

# Annual Inclusion and Belonging Report

# 2022



Our progress  
so far...

**Abri**  
Creating communities,  
empowering lives

# We're delighted to introduce Abri's first ever annual Inclusion and Belonging report.

Our increased focus on this area reflects global events such as Black Lives Matter and Safer Streets. These caused us to question ourselves on whether we're doing enough to create a fully inclusive workplace and provide services that truly reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.

The answer is, of course, that we can and will do more. We're certainly not there yet. But we have made some good progress, having refocused and redoubled our efforts over the last year.

We've taken care to ensure that inclusion and belonging is a top priority for our Board, Executive and wider senior leadership team. And we've put in place the necessary governance structures to challenge ourselves and our organisation on whether we're taking action to tackle disparities wherever we might find them.

We've set out a public commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion in our 'All In' statement and developed a strategy and action plan to make this a reality. We've also reviewed and revised many of our policies and processes to make them as inclusive as possible. And we've expanded our training and development offer, including a series of 'Let's talk about race' workshops.

During the year, we achieved level 2 status as a Disability Confident employer. We expanded our usual recruitment activities to create a more diverse pool of candidates for new roles. And we completed the recruitment of three new non-executive directors to create the most diverse Board in our 90-year history.

We're very aware that this is just the start. Our efforts have focused on raising awareness of issues and beginning to put in place the data and reporting procedures that will give us insight on the issues that need our attention and action.

Looking ahead, our main focus will now be on completing our data collation and generating insight so that we can tackle disparities and make Abri an even more inclusive employer, developer and housing provider.



Gary Orr  
Group Chief Executive  
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Champion



Lou Taylor  
Board Member  
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Champion

## Our purpose, vision, values

### Our vision and why we exist

To create quality homes, thriving communities and improve people's life-chances.

### Our mission and how we'll achieve it

By working in partnership with others, we create quality homes and thriving communities, supported by outstanding customer services.

### Our Values



#### Be the Difference

As agents of positive change, we will always seek a better way. Our obsession with understanding our customers and communities means we can make a difference in everything we do.



#### Always Curious

We're always ready to challenge and question ourselves and others in our search for better answers and smart solutions.



#### Achieving Together

Working in true partnership with others enables us to act as a unifying force. Our collaborative spirit ensures that every voice is heard and that everyone shares in our success.



#### Own it Openly

We take our responsibilities seriously and always stay true to our values. Our behaviours and communications reflect this openly and transparently.



#### Embrace Possibility

We love coming up with new ways of doing things. We consider everything and rule out nothing. We do everything in our power to see every challenge through to a positive outcome.

# All In - our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

## What's this all about?





There's an important conversation happening about equality, diversity and inclusion right now. It's only the start, and we want to be part of it.

But what does this really mean? And why is it so important?

To us, this is about treating everyone with respect and bringing the best out of each and every one of us. And this is how we plan to do it.

## Our plan

We need to:

-  **increase our understanding**
-  **come up with new ideas**
-  **stop doing things the way we used to**
-  **call out bad behaviour**
-  **make sure we treat everyone with respect, always.**

We haven't always prioritised this issue as we should. For that we hold ourselves accountable and promise to do better. We want everyone to feel included. So, we have to do more.

## It's going to take time

We know this isn't going to happen overnight. No big culture change ever does. But we are in this for the long haul. And we aren't going to stop until we get it right. We want to involve everyone in this change, and it starts with a two-year action plan.

Over the next couple of years, we'll start seeing positive change happen in the place we work, and in the communities we're involved in.

The idea is that everything we do from now on will include a clear focus on equality, diversity and inclusion. We'll challenge ourselves and others on whether we really are doing our best to treat everyone with respect and to give them the opportunity to be their best.

And if we aren't? Then we'll keep searching for the ways in which we can do better.

## Change starts from the inside

We have to take time to reflect on how we will get this right. It's not the time to make vague promises.

So, we're going to work with our colleagues to look at where we can be more inclusive as an employer. And then put new practices in place to be more representative of the communities we serve and the country we live in. We will stamp out biased and out-dated points of view.

It's 2022, and there's no place for discrimination of any kind on our doorstep.

## Here's the detail...

The corporate (but important) stuff you need to know.

- We're going to collect and securely hold EDI-related data to identify areas to improve our services.
- We'll recruit, develop and keep diverse and talented colleagues that reflect the communities we work in.
- We're encouraging customer involvement to deliver high-quality services.

## The road ahead

We expect to face some challenges as we continue to learn and improve. But we hope that, by listening and trying hard to find new ways of improving, we can create equal opportunities for everyone. We want to be part of ending discrimination for good. It's in everyone's interest that we succeed.

We hope that by working with our partners we can make change happen more quickly and effectively so the barriers that still exist in our country come down sooner.

There's a lot of work to be done, so we'd better get started.

## Why are we doing this?

And if you're still wondering why we're doing this? It's because we can't address what we don't talk about. To do the best we can for customers, colleagues and communities, we need everyone to be given the chance to be their best. No ifs or buts, that's the right thing to, always.



## How diverse is the housing association workforce in England?

In December 2021, the NHF – the national body that represents England’s housing associations – published its first-ever report on the equality, diversity and inclusion of housing associations’ workforce.

The NHF collected data from 174 organisations, representing 71% of homes owned by housing associations across England. The workforce data covered staff, executives and board members.

Abri is fully supportive of this initiative and contributed to the study. The NHF’s EDI data tool allows us to make comparisons between our workforce and local populations at a regional level by comparing our colleague data to that of our communities.

The NHF’s report highlighted large gaps in what housing associations know about their workforce, executive teams, and boards.

The biggest gaps were around caring responsibilities and socio-economic characteristics, with only between 1% and 4% of workforce data available. Housing Association staff were less likely to share information about their religion or belief and there appears to be a clear lack of representation of disabled colleagues at all levels.

Data is critical to progressing equality, diversity, and inclusion. Not only does it improve transparency and accountability, but it can also lead to change.

So, collecting more colleague and customer EDI data remains a top priority for Abri, as it will enable us to build an accurate picture of our workforce and compare it to the local populations we serve.

**We are  
All In.**

## Profile of Abri’s Group Board, customers and colleagues

The following section is based on our current understanding. We know this is based on incomplete data. While there are too many unknowns at present, we’re committed to improving our data collection, insight and understanding of our customers and colleagues.

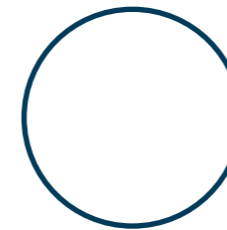
### Our Group Board

#### Abri Group Board - Gender and sex at birth

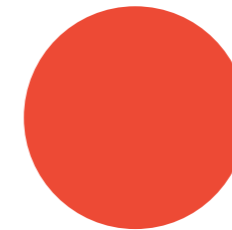
63.6% Female

36.4% Male

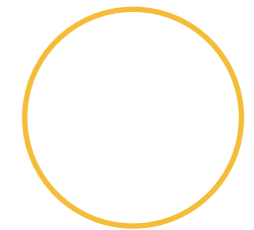
#### Abri Group Board - Do you identify as Transgender



