips on my shoulder. Don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying that everyone with an impairment has chips on their shoulder, but I definitely did for a

number of reasons. I was lucky enough to work in companies where I found people who believed in me, had the patience to listen to my limiting beliefs and meet me where I was, mentored me, gave me opportunities and had faith in me. Where would I be without those people? Still wallowing in my insecurities and holding a grudge against people who are ‘successful’. We are told that we have it in ourselves to achieve everything we want. Well, I disagree. Sometimes we need other people to take a stand for us, and to create an environment where we feel nurtured and supported, for someone to tell us that we are awesome. Having been around enough of these people in my career, I feel it’s my duty to carry this forward as much as I can, so that everyone feels understood and has the chance to thrive.



In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

Culture exists in conversations. It is constructed through language. It exists in how we think about things and often what we think about other people. We create in-groups and out-groups based on assumptions we have about people who are ‘like us’ and people who are ‘not like us’ (she says dusting off her psychology textbooks from her degree over a decade ago).

I believe that sharing experiences and having open conversations is THE way to profound and lasting cultural change. You can have 100 initiatives, but until everyone in an organisation understands WHY, you’ll always get the people who say ‘DE&I, it’s just gone too far’, ‘why is everything in favour of minorities?’, ‘it’s political correctness gone mad!’. Sharing experiences creates a connection, builds understanding, empathy and approachability. It stops people treading on eggshells and breaks down barriers so that everyone feels they are part of one community. It diffuses ‘otherness’ because we are ultimately all human beings first and foremost. We are wired to tell stories, it’s what resonates the most with humans.

As co-chair of the disability and mental well-being network, when a new member joins, or an

existing member shares a personal experience, and you see everyone around them draw in to support them, to ensure they feel heard; when you hear a colleague open up to 120 people on a Teams call about their mental health journey and feel everyone on the call being present and listening, you feel the magic, you feel for a moment the non-corporate humanity that we are all made up of. Those moments are more than just magical, they create allyship that gives DE&I a bigger voice to create bigger change.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

Being a good role model means having good intentions and integrity, being forgiving and empathetic,

“When you hear a colleague open up to 120 people on a Teams call about their mental health journey... you can feel the moment of non-corporate humanity.”

believing in and supporting others, making time for mentoring, being ambitious and successful without betraying your values.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

1. Truly understand why DE&I is important, don’t just jump on the bandwagon because it seems to be what you’re supposed to be doing.
2. Look at the make-up of your organisation and ask yourself if it’s truly diverse.
3. Be open about what you don’t know and be curious to educate yourself. What makes you feel uncomfortable? Don’t run away from it.
4. Speak to people from a diverse range of backgrounds, ask questions about their experiences.
5. Don’t just hire people that look like you, speak like you and agree with your worldview.
6. Commit to 3 things and do them. They probably involve improving representativeness in senior leadership, improving recruitment policies and ensuring opportunities for progression and development are spread across the board.
7. Don’t make false promises.
8. Set yourself a DE&I objective and ask your line reports to do the same.



John Mewett

Company **Screwfix**
Job Title **CEO**

I became the CEO of Screwfix in October 2018, and sit on the Kingfisher Group Executive. I've been at Screwfix for 15 years and before becoming CEO was the Marketing and Ecommerce Director. Prior to this, I worked for over 20 years in Dixons Retail in several roles including Operations, Marketing and Commercial and was based in Italy for some time.

I passionately believe that retail is an industry that can create equal opportunities for everyone who joins, and that there is no ceiling for those who want to build a career within the sector. As we spend so much our time at work, I believe that it's vitally important for people to feel they can be themselves and that this can support people to reach their potential.

I am the chair of the Kingfisher Inclusion and Diversity forum. As chair, I want the I&D forum to support people who may feel apprehensive about the part they play in Kingfisher becoming a truly inclusive and diverse workplace.

I am also the Chairman for The Screwfix Foundation, a charity set up by Screwfix in 2013 which has raised over £10m and donated to over 1,800 charities.

I live in the Southwest of England, and I'm married with two grown up children. I'm a season ticket holder for Southampton Football Club, and loved going to matches with my son until this season!

How have you seen the D&I agenda develop in your career?

I've always had a strong view that our colleagues should bring their real selves to work, and feel comfortable in themselves. But the whole diversity agenda has evolved so dramatically over the years, and we've had to evolve with it.

We've got 13,000 colleagues, and we're in a phase of growth so creating a lot more jobs. And when I go around the shop floor and talk to the teams, it's impossible not to feel driven to make our workplace more inclusive. I'm always so inspired by hearing about their experiences – both in and out of work.

I'm really motivated by the fact that we're on the start of our journey. We've got a lot going on – networks, mentoring, I&D training, ambassadors – but when you look at our organisation, particularly as you go up the levels, it is clear we still have a lot of progress to make. It won't happen overnight, but we're making good progress.

For example, we've just appointed two senior women leaders and one man all of whom have young children. As part of this we've stood back, talked about our working practices as senior leaders and shared openly across our teams, so we don't not overlook what's happening elsewhere in our lives.

It's also become a really collective journey. We've trained 1,000 managers in I&D, and we have a network of ambassadors who represent different areas of diversity. Anybody who wants to can get involved.

What do you feel are the main barriers to progress on I&D?

I'd say the nature and pace of the retail sector. It is so fast-moving, and you're only as good as yesterday's sales. So long-term initiatives can lose focus quite quickly, particularly if the market is difficult.

To combat this, you have to embed D&I in everything you do. Really make it a core part of the strategy, with movement from the top down and the bottom up. Make sure the agenda has its own energy grounded at grassroots.

“ You need to be really inquisitive. If you enter a situation with positive intent, and you're open and honest about what you don't know, then people will give you the same energy back.

Why do you think it's important to highlight role models? What does being role model mean to you?

Ultimately, we need role models to inspire people. Highlighting diverse senior leaders, showcasing their stories, and shining a light on their experiences can show people what's possible. It also sends a clear

message that we want diverse leaders at the helm of our sector.

As for me, I don't immediately recognise myself as a role model. But if someone else can learn from all the great work that we're doing at Screwfix, then I'm very happy to be included.

What advice would you give to a leader looking to be more inclusive?

I think you need to be really inquisitive. If you enter a situation with positive intent, and you're honest and open about what you don't know, then people will give you the same energy back. I've learnt I can ask stupid questions, as long as it's done with the right intent. Before I started this journey, I would have shied away from asking the question in fear of saying the wrong thing.

Also, if you're not hearing things that are tough to digest, then the likelihood is you're listening hard enough. My team and I talk about this all the time. I'll give you an example. I was interested in our head office culture, and what it was really like

to work for Screwfix as a woman. So I had a lunch with twelve women in our business, and I asked the question. They spoke openly, and I found some things difficult to hear. But the conversation really opened my eyes, and unearthed issues I didn't even know existed. As a result, we've made some important changes within our company, to things like flexible working, maternity leave, and support for people going through IVF. Before this conversation, we hadn't had any part-time store managers. We've now introduced part-time, which has removed a real barrier for progress for women in our business.

