

# Research report

Diversity & inclusivity

djs  
research

**1500 Customers**

told us their views on how diverse and inclusive they perceive United Utilities to be

# Methodology

We used an online approach to interview household respondents using a panel. All respondents were screened based on having had some form of interaction with UU in the last 18 months. The data has been weighted throughout to be demographically representative of the region.

Demographics	Total % (weighted base)
Male	49% (735)
Female	51% (765)
White	92% (1377)
BAME*	8% (123)
18-34	28% (420)
35-54	32% (480)
55-64	16% (240)
65+	24% (360)
A	4% (59)
B	18% (271)
C1	30% (452)
C2	21% (315)
D	15% (226)
E	11% (164)

Demographics	Total % (weighted base)
Students	1% (13)
Cumbria	8% (116)
Merseyside	18% (273)
Greater Manchester	38% (571)
Lancashire	21% (321)
Cheshire	15% (220)
Disability in the household	32% (479)
No disability in the household	67% (1007)
Heterosexual or straight	90% (1349)
Bisexual	4% (60)
Gay or lesbian	4% (57)
Other sexual orientation	1% (11)
Prefer not to say	2% (23)

Total sample:  
**1,500**

Fieldwork was carried out from 24th August – 2nd September 2020

\*BAME: White & Black Caribbean, White & Black African, White and Asian, Other Mixed background, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Other Asian background, African, Caribbean, Other Black/African/Caribbean background, Arab, Other ethnic group

# Key Findings

- **Whether a company is diverse and inclusive isn't top of mind for most people, however, it's more important to: 18 – 34's, BAME, LGBTQ+ and disabled customers.**
- **Over half of customers perceive UU to be a diverse and inclusive service provider and employer (especially if you are a minority group). However, most of this is based on assumptions due to UU's size or the fact they haven't heard any bad press about this.**
- **Over half of customers believe 'people like them' work for United Utilities, although BAME, disabled and socio economic group A are significantly less likely to believe this. Some feel women and international employees are underrepresented.**
- **Most customers believe United Utilities is on par with other companies in the NW in terms of their commitment to diversity and inclusivity, but most can't explain why they think this, or make an assumption due to it being a large employer with no negative PR around this issue.**
- **If a company is seen as NOT diverse and inclusive, such as Boohoo, Misguided, Sports Direct etc. this can be very damaging to their reputation as a brand and employer. Negative customer interactions also make some customers more likely to believe a brand is a poor employer.**
- **Those that have had a higher level of engagement with United Utilities are generally more positive about the brand as a service provider and as an employer. These customers are also more likely to view UU as diverse and inclusive.**

Positive customer engagement and interactions improves perception of UU as both a service provider and employer. Some customers also believe UU should communicate their commitment to diversity and inclusivity through comms and publishing stats, as this hasn't necessarily been visible to customers. Although, this needs to be carefully managed to remain authentic, rather than be seen as a 'box ticking' exercise.

# Perceptions of UU as a diverse/ inclusive service provider

**57% of BAME customers ALWAYS consider a company's commitment to diversity & inclusivity before using them**  
 (vs 25% of total pop who always consider this)

→ This is also significantly more important for disabled customers, 18 – 34 y/o's and some LGBTQ+ customers

**IMPORTANCE ▲**

**68%** UU is committed to an inclusive environment for customers

**56%** Agree UU values diversity

**40%** Neither agree/ disagree UU values diversity

**27%** don't know if UU values diversity

→ 18-34 y/o's, BAME and those who 'love' UU are significantly more likely to believe UU values diversity

Cumbria customers are significantly less likely to believe UU is inclusive and value diversity

**PERCEPTIONS ▲**

Those who agree UU supports diversity, say this because they have been treated well in interactions they have had with UU or because they haven't heard anything negative about diversity and inclusivity within United Utilities. Although some feel they haven't heard enough to have an opinion.

"Myself and other members of my family are disabled and are registered with them as vulnerable. They have contacted me in march to ask if we needed any help or if we need help with bill payments and recently they have let us know that there may be an interruption in the water supply. They do all they can to provide the best service they can."

