ISSN: 2009-6208 (Online). Journal homepage: <https://culturalpolicy.ie/>

## Neurodiversity in the screen industries in Ireland

### Eleanor McSherry

#### To cite this article:

McSherry, Eleanor (2024). Neurodiversity in the screen industries in Ireland, *Irish Journal of Arts Management and Cultural Policy*, 10 (2), 114-130

#### Published online:

July 2024

#### Corresponding author:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Eleanor McSherry | University College Cork | Eleanor.mcsherry@ucc.ie | [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7088-9648](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Forcid.org%2F0000-0002-7088-9648&data=05%7C02%7Cflowe01%40qub.ac.uk%7C2873eaff13dd443eb25908dc8c986277%7Ceaab77eab4a549e3a1e8d6dd23a1f286%7C0%7C0%7C638539833329537966%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=dpDbrYubnAPa%2Bwjl8ObCKWwCectjgP4sH3WUurdB4Aw%3D&reserved=0) |

## Abstract

Academic and policy discourse have increasingly recognised the significance of diversity around screen industries. To date, there has been insufficient consideration of neurodivergency as a form of disability in the discussions of diversity within the screen industries. In particular, given the range and breadth of neurodiversity as an overarching concept, there needs to be further research on the role of policy interventions to support neurodivergent people accessing work in the screen industries in Ireland. Currently, various media institutions have policies around inclusion, equity and diversity including the British Broadcasting Corporation’s grassroots initiative from 2017, the *50:50 The Equality Project* (n.d), British Film Institute *‘BFI Diversity Standards’* (2019)*,* the Raidió Teilifís Éireann *‘Diversity and Inclusion in RTÉ – Reimagined for a New Generation’* (2018) and the UK All Party Parliamentary Group for Creative Diversity (Wreyford et al, 2021). However, none specifically address the lack of neurodivergent people in the screen industries: an issue that adversely impacts the potential of this sector to grow. The lack of working conditions that support this sector adversely impacts the diversity and representation of neurodivergent workers. There is a need to address this current absence of knowledge and policy within the screen industry about neurodiversity and for the industry to become more cognisant of this new neurodiversity movement, as a part of a more diverse reality. People who are neurodivergent are already working in the industry but are possibly afraid to declare their difference. This paper will take an interdisciplinary lens to critically analyse current policy measures to ascertain what is currently being done, or not, in this area of neurodiversity in the screen industry (UK/Ireland) and discuss what the industry needs to do to become more inclusive and more importantly, legally compliant. The aim of this paper is to raise awareness about this growing issue and to start a discourse that might lead to better practices, policies and support for neurodivergent workers in the screen industry. At the end of the article, it offers some possible solutions.

#### Keywords: neurodiversity in the screen industry; neurodivergent workers; screen industry; representation; screen industry policy

## Neurodiversity in the Screen Industries in Ireland

#### Introduction

Neurodiversity is a sociological concept that is emerging in academic discourse and research, in the fields of psychology, sociology and others (Singer, 1999; 2015, Silverman, 2016; Crompton, 2020). The recognition of the significance of neurodiversity is a fast-growing civil rights movement, emanating from the disability rights movement in the late 1970s. Yet it has to date had little impact within academic and policy discourse on the screen industry and even less impact on media policy. This research is primarily focused on the Irish and UK industries—within Ireland as the author is based within the Irish academic and industry sector, and the UK given the geographic proximity and relevance of the research there. It should be noted that the majority of research and policy comes from the United Kingdom as there is a lack of discourse around this area currently in Ireland. But this is changing. Both countries and the media have legal obligations under national and international law and government policies on equality, diversity, inclusion and disability. It is contended that there has been insufficient attention paid to the impact of neurodivergency on the access of people to work in the screen industries sector. For the purposes of this research, this article contends that there is merit in distinguishing or differentiating between disability as a broad concept and neurodivergency as part of the neurodiversity paradigm; they cannot be pushed into one. By taking this position, it is possible to interrogate existing disability laws and policies from Ireland and the United Kingdom with a neurodivergent lens, one that recognises the complexity and multiplicity of both disabled and neurodivergent conditions. It is acknowledged that there is intersectionality between neurodivergent and disabled communities.

Recently, the screen industries have been criticised for lack of recognition of intersectional and marginal rights. For example, they have been impacted by scandals due to how women, people of colour and other marginalised groups have been treated within the screen industries (Pasquine 2013; Arnold, 2013; Larrazet and Rigoni 2014; O’Brien 2013; 2019; Kohnen, 2016; Albornoz and García Leiva, 2019; Brannon Donoghue, 2020; Liddy, 2020). Therefore, it is contended that it is time that a discussion should also take place around the importance of recognition of the rights of those who are considered neurodivergent.

