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# Finding Common Ground

Britons on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion



More in  
Common



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## About More in Common

More in Common is a think tank and research agency working to bridge the gap between policy makers and the public and helping people in Westminster to understand those voters who feel ignored or overlooked by those in power. Our British Seven segmentation provides a unique lens at understanding what the public think and why. We've published ground-breaking reports on a range of issues from climate and refugees to culture wars to crime. We are a full-service research agency offering polling and focus group research and are members of the British Polling Council.

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# Foreword

A lot has happened since our first study on British attitudes towards equality, diversity and inclusion in March 2024. The second Trump presidency in the United States has been responsible for focusing political attention on institutional responses to diversity in an unprecedented manner. The Trump administration's rollback of diversity, equity and inclusion – among its defining moves during its first 100 days – has reset how many US institutions are approaching DEI. And it has had an effect, too, on how the rest of the world is approaching these matters. Or has it?

This research finds there remains a distinctive British response to EDI. If US-style DEI has been defined by a focus on remaking systems to remove oppression, British-style EDI has been anchored in something else: namely, in respect and equal opportunity. This difference is not one that is always apparent in public commentary. Yet it reveals itself clearly through the responses of the British public.

While Britain hasn't been immune to US developments, a slight majority of Britons continue to believe that EDI is a good thing. In an age of significant political polarisation, this should provide some reassurance that EDI remains supported. But, clearly, the results highlight there is now a larger portion of the British public unsure or asking questions about EDI. For the advocates of EDI, there is much to play for – and an urgent need to refocus efforts on explaining why work on EDI is done, and how it benefits people and institutions.

This isn't about a rollback of EDI, but a demand for greater precision and professionalism in the work of EDI. Notable controversies during the past year have highlighted how not all EDI practice has been able to withstand scrutiny. But it remains possible to have a version of EDI that can support institutions and society – to help people do their jobs better, to ensure that people are treated fairly, and to remove barriers to equal opportunity where they exist.

As this report highlights, the challenge is to use EDI in a form defined by respect and equality. There is a wide common ground on which to conduct EDI. Now, more than ever, EDI needs to articulate that common ground.

## Executive Summary

### **Movement in Public Opinion**

Though support has softened slightly (from 62 per cent to 52 per cent viewing EDI positively), a majority continues to back EDI principles. Moreover, 48 per cent believe EDI is a very good use of money, and 48 per cent believe EDI leads to fairer outcomes. These findings suggest the need to refine rather than abandon current approaches. Fewer Britons now express uncertainty about EDI, indicating opinions have crystallised into a qualified but sustained support.

### **Following in America's Footsteps**

Britons don't support calls to follow America's sweeping rollback of EDI initiatives. Only 37 per cent support cutting back EDI in public bodies, with even less appetite (23 per cent) for private sector roll backs. This reflects a British preference for bottom-up, context-dependent approaches over top-down mandates.

### **Defining EDI**

The public's primary understanding of EDI as 'respecting people from different backgrounds' and ensuring 'equal opportunity' provides a foundation for broader coalition-building. Left of centre Progressive Activists' focus on 'removing systemic barriers' resonates less widely, suggesting those who seek to preserve support for EDI would do well to emphasise shared values of respect and fairness.

### **Does EDI Help or Harm?**

A growing perception that EDI creates winners and losers rather than mutual benefit poses the greatest challenge to EDI's future. While most see EDI as benefiting ethnic minorities, LGBT+ people, and women, critics increasingly view it as harmful to white people, men, and the working class. Advocates must demonstrate genuine benefits for all groups perceived as disadvantaged.

### **Refining EDI**

Public support varies dramatically across different initiatives. A brand of EDI that emphasises workplace culture measures, that favours voluntary over mandatory approaches, and that does not stray into the realm of the personal is likely to enjoy continued public support.

### **Workplaces**

Strong public support for workplace EDI reflects an understanding of its role in creating fairer, more professional environments. A plurality believe EDI initiatives make workplaces better with overwhelming support for core protections like anti-discrimination measures, shared parental leave, and accessibility improvements. However, Britons distinguish sharply between professional and personal spheres: while majorities support workplace language guidelines and behavioral standards, opposition grows when rules extend to work social events or personal social media.

## Universities

University EDI policies face particular scrutiny, but elite debates may not reflect broader public sentiment about institutional EDI approaches. Strong support exists for broadening the curriculum, but targeted recruitment measures remain contested. There is greater acceptance for interventions that target socioeconomic disadvantage than for those that are seen to favour particular ethnic groups.

## A way forward

- **Building on foundations of respect and equality:** For most Britons, EDI is about respect for other people and equal opportunity. Grounding EDI work in values of fairness and decency may resonate more strongly with Britons.
- **Refine don't abandon:** Britons remain fundamentally supportive of EDI in principle but such support depends on careful implementation. Rather than abandoning or rigidly maintaining current approaches, advocates should build on what works while addressing legitimate concerns. Reforms should prioritise:
  - **A focus on workplace culture**
  - **Voluntary approaches over mandatory approaches**
  - **Greater attention to socioeconomic disadvantage**
- **Context-dependent decisions:** The public wants bottom-up rather than top-down EDI approaches. Different organisations face different challenges, and EDI approaches that adapt to local contexts rather than conforming to one-size-fits-all models are likely to gain wider support.
- **Addressing zero-sum critiques:** The growing perception that EDI creates winners and losers threatens current support. This requires honest engagement with fairness concerns and ensuring EDI genuinely works for everyone.

## Introducing the segments

This report utilises More in Common's segmentation of the British public. Based on extended research into Britons' core beliefs, their values and behaviours, this segmentation allows us to look upstream not just at what different groups think, but why they think it. Going beyond a simple left-right spectrum, it reflects deeper differences in how people relate to authority, change, community and the future, which help explain why traditional party loyalties have weakened and political volatility has increased. Segmentation is a particularly powerful way of detecting and understanding differences and commonality in people's values and in their broader orientation towards society and the big issues facing the country.

The analysis produces seven segments within the British population:

### Progressive Activists - 12 per cent of the population

A highly engaged and globally-minded group driven by concerns about social justice. Politically active, but feeling increasingly alienated from mainstream party politics, they prioritise issues such as climate change and international affairs. Occasionally outliers on social issues, they maintain a strongly held and sometimes uncompromising approach to their beliefs.

### Incrementalist Left - 21 per cent of the population

A civic-minded, community-oriented group holding views which are generally left-of-centre but with an aversion to the extreme; they prefer gradual reform over revolutionary change. They trust experts and institutions yet are largely tuned out of day-to-day politics and can be conflict-averse, stepping away from issues they see as particularly fraught or complex.

### Established Liberals - 9 per cent of the population

A prosperous, confident segment who believe the system broadly works as it is and who trust experts to deliver continued progress. They have a strong belief in individual agency which can make them less empathetic to those who are struggling. Institutionally trusting, they maintain faith in democratic processes and have a strong information-centric way of engaging with issues.

### Sceptical Scrollers - 10 per cent of the population

A digitally-native group whose unhappiness with the social contract means they have lost faith in traditional institutions and seek alternative sources of truth online. Often shaped by their experience of the Covid pandemic, they prefer individual influencers over mainstream media and are increasingly drawn to conspiratorial thinking.

### Rooted Patriots - 20 per cent of the population

A patriotic but politically untethered group which feels abandoned and overlooked by political elites and yearns for leaders with common sense, but does not want to overthrow the system as a whole. They are particularly

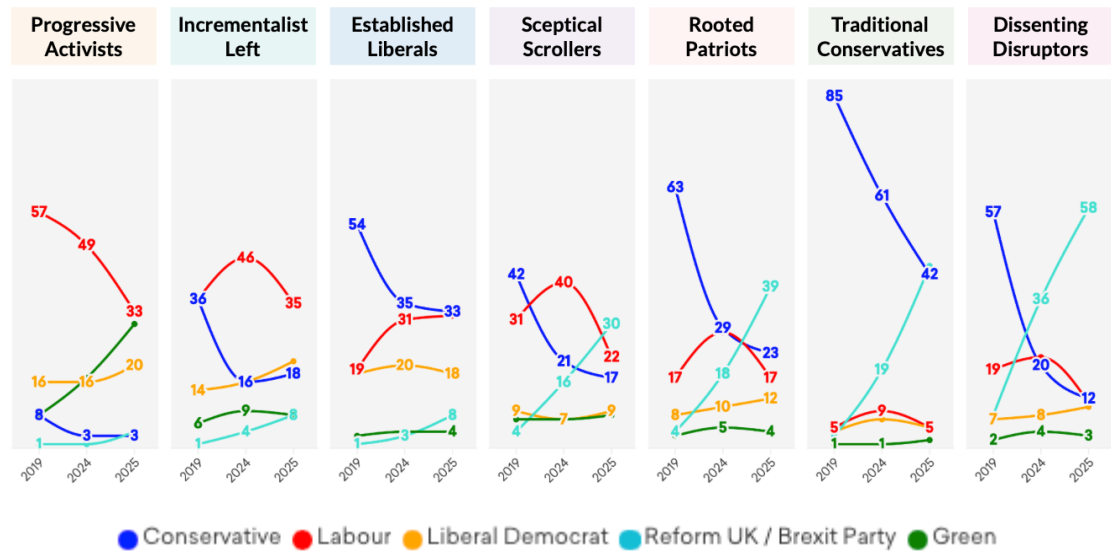
concerned about community decline and the pressures of migration. Interventionist on economics but conservative on social issues, they have shaped much of Britain's politics over the past decade.

