TOGETHER
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WE WILL

Intersectional Approaches to Best Practices

VASW
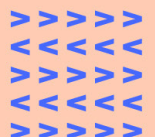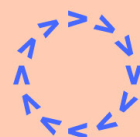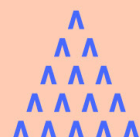
Table of contents

VASW

Introduction

"The road to true inclusion begins with nurturing a culture of kindness, patience, acceptance, pragmatism and focus on the person, not on the people."

"In the arts, we should be able to do things in a different way. We're supposedly working outside of capitalism (where reduction in productivity equals the loss in income for a company). This is where people are supposed to be supported to do things in their own way and not feel like they have to keep up with impossible targets."

Visual Arts South West (VASW) coordinated four Artworker Advisory Groups as part of *Together We Will*, a sector support pilot programme in Spring 2021. The aim of the Advisory Group scheme was to develop, together with South West based artworkers, an action plan for increasing equal access to and equitable working cultures in the visual arts sector. Lifting an array of voices and lived experience to the forefront of VASW's work, the Advisory Group scheme brought together:

- Black and non-Black Artworkers of Colour, facilitated by Dr Nazneen Ahmed
- Disabled and Neurodivergent Artworkers, facilitated by Trish Wheatley
- LGBTQIA+ Artworkers, facilitated by Dr D-M Withers
- Young Artworkers, facilitated by Emily Bull

The participants of each group were selected by the VASW team following a regional open call. Each Advisory Group responded to a series of questions in open conversation,

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with the aim to collectively generate a set of recommendations for intersectional approaches to best practice in visual arts. The questions for each group were formulated in collaboration between the group facilitator and Nella Aarne (Producer, VASW). The Young Artworkers Advisory Group came together twice while the other three groups gathered once. All meetings were exclusively for the participants and facilitators only, and the facilitators reported on the outcomes of each conversation to VASW. Overall, the Advisory Group scheme brought together 35 contributors along with the four facilitators.

This executive summary brings together the four reports provided by Nazneen Ahmed, Trish Wheatley, D-M Withers and Emily Bull.

We would like to extend our warmest thanks to the participants for their generous, insightful and critical contributions, which will help us build a more equitable visual arts sector in South West England:

Jon Adams / Flow Observatorium, Abbi Bayliss, Parys Gardener, Dan Guthrie, Myles-Jay Linton, Yasmin Joan Qureshi, Monica Shanta Brown and everyone who wished to remain anonymous.

Together We Will has been generously supported by Arts Council England.

Notes to Reader

I. The responsibility of transforming working cultures and maintaining relationships with specialist organisations who can support this work belongs to all members of staff, not only to those affected by marginalisation.

II. It is important to recognise that everyone has a multi-layered, intersectional identity and to reflect this in how we work. Be sensitive to how intersections of different social characteristics shape the experience of artworkers in specific communities.

III. There is no single best practice model to aspire to or learn from – many solutions are often context specific and circumstances are continuously shifting. This is why inclusion work requires long-term commitment and continuous self-reflection to transform working cultures.

Recommendations for Best Practice

Organisational cultures

Democratisation

Representation in leadership positions is crucial, especially when this links to decision-making power. This has a long-lasting impact on who sets the parameters of cultural taste and what kinds of values are prioritised when determining conditions and terms of work in the sector.

Work towards a changed perception of what the visual arts is – and can be – to strive towards a cross-disciplinary sector where skills across the academic and vocational spheres are equally vital.

Distribute power equitably and share responsibility of authoring organisational narratives and strategies:

- Instead of viewing leadership as something exclusively for senior institutional employees, invite artists into core decision-making positions and reflect the value of their diverse contributions in appropriate pay.

- Welcome early career artworkers to join Boards of Trustees and Steering Groups, to act as spokespeople for your organisation and to actively participate in creative and strategic decision making processes.

  NB: Early career artworkers who are new to leadership roles need a supportive infrastructure around them to foster confidence and professional growth.

- Find effective ways (e.g. annual assemblies), to invite direct input from your community to develop the strategic and creative journey of your organisation.

Develop and proactively communicate a proficient understanding of the history and legacy of colonialism and racial injustice, and of how visual arts and collecting institutions have been fundamentally complicit in perpetuating colonialism and racism.

