



Rethinking Cultural Inclusion and Diversity **A Call to Action** for Milton Keynes Sept 2020



Contents

Summary Report: Rethinking Cultural Inclusion and Diversity



MK Play Day organised by The Parks Trust

Cover photo: Critically acclaimed comedian, Sophie Duker, speaks at A Gathering of Creative Communities 27 September 2019, organised by AHA-MK to mark the beginning of our research project.



Jaipur Dancer at Willen Lake, MK International Festival 2014.

Photo Credit: Shaun Armstrong



Thanks

First and foremost thank you to all the people who came to our focus groups, who represented diverse voices within Milton Keynes, and to our Milton Keynes based arts and heritage organisations for their commitment to this research and for completing the survey on their organisation's progress on the journey towards excellent inclusion and diversity practice.

We would also like to thank the following people for their support and guidance as critical friends of our Rethinking Cultural Diversity project and research:

- **Gamiel Yafai** for his specialist advice and guidance. We are indebted to him for his consistent support throughout. Gamiel is the Managing Director of inclusion and diversity consultancy, Diversity Marketplace. He works nationally with a wide range of clients including Channel 4, Cranfield University, The Civil Service and a D&I leaders network of over 1000 Inclusion and Diversity Leaders.
- **The members of the Cultural Inclusion Consultation Group** who gave generously of their time, expertise, and invaluable perspectives, and shared our ambition for an inclusive and diverse cultural sector in Milton Keynes:

Julie Dawes (Events and Community Manager, The Parks Trust); Diana Hatton (Director, InterAction MK); Disha Hegde (MK Council Youth Cabinet Chair); Darshana Jagatia (Trustee at MK Hindu Association and Principal at solicitors Ray, Borley, Dunkley); Mike Kasibo (Global Outreach Milton Keynes and co-founder of African Diaspora Day); Peter Kingham (Chair of Q:alliance); Roz Mascarenhas (MK Council Youth Cabinet Lead); Linda McComie (Treasurer at Citizens MK); Kurshida Mirza (Organiser of Great Get-Together Iftaar; Truby's Garden Tearoom); Ranjit Singh (Director of Philanthropy, MK Community Foundation).

Many thanks to **Milton Keynes Council**, for commissioning and funding this project, and for their commitment as a key strategic partner. Fiona Boundy, Creative and Cultural Manager at Milton Keynes Council, and Pam Gosal-Baines, former Head of Economy and Culture, are passionate about inclusion and diversity and determined that Milton Keynes cultural sector be an exemplar of inclusion and diversity.

Thank you to

- **Elizabeth Howard**, Programme and Partnerships Manager, AHA-MK, who conducted the research and drafted the report. Elizabeth comes from an audience development background, connecting communities to space and place. We thank her for her enormous dedication to the project.
- **Lallie Davis**, former AHA-MK Programme Manager, who developed the project proposal and secured the Milton Keynes Council funding, before moving on to her new role as Bucks Cultural Outreach Officer.
- **Kate Cromwell** for her design.
- And finally thank you to all who have been critical readers and editors, and to all those who have contributed, challenged and worked with us.

Francesca Skelton DL, Chair AHA-MK



Key Terms

Diversity

Diversity is the existence of differences between groups and individuals. These differences can be of race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations, and include individual personalities and preferences. This report highlights diversity in ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic deprivation, and age. However, diversity is as complex as the combinations of peoples' identities and this report does not attempt to address all aspect of diversity. An individual's identity consists of multiple, intersecting factors.

Inclusion is about taking action to ensure that contemporary society in the UK is better represented in a range of spaces. An inclusive audience, workforce and governance are not only representative of a range of identities, but are spaces where diverse voices are equal and respected.

Inclusion

Culture is a complex term with more than one meaning. In this report we are guided by the following definitions:

Culture

Culture no longer simply means being familiar with a select list of works of art and architecture, but the accumulated influence of creativity, the arts, museums, galleries, libraries, archives and heritage upon all our lives. When we talk about our 'cultural sectors', we are referring to an extraordinary network of individuals and organisations, that together preserve, reflect and promote who we are as a nation, in all our rich diversity. *DCMS The Culture White Paper*

Culture is the way that we see ourselves and our place in the world; it is how we live our lives and how we appreciate and understand the lives of others. It is also the practice, production, performance and promotion of identity through arts and heritage practice. *Milton Keynes Creative and Cultural Strategy 2018-27*

Arts and heritage organisations are sometimes called 'cultural organisations' and are part of the cultural sector because they portray both historic and evolving cultural practices that reflect society. Arts and heritage organisations can animate, enhance and enable processes by which people exercise their rights and responsibilities as members of communities. The organisations referred to in this report are formally constituted entities whose primary purpose is the production, performance or promotion of arts and heritage. Organisations may or may not be building-based. Organisations are distinct from individual artists.

Arts and Heritage organisations

BAME

BAME is an acronym that stands for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. This term continues to cause discussion and debate as it groups diverse people together who have very different identities, cultural experiences and challenges. Our research 2019 used the term BAME as it is still widely accommodated and understood; however, we acknowledge that BAME is an imperfect term that cannot account for the complex reality of ethnically diverse identities and experiences. To avoid acronyms where possible, we also now write Black, Asian and ethnically diverse.



Introduction: Shaping an Inclusive and Diverse Cultural Sector

Milton Keynes was created as a new town in 1967, inviting settlers to build a new life. 53 years since its inception it now has a richly diverse population of 268,600 with 149 different languages. Capitalising on this richness of diverse communities offers Milton Keynes the opportunity to become one of the most inclusive and diverse cities in the UK, where diverse voices contribute to its continued growth by adding different and valuable perspectives to all conversations.

