CAMEo submission to Acting Up! Inquiry

April 2017

This submission and CAMEo

This submission is made to provide evidence to the Acting Up! Inquiry into the underrepresentation of working class men and women in the performing arts, in this first stage focusing particularly on film, TV, theatre and visual arts.

A growing body of statistical evidence of the underrepresentation of working class workers in the cultural economy's workforce is available from government and sector bodies, for instance the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, Creative Skillset, Nesta or Creative Industries Federation. In this submission we summarize the **academic research into the causes of the inequalities** illustrated by those statistics, especially regarding

- employment conditions as barriers for working class workers
- the importance of HE degrees as a barrier for working class workers
- perceptions of class and careers in culture

After summarising current knowledge on these three areas we **signpost key issues for policy and practice** seeking to address the underrepresentation of working class workers in the performing arts.
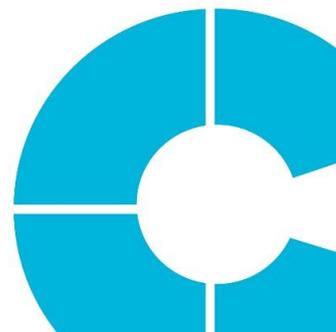
This submission is made by the CAMEo Research Institute for Cultural and Media Economies at the University of Leicester. Our particular focus is on how these economies can develop in ways that foreground participation, social justice and sustainability. CAMEo works with academics as well as practitioners and policy-makers and hosts a range of research, knowledge exchange and engagement activities on cultural work, the 'creative economy', arts, media and cultural policy, consumer culture dynamics, and the mediation and representation of cultural and economic life.

CAMEo projects on workforce diversity include a *Workforce Diversity Meta-Analysis* for the British Film Institute, the AHRC CLORE Leadership Programme Project *Where am I?* on BAME leaders in UK theatre, a British Academy/Leverhulme-funded project on *Creative Industries, Diversity and Austerity* and, as co-investigators, the AHRC project *Bass Culture* on the culture, history and economy of Jamaican music in Britain. CAMEo researchers have published widely on workforce diversity issues, incl. CAMEo Director Mark Banks' recent book *Creative Justice: Cultural Industries, Work and Inequality* (2017).

For more information on the evidence presented in this submission or CAMEo projects and publications please contact

CAMEo Director Professor Mark Banks, mark.banks@leicester.ac.uk
CAMEo Deputy Director Dr Doris Ruth Eikhof, d.r.eikhof@leicester.ac.uk

Employment conditions as barriers for working class workers

A key barrier to workforce diversity in the performing arts and the cultural economy more broadly is project-based employment (e.g. Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013):
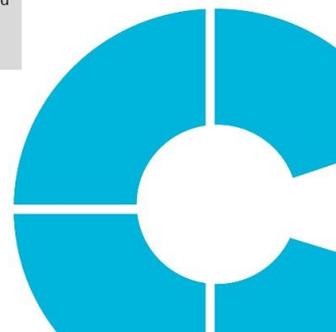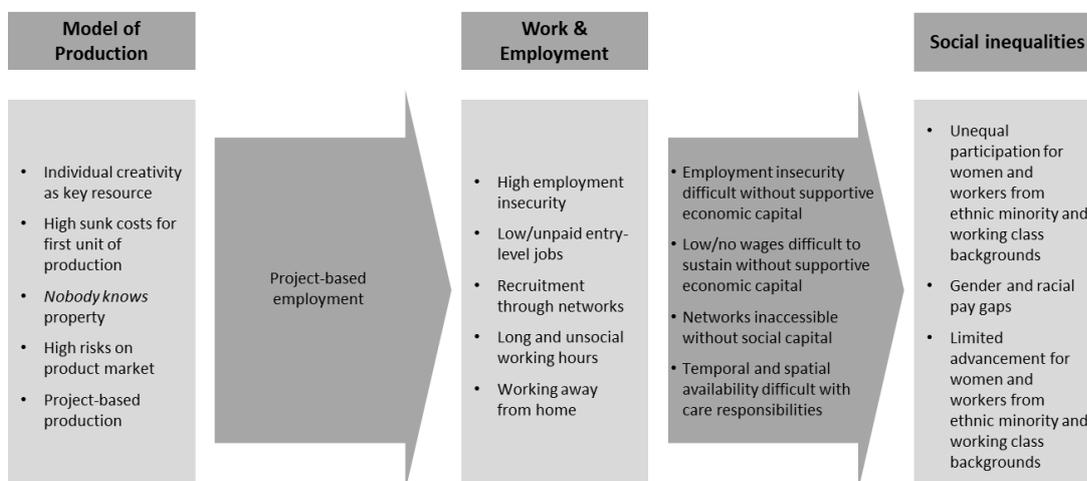
- Workers face substantive employment and income insecurities. In industries such as theatre and film a significant majority of workers are employed as freelancers and many spend half to two thirds of their time looking for work rather than earning income (Creative Skillset 2008; 2014).
- Workers have to undertake unpaid work such as internships to earn reputation, or work for 'exposure' to demonstrate their employability and develop skills (e.g. Banks, 2017; Eikhof & Warhurst 2013).
- Employers recruit through personal recommendations and networks to minimise the risk of making wrong recruitment decisions (e.g. Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012).

