

The voice of the Voluntary Arts

Cultural diversity and the voluntary arts an inspirational opportunity

This briefing looks at the importance of cultural diversity to the voluntary arts as a concept extending *beyond* issues of race and equality. It considers the subject from a philosophical stance, discusses why it matters, looks at its interpretation in practice and shows what voluntary arts organisations can do to demonstrate and promote cultural diversity in their work and artistic activities.

Contents:

1. What does it mean?
2. Cultural diversity and equality background and legislation
3. Cultural diversity in practice
4. Cultural diversity and the voluntary arts: making the case
5. Further information

1. What does it mean?

At the heart of the cultural diversity agenda is cooperation, inclusion, respect and openness towards all segments of society. The creative arts and crafts, in all their rich variety, are no exception in this. They belong to and are a part of everyone, regardless of ethnic origin, religion and belief, social class, custom, age, gender, physical or mental ability, intellectual or emotional intelligence or sexual orientation. Recognising, working with and promoting this diversity is not only artistically enriching and rewarding but is also extremely valuable for our communities.

In recent years, and especially in public bodies, the term 'cultural diversity' has often become synonymous with race and ethnic minority equality agendas. Whilst the term used in this way does, and should, encompass ethnic and racial differences in cultural expression, it is not the whole story. 'Cultural diversity' is actually recognition of difference of expression in the widest sense, including language, lifestyle, ceremony, ways of interacting and relating, and individual and community relationships. Using the term in this way allows for the recognition, valuing and protection of all aspects of the world that makes its people the vibrant, unique, expressive, communicative, demonstrative and inspiring beings that we are.

For arts organisations this means welcoming all and not excluding anyone, seeking new ways of

becoming more accessible and inclusive, taking down any barriers to participation, and becoming aware and accepting of people's *difference*. It involves looking at not only employment in arts organisations or groups, but audiences, membership and access to activities, goods and services, resources and intellectual property. It also means embracing all artforms and variations on artforms – so that no artform is considered less or more superior.

Cultural diversity – a fragile eco system

In our short lifetimes we have witnessed the degradation of vast areas of the world's richest ecosystems and environments as a result of unprecedented human demand. Preserving biological diversity is an issue with which we are all familiar.



Less familiar, and perhaps more difficult to come to terms with, is the parallel economic and social phenomenon of globalisation. Cultures and practices once isolated from change have and are being silently eroded, their loss masked by welcome economic development. Language, cultural and creative practices, artistic expression and ways of life are falling victim to the homogenising effect of expanding markets and digital connectivity. Recognising, valuing, celebrating and promoting all forms of culture and cultural expression plays a vital part in combating this homogenising effect and thus preserving and developing what makes us unique as human beings.

UNESCO Declaration

On 2 November 2001, immediately after the events of 9/11, the 85 member states of UNESCO adopted the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. The Declaration is imbued with the hope that it will become as fundamental to our view of the world as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted at the end of the Second World War.

It affirms the conviction that *intercultural dialogue is the best guarantee of peace* and rejects the idea that conflicts between cultures and civilizations are inevitable. It also states that culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles and ways of living.

It recognises that our diverse cultural heritage (*cultural diversity*) is important to the health and well being of the planet as a whole, just in the same way as *biodiversity* is. At its heart is the recognition that our diverse cultural heritage is a well-spring for creativity and innovation and should be protected and preserved for future generations.

Whilst this declaration may at first sight seem far removed from our personal and local lives it is actually encouraging and supporting engagement with the arts, our wider society and our neighbourhoods. Its scope is global, but it can only be realised through local and individual action and awareness.

2. Cultural diversity and equality – background and legislation

The UK and Republic of Ireland have an expanding body of anti-discrimination and equality legislation particularly pertaining to employment, but with a growing emphasis on other areas such as provision of goods and services.

Discrimination on the grounds of gender, marital and family status, race (*including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins*), sexual orientation, disability, religion and belief, and age (protected grounds) is either currently outlawed or steps are being taken to safeguard these areas in the future.

In England and Wales, The Commission for Racial Equality, The Equal Opportunities Commission and the Disability Rights Commission enforce the law and promote equality of opportunity. They also operate, with some amendment, in Scotland. In Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) and the Equality Authority play similar roles.