Transparency and consistency

Inclusion work has to be holistic and taken seriously across all levels of an organisation to achieve its transformative potential. Who is on the board? Where is the funding coming from and going to? What kind of language does the organisation use? Where are the organisations' inbuilt biases and how do these manifest as barriers for specific communities?

Implement clear, inclusive policies and transparent statements of values. It is important for freelance artworkers as well as prospective employees to know which organisations are committed to equitable practices and safe to work with.

Be open about your commitment to consistently learning about inclusion. What kind of training has your organisation received and who provided this training? What kind of feedback have you received from artists who have worked with you in the past?

Establish processes for reporting incidents of racism, ableism and gender/sexuality based discrimination. It is important that these processes are transparent, available to all and easy to access, and not only about disciplinary action but also about learning.

> NB: When someone opens a conversation/complaint process about oppressive or discriminatory behaviours within an organisation, it is the role of the organisation to support this individual who has put themselves in a challenging position, not to centre its own emotional fragility.

Share how your community can find out whether and how your organisation is carrying out its responsibility and commitments towards inclusion. Establish accessible and clear processes for providing feedback, and transparent procedures for implementing changes resulting from any feedback submitted.

Accessibility

"Normalising access or communication requirements is something that can be applied across whole organisations as it helps non-disabled people too – everybody has different needs."

It is important that access is not an afterthought, but integrated into everything you do from the beginning. Work with disabled and neurodivergent artworkers in order to understand their needs.

Access provision needs to be detailed and easy to find. Prioritise access on your website, not only by making the

website itself accessible, but also by being clear about what access provision your organisation offers. This includes, but is not limited to, details on physical and sensory access in buildings (e.g. ramped access, lifts and toilets), parking and travel links, relaxed events and performances, resting spaces and changing spaces. Importantly, this should extend to staff areas if you want to attract disabled and neurodivergent workers.

Adopt a person-centred approach to work that eliminates assumptions and works to people's strengths. Inclusion cannot be achieved with a 'one size fits all' approach.
The requirements for a person-centred approach (e.g. flexibility in ways of working, pace of work and provision of additional support for disabled artworkers) must be reflected in budgeting.

Proactively promote and foster the use of self-advocating tools such as access documents (also known as access riders) which can help artworkers articulate their own access requirements with confidence.

Use disabled inclusive email signatures that proactively welcome the communication of any access requirements.

Training

While temporary contracts for inclusion work may bring temporary change, knowledge is easily lost. Everyone working in an organisation needs to know what the organisation's values are, and understand them through consistent and ongoing training.

Work with specialist organisations and freelancers to buy in training and address existing knowledge gaps within your organisation.

Make regularly reviewed equality training with diverse source materials mandatory for all staff.

Create safe spaces for discomfort and personal growth in training contexts. Change and learning take time, and happen at different speeds for different people.

If a freelance artworker contributes to staff training with new resources, explore alternative payment models. For example, as well as an appropriate one-off fee, the artworker can receive a payment every time the resources are used again in future training or licensed to another organisation.

When discussing oppressive practices that lead to marginalisation and discrimination, ensure that there is aftercare available for anyone who might be affected by trauma.

Language

Foster a culture where correct use of pronouns is respected and pronouns are not assumed but actively checked. You can do this by openly stating your own pronouns to others and by correcting your colleagues and peers in any instances of someone being misgendered.

Avoid overly academic or complicated language when communicating programme content or mission statements.

Employment and pay

Provide clear terms of employment and ensure fair pay for employees and freelancers. Pay should always be determined in accordance with consistent and transparent fee structures and honestly reflect the level of commitment required to carry out the work.

> NB: The fact that someone is young does not mean that they should be able or willing to work for free.

Everyone's working capacity is different. Create flexible programmes and time contingencies in your plans, and lobby for funders to ensure that slower pacing is possible. Sustained intensity of workloads and schedules without opportunities for rest and recovery can be detrimental to artists' and workers' health.

When inviting artists to work with you, ensure that you have sufficient funds in place or commit to securing sufficient funds on their behalf. Do not expect artists to fundraise for the delivery of your programme.

Offer childcare costs for artists, collaborators and freelance workers who are, for example, attending meetings or undertaking a residency with your organisation.

Programming

Working together

We often see programming *for* communities rather than *with*. How can we create working practices that allow different communities to see themselves in organisations?

