Valuing Diversity

The Case for Inclusive Museums
This publication captures voices and perspectives from across the museum sector and beyond on the subject of diversity in museums at the present moment. It is the culmination of action research conducted by the Museums Association (MA) which took place during 2015–16.

Through this work we explored:

- the experience of working in museums for people who self-identify as from a diverse background

and

- reflections, suggestions and recommendations from those working for change.

Much of the content has been anonymised, due to the sensitive nature of the issues discussed.

Overall this publication captures and shares perspectives from more than 80 individuals working across the cultural sector in a variety of settings and roles. We thank all participants for their honest and thoughtful contributions.

The report has also been informed by key publications on diversity from the cultural sector and from other fields such as the higher education sector.

This publication has been written by Jessica Turtle and is informed by research carried out by Jessica Turtle and Ravina Bajwa.

This publication can be provided in alternative formats, such as large print, Braille and audiotape. Please request alternative formats by email to info@museumsassociation.org.

“This hard-hitting report outlines the lack of diversity in the sector at all levels. We need decisive, meaningful action now from funders and sector bodies if we are to make a real difference on these issues for future generations. The time for talking is over.”

Sharon Heal, director, Museums Association
Definitions

Our definition of diversity is any characteristic which can differentiate groups and individuals from one another.

This includes the protected characteristics as defined by the Equalities Act 2010 but also includes others, such as socio-economic background and status. It also includes and values diversity of perspectives and life experience, for example.

Our definition of inclusion recognises that people need to feel connected and engaged. Inclusion can be defined as a state of being and feeling valued, respected and supported. Practising inclusion is necessary for diversity initiatives to work effectively.

Our definition of equality recognises that every individual should have equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents. It recognises that certain groups of people with particular characteristics have in the past, and today, experienced discrimination.
For more than 17 years, the MA has consistently championed diversity within the museum sector. It remains committed to the development of a diverse workforce and to a vision where all institutions are truly inclusive and effectively address issues of representation and participation.

Since 2014, this work has continued with *Transformers: Radical Change in Museums*. Whilst not specifically a positive action programme, *Transformers* is nevertheless a programme which continues to champion diversity and builds upon the MA’s aim of encouraging values-based change for museum professionals, institutions and their stakeholders. By values-based change, we mean the values inherent in *Museums Change Lives*, the MA’s core campaign for the period 2014-17. Included in this is an expectation that museums will

- promote social justice and human rights
- challenge prejudice and champion fairness and equality
- foster discussion and debate, highlight areas of discrimination and offer a platform for representation that accurately mirrors the needs of communities.

This is coupled with an understanding that museums which encourage active participation and act as facilitators are stronger and more sustainable organisations. We believe that this approach will ultimately lead to a richer, more creative and innovative cultural sector as defined in the report of the fourth Warwick Commission, *Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth*, February 2015.

Within this context, the 2015 *Transformers* programme explored diversity in more depth through programme content, participant action research projects, interviews and a national event. This strand of the programme has been funded by Arts Council England, as part of their commitment to widening diversity in the cultural sector. The Creative Case, which underpins Arts Council England’s approach to encouraging diversity and equality states: “Our key guiding principle will be that inclusivity of outlook and practice creates a better, richer and more dynamic arts sector.” (*What is the Creative Case for Diversity?* Arts Council England, 2011)
To underpin this work, we used some key recommendations from the final report of the MA's Diversify programme as a starting point for internal and external conversations.
Greater links between audience development and workforce development
To what extent does the strong work that has been done in recent years on participation and engagement speak to recruitment and workforce? Are these areas of practice operating in a silo, or are we actively signposting and recruiting from within our volunteers and communities?

Broadening out the idea of diversity
How nuanced and sophisticated is our idea of diversity? Are we able to fully recognise the meanings our space, collections, and locations hold, and apply this effectively to our activity? Or are we still working to generalist quotas? Community is often talked about, but what does it actually mean for each of our organisations? In addition, there is an argument that by identifying and engaging with people on the basis of a single characteristic we are reducing identity. Identity is extremely complex and made and remade constantly as people negotiate their lives. How much thinking of this kind around diversity is currently active and is it being applied to the way that we develop relationships with people outside and inside our organisations?