Definitions

Whilst cultural diversity and equality are related and linked, they are not the same.

i. Equality and equal opportunities

Equality of people is about viewing or treating people

fairly, whatever their background or social situation i.e. making sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to take advantage of whatever activity or service an organisation or group has to offer.

‘Equal opportunities’ in organisations ensures that under-represented groups in particular are able to achieve their potential within that organisation.

Note: it is important to recognise and take account of the fact that people start from different places, and so offering exactly the same service to everyone does not necessarily bring equality.

ii. Diversity

Diversity takes equality a step further. In a social context, the term diversity refers to the presence in one population of a wide range of cultures, opinions, ethnic groups, socio-economic backgrounds, beliefs, etc. It refers to the existence of many peoples contributing their unique experiences, talents and needs to humanity’s culture, and it recognises that people deserve to be treated in ways that respect



and honour their difference. Organisations that embrace cultural diversity are underpinned by values that empower everyone to maximise their potential.

iii. Equal opportunities and diversity in the arts

These apply not only to paid or voluntary employment in arts organisations, but also to the opportunity and right to watch and participate in arts activity without discrimination on any of the protected grounds.

Discrimination

Present legislation protects against direct and indirect discrimination:

i. Direct discrimination:

when, on one of the protected grounds, you are treated less favourably than another person is, or would be, in comparable circumstances.

ii. Indirect discrimination:

occurs when an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice would disadvantage people on any of the protected grounds unless the practice can be objectively justified by a legitimate aim.

An example of indirect discrimination is requiring all people who apply for a certain job to sit a test in a particular language, even though that language is not necessary for the job. The test might thus exclude people who have a different mother tongue.

Cultural discrimination in the arts:

not allowing participation in creative activity because of someone's cultural background, age, class etc, or judging a performance/show against these factors instead of on the basis of their creative work and ability.

Legislation

Note:

i. A range of legislation applies in the UK. Where specified as GB, it covers England, Scotland and Wales, and the equivalent Northern Ireland legislation is listed alongside.

ii. In the Republic of Ireland, two pieces of legislation cover employment, services, accommodation and education and provide protection from discrimination across nine grounds.

- Employment Equality Act 1998 and 2004 amendment.
- Equal Status Act (Republic of Ireland).

Sex, Sexual Orientation and Gender Re-assignment

People cannot be discriminated against on the grounds of sex, marital status, sexual orientation or gender re-assignment. Key legislation that enforces this:

- *Equal Pay Act 1970* (amended 2003)(GB) and *Equal Pay (Northern Ireland) order 1970 (as amended)* make it unlawful for employers to discriminate between men and women in terms of pay and conditions when they are doing the same or similar work.
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1975* (GB) and *Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) order 1976 (as amended)* apply to men and women and make sex discrimination unlawful in employment and vocational training, education, the provision and sale of goods, facilities and services, and premises. They also prohibit discrimination on the grounds of marital status.
- *The Sex Discrimination (Gender Re-assignment) Regulations 1999* (GB) and *Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999* ensure transsexual people are not discriminated against on the grounds of sex in pay and treatment in employment and vocational training.
- *The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003* (GB) and *Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003* make it unlawful to discriminate against someone on the grounds of their sexual orientation. The Regulations also prohibit discrimination on the grounds of perceived and actual sexual orientation.



Race

A person cannot be treated less favourably than others on racial grounds. This covers race, colour, nationality, citizenship or national or ethnic origin.

- *The Race Relations Act 1976 (GB) and Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (as amended)* provides protection from race discrimination in the fields of employment, education, training, housing, and the provision of goods, facilities and services.

Mcpherson Report, 1999: following the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, this report introduced the concept of institutional racism i.e. unconscious racism resulting from lack of awareness or thoughtlessness, or the traditional and unchallenged thinking and ways of working of an organisation, rather than overt, intentional discrimination.

- *Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (GB)* amended the 1976 Act following the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report. It imposes a duty of positive action to eliminate institutional racism and prohibits discrimination in all public functions, with only a few limited exceptions.
- *The Race Relations Act 1976 (Amendment) Regulations 2003 (GB)* implement the European Commission Article 13 Race Directive. The Regulations enhance the Race Relations Act.

