

Diversity and Cultural Leadership in the West Midlands

By Dr Karen Patel and Dr Annette Naudin, Birmingham City University

Executive Summary

Arts Council England's (ACE) *Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case* (2018) argues that diversity is crucial to the connection between the arts and society because "it represents a commitment to the wider world, and forms a two-way channel along which people can travel and find a platform to tell their stories" (2018:2). However, the UK's cultural industries remain unequal in access and opportunity (Banks, 2017; O'Brien and Oakley, 2015) and ACE's latest report stresses that despite small improvements in workforce diversity, "aspirations are not always translating into meaningful actions or significant appointments" and leadership plays a major role in this. ACE argue "**more power should be in the hands of those who understand the need for change**" (2018:2). Those in leadership positions help to determine which types of cultural offerings are valued, and it is essential that everyone should feel able to participate in and produce culture.

Although there is a lack of evidence about leadership in the sector (O'Brien and Oakley, 2015), our report for the West Midlands Leadership Commission, considers existing data from various sources, at a national and regional level. We offer original findings on the diversity of leadership based on our analysis of ACE National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) in the West Midlands. We also highlight areas which need further research and policy attention in relation to cultural leadership, and offer a working definition of cultural leadership. Our key findings and recommendations are summarised below.

Key findings

1. **Data:** For the West Midlands, there is very little data on diversity in cultural leadership. Birmingham City Council (BCC) labour market reports do not include the cultural sector as a distinct category, which has implications for how we can understand workforce diversity in the sector. Nationally, sector diversity reports by ACE present high proportions of organisations who prefer not to disclose diversity data, which also has implications for how much we actually know about diversity in the sector as a whole.
2. **Freelancers/SMEs:** Because the cultural industries have a relatively high rate of freelance and contractual employment, we know very little about the nature of cultural leadership in this area. The high level of freelance employment points to the importance of networking and being 'in the know' which can also contribute to a lack of diversity in the sector

(O'Brien and Oakley, 2015), but presenting a clear picture is difficult due to the lack of data available about freelancer and the self-employed.

Recommendations

- **More data:** A comprehensive survey of diversity and cultural leadership in the region is required. Qualitative and anecdotal data from cultural leaders would also add valuable context and narrative to survey data.
- **Define cultural leadership:** It is important to distinguish between the two core areas of cultural leadership, namely: freelance and entrepreneurial practices which differ from leadership roles within managerial structures such as larger cultural institutions. We suggest our working definition of cultural leadership which encompasses both types of cultural leadership: **activities that inspire, lead and empower others, and innovate, challenge and break ground in the cultural field, or the core arts.**
- **Build on good practice:** Data on freelance workers in the region could be obtained by engaging with leaders involved with RE:Present16 and ASTONish, and tap into relevant networks from there. The learning from evaluating both RE:Present16 and ASTONish programmes should act as case studies for further cultural leadership training which seeks to address inequalities in representation.
- **Refine future reporting:** Future regional surveys and studies should include the cultural industries as a distinct occupational area, which at the moment it is not. Sexual orientation, gender reassignment and/or identity, disability and class should also be considered in reporting to present a clearer picture of intersectionality in cultural leadership.
- **Empower SMEs and freelancers:** Events or training courses using examples of good practice from RE:Present16 and ASTONish can be held to empower SMEs and freelancers from diverse backgrounds who are involved in cultural leadership activities in the region.
- **Promote role models:** Coventry City of Culture 2021 and the #WMGeneration campaign to bring Channel 4 to Birmingham could be used as platforms to promote diversity in cultural leadership in the region, if spearheaded by current diverse leaders who could act as role models.

For more information or for the full report please contact: karen.patel@bcu.ac.uk or annette.naudin@bcu.ac.uk.