

Foreword to Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case: A Data Report, 2019/20

by Sir Nicholas Serota, Chair, Arts Council England

Considering the extraordinary year we have shared since the onset of the pandemic, it seems slightly strange to be reporting now on diversity data gathered for the year ending April 2020. However, the issue continues to be a matter for concern because our sector does not yet fully reflect the diversity of England across boards, leadership positions and the wider workforce – particularly in relation to Disability and Ethnicity, but also in relation to Gender within leadership.

Although we still face significant challenges in dealing with the impact of Covid-19 – and we continue to work with Government to deliver support through the Culture Recovery Fund and our own funding programmes – I again want to stress the importance of building an arts and cultural sector that truly belongs to us all.

In April, we launched the first phase of our **Delivery Plan** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/lets-create/our-delivery-plan-2021-2024>) for **Let's Create** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/letscreate>), our Strategy for 2020-30, with a focus on the new Inclusivity and Relevance Investment Principle, which sets out our own commitment and expectation that funded organisations across England will strive to better reflect and serve all communities.

Organisations applying for regular funding will need to identify which groups are underrepresented, using data they collect about themselves and published data on the diversity of their local communities. They will be asked to use this information to set their own targets to diversify their governance, leadership, workforce, programming and audiences; we will expect these targets to be ambitious and owned and monitored at board level.

This is a journey that organisations tell us they want to be a part of and the Arts Council will provide resource and support to help build a coalition of the willing. For those who lack the will, we shall hold them to account through our funding decisions. This past year has also obliged us to reflect on our own journey, and the actions we need to take to hold ourselves to the same account as the sector we serve. One element has been the development of new Race and Disability Advisory Groups, made up of National and Area Council members, who are offering constructive challenge and deep insight to our National Council and executive team. Inclusion is a theme that permeates all our work and which features in discussion at every National Council meeting, ensuring this crucial work is championed and led from the top.

I am conscious of the timing of this year's report, and the commitments made by the Council in the immediate aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, a year ago this month. Our **equality objectives** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-delivery-plan-2020-2024/equality-objectives>) for 2021-24 set out our intention for a more equitable distribution of funding and creating a sector that is more inclusive of communities up and down the country. As we re-open, we want our work to matter more to people that have been historically under-represented and ensure that their voices are heard and shape our sector.

Embracing cultural change to develop more dynamic, inclusive and relevant arts and cultural institutions is a priority within our strategy, not least because we recognise the disproportionate adverse impact of the pandemic on disabled people, ethnically diverse communities, women and carers.

We are grateful to the National Portfolio Organisations, who reported their data for 2019/20 despite the immense upheaval of this year, as it provides a vital snapshot of the diversity of our sector prior to Covid-19. I will continue to stress the importance

of gathering this information, and the support we can offer organisations to improve their data collection and to use this to drive action.

In a recent blog, accompanying **resources** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/blog/reimagining-relevance>) we commissioned to help organisations become more inclusive and relevant, Nina Simon – author of ‘The Art of Relevance’ and founder of global charity **Of/By/For All** (<https://www.ofbyforall.org/>) – reflected on the moment of time we are in, and the compelling case for change it makes. She asked, amidst the seismic shifts caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, if the cultural sector “[has] a shot to try something different – to be of value to our communities in new ways?”

I believe that we do, and that there can be no recovery from this pandemic unless we establish a foundation of fairness. We have to build inclusive workplaces, hire and retain talent from every quarter and search for new audiences in every community.

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Unit 4 Montpelier Central, Station Road, Bristol BS6 5EE
01179 44 00 44 info@a2i.co.uk www.a2i.co.uk

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