0% Yes

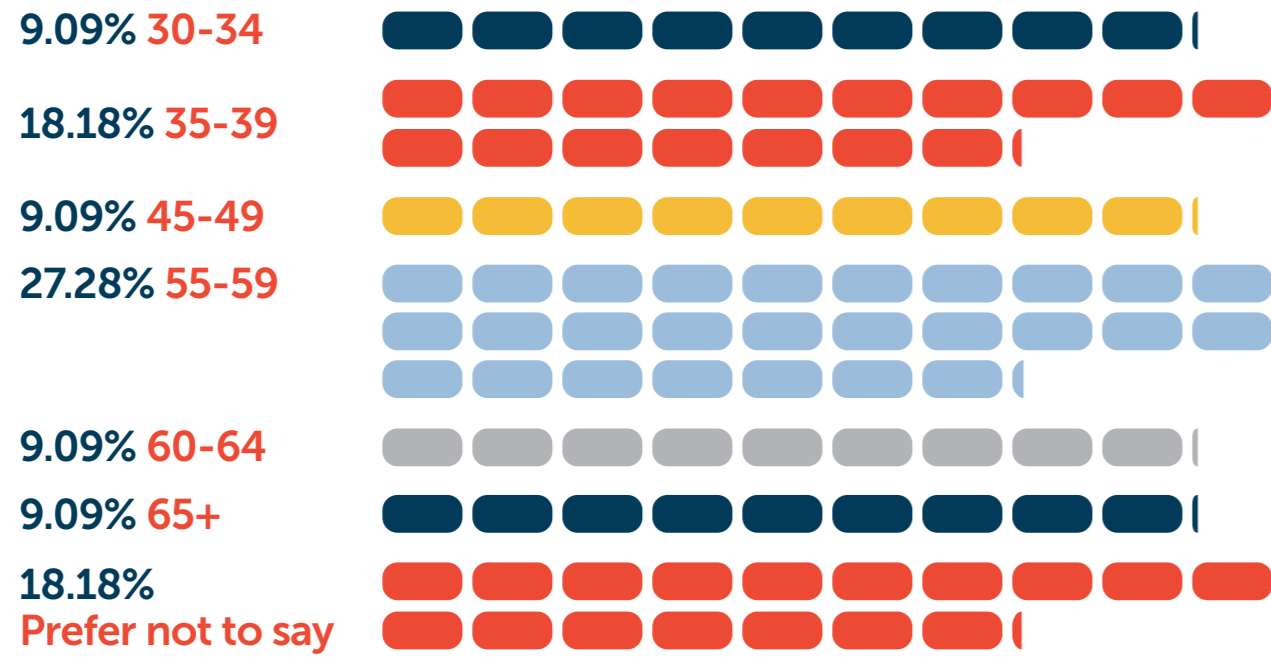


100% No

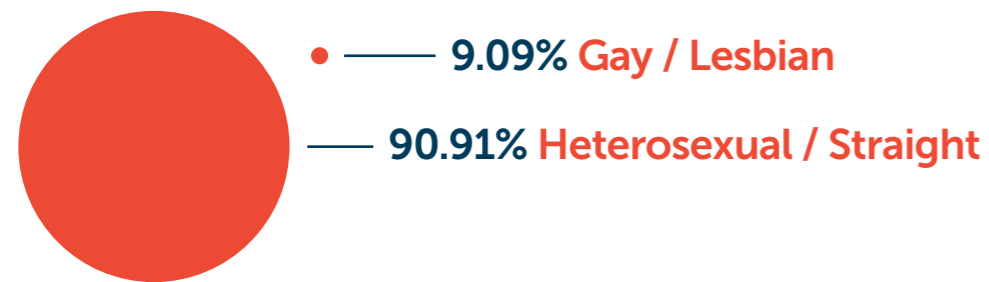


0% Prefer not to say

### Abri Group Board - Age



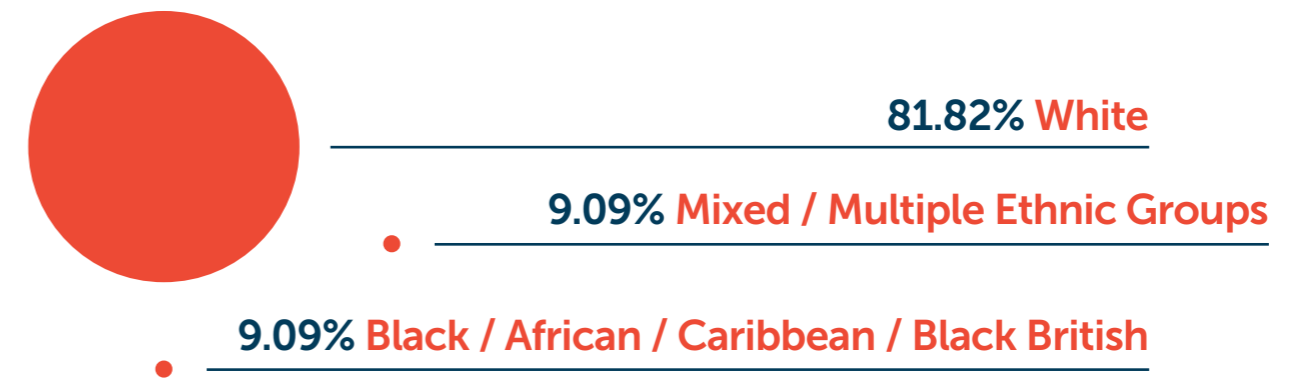
### Abri Group Board - Sexuality



### Abri Group Board - Religion or Belief



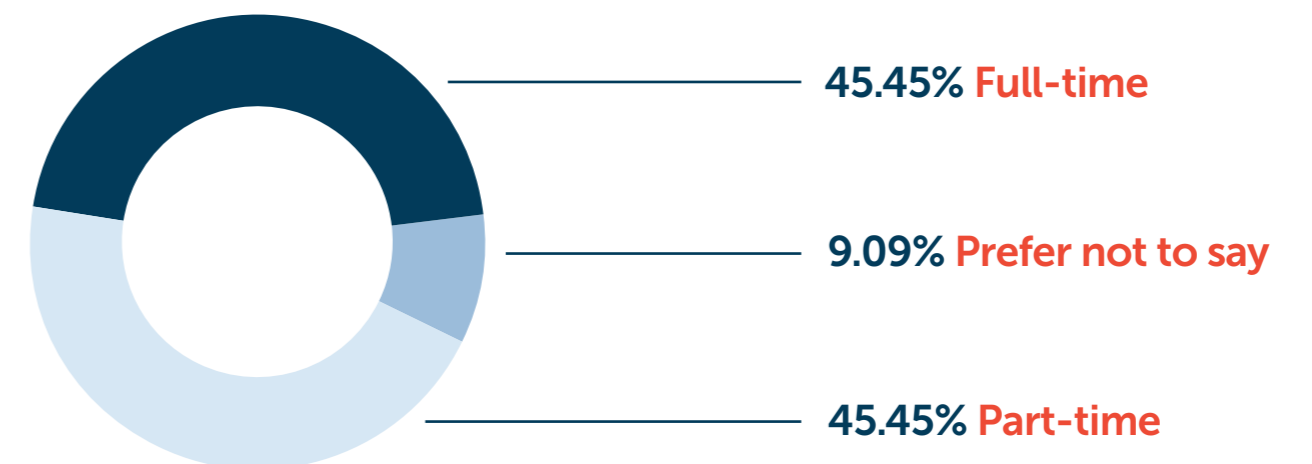
### Abri Group Board - Ethnicity Group



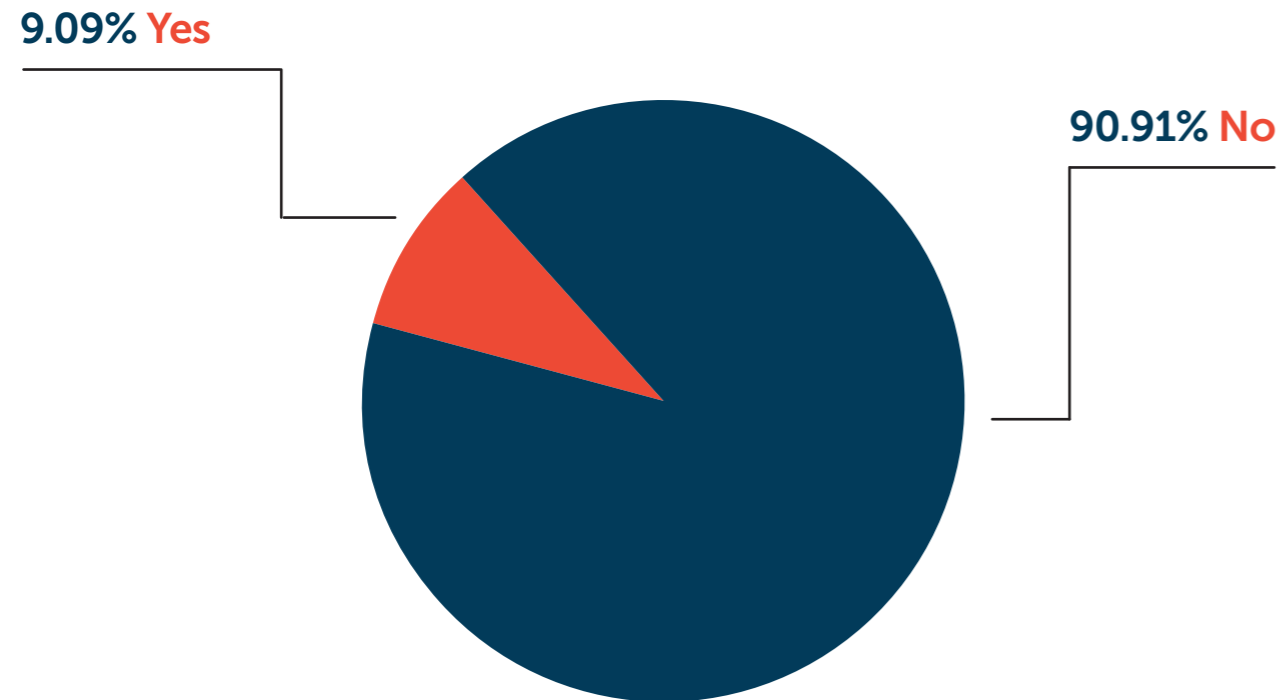
### Abri Group Board - Marital Status



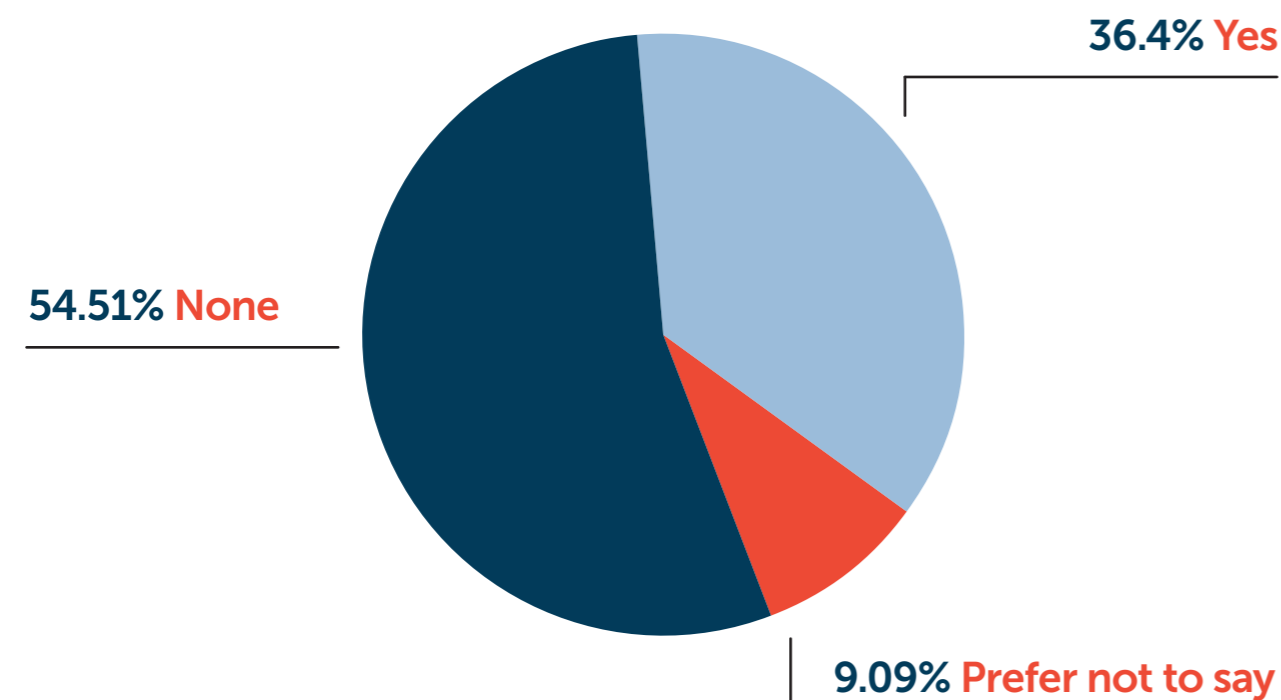