Traditional Conservatives - 8 per cent of the population

Respectful of authority and tradition, this group believes in individual responsibility and established norms that have served them well. Nostalgic for the past but optimistic about the future, they are deeply sceptical of many forces of change such as immigration or the path to net-zero.

Dissenting Disruptors - 20 per cent of the population

Frustrated with their circumstances and with an appetite for radical solutions, this group craves dramatic change and strong leadership. Highly distrustful of institutions, opposed to multiculturalism and feeling disconnected from society, they are drawn to political movements that promise to overhaul the status quo and put people like them first.





## Movement in public opinion

The last two years have seen shifts in the debate about Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). While public support for EDI has softened slightly, the majority of Britons continue to see it positively, suggesting the need to refine rather than abandon current approaches.

This shift has been driven in no small part by Donald Trump's return to the White House. The Trump administration has systematically rolled back DEI initiatives within the US federal government, while pressuring the private sector to follow suit. Trump's cause has been furthered by a handful of high profile instances of backlash against DEI initiatives and its perceived influence on US corporate brands and governance.

In the UK, however, the debate around EDI remains predominantly elite focused. Fewer than half of the public (46 per cent) have heard lots about EDI. But British opinions around EDI do appear to be somewhat more firmly held. Compared with our last study, fewer Brits now say they are unsure on key questions about EDI and the contours of the debate.

Overall, a majority continue to think that EDI is a good thing, but scepticism has grown. Compared to late 2023, the public are less likely to see EDI positively (52 per cent versus 62 per cent). More people now take a neutral stance (25 per cent versus 18 per cent), suggesting some soft supporters of EDI have embraced some of its opponents' criticism.



However, the view that resources institutions and businesses spend on EDI is a waste of money is only held by around a third of Britons. A plurality of Britons see investing in EDI as a good use of money (48 per cent, whereas 35 per cent think it is a bad use of money).

Thinking about the investments that businesses and institutions like universities make in EDI (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) initiatives, do you think this is generally:

- A very good use of money
- A somewhat good use of money
- Don't know
- A somewhat bad use of money
- A very bad use of money



Britons tend to think EDI initiatives lead to fairer outcomes: 48 per cent say EDI makes things fairer while 30 per cent think it makes things less fair, attitudes have not shifted on this over the last year. The British public is also likely to say that people who have opportunities extended to them through EDI initiatives deserve them. This perception has not been shifted by recent debates - 50 per cent now feel that EDI extends opportunities to people who deserve them, compared to 48 per cent a year previously.

Thinking about the work employers and other institutions such as universities do around diversity and equality and inclusion, which comes closest to your view?

- **Work around diversity equality and inclusion leads to fairer outcomes.**
- **Don't know**
- **Work around diversity equality and inclusion leads to more unfair outcomes.**

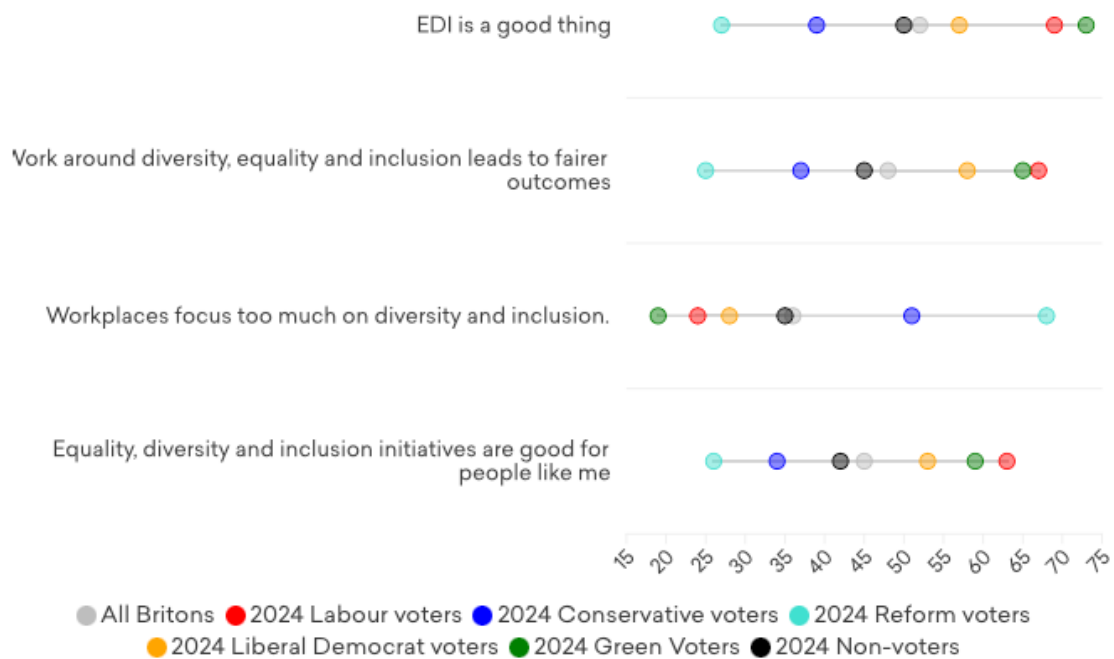


Britons' views on EDI vary with their political beliefs. Most Reform voters say EDI is bad for people like them, while most Liberal Democrat, Green and Labour voters think EDI benefits people like them. Opinions also divide along political lines on whether EDI leads to fairer outcomes, and is overall a good or bad thing. Reform voters, Labour voters and Green voters all stand far apart from the median Briton in their views on EDI.

This has implications for understanding public attitudes towards EDI. Those who are politically engaged are also significantly more likely to post about political issues on social media and can have outsized impacts on debates around EDI. Those engaged with this issue should avoid conflating the views of litigants of online debates with the British public at large, from whom EDI receives majority, but often qualified, support.

### Comparing voters' views on EDI

(% Selecting each statement)



# Following in America's footsteps

British preferences for bottom-up, context-dependent approaches to EDI stand in contrast to the sweeping top-down mandates implemented by the Trump Administration in the United States.

It can be tempting to draw conclusions about EDI in the United Kingdom from discourse in the United States. But this is an issue on which Britain remains distinct from America. The British public is nuanced, for example, on questions of free speech: striking a balance between supporting the principle of free speech and accepting limitations that protect citizens from harm. Three in five (59 per cent) feel it is more important that we protect people from dangerous and hateful speech, than that people should be free to express views even if controversial or offensive. This helps to explain Britons' attitudes towards protest - firmly in support of peaceful protest, but drawing a clear line at violence. Most (68 per cent) think protest marches are always acceptable, but also that e.g. egging a politician is never acceptable (88 per cent).

Against this backdrop a majority of Britons (52 per cent) say they personally feel safe expressing their political views. But they don't feel the same about the United States. The British public is more than twice as likely to say that the UK is a safe place to express political views, compared to the US (43 per cent versus 19 per cent).

Many public figures have called for the UK to follow the US in cutting back EDI initiatives in public bodies. Here Britons are split. While 37 per cent think the UK should follow America's lead on this, a comparable 39 per cent oppose it and 25 per cent don't know enough about the debate to say.

Do you think the UK should [cut back/ follow the US in cutting back] EDI programmes in public bodies such as universities?