Change happens when you ask the questions, and create an environment in which people can speak their mind.

What are you most proud of?

So many things! But one of them would be our inclusion network and the way its been adopted. I'm the Chair, and working with the network has taught me so much. They're not only driving things themselves, but they're supporting us as a leadership team, with things like reverse mentoring.





Holly Pendlebury

Company **Sweaty Betty**

Job Title **Development & Communications Coordinator / Chair of the DEI Committee**

I think the term “squiggly career” applies to my journey to Sweaty Betty. Every experience I have had has helped me to get to where I currently am, from my degree in Fashion Design specialising in Sportswear, working at LFW, all the way to working as an adaptive ski instructor in Canada. I am immensely proud to be a part of Team Sweaty Betty as the Development & Communications Coordinator and the Chair of the DEI Committee. For as long as I can remember fairness has been something that has resonated with me. Sadly, the world is not a fair or equitable place. To change that we need to stand up, speak up and shout out about what we can each do to make a change and level the playing field. I have lots of personal reasons for why I really care and try to advocate for better representation, diversity and inclusivity but I would love to champion the idea that you do not need to belong, relate or be connected to a minority or marginalised group to make a difference and be an ally. I hope in my current role I am helping create the world I want to see.

What does inclusion and diversity mean to you?

I feel I cannot talk about inclusion and diversity without including equity. What they mean to me is when enacted by everyone we will be living in a world where everyone has a fair playing field. Where some of society's greatest problems are solved as the right people have a seat at the table. Where people from all backgrounds and life experiences come together and enjoy life. Where we share our differences, learn and celebrate them.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

I believe that even if we only make small changes, we have the power to change society, and quite frankly that needs to happen. It is not always easy work, and sometimes feels like you are pushing a really heavy rock up a steep hill, but if you look at what humans have already achieved in the world then why cant we continue to develop and change, be that mindsets or buildings. It might not be easy but nothing good ever was. My motivation is that change NEEDS to happen.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

This one is tricky, as YES I do think sharing experiences and having open conversations can encourage action. Equally, as someone who has shared their personal experiences it can be hard, and these experiences can often be linked with trauma, pain and often shame. I think we do need to share but this must only be done when someone is ready and has the support to do so.

What impact have role models had on your career in retail?

A huge impact, I fell into the retail sector by accident and one of the reasons I stayed is due to the amazing people. I am lucky to work for a brand whose sole mission is to Empower Women, so I am surrounded by the most inspirational people who also champion this. They have lifted me up when I have been down, allowed for me to learn, grow and believe in myself.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

Your impact on other people is bigger than you think, don't underestimate your reach and how much your teams look to you for guidance. Not to be afraid of privilege, having it does not make you a bad person. But we have a responsibility to own it and

use it for change. I think everyone, not just leaders, can be scared to do or say something wrong but doing something is better than nothing. It is ok to get it wrong but share those learnings and try again. And sadly, you are never doing enough in this space, there is always more. Don't let that deter you.

“ I am most excited for those small changes to grow into big ones, and for those working hard behind the scenes to see change.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

I think a good role model is honest, authentic and demonstrates kindness. They are the type of person who is willing to stand up, speak up and shout out. They provide feedback to those around them and listen and hear when it is returned. I think they are someone who is human and makes mistakes but owns them. Someone who continues to try even when things get tough.

What are you doing to ensure D&I remains a priority in your organisation?

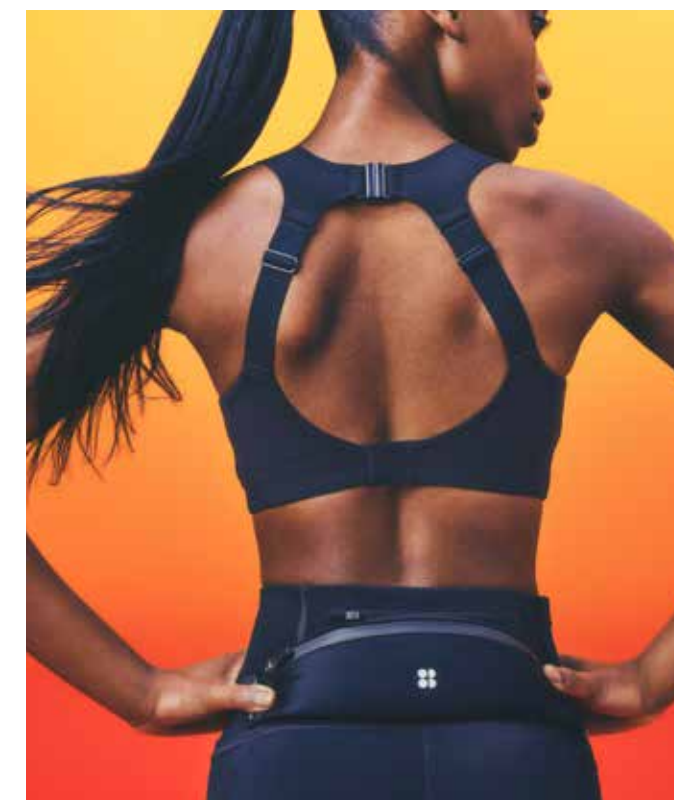
Ensuring we are embedding it in everything we do, we are lucky that our mission and values are deeply interwoven with D&I. I really want to ensure we are doing things authentically so that they are more sustainable. I am grateful to work with so many wonderful and talented individuals who are equally as passionate and up for finding solutions with longevity.

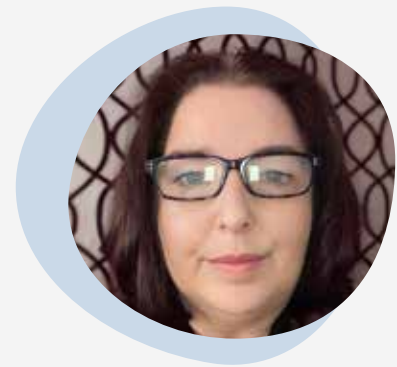
What do you think the future holds for the retail sector? What are you most excited about?

Fashion is a lot of things, it is art, it is history and it also has necessity. It is often overlooked as something self-indulgent but ultimately it has the power to influence society: when we look back at history and how styles have changed to allow us to express ourselves or event to participate.

I think retail has huge links with this ideology and has the potential to do the same. Even going beyond the products we sell and how we market them, when we look at retail spaces and property most are currently not accessible to everyone. I truly believe if we as a sector start to change these spaces, other sectors will have to follow and maybe one day it will be spoken about like women having to wear corsets to play tennis.

I am most excited for those small changes to grow into big ones, and for those working hard behind the scenes to see change.





Alison Ramejkis

Company **QVC**
Job Title **Senior Manager Global PSFGA**

I joined QVC in 1999, as a customer service rep in our contact centre. In my 24 years, I have held roles including Quality Specialist, Team Leader, Shift Manger and have worked in our Contact Centre, Distribution Centre and now in the Inbound Logistic, QA Supply Chain department. My current role is Senior Manager for Global PSFGA (Pre Shipment of Finished Goods Audit). My team, based in the UK, Germany and the USA, co-ordinate quality inspections in the manufacturing factory. I work closely with our team in China, and third party partners across Asia, South America and Europe.