### Abri Group Board - Working Pattern



## Abri Group Board - Disability



## Abri Group Board - Caring Responsibilities



## Our customers

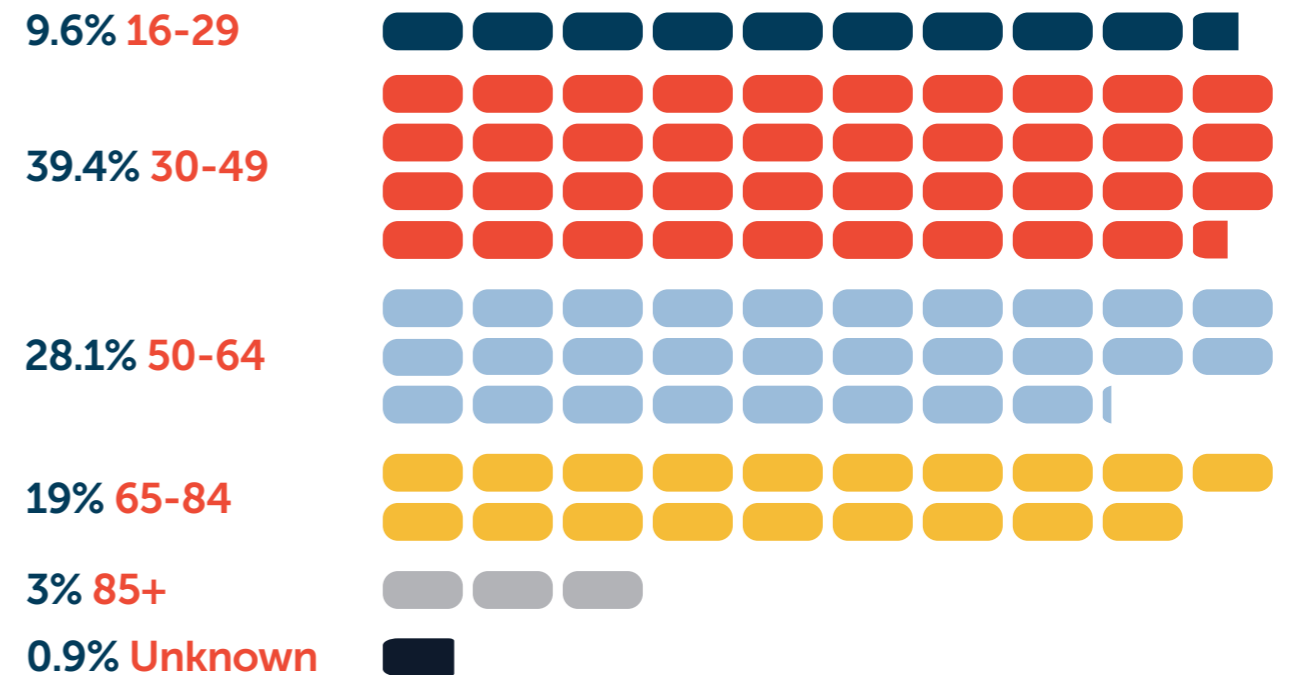
### Customer - Sex

More than 60% of abri customers identify as female.

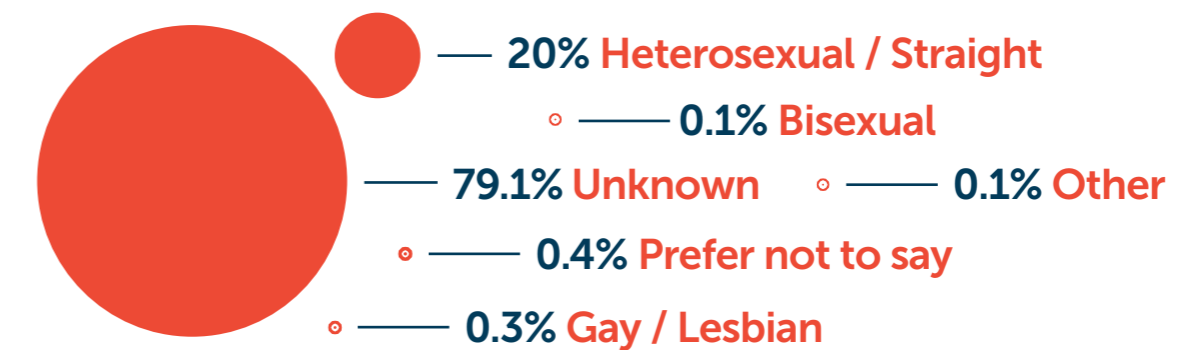


### Customer - Age

Over two thirds of Abri's housing customers are aged between 30-64, one in ten of our customers are under the age of 30 years old with one in five aged 65 or over.