**Male, 18-24, Lancaster**

"Not seen anything bad from UU regarding diversity."

**Female, 25-34, Greater Manchester**

"It is an assumption. They are such a big brand that provides such an amazing, efficient and important service in a region that is so diverse in so many ways. I have never heard otherwise from anyone or anywhere to make me believe they are not."

**Female, 35-44, Greater Manchester**

"I am a black women and often United Utilities have taken my requests seriously and made me feel valued."

**Female, 35-44, Greater Manchester**

"I've never seen any diversity information about United Utilities promoting this."

**Male, 45-54, Merseyside**

# Opinions of UU as an employer are limited

Two thirds of respondents admit to having no opinion of UU as an employer. Those with an opinion are mainly positive.

**67%**  
No opinion  
of UU

“Don't know enough about them to comment on them being an employer.”

**Male, 65+, Cumbria**

**8%**  
Good employer/  
company to  
work for

“The staff always seem happy and are good with their customers so the whole structure of the organisation seems good.”

**Male, 45-54, Greater Manchester**

\*Those in Cheshire are least likely to feel that UU is a good company to work for (4%).

**7%**  
Treat employees  
well/fairly/with  
respect

“I believe that they are a good and fair-minded employer.”

**Male, 55-64, Merseyside**

\*Those from Cumbria are least likely to feel employees are treated well and fairly (2%).

Those of **BAME origin (14%)** are more likely than those of **white origin (7%)** to feel UU are good employers and provide a good quality of service (6% cf. 2%). This may be due to having a more positive interaction as we see **those who had a home visit, called UU or received a call were more likely to strongly agree the customer service was good compared to those of white origin (67% cf. 47%)\*.**

**4%**  
Haven't heard/don't  
know much about them

“Haven't read or heard anything about them as an employer.”

**Female, 35-44, Merseyside**

**Other (12%):** Employees seem happy, reputable/loyal/trustworthy, provide a quality service, haven't seen bad press, provide well paid jobs

Base: 1,500 (all respondents) Q05. What is your opinion of United Utilities as an employer, based on what you have seen, read or heard? \*Caution: low base sizes: white: 278 BAME: 40.

# Perceptions of UU as an employer

Over half (56%) feel UU values diversity and ensures employees feel valued. Although over two fifths struggle to have an opinion on this due to lack of knowledge. The older the customer the more likely they are to remain neutral as to whether UU ‘values diversity and ensures employees feel valued...’ and the less likely to believe UU care about employees.

18 – 34 y/o’s and disabled customers are more likely to agree that UU value diversity. Those who have had lower levels of interaction with UU are less likely to believe UU values diversity and ensures employees feel valued

<b>80%</b> Responsible company	<b>65%</b> I would be happy working for them
<b>79%</b> Trustworthy company to work for	<b>61%</b> Committed to a supportive and inclusive working environment
<b>71%</b> Cater for a diver customer base in the service they provide	<b>58%</b> Reflect the diversity of the customers they serve in their workforce
<b>67%</b> Fair company to work for	<b>57%</b> Communicate well with their employees
<b>67%</b> Good place to work	<b>58%</b> People like me work for them
<b>66%</b> Care about their employees	Value diversity and inclusivity to ensure employees from different backgrounds feel valued
<b>65%</b> I would be happy working for them	<b>56%</b>

Those in Cumbria are significantly less likely to agree (NET) UU is a responsible company (66%), a fair company to work for (57%), they seem to reflect the diversity of the customers they serve (48%), I would be happy to work for them (55%), that UU care about their employees (60%), communicate well (40%).

“People like me work for UU” → 29% don’t know  
13% disagree

Those of BAME origin are significantly less likely to agree (29%) ‘people like me work for UU’.

Whilst those with a disability (8%) are significantly more likely to strongly disagree that ‘somebody like them works for UU’ as are those who are classed as an A socio economic grading (17%).

# There is scepticism amongst a minority around whether UU care about their employees

This mainly stems from the size of the company and not having enough of a handle on individual employees' needs. Women and international workers are felt to be underrepresented by those who disagree 'people like me work for them'. A small number compare the experience they've had as a customer of UU to what they might be like as an employee

## Disagree: They care about their employees

There is an assumption that a company of this size is only concerned with making money and consideration is rarely given to individual employees.