Behaviours and values
Most museums now have mission statements which incorporate some element of inclusion, but how many leaders embody these values? Does our behaviour match the mission? This is required for a sustained culture change that goes beyond project funding, shifts to the institutional core and allows organisations to truly question and explore systemic inequalities.

Opening up entry routes and career paths
There have been many funded programmes that have encouraged non-traditional entry routes in recent years, but to what extent have these been embedded into core organisational activity? Is a Master’s degree still a pre-requisite for a career in museums or are we embracing people from non-academic backgrounds?
Aims

- to critically and honestly examine where we are as a sector for both workforce and audience
- to explore understandings of diversity and to elicit a wider definition of diversity than we have held previously
- to explore and acknowledge hidden assumptions and power dynamics
- to develop a better understanding of why there is a lack of diversity in the sector
- to explore and interrogate the various cases for diversity
- to collaboratively agree concrete actions in response to these conversations – for the MA, for individuals and for institutions.
In 2015, a new cohort of 27 Transformers participants from a variety of museums (local authority, independent, national and university museums) in England, Wales and Scotland were asked to consider diversity in relation to their own practice and their own institutions.
The Museum Association’s Diversity: State of the Nation event gave me much food for thought. In keeping with the title, I think the challenge the sector faces around diversity is intimately linked to that overarching tension between the certainties of museums’ historic role and their search for an identity in the uncertain and complex world we live in today.

On a strategic level I believe that diversification of the workforce partly rests on a structural rebalancing between ‘specialists’ and ‘generalists’, particularly in the curator role.

David Bryan, member of Arts Council England’s National Council, chairman, Working with Men, chairman, Voluntary Arts BAME advisory panel, director, Xtend UK Ltd

“Our cultural institutions need to take the brakes off and make a permanent commitment to greater inclusion at all levels.”

John Orna-Ornstein, director of museums, Arts Council England

“There’s an element of the emperor’s new clothes about this. After years of discussion it’s clear that only much stronger, braver action from all of us – funders, sector bodies, museums – will make an impact when it comes to real diversity.”
“...there is an ethical imperative to make the case for more diverse and inclusive institutions.”
There are different understandings of what diversity means for each of the four nations and this requires acknowledgement. For example, National Museums Northern Ireland has developed programmes which encourage cohesive community relations. These are founded on values of equity, diversity and inter-dependence. The values spring from the specific context and recent history of Northern Ireland and the programmes are designed to respond to this, showing the critical role museums can play in bringing people together and generating shared understandings by using culture and heritage as tools for positive change.

Amgueddfa Cymru (National Museum Wales) is leading on groundbreaking research and evaluation for the programme Cyfuno: Trechu Tlodi trwy Ddiwylliant / Fusion: Tackling Poverty through Culture, addressing a research gap around the benefits of participation in culture in Wales. The pilot year focused on community clusters in six Pioneer Areas in Wales; Swansea, Wrexham, Gwynedd, Cardiff, Newport and Torfaen.

The Welsh government identified these Pioneer Areas in relation to poverty and socio-economic status. The Pioneer Area programme supports local authorities and Communities First clusters to find new and exciting opportunities for people to enjoy and take part in cultural activities. It brings a range of cultural bodies to the table so they can have more of an impact on the lives of individuals and communities. The goals are to work together to: develop confidence and skills; provide volunteering opportunities; support accreditation for people; and make learning exciting.

In recognition of the richness and diversity of Scotland’s cultural practices and living traditions, Museums Galleries Scotland has led on creating, developing and sustaining a national inventory of Scotland’s Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). This initiative follows research commissioned by Museums Galleries Scotland in partnership with the Scottish Arts Council, now known as Creative Scotland, and the Scotland Committee of the UK National Commission for UNESCO (Intangible Cultural Heritage in Scotland: The Way Forward, McCleery et al, 2008). The ICH inventory in Scotland recognises and values traditions, languages and practices that constitute living heritage within Scotland; this includes practices of non-Scottish origin. The researchers noted that although the UK is not a signatory to the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, there exists a particular willingness in Scotland and Wales to adhere to and promote best practice standards related to ICH. This demonstrates that diversity and inclusion approaches in these nations incorporate and value the nation’s own distinct indigenous practices alongside practices from other cultures.

