

Arts Council and the Creative Case for Diversity

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Introduction

Good morning.

This is one of the most important speeches I'll make as Chair of Arts Council England.

Today I'm committing the organisation - which belongs to all of us - to a fundamental shift in its approach to diversity.

The plain fact is that despite many valuable, well-intentioned policies over the past decade, when it comes to diversity, we have not achieved what we intended.

We are not doing well enough. What do I mean by that? Well, we fund art and culture with public money, for the benefit of all; so the work we support should draw on *all* Britain's talents.

Britain's got many, many talents. And our work should reflect and engage with *all* our talent and communities. That's how we'll ensure work of true ambition and enduring quality.

For years, we have tried to promote diversity, without grasping how complex it is.

For example, we thought hard about improving the overall employment figure for diversity, but probably did not grasp how important it was to resource the leadership programmes that would drive sustainable change.

And we concentrated on BME-led organisations – fine, but as a consequence, we didn't nurture diversity in all our work, across all our funded organisations and their audiences.

We need to think about programming, the workforce, leadership *and* audiences, and how all these are interrelated.

We all agree that we can and must do better. I'm going to say how, by outlining new initiatives - and re-affirming existing ones.

Changing society, Changing contexts

I want to begin by talking a little about our changing society, and our cultural traditions.

As you know, every ten years the UK has a census. They're still extrapolating the data from 2011 but the headline figures give us broad pictures of today's society.

The generalised figures don't necessarily tell us the stories of particular communities, of course.

In 2001, for example, around 88% of the population identified themselves as white British. In 2011, that was down to 80%.

But look within that figure, and you see how varied our nation is. For instance, in London, just 45% of respondents are now 'white British'.

The headline statistic tells us that the Muslim population has risen from 3% to around 5% - and that those identifying as Christian have declined from 72% to 59%

But in Tower Hamlets in East London, more than 34% of the population is now Muslim; while in Knowsley on Merseyside, more than 80% of the population remains Christian.

The point of this is to remind ourselves that headline figures do not describe specific communities.

There are many different stories out there, and many different contexts for this word, 'diversity'.

English/British diversity

And this heterogeneous quality has long been true of our culture.

People endlessly debate the essential quality of 'Englishness'. But if there is one thing above all others that sums up 'Englishness' it's the richness of our diversity.

If I may, my own name was French 250 years ago, and Arabic 1,250 years ago.

Our most significant art does not come from any 'English' or 'British' production line. It comes from individual talent reacting to its particular history and circumstances – that's what we do so well.

Much of our national culture has been created through the insight of those who once stood outside – who have come to Britain from other countries, or those whose perspective and voices have not always been included in the mainstream.

For example, who made *A Canterbury Tale*, that most English of films? Powell and Pressburger. The latter came from Hungary, via Paris, in reaction to anti-Semitism.

What film better captured 1980s Britain than *My Beautiful Launderette*, written by Hanif Kureishi – born in Bromley to a Pakistani father and an English mother?

What novel better described our society on the cusp of the new millennium than *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith - the child of a Jamaican mother and an English father?

And last year, Steve McQueen's *Twelve Years a Slave* - an anatomy of our shared history - became the first film directed and produced by a black filmmaker to win the Oscar for best picture.

As you'll all know, McQueen is a Turner prize-winning artist who was born in London to Grenadian parents.

And think of the extraordinary, elegiac display of ceramic poppies around the Tower of London – how that act of remembrance caught the imagination of the world.

That's the work of Paul Cummins, who was one of the disabled artists commissioned for the Cultural Olympiad.

Periodically, our national culture gets a shake-up, a paradigm shift, when those outside the establishment kick their way into the room.

Think of the eruption of the working classes into writing, theatre, television and film in the 1950s and 60s; punk in the 1970s; or young British artists in the 1990s.

Each of these movements rejuvenated our arts and galvanised society.

They gave real power to a new generation of artists.

The question is, when we live in such a diverse society, with such potential, how can we release that next wave of creative energy?

And the point is – that it's in the arts that we should see this first. It's our job.

Where we are now – Progress so far

A general perception is that our arts have been in excellent creative health, despite the financial strictures of recent years.

Artists and organisations have responded brilliantly to repeated financial challenges.

But a more detailed look shows that in some areas, we are vulnerable.

We're not reacting fast enough to the changes in society.

We need to reflect immigration and ethnicity, and recognise that there are substantial parts of society that are still largely invisible: disabled people, or older people for example – one in six of the population is now over 65.

All need to be brought into the conversation.

But in many ways the arts *have* progressed.

