The Network Newsletter:
tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

Number 226, December 2019

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The Network's Website is at www.seapn.org.uk and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

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Introduction

Firstly, I hope everyone is keeping safe and well in these difficult times. We decided to continue with the Newsletters and Ebulletins as people are working from home and still requiring information, news and current awareness – and it's another way of keeping people in touch.

As is probably the case with everyone, my inbox is filling rapidly every day, so that's meant that I have got a bit behind with the Newsletters – but will hope to catch up in the very near future.

John Vincent

Did you see …?

ARC Magazine

The February 2020 issue[1] includes the following items of particular interest:

- Emily Morris "Collecting Matters" column, which looks briefly at making 'Mental Health on Record' at The National Archives – this is: "[…] a stop-motion animation film made by a group of young people which explores how contemporary views on mental health can be used to interpret historical records on the subject. Inspired by mental health records from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries […]" [p8]
- Victoria Draper "Canaries, beer and oxtail soup: discovering the impact of refugees in Norfolk over the last 500 years", which "[…] describes the development of workshops engaging Norfolk's primary school students with the personal narratives of refugees" [pp17-19]
- Philip Milnes-Smith "An archivist joins the SEND network", which looks at the work of the SEND network: "The SEND network, a joint initiative by The National Gallery and the Museum of London, aims to connect SEND teachers and arts and heritage professionals to share best practice in special needs education." [pp19-21]

Equality Act 2010

Equality, diversity and the Creative Case: a data report 2018-19

ACE published its fifth annual diversity report[2] in Feb 2020. This is the first report to include the new National Portfolio Organisations, so it now includes libraries, museums and Sector Support Organisations.

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[1] *ARC Magazine*, 367, Feb 2020.

As the Chair of ACE, Nicholas Serota, says in the Foreword:

> "Whilst we cannot make direct comparisons between the last report and this year's, this report has confirmed that Arts Council and the organisations we invest in are still not representative of this country as a whole. The long-standing issue of under-representation in both the Portfolio and the Arts Council has to be recognised and addressed." [p3]

Some 'headlines' from the report are:

> "For the first time, we have broken down NPO workforce data by artform (discipline), Arts Council Areas and Bands. As this is NPO data only, these organisations are not necessarily representative of the wider sector. This is particularly likely to be the case for Libraries, as they make up a small number of organisations within the Portfolio (6 libraries, 1 library SSO) and as such, we have not broken down that data here.
>
> **Disciplines**
>
> - Dance has the highest BME workforce at 18%. Museums has the lowest at 6%.
> - Museums has the highest percentage female workforce at 57%, Music has the lowest at 32%.
> - Visual Arts has the highest percentage of disabled people in the workforce at 8%. Dance has the lowest at 3% of the workforce identifying as disabled.
> - Theatre and Visual Arts had the highest percentage of LGBT workforce at 9% in each discipline, and Museums has the lowest LGBT workforce 3%." [p8]

In terms of the workforce:

> "The total percentage figures for the National Portfolio workforce show BME at 11%, Female at 47%, Disabled people at 6% and LGBT at 6%.
>
> These compare to the Office of National Statistics for the percentage of the working age population in England: BME 16%, Female 50%, Disabled people 21% and LGBT 2%." [p11]

The report also gives all NPOs a Creative Case for Diversity rating (of outstanding; strong; met; and not met). These ratings show that:

- 1% Not met
- 43% Met
- 50% Strong
- 5% Outstanding.

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[2] *Equality, diversity and the Creative Case: a data report 2018-19*. ACE, 2020. Available to download as a pdf from: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ACE_DiversityReport_Final_03032020_0.pdf.

In addition, according to a news-post from the MA:

> "In April, ACE is expected to reveal details on new targets for arts organisations of all sizes to meet in order to fulfil their funding requirements. From this year, the arts council will also begin to monitor socio-economic data to offer a more detailed picture of diversity in the arts."[3]

This is an important report which shows just how much work there is still to be done.

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Museums Change Lives: Northern Ireland

The MA have just launched this important document[4] which is a:

> ""[…] new series of Museums Change Lives (MCL) case studies to highlight the dynamic and impactful work taking place in museums across Northern Ireland."[5]

The case studies are collected under three headings:

- Enhancing health and wellbeing
- Creating better places to live and work
- Inspiring engagement, debate and reflection.