Disability

People have the right to not be discriminated against on the grounds of disability.

- *Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 (GB)*;

Northern Ireland) – provides protection from discrimination in the fields of employment, education, training, housing, and the provision of goods, facilities and services.

- *Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment) Regulations 2003 (GB; Northern Ireland)* – Broadened the sphere of application of the DDA, particularly including employers with less than 15 people.
- *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (GB)* – amended the DDA to bring higher and further education into the remit of the DDA.
- *Equality (Disability, etc.) (Northern Ireland) Order 2000* – expanded duties and powers of the Equality Commission in relation to disability matters.

Religion and Belief

- *Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (as amended)* – unlawful to discriminate against someone on the grounds of religious beliefs or political opinion.
- *The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 (GB)* makes it unlawful to discriminate against workers because of religion or similar belief.

General

European Directives, wider European Community Legislation and international obligations also affect people's equality rights.

3. Cultural diversity in practice

Best practice

Whilst most of the legislation outlined above addresses discrimination in employment, the thinking behind the law should underpin everything we do, so that employment is only *part* of the cultural diversity picture.

'Best practice', therefore, is about considering cultural diversity in any activities within society i.e. valuing and enabling equal access to all opportunities for community participation and community relationships (including volunteering, membership and participation in activities within social/leisure societies). It requires us to take on the

responsibility of looking carefully at how we engage with different cultural practices and ways of expression and acting constructively and positively on our findings. Doing this will enable us to be accessible and fair and to promote equality in employment and in the provision of goods, services and other general functions.



So how do we go about this?

Many organisations think the answer is to simply create the right policies. Whilst this is a step in the right direction, policies will only be workable if and when organisations and the people within them have extended their thinking and adopted new ways of being. They need to change the culture of their organisation in the long term, rather than simply concentrate on short-term diversity 'compliance':

- **be sensitive to culturally different ways of doing and being**

How meetings and events are structured, and when and where they are held, can all influence how acceptable and accessible they are to others. Serving alcohol at an event or meeting in a pub or bar, for example, could make some participants feel uncomfortable or prevent people from particular groups joining committees or other activities within your organisation. Create spaces in which the quiet voice can be heard, arrange pre-meetings for those unused to meeting structures and formalities, and consider those who have a different first language.

- **understand cultural expression**

Cultural expression is not just about artefacts produced, events held, prose written. It also encompasses choice of dress and food, ways of relating and developing relationships, lifestyle choice, as well as artistic expression. Consider the possibility that your cultural distinctions don't fit when you try and apply them to other cultures. Be careful not to assume that your way of expressing yourself is the only way!

- **develop 'transcultural competency'**

To engage with people from different cultures or with different ways of doing things, spend time learning about these cultures and activities. Try and get under the skin of the culture/activity to discover the meaning. Real understanding will help you look at other forms of (cultural) expression in their own terms rather than in just your own. Being open to moving beyond our usual way of seeing, and doing often enables us to discover new ways of doing things, and therefore create unexpected and innovative organisations, workshops, artwork etc.

- **continually reflect and question**

Being open to cultural diversity requires continual reflection. Questions you might consider are:

- how might our organisation, its activities and our artform(s) be diminished without the opportunity to see and do things differently?
- how has our artform (or organisation) been used for inspiration or skills development by others?
- is our art form mirrored in other cultures? What are the differences and similarities? How can we learn from these other forms of its expression? Is there potential for an exchange of ideas and for working together?
- is our artform threatened in any way? How are we keeping it alive for future generations?
- how does our artform contribute to the greater diversity of our culture in general?