To put this issue into context, at present there are no official figures for the prevalence of disability in the Irish media workforce, let alone figures on neurodivergent workers (O’Brien et al., 2022a; 2022b) The lack of data on disability means this is a hidden issue. However, there are other ways to establish that there are neurodivergent workers in the industry. The Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union (BECTU), a screen union that operates in the United Kingdom and Ireland, surveyed their disabled members in 2021. Out of the three hundred and seven respondents over 73% declared they were neurodivergent or had a hidden disability (such as diabetes) (Wheeler, 2022). In addition, experiential evidence from a panel hosted by the University College Cork and Screen Ireland at the Galway Film Fleadh on ‘Neurodiversity in the Screen Industry’ in July 2023; in a room of over 100 industry members, many were identified as neurodivergent (McSherry, 2023). Another place where there is evidence of neurodivergent workers in the Irish screen industry is the course, ‘Continuing Professional Development in Neurodiversity in the Screen Industry’ designed by University College Cork Adult Continuing Education for Screen Ireland, which has had over sixty students in the last two years. Within this group of students, half identified as neurodivergent and are currently working in the Irish screen industry. All have stated they are struggling or have struggled in the past (University College Cork, n.d.). Even without official data, there is evidence that there are workers who are neurodivergent working in the Irish industry. In contrast to this, the United Kingdom has collated some estimated figures via industry produced reports which set out the prevalence of disabled workers in specific sectors within the industry. For example, it is estimated by the United Kingdom Screen Alliance that 12% of the workers who work in visual effects (VFX), animation and the postproduction industry are disabled, nearly 80% of these are neurodivergent (United Kingdom Screen Alliance, 2019). The United Kingdom Creative Industry Council (2021) estimates that 20-30% of the workforce in the creative industries are neurodivergent.

Two pieces of recent research in the United Kingdom will show that there is a need for more action, BECTU’s research (Wheeler, 2022) and research for the organisation Neurodiversity in Business (McDowall et al., 2023). McDowell et al. (2023) surveyed over five hundred companies in the United Kingdom that represented many different industries, including large media organisations. Both reports stated clearly that neurodivergent people are suffering in industry. Some of the issues they have raised include that there is a lack of accommodations or understanding of the types of neurodivergency, that accommodations are often not provided; there is a fear that if people declare a disability, they will lose employment, limited work locations, bullying, discrimination; and lack of flexibility. Some expressed that their employer is sceptical about their disability and the workers feel pressure to put up with adverse conditions to keep their jobs. What these neurodivergent workers wanted was proactive education, understanding of a person’s legal rights but also that employers act upon requests for accommodations and create a culture of inclusion in the workplace. The research called for more initiatives, better policies and a concerted effort by employers to retain the employees. A very small number did state that they were being treated well but this figure was at less than 5% (Wheeler, 2022; McDowall et al., 2023).

This article employs a critical analysis towards existing policies that support working with a neurodivergency in the screen industry (Holland and Novak, 2017). It will illustrate how current policy frameworks and practices are not set up to support neurodivergent people in the screen industry. In order to carry out this analysis, this article will first explore the development of the concept of neurodiversity. It will then analyse how both policy measures and industry developments attempt to address how to support neurodivergent people working in the screen industries. It will offer some reform proposals which may help the screen industries in Ireland be more diverse going forward. The research is carried out with an interdisciplinary lens, encompassing disability studies, media industry studies and sociology. This article aims to raise awareness about this growing issue and to start a discourse that might lead to better practices, policies and support for neurodivergent workers in the screen industry. It is contended that an examination of current policies towards neurodivergency in the screen industries in Ireland is important precisely because of the complexity of the concept and the multiplicity of policy measures that may serve to support neurodivergent people to work in these industries.

#### An exploration of the concept of neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is a broad umbrella sociological concept; that is, it is not a medical or scientific construct, however, it does include the medical reality of the conditions it encompasses and the social barriers its community faces. The term neurodiversity originated in Australia. It was developed by Judy Singer, a sociologist who was re-evaluating the 'myth of the normal brain'. Having been just diagnosed with autism, Singer concluded that society is full of diversity with each brain unique, therefore theoretically, all people are neurodivergent (Singer, 2016). The complexity of coming up with one definition of neurodiversity points to the complexity of developing policies that support neurodivergent people working in the screen industries. Nevertheless, the solutions proposed by current policy measures are not sufficiently broad to support the multiple variations in neurodivergence in society.

Neurodiversity can be broadly defined as an approach to learning and disability that suggests diverse neurological conditions appear as a result of normal/slight variations in the human genome. According to the National Symposium on Neurodiversity in 2011, held at Syracuse University, cited in Disabled Word (2022) neurodiversity is defined as:

... a concept where neurological differences are to be recognized and respected as any other human variation. These differences can include those labelled with Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyscalculia, Autistic Spectrum, Tourette Syndrome, and others.

As a concept, it can also cover mental health and other neuro-differences. The emergence of the concept of neurodiversity has now grown into an international movement that is leading to the emergence of new ethical, theoretical and ideological debates. We can see that the existing definition of the concept of neurodiversity is broad, fluctuating, open and subject to ongoing developments and re-definitions. Therefore, it is a challenge to develop coherent policies that support neurodivergence in the screen industries in all its multiple forms.

The foundational neurodiversity movement was made up of autism advocates, like Jim Sinclair (1993), Harvey Blume (1998), Judy Singer (1999; 2016), and Steve Silverman (2015) to name the most prominent members, along with other neurodivergent advocates and activists that spearheaded the emergence of the neurodiversity movement and the creation of the concept (Kapp, 2020; Harris, 2023). This movement began as a small group of autistics that simply were striving for acceptance, understanding and equity, not unlike the disability rights movement in the 1970s. This movement has now gone global. It includes neuro-minorities such as autistics, people with attention deficit disorder, Tourette’s syndrome, people with mental health issues, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and many more. Its members are looking for equity, parity, better representation and legal changes to support and resource the people who are neurodivergent, to work and live without any hindrance. Neurodiversity is an ever-evolving concept and movement, where its merits and constructs are being debated and its parameters are changing regularly. This exponential growth of the movement has led to an interest in neurodiversity by researchers, academics and industry. How the screen industry has dealt with this concept and its movement has only begun to be compared with other industries, though this article will show it needs to do more (McSherry, 2021).

