

Equality Action Plan 2020-22

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Introduction

“I hope and expect that many of my recommendations will benefit White working class men, women, boys and girls too. BAME communities face specific challenges, including discrimination in many walks of life. But some of the most marginalised BAME communities have much in common with the White working-class. A justice system that works better for those who are BAME and poor will work better for those who are White British and poor too.” – The Lammy review, 2017

In response to the Black Lives Matter movement we have reviewed our work on racism and inequality. As part of this we have reviewed this equality action plan and published it on our website with a commitment for it to always be publicly visible and available for scrutiny and comment. This plan is primarily focused on race, socio-economic status and disability as three key areas where inequality manifests – whilst also recognising the intersection between these and other protected characteristics.

Our goal with this plan is to be practical, specific and nuanced. We are setting targets that we can deliver. In some instances, activities are already happening but we’ve included them to demonstrate what we’re doing. And in some instances, actions are repeated – for instance they need to happen each time we recruit, or each time we develop a new work. We still think it’s useful to list these actions and will use internal review processes to make sure they are actually happening, and that they have the desired outcomes. If not, we will adjust our approach accordingly.

We recognise the argument that Black is a specific identity that should be addressed on its own terms and that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) is a blunt term. Others use BAME as a term to acknowledge the interlocking experiences of racism experienced by all non-white people. The terms People of Colour (POC) and Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) also collect extraordinarily diverse groups of people from many cultural backgrounds into a single framework. For now, we will follow national and international discussions about terminology and continue to use the term BAME while being aware of its limitations.

We are an artists’ group and a British charity: that organisational and national perspective informs this plan.

Strategic objectives

Blast Theory have actively focused our work on social equality for some time, seeking to increase representation from lower socio-economic groups ([groups C, D and E](#)) in all areas of our work and organisation. This comes from the artists’ own backgrounds and experiences accessing culture when they were growing up, and a recognition that socio-economic status often intersects with race, disability and other protected characteristics to heighten inequality. A 2017 [TUC report](#) found that the employment rate for White people is consistently higher (76.1%) than those from a minority ethnic group (64.2%). According to the [2011 Census](#), Asian and Black people made up a much higher proportion of the ‘never worked and long-term unemployed’ group (at 17.5% and 6.2% respectively) than their share of the general population (7.5% and 3.3% respectively). [DWP data from 2014/15](#) shows that, while generally 18% of working-age adults live in households with below 60% of contemporary median income after housing costs, this rises to 30% in households where at least one member is disabled.

In reviewing this action plan, we have put our focus on our directed sphere of influence, setting four concrete objectives with associated actions that we can track over time:

- **Career development and paid opportunities:** we will support more people from the above groups into paid work in the arts, and we will also work to make sure that our paid opportunities (for instance as a freelance developer, producer or cast member) attract a diverse range of talent. With this, we also want to make sure that vacancies to join the Blast Theory team are more attractive and accessible to a wider range of candidates.
- **Talent development and skills sharing:** we will make sure that opportunities to access Blast Theory’s 30-year experience of successful practice are available to artists from the above groups. This will benefit our practice and contribute to a wider range of talent being able to flourish in the sector.
- **Leadership and governance:** we will make sure that the Blast Theory Board of Trustees contains people with a wide range of backgrounds, ages, and perspectives, and that they and the Blast Theory team have the skills and confidence to actively engage in our work around inequality. This will help to provide a healthy level of critical challenge for our work.
- **Blast Theory’s work:** the work we make is about interaction, engagement and dialogue with the public. It’s important that the participants and co-creators in our work bring different voices and perspectives to the table and that a wide range of people access, experience and enjoy our work. We will make sure that there are no unnecessary barriers in place for this to happen.

Measuring our progress

In order to assess our progress, we must measure it. In some areas, we have good baseline data and in other areas we do not – in those areas, we will implement new ways to gather what we need to know. We will track this data, search for patterns, identify weaknesses and new opportunities, and change our approach accordingly.

We appreciate that measuring, with its surveys and pre-determined boxes to tick, can be problematic. Wherever possible, we will make surveys as easy and accessible as we can and give people the freedom to describe their own identities. We feel that the onus of processing the data should be on us as an organisation, and not on the person answering the survey.