Be reflexive about what perspectives are not being represented in your programmes and establish means to assess and measure representativeness. Offer curatorial opportunities to artworkers whose voices are underrepresented or absent in your organisation.

Consult and co-programme *with* communities of colour, and pay them appropriately for their expertise.

Consult and co-programme *with* LGBTQIA+ people, and pay them appropriately for their expertise.

Consult and co-programme *with* neurodivergent and disabled people, and pay them appropriately for their expertise.

Clearly state what you are doing to ensure that all of your programmes are accessible and inclusive, not just ones aimed at disabled and neurodivergent people.

Invite artists to provide access statements if they have them.

Ensure to include, for example, multiple Black and POC artworkers in selection panels. It can be intimidating and tiring for someone alone to get their voice heard (which can

also mean standing up to discriminatory attitudes) in a social setting where no one else shares their experience.

Make collaborations meaningful by investing time generously, caring for your collaborators, truly sharing authorship and learning from the process for the future. Box-ticking and tokenism only work to exacerbate marginalisation.

Programme content and delivery

Rethink how you find artists to work with. Consider creating alternative ways in which artists can approach your organisation. Create multiple routes of entry to the organisation that suit different access requirements and communication needs.

Seek out and support work that challenges sector expectations. This helps foster systemic change and encourages artworkers who might otherwise feel pressured to fit a particular mould or expectations with their practice.

Work consciously to increase literacy in artistic/curatorial approaches, political concerns and lived experience beyond those of the predominantly middle-class, straight, cisgendered, nondisabled, white community.

When highlighting particular kinds of lived experience, be conscious and explicit about which exact experiences, perspectives or histories are being highlighted – e.g. gay/lesbian experience is distinct from trans experience.

Ensure that offers of work/projects to Black, POC, disabled, neurodivergent or LGBTQIA+ artworkers do not reinforce or reproduce stereotyping and pigeonholing.

Critically consider where your understanding of 'queer aesthetics' comes from. Is this generated by LGBTQIA+ artists or by sector gatekeepers who have appropriated particular kinds of imagery and now impose artistic expectations?

Do not contain social justice issues or the work of particular demographics within themed episodes or isolated strands, e.g. Black History Month or LGBT History Month. Instead, incorporate these lines of enquiry into your overall programme throughout the year.

Avoid labelling young artworkers primarily as 'young'. This may risk undermining the seriousness and value of young artworkers' professionalism in comparison to others working in the sector.

Consider varying access requirements and customs at events. Depending on the event, this can mean, for example, providing seating, quiet resting spaces or non-alcoholic drinks.

Especially in the context of event programming, fund artists' – and if necessary, audiences' – travel to and from the venue. For example, trans and gender non-confirming people may live under a constant heightened risk of violence and hate crime, and it is crucial to protect our collaborators' safety.

Feedback

Invite specific communities to offer audience feedback on programmes and make multiple formats for feedback available, e.g. focus groups, written forms and online surveys.

Ensure that audience consultations are living documents developed throughout project life-cycles, taking place at the beginning, middle and end.

Professional development

Inclusive opportunities for different career paths and stages

Work proactively to demystify roles and progression pathways for early career artworkers. This will help artworkers understand what kinds of opportunities are appropriate for the stage they are at in their career.

In order to create equitable opportunities that address historical underrepresentation of disabled and neurodivergent artists, formulate professional development programmes in consultation with these artists.

When specifically targeting young early career artists, consider extending provision up to the age of 30.

Opportunities are needed more in mid/late twenties than in late teens/early twenties due to education pathways.

Support early career professional development in different ways to provide for different career aspirations – e.g. paid internships and short-term talent development roles, mentoring, skill sharing schemes and paid opportunities to make and exhibit new work.

> NB: Disabled participants may need longer time periods for professional development opportunities than non-disabled participants.

Trust sector newcomers with significant roles within your organisation and provide appropriate support to help them develop their skills and achieve set goals. This mutual trust and support is crucial to building professional confidence.

When advertising an entry level job opportunity, be clear about what 'entry level' means and prepare to offer this opportunity to someone who is truly at the beginning of their career – not someone who already has extensive experience.

Distribute knowledge of careers in the sector to secondary schools, and proactively make yourself known to young creatives to become more achievable. Provide information on different professional pathways to develop young people's understanding on the range of possible jobs in visual arts.