The screen industries, for the purposes of this article are defined as including the television broadcasters, film bodies and streaming companies. In order to analyse the institutional measures taken, and the policy measures put in place to support neurodivergent people to work in the screen industries, it is useful to establish existing policies towards disability broadly. It is contended that there are insufficient measures in place currently to support people with disabilities to work in the screen industries. It is time that a discussion should also take place around the many different depictions of disability, especially neurodivergency, as a perceived ‘hidden disability’, in the media, as there little written on it. Most of the current research on the subject of neurodiversity in the media, which is interdisciplinary, are dominated by the problematic representations of the conditions/neurotypes of neurodiversity on the screen and authenticity of these representations rather than the issues neurodivergent workers face within the industry (Draaisma, 2009; Murray, 2008; Hacking, 2006; 2007; 2009; 2013; Freeman Loftis, 2018; Morgan, 2019; Kolakowski, 2018; Wolff, 2018; Audley, 2020). If there was more of a neurodivergent presence within screen industries, then this might change the depictions and the stories constructed for the screen.

#### The current policy landscape

Having set up the broad definition of neurodivergence and pointed to the importance of representation both on and off screen, this article now interrogates current policy measures in Ireland to illustrate that there is potential to develop supports for neurodivergent people in the screen industry in a way that can encourage diversity, equity and inclusion. This article focuses on reports, strategies and policies in both Ireland and the United Kingdom. It must be noted that setting out the Irish context and policy can be challenging as there is little data on diversity broadly and even less research on neurodiversity in the screen industry in Ireland. From observation, it is evident that the Irish screen industry traditionally has a very poor history when it comes to the representation of disability on the screen, behind the camera, in production and in content creation, and there has been little exploration as to why this is the case. For example, the Irish screen industry has not even produced any statistics of its own on disability employment rates in the industry let alone addressing the issue of employment of neurodivergent people. Instead, data has been generated by disability charities and an independent statutory body. However, these statistics are focused predominantly on representation of people with physical disabilities. O’Brien et al. suggest that there are relatively few people working on productions who identify as neurodivergent or have disabilities (O’Brien et al., 2021). This might arise because people may be unwilling to admit they have a hidden disability (see van den Eynde et al., 2016).

There are several international measures of relevance. For example, the United Nations *Conventions on the Rights of People with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2006) was only ratified in Ireland in March 2018. Many articles in this convention are of relevance to the Irish screen sector. For example, Article 30 which deals with equality of participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport and Article 27 relates to access to work and employment. There are also several legislative measures in Ireland covering equality, diversity and inclusion like the *Equality Acts 1998–2015* and the *Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Policy* 2022 (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2020a; 2020b). However, it is evident that within considerations of equality diversity and inclusion the policy discourse is dominated by issues of race and gender, and not disability. This very point was highlighted by Jack Thorne where he stated that disability was the afterthought in equality, diversity and inclusion policy and strategy in the screen industry.

At a time when disabled people are still being ignored TV has a responsibility. The empathy box has a responsibility and yet, disability is the forgotten diversity. That one everyone leaves out of speeches, gender, race, sexuality, and disability is relegated out. In conversations about representation, in action plans, and in planning disability is confined to the corner. It remains an afterthought … commissioners haven’t taken the opportunity to tell disabled stories. There are few disabled people in front of the camera and even fewer behind it. TV has failed disabled people. Utterly and totally (Thorne, 2021, 13.50-15.13 mins; 15.20-15.45mins).

While his comments were related to the media in the United Kingdom, his quote equally applies to the Irish context. Within an Irish context there is currently no national policy within the screen industries that directly addresses neurodivergency or hidden disabilities, as a part of diversity. There is also a lack of definitions of what ‘diversity’, ‘inclusion’ and ‘disability’ even mean in the relevant policy and sector documents.

#### Policy Initiatives in the Irish Screen Industries

There have been a number of recent policy initiatives in the Irish screen sectors which are of relevance. In 2018, the Irish public service broadcaster Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTE) commissioned its *Diversity and Inclusion—Reimagined for a New Generation* 2019-2020 Strategy (RTÉ, 2018). The report recommendations include a desire to increase representation of the disabled from 5% to 8% on and off the air, educating the workforce on diversity and inclusion, increasing policies and more practice to reflect this and an action plan for implementation. RTÉ has also appointed an EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) officer to ensure that the recommendations are implemented by 2030. However, without current baseline statistics, it is difficult to ascertain whether these are ambitious targets or already reached.

In 2021, the *RTÉ & COVID-19—Diversity and Inclusion and meeting public needs* report (Culloty & Kearns, 2021, p. 20) was the first report to reference neurodiversity. It was mentioned in the context of the need for ‘raising awareness’ of the concept along with a list of others. This was a fleeting mention, but it illustrates that there was a recognition of the existence of the concept. Since coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, RTÉ and other Irish broadcasters are working on workshops, talks, awareness/unconscious bias training and tying production investment to better equality, diversity and inclusion policies in independent productions that they fund. For example, Screen Ireland’s *Pathways Diversity, Equity and Inclusion* (Film, TV Drama, TV Unscripted and Documentary) funding scheme had its first pilot iterations in 2021 and 2022, established to fund diverse and underrepresented groups (Screen Ireland, n.d.) and the new *Animation Pathways* Fund 2023, which is providing further funding to provide work opportunities ‘on productions for those from diverse and under-represented communities and those where access to the industry would historically be limited’ (Screen Ireland, n.d.).