We'll publish an update every year to share how we're doing. Where appropriate, we will take a medium to long-term view in our reporting – for instance, reporting a rolling three-year average as well as a 'current snapshot'. This is in recognition of the fact that as a small organisation our performance will fluctuate over time (for instance, if one of our Trustees steps down) and that often it's more meaningful to understand longer term trends.

Holding ourselves to account

By making this action plan available publicly, we are not asking you what we should do or how we should do it – but we are inviting you to hold us to account; to scrutinise our progress; and to comment on any part of this plan. If you want to get in touch with us, please email our Director Matt Adams at matt@blasttheory.co.uk

Career development and paid opportunities

Our record of supporting people to develop their skills is something we are very proud of. Over the years, people who have volunteered with Blast Theory have gone on to successful careers, often accessing paid work within the company. We know that volunteering is not an option for many and in 2018 we implemented a paid internship programme to allow more people to access the opportunity. We have been fundraising for this and we are very grateful to our donors who have made so much progress in this area possible. Longer paid internships remain a strong ambition and we will continue to seek funding so we can expand the programme.

Offering career development opportunities through paid internships, mentoring and other careers advice is one of the most powerful ways we can address inequality. It's also one of the best ways we can develop the team to be more reflective of our communities – by making Blast Theory job opportunities more attractive and accessible to a wider range of candidates.

We work with a large number of freelancers every year, from software developers and photographers to cast and crew. We recognise our ability to make a positive economic impact on individuals and small businesses, and will make sure that our paid opportunities are advertised to, and accessed by, a wide range of talent.

What we will do	Who will lead	When we aim to get it done	How we will measure it
Expand the internship programme to offer 2 x two-month paid internships at the Real Living Wage	Business Director	Due to Covid-19 we can only deliver one paid internship in 2020/21; we will two more from 1 April 2021	Budgets and business plan
Review the language for advertising opportunities (internships, mentoring, Pot Luck evenings) to make sure it is inclusive and welcoming, and to make it explicit who we are aiming to reach	Communications Manager	August 2020	Diversity dashboard: % of interns, mentees, Pot Luck attendees from target groups
Form new relationships with organisations and educational settings who can help us to advertise our internship and mentoring opportunities e.g. BAME organisations, sixth form colleges, universities and other higher education institutions	Artists' Assistant	December 2020	Diversity dashboard: % of interns and mentees from target groups
Implement an open day and studio visits accompanied by a talk, Q&A, drinks and snacks, working with partners to reach target groups	Artists' Assistant	TBC: we'll add a concrete deadline as soon as Covid-19 restrictions allow us to welcome visitors to the studios again	Diversity dashboard: % of interns, mentees, Pot Luck attendees from target groups (captured via a simple light-touch monitoring form). Number of open days and studio visits per year, number of visitors and background of the visitors.
Offer personal feedback to any job applicant who self-identifies as being from a lower socio-economic background; BAME or disabled – paying close attention to their strengths, identifying areas for improvement and offering concrete actions and, where relevant, support to address these	Director	Whenever we advertise a vacancy	We'll review after every recruitment round, analysing applicant data and reviewing feedback process. We'll analyse how many and what % of applicants came from each of the identified groups

What we will do	Who will lead	When we aim to get it done	How we will measure it
Advertise freelance opportunities widely and with welcoming, inclusive language that is explicit about who we want to apply	Business Director	As soon as we have a new opportunity to advertise	Diversity dashboard: % of freelancers (including cast and crew) from target groups

Talent development and skills exchange

Blast Theory's base at 20 Wellington Road has been developed for use by artists, researchers, emerging businesses and small companies working in creative industries, digital and media industries.

Blast Theory's goal is to create an interdisciplinary community of international significance.

The programmes run from 20 Wellington Road include a residency programme for visiting artists; a mentorship and volunteer programme; talks and other public programmes; studio hire for tenants in the arts and technology industries.

We will make sure that opportunities to access Blast Theory's 30-year experience of successful practice are available to, and accessed by, artists from our target groups. This will benefit our practice and contribute to a wider range of talent being able to flourish in the sector.