In addition to my core role, I also chair the Team Member Resource Group 'Accessibility Allies', who advocate for people with hidden and visible disability, and those who care for or support them. I was inspired to join the DE&I work of the TMRG's due to my personal experience as a parent of a young adult with neurodiversity. I am passionate about changing perceptions about what can be achieved when barriers to access are challenged and removed.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

I have had the privilege of seeing first hand the positive impact of people who have been brave enough to share their story. This courage to be vulnerable has been the building blocks of creating a safe space for others to share their own experience. Being able to attend listening sessions from various team member resource groups, has challenged some of my own unconscious bias, and opened up opportunities to ask questions that might have otherwise

been avoided due to the sensitivity and that ever-present fear of saying the wrong thing.

With every story-sharing experience, whether as a one-on-one, in a group, or in a listening session, allyship has been nurtured, DE&I team membership has grown, leadership enhanced.

For the individual team members who have shared their story, there's a feeling of empowerment, and the positive impact of knowing they are supporting others on their own DE&I journey.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

Being a good role model for me requires a developed sense of self awareness, so you know what it is that you model to others.

I have learnt that the role models you need can change and evolve according to your own development areas at that time.

For me, there are some key attributes of a good role model not least of which is consistent integrity. People who I look to as role models demonstrate positive intention, even when there is disagreement, they conduct themselves in a way that respects the views of others.

I look for courage, someone who can provide allyship, who listens to understand, and who will share their own experience without denigrating the experience of others.

Positive role models understand and respect that all experiences are unique, there is no one journey that applies to everyone.

When it comes to advocating for D&I, is there anything you can share that you're doing outside of retail?

Over the last 12 months, I have had the pleasure of working with a team of very engaged colleagues on an initiative to host young people from our local community.

We have created a programme of activity that supports developing aspiration in students aged 14 – 24 who live with physical disability, learning disability or neurodiversity. The students attend local specialised education or are supported in main stream education.

“ I have learnt that the role models you need can change and evolve according to your own development at that time.

The students are engaged in a programme 'Preparing for Adulthood', delivered by the local council. We have led in advocating for what can be achieved, not focused on the challenges faced.

The reward for that time invested has been the joy of watching a student complete a real work activity or engage in an experience that

they have never done before. We have seen the growth in confidence because of that achievement. The feedback we have had from the students and their teachers has been so positive, and the success of the programme has been in the students' belief that work is in their future and something they can achieve.

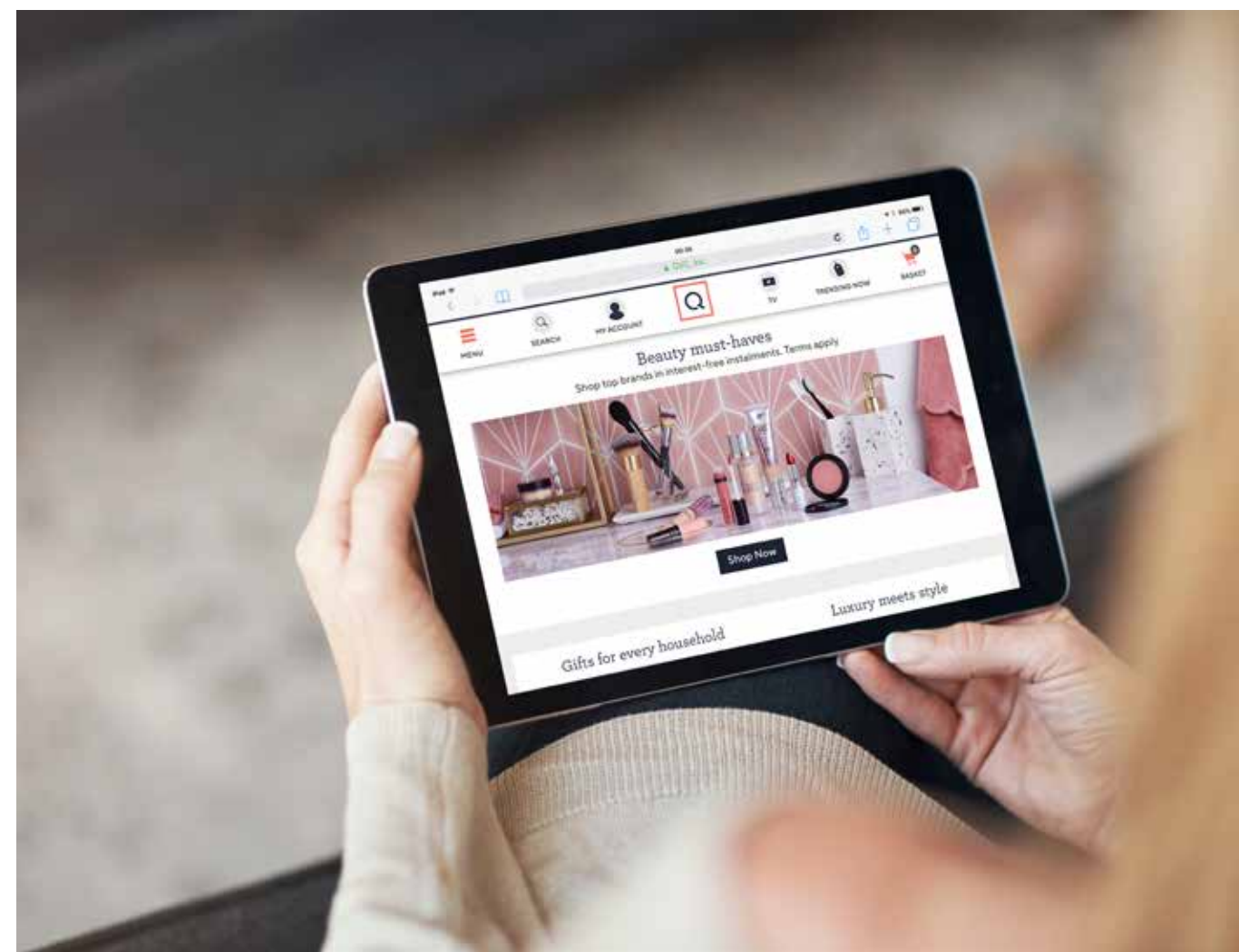
What impact have role models had on your career in retail?

I have been very fortunate in having a diverse group of role models and mentors in my career.

I have benefited from the challenges that come from working with people who think differently, approach situations with a different lens, and communicate differently. All of these people have contributed to my ever-evolving leadership style and supported me on my career path.

One of my first role models was a colleague who was in the same job role as me, they had such skill in quiet influencing, something I had not at that time developed. Her gentle delivery of feedback when I was missing opportunities to flex my communication style was key in me being more self-aware, and helped prepare me to be a better leader of others.