Arts and Heritage Alliance Milton Keynes (AHA-MK) is a collective platform of cultural organisations based in Milton Keynes, who come together to develop good practice as we champion the rich heritage and creative future of Milton Keynes.

AHA-MK and Milton Keynes Council share an ambition for Milton Keynes be a truly inclusive city with creativity and culture at its heart, as stated in the MK Futures Commission Project 6, Milton Keynes: The Creative and Cultured City. Our vision is that everyone should have the opportunity to engage with arts, heritage and creativity through employment, volunteering, participation and attendance. Inclusion and diversity are central to the Milton Keynes Creative and Cultural Strategy, the Arts Council England's Creative Case for Diversity, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.



Jessica Rost, Rost Productions: Hugh the cycle powered Mammoth, MKIAC Art on the Lake festival 29 June 2019



Micro Shakespeare by Laitrum Teatre & Toti Toronell, MK International Festival 2016.
Photo Credit: Shaun Armstrong



In 2019, in response to a Discussion Paper prepared by Milton Keynes Culture Team, AHA-MK proposed a programme of research to take a hard look at how well our arts and heritage sector engages with our diverse communities, with particular reference to gender, disability, race, religion or belief, class, sexual orientation and social mobility. Milton Keynes Council commissioned and funded AHA-MK to undertake this work and deliver an Inclusion Action Plan for Culture. The Council Culture team has been a significant strategic partner for this project.

The focus groups conducted for this research have delivered a powerful expression of the voices within diverse communities in Milton Keynes, and their relationship to arts, heritage and culture. These voices drive our recommendations. By contributing to the future vision for arts and heritage in Milton Keynes, they are helping to create an arts and heritage sector that is not only fit for purpose, but also becomes the exemplar for others to follow.

Key objectives of our research were to:

- understand the views that the diverse communities within Milton Keynes have towards engaging with the Milton Keynes arts and heritage sector.
- map and celebrate good practice in inclusion and diversity in this sector, both in Milton Keynes, and nationally.
- identify gaps in inclusion and diversity in this sector, in terms of audience, visitors, programming, workforce, volunteers and governance.
- draft an action plan that informs the development of inclusion and diversity in the Milton Keynes arts and heritage sector.

What we found is that today Milton Keynes is not as open and as welcoming as it originally set out to be, and is in danger of being a siloed city. Our arts and heritage sector is one of the key pillars of our future growth and is fundamental to placemaking, with its aim to inspire, and to create a sense of belonging, wellbeing and civic pride. But there is much work to do to engage with our diverse communities. This report, published 2020, presents recommendations resulting from our research, and will result in a dynamic action plan to take us forward to the next stage of this journey of inclusion and diversity.



Digital Light Code Makers Project: Milton Keynes Islamic Arts and Culture and Bletchley Park collaboration, March 2020. Photo credit Karen Kodish



Candoco perform with MOTUS at Centre:MK in 2019. Photo Credit Helen Parlor.

Overview

1. The challenge for the Milton Keynes community

Milton Keynes is a growing city benefitting from an increasingly diverse population. As befits a modern and progressive city, Milton Keynes arts and heritage sector should be a leading light in the UK for its inclusion and diversity.

- ◆ **The International New Towns Institute (INTI) New Towns/Arrival Cities report** highlights how new towns such as Milton Keynes are today facing particular challenges in integrating migrants:

New Towns have always been places characterised by migration: by definition, they have no 'original' inhabitants – every resident is a migrant. As such, New Towns are the prototypical 'Arrival Cities' and have in the past been more successful than most towns in integrating migrants or 'newcomers'. However, many of the communities in the older New Towns from the 60s and 70s seem to have stabilized in such a way that as economic and political resources diminish, migrants from outside the country have a hard time being accepted. <http://www.newtowninstitute.org/>

This leads us to ask how open, welcoming and easy to navigate Milton Keynes is today.

- ◆ **The Milton Keynes Creative and Cultural Strategy 2018-2027** highlights how culture can address our city's current and future challenges:

Culture is the way that we see ourselves and our place in the world; it is how we live our lives and how we appreciate and understand the lives of others. By harnessing the transformational power of culture in all its forms, we will help address our city's current and future challenges.

By sharing our cultural capital throughout the city, we will connect and engage our communities, young and old – building confidence, encouraging cohesion, improving health and well-being, and empowering them to take a lead. As an open city, built on migration, with one of the fastest growing and most diverse populations in the UK, we will work towards being a city whose cultural offer truly reflects and embraces our diversity.

2. The project and research

As stated in the Milton Keynes Cultural and Creative Strategy above, 'we will work towards being a city whose cultural offer truly reflects and embraces our diversity'.

Commissioned by Milton Keynes Council, the Arts and Heritage Alliance Milton Keynes set out to investigate how well our arts and heritage sector currently engages with, and reflects, the diversity of Milton Keynes, with particular reference to race, religion and belief, gender, disability, sexual orientation, social-economic circumstances, and young people.

The challenges:

Milton Keynes is known for its open, 'welcoming hands', but is increasingly struggling to offer opportunities for social integration and cultural opportunity.



Graeae performers at MK International Festival 2014.

Photo Credit: Shaun Armstrong



- ◆ The city's current cultural offer does not reflect or represent the diversity of its communities.
- ◆ Current cultural audiences do not reflect or represent the diversity of the city's communities.
- ◆ Milton Keynes cultural workforce, at every level, is not representative of the city's diverse communities.

