

DEI
HARRIS

**PUBLIC RELATIONS
DEI REPORT.**

Supported by





FOREWORD.

SONIA HARRIS POPE, FOUNDER & MD OF HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS



Identifying the challenges and creating pathways to a more inclusive PR industry

When I first started out in PR, two and a half decades ago, I faced a different set of challenges than today's starters. I was a young woman who lacked the traditional qualifications and experiences of my colleagues. I fought hard for my place at the boardroom table, and there have been many times over the years that I've been the only woman at that table. Though I faced many obstacles throughout my career, I also accept that I had a great deal of privilege; my upbringing, education, language skills, my confidence and ability to network and form contacts for life. It is my own experiences, and the experiences of my colleagues and peers, that fuels me to create a better, more inclusive industry than the one I started out in 25 years ago.

So I've built Harris PR on the belief that our people deserve to work in an environment that recognises their contribution, working together to create a better world through work we are proud of. Our foundations are rooted in the work we produce and the way we show up, and our team is the heartbeat of the work we do.

Since the beginning of 2024, we have worked closely with ODI and the PRII to establish a PR Bursary for people from under-represented backgrounds in Ireland. The Bursary includes a nine-month paid internship with Harris PR and a place on the Diploma in PR course, as well as consistent mentorship and supports. We have had two successful candidates through the Bursary so far and will be announcing the third bursary programme shortly.

We established the Harris PR DEI Bursary initiative to help safeguard the future of the PR industry in Ireland and to provide a legacy for the years ahead. Our industry thrives on diverse perspectives and experiences, and as Ireland continues to evolve into a more inclusive nation, so too must the PR industry. Not everyone has a straightforward path to a career in PR, that's certainly my own experience and that of many of my peers and colleagues. At Harris PR, we are committed to investing in the next generation of talent and have a strong track record of supporting those new to the profession and encouraging others to consider it. We hope to see more of our peers across the industry adopt inclusive approaches to nurturing new talent and incorporating more inclusive practises within their workplace cultures.

With this in mind, we set out to establish a benchmark on where the PR industry currently is in terms of DEI. We engaged research provider iReach Insights to undertake a piece of bespoke research to examine both the employer and employee or jobseeker perspectives. Research was undertaken within the PR industry, across agencies and companies with in-house communications functions, as well as across other industries to compare and contrast, and amongst employees and job-seekers in PR and other services industries, the findings of which are laid out in this report.



The report includes real personal testimonies of experiences of those from under-represented backgrounds breaking into the industry, as well as a deep dive into hiring practices, mentorship and training.

The toolkit for employers includes a roadmap for hiring teams to make job applications more accessible, as well as to adopt a more inclusive culture within their businesses.

The purpose is clear, to set a benchmark for the state of DEI in Public Relations in Ireland with an in-depth analysis from Industry Leaders, and to provide a practical toolkit for employers to assist Public Relations agencies and companies with internal comms functions to integrate DEI into their operations, from hiring to workplace culture.

A truly inclusive culture across PR should be evident from the outside in, through visible leadership, meaningful action and a consistent commitment to equality. I'm grateful for the support of ODI, the PRII and PRCA, as well as my own team in preparing this report and developing the toolkit. I hope it inspires members of our industry to rethink their hiring policies and to examine how inclusive their workplace culture is or could be.

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads 'Aine-Lene Byrne'.

www.harrispr.ie





STAKEHOLDERS.

PRII

The Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII) is the representative body for public relations and communications professionals in Ireland. The PRII is committed to promoting the highest standards of professional practice, ethics and education within the industry.

As the professional body for the sector, the PRII recognises that diversity, equality and inclusion are fundamental to the long-term sustainability, relevance and credibility of public relations. The PRII supports initiatives that broaden access to the profession, promote inclusive workplaces, and strengthen leadership accountability across the industry.



www.prii.ie

PRCA



The Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA) is the representative body for the country's leading public relations (PR) agencies. Currently, 37 agencies from across Ireland are members of the PRCA, employing over 500 people and contributing approximately €50 million to the economy each year.

www.prca.ie

The PRCA showcases the positive impact delivered by member agencies to organisations, to society, and to the Irish economy. Membership of the Association requires meeting strict entry requirements – including an adherence to international codes and a commitment to achieving the PRCA Consultancy Management Standard.

