

OUR NATIONAL PORTFOLIO, 2018-22

Diversity Narrative



The arts can hold a mirror up to our world. They can also be beacons to inspire change. In any case, their long-term viability depends on their relevance – how they represent and speak to a diverse, contemporary society.

Over the years there have been numerous initiatives to ensure that relevance, and to increase the diversity of the arts and cultural workforce, work and audiences. These efforts kept diversity high on the agenda, but was seen as the responsibility of a specialized group of organisations operating outside the mainstream.

Our response has been to embed diversity into the mainstream, recognizing that it must be integral to the thinking and planning of all the organisations that we invest in, not an afterthought or the responsibility of others. In addition to equality action plans, regularly funded organisations are now required to implement the Creative Case for Diversity, which asks them to put diversity at the heart of the decisions they take about the artists they commission and employ and the programme they present.

We also recognise that the workforce and leadership of the arts and cultural organisations that we invest in does not reflect the make-up of 21st century England. If arts and cultural organisations look like their communities, we believe that they are more likely to attract people from those communities.

At the last investment round in 2015, diversity seemed to be taking a step backwards in the portfolio, with a decrease in applications from new diverse organisations, particularly those which are disability led. There was only one new Black and minority ethnic organisation introduced into the 2015-18 portfolio, and some diverse led organisations left.

In response we have renewed our focus on diversity, producing an annual diversity and equality report to track progress. Our most recent diversity report showed encouraging progress, particularly around Black and minority ethnic representation, though data for representation of disabled people continued to disappoint. We are trying to understand the context for this and what action we can take.

We have recognised that the existing ‘51 per cent’ definition of ‘diverse led’ no longer reflected how organisations saw themselves, and made it challenging to report on the wider diversity of the portfolio. We’ve since created a new and more inclusive definition of diverse led, which allows us to present a better picture of how the sector sees itself. The definition now also includes LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) and female led organisations and organisations that self-define as diverse led, based on the people who are involved in key strategic decision-making roles.

This provides a benchmark for future evaluation; but to ensure consistency when comparing with past figures, we have also retained the ‘51 per cent’ definition of diverse led.

The National Portfolio for 2018-22 shows a significant improvement compared to 2015. There is an especially exciting story around dance, with new joiners including Aakash Odedra’s Leicester Dance Theatre, Serendipity, Ballet Black, Boy Blue and Avante Garde. There is also a new generation of disability led organisations joining the portfolio including Disability Arts Online, Diverse City, Bamboozle, Together! 2012, Bradford Literature Festival, Yellow Earth, BOM, MeWe, International Curators Forum, Luton Carnival, and Shubbak festival.

Of the 96 self-defined Black and minority ethnic led organisations in the portfolio, 30 per cent are new. Using the 51 per cent definition, 25 per cent of the Black and minority ethnic led organisations are new.

Over the last two years, we have made significant investment in diversity through strategic funds to start to try to turn this around. This investment is starting to pay dividends, with strong results from the Elevate fund. Elevate helps diverse organisations become ready to apply for the portfolio. Out of 40 successful Elevate applicants, 30 applied for National Portfolio funding and 20 are being offered membership.

Diverse led organisations have also been successful with applications for ‘uplifts’ in funding – there have been uplifts for Tricycle, the Bush Theatre, 20 Stories High, Talawa, Tiata Fahodzi, Eclipse, Dash, Attitude is Everything, Extant, Heart N Soul, Deafinitely Theatre, Mind the Gap, New Art Exchange, StageText and Vocal Eyes, with the last two being supported to extend their delivery across museums.

Challenges remain. There are no Black and minority ethnic or disability led organisations receiving funding at Band 3 level (the largest), and only a single Black and minority ethnic led Sector Support Organisation.

Changing this will be the focus of our future efforts, along with holding organisations to account for their implementation of the Creative Case for Diversity. Key to tracking our progress will be ensuring that the National Portfolio Organisations we invest in provide us with better, more accurate data.

MORE INFORMATION:
[artscouncil.org.uk/npo](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/npo)

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