To test the validity of these challenges, AHA-MK undertook the following research, listening to the voices within our diverse communities, and investigating the current inclusion practice of our arts and heritage organisations. Our activities in Autumn/Winter 2019 included:

- ◆ A Consultation Group of diverse community leaders.
- ◆ A launch event, 'A Gathering of Creative Communities', held at the September 2019 Festival of Creative Urban Living in Milton Keynes, inviting people from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse heritage to tell us their stories and explore how they engage with the cultural sector.
- ◆ Twelve focus groups organised with diverse communities to gain their perspectives and experience of the Milton Keynes arts and heritage sector.
- ◆ A survey carried out with arts and heritage organisations to explore their current understanding of inclusion and diversity, to celebrate good practice, and identify barriers and gaps in the current provision. Audience, programming, curation, workforce, volunteers and venues were all examined.

3. Main findings of our research

Milton Keynes is no longer the open, welcoming, easy-to-navigate town of the early days.

The perception of culture feels very different between the diverse communities and the arts and heritage sector:

- ◆ Our focus group members talked primarily of culture and cultural activity as an opportunity to bring people together; of the social benefits, the connection and sense of belonging.

[Culture is] what you believe in. (Young People focus group)

It's a group of people that share the same way of living, the same way of understanding life as well, socially, doing the same traditions, meeting together, doing some kind of activity. (African and Caribbean focus group)

I think connectivity is the issue here. (Asian focus group)

- ◆ The arts and heritage organisations relate the term culture primarily to their output, such as the offer of exhibitions and performance. While they acknowledge that cultural activity is a way to bring people together, this is expressed less explicitly.

Any messages the sector relays about their activity being an opportunity to come together and socialise appear not to be reaching or connecting the diverse communities represented in our focus groups.



When you actually walk into some of these places, you feel alienated in some ways. when you actually say is this my place? Do I belong to this? (Asian focus group)

[When I go to arts and heritage organisations nobody asks me where I'm from, nobody really cares. (European focus group)]

The National Lottery Heritage Fund states: *Inclusion is not just about removing barriers so that people can participate. It is also about creating a welcoming environment, where people feel that they belong. This should begin before visitors arrive at your site or take part in an activity.* <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/publications/inclusion>

It is important to meet people where they are, to build relationships, to ensure that our venues are welcoming, that we specifically invite diverse audiences who have not engaged with the sector.

These are barriers to participation, expressed by people in our focus groups who:

- ◆ See culture as about identity and belonging, but do not relate to the current cultural offer from by the arts and heritage organisations.
- ◆ Do not feel connected, valued or welcomed by the sector
- ◆ Do not have a great awareness or understanding of events and opportunities offered by the sector.
- ◆ Find cost a barrier to engagement.
- ◆ Lack knowledge about the work opportunities in the sector, both paid and voluntary.
- ◆ Perceive the cultural structures as powerful and for the privileged, creating a psychological barrier, difficult to break through.
- ◆ Say marketing does not reach them, and while they are likely to seek out events that are of benefit to their children, they do not search for events for themselves.



Graeae Theatre in the Spiegel tent, MK International Festival 2016.
Photo Credit: Shaun Armstrong



If organisations get the advertisement part of it [right], that knowledge, people will be interested in seeing [what is going on]... if it was advertised properly people would think, oh maybe it's not only for the white. (African and Caribbean focus group)

Culture is a divider and a unifier... it can be a uniqueness that separates you from someone else, but that could also be a boundary that you cross to embrace someone else. (Asian focus group)

The surveys with the arts and heritage organisations showed the sector:

- ◆ Evidences good diversity practice, but has been largely focusing on discrete strands of inclusion and diversity provision (such as disability).
- ◆ Lacks connection with diverse communities.
- ◆ Has not been proactive about targeted, bespoke marketing and communication to diverse communities.
- ◆ Has a workforce of paid staff and volunteers which does not come close to reflecting the diversity of our community.
- ◆ Lacks consistent and developed systems to monitor and evaluate the diversity of its audiences, visitors, programming, workforce, volunteers and governance.

4. Call to Action

In order to be truly inclusive and diverse the arts and heritage organisations need to:

- ◆ Rethink the scale of this challenge and commit collectively to a holistic approach and significant step change.
- ◆ Place Inclusion and Diversity at the heart of their organisation, as an overall driver for all activity, rather than focus on discrete strands. This value should be central to the DNA of all organisations, regardless of capacity. This demands self and institutional interrogation, leading to a change in values, attitude, systems, processes, procedures and language, along with new approaches to recruitment, programming and marketing.
- ◆ Recognise the importance of relationship building, offering welcome and hospitality, supported by positive, proactive engagement and targeted communication.

We invite our diverse communities to walk alongside our arts and heritage organisations on this journey, to share their culture, experiences and knowledge, and to come together in shared spaces and understanding around this important vision of an inclusive and diverse cultural offer.

I see culture as your surroundings and how things within your surroundings influence who you are (Disability focus group)

Cultural activity] is about listening to people's different stories, young and old, so we both understand. (LGBTQ+ focus group)

[Cultural Activity]... its everyone trying to bring out something and relate to something and be more exposed and engaging and incorporating themselves within the community. (Asian focus group)

Headline priorities for collective action by the arts and heritage sector

See more detail under Recommendations on page 29 of this report.

- ◆ **Training:** commit to a shared programme of training and development to address subconscious bias, build awareness, and deliver an inclusive mindset leading to a step change in inclusive practice across the sector: local and national speakers and workshops.