Government bodies that provide regulation and funding are also following this lead. The former Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) (now Comisiúin na Meán) which is the regulator of both the public and commercial broadcasting sector in Ireland, has produced a *Strategy Statement* *2021-2023*. This states that it wants to ‘foster a media landscape that is representative of, and accessible to, the diversity of Irish society’ (BAI, 2021, p. 8) This commitment, they stated, would facilitate more reports and research to improve equality diversity and inclusion policy, which is very much needed. However, despite this rhetoric, there is little in any of these policies and reports that discusses neurodiversity or disability directly or openly, with few if any discussions of explicit accommodations for disabled people.

While the moves from the public service media sector are welcome, it is interesting to note that the Irish film industry, on the other hand, has been more proactive on developing specific strategies to address neurodivergent workers and content. In 2016, the Irish Film Board/Bórd Scannán na hÉireann (now Screen Ireland/Fís Éireann)’s *Building on Success* *2016 - 2020 Strategic Plan* (Screen Ireland, 2021) was dominated by gender equality and diversity, and little on disability specifically. For example, one of the key challenges that the report identified was very general: ‘embracing diversity and gender equality in all its forms and ensuring the participation and representation of the full range of diverse voices in Ireland’ (Irish Film Board, 2016, p. 3). There is an assumption that the use of the concept of diversity in this report is intended to encompass the concept of disability and neurodiversity, however without more explicit definitions or details of concrete objectives it is difficult to tell. Its more recent strategy, *Building for a Creative Future 2024* (2021), does not offer much more clarity. However, it is important to note that the 2021 strategy does offer a promise to invest in the talent and skills required for the future success of the industry through supporting capacity development with diversity, equity and inclusion at its core.

While there have been some actions, it is also important to push for policy interventions. The *Future of Media Commission* report (2022) was undertaken to decide how the media sector in Ireland can be viable and independent in an uncertain future that is due to unprecedented changes in technology, delivery of content and financial challenges. Significantly, the report was the first to set out what it means by diversity and inclusion. It defined it as follows:

In terms of diversity and inclusivity, the public includes particular groups within society and classes of person that may require special provisions to ensure equity of access to, and treatment by, media. In this regard, the Employment Equality Acts, which define nine grounds of discrimination including Gender; Civil status; Family status; Sexual orientation; Religion; Age; Disability; Race and Membership of the Traveller community, may be instructive. Other factors known to impair equitable access to media include socioeconomic status, educational levels, literacy levels (including digital literacy), language barriers and infrastructure or technological deficits (which can be shaped by geographical considerations such as regional or urban-rural disparities, for example, in terms of broadband quality) (Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, 2022, p. 25).

While it does not expressly discuss neurodivergent people it does state that disability is a part of diversity, and that there should be accommodations made to include these people. The other reports and strategies by RTÉ and Screen Ireland did not. There are a couple of main parts of the document that addressed disability but nothing specific on neurodiversity, these were in the equality diversity and inclusion (EDI), employment and disability conditions sections.

Here are some of the main points of note from the document. On ‘Equality, Diversity and Inclusion’ (Ibid, p. 5, 21, 46-48) the authors admit that there is little data about diversity or accessibility. This acknowledgement of the lack of statistics is important. For a government to produce a document about the future of media without even knowing how many people cannot access this media, it is a serious point to admit. However, they did state that there was a ‘strong economic and productivity’ (ibid., p. 47) case to be made for diversity in the media system. Another one of the recommendations was for ‘Diversity Boards’ to be put in place to promote equality, diversity and inclusion in production and in representation (ibid, p. 50) together with plans for the implementation and development of standards for diversity. However, the section on employment (ibid, p. 62-67) did not discuss diversity or inclusion which may be because of a lack of statistics. The report does state however that there is a need for the development and implementation of standards, discussing the example of the standards recently implemented in the United Kingdom, created by the British Film Institute. These were perceived as a good template upon which to base an Irish cultural version.

These positive elements within the document are very welcome. However, in the whole document, there was no mention of neurodiversity. This lack of recognition of a movement that is relevant to the disabled community in Ireland, which has been growing since the early nineteen nineties and where the statistics from the United Kingdom have shown that a large proportion of staff in the media industry are neurodivergent, is very telling. The National Disability Authority in their submission to the *Future of Media Commission’s Public Consultation* in 2021 requested that in the future the media (which includes the screen industry) in Ireland make sure disabled people not only have access to the media, in the right way (by provision of sign language et cetera) but also to be represented as they are part of Irish culture, both on and behind the camera. This is a recent report. If the recommendations are implemented, it will take time to see if they bring about change. The report does state very clearly that the public want change and want more diversity in the Irish media.