Case studies include:

Enhancing health and wellbeing

- NI Museums Council – Dementia friendly museums

- Mid & East Antrim Borough Council – Carnlough Community Hub: The Hub "[…] acts as an orientation space at the heart of the village, encouraging participation in guided and self-guided walking tours to explore Carnlough and beyond, into the Glens of Antrim region and its landscape, geology and maritime history." [p8]

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[3] Taken from: Yosola Olorunshola "ACE threatens funding cuts over lack of diversity", MA, 19 Feb 2020, https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/19022020-ACE-threatens-funding-cuts-over-lack-of-diversity.

[4] *Museums Change Lives: Northern Ireland*. MA, 2020. Available to download as a pdf from: https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1266325.

[5] Taken from: https://www.museumsassociation.org/news/05022020-launching-museums-change-lives-Northern-Ireland?utm_campaign=1707767_12032020%20MA%20newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Museums%20Association&dm_i=2VBX,10LPZ,27LU0M,3V402,1.

- Consortium of Heritage Organisations – Linenopolis "[…] a pop-up visitor experience that celebrated Belfast's linen heritage." [p9]

- National Museums Northern Ireland – Live Well: "Live Well reaches out to people who don't normally visit museums, supporting active ageing through social engagement and new learning. More than 100 groups have enjoyed six-week outreach programmes – five weeks within communities and one supported museum visit – followed up by monthly open afternoons." [p11]

Creating better places to live and work

- North Down Museum – Celebrating our ethnic minorities: "The project, which was funded by the EU Peace IV programme, saw three groups use the collection to learn about and celebrate Korean and Chinese cultures." [p13]

- NI Museums Council – Playful Museums: "[…] local museums creating fun, engaging and accessible spaces for young children, toddlers, babies and their carers, families and educators." [p14]

- Partnership led by NI Museums Council – The Late Shift: "The Late Shift was a series of after-hours, adults-only events that took place in museums across Northern Ireland during the Halloween season. More than 1,000 paying visitors attended six unique events." [p16]

- Fermanagh County Museum – Enniskillen Workhouse Project: "Fermanagh County Museum's ongoing Enniskillen Workhouse Project aims to reopen the entrance block – the only surviving part of the town's former poor house – with an exhibition about the institution, featuring the stories and memories of those who spent time there." [p17]

Inspiring engagement, debate and reflection.

- Consortium of Cultural Organisations – Reimagine, Remake, Replay: "[…] a four-year project that aims to connect young people and heritage in meaningful ways using creative media and the latest technologies, while delving into museum collections using new approaches." [p19]

- FE McWilliam Gallery – Linen Lab: "[…] the result of a yearlong creative engagement programme that saw eight artists and designers collaborate with more than 400 young people from 13 local schools." [p20]

- Museum of Free Derry and Siege Museum – NI Schools Outreach Programme

- National Museums Northern Ireland – The Troubles and Beyond: new exhibition "[…] achieved as part of the wider Collecting the Troubles and Beyond project, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The aim of the project was to widen the scope of the collection through greater academic and community engagement and to ensure that the collection could be used to support a full and inclusive narrative." [p23]

- Consortium of Heritage Organisations – Making the Future: "[…] a collaborative cultural heritage programme using museum collections and archives to explore issues of the past and create a vision for future change." [p24]

Finally, the document includes a list of "Resources for socially engaged practice" with weblinks.

This includes lots of interesting examples of work that could be developed elsewhere. Recommended.[6]

Disability issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

An ethical approach to interpreting disability and difference

This important new guidance[7] has just been published:

> "The Wellcome Collection in London and the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries at the University of Leicester have published new guidance outlining how museums can take an ethical approach to interpreting disability and difference in gallery spaces."[8]

It starts by stating why a new approach is needed:

> "International museum thinking and practice has come to be characterised by a desire to create inclusive narratives that draw on the cultures and contributions of previously marginalised or excluded groups. However, disabled people – sometimes referred to as the world's largest minority – remain underrepresented, sometimes entirely invisible, within most institutions' exhibitions, displays and public programmes […] Where they do appear, they are often portrayed in ways that reflect deeply-held, negative attitudes towards physical and mental difference that sit uncomfortably with 21st century approaches to disability rights, equality and respect for all […]" [p2]

The recent research collaboration between the Wellcome Collection and RCMG has led to a different view of what a museum might offer:

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[6] Source: Museums Association email updates, 12 Mar 2020.
[7] *An ethical approach to interpreting disability and difference*. Wellcome Collection/RCMG, 2020. Available to download as a pdf from: https://le.ac.uk/rcmg/research-archive/disorder-dissent-disruption.
[8] Taken from MA press release: https://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/new-practice/13022020-museums-urged-to-address-unethical-representation-of-disability?utm_campaign=1686603_13022020%20Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Museums%20Association&dm_i=2VBX,105E3,27LU0M,3T6KF,1.