Another memorable role model for me was a manager I had who encouraged bravery and risk taking. They really encouraged me to play to my strengths, of creativity and innovation. I had previously been guarded about sharing this aspect of myself with fear of judgement. They truly modelled how to create the safe place to try and fail, and develop the necessary resilience to innovate. This is something I live and breathe with my own team now.





Julia Reardon

Company **Selfridges & Co.**
Job Title **Head of PMO, Masterplan**

I have worked in luxury department stores for over 30 years, starting as a temporary sales associate in Harrods through to Retail Director at Liberty London and most recently as the Head of PMO Masterplan at Selfridges.

As a woman of colour in business and mother to a 15-year-old daughter, I am passionate about the importance of representation of individuals from all backgrounds, and I champion this throughout my personal and professional life.

An energetic people leader and advocate for my team's success, I have led teams of up to 500 people, recently heading up the Selfridges Diversity Board as Chair. Throughout this time, I have been focused on coaching and empowering team members to be their most authentic selves. Under my leadership, the team have brought real change to DE&I at Selfridges, working with B&M to influence a more diverse product selection, alongside the Property & Store teams to design inclusive team member facilities and creating a community for neurodiverse team members and customers, implementing a Quiet Hour throughout Selfridges stores and offices. During my time, the Selfridges Diversity Board has seen growing success and recognition for its work, being shortlisted for both the European Diversity Awards and British Diversity Awards.

What does inclusion and diversity mean to you

True inclusion and diversity is about everyone having a seat at the table and their voice being heard. It's about fairness, representation and allowing everyone to have equal access to opportunities.

With the current state of the world, I recognise that my daughter has a future that is challenging enough without her being disadvantaged because she is a woman from an ethnic minority, and I am passionate about working toward a future where this is not the case.

“ We must truly challenge ourselves and our teams to talk about DE&I with the same importance that they talk about profit.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

We cannot create a sustainable future unless all under-represented groups feel seen and heard, meaning we must effectively engage with all of our communities.

Leaders wanting to improve in this space need to be honest and open, take a look at their company values and be prepared to put themselves into uncomfortable spaces to confront the sometimes difficult realities that exist in their organisations.

We must truly challenge ourselves and our teams to talk about DE&I with the same importance that they talk about profit, and support teams by investing in training – inclusive leadership and unconscious bias are a good starting point.

Leaders should also listen to all levels of their organisations and really recognise the importance of

diversity of thought. Even though it's easy, do not just surround yourselves with people who look like you. Instead look inside your organisation at how you can nurture, develop, and promote diverse talent.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

By sharing our cultural identities and our unique stories, we create a safe environment where we can talk openly and ask honest questions. Through this, we raise awareness, educate, and celebrate each other – it often helps us to understand ourselves better too.

When we embrace individuality and uniqueness, we are able to think more broadly and creatively, ultimately making us much more productive and unified.

What are the biggest barriers to progress on D&I in the retail sector in 2023?

Unfortunately, 'protest fatigue' is a real issue, we see a drop in interest and support once key issues have been in the limelight for a while. We all saw how the attention and support for BLM has diluted as time has passed since George Floyd was murdered.

Authenticity has always been an issue, reflecting on the BLM movement in 2020, it was very easy to post a black square on social, but less easy to actually take action. It's hard work and we must be held to account.

D,E&I have become buzzwords for many without having true meaning or action associated with them, and we've seen the government, businesses, and leaders complaining about "wokeness".

There are also financial barriers which are impacting progress in this space, whether that be lack of investment in training, lack of budget for hiring and creating D&I teams and lack of resource to look at data around anything beyond gender diversity. The cost of living crisis will inevitably negatively impact those from minority groups.





Ebru Sayilan Nebol

Company **Kingfisher**

Job Title **Group Business Development and Partnerships Director**

I'm the Group Business Development and Partnerships Director for Kingfisher plc. Kingfisher is an international home improvement company (FTSE 100) that operates some of the largest home improvement brands in Europe (B&Q, Screwfix, Castorama & Brico Depot.) with over 1,900 stores and a team of over 80,000 colleagues. I'm responsible for Group business development, including format development, the Group Investment Committee and international expansion via joint venture, franchising and wholesale business models.

I grew up in Istanbul, Turkey and studied Industrial Engineering followed by an MBA degree. I worked as Commercial and Supply Chain director for Koctas, a Kingfisher joint venture, for 10 years in Turkey before moving to UK to work for B&Q in 2010.

I've worked in retail for over 20 years and held various senior leadership roles, including working as the B&Q Commercial Director until 2015 when I moved to Kingfisher. Whilst working for the Group, I've led international commercial teams as Group Category Director as well as delivering international development and growth in my current role of Group Business Development & Partnerships Director.

What does inclusion and diversity mean to you?

I'm passionate about inclusion and diversity. Indifference on this matter affects us all. As a first-generation immigrant and as a woman, I've experienced various challenges during my career. These experiences were often very hard, but I chose to overcome them. They helped me become a strong, resilient and positive individual, both personally and in my professional endeavors.

Equity is the starting point for real progress in this space. Understanding what equity looks like and how business' promote the representation and participation of different groups of individuals is so important.

When it comes to inclusion and diversity, there can be no neutral. It's time to take change into our own hands. Inclusion is an act and a conscious choice. I actively drive this work both within Kingfisher, and externally, including mentoring as a part of a non-profit organization. By sharing my own experience, I hope to inspire others reach their full potential.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

With all business development, success comes from setting clear intentions and having a delivery plan. Set targets around inclusion and diversity and what that means for your business. Define goals, actions and deadlines to make sure the development is tangible.

Leadership teams have a responsibility to consistently



demonstrate the right behaviours. The best guidance I'd offer leaders is start by understanding your own role in inclusion and diversity and build from there. Define what equity looks like for your organisation. Set up space internally for discussion. We have so much to learn from each other and the people in your business are a great place to start learning.

The commitment of organisations and individuals when it comes to inclusion and diversity helps people feel empowered to be themselves. Individuals and businesses alike benefit from a truly diverse and representative workforce and this is something I'm passionately committed to.

Representation matters, both for our colleagues, but also our customers. We have a responsibility as retailers to drive this, whether that's through inclusive ranges and services, or our marketing campaigns, we must reflect our diverse customer base.

What are you doing to ensure D&I remains a priority in your organisation?

For over three decades, Kingfisher has been prioritizing responsible business practices, including inclusion and diversity.

As a key part of our 'Powered by Kingfisher' strategy, we're integrating our responsible business practices into everything we do. Kingfisher has a Group-wide inclusion and diversity strategy and action plan that I'm actively part of and a passionate advocate for.

As a senior leader, I model inclusion and diversity in everything that I do and authentically sponsor cultural change within our organisation.

We've set up affinity networks that create a positive space for colleagues to discuss subjects like Gender, Race & Culture, LGBTQ+ and Neurodiversity. These forums help to influence key stakeholders in the business, inform best practice and internal policy change. I co-chair the Race and Culture Affinity Network and I'm a member of Gender Affinity Network.

What do you think the future holds for the retail sector? What are you most excited about?

