

Fostering Diversity to Breed Success

Notes from Seminar

25 February 2003

Introduction

The seminar was opened by Chair Michael Frye who outlined the purpose of the Mayor's Commission on the Creative Industries, and the work that it has done so far on a range of issues. Michael reminded the audience of the tremendous economic importance of the creative industries to London, which are thought to have an aggregate annual turnover of £21 billion, and to employ in excess of 500,000 people. This success was, in large part, built around London's diversity and coming together of different creative cultures and talents. Despite this, there are concerns that more could be done to widen the 'net of opportunity', and ensure that as many as possible, irrespective of their background, could participate in and contribute to London's creative economy. One of the LDA's prime concerns is employment and job creation, and the Commission is exploring initiatives for growing employment both in the Creative Industries and among BME communities, whom it is hoped will be responsible for at least 25% of new jobs created in London. Michael then introduced his three fellow-panellists, all of whom spoke briefly before leading into a chaired discussion.

Guest Panellists

Parminder Vir, Producer at Carlton Television, described her experiences in the performing arts and broadcasting over the last twenty years, and highlighted the progress that had been made but also the work that still needed to be done in improving opportunities for all. As diversity advisor at Carlton, Parminder has been instrumental in diversifying Carlton's workforce, and increasing the number of BME professionals working both behind and in front of the camera across the UK's broadcasting industry. The challenge Parminder had to overcome is that mainstream media companies were aware there was Black and Asian talent out there, but didn't know where to find it. A practical step to tackling this was the establishment of a database, which enabled producers and commissioners to access BME talent. Today, through Parminder's work, the Cultural Diversity Network holds an online database of thousands of BME television professionals and is regularly used by the UK's major broadcasters, all of whom have publicly committed themselves to having a more representative workforce.

David Grayson, Director of Business in the Community echoed Parminder, making it clear that diversity is a business imperative – the diverse organisation will always out-perform the homogenous one. For London's creative businesses to remain competitive in a global economy, it is therefore essential that they embrace diversity in all its forms, including better representation for those one million Londoners with some form of disability. David warned of the dangers of 'reinventing the wheel' and stressed the valuable support infrastructure that was already in place, and the good practice we can learn from projects such as the Shell LiveWIRE, which is currently supporting the start-up of many creative businesses by young people.

Tony Winterbottom, Director of Projects at the LDA, began by saying that diversity is a fundamental cross-cutting issue – the guiding principle of it the LDA's Economic

Development Strategy and at the heart of everything it does. It is a major concern of the Mayor's that, while Black and Minority Ethnic communities comprise almost 30% of London's population, this is not reflected in the figures on employment, ownership, company formation and wealth distribution. The LDA is dedicated to addressing these problems, and Tony gave some current examples of how the LDA was 'delivering on the ground', with the establishment of the Rich Mix Centre, the Stephen Lawrence project, supporting the Talawa Theatre in Westminster, and a number of other exciting initiatives. In addition, there are ongoing discussions that London's potential bid for the 2012 Olympic Games would be largely based around the theme of London as a world city, built upon values of diversity and inclusiveness.

Discussion: Themes and Comments

- More must be done to 'catch them young' – within and beyond formal education, there is scope for engaging young people, broadening their horizons and raising their creative aspirations.
- There are a number of general and specific problems that need to be addressed – many established financial institutions tend to discriminate against a range of groups across sectors, while certain CI sub-sectors have a particularly poor diversity record.
- The good work pioneered by Parminder and others in the broadcasting industry has not been replicated in the other creative sectors – do we need a diversity code of practice for all of the Creative Industries?
- As well as the work that has already taken place in the UK, we should look at initiatives and models from around the world which have attempted to address issues around access and diversity.
- We need to be realistic about the value and practicalities of codes of practice – a sensible, sensitive diversity approach to each of the CI sectors is needed. For instance in certain creative sub-sectors, such as visual arts, it is difficult to imagine how a code of practice would work in the same way that it might for broadcasting.
- Diversity must get 'buy in' and be driven forward at the highest managerial levels – the Cultural Diversity Network, for instance, is supported by Greg Dyke at the BBC and other leading industry figures.
- Diversity cannot and should not be imposed at the demand-end: people will simply resent it. A business case needs to be made for people to sign-up to it.
- Employment under-representation of BMEs reflects the general problem that people like to work with people they know – it's how many people get their first jobs in an industry. If diversity is really to be increased then what is really needed is BME owned businesses and BME access to power and decision-making in the CIs.
- Business and entrepreneurial skills need to be developed among young people early on, in order to encourage a culture of business ownership and enterprise.
- There is a problem that many good intentions and initiatives are failing to 'reach the streets', with support providers and clients unaware of them.
- Recent research by Richard Florida and others in North America confirms that those regions with the highest levels of diversity (measured on a variety of indices) have enjoyed the fastest economic growth over the last decade.
- London's cultural diversity is a tremendous selling point around the world, and there are potentially very large international markets for creative products that reflect this.

Discussion: Ideas and Potential Action Points

- A third of Londoners are BME, but are they getting their fair share of public funding? An interesting and useful piece of research would look at whether funding bodies (eg LDA, Arts Council, NESTA) are allocating their spending accordingly.
- More mapping of the role and contribution of BMEs to the creative economy will help to raise awareness of their importance, and raise their profile among young people and the CIs themselves.
- The established industry bodies and networks partly shape London's CIs, and BME-led networks should be developed to interface with them and generate commercial and creative opportunities for BME talent within the mainstream creative economy.
- Mentoring and placements for young BME talent with established creative businesses and practitioners can raise aspirations and develop career progression routes.
- The model pioneered by the Cultural Diversity Network could be replicated in other areas – for instance a database of BME creative designers that schools could use to identify and contact potential mentors.
- Bursaries/scholarships for BME talent to enter London's well-established creative industries, such as broadcasting and advertising, where there are large employers and structured career paths.
- Brokerage services and agencies, both face-to-face and online provide a means of linking together members of BME and CI networks, and
- London's different communities can be a means of accessing and developing foreign markets for our creative products and services – this could be supported with a development fund for BME creative businesses to access these markets.
- A mapping of London's 'hidden' creative economy – for instance music from Asia and Africa is bought and listened to in large numbers, but rarely tabulated in the industry charts. Giving this a higher profile will help to encourage the cultural consumption, and therefore commissioning, of more diverse talents.