ODI

The Open Doors Initiative's mission is to create equitable pathways to education, employment and entrepreneurship for all underrepresented people.

Some of the people ODI work with include refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, people with disabilities and disadvantaged youth, those from a Traveller or Roma background, LGBTIQ+, people with a criminal past, and any intersectionality between the groups.



www.opendoorsinitiative.ie

In Ireland today, these groups face higher barriers to employment than most others. Many are cut out of work, even during the recent times of nearly full employment.



RESEARCH & METHODOLOGY

Harris PR engaged iReach Insights to commission the research that informs this report.

To gain a rounded understanding of DEI in action, questions were developed focusing on two cohorts:

EMPLOYERS

223 of Ireland's small, medium and large* business organisations from iReach's panel of senior business decision makers and stakeholder organisations, of whom 38% work in a PR agency or in-house PR or Communications team.

EMPLOYEES

260 responses from iReach's nationally representative omnibus panel of 1,000 people, of whom 140 identify as being part of a minority group** and 25% work in a PR or Communications role.

Research was conducted from 8th to 30th January 2026 using iReach Insights leading market research solution for all aspects of survey project management: sampling, design, data collection, and tabulation, and its proprietary research panels across consumer and business groups, built on a nationally representative model.

*Small is 1 to 50 employees, Medium is 51 to 150 and Large is 151+

**Minority or diverse groups include ethnic minority, disadvantaged background, LGBTQ+ community, gender minority, disabled community, and neurodivergent community.



DEI IN ACTION.

THE EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

The research shows that while most organisations recognise the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion, progress remains uneven and often inconsistent in practice.

Key Insights:

PR and communications a growing function within organisations.

71% of all businesses surveyed have an internal PR or communications function, with this figure unsurprisingly highest in large companies (94%).

The average headcount of this function is 5 people, with 3, 4, and 6 the average in small, medium, and large businesses respectively, and the average agency size is 22 people.

38% of those surveyed work in a PR agency or an in-house PR or Communications team, while a further 25% work in a marketing or advertising business and the remaining 37% in other services agencies or in-house services teams.

“

The findings clearly reflect what we are seeing across the profession: communications is no longer a support function, it is a strategic driver of organisational reputation, stakeholder trust and long-term value. The growth of in-house teams and the scale of agency expertise demonstrates that Irish organisations increasingly recognise the critical role of communications and public relations in shaping corporate performance, public discourse and brand resilience. As the function matures, it must also lead on standards - including embedding diversity, equity and inclusion into how we recruit, develop and lead.

”

Laura Wall, CEO, Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII).

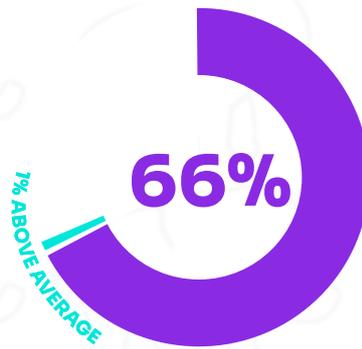
DEI policy adoption is widespread, but depth varies.

On average two-thirds (66%) of companies have a DEI policy in place, signalling strong top-level intent. However, policy maturity is mixed: only half (50%) of those with a policy review it annually, suggesting that for many organisations DEI risks becoming static rather than embedded and evolving as the organisation and society evolve.

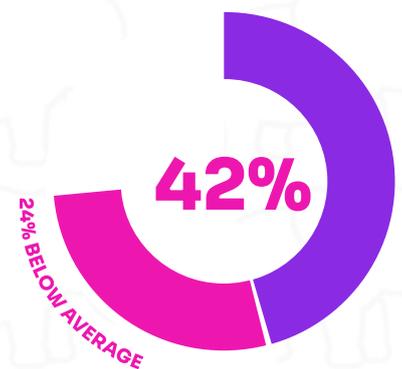
DEI POLICY IN PLACE



LARGE COMPANES



MEDIUM SIZED COMPANIES



SMALL COMPANIES

Within the PR sector, 75% of in-house teams have a DEI policy; however disappointingly PR agencies lag behind at just 45%. Conversely of those agencies that have a policy in place, 67% review it at least once a year, whereas with in-house teams this falls to 38%.