There's so much to be excited about. The way we shop is evolving and it's our job to keep up with expectations and the changing landscape. We've seen more change in the past decade than there has been since the industry was created. True omnichannel retailing offers huge potential. The role of physical and online retail are not binary choices in a customer's shopping journey but rather, complimentary. Once retailers fully recognize the value of both channels, that's when we can unlock the true potential of omnichannel retailing, creating an end-to-end experience.

One pivotal consideration in the future of retail is the development of AI technology. For the next generation, this will be the norm, so we need to look at integrating this emerging capability into our daily business routines. Using it to take

“ The best guidance I'd offer leaders is to start by understanding your own role in inclusion and diversity, and build from there.

omnichannel retail to the next level and its role in achieving operational excellence behind the scenes in our supply chains and business development.

Inclusion and diversity is an important factor in the future of our industry. Retail can be a vehicle for social mobility and change. With a new generation of shoppers and colleagues comes a growing awareness of what it means to be a responsible business. They have clear expectations of what good looks like including how businesses create equity through business practices like flexibility, inclusive employment and authentic allyship.

Our job is to make sure we incorporate these things into our plans to set our businesses up to be strong, resilient and relevant in the future.





Karen Semon

Company **Currys Group**
Job Title **Group Financial Controller**

Born in Sri Lanka, my parents moved to Melbourne when I was just 4 months old. I started working at the young age of 17 through a 6-year Accounting Trainee Program with KPMG – whilst juggling my Bachelors’ Degree at University. If you had told me then that I would be working in London as the Group Financial Controller for a FTSE 250 company, I wouldn’t have believed it. Management and boards had a very different composition and leadership style only 20 years ago.

I was always curious about the ‘bigger’ world and during my time in practice I worked on a wide variety of sectors and had the opportunity to travel which brought me to London in 2008. Since then, I’ve worked for various retailers including Walgreens Boots Alliance and Kingfisher and have also lived and worked in Dubai and Saudi Arabia. Early on I realised how much I enjoyed delivering as a team and then, once I had my own teams, providing encouragement and motivation for people not to give up

I’ve been with Currys since 2021 and had the opportunity to develop in a new role after 18 months. I have been lucky enough to have access to a fantastic support network and have the encouragement of a great management team. But not everyone has this – so it’s important we all support and encourage one another.

What does inclusion and diversity mean to you?

I’ve only recently understood that diversity goes beyond the superficial idea of people looking different and focuses on thinking differently, encouraging new ideas and creating an environment where everyone feels

like they belong and comfortable to contribute.

All perspectives and experiences help to add value.

The main thing is that it needs to feel genuine. When it is real, working as a team can not only be rewarding but motivating for further collaboration,

“ The definition of being a good role model has changed for me over time.

enabling diversity of thought and better communication with one and another.

This then encourages colleagues from all backgrounds to feel more confident they can be themselves and continue to grow and develop.

Everyone should feel there are no glass ceilings to their aspirations.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

I have been lucky enough to work for amazing leaders who not only supported my development but also gave me the confidence and belief that I could do it. This motivates me to help make this achievable for everyone.

Studies tell us a diverse work force brings diverse thought and the more diverse your organisation, the more successful it is. I really enjoy delivering as a team – and have found the more diverse the team is in terms of background, experiences and functional area, the better the results and output.

We can all help create an opportunity for everyone to flourish. Likewise, no one should feel they have to change who they are to ‘fit in’ due to their background or life experiences.

Tolerance, curiosity, kindness, and

fairness are all important behaviours that mean so much to individuals yet are relatively easy to give.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

I have been very lucky to meet many incredible role models throughout my career who have openly shared conversations with me about their own journeys and struggles and how they have overcome them. The impact this has had on me has helped me humanise individuals and also helps us all understand that we are on a journey of learning and the situations and challenges faced aren’t specific to just ourselves.

At Currys the Exec team actively listens to feedback, acknowledges achievements, and has encouraged me to gain confidence in myself and trust my judgements. I would like to continue to pass this on.

Our careers are big parts of our lives, where we spend a considerable amount of time – so it’s important we help support bringing individuals and

teams together and create supportive and fun working environments.

I’m shamelessly going to copy a prior role model’s reflection as it really resonated with me: There’s a saying that “You’re the average of the five people you spend the most time with”. Who you surround yourself with is a conscious choice. You can choose to remain in your comfort zone and surround yourself with people who will echo your way of thinking, your perspective, your ideology – that’s the path of least resistance, always. If you choose to surround yourself with people who bring new and different perspectives, you won’t always agree but it will help you understand the weaknesses and strengths of your own point of view and in doing so, you’ll refine your own beliefs while broadening your understanding.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

The definition of being a good role model has changed for me over time. The characteristics I admire most are authenticity and not having to change who you are. I’ve come to appreciate how important it is to have visible

role models and promote self-belief. Which has been so important to me over recent years.

Continual self-improvement and growth, along with curiosity means being aware of the impact that you have on others and taking responsibility for your actions.

I’d like to think of myself as someone who commits to achieving a desired goal and does not give up when faced with challenges but is willing to invest effort and work together as a team to achieve success.

Continuous encouragement and ensuring teams feel supported is important to me. I’d like to think I’m a good role model who is approachable and relatable – providing motivation and encouragement for people not to give up.

I am humbled to be considered a role model – and will be forever grateful to the amazing Finance Directors and mentor that I have been lucky enough to learn from and the support they have given me through-out my career. I feel very motivated to pass on this support and encouragement to all the fantastic people I work with at Currys.





Adela Smeu

Company **Brico Dépôt Romania, part of Kingfisher Group**
Job Title **CEO**

I have over 20 years of experience in multinational companies, such as OBI Group, United Technology Corporation Paris and PwC, both locally and internationally. I remember fondly the beginning of my career as a financial consultant, which allowed me to expand my horizons in so many ways – by traveling, being constantly challenged, meeting professionals from a multitude of industries and forming life-long friendships.

I have been the CEO of Brico Dépôt Romania since 2017, after two years as the company's CFO. The change came at a time that was demanding on a personal level – when my children were very little. The period also coincided with a major shift in business. Brico Dépôt had just acquired another important retailer, Praktiker, and beyond the formal integration that ended in 2020, the acquisition implied significant organisational culture changes. In short, a demanding period during which, together with our team, we achieved a lot and learned a lot. My mandate as CEO has been marked by several significant developments: the acquisition and merger, the business shift and rebranding of acquired stores, the accelerated development of range and services, the development of the online channel. I am very proud of all we have managed to achieve, but mostly of our team – a team that is ambitious, resilient, pragmatic and passionate. All have led us to triple the size of the business, and position Brico among top retailers and a Top Employer in Romania. It has been a beautiful journey, providing me with tremendous opportunities for development.

What does inclusion and diversity mean to you?

It means first equality of change, irrespective of background and approaching anybody without

prejudice. It means respect, fairness, humanity, innovation, development. Acknowledging differences and valuing individuals for who they are, regardless of their background.

