



What is the Creative Case for diversity?

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Introduction: Achieving great art for everyone

In this publication, the Arts Council sets out and invites the arts sector to engage with a new and different approach to diversity and equality in the arts, which we are calling the Creative Case.

This is a repositioning of the Arts Council's previous work where, due to statutory requirements and legal duties, we did separate strands of work on race, disability and gender equality and where the focus was on addressing past imbalances and reducing deficits and structural gaps in the arts sector. These factors are still present and there are still barriers to creativity, participation, learning and involvement – which consequently put a brake on the fullest development of the arts and creative industries in this country. The Arts Council is as committed as ever to removing those attitudinal, hierarchical and class barriers that still exist.

The Creative Case does not deny the worth of previous work - the moral, legal, ethical and business cases - but argues that there is a clearer, simpler and more potent position to articulate: that diversity and equality are crucial to the arts because they sustain, refresh, replenish and release the true potential of England's artistic talent, regardless of people's background.

We are conscious of the growing call to bring art back into the centre of the discussion and thinking on diversity. We have already acted on this impetus, so that for the first time our ambitions for diversity and equality are knitted into those of excellence, reach, engagement and innovation. This is articulated in our 10-year vision for the arts, *Achieving great art for everyone: a strategic framework for the arts*. Here we set out an artistic-led approach to diversity in the arts as the driver for change.

This publication aims to go further than the conviction that diversity and equality are good for the arts. The Creative Case builds on what we believe to be an instinctive understanding within the arts community that diversity and creativity are

inherently linked. We wish to articulate an approach that encompasses the ways in which diversity has been and remains an intrinsic and dynamic part of the creative process.

Arts Council England approached visual arts organisation Third Text in 2009 with an offer of a partnership to work together to take the debate about diversity and the arts to a new and different level. Third Text is a unique organisation, and not without its criticism of the Arts Council's diversity interventions and policy. It has many years of high-level advocacy for the visual arts and has championed a reinterpretation of the arts and its written history. We chose a visual arts organisation to map out the Creative Case for diversity in recognition that the visual arts have in recent times been an arena for sharp and rigorous debates around diversity and equality.

Our partnership in 2010 produced a book *Beyond Cultural Diversity: the case for creativity*. This special Third Text Report, a series of essays and provocations by leading figures in the visual arts and diversity, provides a coherent critique of cultural diversity while looking ahead to the development of an inclusive history of modern British art. Third Text argue 'that a break with official policies of cultural diversity do not mean a return to "business as usual" for the arts establishment but a deeper understanding of the intrinsic value of diversity in the arts'¹.

We are convinced that the benefits to the arts, museums and libraries and wider creative industries of unlocking this creativity, eradicating exclusion and having a cultural sector that is truly welcoming and focused on people is potentially magnificent.

¹ Appignanesi, Richard (ed.), *Beyond Cultural Diversity: the case for creativity*, Third Text, 2010 cover text

The development of the Arts Council's diversity and equality policies

Our definition of diversity encompasses responding to issues around race, ethnicity, faith, disability, age, gender, sexuality, class and economic disadvantage and any social and institutional barriers that prevent people from participating in and enjoying the arts. We are turning our focus from remedying past imbalances towards celebrating diversity positively, with all the artistic and creative opportunities it offers.²

Since the 1970s, the Arts Council and those it funds and seeks to influence have pursued various ways of increasing equality in the arts, mainly by implementing measures under the umbrella term 'cultural diversity'.

Responses to inequalities and what has been seen as a lack of diverse representation in the arts world have included putting aside funds to encourage cultural diversity; the setting of various targets; consultations and reports to pinpoint perceived problems and find solutions; and interventions to force the pace of change, including targeted programmes of work and positive action initiatives.

The thrust of this work was pulled together and integrated as a legal imperative for the first time in the wake of the Macpherson Report arising out of the Stephen Lawrence affair, and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 that followed.

The Arts Council's first Race Equality Scheme 2004-07 played a major part in embedding race equality within the organisation. The requirement in the Race Equality Scheme that obliged all our regularly funded organisations to draw up and enact race equality schemes has had a largely beneficial effect by increasing opportunities for Black and minority ethnic artists and their companies and pushing a wider equality agenda.

² *Annual review 2009*, Arts Council England, 2009, p67

The Race Equality Scheme was complemented by a number of time-limited projects, the most prominent of which has been the decibel programme and its legacy decibel Performing Arts Showcase. Subsequent legislation around disability and gender equality has begun to have a similar impact in these areas as well.