The vast difference in DEI policy adoption based on company size suggests that DEI is still widely perceived as a scale issue rather than a core business principle – something you do once you're big enough.

- Large organisations are far more likely to have a DEI policy in place and to review it regularly. This suggests DEI is more embedded into governance and leadership routines.
- Medium-sized companies sit in a transition zone: most have policies, but fewer show evidence of active iteration or strong ownership.
- Small companies lag significantly, indicating that DEI is often informal, deprioritised, or seen as something to address later as the business grows.



Representation of diverse employees remains relatively low.

On average, fewer than one in five employees (17%) come from a diverse background, however within in-house PR and Communications teams this falls to 15%, while 20% of PR agencies and 9% of in-house PR and Communications teams say they do not have any diverse employees.

Representation increases with company scale, indicating that smaller organisations face greater structural or capability barriers when it comes to building diverse teams, with just 12% of employees on average from a diverse background in small businesses, while this figure rises to 21% in larger businesses. 30% of small businesses state they do not have any diverse employees.

However, the increase in diversity is modest relative to the jump in organisational resources, suggesting that scale alone does not automatically solve representation gaps. Growth enables diversity, but intention and process determine outcomes. Even large organisations appear to underperform relative to their potential.

Public Relations is built on trust, credibility and influence. If our industry does not reflect the diversity of the communities we engage with, we weaken both that credibility and ultimately our impact.

Within agencies, diversity is not just about representation; it is about diversity of experience, diversity of perspective and diversity of thinking. That mix sparks creativity, strengthens strategy and enables us to challenge clients with new perspectives. It makes our work sharper and more relevant

Brian Harrison, Chair, PRCA Ireland.

Hiring barriers are largely supply, and confidence, driven.

Of those who do not currently employ any people from a diverse background, all are small businesses. The most cited obstacles to hiring from diverse backgrounds relate to perceived candidate availability, experience, qualifications, and local cultural knowledge. This points to a combination of talent pipeline challenges and employer uncertainty about how to assess or support diverse candidates effectively.

However, this framing suggests a belief that the issue lies outside the organisation rather than within hiring practices, networks, or role design. Smaller employers may be unintentionally narrowing their own talent pools by relying on familiar profiles, informal hiring, or rigid criteria.

Top reasons cited by small businesses for not having diverse employees

Not enough candidates	●●●●○○○○○○	40%
Lack of experience	●●●○○○○○○○○	27%
Lack of suitable qualifications / training	●●○○○○○○○○○○	20%
Lack of local cultural knowledge	●●○○○○○○○○○○	20%
Language barrier	●●○○○○○○○○○○	13%
Lack of media knowledge	●○○○○○○○○○○○○	7%



Jeanne McDonagh, CEO of ODI comments:

According to the last Census, over 20% of people in Ireland were not born here. One fifth of your customers and clients are therefore not responding directly to your work as there is a lack of representation in PR organisations and media.

Jeanne suggests agencies need to go where these groups look for work:

For example, Ukrainians use Telegraph not Indeed for job searches and information. Traditional funnels don't work in getting these groups involved, therefore employers need to widen their search to benefit from their skills.

Inclusive hiring practices are far from universal.

Less than half of businesses (44%) actively take steps to make their hiring processes more inclusive. This falls to 36% in small businesses, whereas in large businesses it increases to 59%. However, while in-house PR teams align with the average (44%), PR agencies fall far short of this with just 20% of agencies taking steps to make their hiring policy more inclusive. Inclusion tends to become operationalised only when HR processes formalise, leaving early-stage businesses vulnerable to lack of awareness.