In addition, diverse opinions, perspectives and experiences help me make better decisions every day. I come from a family with strong women role models, women that built their careers and families in Romania during a tough regime, without compromise and with resilience, elegance and determination. Therefore, I am a strong supporter of ambitious women who dream to become the best versions of themselves, and this can be easily seen in the structure of my team.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

I'm a firm believer in performance through perseverance. I'm driven by the desire for constant improvement in all business and non-business areas. However, while pursuing this, it's important for me to balance the demands of business objectives and the needs of clients, colleagues, and the organisation. I can only be part of a team that values authenticity and trust those around me.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

It's essential for normalising the differences that make us unique and creating bridges.

In the broader picture, sharing and having open conversations contribute to a healthy organisational culture which everyone feels part of, and which values not only business performance, but also the individual. This creates a virtuous cycle which eventually benefits the business.



“It's important to build trust between our colleagues, and having honest discussions adds value to the overall working environment.”

On a more personal level, for me it's important to build trust between our colleagues and having honest discussions adds value to the overall working environment.

As an example, I appreciate the impact that diversity has on our executive Board interactions. We have a Board that is comprised of 62% women and every member has their own background and incredible life story. We feel safe to not only solve issues and tick 'Completed' on projects in every Board session, but to speak up and bring into light uncomfortable issues, to brainstorm and to constantly come up with new ideas.

What are the biggest barriers to progress on D&I in the retail sector in 2023?

Retail has made great progress in recent years – from calibrating teams to reflect the diversity of customers to marketing or employer branding campaigns that communicate this

diversity with authenticity and essentially driving forward broader discussions on D&I.

However, there is still much to do. As a first step, I believe that one objective is for the team structure to be a reflection of society, and this is the starting point to establish what is more important to focus on in the first place.

When it comes to barriers, the biggest one might be viewing D&I as a separate objective and not an integral part of the business decisions.

Furthermore, leaders are the driving force in D&I progress, but meaningful impact comes from concerted efforts across the organisation.

This also relates to the need for long-term vision. As individuals we should think about what we leave behind. We should act with regard to the future. It's the same for a business – seeking short-term results might get you to the next level, but the steps you take while pursuing long-term objectives are more meaningful and the results are truly worth it.

So we need to evaluate all opportunities. Seek to build a diverse team and, more specifically, a diverse succession team. Take time to speak to customers, to colleagues. Build a healthy organisational culture that speaks to people of all backgrounds and ages.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

A good role model is relatable and at the same time inspiring, but mostly

always acting with authenticity. They are guided by values and are dependable for those around them. They have a solid understanding of their field of activity and do not gate-keep but are willing to share with others this knowledge. They are human and – why not – vulnerable at times. When times are difficult, they motivate those around them.

While I write down the words to describe a role model, I think of our female leaders in Brico Dépôt Romania's Board, making up 62% of our executive team, or to all our female colleagues who make up 44% of our overall team. They inspire me day by day with their strength and resilience.

What do you think the future holds for the retail sector? What are you most excited about?

Retail never sleeps and never ceases to develop. I'm grateful to be part of such a dynamic and bold field. We are always dealing with new situations and this tension enables us to continuously innovate and progress. I'm certain there will continue to be unexpected situations, but when it comes to things I can foresee, I'm most excited for the evolution of customer centricity – how will the client of the future behave, what will they ask for, how can we best serve them, and essentially, how can we anticipate needs rather than respond to current needs?

In that sense, I'm eager to see the impact of omnichannel and integrated services.



Leona Smith

Company **John Lewis Partnership**
Job Title **Diversity & Inclusion Lead**

As Diversity & Inclusion Lead at the John Lewis Partnership, I'd like to say I'm known for my ability to lead and deliver innovative people-focused strategies, improving employee relations, performance, and reputation. With a 15-year background in developing proactive communication strategies, I've now cultivated a unique engagement-centered approach to delivering diversity and inclusion.

As a Black female professional, I always try to harness my lived experience to influence, coach, and connect so that I create the conditions for everyone to thrive, feel safe, and be respected.

But it's fair to say that my profession is only a small part of my pursuit for inclusion. Fairness and representation is ingrained in everything I do. All you'd need to do is read my school reports from the tender age of five. I always stood up for what was right, volunteered for every group, council committee during my teens, to ensure that voices were heard. And started a community interest company in my early 20s with the purpose to change the negative stereotypes of Black men in London.

So for me, it's business as usual as I continue to do what I've always done. With some added life and professional experience gained along the way.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

The experience of diversity and inclusion is so nuanced, that the only way to fully understand any experience is through open conversation. It's one of the

most important ways to build understanding. Especially in the Partnership, which is so unique. Through open conversation, I've been able to understand that there are more experiences that bind us than separate us, and helping people to realise that is a great way to forge human connection. Listening has

“ You must be prepared to take on the responsibility of making your organisation a safe space.

been a key component of my team's delivery of our priorities. Without it, I can only assume to know what the problems are that I need to solve. With it, I have the insight I need to solve the right problems and improve experiences in a meaningful way.

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

My advice to leaders is to enter from a position of vulnerability, accountability and action. Building spaces where everyone can belong and get along is a difficult thing to do. You must be vulnerable enough to deal with the discomfort that you'll inevitably feel. We're all human, and showing vulnerability in the way you start conversations with your people, helps to build trust. You must be prepared to take on the responsibility of making your organisation a safe space. When you take real accountability for the issues, you'll make it your personal responsibility to resolve. And finally, you must be driven to take action. It's the only way to close the loop.



When it comes to advocating for D&I, is there anything you can share that you're doing outside of retail?

In July 2021 I was appointed as a member of the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime's External Reference Group. As a result, I've been instrumental in leading discussions with the Mayor of London, and the MET's Commissioner to develop engagement, education and policy for underrepresented groups, to improve trust in the MET Police. Which is a significantly hefty task considering the recent spike in negative press, Baroness Casey's report and number of high profile cases.

This role has taught me so much about the scale of the problems we face in our society. Be it, policing in London, the NHS or our education system. There is so much work to be done. And my ultimate goal is to influence as many societal systems as possible, to ensure that whatever room we enter, we're sure to be treated fairly and respectfully. And more than anything, we're safe.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

I've always found the concept of role models really challenging. Not because I don't agree with the need to have them, but more so because of the weight of responsibility placed on the shoulders of one person, without said person requesting it. And so, considering this, I feel that being a good role model means being honest about who you are and what you have to give and share.

What are you doing to ensure D&I remains a priority in your organisation?

Fortunately, the Partnership is fully engaged with diversity and inclusion and it remains a priority to our leaders and Partners. However, in my role I ensure that it remains a priority by constantly sharing insight and data across the business. But also, ensuring that we measure and think about how everything we do will impact our Partners from a D&I perspective. I've challenged every Partner to be the 5th member of my team, and by that, I'm challenging them to consider diversity and inclusion in everything they do.





Naomi Smith

Company **Central Co-op**
Job Title **Inclusion & Wellbeing Manager**

Having worked in various generalist HR roles for over twenty years across sectors including construction, professional services and retail, I was thrilled to take on the newly created role of Inclusion & Wellbeing Manager in October 2022 at Central Co-op.