If one doesn't feel assimilated with the culture it represents, you're not going to make great use of it, are you? (African and Caribbean focus group)

- ◆ **Recruitment:** each organisation to conduct a fundamental review of their approach and unintended barriers (in hiring for both paid and volunteer roles) to include processes, procedures, expectations, qualifications and language; to develop an inclusive employer brand which leads to an inclusive and representative workforce; and, with a particular focus on young people, to develop a sector-wide scheme to nurture specific and transferable skills, and offer job opportunities through work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships.

It's kind of an exclusive thing, you don't see many people with these kinds of jobs. (Young People focus group)

Can I suggest that the jobs be advertised in a space that we occupy? It could be advertised on the Friends of the Caribbean or the African Diaspora site. (African and Caribbean focus group)

Work placements, shadowing somebody. Lots of people are looking for work, they don't know where to start, it's always a vicious circle, how would you be qualified to work somewhere if you haven't experienced it. (Asian focus group)

Just having something on the advert that says we welcome people with challenges and to actually say that this is a space for you. (Disability focus group)



Knowing you're there because they want you to be there, not just to be a token to come out and say look we have a queer person working for us (LGBTQ+ focus group)

◆ **Engagement:** build relationships with diverse, underrepresented communities of Milton Keynes through a welcoming programme of invitations, hospitality and targeted events leading to participation, collaboration, co-creation, and a culture of mutual learning, respect and understanding.

You feel you need to at least be invited to participate. (Asian focus group)

It's about feeling welcome and feeling like there are opportunities designed around people who face similar challenges, rather than me always trying to fit into what somebody else is trained to do (Disability focus group)

I think it will be better if the arts and heritage group work really closely with the community leaders, in that way they'll be connected to those community leaders that have followers... (African and Caribbean focus group)

◆ **Communication and Marketing:** develop bespoke, targeted marketing, recognising the significant and growing diversity of the Milton Keynes audience and that no one is entitled to an audience, it has to be earned.

You need to be advertised to, it can't just be happening, show up (Asian focus group)

Plenty of people on our estates don't look at social media. Tesco shops community council notice boards, just to be a little creative [would be better] (Socio-economic deprivation focus group)

◆ **Sustainability:** deliver a sector-wide monitoring and evaluation system to ensure inclusion and diversity are assessed across the organisations, and progress consistently measured and sustained; and conduct audits to include the accessibility of venues (emotional and physical barriers), organisational culture, programming and curation, recruitment/workforce (paid and voluntary), training, governance, marketing and communication.

'When you actually walk into some of these places, you feel alienated in some ways... when you actually say, is this my place? (Asian focus group)

5. The imperative to act now

This research has galvanised the arts and heritage sector and diverse communities to work together to co-create and achieve real change for Milton Keynes. We must now harness this commitment and enthusiasm to deliver a programme of change. Without significant change, jobs and career opportunities in the sector will continue to be perceived as reserved for the privileged; the scope for creative thinking will be reduced; and communities continue to be marginalised.

Everything you do creates its own culture... Being in Milton Keynes there is something so fresh, so young about the city itself... everybody that moves here moves from somewhere else, it could be from down the road, or it could be from another country. And people have combined here and Milton Keynes has its own culture in itself. (Asian focus group)



A discovery walk organised by The Parks Trust



Hearing the Voices within our Diverse Communities

The Inclusion Consultation Group

Community leaders were invited to be a 'critical friend' and collective think tank, meeting with AHA-MK and Milton Keynes Council to share valuable insights into the needs of diverse and underrepresented communities, and to help provide access to networks and groups fundamental to this project (members of the Consultation Group are listed on the Thanks page 4).

A Gathering of Creative Communities

Our research began with a Community Gathering at the Milton Keynes Festival of Creative Urban Living held on 27 September 2019. We invited members of different Black, Asian and ethnically diverse communities to come together to discuss their experiences of engaging with the Milton Keynes arts and heritage sector. Acclaimed comedian Sophie Duker and Yasir Mirza, Head of Inclusion and Diversity at Channel 4 (now Head of Diversity and Inclusion, BBC Studios), both shared their insights and personal journeys. Over 30 people attended and endorsed the need for this research. We shared food provided by the splendid Syrian Kitchen.

Focus Groups

Twelve Focus groups were held in Autumn 2019 to explore how diverse and underrepresented communities viewed and engaged with the arts and heritage sector.

The twelve focus groups covered:

- Black, Asian and ethnically diverse communities
- A range of faiths
- Disability
- Socio-economic deprivation
- LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Other)
- Women
- Young People

Four main topics were covered in these sessions as we explored participants understanding and experience of:

- cultural identity and meaning
- feeling welcomed by the Milton Keynes arts and heritage sector
- marketing by the Milton Keynes arts and heritage sector
- working and/or volunteering in the Milton Keynes arts and heritage sector

There follows here a selection of quotes and a summary of the issues arising from the focus groups.

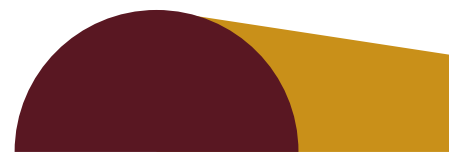


'Kattam Katti' by Pagrav Dance (20).