The top ways employers believe they can be more inclusive in the workplace is by hiring more diverse people (14%), greater accessibility including physical workplace accessibility, tools, language and communication (14%), and by introducing blind reviews of CVs and an equalised application process (11%). The latter two practical measures are relatively low-cost, high-impact actions, yet they appear to be underutilised.

While many organisations support the idea of inclusive recruitment in principle, there is a significant gap between awareness and action. This points to a need for practical toolkits and education for businesses to enable them to more easily embed DEI into their hiring process and support greater diversity in their organisations.

While business leaders across all sectors intuitively understand the value of diversity, this research highlights a gap between that understanding and action. This research shows that translating that understanding into consistent, practical action can be challenging. The focus should now be on continuing the conversation across the sector. Sharing insights, learning from one another, and building on the progress already underway.

Brian Harrison, Chair of the PRCA



Uncertainty remains a major challenge, especially among larger employers.

A notable proportion of organisations (28%) openly admit they do not know what steps to take to become more inclusive, notably higher within larger companies (34%). This suggests a strong opportunity for clearer guidance, leadership frameworks, and external support to translate intent into meaningful change.

While small companies struggle with awareness and capability when it comes to DEI paradoxically, large companies are the most likely to say they don't know how to be more inclusive. This suggests complexity, fear of getting it wrong, or lack of alignment across departments rather than lack of intent.

At scale, inclusion shifts from a values issue to a systems challenge and many organisations have not yet cracked how to operationalise it consistently.

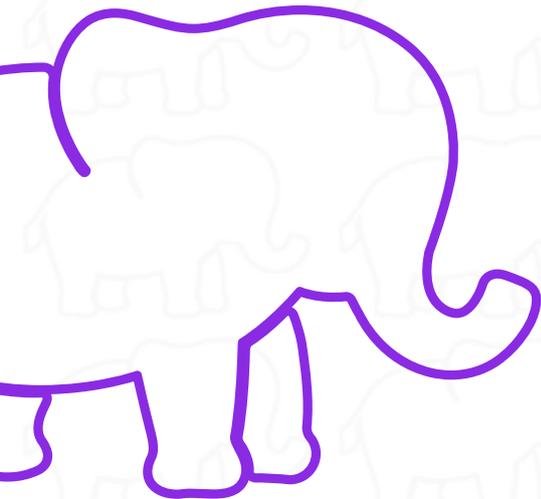
Meanwhile, medium-sized companies are at the tipping point. They broadly mirror large firms in policy adoption but fall behind in action, review cadence, and confidence. Without deliberate investment, they risk becoming policy compliant but impact light. Medium-sized organisations represent the biggest opportunity for progress – they are large enough to act, but still agile enough to change quickly.

“

In our inclusion work with companies of all sizes, we find that intentionality and leadership is key to progressing this work. We actively offer bespoke programmes for our partner companies of different sizes and capacity to meet their needs and encourage them in inclusive practices. Anyone can be an active supporter of social impact – it's not one size fits all and the smallest company can make real inroads into helping people in a really values led way.

Jeanne McDonagh, CEO, Open Doors Initiative.

”



DEI IN ACTION.

THE EMPLOYEE AND JOBSEEKER PERSPECTIVE

Access to employment remains a critical pathway towards national economic stability, but also professional growth and social inclusion for job seekers themselves. However, for many individuals, particularly the marginalised members of our society, hailing from minority and underrepresented backgrounds, the process of seeking, interviewing and then securing employment continues to present challenges.

From ethnic minorities and people with disabilities, to people from LGBTQ+ communities, people with learning difficulties or those from a disadvantaged background or youth, there remain large groups of people who face higher barriers to employment than most others. This is despite reports of Ireland experiencing sustained employment growth in 2025, with record job numbers in the first three quarters of 2025.

The employee research explores the experiences of employees and job seekers as they navigate recruitment and employment in Ireland, with a particular focus on those in the PR and communications industry (25% of respondents) and who identify as being from a minority group (54%). This will highlight the barriers encountered at key stages – from application stage right through to securing a new role and experience on the job.

Understanding the barriers is essential, not only for improving fairness and access within recruitment practices, but also for supporting PR and Communication organisations and broader industries in building more inclusive, representative and effective teams.