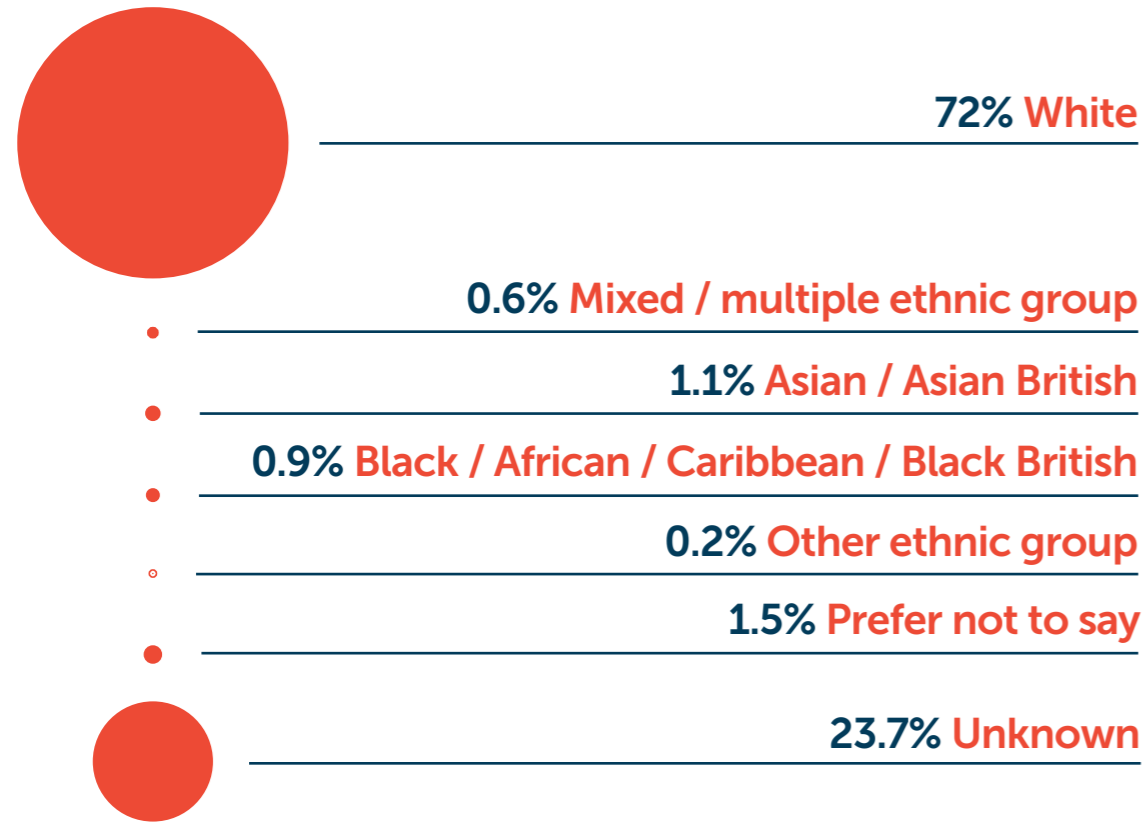


### Customer - Sexuality



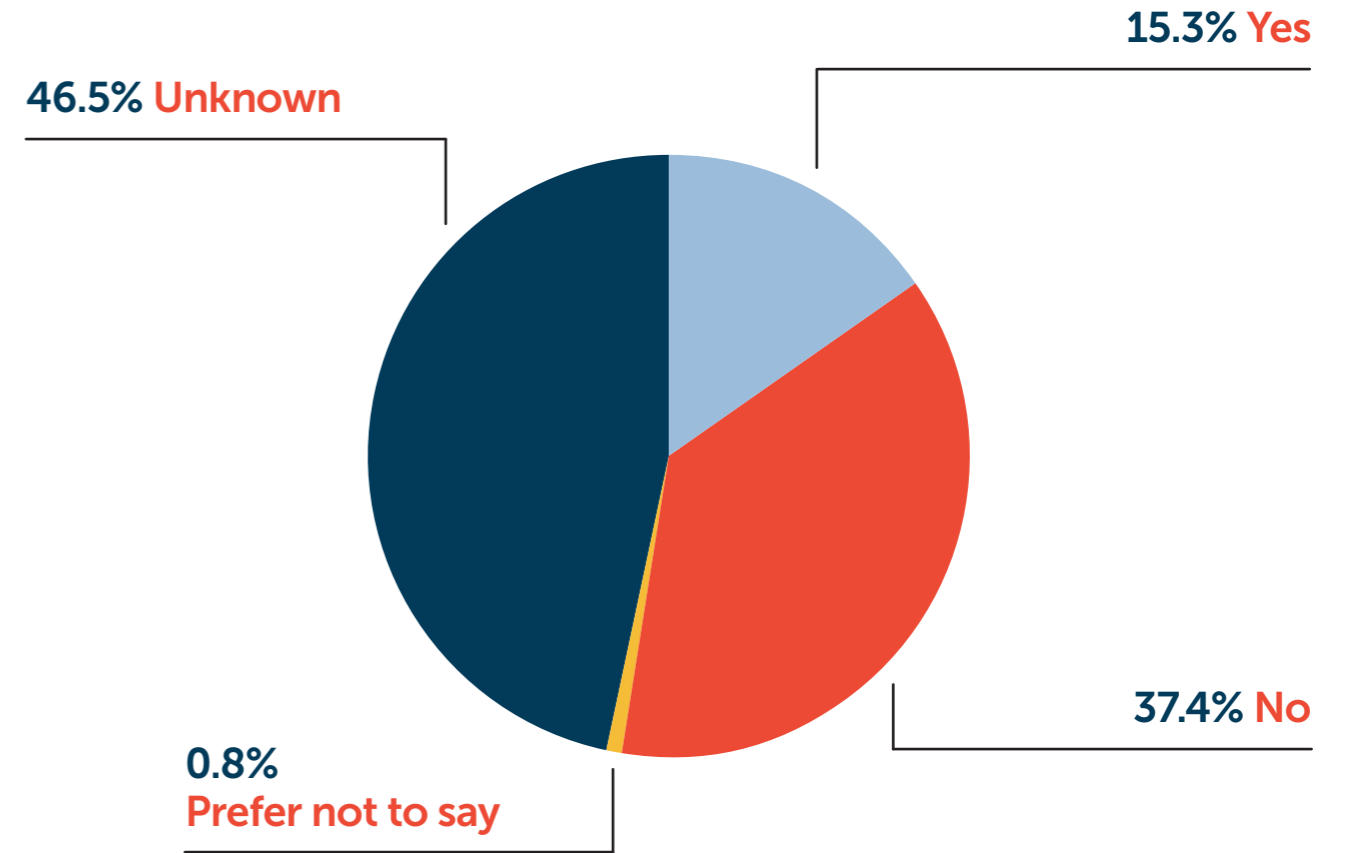
## Customer - Ethnicity Group

Abri's customers reflect a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. We only have this data for three out of four customers and are taking steps to increase this during the coming year.



## Customer - Disability

Over 15% of our customers are disabled, although we only have this data for just over half of our customers, something we are addressing.



## Customer - Religion or Belief

Prior to the creation of Abri, information on religion or belief and sexuality was only collected for former customers of Yarlington Housing. This is an area that we are currently addressing.



# Our colleagues

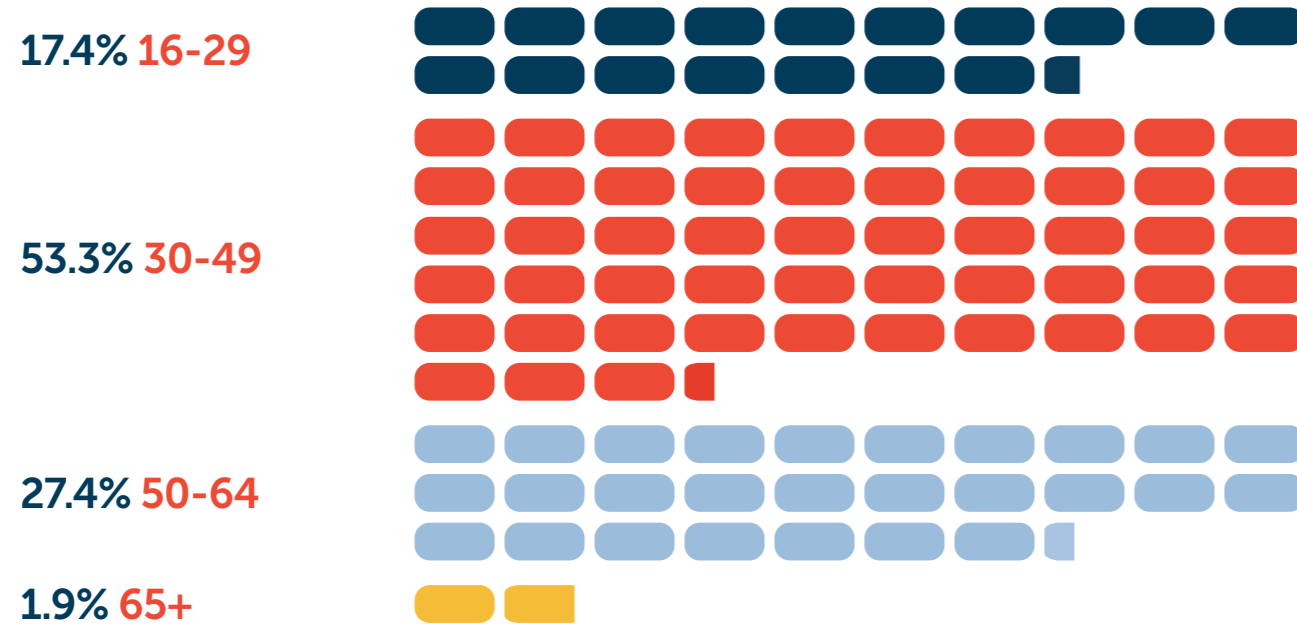
## Colleagues - Sex

Abri has slightly more female colleagues than male.



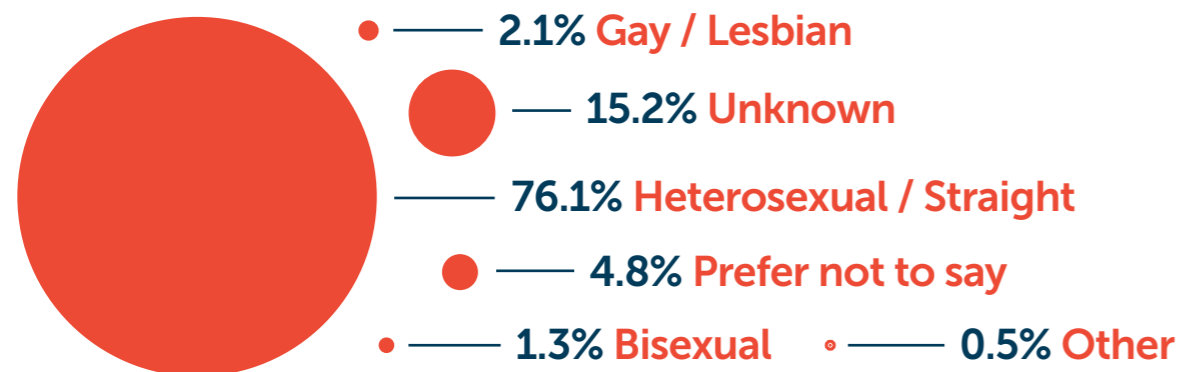
## Colleague - Age

Nearly one in five of our colleagues are under 30, with the majority aged 30-64 years old.



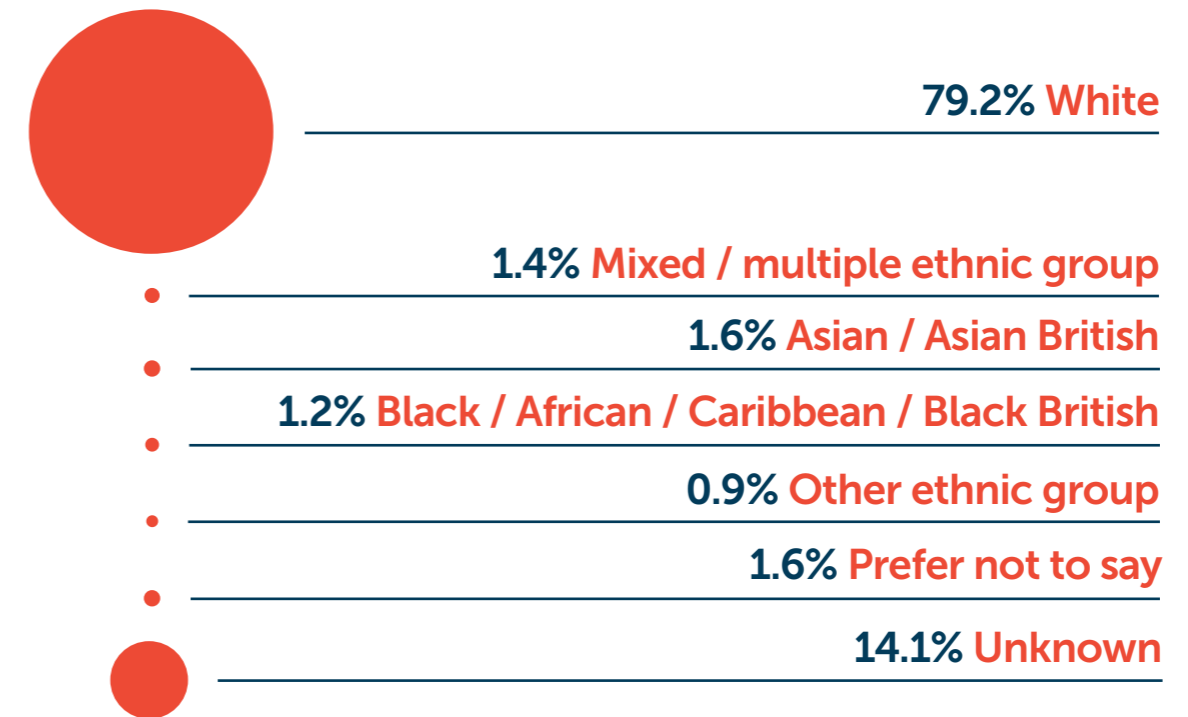
## Colleague - Sexuality

Over 75% of our colleagues identify as heterosexual.