Photo Credit Chriss Nash



The voices within our diverse communities from the focus groups

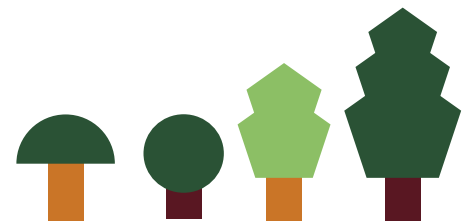


You really need to get people involved if you're showcasing something, like a workshop, and they talk about their culture and they exchange whatever experience they have

There was no reason for me to go, do you know what I mean? There's nothing for me to sort of go, oh I'd go there

I want to see different faces

We need to make it a little bit more accessible in terms of the stuff we put in there... it doesn't have to be from Milton Keynes but a bit more applicable to our class of people... otherwise it risks being quite an exclusive thing



The tickets at the pantomime are very expensive. Quite a lot of our Residents' Associations have to go for grants... perhaps working with Residents' Associations to have local, special performances that are going to be cheaper for them

And if they go there what are they going to gain? So, it depends what you're putting on there

A person needs to feel there is something offered [for them]... something to say come here... you go by word of mouth



a lot of people don't feel like that building is there to enrich their culture so there is a gap between the communities and that building

The art [MK Gallery] brings to the city is valuable but it doesn't reflect the society... there is an opportunity to develop further diversity

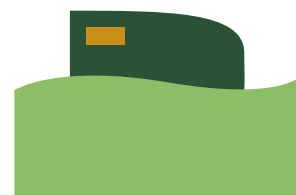
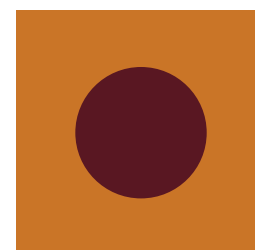
If there was an opportunity for [adults] to meet the artists and do activity around the installation [and] didn't have barriers like cost that would be really good



[An exhibition focusing on women] empowers you in a way

We have to consider [the average salary of] ethnic minorities within Milton Keynes. If my disposable income is £30 then I'm paying £15 [for arts and heritage events]. I wouldn't necessarily [become involved with] what you may deem upper class or higher class [tastes]

If [my friend from MK SNAP] was onstage that [would encourage me] to attend



In my city... they refurbished a space, a bar which has coffee during the day and you can order drinks during the evening, but every day they have all these young artists presenting... this grew and in two years it is the most popular place in the city



Access to culture is about education... people do lead blinkered lives and then they'll step into an art gallery or they'll go to the theatre and their lives will open up

with me it's to make sure they're gonna be tolerant because of how I'm dressed

I work with a theatre group [with special needs]... we don't hear about [opportunities to present work early enough]... it's going to take other groups six months, it's going to take us a year

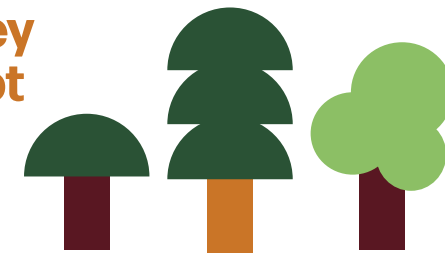
If it's somewhere much more accessible I'm much more likely to go to it

[The sector is] not offering something for [diverse] communities, they're just keeping away from it



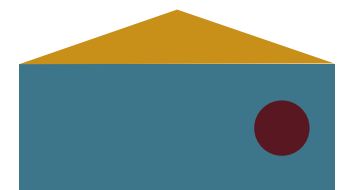
I think one day free a week is limiting a lot of people and I know an awful lot of residents, not only on my parish but also this parish that can't afford to pay and at the same time can't take their children out of school on a Tuesday

The theatre, the gallery, they are typical English stuff, not that there is anything wrong with that but you need variety



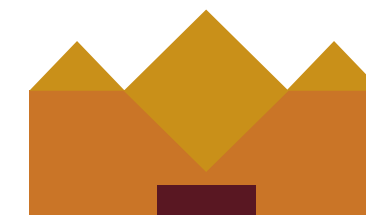
If someone from my community is going, I'd want to go as well, whereas I probably wouldn't take just myself there because I'd feel kind of alienated and like I don't know anyone there, so it's a fear that we have, not being immersed in our own culture

Part of our heritage in Milton Keynes was about developing artists, building sculptures... I'm not sure we're really celebrating that and I really do feel we should be



Maybe it's about education, it's the language that people use, so not assuming your partner is a man or a woman, saying 'they' - things like that could really be woven into conversations... there is assumed heterosexuality

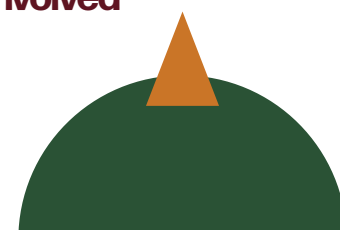
All the places we named [these are] the places to go to spend some time, but you don't meet anyone. When you go to the arts gallery, you look at something but you don't meet people



We went to MK Gallery... we were doing a sensory tour, we set it up... it was good'

MK Museum, The Stables... There's probably a perception that some of these venues are middle class

My kids love to explore different things and it keeps them active... By getting them involved they're more enthusiastic about it. The main reason that we attend anything is if they can be involved



Headline findings from the focus groups:

We very much encourage you to experience the full range of the valuable insights of our diverse communities by reading the detailed feedback of our Focus Group Findings in our separate ‘Supporting Documents’ file attached.

1. Understanding identities and the value of culture

The idea of culture suggests: a sense of belonging and shared identity; a way of life; upholding identities and beliefs; a set of values; a way to bring people together; an expression of stories, creating a sense of community.

- Engaging with inclusive culture benefits the mental health of the individual, which in turn benefits the mental health of the collective, leading to a happier and healthier society.
- To understand a culture is to understand the people belonging to a community; a key aspect of inclusivity.
- Integration with British culture is valued, especially for the younger generation.
- Culture should promote and engender social cohesion and belonging.
- Cultural organisations to be encouraged to provide opportunities to socialise for the communities to come together.

2. Barriers to participation

There were many perceived barriers which inhibited enagement with the arts and heritage sector.

