

Milton Keynes Arts Centre

Diversity & Inclusivity Action Plan

June 2023

Introduction

In Arts Council England's 'Equality, Diversity & Inclusion 2020-21 Report', it compared workforce data collected from existing National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) to the Office of National Statistics' data for the working age population in England for the same period. This showed that 50% of the English working population was female compared to 49% in NPOs; 17% nationally were Black, Asian or ethnically diverse, compared to 14% in NPOs; 3% were LGBTQ+ nationally compared to 10% in NPOs; and 23% were disabled nationally, compared to 7% in NPOs. In NPO Boards, 49% were women; 18% identified as Black, Asian or ethnically diverse; 9% as disabled and 8% as LGBTQ+. Representation of women; Black, Asian or ethnically diverse people in NPOs decreased as levels of Arts Council funding increased between Bands 1, 2 and 3. Audience data collected in 2020-21 meanwhile shows that 7% of NPO audiences identified as having a disability; 7% identified as being of Mixed, Asian or British Asian, Black or Black British, or other heritage; and 64% female.

In the Arts Council's 'Let's Create' strategy, it points out the 'persistent and widespread lack of diversity across the creative industries and in publicly funded cultural organisations' and one of its four investment principles for National Portfolio Organisations 2023-26 was that:

'England's diversity is fully reflected in the organisations and individuals that we support and in the culture that they produce'.

Milton Keynes Arts Centre is committed to creating an inclusive environment in which individuals of all backgrounds feel at home and can thrive; an environment that fully reflects the rich diversity of Milton Keynes and society more widely – from the people we employ as trustees, staff, volunteers and artists, to the organisations we partner and the people we engage through our work as participants and audiences.

This Action Plan is designed to monitor the Arts Centre's progress in achieving this aim, which will be reported quarterly to our Board of Trustees. The Plan will be under constant evaluation – updated and adapted as required to ensure it's working as intended, as proposed solutions are tested in the real world. This Plan is not intended to replace our Equality Policy, which focuses on our workforce; instead it is intended to widen and embed our commitment to diversity and inclusivity across all areas of our work.

Looking Back and Looking Forwards

In the 2021 census, 51% of the population in Milton Keynes identified as female, 28% as Black, Asian or ethnically diverse, 3% as LGBTQ+ and 7% as disabled.

As of April 2023, 98% of the MKAC permanent staff team (the equivalent of 4.1 posts) identified as female, 19.5% as Black, Asian or ethnically diverse, 24% as LGBTQ+ and 0% as disabled. 43% of our 7 elected Trustees identified as female, 28.5% as Black, Asian or ethnically diverse, 14% as LGBTQ+ and 28.5% as disabled. Whilst we have a talented and diverse Board, therefore, our staff team is predominately female and white British; and none identify as disabled. Moreover, in 2019-20 (the last pre-pandemic year), 80% of our audiences were female; only 12% identified as Black, Asian or ethnically diverse, or preferred not to say; and only 4% as disabled.

Most of the audiences surveyed in 2019-20 were students on our fee-paying courses. In 2022, Milton Keynes Arts Centre made the decision to end these courses and close the building in which they took place in order to focus our fiscal and human resources on developing projects with and within marginalised or disadvantaged communities in Milton Keynes. This includes people living in areas of the city ranked amongst the 10% most disadvantaged in the UK; people living with physical or learning disabilities or poor mental health; and those who identify as belonging to the global majority.

Our Basic Principles

- We oppose all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination. All employees and freelancers, whether part-time, full-time, temporary or voluntary, will be selected solely on the basis of aptitude and ability and will be treated fairly and with respect. We will not discriminate on the grounds of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marital status including civil partnerships, race, ethnic origin, nationality, national origin, religion or belief (insofar as it is consistent with the protection of these other characteristics), sexual orientation or socio-economic background.
- We know that not everyone has the same advantages and opportunities. There is no level playing field. Beyond simply avoiding discrimination, we want to create an inclusive and equitable environment in which individuals of all backgrounds feel at home and can thrive: one in which opportunities and resources are tailored to meet the unique needs of each individual. Through this approach, all people who work for and with us will have an equal chance to succeed, regardless of their circumstances.
- Our ultimate goal is that Milton Keynes Arts Centre be fully representative (in terms of demographic makeup) of the local, national and global society in which we work.
- We see the promotion of diversity and inclusion as a basic issue of fairness, but also as a business necessity – essential to ensuring that our organisation remains relevant and resilient to change.
- We believe this is an issue that needs to be tackled at all levels simultaneously – that it is as much about retention and progression as about entry-level selection.

- We recognise that socio-economic background and basic economic practicalities underpin many of the other structural barriers to employment and engagement in the arts. They need to be part of this conversation – and part of our solutions. We are committed to paying the Real Living Wage as a minimum to all staff and freelancers; and to pay artists, creatives and project specialists fairly, in line with recognised codes of best practice.
- Diversity in terms of the artists we employ, the partners we work with and the subjects of our programmes of work are all essential. We want our creative output to reflect modern Britain and the world beyond it.
- We want this strategy to be simple, focused, consistent, fair and measurable in its impact. It will be regularly reviewed and open to new ideas, and the Board of Trustees will be held accountable for delivering it.