Others know people who have been unfairly dismissed or who have worked for UU and not had a positive experience

"Never heard a good word said about United Utilities from an employee."

**Male, 45-54, Merseyside**

## Disagree: People like me work for them

It is felt that women and international employees are underrepresented at UU. Some also feel they'd lack the skills to work at UU.

"It's a truly English company and no foreigners work there. It doesn't look a good place to work."

**Female, 25-34, Lancashire**

"I don't see many females working for them."

**Female, 25-34, Greater Manchester**

## Disagree: It looks like a good place to work

Those who have had a negative experience as a customer tend to feel it would be similar as an employee. Some feel that staff seem overworked and not well supported.

"We live close to UU and have had to contact them a lot, they are not very friendly, certainly not a company I would work for."

**Female, 45-54, Greater Manchester**

## Disagree: They are committed to providing a supportive and inclusive environment for all of their employees

It is felt that staff don't appear to be well supported and don't tend to see them present at careers events.

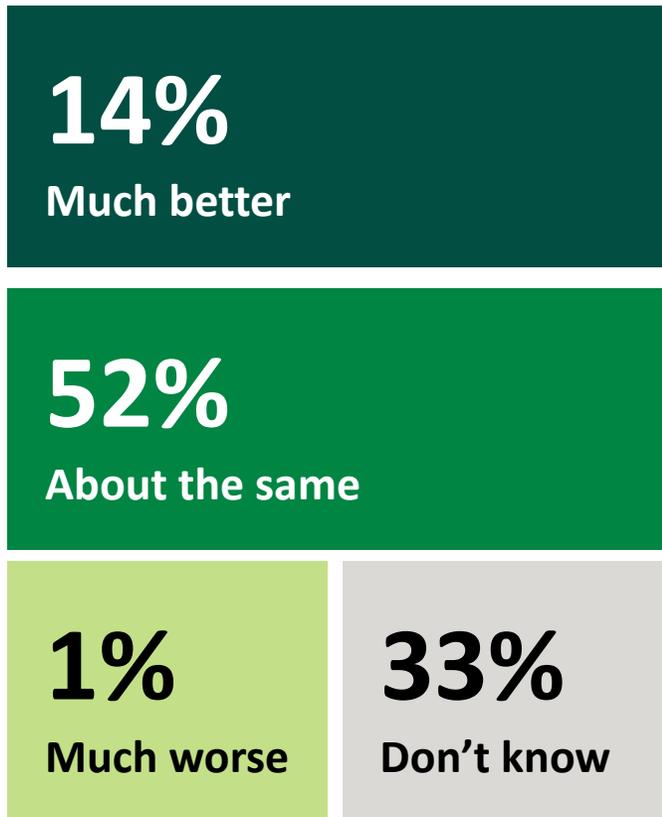
"The people who I have seen there don't seem too well supported."