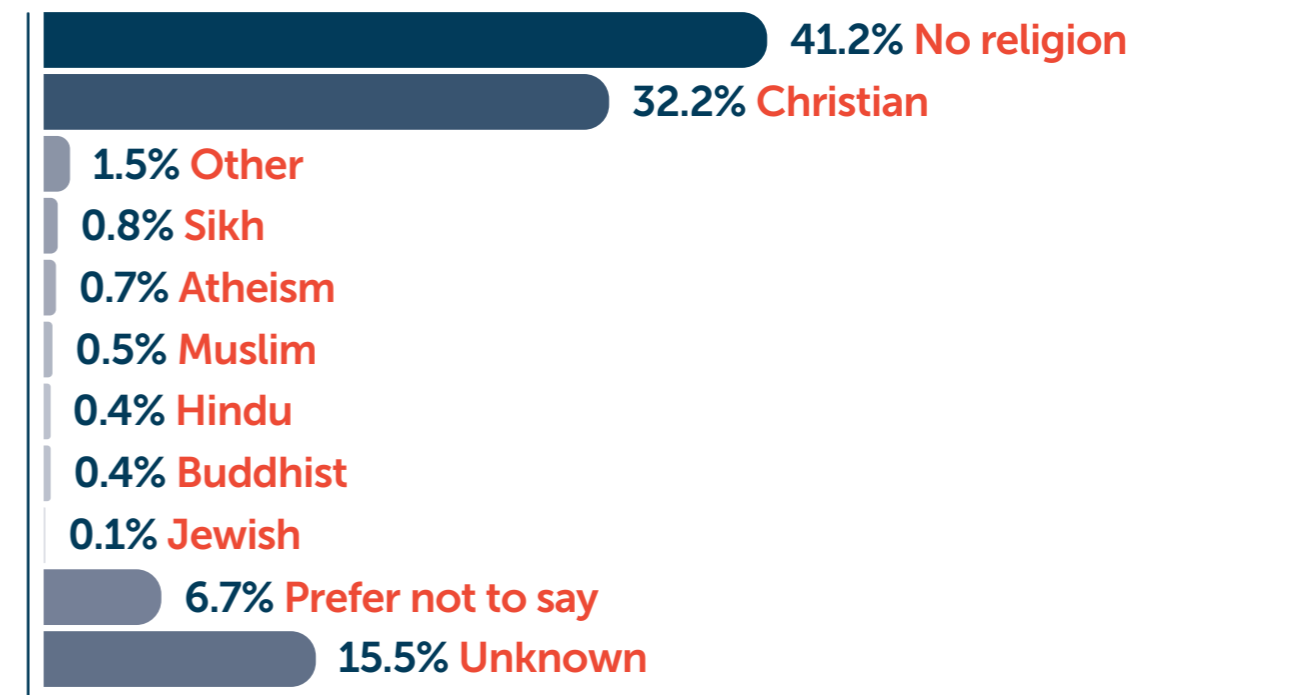
## Colleague - Ethnicity Group

Nearly four in five of our colleagues are from a white ethnic group. We still need to improve data in this area, as we don't know the ethnicity of 14% of colleagues, which is a common theme in the remaining areas.



## Colleague - Religion or Belief

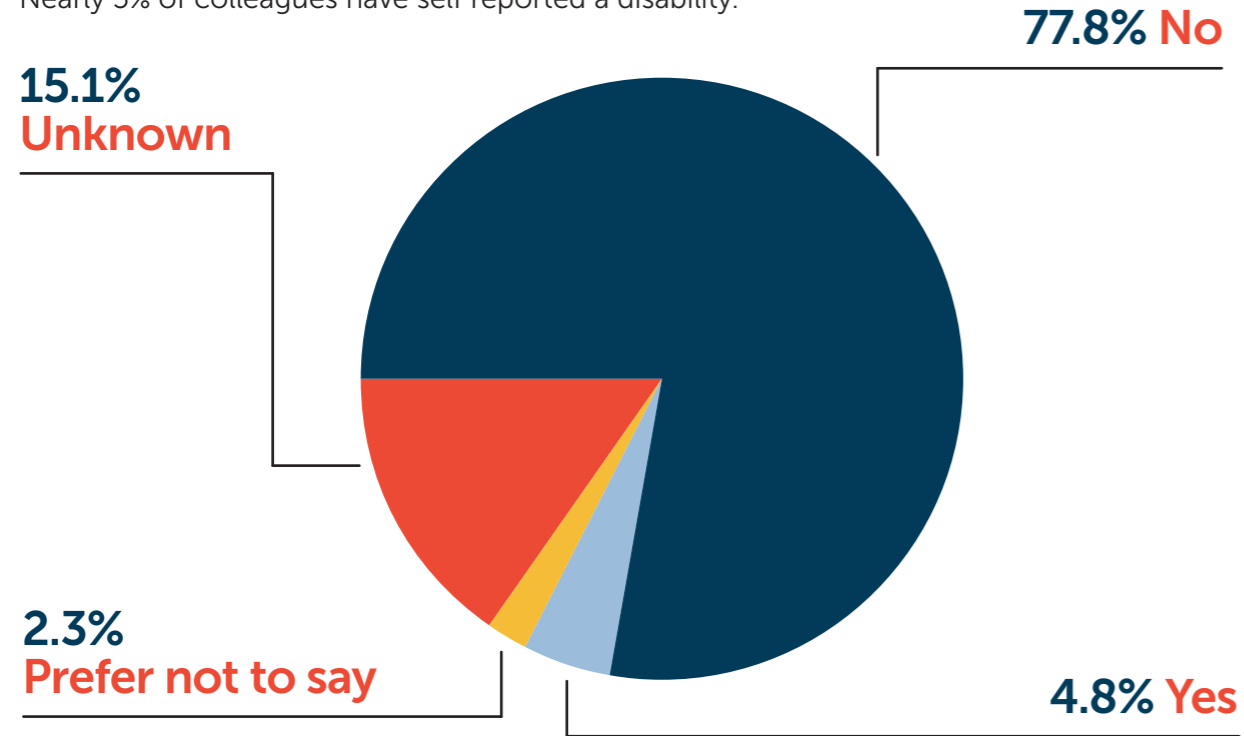
41% of colleagues have no religion, 32% identifying as Christian.





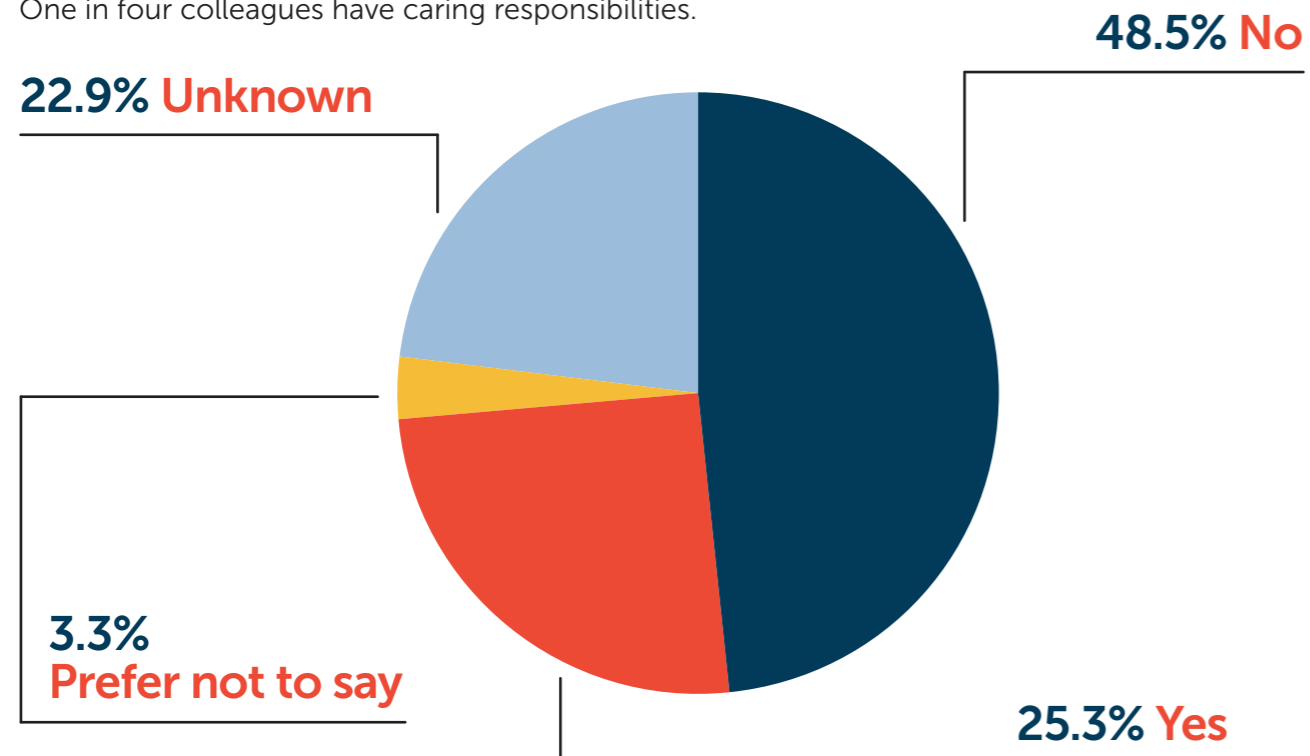
## Colleague - Disability

Nearly 5% of colleagues have self reported a disability.