Action Plan

1. Bringing in greater local representation of the diverse communities we work with onto our Board and staff team

What we have done

- 1.1 In 2022 we undertook a skills and diversity audit of our Board followed by a recruitment drive, through which we invited 3 new Trustees onto our Board, all of whom live in Milton Keynes. One of these Trustees is an artist with experience of working with the Arts Centre; another is the Chair of the African Diaspora Foundation, with which we regularly work. Including these new Trustees, our elected Board is now 50% female; 50% of the Board live in MK, 50% identify as non-white British, 20% as living with a disability and 10% LGBTQ+.
- 1.2 In 2022-2023 our staff team attended and contributed to meetings, festivals and events organised by our diverse communities so that we might listen and learn from them, demonstrate our commitment and build mutual trust. This included the African Diaspora Festival, Art in the Park, regular attendance at the Eaglestone Community Café, Woughton Festival and Community Awards.
- 1.3 In 2022 we welcomed two new casual Event Assistants onto our staff team, neither of whom identify as white British, both of whom are MK-based and were selected from a shortlist of applicants, 75% of whom did not identify as white British.
- 1.4 Milton Keynes Arts Centre's staff are paid no less than the Real Living Wage; our Artists are paid no less than £30 per hour, including for preparation and planning time.

What we will do

- 1.5 Our permanent staff team is currently 98% female, 80.5% white British, 75.5% heterosexual/straight and 100% non-disabled. 56% live in MK. In both 2021 and 2022, we attracted highly skilled as well as diverse applicants into the roles of Casual Event Assistants; one of the Event Assistants appointed in 2021 subsequently progressed into a permanent position in the organisation. We will work with our community partners in promoting opportunities for paid and voluntary positions on our Board and staff team; and continue to support staff and volunteers to progress within and beyond the organisation through individual Personal Development Plans.
- 1.6 In 2022, attempts to introduce project partners to the Board of Trustees was not successful. Conflicting availabilities and the sense that it was not a priority in our

partners' busy schedules were the primary reasons. In 2023, we will invite our community partners to the Arts Centre's AGM, hold it in one of the estates in which we have been working and ask them to contribute to its planning and delivery.

- 1.7 With a staff team now partially relieved from covering the site, we will divide responsibilities for attending events and activities led by our community partners, ensuring that Milton Keynes Arts Centre is seen to be supporting these events and activities, that recognition of our staff team widens and that our relationship with community partners is based on reciprocity.
- 1.8 We will actively seek out and participate in training and development opportunities, which will equip our staff and Board to understand the challenges facing the communities we work with, what their ambitions are, and how we might support them in realising these ambitions.
- 1.9 We understand that, to attract diverse applicants onto our Board and staff team, we need to identify and remove any potential barriers. This includes removing any requirements for senior-level experience and qualifications unless absolutely essential, accommodating flexible working patterns and time commitments wherever possible, regularly reviewing the timings of Board meetings to best suit people's availability and making clear that travel expenses are paid to volunteers, including Trustees.
- 1.10 Positions on our Board will be advertised externally, rather than relying solely upon existing networks. Where appropriate and if funding allows, we will work with recruitment agencies supporting organisations to diversify their boards and staff teams such as Young Trustees Movement, Beyond Suffrage and Girl Dreamers.
- 1.11 Just because there is an established format for job interviews, that format is not necessarily right for all people. We recognise that interview panels and unrehearsed interview questions can disadvantage neuro-divergent people or people who are learning-disabled. We will match the interview format to the person specification on a case-by-case basis and invite applicants to discuss with us their access needs in advance of interview, enabling us to make reasonable adjustments. This will include consideration of informal interviews, providing interview questions in advance and making provision for support workers.

2. Ensuring the artists we employ and the work we produce reflect the communities we work with and represent their needs and interests

What we have done

- 1.12 In 2022-23, Milton Keynes Arts Centre worked with communities in three MK first phase housing estates, which rank among the 10% most disadvantaged areas in the UK. In these estates we have been building relationships since 2021, delivering activities within each of the neighbourhoods responding to what they tell us they want. We provided art and wellbeing courses for adults and young people experiencing poor mental health. We also connected groups from across Milton Keynes including the YMCA, SOFEA (which supports young people who have been excluded from mainstream education) and the Frank Moran Centre in Bletchley, through our project with Harold Offeh.
- 1.13 We have an established reputation for working with local and visiting artists reflecting the rich cultural diversity of communities in MK as well as artists with lived experience of many of the issues they are facing.

What we will do

- 1.14 We will work with artists and organisations with a track record of embedded socially engaged practice, which will in turn support skills development in MK artists.
- 1.15 We will invite our partner groups to meet regularly with our Board and tell them about their priorities for the next 3 years period so that our programme remains relevant to them.
- 1.16 We will recruit artists and project coordinators reflecting the communities we work with to support projects in development to ensure breadth of reach.

3. Monitoring our progress, listening to the communities we work with, learning from best practice, being open to being challenged and adapting as required

What we have done

- 1.17 We have developed an Audience Development Plan to better reflect our new business model and to ensure that we are working with the appropriate local partners in addressing need.
- 1.18 Our Director reports quarterly to our Board of Trustees to report upon progress against targets.
- 1.19 We collect demographic data for staff, trustees, artists, participants and audiences. More in-depth information is collected via surveys through Illuminate as well as Impact and Insight: a sector-designed monitoring and evaluation toolkit, which allows us to adapt questions around our specific requirements.

What we will do

- 3.4 We will monitor our progress against our Diversity Action Plan as a standing agenda item at our Board meetings.