● Yes ● Don't Know ● No

**Cut back**



There is even less support for the proposition of cutting EDI in organisations other than public bodies. Only one in four Britons (23 per cent) support businesses and other institutions stopping their work on EDI. The majority (56 per cent) think businesses and other institutions should instead maintain or increase their EDI efforts. Fewer than three in ten would view institutions more positively if

they cut back EDI programmes, with the public most likely to say it would make no difference to their view of businesses, universities or government.

Which of the following comes closest to your view about EDI efforts in businesses and institutions like universities?

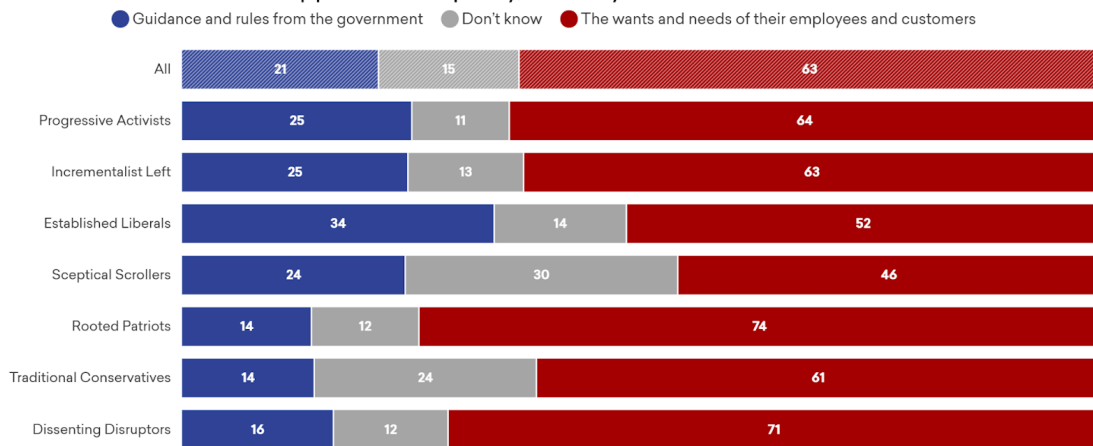
- **They should stop their work on EDI**   ● **Don't know**
- **They should continue at the current level**
- **They should do more work on EDI**



Driving this sentiment is a view shared by many Britons that decisions on EDI should be decentralised and left up to individual areas and organisations. Rather than a top-down executive order approach (as has played out in the US under the Trump administration), Britons think organisations should conduct EDI bottom-up - grounded in the specific organisational context. Every one of the British Seven Segments believes that EDI approaches should be based more on the needs and views of employees and customers rather than regulations or guidelines from the government.

This may explain why some measures associated with corporate management - including setting diversity quotas and creating roles like diversity officers - are among those with least support. The reputation of EDI would likely be strengthened by more closely aligning with common values of fairness. If EDI is perceived as only relevant to elite white-collar professions, it may alienate people who feel these discussions don't apply to their work or lives.

Which of the following comes closest to your view? Public institutions and workplaces should base their approach to equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives on...



However, the preference for a bottom-up approach is not universal. On some of the most contentious issues Britons would rather have legal clarity. Following the Supreme Court judgment ruling sex should be understood as biological sex, a plurality (50 per cent) think this should apply to all pubs, restaurants or workplaces rather than at the discretion of the individual establishment. Legal guidance in areas like this can provide organisations with greater feelings of security.

A recent Supreme Court judgment ruled that sex should be understood as biological sex. This is understood to mean that, if workplaces and public spaces (like pubs or restaurants) have separate toilets for men and women, trans people have to use the toilets for their biological sex.

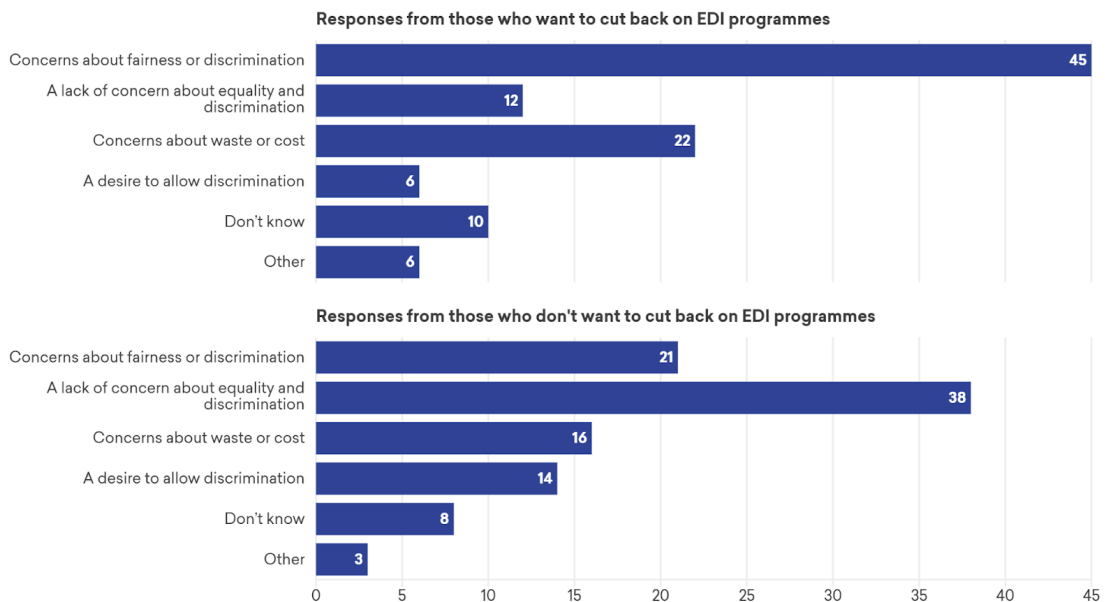
- Pubs, restaurants and workplaces should only have gender neutral toilets
- Pubs, restaurants and workplaces should be able to choose whether use of their separate bathrooms are based on gender identity or based on biological sex
- The law should require that separate bathroom use is based on biological sex in all pubs, restaurants and workplaces



While those who would reverse EDI work are not in the majority, it is instructive to look at the motivations of those who would like to see it cut back. There may be some degree of mutual incomprehension. Supporters of EDI can misunderstand the concerns of its opponents (and vice versa), leading to a perception gap on motives between those who do and do not want to see EDI cutbacks.

Those who want to cut back on EDI tend to do so because of concerns about fairness and discrimination – that is, a belief EDI is in fact leading to less fair outcomes. However, when those who don't want to cut back on EDI are asked about the motives of those who do, they are more likely to say it is because those people lack concern about equality and discrimination. Equality and discrimination mean different things to different groups. Supporters of EDI may need to recognise that the meaning of these words has become contested.

### In your view, efforts to stop or reduce EDI initiatives are motivated by:



# Defining EDI

## How is EDI understood?

In thinking about how people approach EDI issues, people understand the term Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in different ways. Britons' fundamental association of EDI with respect and equal opportunity provides a foundation for building a broader coalition of support.

The British public primarily associate EDI with respecting people from different backgrounds and ensuring equal access to opportunities. But this varies by segment. For socially liberal segments, EDI is primarily about equal access to opportunities alongside respecting people from different backgrounds. This is particularly true for the Incrementalist Left – strong supporters of EDI who are not worried about how it is being implemented. While the idea of EDI representing equal opportunity also resonates with Progressive Activists, this group (overrepresented within civil society, public institutions and EDI professionals) is far more likely than others to view EDI's purpose as being to remove systemic barriers and to empower minorities through representation.