I've long had an interest in all aspects of diversity and inclusion having previously been a member of the Inclusion Working Group at Central Co-op so was pleased to see the commitment in the creation of a role to focus on such an important area. The last seven months have been a really steep learning curve, for both myself and the business with both of us being relatively early in our inclusion journey and there's certainly been a lot of work to do but I am loving every minute!

There's a real advantage to both myself and the business starting our inclusion journey together as we're able to navigate our path at the same time – I'm learning at the same time as colleagues and the business. I have no preconceived ideas of what we should be doing or what will or won't work and I'm thoroughly embracing the opportunities that creates. We also have a hugely supportive Executive team who have already cleared the pathway to support us on our journey.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

No amount of data or statistics has the same impact as storytelling. Whether it's part of launching a new policy, highlighting the need for an area of colleague support or sharing the successes of a development program, the most impactful way of educating, sharing and changing hearts and minds is through personal story telling.

We've launched several new policies over the past few months and have used panel discussion webinars to help with educating colleagues and bringing to life our policies. When colleagues send us feedback it's inevitably to say thanks for the sharing the personal stories. Colleagues will tell how they were moved to tears or had never considered the real impact on someone else's life, or how they now understand why having a policy or development program is so important.

“As each organisation works hard to remain competitive, there's a real risk that the sector may lose focus on D&I.

We're having much more open conversations as a result of sharing more personal experiences. It's also telling us what we're doing well and highlighting what we can and should be doing better. Creating the safe space where colleagues feel they can really share is a huge step forward in creating a workplace where everyone feels they are welcome and included.

What are the biggest barriers to progress on D&I in the retail sector in 2023?

With the current cost of living crisis, ongoing war in Ukraine and impact of Brexit, the retail sector will remain volatile and challenging for some time. As each organisation works hard to remain competitive and relevant there's a real risk the sector may lose its focus on D&I.

For those of us already sold on the business case for diversity, equity and inclusion we'll need to continue to demonstrate the value of getting D&I right. Showing how it will set us apart and make us more competitive and more relevant. We'll need to work hard not only at ensuring

those in leadership positions are representative and inclusive but also that they create workplaces where everyone feel able to bring their whole selves to work.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

Being a good role model is about actions and behaviours so for me, being a good inclusion role model is about making sure the actions and behaviours you take support, amplify and advocate with others, especially those who belong to different social groups than you.

For me, it means trying to be better and trying to do better. And that happens by gaining a better understanding of people through educating yourself and

then demonstrating those behaviours to others.

A good role model doesn't have to get things right all the time but they do have to be prepared to examine their own behaviours and should be prepared to accept feedback with grace, even when it's uncomfortable.

What are you doing to ensure D&I remains a priority in your organisation?

We're working closely with DiR on their new Maturity Curve and are looking forward to putting into action their feedback and recommendations. We'll be using the outputs of this to inform our strategy and roadmap for our D&I work.

Through our Inclusion Working Group we'll continue to deliver our Calendar

of Inclusion Events throughout 2023 and we'll also continue to embed our new policies. We'll keep listening to our colleagues on D&I through our engagement surveys and will look to roll out more D&I learning activities later this year.





Samantha Thompson

Company **Central Co-op**
Job Title **Retail Store Manager**

I am a retail store manager at Central Co-op. When I started at Central Co-op 10 years ago, I was a deputy store manager and have had many store manager positions across different sites. I'm now located in a supermarket in Hertfordshire. I am passionate about leading people and cultivating a supportive and inclusive environment where all colleagues can thrive.

I am a part of the inclusion delivery group at Central Co-op and have immensely enjoyed the past 18 months helping to drive inclusion and diversity through the business challenging the status quo. I am nearly qualified for my level 5 operational management apprenticeship; this opportunity has enabled me to excel within my leadership role and has driven me to grow within myself.

In your view, why is sharing experiences and having open conversations an important part of seeing progress on D&I?

When we share personal experiences, we enrich the people around us with life experiences that may be unfamiliar to them. Cultivating a safe environment to have these open conversations leads to invaluable points of view to drive forward inclusion within an organisation. Without these safe spaces enabling these open conversations, we can't hope to challenge what isn't yet right, and make things better. Each person brings such a different viewpoint of a topic across, and this is what this truly enables us to make real progress within the business.

During a podcast we created for International Women's Day, I helped to co-write and take part in a panel discussion on what allyship means to me. By sharing my own personal experiences, I could help bring to life the reality of lived experiences for many women. In listening to the stories of my female colleagues I also was able to gain a completely new perspective. Especially for my colleagues working in completely different areas of the business such as funeral and distribution.

What does inclusion and diversity mean to you?

Inclusion to me is the feeling of being a part of something bigger than myself; it's about something or somewhere that embraces everyone and celebrates differences. I want to be a part of creating safe environments for colleagues to thrive in and be who they are without



fear. I want to empower people by understanding and respecting what makes us all different.

Diversity is seeing the above in action. The positive actions and steps my organisation have made, makes our inclusion promise goal a reality.

Inclusion and diversity are so important to me, I am an advocate for this in every aspect of my life and with the support of the inclusion delivery group this is a reality within my career too.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

I want inclusion and diversity to be as important to everyone within my organisation as it is to me. I want to help educate and support people to an understanding of the purpose of achieving in these areas. I have been subject to discrimination and discriminative language in the past, I am therefore all too aware of how a lack of understanding of diversity and inclusion can negatively affect someone. In that moment, with one throw away comment, I didn't feel included. I don't want anyone to feel like that again. I am passionate that I

will, with my colleagues, do all I can to be an advocate for progress within Central Co-op.

“ Change is a gradual process, so I'll continue to challenge and ensure that diversity and inclusion is at the top of everyone's agenda.

What are you doing to ensure D&I remains a priority in your organisation?

I am an active part of the inclusion delivery group at Central Co-op and have been for the last 18 months. We're a team of colleagues from

different areas of our business that help in the delivery of an annual Inclusion Events Calendar. I have so far supported on International Women's Day (which became a week of events) and am now busy planning our celebrations for Pride month. I am really proud to have been pivotal in the creation of our first ever podcast on allyship as part of International Women's Day and am now busy working on a follow up one for Pride month.

I will continue to champion and celebrate all the great work that the rest of the Inclusion Delivery Group does including religious engagement guides, new policies, webinars and manager guides. I'll do this by advocating with my team and colleagues face to face and on our social media channels both internally and externally.

Change is a gradual process, so I'll continue to challenge and ensure that diversity and inclusion is at the top of everyone's agenda. Within a fast-paced environment such as retail, it can be easy to get side-tracked, but I'll ensure focus on inclusion is always kept.