Key Insights:

Overall, perceptions of inclusion in the industry are broadly positive, but there are clear gaps between intent, experience, and consistency – particularly around hiring transparency and progression.

Of those represented in this research who identified as being from a minority group (140 out of the entire sample of 260), 31% of respondents identify as neurodivergent, 29% identify as a racial/ethnic minority, and 27% identify with a disadvantaged background.



Hiring feedback is a major blind spot.

The research showed that over half (56%) of respondents who applied for a role in PR and related industries were not successful in receiving a job offer.

Among respondents who were unsuccessful in securing a role, a massive 83% reported that they did not receive any feedback on why they were not selected, with 69% of those who applied for a role in PR citing lack of feedback in the post-interview phase.

However, 1 in 2 respondents who did receive feedback indicated they were told the role went to a more qualified candidate – with 5% citing language barriers as a contributing factor. A lack of cultural fit (36%) was a standout reason for minorities not receiving job offers.

This lack of transparency creates frustration and uncertainty, particularly for candidates trying to understand whether outcomes relate to skills, experience, or systemic barriers. The 'cultural fit' feedback points to subjective decision-making in the industry, rather than clear, skills-based assessment.

Other factors outlined in the feedback shared with just 17% of respondents, cited lack of media knowledge (5%) and lack of local cultural knowledge (5%) as additional reasons for not being successful in the recruitment process.

When asked their opinion as to what factors contributed to these job seekers not being successful when it came to applying for a job in PR or related industries, 31% of respondents said they believed it came down to lack of media knowledge. 26% believe they did not show enough experience while 18% believed that language barriers played a significant role.

Most candidates feel encouraged, but encouragement is unevenly delivered.

Despite broad agreement that the industry does enough to encourage participation by people from underrepresented backgrounds (73%), only 38% reported seeing this encouragement translated into tangible action within organisations' hiring processes and in company DEI policies. This suggests that inclusion is often fragmented rather than holistic.

A total of 26% of respondents would rate the DEI policies in their industry at a 5 out of 10. 22% would rate it an 8 out of 10 (25% of minorities) and 14% would rate it a 7 out of 10. This means that DEI policies are seen as 'adequate', not exceptional. While most acknowledge that DEI is present, most respondents tend to centre on the 'midpoint' of the scale (4 - 6 out of 10) and it's rarely viewed as a strong differentiator. This shows that there is limited evidence of standout leadership and practise in this area.

Job experience post-hire is largely positive.

The vast majority of respondents (87%) who have successfully secured roles in the industry, report positive experiences once employed. This suggests that once barriers are overcome, workplace culture is generally welcoming and supportive.



Other industries are often seen as more inclusive.

A significant proportion of respondents have successfully sought work elsewhere, and many of these describe more positive experiences outside their current industry. This comparison suggests a competitive risk: that ultimately, talent may migrate towards sectors that are perceived as more progressive or transparent than PR and Communications.

“Underrepresented job seekers often face barriers not because of a lack of talent, but because of limited access to professional networks and insider information, particularly in Ireland where social connections are key”

Jeanne McDonagh, CEO of ODI.

Jeanne explains that informal connections frequently shape who hears about opportunities and how hiring processes are navigated. Employers can help level the playing field by making career pathways transparent, sharing knowledge openly, and intentionally widening access to networks and actively creating mentoring opportunities.

Beyond access, ODI believes fostering belonging and psychological safety is critical. When new hires feel safe to ask questions, contribute ideas, and learn from mistakes, their confidence and performance grow.

“By embedding inclusive practices, clear expectations, and supportive leadership, employers not only empower individuals but also strengthen organisational success,”

Jeanne McDonagh, CEO of ODI.



CASE STUDIES.

Vika Hurska's Story.

I moved to Ireland after being displaced by the war in Ukraine in 2022, never imagining I would stay for this long. During my first year here, I focused on community support and volunteering, which later led to roles as an Employment Advisor and then a Clerical Officer. Even though my professional background has always been in PR and communications, finding a way back into the industry proved far more challenging.