The above policy review illustrates some, albeit minor, shifts in perspective in the Irish landscape. However, the actions of Screen Ireland in implementing its strategic objective towards equality, diversity and inclusion are significant. Screen Ireland held the first seminar on neurodiversity in the screen industry in Ireland and Europe in October 2021, which I was involved in under their ‘Screen Talks’ series. It is also working on a suite of university accredited Continuing Professional Development (CPD) short courses on neurodiversity, wellbeing coordination, and possibly inclusion, diversity and equality with University College Cork’s Adult Continuing Education (UCC ACE) in the Centre for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (CIRTL) department. Significantly, these are the first university courses of their kind for the screen industries. Since 2022, workshops have also been held on neurodiversity organised by University College Cork’s Adult Continuing Education, facilitated by myself to Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ), Teilifís na Gaeilge, Cartoon Saloon, Lighthouse Studios, University College Cork (UCC) Film Department, University College Cork Staff, European Broadcasting Union Human Resources, Northern Ireland Screen, Ulster University, University College Dublin-School of Medicine and Equity/Equality, Cork Further Education Training Board (FET), Diversity and Inclusion sub-committees, with invites from other screen organisations in the United Kingdom and Europe for 2024. I also recently spoke on neurodiversity in the screen industry, in January 2024, at the Media Commission/Coimisiún na Meán’s workshop for the Irish Audio and Audiovisual stakeholders for their new *Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy* for this sector. Strategies tend to be aspirational and often contain little detail, they are guides rather than offer practical solutions. The real actions of an organisation are seen through their programmes, how they educate their staff, the conditions they put on funding and their initiatives, this is where real change is seen. Therefore, the actions of Screen Ireland and the other institutions in putting training and education in place are significant.

#### Policy directions in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom, traditionally, is perceived as more proactive and progressive than Ireland when it comes to policy and data on disability in general evidenced by the above cited reports. However, an analysis of the current policy landscape in the United Kingdom shows that there are only recently some indications of change. The ‘Creative Equals’ Equality Standard data (in Hanan, 2019) asserts that the creative industry has twice the percentage of neurodivergent people as the standard population. These figures are from the whole of the United Kingdom creative industries but it gives a good idea of how prevalent neurodivergent people are in these industries broadly. However, the United Kingdom screen industry itself has no policy, little data and little research on the prevalence of neurodivergency. The extant statistics show that there are very few disabled people working in the screen industry in the United Kingdom. As shows in Figure 1, in the United Kingdom regulatory body OFCOM’s *Five Year Review* *2016-2021* (OFCOM, 2021) data emerged from their report on television and radio which raises some interesting points. Disabled people make up only 7% of television employees and 8.2% representation of on-screen characters.

Figure 1: Representation of Disabled People in TV and Radio Workforce over the last five years (source Five Year Review 2016-2021, OFCOM, 2021)

A graph of different colored bars

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

There is no breakdown of disabilities in these reports. The report acknowledges that there are issues with the reliability of data as many people do not identify with or self-declare their disability. It is noted that many neurodivergent people do not declare at all. The 2021 report also suggests that there will be even fewer disabled people working in the industry in the next five years, and that there is a serious lack of diversity in senior positions and key decision makers, particularly from those with disabilities (Ofcom, 2021). The Ofcom report suggests some measures to take going forward. These include

* Refocus resources to retain, encourage career progress and senior recruitment
* The development of retention targets
* An improved data collection approach
* Be more transparent in their reporting of successes and failures

These reports highlight how diversity and inclusion is a collaborative activity. However, the measures must not be tokenistic. It will be interesting going forward to see what data will be collected.

The United Kingdom *Screen Alliance* (2019) released a critical report in 2019. The *Inclusion and Diversity in UK—Visual Effects, Animation and Post Production* report was produced in conjunction with *Animation United Kingdom* and *Access VFX*. It examined the inclusion and diversity in the United Kingdom’s visual effects, animation and post-production sectors. Its research filled the data gap that exists in the rest of the screen industry. While their survey was small, with only one thousand, one hundred and fifty respondents compared to the two hundred and eighty nine thousand employed in television and film alone (Creative Industries Council, 2021), it still showed that over 77% of this group were neurodivergent. There could be a number of reasons as to why they obtained better statistics than other screen industries. It is possible that disabled people in this area of the screen industry felt they could declare their disability that this was a place where their disability did not define them and that their job would not be in jeopardy if they gave this information. Neurodivergency was the highest percentage of any disability present.

There are other relevant reports on the United Kingdom sector, as well as the previously mentioned Bectu survey (Wheeler, 2022) and United Kingdom Screen Alliance (2019) report. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has a number of important policies. Its 2021 *Diversity Commissioning Code of Practice* *Progress Report 2019/2020* (BBC, 2021) notes that the first iteration of the British Broadcasting Corporation’s (BBC) *50:50 Project*, where the project started with tackling gender inequality, did not include Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers (BAME) or disabled workers. It now states it will look at authentic portrayal of disability in content creation meaning that it intends to bring in more writers with disabilities. This is a positive move, however, there are no concrete indications of how this will be enacted. For example, will the BBC expect people to self-declare, will a declaration be enough or will there have to be evidence produced? The commercial broadcaster Independent Television (ITV) started a new on-air marketing campaign in August 2021 (Independent Television TV Press Centre, 2021) to highlight the concept of *Invisible Disabilities*. This measure forms part of ITV’s commitment to help create culture change around disability perception and representation. These are not the only policies for these companies on diversity, but they are the main ones and while they are a great start, this progress is very slow. An example of this is the Diamond Project report on TV Production, *Diamond The Sixth Cut* which stated that so far, the measures that broadcasters have implementing are failing to improve representation on the screen or behind the camera (Creative Diversity Network, 2023).