Jason Williams

Company **WHSmith**

Job Title **Group Talent Development Manager**

I got the retail bug early in life, starting work in a local supermarket at the age of 13. From the amazing colleagues to the huge smiles from our customers, retail felt like home. University wasn't really a consideration for me – growing up in a working-class family unfortunately it was just too expensive! So, during my time at college, I proudly become a weekend Duty Manager for Woolworths. 17-year-old me couldn't have been prouder to be running a store! I progressed through various store management roles and gained a reputation for thriving in challenging stores. However, I really wanted to fuel my passion for working with people even further. Alongside my day-to-day role managing 5 stores, I dusted off my academic skills and started studying for my CIPD qualifications. This led to an opportunity to move into WHSmith's People team, as a Learning and Development advisor. Now in my current role of Group Talent Development Manager, I have the privilege of supporting people across the company to grow and be the very best they can be.

What does inclusion and diversity mean to you?

It is about everyone feeling able to be themselves, without fear or shame. Respecting each other by listening to experience and celebrating the differences between us. Giving everyone equitable opportunities in life and workplace, and being aware of privileges we may have.

What motivates you to help drive up progress in your organisation?

As someone who really struggled coming to terms with my sexuality, I know very well the feeling of being different from others. The fact we are all different should be celebrated! I care deeply about creating a workplace where everyone is celebrated no matter who they are, where we can challenge any unconscious biases which prevent people having equitable experiences,



and where we seek to continually do better. If what I do to help progress this impacts just one person, it has made a difference!

What advice would you give to leaders wanting to increase their focus on D&I?

No matter what their experience with diversity, equity and inclusion, I would encourage all retail leaders to make this a part of their agenda. We all have a responsibility to grow our knowledge in this space. Be curious and take the time to listen to colleagues and hear about their experiences in your organisation. Get involved in conversations outside of your organisation - there is a huge warm and welcoming community and network to share ideas with and gain insights. Everyone is still growing and learning, so don't allow the fear of getting it wrong to be a barrier to increasing your focus in this space.

What are you doing to ensure D&I remains a priority in your organisation?

The key is remembering that the work and progress for diversity, equity and inclusion is never finished. There is

always an opportunity to do better. I know I don't have all the answers, so I am always looking to grow my network to learn from other people about their ways of working and how they are ensuring equity across their teams.

At WHSmith, I am founding co-chair of our Pride network, and in this role I take lots of learnings from my network to help us provide a really great space for colleagues to come together and drive forward business change.

Question choice:

When it comes to advocating for D&I, is there anything you can share that you're doing outside of retail?

As a proud same sex adopter, I could see that my friends and colleagues who are LGBT+ parents were having many of the same societal challenges as my partner and I. To support this, I have created a WhatsApp community for same sex adoptive parents as a safe place to come together and share their experiences. We can all talk to others who could understand the complexities and differences in parenting children with trauma alongside the social stigma that same sex parents can experience.

“ We all have a responsibility to grow our understanding in this space.

What does being a good role model mean to you?

For me, it's about staying curious. A good role model is someone who wants to learn, listen, and do the work to be better; they don't sit back and wait for the answers or expect people with lived experience to do the work for them.

It's also about elevating the voices of others without the privileges that you have, especially when they aren't in the room. And being supportive and making the time to share contacts and connections. I think it's important to be prepared to admit when you get things wrong as well - we are all continually growing and learning.

In Remembrance



Jacqueline Gold CBE

Jacqueline Gold CBE was the Executive Chair of Ann Summers and was renowned for managing a business run by women, for women. Jacqueline was an activist for women in business, championed female entrepreneurs and, through sharing her own experiences, aimed to better the working environment for women in the industry. Her attitude towards female empowerment and gender equality inspired countless generations of women to pursue their dreams and celebrate their successes, not least her 13-year-old daughter, Scarlett.

From an internship at Ann Summers to Chief Executive Officer in less than 10 years, her determination and commitment to creating a unique retail offering led to the creation of a multi-channel retail chain, with retail stores, direct sales ambassadors and a growing online and third-party business. It was her vision and creativity that saw Ann Summers grow from an unknown brand to a British household name and staple of the British high street.

In recognition of Jacqueline's significant achievements during her 40-year career, she was awarded a CBE in the 2016 New Year Honours for services to Entrepreneurship, Women in Business and Social Enterprise. It is this moment in her career that she described as her proudest.

Jacqueline's further accolades and honours include Retail Week's Most Powerful Woman in Business, Barclays Bank's Most Inspirational Businesswoman in the UK and numerous awards from publications including Cosmopolitan, Esquire and Good Housekeeping. In October 2012 Jacqueline was named most Inspirational Celebrity at the Inspirational Women Awards and in 2019 she was awarded Retail Week's inaugural Retail Activist Award.

Jacqueline's incredible career has not come without challenges. From receiving a bullet in the post, taking the Government to court – and winning, and being arrested twice. Despite this, Jacqueline always made it her mission to empower women in the bedroom and subsequently the boardroom.

As well as professional challenges, Jacqueline also faced several personal challenges. Growing up, Jacqueline's childhood was difficult and marred by abuse. Later in life, having undergone IVF treatment, she tragically lost her son, Alfie, when he was 8 months old to a rare brain condition. In 2011, Scarlett's nanny admitted to trying to poison Jacqueline and was sent to prison.

In 2016, Jacqueline was first diagnosed with breast cancer, and following a year of grueling treatment she went into remission. Unfortunately, it returned in 2019, but she continued to battle the disease, refusing to let it define her. She had started her third round of chemotherapy before she passed away in March 2023.

Jacqueline was passionate about sharing her journey with others in the hope it would help and inspire them. Jacqueline believed that through all of life's adversities there were lessons to be learned and opportunities to come out of them.

About Us

About The MBS Group

For more than 30 years, The MBS Group has been a leading sector-specialist executive search firm advising all consumer-facing industries, with a particular focus on the retail sector. Clients consider us to be the partner of choice when searching for critical leadership roles that make a difference. We work at board level and on executive positions across all functions of strategic importance.

For more information, visit www.thembsgroup.co.uk

About Diversity in Retail

At Diversity in Retail we believe that through collaboration we can amplify the impact of individual diversity initiatives, that together we can have a bigger, louder voice for the good of the retail sector.

Our mission is to support companies across the retail industry to create diverse and inclusive environments and positively impact 1 million employees globally by 2025.

For more information please visit www.diversityinretail.com

Contact: info@diversityinretail.com

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank and acknowledge each person highlighted in this report for so generously giving up their time to contribute to this publication. Particular acknowledgement must go to Tea Colaianni, Jo Aunon, Silvia Sanvito, and the rest of the team at DiR for their continued partnership and dedication to making a difference in the retail sector. We would like to thank our team at The MBS Group – Moira Benigson (Chair and Founder), Elliott Goldstein, Aelf Hewitson, Simon Pryde-More, Callum Orr, Imogen Sewell, Mary Baxter and Krystyna Robbins – for their invaluable contribution to the production of this report.

The MBS Group

3 Primrose Mews
Off Sharpleshall Street
London, NW1 8YW

+44 (0) 20 7722 1221
info@thembsgroup.co.uk

www.thembsgroup.co.uk

© Copyright 2023, The MBS Group.
All rights reserved.