Formalising practice – taking action

So, the first step in promoting cultural diversity is taking a good look at where your organisation is now and then working out where you want to be. Put together a plan to get there. In so doing, consider:

- **awareness** – include cultural diversity awareness in organisational communications, both formal and informal e.g. including it in speeches and written messages. Keep up to date with publications and current thinking. Schedule it for discussion at staff and committee meetings.
- **staff/volunteers** – provide ongoing, good quality awareness and skills-based training so that staff are committed and knowledgeable. Be creative in this and remember that the issue is as much about management practice as about artistic development, creativity and innovation.
- **recruitment (employees, members, participants)** – recognise potential. Be careful not to disadvantage people who have no had access to formal qualifications and training.
- **monitoring** – identify ways to track your progress and record success in all areas of your work, membership, audience and artform development. Disseminate information regarding success and progress in awareness and shifts in behaviour to reinforce, and show, your organisation's commitment.



- **equal opportunities AND cultural diversity policies** – develop both. They should help your organisation structure how it works with employees/volunteers and how it promotes activities and membership.
- **organisational context** – link cultural diversity to all your organisation's goals. Integrate it into all your activities so that it is part of the entire context and not simply added on to meet funder requirements.

Note: none of this has to be expensive. Rather, it is about adapting, changing and developing what you are already doing – so that it empowers everyone.

For example:

- make sure your timetables, venues and food don't exclude people.
- encourage and make it possible for minority interest (i.e. groups who gather together through a shared interest) and minority ethnic groups to have a formal voice in management structures and on governing bodies and committees.
- help people contribute to meetings by explaining how they work in your organisation; have pre-meetings if necessary to assist those who are not familiar with formalities.
- think about how and where you publicise your

organisation and its services e.g. use ethnic minority or minority interest publications, notice boards and centres.

- demonstrate open ways of working i.e. ensure your systems are transparent and open to scrutiny.
- develop partnerships:
 - with staff and members to achieve your organisation's goals and demonstrate that everyone involved is valued and respected e.g. use employees/members as internal cultural diversity trainers, have special events focusing on specific cultural groups, issues or artforms.
 - with specific vendors and service providers e.g. for food, training, advice etc.
 - with the community e.g. through assistance with community events.

Finally – Communicate!

Communication is the key. Ask.

Ask: your staff, volunteers, members and representatives of different groups of people so that you have the understanding and background information that will enable you to meet everyone's needs.

4. Cultural diversity and the voluntary arts: making the case

Cultural diversity and the adoption of the values promoted by the UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity presents a significant opportunity to all voluntary arts groups.

Articles 5 and 6 particularly point to extending our ideas of access, participation and self expression beyond existing notions of equality.

The voluntary arts sector reflects the diversity of our cultures through cultural/artistic expression. It effortlessly embraces a hugely diverse range of activities and practices many of which fall outside mainstream artistic practice and involve minority groups or cultures; organisations engaged in the voluntary arts are also, often, simply through their existence, promoting and preserving those arts and traditions that are threatened by rapid social change and economic development. Thus, the voluntary arts has a significant contribution to make to maintaining and promoting cultural diversity in the UK and Republic of Ireland today.

For example: Quilters groups are keeping alive a heritage art, traditionally a domestic and female activity, one in which patterns and meaning are passed down from generation to generation. The quilting tradition reflects and helps keeps alive social interaction in many communities. Many cultures have similar textile or craft based traditional expressions.

Brass bands also exemplify community cohesion and expression, identity and heritage. Blaenavon, an old coal mining town in South Wales now has World Heritage Site status granted by UNESCO. Just as the buildings are testimony to the industrial heritage of the area, so too is the music of colliery band and brass bands throughout South Wales and other mining areas of the UK. Most cultures have similar musical traditions rooted in a place and time.



5. Further information

UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity –

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127160m.pdf>

The following articles may be of particular interest to the voluntary arts.

Article 1 – Cultural diversity: the common heritage of humanity

As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature.

Article 2 – From cultural diversity to cultural pluralism

In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together. Policies for the inclusion and participation of all citizens are guarantees of social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace.

Article 3 – Cultural diversity is a factor in development

Cultural diversity widens the range of options open to everyone; it is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence.

Article 4 – Human rights as guarantees of cultural diversity

The defence of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity.

Article 5 – Cultural rights as an enabling environment for cultural diversity

All persons should be able to participate in the cultural life of their choice and conduct their own cultural practices, subject to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Article 6 – Towards access for all to cultural diversity

While ensuring the free flow of ideas by word and image care should be exercised that all cultures can express themselves and make themselves known.