What we will do	Who will lead	When we aim to get it done	How we will measure it
Offer free weekend use of meeting room and free use of the residency space when available to BAME organisations and artists	Business Director	TBC: we'll add a concrete deadline as soon as Covid-19 restrictions allow us to welcome visitors to the studios again	Internal management meetings and reviews
Offer free use of the residency space when available to Rocket Artists and other deaf/disabled artists	Business Director	As above	As above
Review the language we use when advertising our Residency programme to make sure it is inclusive and welcoming and it's explicit who we're targeting – with proactive advertising to BAME, deaf/disabled networks etc.	Business Director	December 2020	Diversity dashboard: % of residents from target groups

Leadership and governance

Blast Theory is governed by a strong Board of Trustees who share their expertise and offer critical challenge to our work and business operations. It's important that the makeup of our Board is reflective of the UK population and includes people of different ages, socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicity and disability.

It's also important that our team and our Trustees have the knowledge and confidence to actively engage in our work around inequality, and to challenge us where necessary.

What we will do	Who will lead	When we aim to get it done	How we will measure it
Design Trustee recruitment plan to include wide advertising, clear and explicit language and review/analysis	Business Director	End March 2021 (one new Trustee appointed)	Director and Business Director will review monitoring data and recruitment process and report back to the Board.
Review succession planning for the Board to maintain a balance of skills and backgrounds	Business Director, Director, Chair	End March 2021	Business Director, Director and Chair will discuss at meeting and report to the Board
Invite Trustees to undertake a skills audit that includes equality and diversity strengths and weaknesses	Business Director	Every two years starting 2021	The Director and Business Director will report on this to the Board of Trustees for review
Implement compulsory unconscious bias training for the team. All staff will also attend a follow up session where we will agree concrete steps as to how we will address the unconscious biases that we all hold, and we will actively monitor the implementation of these actions. This will become a default part of the process for anyone joining Blast Theory.	Business Director	End August; then refreshed annually	Budgets and business plan We'll also check in with staff at their annual review every December

Blast Theory's work

The starting point for our work is thinking about the audience. Since 1991 the work we make has been about interaction, dialogue and engagement with the public. We create ambitious partnerships to do this successfully, whether we're working in a West Midlands library or a festival in Toronto.

We respect and activate the autonomy of everyone we work with, and participants in our projects are often co-creators of the work. It's important for the development of our practice as artists that these people bring different voices and perspectives to the table. The same goes for our wider audiences: it's important for us that a wide range of people access, experience and enjoy our work and that there are no unnecessary barriers that prevent them from doing so.

Blast Theory's work is not always an easy or straightforward 'sell'. And, because we work in so many different places all over the world, it doesn't make sense to set rigid 'diversity targets' (for want of a better word) that apply across the board. Instead, we set appropriate targets for each project we work on, taking into account what local audiences look like, and what they want and need.

BLAST THEORY

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What we will do	Who will lead	When we aim to get it done	How we will measure it
Assess each of our artworks for their theme and content to make sure we have a mixed portfolio of work that reaches different audiences	Director	Each time we develop a new work	The Director and Business Director will report on this to the Board of Trustees for review
Invite a range of voices (for instance artists, practitioners, experts) during the creative process to make sure target groups are represented within the creation of the work. When our works involve the stories of BAME, deaf/disabled people and/or those from socio-economic groups CDE we will engage with those groups to ensure that we are representing those stories appropriately.	Lead Artist for each project	Each time we develop a new work	The Director and Business Director will report on this to the Board of Trustees for review
For each project, work with local partners to engage target audiences appropriate to that place. For example, in a city with a high proportion of BAME residents we will adjust our targets accordingly.	Lead Artist for each project	Each time we develop a new work	Project reporting/data
Use plain, welcoming language when describing the work online and in other marketing channels	Communications Manager	Each time we develop a new work	Internal reviews, management meetings and audience feedback
Introduce access checklist when planning each project to make sure reasonable adjustments are made to allow those with access needs to participate (e.g. signage, captions, free Personal Carer tickets) and that e.g. food options and hours of work do not pose a barrier	Project Manager	Each time we develop a new work	Internal reviews and management meetings
Translate work into local language	Lead Artist for each project	Each time we develop a new work	Internal reviews and management meetings
Invite BAME and/or deaf/disabled voices into testing and feedback process of our work	Lead Artist for each project	Each time we develop a new work	We'll use anonymous monitoring forms and self declaration to assess whether we're successfully doing this, and use internal management meetings to review and adjust our approach