#### New Directions

In contrast to the slow pace of reform in the public and broadcast sectors, the streaming companies seem to be moving at a much quicker pace. However, while there is no published data on employment figures, many streamers are putting policies in place that may force change. For example, Netflix’s *Inclusion Report 2021* (Netflix, 2021b), discussed its workshops around diversity, and its policies around language, privilege and ally-ship. It established a fund for *Creative Equity* in February 2021 influenced by this document (Netflix, 2021a). This fund is a €100 million fund to support underrepresented communities in film and television. The fund will also be used to back in-house initiatives to identify, train and provide job placement globally for emerging talent. Sony Pictures Entertainment (Robb, 2021) signed the Ruderman Family Foundation’s pledge where they promise to audition disabled actors on every new show. These are not only proactive but a recognition that actions and funding need to be put in place to force change.

#### Some thoughts on future directions

To conclude, this section offers some policy suggestions. While there has been huge progress on the recognition of disability and especially the concept of neurodiversity in the screen industries in Ireland and the United Kingdom there needs to be more acceptance of the fact that neurodivergent people are already working in the industry. Talent like Paddy Considine, Tim Burton, Stanley Kubrick, Billie Eilish, Sir Anthony Hopkins, Jules Robertson, Chris Packham, Jordanne Jones, Jane McGrath, Stuart Dunne, Tom Holland, to name but a few, have all acknowledged their neurodivergency. Recently James Martin was the first person to win an Academy Award for a short film produced in Northern Ireland. They are the people who feel they can declare their disability; others are afraid to declare.

This section sets out some suggestions to ensure that the Irish screen industries take on board their legal and moral obligations to help neurodivergent people to work in the screen industries. These suggestions incorporate the findings of the BECTU survey (Wheeler, 2022), Dublin City University’s Centre of Excellence for Diversity and Inclusion/Indeed (2020) toolkit, the *Neurodiversity in Industry* report (McDowall et al., 2023) and the *Creative Differences* handbook (2020) created by the Universal Music United Kingdom for the music industry.

* + Education — brings awareness, takes away fear, more training and better education. This should be designed with industry leaders in conjunction with bodies such as Screen Ireland and Comisiúin na Meán. This is already happening with Screen Ireland, who have worked with a neurodivergent screen industry course team based in University College Cork (University College Cork, n.d.).
  + There is a need for more accurate figures of the prevalence of neurodivergency in the industry and more research to guide any changes that are proposed within the industry, using the United Kingdom research as a model.
  + More opportunities, stronger policies and representation on the screen and behind the camera. This could begin with equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) policies which should incorporate neurodivergency and neurodiversity explicitly. These policies should include consultation with industry leaders and workers, unions and the Screen Guilds, similar to the work being done on race and gender. Any policy designed must be robust with realistic aims, goals and accountability, in alignment with current Irish legislation, like the *Disability Act 2005*, the *Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015* (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2020) and the *Equal Status Acts* 2000-2018 (ibid.). These policies must be reviewed to ensure that they are up to date. They should make explicit work pathways that are clear for progression and retention in the industry. Employers should be encouraged to be educated on neurodiversity in order to create informed policy to manage their neurodivergent workforce. Clear planning and pathways in the industry where talent is rewarded and up skilling is supported rather than focusing on traits and deficits.
  + Accommodations (basic accommodations are all that is needed) and resources should be provided. These do not have to cost a lot but benefit the whole workforce. As already illustrated, the right accommodations are vitally important for the employment of neurodivergent workers. This can only be ensured if the leadership is educated on the conditions/neurotypes of neurodivergency and the accommodations available. For example: flexibility of work practices, a culture of inclusion that takes away the fear of disclosure, adjustments are relational rather than transactional, routinely evaluating the provision, mentoring/coaching for management, informal adjustments are very effective in the transitional type of employment.
  + Government Funding — for production, supports, training and accommodations. This is already taking place on a small scale with Screen Ireland and its university partners but more could be done. Places on courses are already provided and paid for, but there needs to be more encouragement in the industry to take up these paid places.
  + Guidelines — that are created by the neurodivergent community in conjunction with the industry. There are already collaborations on guidelines for gender and race, through work with representative organisations and with government and organisational supported research such as Screen Ireland’s *Six Point Gender Plan* and their *Fís Éireann/Screen Ireland Gender and Diversity Plan* (Screen Ireland, n.d.) While there is no law to force companies to comply with guidelines, there are laws that protect disabled workers that could be enforced. Consideration should be given to offering incentives for organisations that comply.

There is an opportunity here for the screen industry in Ireland to be proactive rather than reactive and to develop best practices.

## References

Blume, Harvey (1998). Neurodiversity, on the neurological underpinnings of geekdom. *The Atlantic*, September. Available at https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1998/09/neurodiversity/305909/ [Accessed 5 May 2023].

British Broadcasting Corporation (n.d.) *50:50 The Equality Project.* Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/5050/> [Accessed July 2024].

British Broadcasting Corporation (2021). *BBC Diversity Commissioning Code of Practice Report 2019/2020*. Available at: <http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/reports/reports/diversity-cop-progress-1920.pdf> [Accessed 1 Oct 2021].