## Colleague - Caring Responsibilities

One in four colleagues have caring responsibilities.



## Our Gender Pay Gap

The table below provides an overview our Gender pay gap.

Metric	Abri		
	2020	2021	Change
Gender Pay Gap %	11.2	16.8	up 5.6
Median Gender Pay Gap %	8.9	16.5	up 7.6
Gender Bonus Gap %	78.9	82.1 **	up 3.2
Median Gender Bonus Gap %	0.0	0.0	no change
% of males receiving bonus	91.5	97.2	up 5.7
% of females receiving bonus	90.8	95.3	up 4.5

## What lies behind the gender pay gap changes?

The following tables show the percentage of males and females joining, leaving, or receiving a change to their hourly pay rate during the year, Band D being those within the highest paid quartile and Band A the lowest paid quartile.

Quartile Band	Hires (339)		Leavers (117)		Out of cycle salary increases (278)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
A	39%	61%	45%	55%	61%	39%
B	40%	60%	56%	44%	81%	19%
C	58%	42%	36%	64%	44%	56%
D	57%	43%	64%	36%*	61%	39%
Overall	44%	56%	51%	49%	67%	33%

The following factors are likely to have contributed to the increase in the gender pay gap.

- During the year, Abri recruited a greater proportion of females into Bands A and B and a greater proportion of males into Bands C and D.
- Although there was a mixed pattern of leavers overall, there were three senior female leavers from the very top of Band D.
- Two thirds of out of cycle salary increases were given to males – many of these were changes to the salaries of trades colleagues as part of a harmonisation of terms and conditions with the removal of trades-related pay (the primary reason for the 81% spike in Band B).
- 64% of new hires who joined between December and April - who didn't receive the £250 bonus payment in December - were female. This is the reason for a slightly larger percentage of males receiving a bonus than females (96.8% vs 93.9%).

## Calls to action.

In keeping with our previous Gender Pay Gap report, our actions are focused on attracting, progressing and keeping women in the workforce. Our action plan includes new interventions to reduce the gap using the information and data that was available at the time of writing this report. New actions include:

- holding a series of listening groups to understand the barriers to progression within Abri
- using the talent and succession module within our Learning and Education platform to identify a talent pipeline within Abri
- establishing a women's network to support women at all levels in the organisation
- using Gender Decoder to remove the potential for bias in our job adverts
- considering becoming signatories of the Tech Talent Charter and Tech She Can Charter
- putting in place robust policies to support women experiencing bullying and harassment in the workplace to create a positive environment in which they can develop and progress their careers.

## Progress against our wider EDI objectives

We created an EDI strategy and action plan as a blueprint for creating an inclusive environment where everyone feels that they belong at Abri, colleagues and customers alike. It provided a framework for building on our engagement and involvement with customers and set out some new activities that might differ from what housing associations have traditionally done. We will review our EDI strategy in 2023 to align it with our refreshed corporate strategy and to reflect what we learn in 2022.

Here's a summary of the progress we've made against the eight specific objectives in our current EDI strategy.

### 1. Embed a culture of inclusion within the organisation

One of our first actions was to create a new sub-committee of Abri's Executive Board to provide representatives across the length and breadth of our organisation with the opportunity to discuss issues relating to inclusion and to hold Abri to account for any discrepancies.

Our Group Chief Executive attends the meeting as Board EDI Champion, while the meeting is chaired by members on a rotation basis. Our Board provides oversight and scrutiny of the EDI committee through our People and Culture Committee (PACC). Throughout the year, PACC provided a high level of challenge on what we've done as an organisation to promote inclusion and belonging and what we're planning to do next. For example, this included making sure that all business areas had an EDI focus in their functional strategies and that equality impact screening was carried out for all new projects before they could begin.

During the year we provided 'Everyday inclusion' training for our Board members on their role in implementing our EDI strategy.

**“ Throughout the year PACC provided a high level of challenge on what we've done as an organisation to promote inclusion and belonging and what we're planning to do next. ”**

As well as receiving insight reports and updates on our EDI strategy and action plan, the EDI Committee meeting includes a standing agenda item for corporate directors to come and share how they are tackling issues within their business areas, what they're doing to make sure Abri is fully inclusive for colleagues and that it provides products and services that meet the needs of our diverse customers and communities.

In addition, we reviewed our training and development programme and added a number of modules specifically to address issues of equality, diversity and inclusion. A successful example of this was a series of workshops called Let's Talk About Race that were attended by 50 colleagues. The workshops encouraged colleagues to be more confident about discussing race issues and provided a safe space for colleagues to discuss what prevents them from having an open and honest discussion about race. We also held a number of 'Get Curious' events to explore understanding and awareness of unconscious bias among colleagues, provided guidance to our managers on supporting colleagues during Ramadan and offered 10 days' additional leave for colleagues experiencing the impacts of domestic abuse.



We made some EDI training mandatory for all colleagues and created a calendar of notable dates to support learning, including LGBT and Black History Month and International Women's day.

We also identified the need for and began work on creating new courses including: Managing a Diverse Workforce, training for Diversity Ambassadors and Equality Impact Assessments.

## 2. Make a commitment to diversity and inclusion at all levels

In September 2020, we made a public commitment to inclusion by publishing our All In statement. This is a concise testimony for colleagues, customers and stakeholders that emphasises our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion in all of our communities.

We sent a personalised email to every single colleague providing them with a copy of our All In statement. Our Group CEO recorded and shared a video to explain in more detail the sentiment behind our statement. We shared the video across all our internal communication channels and published our statement prominently on our website home page. In addition, we shared, promoted and summarised its content through our social media channels. We also emailed our entire database of more than 1,000 stakeholders to let them know about our commitment.

Our All In communications received high levels of engagement, confirming what we suspected, that our colleagues are already very invested in our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion and that there is growing consciousness and momentum among our external audiences too.

We know that we do need to do more to encourage colleagues and customers to speak up and be prepared to comment on issues and concerns relating to inclusion and belonging.

## 3. Provide high-quality services that are accessible to all and continuously improve to meet the changing needs of our customers

We carried out 50 Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) to remove the potential for bias and adverse impact within our policies, processes and programmes. We also provided training to ten colleagues on how to complete the assessments, encouraging them to be insight-led and undertaken at the start of the process.

We embedded the EIA process into our programmes and projects and also made sure that an initial screening stage is undertaken.

We also include the EIA process in our policy writing guidance. We will not approve a policy or procedure without an accompanying EIA. Mainstreaming EIAs has meant that there is high engagement with the process and whilst they may be considered by some as onerous, on the whole our colleagues understand the benefits of completing an EIA.

A large proportion of EIAs (17) that were submitted for approval were undertaken by the Operations directorate followed by the Health, Safety and Wellbeing directorate (14). The EIAs were undertaken to support policy and procedure development. Four EIAs were completed to support projects or proposals from our People and Organisational Development team, including harmonisation of colleague terms and conditions. Seven were undertaken to support programmes, a further two were undertaken to support finance-related policy changes and two to support reorganisations of teams or services within Homecare. The remainder were high level EIAs to support initiatives such as community investment plans, understanding the impact of Covid-19 and initial screenings to support development projects.

EIAs that were undertaken to support organisational change, such as in Homecare, were predictive in nature, highlighting actions that should be undertaken to ensure that our processes take account of particular needs. An example of this is encouraging colleagues to disclose if they have a disability so that the appropriate reasonable adjustments are discussed within individual consultations and put in place so that everyone has equal access to selection processes.

**“ Our Community Investment Plans were written with partners, residents and other local stakeholders to ensure they represent the experiences of people they will benefit. ”**

Our work in communities is led by the needs of those who live there, and we know that the success of any initiative will be dependent on how relevant it is to those who will use it. Our Community Investment Plans were written with partners, residents and other local stakeholders, to ensure they represent the experiences of people they will benefit. We strive to involve our customers in the design and delivery of our activities wherever possible.

Good examples of this are our community cafes, Round About Café and Café 1759, which involved customers from the outset – from naming the cafes, designing logos, coming up with the menu – to ensure that what we were offering was something that everyone in the community could benefit from. We rely on regular communication with customers and partners to ensure our delivery plans remain up to date and we are able to respond to emerging issues within a community. Having embedded diversity impact assessments within our organisation, we are now focusing on using them in the design and delivery of our products and services.





## 4. Encourage and facilitate involvement from our customers in shaping the delivery of high-quality and accessible services

We know that some of the communities we serve are disproportionately disadvantaged. We want to ensure that everyone has access to equal opportunities. The Covid-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact on our communities. We were quick to recognise that some of our most vulnerable customers would be isolated so we introduced a Buddy Club, using internal volunteers to make calls to more than 2,000 customers to offer moral support and a crucial link with the outside world.