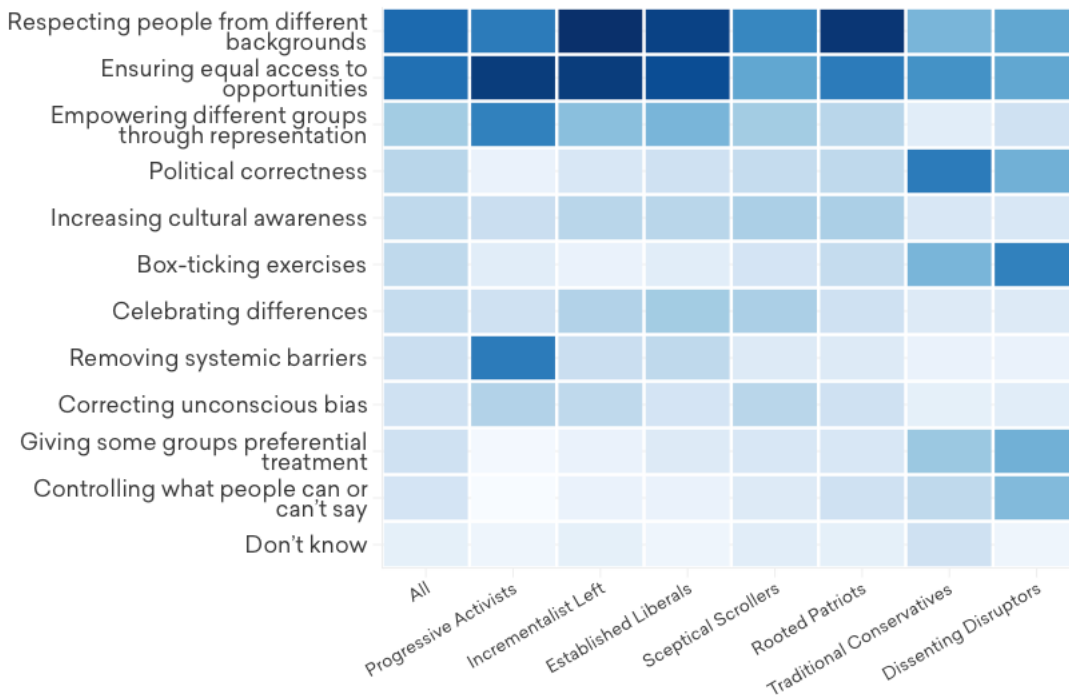
The idea of respecting people from all backgrounds is central to how Rooted Patriots think about EDI. This group differs from other socially conservative segments in their greater willingness to tolerate restrictions on freedom of speech in order to tackle offensive language. Rooted Patriots place a premium on treating people with politeness and respect and see offensive language as antithetical to the type of society they want to live in. Other social conservatives are more sceptical: a Traditional Conservative is most likely to associate EDI with political correctness, while Dissenting Disruptors think of it as a series of box-ticking exercises. Both, also, worry about restrictions on freedom of speech imposed by EDI.

If EDI advocates and reformists want to build broader support for EDI they may want to lean into the more inclusive definitions, rather than those that narrowly appeal to progressives. The idea that EDI is about respecting people's differences and about fairness and equal opportunity could lay the foundation for a broader coalition of support.



### Which of the following do you associate with Equality, Diversity, Inclusion?

% selecting 0  50



It is also striking that for many their concept of EDI is practical and grounded rather than an exercise in abstract political debates or symbolism. EDI which is seen to be advancing a political agenda - rather than creating a culture of respect and equal opportunity - is more likely to create a backlash.

### Does EDI Help or Harm?

Growing concerns about the zero-sum nature of equality initiatives place a premium on being able to demonstrate that EDI genuinely benefits all groups facing disadvantage, including the white working class.

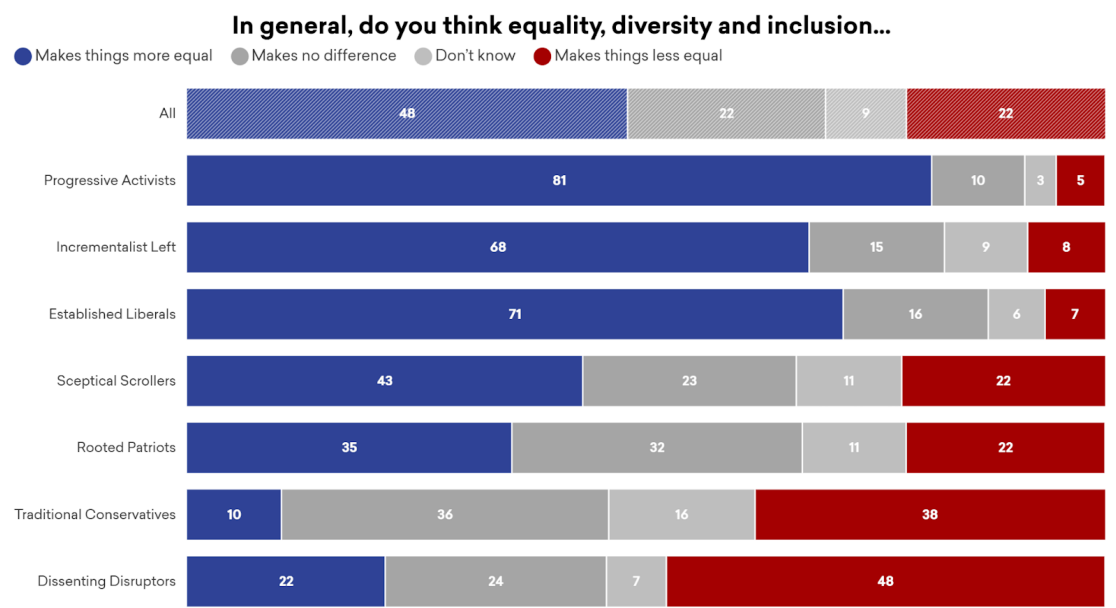
Critics of EDI argue that associated initiatives do not live up to the name in promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. American scientist Steven Pinker, for example, suggests that the way EDI is delivered in practice 'favours certain groups over others'. This is a view shared by around one in five Britons - 22 per cent think EDI makes things less equal while, 48 per cent think EDI makes things more equal and 22 per cent think it makes no difference.

Among Dissenting Disruptors a plurality think EDI makes things less equal. Traditional Conservatives have less strongly held views on this: while few think EDI improves equality, they are as likely to say it makes no difference as makes

things less equal. A key challenge remains for proponents of EDI to ensure and demonstrate that EDI bolsters, rather than undermines, fairness and equality of opportunity.

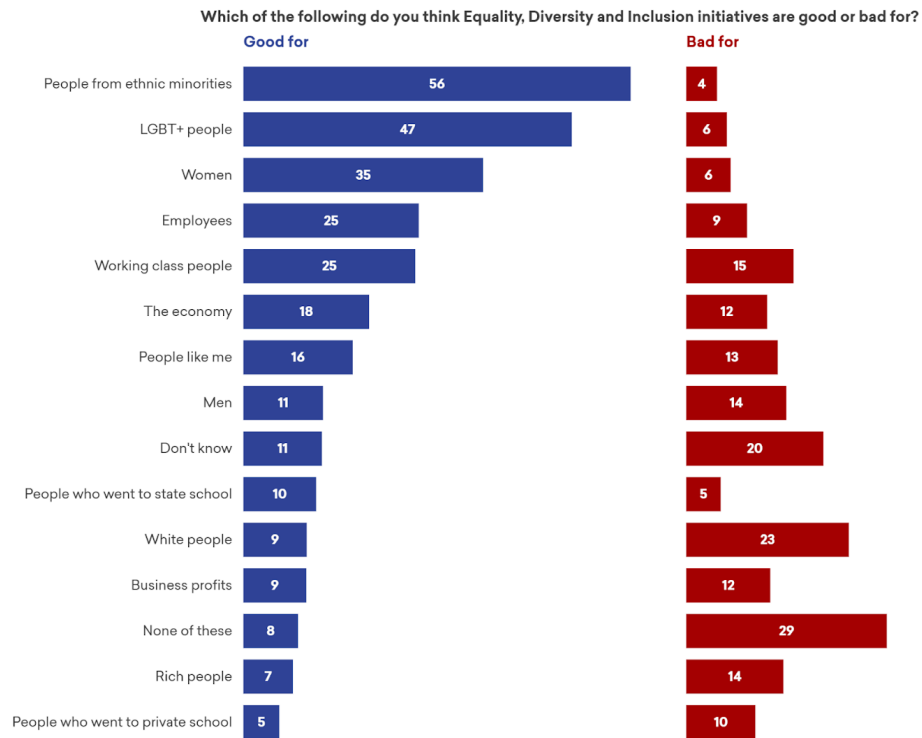
Certain groups are particularly seen to benefit from EDI initiatives. 56 per cent say EDI initiatives are good for people from ethnic minorities, 47 percent say the same about LGBT+ people and 35 per cent for women. The view that EDI benefits these groups most is held by Britons across the ideological spectrum, which may reflect the role EDI has played in addressing the disadvantages faced by these groups.

Where the segments diverge is on the negative impacts of EDI. Most Progressive Activists say that no groups are negatively impacted by EDI. Meanwhile EDI-sceptic segments tend to see EDI as bad for white people, as well as men and the working class. Strikingly 37 per cent of Dissenting Disruptors think EDI is bad for working class people.