Opportunities to produce and exhibit work

Share your resources. Offer free or affordable/subsidised access to studios, workshops, specialised technical equipment and storage space.

Share your platform. Offer space, equipment and advice to support the realisation of independent exhibition projects and event programmes.

Training and mentoring

Navigating the practicalities of working as a freelancer and applying for funding can be intimidating. Fold advice on freelancer work and fundraising into any professional development opportunity aimed at early career artworkers.

Contribute to building professional confidence. Advise early career artworkers and freelancers on finding collaborators, developing partnerships and negotiating fees and contracts.

Ensure that outreach also supports organisational development – e.g. provision of business advice tailored to the needs of small arts organisations – focusing especially on organisations whose teams may experience multiple forms of oppression.

Alongside training sessions for wide audiences, find effective ways to offer individualised advice and long-term progression support with room for reciprocal interaction.

Application processes

Application processes are not inclusive when they entail a submission fee. Instead of funding your project with submission fees paid by individual artists, keep your application processes free and apply for funding from established funding bodies.

Ensure that your opportunity is widely distributed beyond your established networks.

Accept applications in multiple formats, e.g. written applications and audio/video recordings.

Invite artists to submit their access document with their application so that provision can be made to meet their access requirements.

If you offer grants for the development of new projects, build flexibility into your application processes to allow enough development time for applicants.

Disabled and neurodivergent applicants may need more time to arrange the access support that they need to apply for an opportunity and to complete the application itself. Provide extra time or extended deadlines for disabled and neurodivergent applicants.

Provide written guidance for applicants in accessible language and explicitly invite enquiries to offer further information on an individual basis.

Offer meaningful feedback on unsuccessful submissions to help applicants develop their skills for future application processes.

Consider offering paid development time during application processes. For substantial opportunities that require applicants to produce an extensive project proposal for consideration, run a two-tier process: one round of small-scale applications followed by a second round of applications for shortlisted artists, who are paid for their time to develop a more in-depth proposal.

NB: Accessible application processes have to be met with accessible workplaces and partnership arrangements that take into account the individual requirements/capacity of each person and structure the work accordingly.

Developing connections

"I am interested in opportunities to connect with other artists and people of colour without white people around, but I also want spaces where I can contribute to the collective human experience – one that doesn't begin and end with the white human experience."

Build and maintain relationships and/or partnerships with local or sector specific Black and POC, LGBTQIA+ and disabled led organisations and community groups.

Make a conscious effort to reach out to and build long-term, nurturing, sustained relationships with Black and POC, LGBTQIA+, disabled and neurodivergent artists – early career and otherwise.

Minimise purely transactional engagement with artists and, instead, foster ongoing investment in artists and their careers. This can mean signposting opportunities and facilitating contacts with other arts and community organisations and peer networks.

Establish, foster and/or promote networks/support groups of disabled and neurodivergent artworkers. They are an important resource for sharing good practice and developing confident professional voices.

Establish, foster and/or promote networks/support groups of Black and POC artworkers. They are an important resource for sharing good practice and developing confident professional voices.

Establish, foster and/or promote networks/support groups of LGBTQIA+ artworkers. They are an important resource for sharing good practice and developing confident professional voices.

Establish, foster and/or promote networks/support groups of early career artworkers. They are an important resource for sharing good practice and developing confident professional voices.

Offer intergenerational networking opportunities in multiple formats, and in person as well as online. For example, structured networking – with clear parameters for interaction and facilitated by a host – can help level the playing field for anyone who finds the informality and unspoken social etiquette of typical art world networking intimidating.

> NB: While online meetings with agendas can be more accessible to some because the rules of engagement are clear, online spaces can also be more challenging for others, particularly for participants with sensory impairments.

Invest staff time and resources to ensure that genuine connections are made, and that access requirements are met.

Find ways of being approachable as an organisation. This includes explaining how people can get in touch and which members of staff they should contact.

Resources

7 Principles for an Inclusive Recovery
Access docs for artists
Little Cog resources: Access docs, accessible online meetings and the Social Model of Disability
MAYK Mental Health Policy
Arts Council Investment Principles
Ashokkumar Mistry DNR_RND Project
Disability And... Curation Podcast
Gendered Intelligence

Questions and feedback

If you have any questions about this series of recommendations or would like to share your thoughts with VASW, please reach out to the VASW Team at info@vasw.org.uk.