We have a generation of exceptional leaders from minority groups now heading companies of national significance: Jenny Sealey at Graeae; Kully Thiarai at Cast in Doncaster, Skinder Hundal at the New Art Exchange, Nottingham; and in London, Indu Rubasingham at the Tricycle Theatre, Madani Younis at the Bush and Kenneth Tharp at The Place.

It is a fact that women outnumber men as leaders across the cultural sector, and we have influential all-women teams at some of our leading venues - such as the Royal Exchange, Manchester, the Liverpool Everyman and the Donmar Warehouse in London.

When it comes to sexuality, the arts sector has been crucial in promoting rights and role models.

We may have a long way to go in terms of disability arts, but remember the work of Unlimited and the Cultural Olympiad - for which Jenny Sealey was artistic advisor, as well as co-artistic director of the Paralympics opening ceremony.

Think what that did for disabled and deaf artists.

The work of Unlimited continues today – I enjoyed attending their excellent festival on the South Bank in London this September.

Generally, we are seeing the kind of work that wasn't happening twenty years ago.

We've had writers like Gurpreet Bhatti on stage at the Birmingham rep – alongside a play written by, and starring, Lenny Henry.

Collaborations like that between Akram Khan and Israel Galvan – Kathak meets Flamenco.

The emergence of artists like Hetain Patel or Yinka Shonibare.

Cast's revival of Barry Hine's Kes in Doncaster – a professional and community retelling of a story that's so important to the town and its children.

I have seen some especially memorable productions, like Josephine and I at the Bush Theatre, or Tricycle's multiple award-winner, Red Velvet.

One of my highlights last year was Graeae's production of Iron Man, which I caught in Ipswich.

And I also loved Maxine Peake as Hamlet at the Royal Exchange Manchester.

All this is inspiring and challenging work. But it's just a beginning. Diversity evolves, as our communities evolve, and we have to respond to that.

Identities are changing.

For example, according to that 2011 census, the mixed race population has climbed sharply, to more than a million for the first time.

And in many post-industrial, or rural areas, there are communities that are not defined by race but by deprivation.

Poverty that does not distinguish between black or white.

We must give opportunities to everyone. To the children of middle class Asian parents; to the children of working class white parents.

As a society, if we don't use that diversity, we will have a world with no social mobility - one that is shaped by static elites.

In economic terms, we have a creative sector that is growing at three times the rate of the economy.

It needs ideas, revenue streams and audiences from this diverse society.

As an arts and culture sector, if we don't drawn on that diversity, we'll lack new talent and fresh narratives.

We will, as Jenny Sealey put it, become 'male, pale and stale'

So, in talking about diversity, we're talking about the future of our arts and culture – and our nation.

It's an issue of national importance, and the political parties recognise this.

The context for the Arts Council – Benchmarks can't drive change

Our new generation of cultural leaders come from different backgrounds and have different things to say. But they express common themes.

One of these is that arts organisations must reflect their communities.

As Indhu at the Tricycle puts it: "If you don't represent your community, how is your work authentic? And if you don't engage with the taxpayers, why should they fund you?"

But they also tell us that diversity is about who has power, and how they deploy the available resources.

They tell us to look at popular music, and think why there's no question about diversity being an issue. It's because resources are no issue; you can record and broadcast music in your bedroom.

So, to some extent, the art we produce reflects who is in charge.

And, as Kully Thiarai puts it: "If you are comfortable within the arts world, you're likely to make choices that confirm your world view."

If your work ends up being 'male pale and stale', it won't look to those on the outside as if the arts belong to them.

They won't try to get in. So the circle stays closed.

For things to change, long term, they need to become more uncomfortable at the top. We have to open up access to power, and to resources.

And in a way, there's been good news, and bad news.

We have, as I said, some outstanding leaders from minorities. We need more.

But the doorway into the arts can be hard to find. And beyond it there are few pathways for progression, and many economic dead ends. It's a frustrating experience.

And looking up, many see the white cliff-face of the arts establishment and feel they just cannot climb it.

So they try to find access through one of the smaller companies that champion minority and black artists work – some of these are companies with

51% BME leadership which the Arts Council has made a point of benchmarking as a measure of progress in diversity.

But there, as Madani from the Bush points out, they run into a leadership bottleneck.

Because, as he puts it, 'the responsibility for diversity, which should be everybody's responsibility, has been abandoned to a few companies,'

So these are, in effect, oversubscribed. And so aspiring minority artists, and the leaders we need can feel that they have been scripted out of this story, by those who run the establishment.

There are two things here that I want to make very clear.