On a more personal level, a plurality of Britons think EDI benefits people like them (45 per cent, while 27 per cent say it is bad for people like them). This has remained stable over the past year (two point decrease in net proportion selecting ‘good’ over ‘bad’ between February 2024 and April 2025). But for certain groups there has been a shift. White men are now eight per cent more likely than they were a year ago to say that EDI initiatives are bad for people like them. One in two Reform voters say the same. This zero-sum view of EDI, as giving special advantages to some and not others, aligns with the worldview of those who feel they get a raw deal and are overlooked by political elites. This zero-sum thinking informs political opinions and will likely remain a fundamental barrier to support for EDI unless its advocates can demonstrate that it truly delivers better

outcomes for all groups that face disadvantages, including white working class men.



# Refining EDI

The tendency to treat EDI as 'one thing' is likely to be unhelpful for engaging the public. An abstract debate around EDI misses the fact that different EDI initiatives, as well as having stronger or weaker evidence bases, also command different levels of public support. Approaches likely to maintain support are those that emphasise uncontroversial measures like flexible working and closing pay gaps while reconsidering more contested activities.

There is clear public support for measures such as flexible working opportunities for parents (net +61 support), closing pay gaps (net +41 support), diversifying the curriculum (net +23 support) and outreach schemes for under-represented groups (net +23 support).

Celebration of special cultural or awareness days is more contested and splits the public (net +15 support), as do staff network groups for protected characteristics (net -5 support), and the appointment of dedicated diversity officers (net -3 support) - in part because many think EDI should run across everyone's role rather than being the responsibility of just one individual.

One of the more contested EDI initiatives (net -11 support) is around diversity targets, as opposed to outreach activities, which are associated with positive discrimination and undermining merit based selection criteria.

The only activity tested that had majority opposition was asking staff to display their preferred pronouns (net -35 support). However, focus group participants were more relaxed about those who choose to do it voluntarily.

Some people within my organisation do [put pronouns in their email signature] and when it gets to the day when we are forced to do that, I just think I can no longer work there anymore.

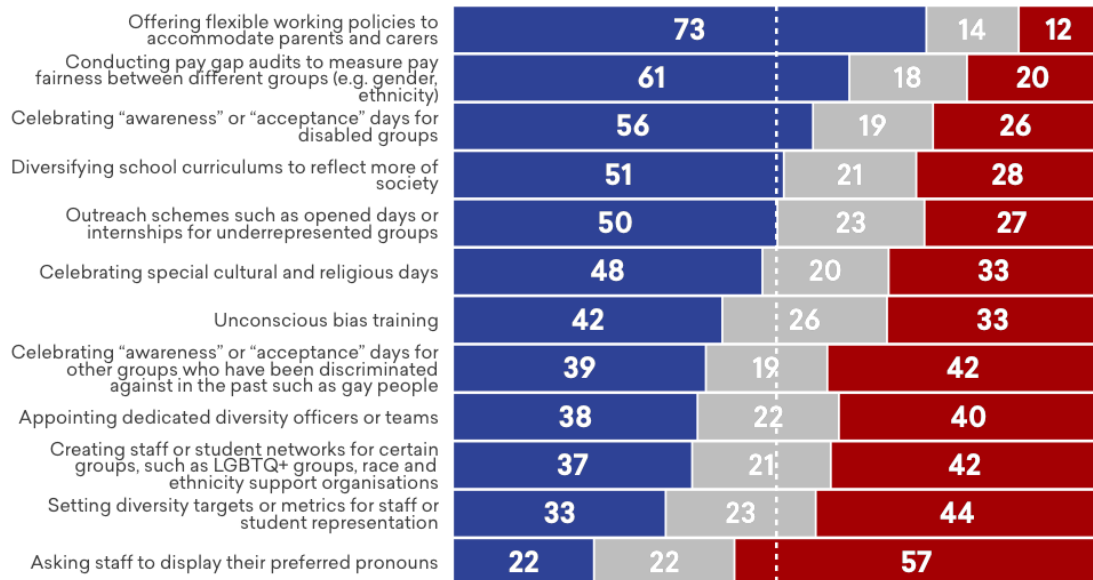
Kaylee, Traditional Conservative

I get confused at work and we get emails with all these pronouns on, I don't have any on mine, but sometimes I'm like, I don't want to offend someone and equally I don't want to get into trouble and lose my job by offending somebody."

Leanne, Dissenting Disruptor

For each of the following equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives do you think...

● Institutions should be doing this    ● Don't know    ● Institutions should not be doing this



## Workplaces

[Previous research into public attitudes towards EDI](#) found that context matters significantly in whether or not Britons support EDI activities. Strong support for EDI in workplaces reflects the public's understanding of its role in creating fairer, more professional environments.

For most people initiatives are most relevant when they are connected with the day-to-day work of an organisation. A plurality think EDI initiatives make places better to work, while just 18 per cent say they make them worse. As to the success of a business, most think they make no real difference - though they are twice as likely to think EDI makes places better rather than worse.

When it comes to EDI initiatives in businesses, do you think they generally make businesses

**Better/worse places to work**



**More/less successful**



● Better place / More successful    ● Don't know    ● Make no real difference    ● Worse place / Less successful

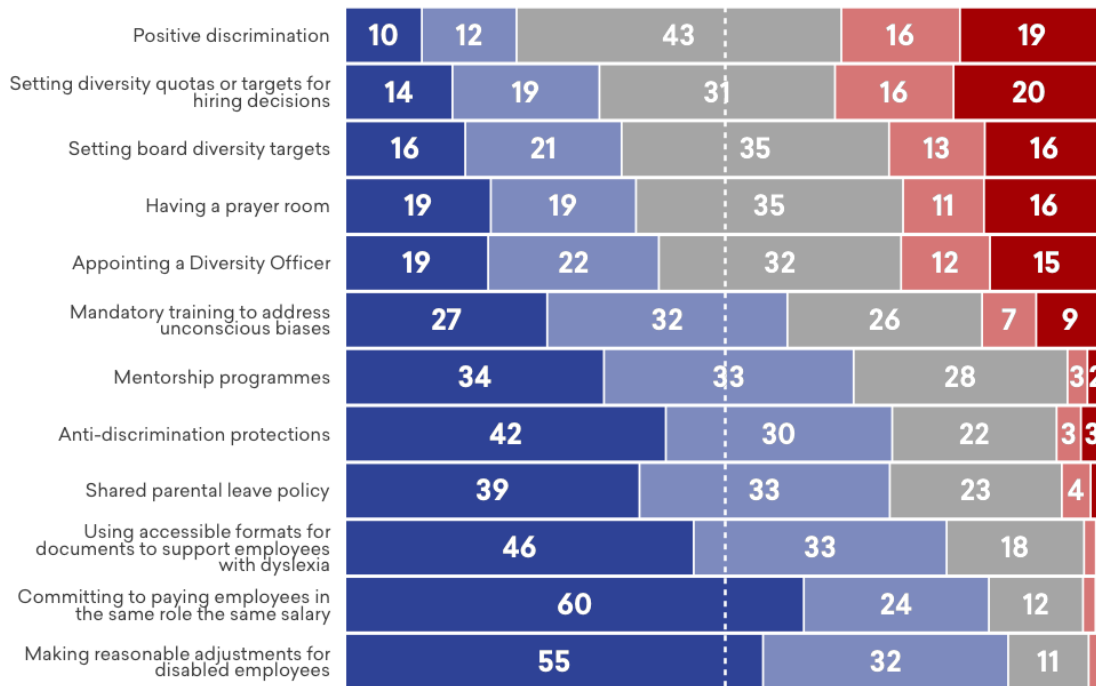
Looking at the narrower question of EDI initiatives in the workplace, overwhelming majorities support workplace protections against discrimination, shared parental leave, measures to improve accessibility and reasonable adjustments for disabled people. A clear majority also support workplaces carrying out unconscious bias training.

Support remains more mixed for appointing diversity-specific roles - this has plurality support in workplaces (net +14), though not in institutions in general (net -3 support). Given that most institutions are employers, this probably suggests the public support EDI roles in HR facing jobs, but are less convinced about EDI posts that relate to the organisations wider work beyond HR. The idea of workplaces having a prayer room also receives plurality but not majority support (net +12 support) - with socially conservative segments more likely to oppose than support this.

Again the most contested workplace diversity initiatives involve quotas. While there is narrow (net +7) plurality support for board diversity targets, fewer than 4 in 10 back these targets. Using quotas and targets in hiring decisions is even more unpopular (net -3) with just a third in support. while positive discrimination is a red line for many Britons (net -13) support.