We also responded to the growing global social consciousness prompted by the Black Lives Matter protests and events. This included doing more to surface colleague and customer voices and creating stories that celebrate the contribution they have made as part of Black History Month. We will involve our customers and communities as we continue to review all our customer and stakeholder touchpoints through an EDI perspective.

## 5. Gather and securely hold EDI-related data on our customers, employees and Board members, and use this to identify areas for future service improvement

This is a critical area as data and insight are absolutely essential if we are to identify the disparities and other issues that require our attention and action. We are committed to leading with questions and using data, insight and evidence to increase our understanding of where we need to take action on equality, diversity and inclusion issues.

During the year, we launched a new campaign asking every single one of our colleagues to share more of their personal data by recording it on our HR system where it can be stored safely and securely. We plan to do this with customers but felt, if we are asking our customers to share their data, then we need to do it ourselves first.

We set ourselves an ambitious target for March 2021, that 100% of colleagues would provide data on the nine protected characteristics. We've more to do here where, at the time of writing, we had all required information for 79% of colleagues.

## 6. Recruit, develop and retain a diverse, talented and motivated workforce that reflects the communities we work with

At Abri, we value everyone without prejudice. We took some important steps during the year to ensure that our workforce is representative of the customers and communities we serve. Our efforts to recruit across the widest possible pool of talent were reflected in the award of Disability Confident Level 2. We introduced different recruitment pathways to remove the potential for bias and established a new, fully inclusive recruitment framework to use agencies that specialise in attracting diverse candidates so we can grow our potential pool of candidates. We also provided guidance on inclusive recruitment to all our hiring managers.

In October 2021, we launched a new development programme to which every single colleague had access. Housing Professional of the Future recognises that whatever our role, personal background, experience or qualifications, all our colleagues are housing professionals. The programme offers bespoke training and development opportunities but most importantly of all, recognises that anyone can be anything they want to be at Abri and will receive the support they need.

## 7. Facilitate the 'employee voice', supporting involvement from all staff to promote innovation, create a sense of belonging and make this organisation an employer of choice

We added some important questions about equality, diversity and inclusion to our all colleague survey 'Peakon' to provide a further opportunity for colleagues to air their voice on how they feel Abri is delivering on its commitment to inclusion and belonging. These include the following recurring statement which we repeat in each survey to track colleague's attitudes over time:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: ***I'm satisfied with Abri's efforts to support diversity and inclusion***.

Our latest survey score puts us in the 'good' range of the Peakon benchmark, which compares us with other similar organisations. We just missed being in the top 25% of the benchmark, which is our target. Many colleagues commented that they can clearly see Abri's commitment to EDI and we scored within the top 25% of Peakon for the question "A diverse workforce is a clear priority at Abri".

Some comments and scores indicate that we still have more to do. Key themes included: whilst colleagues can see the intention of our EDI strategy, they feel that they have not seen this in action, concerns regarding our gender pay and a desire for more colleagues to be involved in creating and implementing strategy and actions.

We hope that this, our first Inclusion and Belonging report, will provide some additional detail and clarity on the actions we have taken and how colleagues might be able to participate in Abri's future EDI plans.

During the year, we appointed 12 EDI ambassadors whose role is to:

- promote equality, diversity and inclusion which involves forming strong relationships with other parts of the organisation
- support others to deliver inclusive practices, including influencing other people's thinking
- act as organisational role models
- act as a knowledge resource
- review current resources and practices
- promote best practice.

The ambassadors will be pivotal to embedding EDI initiatives within their business groups.



## 8. Make the organisation a safe, fun and enjoyable place to work where everyone is encouraged to be their authentic self

In 2021 the tragic and appalling murder of Sarah Everard highlighted the need for all of us to do more to promote zero-tolerance of violence against women. This is equally pertinent for Abri in the workplace and in the communities where we work, where everyone should feel safe.

To enable us to better understand colleagues' experiences and understanding of violence against women and girls, we established a number of listening groups and carried out a survey among our wider colleague base.

In summary, 204 colleagues completed the Reclaim Our Streets survey. 78% of those who responded were female and 21%, male.

There were some key focus areas for the groups and within the survey:

- understanding women's experiences as they go about their daily lives and what they do to feel protected and safe
- highlighting workplace behaviours that can make women feel less safe
- using our influencing role to support projects in the community which promote behavioural change
- helping people to identify those behaviours that may impact women's safety
- allyship – one of the listening groups was a male only group – and discussing how men have a key role in addressing safety of women in the workplace and society.



The answers are complex and there are no quick fixes. The measures we put in place must have a tangible impact allowing people to live free from violence and harassment and where they can prosper and thrive, regardless of sex or gender. The survey results and a detailed set of recommendations were presented to and approved by the EDI Committee.

Actions include:

- using our influencing power to create safer streets
- creating a safety charter or pledge alongside other agencies such as the police and local authorities
- nominating a champion in the organisation who actively promotes women's safety, especially at night
- launching a communication campaign to demonstrate to colleagues and customers that we take women's safety seriously
- reminding customers and colleagues what to do if they experience harassment when working, going out or travelling
- encouraging reporting by victims and bystanders as part of our communication campaign
- designing public spaces and workplaces to make them safer for women.

We also discussed and agreed the need for a New Parent Mentoring scheme to support people coming back to work after a period of maternity leave. This scheme aims to make the transition back to work easier by matching individuals with people who have experienced it themselves and are able to provide support based on their own real-life experiences.

Surrogacy is increasingly becoming an option for starting a family for people who are unable to conceive a child themselves. So, we have revised and updated our surrogacy policy accordingly.

# Community Investment zones

## – keeping the area safe

### Respect allies

We also created a network of Respect Allies, colleagues from across the organisation who are personally committed to supporting colleagues experiencing bullying and harassment and who are available to listen and provide open, honest, non-judgmental support.

### How are we doing?: the KPMG audit

In February 2021, we invited KPMG to undertake an independent audit of the work of our EDI committee.

#### KPMG identified a number of areas of good practice, including:

- Abri's EDI champion is the CEO of the organisation and attends the EDI committee
- EDI committee members include the Head of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, the chair of ConneXus (Abri's staff forum) and a Board member
- Abri has developed an EDI strategy which was approved by the Group Combined Board (GCB) in July 2020
- EDI leadership training has been undertaken with the GCB
- report templates include a section on EDI implications that ensures owners of reports consider EDI within decision making
- the EDI Committee is well structured with a high level of engagement and discussion
- Abri is taking a visible leadership role in promoting awareness of different groups with protected characteristics. This includes events such as the Black History month and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) History month
- Equality Impact Assessments are used to facilitate and evidence compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty
- a "census" day for all staff was undertaken in March 2021 to encourage completion of diversity profiles.

#### KPMG identified the following areas for improvement which we have included in our updated EDI action plan:

- strengthen customer representation on the EDI Committee
- create a plan for the collection of customer data
- encourage a wider group of colleagues to bring issues and ideas to the EDI Committee for discussion
- finalise Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the EDI Committee (NB these were in draft at the time of the audit but have since been confirmed)
- complete missing EDI data fields for colleagues
- improve monitoring and reporting of EDI training.





## Case studies



# Black History Month

Abri have been long-time supporters of Black History Month, taking the opportunity it provides to start conversations, tackle barriers to equality and influence positive change.

In this blog, published internally as part of this year's Black History Month activities, Lou Taylor, an Abri Board Member, shares his thoughts on how to carry the momentum forward beyond October.

Black History Month is an annual opportunity to celebrate the influence and contributions made by the Black community over the years. But to make lasting impact, it's important to see October as a starting point rather than a one-off focus.

### Let's get everyone involved

Black History Month is a celebration of the vast, and truly rich, cultural heritage of the UK. It's a global moment to get everyone involved, while championing the history of black communities and elevating black voices. It's also a chance to emphasise the importance of allyship, proactive activism and the role of those more privileged to stand up and play their part in achieving equality of opportunity.

**“ Abri have been long-time supporters of Black History Month. ”**

With all these things in mind, it's important to get our colleagues involved in the conversation. Hold workshops, host informal coffee and chats, set up internal committees and working groups. Whatever it is, ensure representation from across the organisation and make space for every voice to be heard. Be mindful and aware of black voices too, consider holding sessions that prioritise hearing directly from those colleagues so that leaders can hear and be informed by their experiences first-hand.

### Be prepared to make mistakes, but learn from them

People and organisations are often held back through fear of getting something wrong. But often the only way to learn is through making a mistake and being corrected. This is really true when it comes to equality, diversity

and inclusion. Black History Month is a great time to speak to the colleagues, customers and communities we work with to learn more about the language we use and challenge biases.

There will undoubtedly be uncomfortable conversations, but it's only when those have been had that some kind of positive outcome will take place.

### Be present and aware in the community

As a sector we're in a fortunate position. We have access to diverse communities, and we can make a real difference. We can use that position during Black History Month and beyond to get out into the communities where we work and hear from our customers about what they want to see from us when it comes to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Whether it's by utilising assets like cafes to host informal events, launching campaigns to improve inclusion, or diversifying customer panels, any small step can make a big difference.

Ultimately, if we use our collective platforms to elevate diverse voices and make a real commitment to achieving true equality and inclusion, it's a great place to start.

**Lou Taylor,**  
Board Member at Abri



# Safer streets



Safety is a big priority for us here at Abri. We launched our Safer Streets action plan in October 2021. It sets out a number of goals which, when achieved, will greatly improve the level of safety among both our colleagues and customers.

It was developed in response to the tragic kidnap and murder of Sarah Everard and it's painful reminder that we can all do more to protect our colleagues and customers.