- Not feeling like the offer relates to their identity and culture.
- A lack of information.
- The cost of entry: targeted price incentives to attend events and venues would be welcomed.
- Cultural structures are seen as powerful and difficult to break through by people experiencing socio-economic deprivation. There is a perception that culture is for the middle classes.
- A lack of confidence, lack of education.
- LGBTQ+ stories tend not to be represented in mainstream cultural activity, and are seen as a sub-culture.
- Venues can feel actively exclusive and unwelcoming, rather than inclusive.
- Transport is a problem
- Accessibility and suitable transport are particular challenges for people with a disability. This leads to a lack of confidence that they will be welcomed in venues (information on accessibility on websites is essential). Relaxed Performances would be welcomed for adults with disabilities, as well as for children.

3. Audience development, communication and marketing

In general, the communities we spoke to do not feel informed about what is going on in the cultural sector. Direct, targeted marketing would be valued. Not receiving information through familiar channels can lead to mis-information, and a general feeling that the cultural offer is ‘not-for-me’.

- To want to attend, It is important to relate to events.
- Coming to events as a group/with friends reduces apprehension. Being invited to participate makes a difference.
- People are often more inclined, or find it easier, to attend events for children and young people, than for themselves as adults. It is a point of access.
- Sharing food breaks barriers and brings the community together as it demonstrates hospitality and a warm welcome.
- Co-creation: inviting people to be part of the creation of events and to take on tasks provides a sense of ownership leading to engagement
- It is important to recognise there are generational cultural differences.
- It is a challenge for the cultural sector to integrate sub-cultures (like LGBTQ+) into the mainstream.
- Young people engage with arts and heritage through school and families, but largely do not engage individually. They mentioned that they would like to attend venues that engaged with their current interests, such as drill music and video games. They have not experienced direct marketing to them as young people (and suggested platforms such as Snapchat, but also bus stops, school corridors and word of mouth).
- Building relationships with diverse communities by, for example, visiting their spaces and events and by liaising with Residents’ Associations and Parish Councils, would be welcomed.

4. Towards an inclusive workforce

There is a sense that people who work in the sector do not represent diverse communities. More information is needed to inform children, young people and their families about types of jobs and specifications, and opportunities for work experience and placements. Volunteering is of interest to many.

- There is a lack of support and mentoring for people with disabilities, and a need to advertise roles within a disability context.
- Inbuilt values of acceptance and support need to be demonstrated, rather than assumed, by signs, attitude, training of staff. Supportive structures that aid inclusion should be promoted throughout recruitment and programming. Tokenism is to be avoided at all costs.
- Young people are excited by conversations around job opportunities in the cultural sector, but do not know what pathways to take. They think such jobs are not accessible to them as they do not know anyone working in the sector.



Towards Inclusion in the Cultural Sector

Research into the Milton Keynes arts and heritage sector's approach to inclusion and diversity was conducted through a survey shared through Survey Monkey in Autumn 2019. It provided an insight into the achievements and challenges.

Our research has evidenced many examples of good practice in the arts and heritage sector, focusing on specific strands of inclusion and diversity:

The Stables has appointed Jenny Sealey, Director of the Graeae Theatre (which works with deaf and disabled actors), to be artist-in-residence for the 2021 International Festival (IF). In 2019 Milton Keynes Gallery hosted a conference on Neurodiversity, Art and the Politics of Inclusion. The Play's the Thing's two-day symposium Taking the Stage: Women in the Performing Arts focused on gender inclusion and representation. MÓTUS Dance's Fluid in Flight project worked with twenty-one schools and delivered an impressively diverse performance to an equally diverse audience at MK Theatre. In March 2020 MK Islamic Arts, Heritage and Culture (MKIAC) worked with Bletchley Park to create a spectacular light display of Islamic geometric design, projected on to buildings famously associated with a western approach to coding and maths. Milton Keynes Arts Centre commissioned the Zadissa Sisters to deliver *Ephemeral Lines*, a project examining the importance of human connections and sharing experiences. and they are now partnering with the African Diaspora Foundation.

The journey has begun but ambitions must be stepped up. To be truly inclusive the sector needs to build on this work and fully embrace and embed the challenge of inclusion and diversity across all aspects of its organisations to meet the ever-changing needs of our diverse population. This is an opportunity for the Milton Keynes based cultural sector to work collectively to ensure our city leads the way on excellent inclusion and diversity practice.

Arts Council England, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Milton Keynes Council and Milton Keynes Community Foundation all state that inclusion and diversity are a priority, which underlines the imperative of ensuring the Milton Keynes cultural sector and our city are leading the way. The requirements of a funder bring a useful urgency to a programme of change, and to effective monitoring and evaluation. The voices within our diverse Milton Keynes communities captured in this research, and global movements such as Black Lives Matter, underline this urgency.

Inclusion and diversity need to be embedded into the DNA of the cultural sector and be integral to core activity. Self and institutional interrogation are essential key steps to embed inclusion and diversity across all aspects of organisations.