For individuals from working class background these employment conditions are particularly problematic:

- Working class workers are less likely to have the financial capital needed for buffering the risks of flexible employment;
- Working class workers are less likely to be able to afford working for free, for instance as interns;
- Working class workers are less likely to have access to the all-important social networks.
- Informal recruitment favours appointments in the decision makers' image, i.e. middle class decision makers recruit middle class workers.

Importantly, the problematic employment conditions result from a project-based model of production. Cultural production requires flexibility to be profitable and the employment conditions that have developed to meet those flexibility needs are one important cause of social inequalities in cultural work (see figure below). Women and ethnic minority workers are similarly disadvantaged, which means that working class workers who are also women or from ethnic minority backgrounds therefore face particularly high obstacles to working in the performing arts.

Translation of model of production into social inequalities (from Eikhof and Warhurst 2013)

Model of Production	Project-based employment	Work & Employment		Social inequalities
• Individual creativity as key resource • High sunk costs for first unit of production • *Nobody knows* property • High risks on product market • Project-based production		• High employment insecurity • Low/unpaid entry-level jobs • Recruitment through networks • Long and unsocial working hours • Working away from home	• Employment insecurity difficult without supportive economic capital • Low/no wages difficult to sustain without supportive economic capital • Networks inaccessible without social capital • Temporal and spatial availability difficult with care responsibilities	• Unequal participation for women and workers from ethnic minority and working class backgrounds • Gender and racial pay gaps • Limited advancement for women and workers from ethnic minority and working class backgrounds

The importance of HE degrees as a barrier for working class workers

Attending a university, arts or drama school is vital to a careers in performing arts, again as in the cultural economy more broadly:

- Attending higher education allows workers to cultivate their talent, acquire important skills, art form and sector knowledge, and develop marketable creative persona (e.g. Ashton & Noonan, 2013; Banks & Oakley, 2015).
- A degree from a reputed university, art or drama school signals quality of talent to prospective employers and thus functions as an important filter in recruitment processes (e.g. Comunian et al., 2010).
- Attending higher education is crucial for building the social networks and making the connections with peers and influential sector players that careers in the performing arts depend on (e.g. Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012).
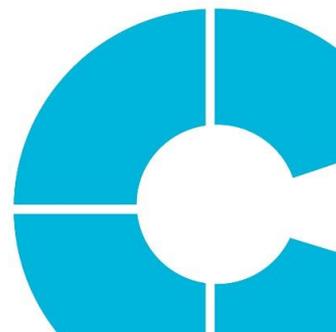
This central role of higher education is particularly problematic for working class for workers:

- Individuals from working class backgrounds are significantly less likely to be financially able to afford degree studies, or sustain them over time
- Arts and drama schools do not readily supply information on the portfolios and signals of talent they expect to see at admission stage, so applicants have to rely on informal information about entry requirements. Working class youth are much less likely to have access to such information via parents, teachers, tutors, or exposure to previously successful candidates (Burke & McManus, 2009; Hayton et al., 2014).
- Arts and drama schools require applicants to possess cultural knowledge and skills (e.g. playing instruments, mastering visual arts techniques, formal exposure to arts and culture) significantly exceeding what pupils might acquire in state schools. Working class youth are also much less likely to have acquired this cultural capital through their family or non-school connections and extra-curricular activities (Banks, 2017; Gaztambide-Fernandez et al., 2013).
- Admission decisions depend on HE staff's subjective perceptions of artistic 'talent', and those perceptions typically prioritise middle class, white-ethnic and Eurocentric ideas of this vital quality (Banks 2017).

Working class youth are thus not only less likely to attempt HE studies for financial reasons, they are also much less likely to present their talent in ways that are recognised and rewarded by middle-class selectors at admissions stage.