In recent times, issues of equality inside the arts world have increasingly been influenced by wider debates in society at a national and global level.

This has seen the Arts Council's diversity and equality policies extensively scrutinised, debated and critiqued. The debate has often focused on the efficacy of positive action. Other concerns include perceived 'tick box' exercises around diversity and equality and the feeling some artists from diverse backgrounds have that Arts Council England policies were contributing to them being devalued as artists.

Public policy thinking around equality has evolved from the previous view that areas of inequality and discrimination could be tackled separately, to a much more sophisticated approach that takes account of the complexity of discrimination.

This has allowed the Arts Council to orientate towards a single equality view, with no strand seen as more important than any other and with all of them interlinked. This change of consensus is enshrined legally in the Equality Act 2010.

In response to these factors the Arts Council has been developing and testing the more inclusive approach within the Creative Case framework.

This broader approach manifested itself in, among other things, the opening up of decibel Performing Arts Showcase in 2009 to disabled artists. It was a successful intervention that laid the foundation for the breaking down of existing disability and race 'silos' and a release of dialogue, collaboration and creativity.

In the 2011 showcase the remit was extended even further to embrace artists with 'diverse practice'. This is defined as including, but not limited to, artists from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, disabled people or any other artist who may have had limited opportunities to participate in the arts.

What is the Creative Case for diversity?

The Creative Case is based upon the simple observation that diversity, in the widest sense, is an integral part of the artistic process. It is an important element in the dynamic that drives art forward, that innovates it and brings it closer to a profound dialogue with contemporary society.

We readily acknowledge that this is not new thinking: the innovative potential was highlighted in Sir Brian McMaster's 2008 report to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport into excellence in the arts:

Within these concepts of excellence, innovation and risk-taking, and running through everything that follows below, must be a commitment to diversity. The diverse nature of 21st century Britain is the perfect catalyst for ever greater innovation in culture and I would like to see diversity put at the heart of everything cultural. We live in one of the most diverse societies the world has ever seen, yet this is not reflected in the culture we produce, or in who is producing it. Out of this society, the greatest culture could grow... it is my belief that culture can only be excellent when it is relevant, and thus nothing can be excellent without reflecting the society which produces and experiences it.³

³ McMaster, Sir Brian, *Supporting excellence in the arts: from measurement to judgement*, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2008

Sir Brian McMaster makes an obvious point - that it is to the benefit of everyone involved in the arts – creators and participants and audiences – to put ‘diversity at the heart of everything cultural’. He is also right in pointing out that we are not there yet. We have a journey to go on, one that leaves behind increasingly outmoded approaches to our artistic and cultural life in favour of new ways of seeing and telling and making.

We need to recognise that art placed in the margins through structural barriers and antiquated and exclusive approaches has to be brought to the centre of our culture and valued accordingly. The Arts Council believes that the Creative Case approach demands three interlocking progressions:

1 Equality

There has to be a continued drive for equality to remove barriers in the arts world, releasing and realising potential and helping to transform the arts so that they truly reflect the reality of the diverse country that we have become but still do not fully recognise.

2 Recognition

There has to be a new conversation that attempts through various means to resituate diverse artists, both historically and theoretically, at the centre of British art – whether that is the performing arts, the visual arts, combined arts, music, literature or film.

3 A new vision

We need a new framework for viewing diversity, one that takes it out of a negative or ‘deficit’ model and places it in an artistic context. Diversity becomes not an optional extra but part of the fabric of our discussions and decisions about how we encourage an energetic, relevant, fearless and challenging artistic culture in England and the wider world.

Equality

Diversity is not the problem. Diversity exists. It does not have to be created – it is all around us. But it only has meaning and value, and becomes an active force, when it is linked to the drive for greater equality.

The issue we face is that within a diverse society and diverse arts community, within its history, its practice and critical debate, some are seen as far more equal than others. This presents the paradox of the creative process - diversity rich in inspiration, but the distribution and consumption of the creative product being delivered in the main through a network of exclusive clubs.

Unfortunately this inequality is widening, particularly for those attempting to enter the profession. New Deal of the Mind's 2010 report *Creative survival in hard times* found that 'employment in the creative industries is becoming a prerogative of the privileged, and that entry into the profession is largely confined to those who can afford unpaid internships or who have access to those in a position to get them into work'⁴.