Diversity is also nuanced towards local contexts. Exploring diversity should be meaningful to each museum’s collections, spaces and mission. Within England, diversity in a rural context is sometimes felt to be unacknowledged and misunderstood. Cornwall, for example, has the largest unitary local authority in the United Kingdom and in 2014 the Cornish people were formally recognised as holding national minority status. Although nationality is not a protected characteristic under the Equalities Act, these social and political nuances speak directly to conceptions of heritage and use of collections. They should therefore be recognised and explored within the museum sector.

National and local contexts

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“Voices from the region, and especially Cornwall, tend to get muffled or ignored or simply deemed too far and too remote and not plentiful enough to engage with. Within this situation, what hope do minority people have in finding a voice?”

Dr. Tehmina Goskar, Museums Association Representative, South West

Unconscious bias

There is a wide literature on unconscious bias and this literature suggests unconscious bias affects everyone, is automatic and is rooted in background, personal experience, cultural environment and social stereotypes. The study of unconscious bias has increased in recent years but there is limited application of the findings to organisational practice in museums. The Equalities Challenge Unit has conducted a literature review and toolkit for Higher Education which makes for useful reading when considering museums. This research demonstrates that unconscious bias not only impacts decisions related to recruitment and salary of individuals but also impacts investment in their ongoing development once inside an organisation.

Our interviews demonstrated that unconscious bias is a live issue and does play out across the sector. This can of course impact on recruitment but a clear finding here was the effect this has on day-to-day experience for those self-identifying as – or who are identified as – diverse. Our respondents also indicated that unconscious bias can influence decisions around programming, interpretation and representation in museum spaces.

Conscious prejudice

One person reported cases of conscious prejudice operating on people of diverse backgrounds. In one museum, staff made and communicated the assumption that Asian visitors posed a terrorist threat, which had a significant emotional impact on colleagues who shared ethnic and faith background with those visitors. There have also been situations where racism is dealt with by moving the person affected to another department rather than dealing with the person conducting the acts. These examples are extreme – and most likely, rare – in the sector, but they demonstrate what can occur even when an organisation promotes diversity without also encouraging and supporting inclusion.
Retention

One clear piece of feedback we received was that for people who self-identify – or who are identified as – being of a diverse background, the day-to-day experience of working in museums can be exhausting and can present regular emotional and psychological challenges. This may lead to people leaving once they approach mid-career level, rather than continuing in a challenging landscape. In order to navigate organisational cultures, people report needing to: constantly articulate and demonstrate how they have achieved their position on merit; explain issues of identity and cultural heritage to colleagues and deal with micro-inequities on a daily basis. Micro-inequities occur as an effect of unconscious bias and can be defined as micro-messages that communicate who is ‘within’ and who is ‘without’. They are social and professional slights that can become collectively acted out without people realising. They have the effect of damaging morale and devaluing individuals. Although there have been some excellent entry route programmes to diversify the sector in recent years, there is anecdotal evidence that retention at mid-career level is an issue, due to the factors explored above.

Entry routes

Some people who engaged with this process feel that the sector holds on to a culture of over-professionalisation, with many practitioners over-qualified for their role. This narrows entry to the workforce for people who don’t take traditional academic routes. Others felt that academic qualifications are important for collections care and interpretation. The impact of this belief where collections care and interpretation are held psychologically and symbolically in the academic realm, means that this area of museum work will remain out of reach to many.

Some people felt that there is a ‘pipeline’ issue which exists at school level. Put simply, not enough children and young people would necessarily consider a career in arts and heritage or know about the broad range of career options that museums can offer.