> "Inspired by what has come to be widely referred to as the social model of disability, Wellcome Collection's new permanent gallery Being Human draws together diverse perspectives and personal stories from artists, activists, clinicians and researchers. The development of the gallery explored how curatorial and interpretive practice could create authentic portrayals of physical and mental difference and disabled people's lives." [p3]

The core of the document is "Guidance on interpreting disability-related objects and stories" which compares medicalised approaches and social model approaches, for example:

> "Suggests disability is the individual's problem – a focus on what the person can't do"

> versus:

> "Views disability as arising from barriers society imposes – draws attention to society's inadequate response to difference and impairment" [p5]

And:

> "Assumes disabled people as a homogenous group"

> versus:

> "Recognises a diversity of lives and experiences" [p5]

This short, thought-provoking and practical guide is highly recommended.[9]

Broader issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Let's create …

Following a short delay because of the December General Election, the ACE 2020-2030 strategy[10] has just been published.

Just to declare an interest, John Vincent attended a number of workshops (eg a London regional workshop in Nov 2018) and made a series of comments to ACE as part of the process of drafting the strategy.

This is a major document – this assessment looks primarily at the engagement with social justice.

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[9] Source: Museums Association email updates, 13 Feb 2020.

[10] *Let's create: strategy 2020-2030*. ACE, 2020 [dated 2021 in document]. Available to download as a pdf from: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Strategy%202020_2030%20Arts%20Council%20England.pdf.

The strategy begins with setting out the ACE vision:

> "By 2030, we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish, and where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences." [p14]

This leads into "What we want to achieve" and then into "How we will work to achieve it":

> "This Strategy is based on the need to recognise and celebrate the creative lives of everyone in this country, and its success will depend on our ability to understand and champion a wider range of culture than we have before, including in the amateur, voluntary and commercial sectors." [p18]

Key initiatives will include:

- Work with children and young people: "[…] we will focus a large part of our development role on ensuring that children and young people are able to fulfil their creative potential, and access the highest-quality cultural experiences where they live, where they go to school and where they spend their free time." [p19]

- Investment: "Over the next 10 years, we will work to improve the way we make the case for the social and economic value of investing public money in culture." [p19] This will also include promoting research and development, and supporting the adoption of new technologies.

- Diversity: "Given the persistent lack of diversity across the creative industries, we will push to ensure that the cultural workforce is representative of contemporary England." [p22]

- Climate emergency: "We will take steps to support the cultural sector to set the pace in coming up with imaginative new approaches to promoting environmental responsibility." [p22]

- Inclusive economic growth: "At a local level, we will work with partners to support inclusive economic growth through investment in libraries, museums and arts venues to ensure that they are fit-for-purpose and able to meet the needs of their communities and the people who work and create within them." [p22]

There is now recognition of the role of museums and libraries within the ACE portfolio, and, thankfully, a commitment to libraries' funding:

> "[Libraries] will be central to our delivery of this Strategy, and over the next 10 years we will increase our investment in them." [p22]

However, although a number of us made the point at the workshops and in responses, the strategy still does not really reflect the full role that libraries and museums play.

In terms of libraries, it says:

> "They are the country's most widespread and well-used cultural spaces, sitting at the heart of communities and often providing the first point of access to cultural activity. They help to build stronger, happier communities, support social prescribing, develop readers and promote digital literacy." [p22]

Yes, this includes some aspects of libraries' role but not the range of activities beyond 'culture'.

Similarly with museums, the emphasis is on culture, and no real mention of their role in community cohesion, tackling social exclusion, and so on:

> "Museums play an essential role in helping us understand and shape culture. They connect us to the past and encourage us to think about the future. Museums themselves have evolved into cross-disciplinary institutions, connecting science, history and art, developing knowledge through research, making space for education, debate, creative and artistic activity and sustaining a spirit of place in communities." [p23]

Following these sections, the document then focuses on the strategy itself. This includes three Outcomes:

- Creative people, which "[…] focuses on amateur and voluntary creative activity, including by children and young people." [p26] In fact, according to pp33-34, this section is primarily about provision for children and young people.