The student pressure body The Arts Group, have found that 80% of jobs in the creative industries are still secured through closed networks:

Networking remains the key method of finding opportunities, effectively perpetuating closed circles of contacts dominated by the middle classes. As long as there is no properly structured and accessible recruitment path, we will not be able to open up opportunities to those with talent. We appear to be heading quite willingly into a model where those who can afford to pay [by

⁴ Gunnel, Barbara and Bright, Martin, eds., *Creative Survival in Hard Times*, a New Deal of the Mind report for Arts Council England, 2010, p5

being able to undertake unpaid internships] are able to access the best paths to the creative sector.⁵

New Deal of the Mind warns that:

One consequence of this is a serious under-representation of ethnic minorities in the creative industries. CCSkills, the sector skills council for the creative and cultural industries (excluding media), believes this to be as low as four per cent. Since January 2010's unemployment figures revealed that half of all black 16- to 24-year-olds are unemployed, fair and equitable entry into the creative industries is an issue that needs to be urgently addressed by the sector and by politicians of all parties.⁶

Recognition

We can all be enlightened by new ways of telling the story of the development of contemporary art in Britain. For example, post-World War II immigration has forever changed the essence of British life – so why do we still largely struggle to properly articulate that phenomenon within the arts?

There needs to be an acknowledgement that, for example, artists whose work has been marginalised through inequalities and structures of discrimination in wider society have nevertheless had a significant and sometimes pivotal influence on artistic genres, forms and styles that have developed over the years. Diversity in its widest sense is intrinsic to the development of art and culture, yet this viewpoint is often obscured by orthodox and dogmatic narratives and histories.

⁵ Gunnel, Barbara and Bright, Martin, eds., *Creative Survival in Hard Times*, a New Deal of the Mind report for Arts Council England, 2010, p23

⁶ Gunnel, Barbara and Bright, Martin, eds., *Creative Survival in Hard Times*, a New Deal of the Mind report for Arts Council England, 2010, p5

Take the case of the development of modernism in the visual arts. Many art historians now acknowledge that Picasso, Brancusi, Modigliani, Matisse, Klee, Epstein, Hepworth and others all drew their inspiration from art whose origins were in the African subcontinent and beyond.

But in Britain we have yet to fully incorporate the full contribution of artists who migrated to this country on the development of our own modernist movements. Rasheed Araeen of Third Text has already identified this 'missing story' in the context of post-World War II visual arts:

The presence of artists in Britain originating from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean is totally absent from the official narratives of art history... Although some Afro-Asian artists have been received benevolently and with admiration, there is little institutional recognition that the absence of non-white artists from mainstream art history has falsified the history of modernism.⁷

We have to question why so many influential artists remain largely invisible in the history of the arts, and absent from contemporary conversations of the value of diversity in the arts today. As dramatist Kwame Kwei-Armah observes: 'That which is not articulated does not exist – we have been really bad at articulating the links between what could be seen as a peripheral activity and its impact on the mainstream.'⁸

To make the point, Kwei-Armah picks out the place of playwright Barry Reckord in regard to the course of post-war British theatre. Reckord came from Jamaica in the 1950s to study at Cambridge. His first play was staged at the Royal Court Theatre

⁷ Araeen, Rasheed, *A Very British Issue*, Third Text, 2008, p126

⁸ Mahamdallie, Hassan, '“That which is not articulated does not exist” – what the mainstream owes Black Theatre' in *Beyond Cultural Diversity: the case for creativity*, Third Text, 2010, p116

in 1958 and his contemporaries include Caryl Churchill, Edward Bond, John Arden and Arnold Wesker.

Ann Jellicoe, (who wrote iconic play/film *The Knack*), directed the Royal Court's production of *Skyvers*, Reckord's portrayal of alienated and brutalised working-class schoolboys up against the authorities.

Guardian theatre critic Michael Billington has described *Skyvers* as:

...a devastating account by a young Jamaican writer of life in what would now be called a 'bog-standard' London comprehensive. Other dramatists, such as Nigel Williams in *Class Enemy*, went on to explore the failure of the system to cope with those at the bottom of the heap. But Reckord got there first.⁹

Skyvers had a huge impact at the time, but is now largely forgotten and has not entered the British theatre repertoire. Barry Reckord played a key role in driving forward British theatre of the 1960s but today we are a long way from acknowledging and expressing such an integrated vision of key moments that 'switched the tracks'.

Think how many different ways we could expand our possibilities for the art and culture of today and tomorrow if we truly valued and could harness and release that kind of transformative potential that exists unrealised in our society today? We could then talk about seriously about the authentic and the profound and truthfulness in human creative expression.