The first is that from now on the responsibility for promoting diversity within the leadership, workforce, programming and audiences, must belong to *all* our funded arts organisations.

(And in a minute I'll be talking about how we'll go about that.)

Secondly, yes, there has been an unfair responsibility for diversity conferred on a limited number of organisations. These organisations have often been the more vulnerable ones with relatively small funding grants.

As I said, some of them are the 'diverse led organisations' with 51% benchmark of disabled or BME representation at board and senior management level.

And for too long we've judged our progress in terms of diverse leadership in relation to these specific organisations.

They have done - and will continue to do – excellent work.

But focussing on these organisations has diverted our attention from promoting change across the *whole* arts sector.

And the criteria of 51% that defines these organisations and by which we have measured overall progress, doesn't necessarily capture the contribution of companies like Baby People in Derby or The Mighty Creatives in Leicester, who are recruiting and training a new generation of board members from diverse backgrounds.

Nor can it include the successes of individuals like Madani or Kully, or Indhu, who are bringing fresh perspectives to organisations of local and national importance but which are not, according to that 51% benchmark, diverse led.

But when I talk about the accomplishments of these individuals, I'm not offering them as a fig-leaf to cover some of our historic shortcomings.

I know from my own experience in television how there's been a temptation to push successful minority candidates in front of the camera – and how that can be a substitute for a real change in culture.

Too often talented black and Asian recruits have been thrust into performing instead of being encouraged to progress towards leadership.

We need to promote real role models with real power.

However, the Arts Council's 51% construct has allowed people to think, as Madani puts it, that "diversity is a black problem" – or that disability for that matter is an issue for disabled people - to be resolved on the margins, by organisations that are the least resourced.

My colleague on our National Council, David Bryan, has rightly said that if that were all we did it could become 'a cul de sac'.

Measuring how we're doing remains important. But from now on we're going to make sure diversity is truly the responsibility of everyone and every organisation.

The context for this is urgent. Our last investment round for National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs, our larger funded organisations) saw a drop in the number of applicants from those benchmarked BME and disability led organisations.

Some areas of the country had no new applications at all.

If I thought the reason was that more ethnic minority, and deaf and disabled artists had already successfully entered the mainstream I'd be pleased. But that's not the case.

Government figures for the overall creative and cultural workforce show that it's more white now than in 2008-9 – up from 92% to 93%.

In this context, our National portfolio organisations are making some progress.

Our Equality Analysis of our National portfolio from 2012/13 shows that overall representation from black and minority ethnic groups is currently 13%, not far off the national average of 15%.

On the face of it, that compares favourably with television, for example. But the headline figure does not tell the whole story.

Firstly, this diversity doesn't extend to management, where fewer than one in ten come from a BME background; and secondly, our collection of statistics is not comprehensive, for reasons I'll come to.

And when we look at our figures for our Grants for the Arts programme, which, funds more than 3000 small organisations and individual artists, we've

seen another decline in black and minority ethnic applications, and a substantial fall in applications from disabled people.

So there is something happening at a fundamental level.

Perhaps there are wider social and economic contexts that have put these groups on the back foot. We just don't have the specific data.

There have been, for example, changes to the Government's Access to Work and Independent Living Funds – these are of concern to many disabled and deaf artists.

As we upgrade our application systems, we will be doing more to help people apply and ensure that their applications are eligible.

But above all there are embedded cultural issues that we must address to make the arts genuinely accessible. We have to make it clear that they belong to everyone, through the very nature of the work that they do.

What we are going to do

This brings me to that fundamental shift I referred to at the beginning.

From 2015, measured action on diversity in arts and culture goes mainstream.

We have already had plans for this from the 670 NPOs that are being funded from March 2015 to 2018.

They have all signed up to what we call the Creative Case for Diversity.

This is their commitment to make their work appeal across their communities. Call it accessible programming, if you like.

The Creative Case requires that diversity is not seen as an obligation but an opportunity – a long-term asset that will enhance talent, resilience and income.

It demands that our arts make progress in reflecting the nature of our communities; giving a voice to everyone, irrespective of background, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age and disability.

We expect the bigger organisations to play a leading role.

And I'm very pleased that we today we have the leaders of some of our major companies – including the English National Ballet and the National Theatre – who'll be telling us how the Creative Case will shape their work.

But we're clear that all NPOs will deploy a Creative Case plan. This is a sea change in our approach.

We've made initial ratings of these plans, and have been encouraged; 80% were found to be 'good or strong'; we'll be re-visiting those ratings when we see organisations' business plans.

Of course, a plan isn't the work itself. But we are building a new approach to public engagement here: that's a major construction process. It needs plans.

