



DIVERSITY IN ADVERTISING AWARD 2026

Authentic Representation of Class

Challenging our industry to
authentically represent modern
Britain by moving past outdated
working-class stereotypes

Background to The Brief

Channel 4s Diversity in Advertising Award has played a vital role in encouraging the industry to be more representative of the UK. Now in its 11th year, we have seen brands successfully represent women, the LGBTQIA+ community, disabled people, and ethnic minorities. In 2026, we are challenging the industry to tackle class portrayal.

Why Now?

Our industry relies on a flawed aspiration myth. Our Mirror on Class and Social Grade report shows only 17% of people strongly agree they aspire to occupations at the top of social grade lists. Yet, the assumption remains that audiences only want to see aspirational middle-class portrayals.

This ignores how the UK population actually views itself. Recent data from a 2024 YouGov survey reveals that **56%** of Britons consider themselves to be working-class, and the Social Mobility Commission's 2025 public attitudes report similarly found that **53%** of the public identify as working-class.

Despite this, working-class talent makes up just **19%** of the advertising workforce, while those who attended a fee-paying school (**18%**) are more than twice as likely to work in advertising than the general public (**8%**). (All In Census Data, Advertising Association, IPA, ISBA, Kantar, 2023).

This disconnect translates directly to our screens. Our upcoming update to the Mirror On The Industry report reveals:

- Only **11%** of characters are identified as working-class, compared to **41%** as middle-class.
- Working-class portrayals rely heavily on narrow narratives and stereotypically gritty settings.
- Working-class characters are significantly more likely to be shown in a uniform at **37%**, compared to **11%** for the total sample.

What Do We Mean By Authentic Representation?



This brief challenges entrants to move past outdated tropes. Authentic representation means featuring working-class people in nuanced roles. It requires avoiding reliance on uniforms, manual labour tropes, gritty settings, and regional accents as lazy shortcuts for characterisation.

Working-class individuals should be portrayed as experts, leaders, and nuanced protagonists, giving a platform to historically unheard voices.

Why Should Brands Get Involved?

Reaching more than half the UK population makes clear commercial sense. The best entries will authentically cater to and represent the 53% of the population who identify as working-class (Social Mobility Commission, 2025), unlocking long-term commercial impact for the brand.

With clear and authentic storytelling, your ad can capture the attention of a massive segment of the UK population that are currently overlooked and under served.

By moving past tropes and portraying working-class individuals as nuanced protagonists, you have the opportunity to build genuine brand affinity and trust. This is a moral and creative mandate to put authentic inclusion at the heart of your advertising in the best creative tradition of our industry.

What We Are Looking For

Great advertising is about compelling storytelling. We are looking for bold, creative campaigns that challenge what is considered the last acceptable stereotype in media. The best entries will shape their communication around the objective of authentic working-class representation, making it a strategic consideration rather than an afterthought.

We welcome joyful, diverse stories that reflect the full scope of working-class experience rather than relying solely on gritty social realism (Authentic Portrayal in UK Media, 2025).

Last year, Tesco alongside BBH and Essence Mediacom successfully leveraged this award to drive authentic inclusion.

The Guidelines:

Questions To Ask Yourself

- To help shape your creative process and avoid common pitfalls, ask these questions to ensure authentic portrayal:
- Is the character defined solely by their job title or social grade?
- Are we relying on a regional accent to do the heavy lifting of characterisation?
- Are working-class individuals shown in positions of authority, expertise, or thriving within their communities, careers, or lives?
- Are we telling joyful, diverse stories rather than relying on gritty social realism or narratives that demand escape as a success metric?
- Does the portrayal reflect the intersectional diversity of working-class communities, rather than defaulting to a single demographic?
- Have we meaningfully consulted working-class communities and involved working-class creatives, freelancers, or consultants behind the scenes when building this campaign?



Who Can Enter?

Entries are welcomed from any part of the advertising industry for ideas covering all brands suitable and legal to advertise across Channel 4 platforms. Entries can be submitted by creative agencies, media agencies, or brands directly. All entries must include direct endorsement of the concept from a senior figure at the featured brand. We particularly welcome pitches that demonstrate meaningful engagement with working-class communities, or where organisations have involved creatives, freelancers, or consultants from working-class backgrounds in creating this work.



Be Sustainable

The winning campaign must follow AdGreen guidelines provided by the Advertising Association, which helps eliminate negative environmental impacts during production. You must also measure your campaigns emissions via our partnership with Scope 3. This is a mandatory process for all Channel 4 Business for Good winners.

The Prize

The winning brand will receive **£1,000,000** of 4Sales ad value across our linear and VOD platforms. Our five non-winning shortlist entries will also be offered up to **£250,000** of match funded commercial ad space. The total prize pot for 2026 exceeds **£2,000,000**.

2026 Key Dates



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20th July 2026

Entries Open

1st October 2026

Entries Close

13th October 2026

Shortlist Announced

W/C 19th October 2026

Final Pitches Take Place



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