⁹ Michael Billington, *The Guardian*, Wednesday 25 January 2006

A new vision

We need to develop a total approach to the arts that allows us to reassess artists whom we consider to display excellence, and uncover aspects of their lives that the establishment template cannot hold – for example the role of disability in art.

This is not to go back into history and tag famous artists as ‘disabled’, or even to necessarily claim that individuals past or present have been oppressed or faced discrimination because of disablism. Many artists have had impairments. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Frida Kahlo are two examples well-known to the public. However, it is of value to understand how their disabilities may have entered their artistic processes. In contemporary times, the Turner Prize-nominee Yinka Shonibare has explained how the nature of his disability interacted with his artistic development. A 2001 profile of his work revealed that:

Shonibare’s developing intellectual critique was informed by his own experience of physical disability. At the age of 19, while doing a foundation course at the Wimbledon School of Art, he contracted a viral infection that left him completely paralyzed for a month and in a wheelchair for three years. Although able to get about, he has impaired mobility, including limited use of his left side.

This, he insists, made him both more determined and more creative as an artist: ‘Historically the people who made huge, unbroken modernist paintings, were middle-class white American men. I don’t have that physique; I can’t make that work. So I fragmented it, in a way which made it both physically manageable and emphasises the political critique.’¹⁰

If we can open up these commonly neglected areas of inquiry, there is the chance that a proper place can be given to those artists today who are fighting against

¹⁰ Nancy Hynes, ‘Yinka Shonibare: Re-dressing History’, and John Picton, Yinka Shonibare: Undressing Ethnicity’, *African Arts*, vol 34, no 3, autumn, 2001, pp 60–73, pp 93–95

their work being devalued or being exoticised, and for its true potential to be recognised.

When the artist Louise Bourgeois died at the age of 98, obituary writers and critics praised her for her 'persistence' and noted that she had not gained prominence until she was in her 70s. However, most did not touch on how she was excluded from the charmed circle of male artists whose work was purchased and exhibited by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in the late 1930s:

Because I was French and kind of discreet, they tolerated me – with my accent I was a little strange, I was not competition – and I was cute, I guess. They took me seriously on a certain level, but they refused to help me professionally. The trustees of the Museum of Modern Art were not interested in a young woman coming from Paris. They were not flattered by her attention. They were not interested in her three children. I was definitely not socially needed then. They wanted male artists, and they wanted male artists who did not say they were married. They wanted male artists who would come alone and be their charming guests. Rothko could be charming. It was a court. And the artist buffoons came to court to entertain, to charm.¹¹

It took MoMA 50 years to mount a major exhibition of Bourgeois's work (and thereby its first retrospective of a female artist). According to Bourgeois, this finally came about in 1982 because a female curator, Deborah Wye, 'convinced them [the trustees] that I was important'.

The cultural theorist Janet Wolff has argued that in the field of the visual arts there is still a job to do in uncovering women artists in history and analysing their work. But there is also much work to do in challenging the 'natural' view of the artistic legacy that exists in museums and galleries:

¹¹ Kuspit, Donald, An interview with Louise Bourgeois in *The Phallic Woman*, Vintage Books, 1998.

We should also look at questions about gender made more visible and more central by new theories and by our changed circumstances. The answer to male domination of the museums is not to get rid of all early 20th-century Modernist paintings of female nudes – they are wonderful works of art after all. Instead we should try and figure out new and critical display strategies based, for instance, on juxtapositions which would dismantle the concept of a woman as a passive object of the gaze.

Raising a challenging question doesn't have to abolish the pleasure of looking.¹²

If we can apply a total vision of the arts then we can begin the enriching process of expanding the creative possibilities to the benefit of everyone.

How do we apply the Creative Case?

Our key guiding principle will be that inclusivity of outlook and practice creates a better, richer and more dynamic arts sector. At the heart of this is the Arts Council's desire to forge a new relationship with the arts sector on issues of diversity and equality characterised by shared discourses and critical debate.

We are keen to set this new direction into the wider context of a rapidly changing and diversifying arts world, in which one-size-fits-all and top-down approaches are inappropriate. As we state in *Achieving great art for everyone*: 'The Arts Council is not an academy. It is an organisation whose duty is to engage with living artists and audiences, to encourage and inspire to ever-greater ambition and boldness.'¹³

¹² Wolff, Janet, 'Society and the Public Sphere: Strategies of Correction and Interrogation', in *Mobile Fidelities: Conversations on Feminism, History and Visuality*, n.paradoxa, online issue 19, May 2006, p 92

¹³ *Achieving great art for everyone*, Arts Council England, 2010, p2

The purpose of an arts and artists-led approach to diversity and equality is for our profession to take ownership of the Arts Council's policy on diversity and equality, to tailor it to its needs, to develop and share good practice, to probe the questions that it raises and to innovate creative approaches and solutions.