Article 7 – Cultural heritage as the wellspring of creativity

Heritage in all its forms must be preserved, enhanced and handed on to future generations.

Article 8 – Cultural goods and services: commodities of a unique kind

Economic and technological change opens up opportunities. Attention must be paid to the diversity of the supply of creative work, to recognition of the rights of artists and to the specificity of cultural goods/services which, as vectors of identity, values and meaning, must not be treated as mere commodities or consumer goods.

Article 9 – Cultural policies as catalysts of creativity

While ensuring the free circulation of ideas and works, cultural policies must create conditions conducive to the production and dissemination of diversified cultural goods and services.

Article 10 – Strengthening capacities for creation and dissemination worldwide

It is necessary to reinforce international cooperation and solidarity aimed at enabling all countries to establish cultural industries that are viable at national and international level.

Legislation

The following bodies operate within different legal frameworks to promote inclusion.

- The Commission for Racial Equality – www.cre.gov.uk
- The Equal Opportunities Commission – www.eoc.org.uk
- Disability Rights Commission – www.drc-gb.org
- Equality Commission for Northern Ireland – www.equalityni.org

- The Equality Authority – www.equality.ie – Republic of Ireland legislation.

Employment

- Department of Trade and Industry www.dti.gsi.gov.uk/er/equality – Employment equality regulations, age discrimination.
- www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk – Women and Equality Unit.

- Employment law in the Republic of Ireland – http://oasis.gov.ie/employment/employment_rights/employment_law_update.html
- ACAS – <http://www.acas.org.uk/> – free advice to employers on employment issues, including diversity. Helpline: 08457 474747.
- Home Office – www.homeoffice.gov.uk – Race Equality Unit; Faith Equality Unit.

Local advice and guidance

- National Council for Voluntary Organisations – www.ncvo-vol.org.uk
- Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action – www.nicva.org
- Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations – www.scvo.org.uk
- Wales Council for Voluntary Action – www.wcva.org.uk
- The Wheel – www.wheel.ie

Cultural diversity and the arts

EQ – www.thinkeq.net – national equality and diversity agency working in the creative industries.

- *Diversity Manifesto* – The Diversity Manifesto was produced from the recommendations that came out of the Creative Renewal programme. It contains important messages for anyone working in the creative industries on how we can make them representative of society as a whole.

Arts Councils – source of guidance and good practice material on cultural diversity, policies and practice. Some also offer training and workshops.

- Arts Council England – www.artscouncil.org.uk
- Arts Council Ireland /An Chomhairle Ealaíon – www.artscouncil.ie
- Arts Council of Northern Ireland – www.artscouncil-ni.org
- Scottish Arts Council – www.scottisharts.org.uk
- Arts Council of Wales – www.artswales.org.uk

Other resources

A wide range of organisations exist to promote equality in all the grounds. Contact Voluntary Arts Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales for referrals to local agencies. www.voluntaryarts.org for contact details or info@voluntaryarts.org

VAN publications

www.voluntaryarts.org/publications

- 32: So, what's so Great about the voluntary arts? (with a special version for Ireland).
- 42: Culture Makes Communities.
- 44: Disability Discrimination Act Part III.
- 45: How do I Create an Equal Opportunities Policy?
- 53: Creating Clear Print – reaching the blind and partially sighted.
- 59: Value and Values in the Voluntary Arts.
- 80: Monitoring & Evaluation.
- 84: Artists in Hospitals: guidelines for the voluntary arts.
- 85: Taking the voluntary arts into education.
- 86: Making your website for everyone.
- 90: Young Adults and Voluntary Arts: three models to promote participation.
- *Doing It Ourselves* – learning to challenge social exclusion through the voluntary arts.
- *Tear Up Your Tick Boxes* – a guide to the creative evaluation of participatory arts activities.

Human Rights

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights – www.un.org/Overview/rights.html

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Disclaimer: We have taken reasonable precautions to ensure that the information contained in this Briefing is accurate. However, the document is not intended to be legally comprehensive. We recommend you take legal advice before taking action on any of the matters covered herein.

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