What I struggled with wasn't capability, experience or language – it was access.

The Harris PR DEI Bursary supported by the PRII and Open Doors Initiative gave me exactly that: a real way into PR in Ireland. It gave me a starting point, local experience, and the chance to rebuild my professional network.

I truly hope programmes like this continue to grow and support people from all underrepresented backgrounds. Having clear entry points into the industry matters. They help people get a foot in the door, and from there, real progress becomes possible.

We work in an industry built on storytelling. Let's stay curious, ask questions, and really listen to people's stories. Because experience doesn't disappear at the border.



CASE STUDIES.

Carolina Lucca's Story.

As an immigrant living in Ireland for over 8 years, I wanted to pursue a career that would not only assist in improving my English, but also to fully immerse myself in Irish culture. Although I hold a degree in Gastronomy from Brazil, a field that I feel really strengthened my creativity, attention to detail, and communication skills, I decided to explore a new career path after embracing opportunities that arose in different fields during my journey living abroad.

I was determined to integrate into Irish society. Upon my arrival to Ireland, I first found work as a childminder, a role that helped me refine my English while also gaining a deeper understanding of Irish cultural nuances and communication styles. A few years later, I had the opportunity to work in content creation and soon discovered a real interest in strategic communication. This sparked my passion for public relations and ultimately motivated me to further my education in the field.

Alongside this, I also volunteered as an English tutor for Ukrainian refugees through a non-profit organisation. This experience deepened my understanding of how structured support programs can positively impact integration and resocialisation, further reinforcing my desire to pursue a career in public relations.

Applying for the Bursary opportunity with Harris PR, the PRII and ODI, marked a pivotal step in my journey. It helped me recognise the value of mentorship from experienced professionals and the importance of gaining industry knowledge. The internship at Harris PR offered me invaluable hands-on experience within a leading PR agency, allowing me to work with both global and local brands, apply my academic learning in real-world scenarios, and develop a practical understanding of successful communication campaigns.

“

I was incredibly honoured and excited to have received the bursary and internship opportunity. As an immigrant in Ireland, this opportunity meant even more to me, as I understood how challenging it can be to secure such opportunities. Continuing my studies and starting this role in PR gave me the chance to be part of something amazing, working alongside such talented people within the Irish work environment. I began the role eager to learn as much as possible from this experience and am deeply grateful for the support that helped me advance in my career

Carolina Lucca

”



Reflecting on the opportunity, Carolina said:

“

The bursary allowed me to gain hands-on experience from an amazing and supportive team while applying everything I was learning through the course. It was an invaluable experience, and I would encourage anyone considering applying to go for it. It's a great opportunity to kickstart your career as well as getting a real insight into the world of PR.

”



For Carolina, the scholarship and internship represented more than professional development but marked a transformative chapter in her journey of growth and integration within Ireland's PR & communications industry.

WHY IT MATTERS?

By continuing to rely on traditional or narrow hiring processes, employers risk losing or excluding potential strong and capable job seeker candidates for roles. This limits access to diverse talent and undermines credibility as well as missing the broader benefits that inclusive recruitment can deliver – such as the diversity of skills, fresh perspectives, cultural variety and lived experience.

The lack of visible inclusion and efforts to improve hiring processes in this way can also signal to existing employees – and clients – that progression and belonging is not a priority. However, putting surface-level initiatives in place is not a long-term solution. Not only do hiring processes need to be more inclusive, but the supportive structures in place once the job seeker has accepted a role needs to ensure follow-through. Initiatives and actions need to be less tokenistic, and more sustained and thoughtful.

“

For the public relations profession, this is not simply a HR issue – it is a strategic one. Our industry’s credibility depends on its ability to understand, reflect and communicate with an increasingly diverse society. If our teams lack diversity of background, experience and perspective, we risk limiting creativity, missing emerging audiences and weakening trust.

DEI must therefore move from being policy-based to performance-based. It should be measured, reviewed and embedded in leadership accountability. This report provides a benchmark for where we stand – and a practical pathway for how we can improve.

Laura Wall, CEO, PRII.

”