We see the Arts Council exercising leadership by catalysing debate and dialogue and facilitating and sustaining future developments and strategies. We want to work as a broker encouraging meaningful and sustained partnerships that are based on mutual respect and equality.

In moving away from a 'deficit' and 'problematizing' approach to diversity, the Arts Council wishes to encourage those we fund and partner to be responsible for creating the conditions on the ground for further equality in the arts. We believe this approach will lead to a greater diversity of artistic expression connecting with a wider audience for the work.

We all have to continue to dismantle the barriers that exclude the widest participation in the arts. Issues of class, gender, race and disability discrimination or stereotype have prevented working-class people, women, Black and minority ethnic and disabled people, lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgendered people and other groups from enjoying quality artistic experiences as creators and thereby growing their professional reputations.

The Arts Council is aware that artistic collaboration between artists and organisations from diverse backgrounds and what is regarded as the mainstream remains limited, but, where it has taken place, it has demonstrated a creative dynamic that fuels innovation. We are convinced that there exists a range of exciting, challenging and fascinating arts opportunities waiting to be explored. We would like to see peer-to-peer learning and knowledge of examples of good practice to increase.

We would like those artists and organisations we fund to share their resources, knowledge, experience and artistic platforms with artists and companies from diverse backgrounds. Such collaborations should be based on the working principle of mutual exchange and mutual benefit. It should not be seen as doing diverse artists a favour or acting to please the Arts Council.

There is generally a lack of profile and critical debate on work produced by diverse artists. We want the arts community, including academics and critics, to grasp the nettle and find ways of addressing the historical distortion in art critique that too often casts work by diverse artists as exotic, outside the main debates or of somehow lesser value.

What about the Arts Council?

For the Arts Council, the Creative Case means a number of things. Firstly that the Arts Council England itself becomes an organisation that reflects the society it serves. The Arts Council will follow the principle that it set down in Race Equality Scheme 2004-7 stating that we will 'make equality a core issue in all that we do, across all programmes and activities'¹⁴. There should be no divide between what we ask of those we fund in regards to diversity and equality and what we are prepared to implement in regards to our own operation.

We will create the conditions inside the Arts Council that enable staff to confidently articulate the Creative Case for diversity and the policies that flow from it. We cannot expect to deliver a quality service unless our staff are outward looking, confident and knowledgeable.

In summary, we will create ways of working inside the Arts Council that make the organisation more receptive to creativity, challenge and change.

¹⁴ Arts Council England, *Race Equality Scheme 2004-7*, 2007, p6

The production of Arts Council's own Equality Scheme and Action Plan in April 2012 will set out in detail the actions we will commit to over the next three years. We will require all national portfolio organisations to have their own action plans in place by April 2013. We want these schemes to be based on an arts-led approach to diversity and equality.

We also need to find imaginative and innovative ways to gather together a consensus that agrees that the relationship between the arts and diversity and equality needs to find another, more fundamental axis to turn on.

The Arts Council doesn't have a monopoly on this initial debate we are launching. We want to create the opportunities for people to ask profound questions, to debate them and provide convincing evidence for their assertions and viewpoints. We hope the actions that flow from such conversations will result in an arts community that sees diversity and equality as wholly integrated into its everyday thought and practice.

Useful further reading

The Creative Case for Diversity in Britain website

<http://www.creativecase.org.uk>

Achieving great art for everyone: a strategic framework for the arts, Arts Council England, 2010

<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/about-us/a-strategic-framework-for-the-arts/>

Appignanesi , Richard (ed.), *Beyond Cultural Diversity: the case for creativity*, Third Text, 2010

McMaster, Sir Brian, *Supporting Excellence in the Arts: from measurement to judgement*, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2008

http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication_archive/mcmaster-review-supporting-excellence-in-the-arts-from-measurement-to-judgement/

Gunnel, Barbara and Bright, Martin, *Creative Survival in Hard Times*, a New Deal of the Mind report for Arts Council England, 2010

http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication_archive/creative-survival-hard-times/

Nwachukwu, Tony and Robinson, Mark, *Diversity and adaptive resilience*, Arts Council England, 2011

<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/about-us/conferences-training/creative-case-symposium/>