- Cultural communities, which considers "[…] how the professional and voluntary sectors can work with each other to help shape stronger cultural provision in villages, towns and cities." [p26] The strategy does include some relevant outcomes for this work: "We want to see communities that are more socially cohesive and economically robust, and in which residents experience improved physical and mental wellbeing, as a result of investment in culture." [p37] The strategy does recognise some of the range of work that libraries undertake; however, at the same time, the it also reiterates the view that libraries and museums do not really know their communities:

  > "Museums are centres for knowledge and cultural participation. They work with local communities to create understanding of people and places. Libraries reach audiences from all backgrounds and of all ages, and provide meeting places, maker spaces, and focal points for creative and cultural activity within local communities, in conjunction with their delivery of four national Universal Offers (reading, health and wellbeing, digital and information, and culture and creativity). We will support local

cultural organisations, including libraries, museums, Music Education Hubs and arts organisations, to develop a better understanding of the needs and interests of their communities, and to use that intelligence for the measurable benefit of those communities." [pp37-38]

- A creative & cultural country, which "[…] looks at the professional cultural sector, including those seeking to develop a career in the creative industries after they leave full-time education." [p26]

The strategy notes that:

"[…] within this country, there are places and people who have been disadvantaged by historic patterns of public funding, including within culture. Therefore, the Delivery Plans that we will publish over the next decade in which we set out the detail of how we will deliver this Strategy will pay particular attention to addressing those historic imbalances. Specifically, we will ensure that our programmes meet the needs of those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, D/deaf or disabled people, and those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, who have traditionally had least access to our resources." [p26]

This is followed by four Investment Principles:

"The four Investment Principles set out how cultural organisations will need to develop so that they can better deliver the three Outcomes." [p27]

These are:

- Ambition & quality: there was considerable discussion about this point at the workshops that I attended, with concerns expressed about the emphasis on "quality". However, the strategy continues to emphasise this.

- Dynamism

- Environmental responsibility – in this section, it suggests considerable activity has happened: "The cultural sector has already taken major steps to reduce its carbon footprint, partly as a result of a range of initiatives supported by the Arts Council." [p51]

- Inclusivity & relevance – this section seems to hark back to previous views about the Creative Case for Diversity and its role in commissioning arts, rather than looking at the wider role of museums and libraries:

  "In 2011 Arts Council England launched the Creative Case for Diversity. In the years since, it has helped focus attention on the decisions that cultural organisations make about the work that they produce, present and collect. It has led to a wider recognition that choices about which artists to commission, what repertoires to stage, which exhibitions to mount and which performers to employy

play an important part in representing the diversity of this country and ensuring that public money is invested to the benefit of all communities." [p53]

However, it does also recognise the major issues that remain to be tackled:

"It is now time to build on this work and address the persistent and widespread lack of diversity and inclusivity in cultural organisations' leadership, governance, workforce and audience." [p53]

Finally, the strategy redefines ACE's own role and ways of operating in order to deliver this new strategy as well as possible.

As noted at the start, this is an important paper. It has some real strengths (particularly commitments to funding, recognition of the importance of aspects of equality and diversity), but also some fundamental weaknesses (especially the limiting of the ambition for museums and libraries).

It concludes with a 'call to arms' from Darren Henley (ACE Chief Executive).

"I believe in the vision of this Strategy. I believe in the power of artists, curators, librarians, arts organisations, museums and libraries to deliver it. I believe, above all else, that people with creativity and culture in their lives are happier and more fulfilled human beings. With this Strategy, we want to build a country in which every single one of us has the opportunity to benefit from creativity and culture. So I ask you to join today in committing to the Principles and realising the Outcomes that we've set out here. Together, let's create better lives." [p64]

Let's take him up on that: work together with ACE towards these Objectives, but, at the same time, constantly engaging them about the full role that organisations in the sector play.

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Sue Williamson (ACE's Director, Libraries) has written a blogpost for Libraries Connected, highlighting the important funding priorities within the strategy:

"One of the priorities in the Creative Communities outcome is that we will enable public libraries to apply for National Lottery Project Grants to deliver on all four Universal Library Offers.