Perceptions of class and careers in culture

Perceptions of what constitutes talent and who 'belongs' in the performing arts are an import influence on careers in culture generally. Cultural workers' habitus, i.e. speech, appearance and gestures, but also the confidence with which they presents themselves and their talent, have to fit with sector norms and expectations. Overwhelmingly, working class habitus are still perceived as less legitimate and employable in arts and culture than middle class habitus, regardless of the actual job requirements. Not presenting what is perceived to be the right social appearance or disposition impedes participation and progression, as

illustrated by the case of a black stunt man whose found that his black and working class accent blocked his progression to stunt coordinator even though speech would have been irrelevant in both his on-screen and the aspired off-screen coordinating role (Randle et al., 2015).

Importantly, class-related perceptions of fit also influence young people's pursuit of a career in arts and culture. As Allen and Hollingsworth (2013) show, working class youth perceived the cultural economy as a middle class domain with careers that were unobtainable for them and they therefore did not even attempt to pursue.
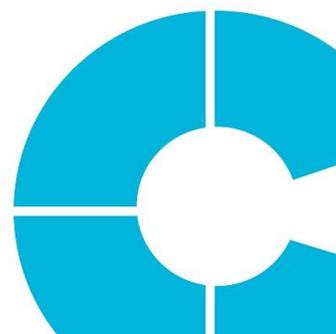
Ways forward for policy and practice

Policy and practice that seeks to improve the representation of working class workers in the performing arts needs to recognise two issues:

1. Barriers to working class workforce participation in the performing arts are deeply rooted and systemic. They result from class-driven norms and perceptions, underpinned by entrenched patterns of material disadvantage, which are being exacerbated by increasingly precarious and project-based models of production. Action to change deep rooted and system causes has to be of substantial scope and breadth in order to be effective. **Cosmetic action will not do**.
2. Because lack of opportunity is in large parts caused by the performing arts' business model, change will only result from **action that affects businesses across the sector in equal measure**, i.e. that doesn't allow individual organisations to gain a competitive advantage by not adopting new practice.

Based on these two recognition, policy and practice face a number of options:

- **Empowering actions** seek to make good individual workers' disadvantages. Mentoring schemes for instance can address a lack of access to networks and informal information or role model campaigns can promote careers in the performing arts. Empowering initiatives account for the vast majority of practice initiatives so far but there is scepticism of how much change can be achieved by actions that work with the system rather than seeking to change it (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013; Eikhof et al. 2017).
- **Transforming actions** aim to remove existing barriers to participation and opportunity. Initiatives to make admissions requirements more transparent fall into this category, as do campaigns to regulate the use of internships and unpaid labour. While politically more difficult to achieve, transforming actions are much more likely to achieve quick and sustained improvements than empowering actions.
- **Regulating and incentivising actions** can change business conditions to make certain practices less profitable for organisations and companies. The British Film Institute's *Diversity Standards*, for instance, require funding applicants to address diversity challenges. Equivalent schemes could be rolled out across the sector, including linking the availability of tax breaks to diversity action or (self-) imposing diversity targets/quotas.
- **Actions to promote culture change** in the performing arts can challenge perceptions of class (and other diversity characteristics) and promote the intrinsic and extrinsic values of workforce diversity. Organisational initiatives such as

unconscious bias awareness training can be beneficial. Similarly, artistic work that boldly challenges limiting perceptions is likely to be effective and in keeping with the sector's interests and practices, and should therefore be a focus of commissioning.

Underlying such actions would need to be a body of evidence that is improved in quality and scope and readily accessible for policy-makers and practitioners. Currently there exist significant gaps on workforce data with respect to class and other diversity characteristics. These shortcomings could be addressed through the following:

- consistent and sector-wide monitoring systems for key workforce characteristics, preferably designed with a view to international comparability and likely involving collaborations between sector organisations and experienced academic or industry researchers;
- a practitioner-facing database of interventions to increase workforce diversity, preferably including descriptions and evaluations of initiatives;
- a sector-wider funding programme that funds initiatives and project relevant to workforce diversity in combination with research on these activities. Such a funding programme could provide concentrated research capacity for a sector in which many businesses or organisations cannot afford interventions or evaluations.

Importantly, such initiatives should not focus solely on class but should include other diversity characteristics as well (e.g. as defined in the Equalities Act 2010). Only joined-up evidence on workforce diversity can take into account intersectionalities between diversity characteristics that exacerbate barriers to workforce participation and opportunity (e.g. when class-related barriers intersect with challenges resulting from caring responsibilities, or when forms of classed and racialized discrimination intersect to exclude people from selection or elevation to the best arts jobs).

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