So earlier in the year, our Chief Financial Officer, Caroline Moore, launched a bespoke piece of research into women's safety. We invited colleagues to listening workshops, and we also sent out a survey which received more than 200 responses. Those findings were used to create an action plan which focuses on making real, positive change for our colleagues, customers, and communities.

Our Safer Streets action plan is another example of our commitment to improving equality, diversity and inclusion at Abri.



We'll be developing an engaging and impactful training offer for colleagues that supports our zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment in the workplace.



We'll be working to keep colleagues safe while out lone working by reviewing our use of technology and providing safety training.



We'll be creating a safer streets charter with other agencies, which will begin with a pilot in one of our operating areas.



We'll be supporting colleagues to report bullying and harassment in the workplace. We'll do this by creating a network of respect allies, and by making policies more accessible to all colleagues.



We'll be working to create a more gender balanced workforce, targeting areas that are traditionally male dominated.



We'll be launching a communication campaign which will inform colleagues and customers about our approach to creating safer streets.



We'll be introducing male allies across Abri who will support the Safer Streets initiatives and actively champion gender equality.



We'll be using our influencing role to help people in our communities feel safer through a proactive education programme.

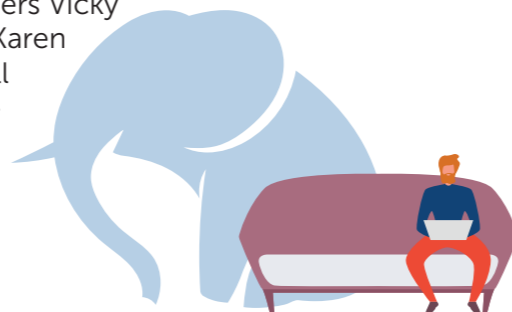


We'll be creating a culture of belonging across Abri to ensure that we engage and collaborate with women across the organisation.

# Elephant in the room.

We launched a new internal communication campaign to tackle sensitive issues that are of importance to our colleagues. The individual topics are colleague driven and the first included a discussion on the impacts of

the menopause between two of our senior leaders Vicky Beckwith and Karen Dumper as well as some myth-busting facts.



# Domestic abuse

One in four women and one in six men will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime with a further two women a week being murdered. Unfortunately, since the directive to stay at home, domestic abuse has increased dramatically with calls to agencies like Refuge increasing by 700% and sadly, an increase in fatalities across the country. We know that some of our customers and colleagues might experience domestic abuse during this challenging and unprecedented time and feel they are unable to access traditional support services. So, we established a new domestic abuse taskforce made up of colleagues from our Community Safety Team and our Tenancy Compliance Team to find new ways to reach out, support and reassure our customers and colleagues that we are still here to help.

**“ One in four women and one in six men will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime. ”**

For customers, we continued to provide telephone advice, referrals and signposting to agencies and work in partnership with the police – isolation rules do not apply if someone is in danger. Our colleagues in our trades divisions carried on delivering essential repairs such as lock changes or installing fireproof letterboxes to increase the safety of customers in their homes.

Our teams have rallied to provide emergency accommodation for anyone that needed to escape their current living situation.

We also proactively contacted customers who had reported a domestic abuse incident within the previous few months.

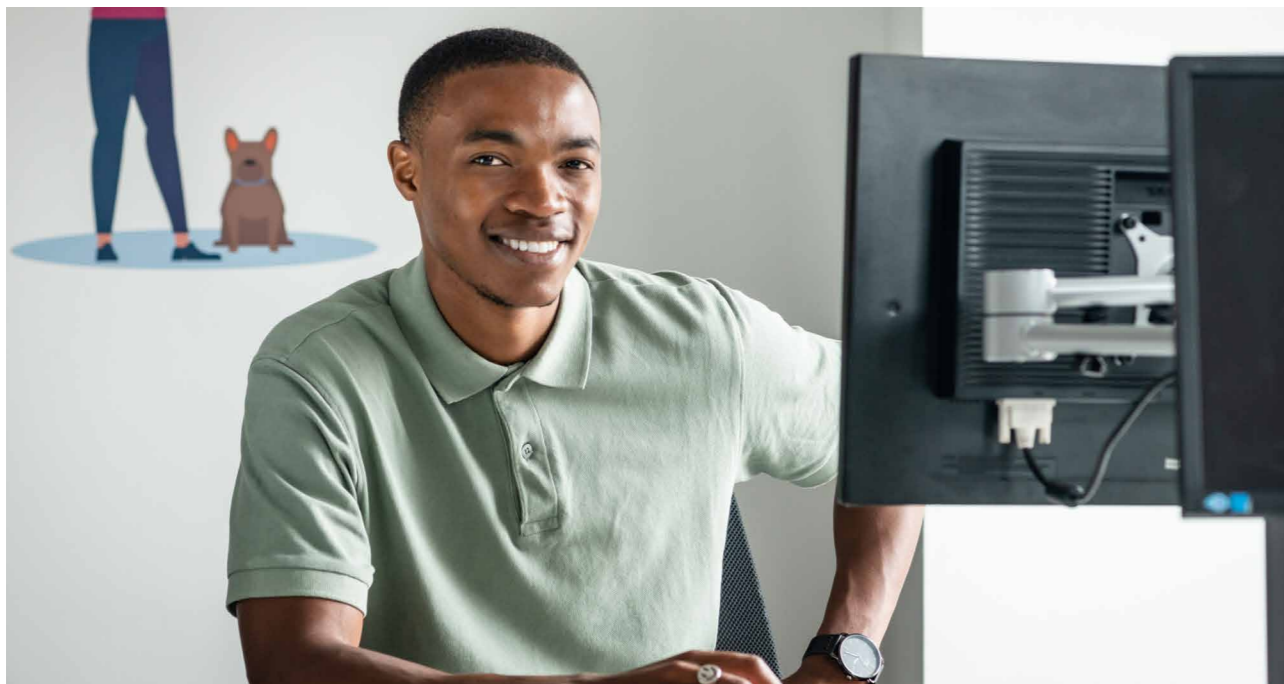
And we carried on providing our usual support services to vulnerable customers. For colleagues, we provided confidential advice and support to anyone in need including male victims and the LGBTQ+ community, without judgement. We urged anyone that was experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse to contact a member of the taskforce within our teams, or talk to their line manager.

We also provided support services available for perpetrators of domestic abuse. While any disclosures are treated in the strictest confidence, we have a responsibility to liaise with partner agencies if any safeguarding issues should arise. To support this work and to provide reassurance to our customers and colleagues, we backed the Government's #YourAreNotAlone campaign and asked colleagues to get behind the campaign by posting a picture with a heart drawn on their palms with the hashtag #YouAreNotAlone across Twitter and Yammer.

**Karolyn Barta**  
Housing Manager and head of Domestic Abuse Taskforce







## What next?

**Our EDI strategy is constantly evolving and we want to ensure that it is both relevant and impactful**

Here are some of the actions we'll be taking over the next 12 months.

- Looking at the role of our EDI committee. A recent review of the committee highlighted that although the Committee has made a good start in progressing our EDI actions, we need to do things a little differently. There will now be an EDI committee that will have a strategic focus and an operational group to support delivery of actions.
- We want our actions to be impactful. In order to do this we need data. Using results from our data collection and data analysis work will help us determine our priorities.
- Collecting EDI data from our customers so that we can better understand where we need to improve or adjust our services to meet need and also plan for the future.
- Creating more listening groups with our colleague representative body ConneXus that have an EDI focus so we can understand how we can embed EDI in the workplace to effect real change.
- Constantly revising our EDI learning offer so it is not just about legislation and compliance but has an array of interesting subject areas driven by colleague requests for more information or guidance.
- Implementing the actions from our Safer Streets action plan.
- Creating guidance documents on religion and belief and LGBTQI-friendly workplaces.
- Beginning work towards level 3 of Disability Confident accreditation – the highest level available.

## Targets and commitments

During the year, we appointed a new, dedicated analyst for EDI-related issues and began the process of developing a set of SMART targets. We also agreed some interim measures which are listed below.

Looking ahead, we're including equality, diversity and inclusion as one of our eight corporate objectives to ensure that it receives the priority it deserves. We will also, in future, report our service delivery standards and customer satisfaction measures by protected characteristic at board level.

### Interim EDI measures

- Our total workforce.
- Representation of protected characteristics across the organisation at all levels as a percentage of total workforce.
- Changes in representation.
- Actions taken to reduce disparity.
- Data to show how employees from underrepresented groups are moving through the organisation (e.g. promotion or attrition).
- Work Options shows the % of full time and part-time workers. This can be extended to include more flexible work options if data is available (e.g. job share).
- Acquisition – the % of employees from underrepresented groups hired across all levels in the organisation.
- Promotion – the total of promotions for employees from underrepresented groups at all levels in the organisation.
- Attrition – the number of employees from underrepresented groups that have left the organisation and have not been replaced across all levels.
- The addition of diversity and inclusion questions into our Peakon survey which will provide insight into whether efforts to increase inclusion among a growing diverse workforce are effective. They can also pinpoint problem areas that need correction.
- By measuring changes in the Net Promoter Score (NPS) so that we can better understand how our colleagues feel we progressing on our EDI journey. We want all our colleagues to feel valued and included in the success of Abri.
- Free text comments to help highlight any EDI issues or areas of concern.
- Diversity-related good practice – customer based.
- Diversity-related good practice – community based.
- Customer satisfaction broken down by protected characteristic.



## Our commitment

**“We’re committed to making Abri an inclusive employer and service provider that reflects the diversity of the communities it serves and where everyone feels they belong.”**