We will support applications for projects in support of Health and Wellbeing, and Information and Digital, as well as Reading and Creativity and Culture, which might seem more closely aligned to the more traditional aims and objectives of the Arts Council.

This underlines our role as the national development agency for public libraries and is a move towards supporting libraries to develop as

practitioners in their own field, as better and more innovative library services."[11]

A range of other organisations has commented on the new strategy, including:

Arts Professional:

> "It's fantastic to see libraries recognised as valuable public spaces that need protection and increased support, but I'm concerned that the attempt to rejuvenate them through the arts could backfire. Rather than reviving libraries, it could transform them into something else completely […] It makes complete sense for libraries to now become a key priority for ACE. Investing in their revival can bring much-needed resources to an ecosystem that has been devalued and ignored in recent public policy. But this can't be another culture-led regeneration mission, based on professionalised programming that leaves many alienated."[12]

Black Europe Resources

The "Blog on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic issues" makes some critical comments under the title "Let's Not Create Ethnic Minority Scapegoats Because There Isn't Enough Funding In The Arts Sector"[13], concluding:

> "It is probably still too early to know what the new Arts Council England strategy entails without first seeing the 'delivery reports'. It seems to me that the whole strategy is currently more about streamlining costs in a post-Brexit era than truly 'valuing diversity' or less privileged cultural communities."

Museums Association:

> "The arts council's brief expanded to include museums and libraries in 2011 and at times since then, it has been accused of not fully recognising the unique, distinguishing characteristics of those forms of culture.
>
> The new strategy makes strides towards overcoming this criticism. It promises to create 'museums of the future', acknowledging how museums are evolving into cross disciplinary institutions that 'help us understand and shape culture' […]
>
> There's been a significant change in how the arts council talks about diversity. The sector's glaring lack thereof is a persistent failure, and the strategy highlights it as an important issue the requires action.

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[11] Sue Williamson "Let's Create", *Libraries Connected*, Jan 2020, https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/news/lets-create.

[12] Hassan Vawda "Please don't turn our libraries into trendy arts hubs", *Arts Professional*, 30 Jan 2020, https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/article/please-dont-turn-our-libraries-trendy-arts-hubs.

[13] Thushari Perera "Let's Not Create Ethnic Minority Scapegoats Because There Isn't Enough Funding In The Arts Sector", Feb 2020, https://blackeuroperesources.com/2020/02/12/lets-not-create-ethnic-minority-scapegoats-because-there-isnt-enough-funding-in-the-arts-sector/.

What was a goal of 'diversity and skills' in the previous strategy has now evolved into 'inclusivity and relevance', reflecting an ongoing dialogue that has led to diversity being viewed in a more holistic way: it is no longer just about recruiting staff and reaching audiences from diverse backgrounds, but about ensuring people feel included and represented every time they walk through the doors […]

The strategy is light on detail of how its ambitious vision will be realised – but the first of several delivery plans is due in April that will shed more light on the requirements for prospective grantholders if they want to make the grade in the next portfolio."[14]

ACE in a hole?

The MA article concludes by saying that:

"Not everyone is impressed by what have been described as the "vague generalisations" in the arts council's vision, however. Five culture professionals launched an alternative strategy last week, calling for the arts council to focus on values such as justice, trust, accountability and risk."

This alternative strategy[15] argues that the ACE paper "[…] is unlikely to solve the crises facing the cultural sector in terms of engagement, education and funding." [p1], and, instead, reasserts some core principles (as noted above).

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACE = Arts Council England
MA = Museums Association
NPO = National Portfolio Organisation
SEND = Special Educational Needs and Disability

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[14] Geraldine Kendall Adams "Cultural equality and environment central to new arts council strategy", Museums Association "News analysis", Jan 2020, https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news-analysis/30012020-arts-council-england-10-year-strategy?utm_campaign=1675172_30012020&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Museums%20Association&dm_i=2VBX,ZWKK,27LU0M,3S4NP,1.

[15] John Holden, John Kieffer, John Newbigin, Shelagh Wright <u>and</u> Robert Hewison. *ACE in a hole? An alternative cultural strategy for England.* Arts Professional, 2020, https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/sites/artsprofessional.co.uk/files/administrator/ace_in_a_hole_jan2020.pdf.

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