One Transformers project – Are Galleries Just for Girls explores the gender imbalance in relation to young people accessing the Whitworth following observations that young men are not engaging with formal and informal learning offered there. More widely, in order to address the ‘pipeline’ issue and raise awareness of museums as a career option, we have been advised that 14–15 years of age is a critical moment for intervention when young people are beginning to shape and imagine their adult lives.

Lack of holistic access and interpretation

People with disability report that they can often feel that they are invited to engage with one part of the collection, one event, one exhibition or one part of the building rather than being invited in to an inclusive experience, despite accessible and inclusive environments being of benefit to all visitors. The Disability Co-operative Network, that was set up as a result of Transformers, is a central hub where museums can share good practice and create more holistic approaches to access across the sector.

Despite pockets of excellent work and progress being made, museum collections are often not interpreted from diverse viewpoints. In addition, work with groups or individuals from diverse backgrounds can be project based and bolt-on. Often the good work that comes out of projects is not used or displayed in the long term and therefore is inaccessible to people who would be interested in engaging with narratives that are relevant to their lived experience.
**Understandings**

As the 2013 *Diversify* report recommended, it is still necessary to broaden out our idea of diversity. In addition to national, regional and local nuances it is also important to develop a better understanding of the invisible dimensions of diversity (as well as continuing to pay attention to the visible dimensions). For example, some excellent work is under way to develop better understanding of and support for neurodiversity, and more consideration is being given to socio-economic factors as a facet of diversity. Finally, it is important to develop an understanding of how these dimensions interconnect and relate to organisational structure, values and process.

**Power**

Related to this, some people felt that more focus should be given to how power operates in organisations and how this impacts on policies and decision-making. If the higher levels of our organisations are not diverse – and it is well documented that they are not – then in what ways can we devolve decision-making to genuinely include and act upon diverse perspectives? It is important to work towards diversifying senior leadership and boards, but there are actions that can be taken while the changes happen to support genuinely inclusive practices.

Some respondents pointed out that there are still silos between departments, so good practice happening in the learning department, for example, might not translate to recruitment.

Other practitioners have pointed out that where effective diversity-related work exists in programming, it does not extend to the rest of the organisation’s operations, limiting its effectiveness. For example, to create a truly welcoming environment, inclusion practices should extend to procurement for cafes, to accommodate dietary requirements for people of diverse backgrounds. Similarly, an access line should be included in every departmental budget to support people to give consistent consideration to access in its broadest sense as part of everyday practice.

Some practitioners of a black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) background expressed frustration at being pigeonholed into roles which focus on working with communities. This approach may be implicitly linked to assumptions that diversifying the workforce will lead to a diversification of audience.

Finally, there is evidence that when organisations are under pressure due to funding cuts, for example, diversity-related initiatives that concern workforce are likely to be side-lined or removed altogether.

**The case**

Many of those working for change feel that currently it is important to present the business case for diversity. This idea of diversity as a driver to resilience is popular and relates to newer conceptions of museums as entrepreneurial, agile and relevant to 21st-century Britain. However, the business case alone is unlikely to lead to lasting change. Values-based change requires a commitment to understanding and embracing diversity fully, not simply to ensure that museums survive.

The MA’s work on ethics and *Museums Change Lives* indicates that there is an ethical imperative to make the case for more diverse and inclusive institutions.

At the State of the Nation event it was discussed that each case – ethical, business and creative – ultimately has relevance and that it is important for organisations to work with a combination of the three and most importantly to make sure that this informs their organisational values, mission, behaviours and decisions.
“We call on funders and policy makers to ensure that diversity is understood in all its complexities, in order to inspire and support people working in and for museums.”

Pathways to action
For institutions and leaders

**The case for diversity**

Time and energy is often spent debating the cases, when in fact they all have merit. Organisations should use the case that most closely matches their mission and values, or indeed a mix of cases.

The Museums Association remains committed to the ethical case, which underpins our flagship campaign Museums Change Lives and matches our own organisational values. This is because we believe that in a time when public trust in the major institutions is waning, museums have the potential to offer active spaces for debate and discussion that highlight areas of discrimination and offer a platform for representation which accurately mirrors 21st-century Britain.