### Do you support or oppose workplaces doing the following?

● Strongly support   ● Somewhat support   ● Neither support nor oppose   ● Somewhat oppose   ● Strongly oppose



Britons distinguish between what is acceptable in and outside of a workplace. Most place a premium on professionalism and equal treatment in the workplace.

Britons do not believe employees have an absolute right to free speech and the majority of the public supports language and behaviour guidelines and rules. Britons support mandatory training and company policies on what is and is not acceptable in the workplace. The public also believes companies should be able to reprimand employees for inappropriate language or offensive language, as well as shouting and swearing.

However, many take a different view on activity outside of the workplace. Three in ten oppose reprimanding employees for offensive language if this takes place at work drinks or on an employee's personal social media, while around one in two support these reprimands.

The message from the public is clear. Organisations can have confidence to assert limits on employees' behaviour and language, in the interests of creating professional, fair and tolerant working environments, provided rules are clear and bounded within the workplace.

## Universities

Much of the debate around EDI has taken place in the battleground of higher education.

The public are more likely to say EDI does not restrict free speech and most (56 per cent) think EDI policies do not undermine academic excellence. Yet a significant minority of Britons have concerns around the impact of EDI policies within universities: three in ten saying that EDI policies in universities unnecessarily restrict free speech.

Britons take much the same attitude to EDI work universities conduct in their capacity as workplaces, as they do for other employers. For example, most Britons support universities providing diversity training to academics. Attitudes to academia-specific policies are more split.

Diversifying curricula is popular, but framing matters: 'decolonising the curriculum' is supported and opposed in roughly equal measure (26 per cent support, 23 per cent oppose) but when this is phrased as 'broadening the curriculum to include more perspectives from non-European countries' net support increases by 20 points (43 per cent support, 21 per cent oppose). Similarly the public is much more likely than not to support including more female authors in reading lists (46 per cent support, 12 per cent oppose). This suggests that linking policies around diverse curricula to contentious terms such as 'decolonisation' may undermine the broad soft support that would otherwise exist.

No-platforming is also divisive - Britons are slightly more likely (37 per cent) to say that universities should not host speakers who express views many consider offensive, than that they should (28 per cent).

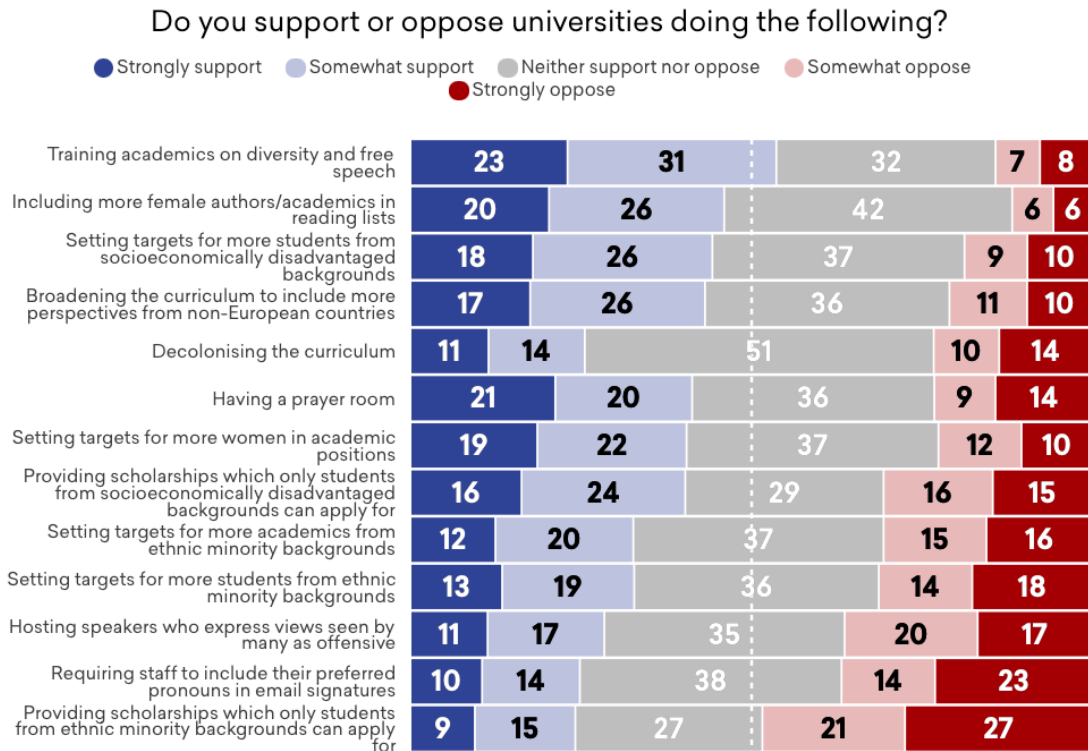
Again there is more opposition to targeted recruitment measures. The public are split on having targets for academics from minority backgrounds, and generally oppose providing scholarships limited to ethnic minority applicants. They are more supportive of targets for women in academic positions and particularly supportive of targets for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

A significant minority (roughly one in three) take a neutral position on these questions. Some may be deterred from weighing into debates or taking a position due to feeling insufficiently informed about what may be seen as a controversial topic. Specialist language in particular may be a barrier to engage with these debates - it is notable that the number who take a neutral stance is particularly high on 'decolonising the curriculum' which is a term few are likely to be familiar with.

For others their neutral stance likely represents genuine indifference - perhaps a sense that this sort of debate doesn't matter that much. Those who did not themselves go to university are significantly more likely to say they are unsure



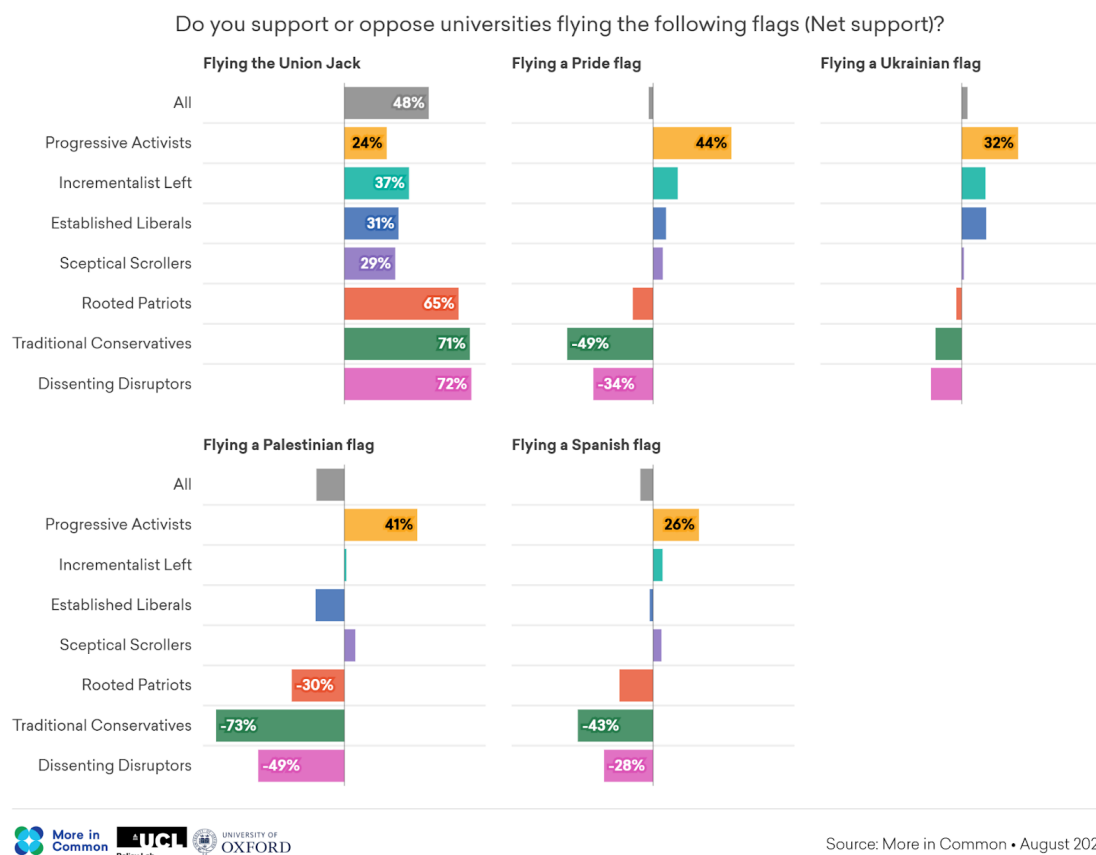
about questions around EDI-related activity in universities. This highlights the risk of conflating those who engage in discourse around EDI, who are likely to hold their views more strongly and who do not reflect the demographic or ideological makeup of the population, with the views of the public at large.