British Film Institute (2019). BFI Diversity Standards Criteria. Available at: <https://awards.bafta.org/sites/default/files/images/bfi-diversity-standards-criteria-2019-07-23_8.pdf> [Accessed 1 Oct 2021].

British Film Institute and Doc Society (2021). FWD-Doc (Filmmakers with Disabilities) Engagement Pack. Available at: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5dd1c2b5a0f7a568485cbedd/t/60b9076aa44b10660378547b/1622738803861/FWD-Doc+Engagement+Pack+FINAL+2Jun21.pdf [Accessed 22 Jan 2022].

Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (2021). BAI Strategy Statement 2021-2023. Available at: <https://www.bai.ie/en/about-us/our-strategic-goals/> [Accessed 1 Oct 2021] .

Creative Diversity Network (2023). *Diamond - the Sixth Cut.* Available at: <https://creativediversitynetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Diamond-The-6th-Cut-July2023.pdf> [Accessed 10 Jan 2024].

Creative Industries Council (2021). TV & Film Employment. Available at: https://www.thecreativeindustries.co.uk/facts-figures/industries-tv-film-tv-film-facts-and-figures-tv-film-employment [Accessed 1 Sept 2022].

Crompton, Catherine (2020). Autism, Neurodiversity and the Humanities. In: Fletcher-Watson, Ben. and Phillips, Jana (eds.) 2020. *Humanities of the Future – Perspectives of the Past and Present* - IASH 50th Anniversary Symposium. Edinburgh: The Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities. 45-58.

Culloty, Eileen and Kearns, Colm (2021). *RTÉ & COVID-19—Diversity and Inclusion and meeting public needs.* Dublin: DCU & FuJo.

Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltact, Sport and Media, (2022) *Report of the Future of Media Commission*. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/e2cbb-tuarascail-an-choimisiuin-um-thodhchai-na-mean-straiteis-feidhmithe-agus-plean-gniomhaithe/> [Accessed 1 Apr 2023].

DCU Centre of Excellence for Diversity and Inclusion and Indeed (2020). *Hiring Managers* *Toolkit for Neurodiversity*. Dublin.

Disabled World (2022). What Is: Neurodiversity, Neurodivergent, Neurotypical? Disabled World.com [online]. Available at: [www.disabled-world.com/disability/awareness/neurodiversity/](http://www.disabled-world.com/disability/awareness/neurodiversity/) [Accessed 2 Feb 2022].

Draaisma, Douwe (2009). Stereotypes of autism. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society Biological Sciences*, (364),1475-1480.

GettyNellis.com (2021). Neurodiversity/Neurominority. Available at: <https://www.gethynellis.com/2021/03/neurodiversity-the-workplace-how-can-you-support-neurodiverse-staff.html> [Accessed 1 May 2022].

Government of Ireland/Rialtas na hÉireann (2005). *Disability Act 2005*. Available at: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2005/en/act/pub/0014/> [Accessed 14 Nov 2013].

Hacking, Ian (2006). Making up People – Clinical Classifications. *London Review of Books*, 28 (16). Available at <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v28/n16/ian-hacking/making-up-people> [Accessed June 2024].

Hacking, Ian (2007). How we have been learning to talk about Autism: A Role for Stories. In: Kittay, Eva Fedder & nLicia Carslon (eds.) 2007. *Cognitive Disability and its Challenge to Moral Philosophy*. Sussex: Wiley Blackwell. 499-516.

Hacking, Ian (2009). Autistic Autobiography. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 364(1522), 1467-1473.

Hacking, Ian (2013). Making Up Autism – Inaugural C. L. Oakley Lecture in Medicine and the Arts. [Podcast]. BSHS [online]. Available at: <http://www.bshs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Hacking-Making-Up-Autism.mp3> [Accessed: 10 March 2016].

Hanan, Ali (2019). Creative industries have to embrace #DiverseMinds It's time to move from talk to action when it comes to embracing neurodiversity’. Campaign live [online]. Available at: <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/creative-industries-embrace-diverseminds/1523015> [Accessed 3Oct 2021].

Harris, John (2023). The mother of neurodiversity: how Judy Singer changed the world. *The Guardian*, 5 July. p.4.

Independent Television TV Press Centre (2021). ITV launches new on air campaign to highlight Invisible Disabilities’. ITV.COM [online]. Available at: <https://www.itv.com/presscentre/press-releases/itv-launches-new-air-campaign-highlight-invisible-disabilities> [Accessed 5 Oct 2021].

Irish Film Board/Bórd Scannán na hÉireann (2016). *Strategic Plan 2016-2020 Building on Success.* Available at: <https://www.screenireland.ie/images/uploads/general/IFB_Five_Year_Strategy_2016-1.pdf> [Accessed 1 Oct 2021].

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2020a). *Your Rights Guide – The Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015* (*2nd edition*). Dublin.

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2020b). *Your Rights Guide–The Equal Status Acts 2000-2018* (*2nd edition*). Dublin.

Kerrigan, Páraic, Liddy, Susan and O’Brien, Anne (2021). *How to Improve equality, diversity and inclusion policies and practice in the Irish media Industry – Auditing Gender & Diversity change in Irish Media Sectors Report*. Dublin: BAI. Available at: <https://www.bai.ie/en/bai-welcomes-publication-of-research-report-on-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-in-irish-television-and-film-industry/> [Accessed 1 Oct 2021].