There is value in the other cases for diversity and more consideration should be given to how the creative case applies to museum practice. There is a great deal of strength in the way that the creative case seeks to move away from a deficit model which problematises diversity.

**Horizontal decision-making**

Institutions should consider how they will encourage ideas from across the organisation, to support decision-making that brings diverse perspectives and devolves power. One example of an organisation that has pioneered new approaches to this is Glasgow Museums, through the Paul Hamlyn-funded Our Museum programme. This programme developed three ways of creating opportunities for exchange, dialogue and reflection: staff ambassadors, insight cafes and creative cafes. Creative cafés in particular are designed as a regular ideas-generation mechanism that provide an ongoing opportunity for community partners and museum staff to share and collaboratively generate ideas and dialogue to drive Glasgow Museums' programme planning. The cafés encourage and capture the creativity of staff and communities from the beginning of the planning process for programmes of displays, events, learning opportunities and research.

For individuals

Self-organised networks are emerging in the sector as a space for those who identify as diverse to gather, offer support and take action. Examples of this are Museum Agender and Museum Detox. We would recommend that people think about joining a network or starting one, if there is not a network which appeals.

It’s important to have a sound knowledge of all the cases and to deploy a case that will be effective for the person you are speaking with. If they need to be convinced, think about which case is going to speak to them most strongly – the creative, ethical or business case? In order to influence effectively we must have a good knowledge of what motivates the listener.

It is important to think about the small changes that can be made. A collective push of incremental changes can have real impact over the long term. Regardless of seniority, everyone has some influence over organisational activity and it’s important to feel empowered.

**Honesty and a culture of peer-led learning**

In May 2014, Google published its diversity data, stating openly that being honest about where workforce diversity currently stood is a key part of the solution. A culture of self-awareness and ‘bias-busting’ can support inclusion. Managers have undertaken training to generate better awareness and to challenge themselves and colleagues when unconscious bias plays out at work. It is recommended that the museum sector also works towards greater honesty in relation to what still needs to change and improve.

**Equality, diversity and inclusion training and development**

Inclusion training and development should be undertaken at all levels: governance, management and staff level. All who work in and for museums should have the right training and support in these areas.
For the sector-wide funders, bodies and associations, including the Museums Association

**Data**
Better and more comprehensive data is needed to measure diversity of governance, workforce, visitors and stakeholders. Arts Council England’s yearly capture of this data for Major Partner Museums in England is a good start but data is needed across the whole of the UK in order to support initiatives for change and measure shifts over time.

In addition, the MA should conduct research to explore how many Diversify participants are still in the sector, their experience and current role.

**Key performance indicators**
Strategic sector bodies across all four nations should set clear and measurable key performance indicators (KPIs) to increase workforce and audience diversity in the sector, working collaboratively to ensure that these are congruent but that they also respond to specific contexts. These KPIs should include all characteristics and should inform policy initiatives and funding, providing a cohesive framework for data capture and analysis of change.

**Embedded equality, diversity and inclusion training**
Specialist training that addresses the issues outlined in this report should be threaded through all workforce development initiatives delivered in the sector by specialist bodies. This would support trustees, leadership and staff across the UK to better understand and lead on equality, diversity and inclusion in their organisations.

The MA is committing to explicitly address this and ensure training and development on diversity, equality and inclusion is included in Transformers, the AMA, the FMA, Museum Practice programming, MA conference and other MA content.

**The creative case**
We believe that there is further work to be done to better understand how the creative case applies to museums. One clear area set out by the creative case is that of recognition. The creative case outlines the importance of addressing the invisibility of influential artists of diverse backgrounds in the history of the arts in the UK – how could that line of enquiry be developed to consider other stories, other histories, other narratives related to science, industry and everyday life as captured and shared in our collections?
Supporting mid-career professionals to become diverse leaders

The MA will develop a programme to support a cohort of mid-career professionals from diverse backgrounds to navigate the shifting sands of a career in museums. The programme will be designed to energise and will provide a space of mutual support, offering the opportunity for new connections and understandings. It will also equip professionals with the tools needed to negotiate and influence within their organisations, supporting the next generation of diverse leadership.