## Flags

Public support for flag flying depends on the flag in question. Most support universities flying the Union Jack, with net support across every segment.

Yet support for universities flying other flags divides along ideological lines. While on a personal level most take a 'live and let live' approach to neighbours flying flags - most saying they would feel no different towards a neighbour for flying a Union Jack, a Ukrainian flag or a Pride flag - this seems not to extend to institutions. Socially liberal segments tend to support universities flying Ukrainian flags while social conservatives tend to oppose it. Most Progressive Activists support universities flying a Palestinian flag or Pride flag - but the public at large is more likely to oppose than support it. In fact Progressive Activists actually support universities flying the Ukrainian, Palestinian or Spanish flag more than they do the Union Jack.



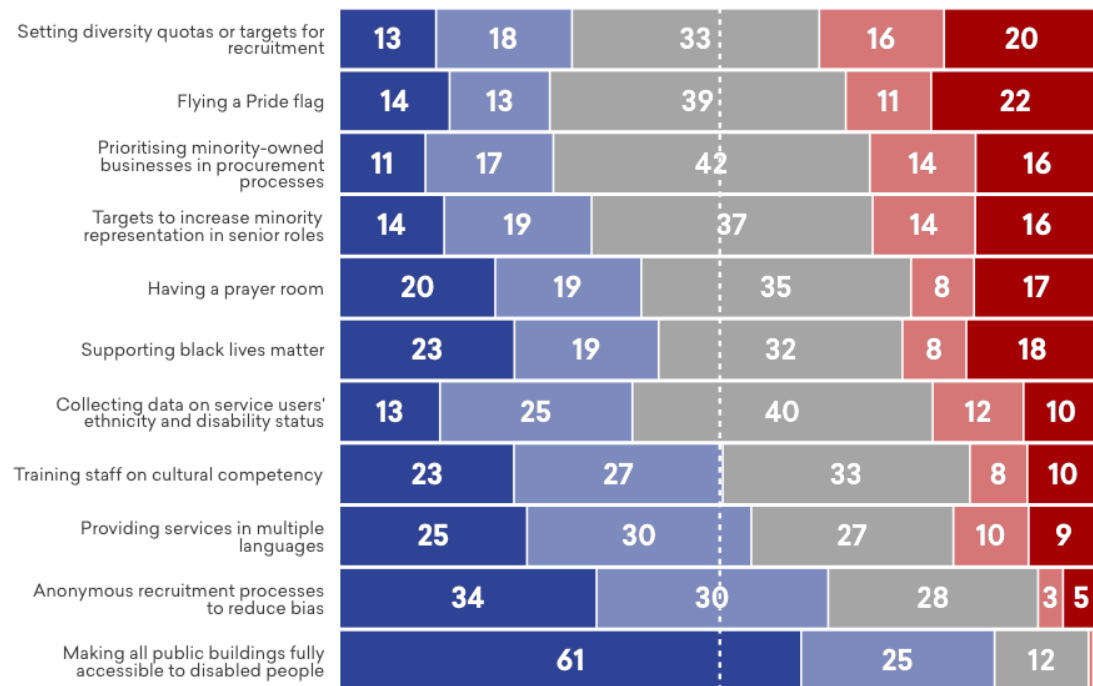
## Public sector

The public's view on public sector EDI policies reflects a desire for services that treat everyone with respect.

A majority support training staff on cultural competency, along with accommodations such as disability access for public spaces and providing services in multiple languages. Most Britons support measures that seek to make things fairer, such as anonymising recruitment processes to reduce bias, but measures that appear to tilt the playing field face more opposition - including diversity quotas for recruitment, and prioritising minority-owned businesses in procurement processes.

## Do you support or oppose government departments, or local council town halls doing the following?

● Strongly support ● Somewhat support ● Neither support nor oppose ● Somewhat oppose ● Strongly oppose



### Diversity targets and quotas

Greater support for socioeconomic-based targets compared to ethnicity-based ones may indicate that greater attention to socioeconomic disadvantage could broaden support for EDI initiatives per se.

Whether in the public or private sector, Britons are slightly more likely to oppose than support setting diversity quotas or targets for recruitment. This is particularly the case for Traditional Conservatives (73 per cent oppose) and Dissenting Disruptors (60 per cent oppose). These segments also oppose diversity targets at the board level, though this is more popular with other segments. In fact underneath headline support and opposition is a disparity across the segments in the perceived impacts of diversity quotas and targets.

Socially liberal segments are more likely to say that targets lead to more representative workforces and increased opportunities for disadvantaged groups. Social conservatives meanwhile are most likely to believe they lead to 'qualified' candidates being overlooked and undermine the merit basis of appointments.

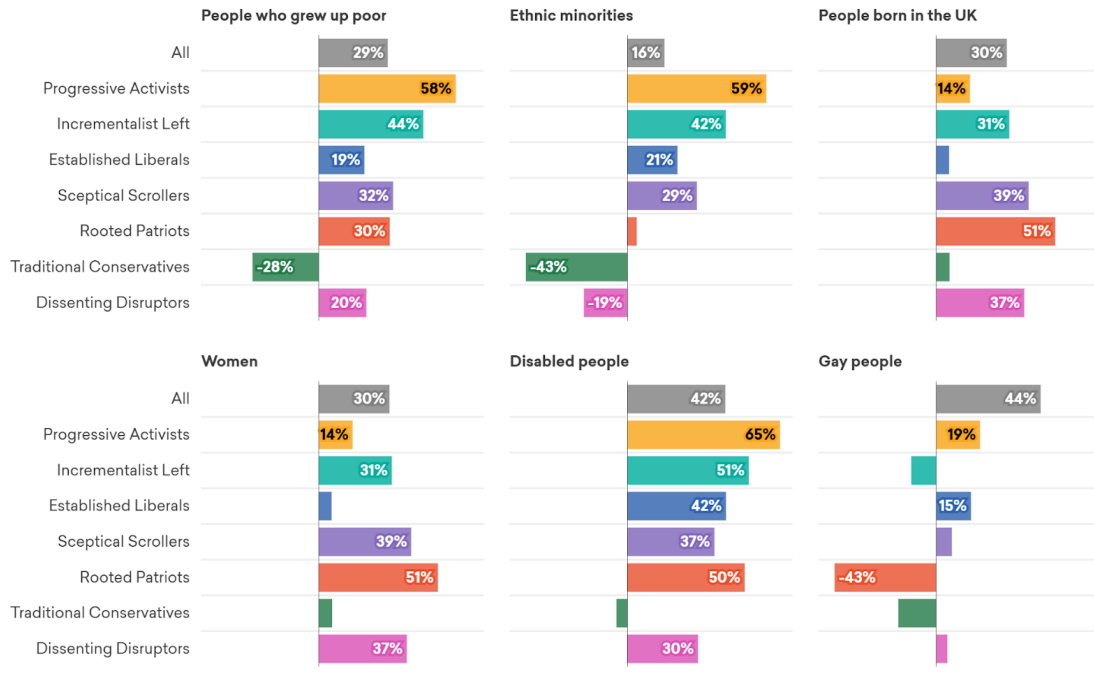
Diversity quotas are targets for the number of people from underrepresented groups hired or admitted into an organisation. Which of the following do you consider the main impacts of diversity quotas?

Proportion selecting: 0  60 %



Support for diversity quotas shifts depending on the type of disadvantage of the groups being targeted. Most Britons think it would be a good thing for institutions to set quotas to hire more disabled people. Two in five also think diversity quotas to hire more ethnic minorities would be a good thing, but one in four oppose using them in this case. The public are more likely to support a public institution setting diversity quotas to hire more people born in the UK than more ethnic minorities.