**Male, 65+, Lancashire**

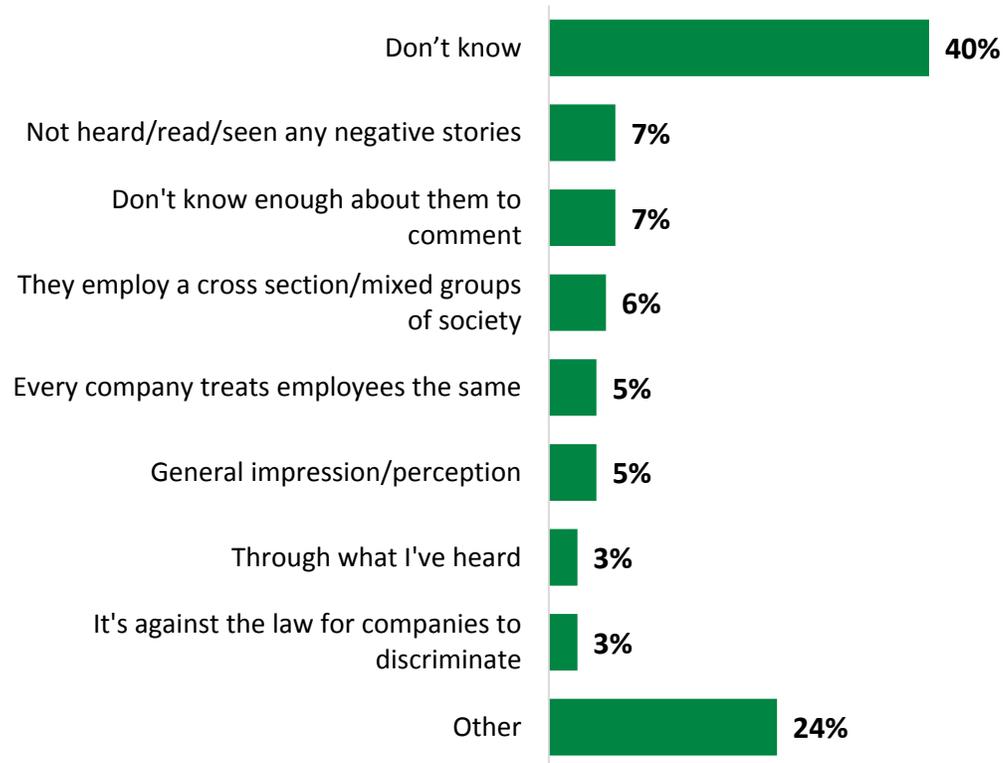
**Base: 23** (all respondents who disagree) Q06b. Why do you disagree that: They care about their employees, (138) People like me work for them. \*Caution low base size.

# Customers put UU on par with other employers in the NW in terms of diversity and inclusion but struggle to explain why

They revert back to reputation or what they have or haven't heard to make a judgement.



## Why do you say that?



## Other:

- They have a good reputation
- They provide a good service
- Many companies have a diverse workforce
- Don't see many women employees
- I do not have a view

Base: 1,009 (All respondents excluding don't know at Q09a) Q09b. Why do you say that?

# National or multi-national, well-known companies are thought to be the most diverse

UU is rated the highest amongst the North West companies in a pre-coded list.

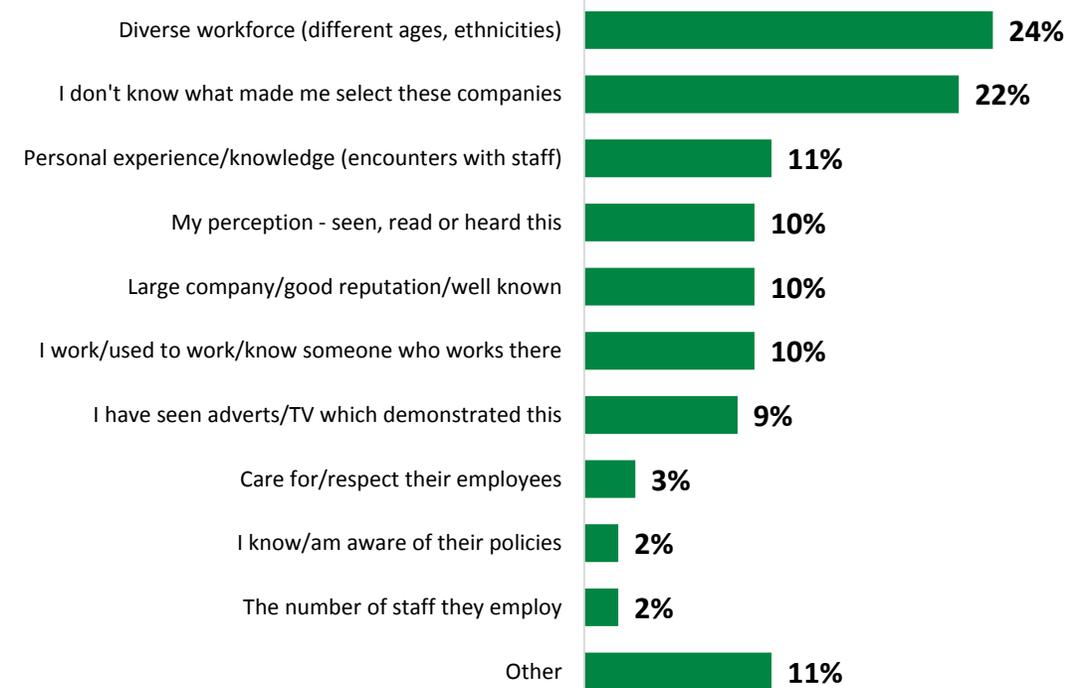
Top companies perceived to be diverse & inclusive (spontaneous responses)