McDowall, Almuth, Doyle, Nancy and Kiseleva, Meg (2023). *Neurodiversity at Work 2023, Demand, Supply and a Gap analysis*. London: University of London.

McSherry, Eleanor (2021). Neurodiversity in the Screen Industry. Paper presented at Neurodiversity and the Irish Screen Industries Seminar [online]. 6 October. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/625270761> [Accessed 1 Sept 2022].

McSherry, Eleanor (2023). Panel on Neurodiversity in the Screen Industry, 15 July. Galway Film Fleadh.

Murray, Stuart (2007). Hollywood and the Fascination with Autism. In: Osteen, Mark (ed.) 2007. *Autism and Representation,* New York: Routledge Publications. 252-263.

National Disability Authority (2021). *Submission from the National Disability Authority to the Future of Media Commission’s Public Consultation*. Dublin: Future of Media Commission. Available at: https://futureofmediacommission.ie/wp-content/uploads/764.-The-National-Disability-Authority.pdf [Accessed 1 Oct 2021].

Netflix (2021a). Netflix Fund for Creative Equity. Available at: https://about.netflix.com/en/programs [Accessed 5 Oct 2021].

Netflix (2021b). *Inclusion takes root at Netflix: our first* report. Available at: https://about.netflix.com/en/news/netflix-inclusion-report-2021 [Accessed 5 Oct 2021].

O’Brien, Anne, Kerrigan, Páraic and Liddy, Susan (2022). Conceptualising change in equality, diversity and inclusion: A case study of the Irish film and television sector. *European Journal of Cultural Studies, 26*(3), 336-353.

OFCOM (2022). *Five Year review: Diversity and equal opportunities in UK Broadcasting*. Available at: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\_\_data/assets/pdf\_file/0029/225992/dib-five-years-2021.pdf [Accessed 24 Apr 2022].

Robb, David (2021). Sony Pictures Entertainment Signs Ruderman Family Foundation Pledge To Audition Actors With Disabilities On Every New Show. Deadline.com[online].Available at: https://deadline.com/2021/09/sony-to-audition-actors-with-disabilities-on-every-new-show-ruderman-family-foundation-1234827115/ [Accessed 5 Oct 2021].

Raidio Telefís Éireann (RTÉ) (2018). *Diversity and Inclusion in RTÉ – Reimagined for a New Generation*. Available at: https://about.rte.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/rte-diversity-and-inclusion-charter-2018.pdf [Accessed 1 Oct 2021].

Screen Ireland (2021). *Building on Success: Strategic Plan 2016 – 2020*. Available at: https://www.screenireland.ie/industry-insights/industry-reports/building-on-success-strategic-plan-2016-2020  [Accessed: 23 Feb 2022].

Screen Ireland (n.d.). ‘Film, TV Drama, TV Unscripted & Documentary Pathways Fund. Available at: https://www.screenireland.ie/funding/distribution-loans/film-tv-drama-tv-unscripted-documentary-pathways-fund [Accessed 5 Jun 2023].

Screen Ireland (n.d.). *Fís Éireann/Screen Ireland Gender and Diversity Plan*. Available at: https://www.screenireland.ie/about/gender [Accessed 2 Oct 2023].

Screen Ireland (2021). Neurodiversity in the Screen Industry, Screen Talks Series [Vimeo]. Available at <https://vimeo.com/625270761> [Accessed May 2024].

Silverman, Steve (2015). *NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future or Neurodiversity*. New York: Penguin Random House.

Singer, Judy (1999). “Why can’t you be normal for once in your life?” From a problem with no name to the emergence of a new category of difference.” In: Corker Mairian & French Sally (eds.). *Disability Discourse*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press. 59–67.

Singer, Judy (2016). *Neurodiversity:* *The Birth of an Idea* [Ebook]. Available at: https://www.amazon.co.uk/NeuroDiversity-Birth-Idea-Judy-Singer-ebook [Accessed 2 Aug 2022].

United Kingdom Screen Alliance (2019). *Inclusion and Diversity in UK – VFX, Animation and Post Production Disability and Neurodiversity Report*. Available at: https://www.ukscreenalliance.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/bfi-workforce-diversity-in-uk-screen-sector-evidence-review-2018-03.pdf [Accessed 1 Oct 2021].

United Nations (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Treaty Series, 2515, 3.

University College Cork (n.d.). Continuing Professional Development in Neurodiversity for the Screen Industry. Available at: https://www.ucc.ie/en/ace-ccpdns/ [Accessed 13 Oct 2023].

van den Eynde, Julie, Fisher, Adrian, and Sonn, Chris (2016). *Working in the Australian Entertainment Industry: Final Report*. Melbourne: Entertainment Assist/Victoria University. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/584a0c86cd0f68ddbfffdcea/t/587ed93e3e00be6f0d145fe0/1486006488652/Working+in+the+Australian+Entertainment+Industry_Final+Report_Oct16.pdf> [Accessed June 2024].

Wheeler, Rodney (2022). *Disabled Members Survey 2021*, London: BECTU.

Wreyford, Natalie, O’Brien, Dave and Dent, Tamsyn (2021). *Creative Majority Report - An All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Creative Diversity report into ‘What Works’ to enhance diversity, equity and inclusion in the creative sector.* Arts and Health South West. Available at: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/resources/reports/creative-majority-report-v2.pdf> [Accessed 5 Oct 2021].