MK Play Day organised by The Parks Trust



Themes emerging from the survey

- Monitoring and evaluation of inclusion and diversity of audiences, visitors, programming, workforce, volunteers and governance are underdeveloped. The evidence indicates that organisations are not finding it easy to capture accurate and consistent data to inform their strategies.
- Organisations have varied capacity: some have no, or few, paid staff, and limited resources (time and financial). Some feel that this limits their potential to embrace a culture of inclusion and diversity and to deliver impact.
- It is vital to understand the breadth of the inclusion challenge, so as not to overestimate progress. This is an ongoing journey of listening, learning, conversations and change.
- The more the challenge is embraced, the more the scale of the change necessary becomes evident through everything from assumptions to language, to process and systems, as well as in programming, recruitment, marketing and communication.
- Shared challenges include addressing organisational culture and building networks.
- Organisations may believe they are open to all and all-embracing, but underrepresented communities have expressed the importance of being proactively welcomed: e.g. invitations, postcode targeting, inclusive language and images.
- This is a long game if it is to be sustainable: relationships and inclusive communication need to be built over time.
- Lack of applications from underrepresented communities for roles as paid staff, volunteers and trustees, indicate a need to examine the unintended barriers of language, expectations of qualifications, skills and experience, the overall application process and lack of training opportunities.
- Most of the organisations believe that direct contact with diverse communities is the best way to effectively target the audience and the workforce.
- Some organisations are already setting appropriately high expectations of good inclusion practice from suppliers, contracted workers and funders.



International Women's Day celebrations organised by Milton Keynes Islamic Arts and Culture.



Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre: Chinese ESL students who volunteered at the centre

Recommendations

Our key recommendation is that a commitment to inclusion and diversity should be a core strategic ambition of each cultural organisation, regardless of capacity: this is central to survival. Moving from a project-by-project approach to delivering inclusion and diversity throughout an organisation will lead to sustainable change. Realising this ambition should be enabled by organisations working together to share training, expertise, networks, challenges, successes, all leading to best practice, and to support smaller voluntary providers to develop strategies for inclusion.

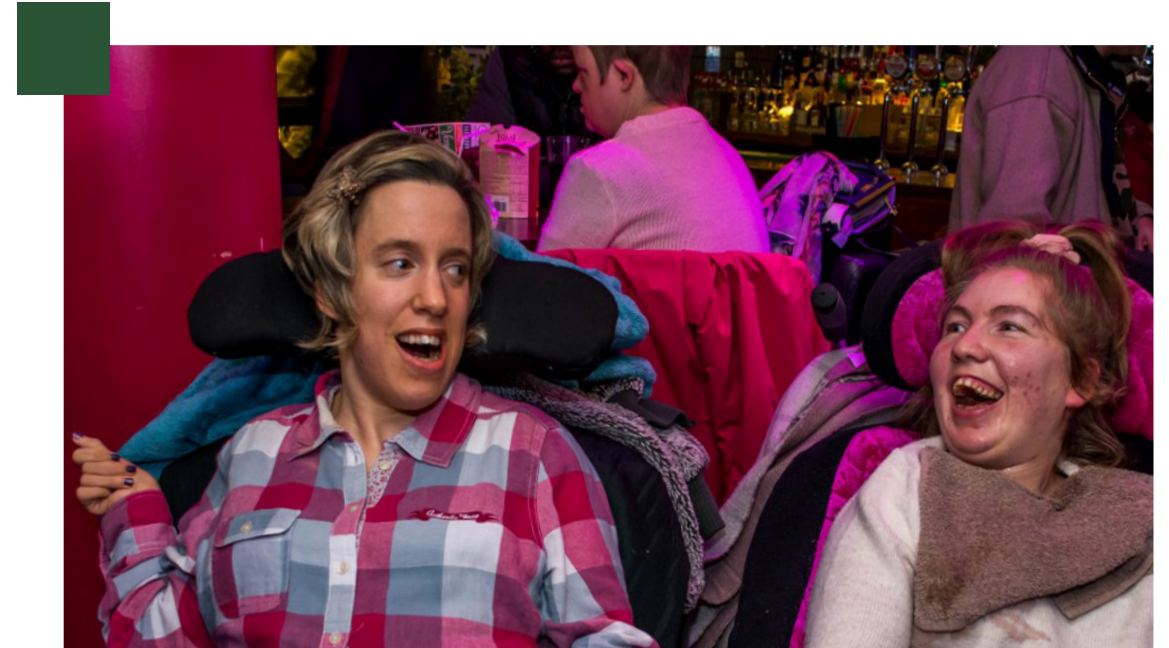
The arts and heritage sector has the potential to be a powerful deliverer of engagement across diverse communities, building bridges and making connections. An inclusive and diverse sector will promote community cohesion, welcome new audiences, develop skills and opportunities for young people, and be an attractive and inclusive place to work.

This research project has highlighted some excellent work being done in the Milton Keynes cultural sector, mainly on individual strands of inclusion and diversity. Each organisation is on its own inclusion and diversity journey, and each is at a different stage of that journey. This research tells us that diverse communities would like to have greater representation in the sector, to feel welcomed and for the offering to be more relevant to their lives.

Feedback confirms that the sector is ambitious for its inclusion and diversity practice. The focus groups expressed the desire to engage and get involved in a sector that will seek their thoughts and will adapt to their needs in a meaningful way. This readiness provides an opportune moment to act and develop Milton Keynes as an exemplar city for good inclusion and diversity practice that harnesses and inspires the creativity of all its citizens.



Afro-celt Sound System in The Spiegeltent, MK International Festival 2016.
Photo credit: Shaun Armstrong



Inter-Action MK: Enjoying Groovy Gecko, the nightclub run by Inter-Action for adults with learning disabilities.



Our detailed recommendations cover:

- a) Training
- b) Recruitment
- c) Engagement
- d) Communication
- e) Sustainability

a. Training

If one doesn't feel assimilated with the culture it represents, you're not going to make great use of it, are you? (African and Caribbean focus group)

Cultural organisations might put a rainbow flag out, but you can still overhear staff in the aisles making a joke of sexual orientation... that's wallpaper rather than values. (LGBTQ+ focus group)

Recommendations:

Goal: to develop an inclusive cultural workforce, paid and volunteer, that fully embraces inclusion, and is knowledgeable and well-trained in inclusion and diversity.