Top 5 perceived diverse & inclusive North West companies (pre-coded)



What made you select these companies as diverse & inclusive?



Base: 1,500 (all respondents) Q10a. Now, just thinking about diversity and inclusivity, can you think of any large companies in the UK who you perceive to be diverse and inclusive? 1500 (All respondents). Below is a list of large companies based in the North West. Now, please select up to 3 companies who you perceive to be diverse and inclusive.

# Companies not seen as diverse and inclusive tend to have been exposed in the media

These companies are seen as lacking diversity and inclusivity because they are known to mistreat staff, their employee make-up lacks diversity and they show inequality in how they pay staff.

Most mentioned companies perceived to be lacking in diversity & inclusion

boohoo

amazon.co.uk

MISSGUIDED

BBC

SPORTS  
DIRECT.COM



“BBC from recent reports it doesn’t give equal pay to women and doesn’t employ as many people from diverse backgrounds.”

**Female, 65+, Merseyside**

“Sports Direct, Amazon. Criticism from lower paid workers regarding conditions they were working in.”

**Male, 65+, Greater Manchester**

“Boohoo I know many people who work there and the negative comments are intense.”

**Female, 55-64, Lancashire**

“Misguided, I saw a programme on it where they were shown to be using factories that were exploiting their employees, the company only tried to rectify the issue when exposed.”

**Female, 45-54, Cheshire**

“Police, don't see many ethnic or LGBTQ+ officers on the streets. Only a couple as if they're just trying to hit a quota.”

**Male, 35-44, Greater Manchester**

Base: 258 (all respondents) Q11b. Can you provide any examples of companies who you do not perceive to be diverse and inclusive?

# Around two fifths of customers think UU need to communicate they are diverse and inclusive as there is not enough coverage of this at present

## What can UU do to communicate they are diverse and inclusive?

### Advertise

- Focus on employees in the adverts and the value they add
- Provide more information on your website, leaflets, social media and bills on how you treat your employees
- Publish employee data (BAME, gender, pay levels etc.)
- Visit schools, colleges and careers events
- TV adverts and displays billboards or images on vans (already something UU have implemented) are also mentioned as a way to show people UU values diversity

“If they actually are a diverse and inclusive employer then they can show that through the people we interact with on the phone, the people we see out working, and photos of actual employees on the website.”

**Female, 45-54, Greater Manchester**

“Do a social media campaign! Put it on the front page of your website, your vans & uniform, your emails and info places. Don’t make it so someone would have to go out of their way to find out. Keep up or get left behind.”

**Female, 25-34, Lancashire**

“They should emphasise, perhaps on their website, exactly what proportions of people they employ from various backgrounds. Obviously they can represent this through a more diverse group of people in adverts but it will fall flat if they do not show this through statistics. They should be able to display that those from minority backgrounds are not only employed and safe but are in high positions through statistics.”

**Female, 18-34, Greater Manchester**

**But customers want to feel UU is not ‘ticking a box’ & employing people for the right reasons...**

“Constantly informing of how good they are in this respect, may cause some to wonder why they are doing so. Their actions and workforce happiness and occasional reminder should suffice.”

**Male, 65+, Merseyside**

**Base: 704** (all respondents) Q13. Finally, what do you think United Utilities should do more of to communicate they are a diverse and inclusive employer and service provider?

# For more information



**Shy Sharma, Customer Insight and  
Exploration Manager**

[Shy.Sharma@uuplc.co.uk](mailto:Shy.Sharma@uuplc.co.uk)

[unitedutilities.com](http://unitedutilities.com)