Now we expect organisations to see these plans through.

Some people may ask, why don't you adopt the 'Three ticks' checklist used by the BFI? It's a good question; the answer is that the variety of work and local projects we support, especially through Grants for the Arts, is simply too various for one-size-fits-all 'Three ticks' process.

As I've just illustrated, diversity is an evolving agenda, that's particular to local communities.

So it's best for us to encourage more quality applications from the widest field. Let communities tell us what their diversity is, rather than us impose ideas on them.

And to help us reach the parts that other funds don't reach, we're also committing £6 million for additional support.

This money will fund more work in support of diversity

There will, for example, be a dedicated Creative Case commissioning fund.

And we'll be investing a further £1.8 million in Unlimited, enabling them to develop their work with disabled and deaf artists across the country.

That extra money for diversity is also going to fund the processes that produce the work. It's going to fuel the creative, intellectual and practical connections that will be required, across the country.

We need people who will spread good practice – 'agents for change' we call them- working across organisations, bringing people and ideas together, and enabling creative evolution throughout the National Portfolio.

And, yes, there will also be conferences.

Maybe even some symposia.

But I believe that far from being dry and procedural, these will be challenging and exciting occasions.

We need fora that will connect organisations of different scales, and bring the best resourced together with those that are best connected on the street.

We must remember that while many companies have been working in depth with diversity for years, others will find this new territory.

I'm also pleased that we're going to set aside specific funds to promote talent and diversity outside the National portfolio. The details of this are being worked on now.

We're also commissioning research into the diversity challenges faced by museums.

We know that a lot is expected of the Creative Case; its progress will be watched in the wider world. We'll be monitoring it ourselves, of course.

But we don't want our account of it to be anecdotal.

That won't help us make the case for funding to government; it won't persuade the public.

To assess progress, we're going to need better data.

We'll be seeing how we can improve and widen the data we collect.

We're looking at new ways of assessing the make-up of audiences.

And we'll be reporting in greater detail on progress with the workforce, and how we're offering real career pathways – not just a taste of the arts to those from minorities, but the whole meal.

Our funded organisations have all been required to implement Equality Action Plans for some time.

But from 2015 we'll also be publishing workforce diversity data for individual National portfolio organisations and Major partner museums.

But we have that issue with data I referred to earlier. It's a serious problem.

An increasing number of the workforce we survey – currently as many as 20% - choose not to identify themselves in any particular category.

They're entitled to do this, but it makes it difficult to demonstrate verifiable progress. So we need to understand why this is - and see if we can persuade them otherwise.

There will be incentives and encouragement.

And ultimately there has to be a reckoning; the progress our funded organisations make with the diversity of their programmes, their audiences, their artists and their workforce, will inform the decisions we take on their membership of the next National portfolio after 2018.

As the Creative Case rolls out, we'll continue with our current support for diversity.

Up to 2018, our Creative People and Places programme will deploy a further £25 million to areas of low arts engagement.

Strategic Touring will target at the needs of specific audiences – last year around a quarter of the shows funded to tour were for culturally specific audiences.

The Creative Employment Programme will continue to offer the opportunity of paid internships in arts and cultural organisations, so that young people can have a fair chance when there's no bank-of-mum-and-dad.

And we'll keep investing in our future leaders through our support for the Clore Leadership Programme.

Summary

In conclusion let me remind you of two simple points. When we invest public money in arts and culture it must be for the benefit of *all* the public.

And to deliver the most exciting, inspirational and, yes, excellent, art for everyone we must draw on the best talent from *every* part of our country, and think about *every* aspect of our work, and how it is all interrelated.

How the diversity of our programming gives ownership to our audiences; how that will inspire young talent, and how they'll become our future generation of cultural leaders.

The Arts Council is not the creator; it's the facilitator. It depends on the commitment of our world class arts and cultural organisations.

I believe we have that commitment. So let's make it happen. We really can do this.

If we make this work, diversity – and I'm talking ten years from now – will be no longer be an aspiration. It will be a reality.

Young talent, whatever its background or class will see the kind of work that convinces them that the arts *belong* to them - and that they have a way in.

They will seek careers on the technical side; in administration; as performers; creators and, crucially, as leaders.

If we do this properly, we'll have flourishing centres of creativity throughout our cities with work that inspires, enriches and broadens our horizons.

Creative work that liberates the energy of our nation.

We can't give people creative talent. But we can and must give those with talent creative opportunities.

The arts are a mirror for society; and if we sort this, the arts won't have to make the case for diversity. The arts will simply *be* the case.

Thank you.