Improve perceptions of museums amongst young people

The MA should develop its work with media partners and educational bodies to raise awareness with young people from diverse backgrounds around the potential of a career in museums.

Explore and share cultural nuances across the four nations

Sector bodies and the MA can act as brokers where nations or regions have good practice that is relevant. Through our regional representatives, members’ meetings and networks, the MA is in a strong position to support shared learning across the UK and should actively seek to do so.

Support broader understandings of what diversity means

Finally, broader understandings are needed in order to truly explore diversity. Some current initiatives focus on one or two characteristics and while this is valuable in some ways, it could also be viewed as reductive. We call on funders and policy-makers to ensure that diversity is understood in all its complexities, in order to inspire and support people working in and for museums.

The MA will remain committed to this approach and will continue to use all its channels: policy, events and editorial to encourage broader understandings of what diversity means for museums and the public they serve.
Transformers projects
Case studies
Changing Perceptions: Public Opinion on Museum Volunteering

Alex Nicholson-Evans, commercial director, Birmingham Museums Trust

The particular research motivation for this project was to understand why people from a BAME background might not choose to volunteer at Birmingham Museums Trust. The 2011 census shows that Birmingham has a broad range of residents from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, with 42% self-identifying as being from a BAME background. 33% of volunteering applications for the Trust currently come from people of a BAME background and the organisation would like to increase this to further diversify their workforce. The findings have a wider importance for the sector.

“Maybe people feel it might embarrass them if they were spotted by their mates.”
Anonymous interview respondent

Setting up a National Network for Disability in Museums

Becki Morris, founder, The Disability Co-operative Network and collections assistant, Heritage and Culture Warwickshire

This network responds to a continued need to improve equality and inclusion in museums for disabled people. Its aims are:

- to create a new way of holistic thinking for disability in museums
- to link into existing social frameworks and thinking within the sector such as Museums Change Lives (Museums Association) and Equality and Diversity in the Arts and Cultural Sector (Arts Council England)
- to provide a consultation for a strategic steer for key governance parties such as Arts Council England, the Group for Education in Museums and Museums Association
- to challenge existing practice and create cost-effective, inclusive ways of thinking within the sector
- to provide a glossary of accepted terminology and available legislation through partners
- to develop the culture and identity of disability within the heritage sector.

Legal Literacy programmes

Pollie Shorthouse, executive director of National Centre for Citizenship and the Law, part of the Egalitarian Trust, a charity that runs the Galleries of Justice Museum and the City of Caves in Nottingham

There is a need to increase women’s legal literacy in Nottingham to not only inform women about their rights within society but also empower them to make changes to their lives and those around them. The Women in Law session delivered at the Galleries of Justice Museum started conversations with women about how imbalanced the law and society are but more importantly what can be done to change this.

Are Galleries Just for Girls?

Denise Bowler, secondary and post-16 co-ordinator, The Whitworth, Manchester

This project responded to observations that young men are not engaging with the Whitworth’s programmes. The project researched young people’s perceptions of art and art gallery spaces to explore whether galleries are more likely to be accessed by young women through both formal learning and informal visits.

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Further reading

Printed resources


Online resources

Amgueddfa Cymru National Museum Wales Operational Plan 2015/16

Culture Change, Dynamism and Diversity, Museums Association, 2010

Equalities Challenge Unit Unconscious Bias in Higher Education Training Pack

Fusion: tackling Poverty through Culture. The Pioneer Area programme: Pilot Year 2015/16

Glasgow Museums Our Museum project

Intangible Cultural Heritage in Scotland: The Way Forward, Alison McCleery, Alistair McCleery, Linda Gunn and David Hill (Napier University) based on research commissioned by Museums Galleries Scotland, Napier University, 2008

What is the Creative Case for Diversity? Arts Council England, 2011


You don’t know what you don’t know blog