- Bring together arts and heritage organisations to plan and participate in a collective inclusion and diversity training programme for staff, volunteers and trustees, addressing awareness, attitude, understanding, knowledge and skills to enable the sector to embrace challenge and change (programme of talks and workshops, including national expertise).
- Invite diverse communities and the sector to meet together to explore the meaning of culture and examine what a diverse sector means.

b. Recruitment

Just having something on the advert that says we welcome people with challenges and to actually say that this is a space for you. (Disability focus group)

I check the terminology on the equal opportunities forms. If they've got their terminology wrong then I generally have an instinct of whether they[maybe] don't care. (LGBTQ+ focus group)

It's kind of an exclusive thing, you don't see many people with these kinds of jobs. (Young People focus group)

We should encourage schools... to reach out [to arts and heritage organisations]. To come and do assemblies or a special assembly [about roles in the sector]... it will create curiosity. (Asian Focus Group)

Recommendations

Goal: to create a cultural workforce that is representative of, and welcoming to, diverse communities and offers young people job opportunities and skills development

- Each organisations to conduct an audit of accessibility reviewing current recruitment methods, processes, procedures, language, expectations addressing barriers to recruitment of paid staff and volunteers.
- Develop an employer brand with organisational policies, processes and procedures to encourage diverse candidates.
- Use the platform of MAKE, the Milton Keynes Cultural Education Partnership, to promote employment opportunities in the cultural sector with job centres, career services, schools and colleges, and organise road shows and open days.
- Offer a city-wide programme of young leadership training, work experience, creative traineeships, with pathways to creative apprenticeships, all based in the cultural sector.

c. Engagement

When you actually walk into some of these places, you feel alienated in some ways... when you actually say is this my place? Do I belong to this? Or rather I'll go out with my friends and other things. (Asian focus group)

If we're going to be included we have to be there. (Disability focus group)

The barrier to entry is more to do with perceived social status or class as opposed to anything else that's necessarily concrete. (Socio-economic deprivation focus group)

It's a big thing to be welcomed somewhere for your part. (Women focus group)

Recommendations

Goal: to create an empowered community that feels a sense of belonging to, and a sense of ownership of, the Milton Keynes cultural sector

- Develop a Cultural Community Ambassadors Network (CCAN) to connect communities to the Milton Keynes arts and heritage sector.
- Work with the Ambassadors to set up invitations linking diverse communities and cultural venues.



- Review cultural sector spaces to ensure they are not only accessible, but welcoming.
- Explore the potential and funding for longer term co-created, city-wide, collaborative projects between diverse communities and the sector. The Amazing Grace 250th anniversary in 2023 is already engaging in co-creation.

d. Communication

'I'm not really aware of the events that happen at these venues.
(Young People focus group)

*You need to be advertised to, it can't just be it's happening,
show up.* (Asian focus group)

Recommendations

Goal: to ensure the cultural sector effectively communicates with diverse communities

- Deliver a relationship building programme.
- Ensure communication and marketing strategies deliver inclusive language and targeted messages across a range of platforms and in different spaces and places.
- Promote accessibility in all sector marketing communications.
- Ensure the new DMK website promotes inclusivity and diversity.
- Work with DMK to develop targeted promotions, such as a calendar of events that recognises, reflects and celebrates the diversity of Milton Keynes.

e. Sustainability

*People say Milton Keynes is a city of ghosts because people
don't get together and socialise... we've been living here
for three and a half years and still most of our friends are in
London... we would love to make like-minded friends in Milton
Keynes.* (European focus group)

*If we [encourage inclusivity] it will help because it will give the
kids a sense of belonging and once they get that sense of
belonging I don't know if the gang will take our kids.*
(African Caribbean focus group)



Recommendations

Goal: to ensure that inclusion and diversity measures are evaluated and sustained across the Milton Keynes cultural sector

- AHA-MK to publish a digital cultural manifesto that both inspires and commits our arts and heritage sector to a programme of change to deliver cultural inclusion and diversity.
- Devise a city-wide monitoring and evaluation framework to record impact and progress towards the delivery of consistent inclusion and diversity.
- Develop a model to promote good inclusion and diversity practice to suppliers.
- AHA-MK to create a platform for shared resources and networks to support the arts and heritage sector on matters of diversity and inclusion.

Call to Action: A Programme of Change

This report recommends a programme of change to include both self and institutional interrogation with a review of awareness, culture, language, engagement, systems, processes and procedures.

AHA-MK have proposed an Action Plan from these recommendations. Like all action plans, it is a living document, and will be updated to reflect changing contexts, developing partnerships, funding possibilities and new projects. AHA-MK will use this plan to support its members on the journey towards becoming more inclusive and diverse.

The research and report have galvanised the cultural sector and diverse communities in Milton Keynes. Appropriate investment and collective commitment over time are essential to deliver a real step change to transform the city into an exemplar for cultural and creative inclusion and diversity. Sustainable impact would be delivered through training, inclusive recruitment, engagement, communication and evaluation.

Milton Keynes Council, Fiona Boundy, Creative and Cultural Manager

'Milton Keynes Council is committed to working in partnership with the arts and heritage sector, alongside other partners and stakeholders to ensure that the recommendations outlined in this report are incorporated into an updated Creative and Cultural Strategy Delivery Framework; inform the development and delivery of a revised Arts and Heritage Grant-Aid Funding application process and annual grant-aid agreements and steer the strategic development of city-wide projects, commissions and programmes in order to support effective, systemic and sustainable change'





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