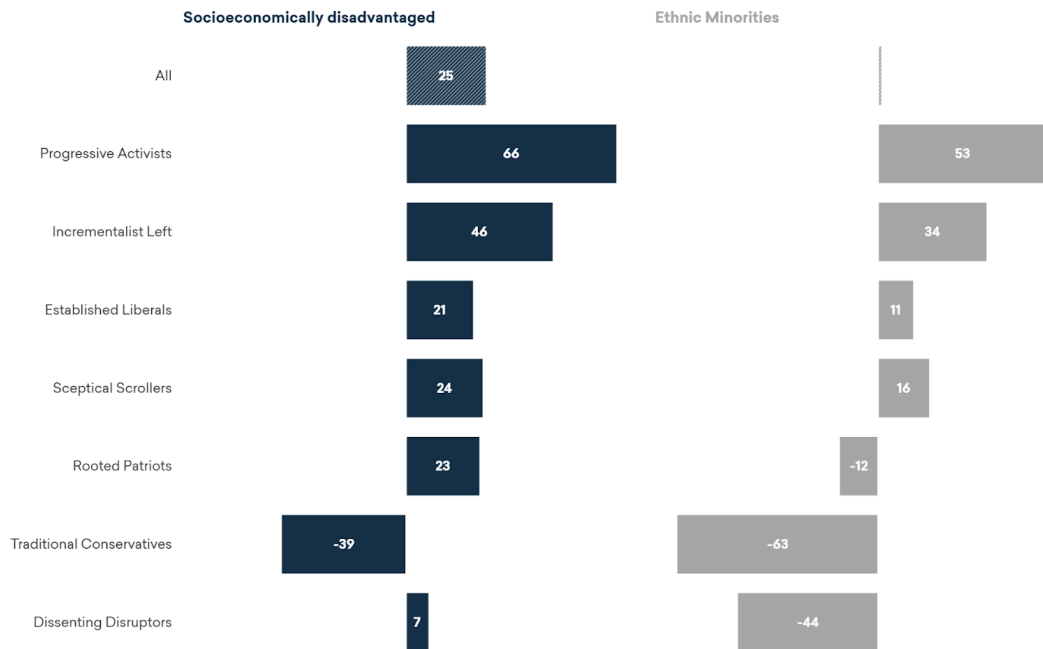
For each of the following groups, to what extent do you think it would be a good or bad thing for the public or private sector to have quotas for recruitment (Net Good)?



For university admissions, 44 per cent support setting targets for more students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, and 40 per cent support providing scholarships exclusively for this group. However, targeting more students from ethnic minority backgrounds splits the public (net support +1 point), and providing scholarships exclusively for students from ethnic minority backgrounds receives net opposition (net support -24 points).

Targets for socioeconomic diversity tend to be more popular than targets on ethnic diversity, particularly among more socially conservative segments. Strikingly, Rooted Patriots and Dissenting Disruptors, who tend to oppose ethnicity targets, support targets based on socioeconomic status. Again this highlights the importance of ensuring that socio-economic disadvantage is seen to sit at the heart of EDI initiatives.

## Do you support or oppose universities setting targets for more students from the following backgrounds



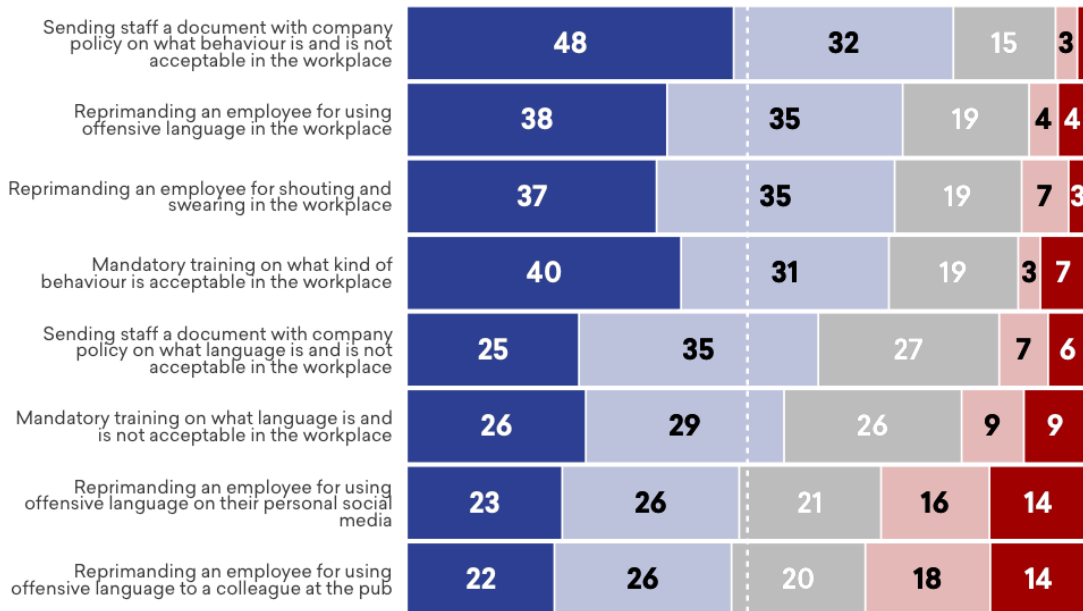
## Mandatory versus voluntary

The public tends to be sceptical of rigid EDI rules applied to everyone. On many issues people support a personal choice approach, are split on guidelines and have more resistance to mandatory requirements.

One example is displaying pronouns. Britons are slightly more likely to support than oppose offering badges to display pronouns to staff. Guidelines that encourage university staff to wear such pronoun badges are more likely to be opposed than supported (45 per cent opposed, 18 per cent support). But a mandatory approach is even more unpopular: 53 per cent oppose requiring staff to wear pronoun badges, and more oppose than support reprimanding staff who do choose to wear pronoun badges.

### Do you support or oppose universities doing the following?

● Strongly support    ● Somewhat support    ● Neither support nor oppose    ● Somewhat oppose    ● Strongly oppose



It is nothing new for workplaces to promote organisational values and encourage employees to treat others the way they would like to be treated. EDI initiatives that are seen to continue in this vein – shaping culture through education and, where appropriate, guidelines rather than reprimands or sweeping regulations – may benefit from more sustained support among the British public. Britons recognise EDI's value when it is concerned with improving organisational culture. They are less receptive to EDI as expressions of political ideology.

# Charting a way forward

## Building on foundations of respect and equality

For most Britons, EDI is about putting into practice the shared principle of respect for other people. This presents an opportunity for those championing EDI initiatives to ground their work in values of fairness, decency and respect for the rules, which govern much of British public opinion. This is particularly important for the socially conservative Rooted Patriot segment, who have outsized influence in electoral politics, and who support EDI when it is grounded in the notion of respect. EDI advocates may benefit from framing initiatives through this lens of mutual respect rather than the lens of systemic discrimination, which primarily resonate with Progressive Activists but which can make some feel excluded. By emphasising how EDI fosters workplaces and institutions where everyone is treated as they would wish to be treated, supporters can maintain a broad coalition of support.

## Refine don't abandon

Britons remain fundamentally supportive of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in principle but implementation risks becoming increasingly polarised. Rather than totally abandoning EDI or stubbornly adhering to existing approaches, advocates should look to build on what the public thinks works and address legitimate concerns by changing what doesn't.

Reforms should prioritise:

- **A focus on workplace culture**, building on the fact the public understand and support the need for EDI in making workplaces fairer and more professional. Pulling back the expansion of EDI into the personal realm could help to sustain support.
- **Voluntary approaches over mandatory approaches** where possible, reflecting the British preference for "live and let live" solutions. Inflexible requirements can generate more opposition to mandation rather than the policy itself.
- **Greater attention to socioeconomic disadvantage**: Support for measures benefiting socioeconomically disadvantaged groups suggests that an approach to EDI that demonstrates alignment with, rather than against, efforts to address socioeconomic disadvantage could command the broadest support.

## Context-dependent decisions

The public wants to see bottom-up rather than top-down approaches to EDI. Rather than following the Trump administration in targeting EDI initiatives through sweeping executive government mandates, the UK should build on the public's belief that different types of organisations, in different places, with different make ups, will know best how to apply EDI work in their institution. While the public support anti-discrimination and equal treatment rules that apply to everyone, they know that when it comes to the specifics universities businesses and public bodies face different challenges, and EDI approaches



which adapt the national to the local rather than conforming to a one-size-fits-all model are likely to gain wider support.

**Addressing zero-sum critiques**

Perhaps the most significant challenge facing EDI advocates is the growing perception, particularly among men and Reform voters, that these initiatives create winners and losers rather than mutual benefit. This zero-sum thinking, exacerbated by economic and social pressures, threatens to erode the soft support that EDI currently enjoys. Addressing this requires honest engagement with concerns about fairness and discrimination and ensuring EDI genuinely works for everyone.

