The Creative Case for Diversity International

‘The diverse nature of 21st century Britain is the perfect catalyst for ever greater innovation in culture and I would like to see diversity put at the heart of everything cultural’

- Sir Brian MacMaster  Former CEO Edinburgh Festival, UK

‘That which is not articulated does not exist – we have been really bad at articulating the links between what could be seen as a peripheral activity and its impact on the mainstream’

- Kwame Kwei-Armah Artistic Director, Center Stage, Baltimore

The Creative Case is based upon the simple observation that diversity, in the widest sense, is an integral part of the artistic process. It is an important element in the dynamic that drives art forward, innovates new expression and genres and brings it closer to a profound dialogue with contemporary society.

There needs to be an appreciation that much innovation takes place at the margins. We should recognise and acknowledge that, for example, artists from differing cultural backgrounds have had a significant and sometimes pivotal influence on artistic trends, forms and styles that have developed in Western influenced societies.

Diversity is intrinsic to art and culture, yet this viewpoint is often obscured by establishment narratives and histories. Inequalities and barriers within society and the arts act to choke off the potential for a diverse flowering of expression, participation and criticism and study. The creative case is about unlocking all those possibilities for innovation, excellence and engagement in the arts for the benefit of all of us.

The creative case approach demands three interlocking progressions:

1 Equality: There has to be a continued drive for equality across agendas of race, disability, gender, sexual orientation and social class, to remove barriers in the arts world, releasing and realising potential and helps transforms the arts so that they truly reflect the diversity of this country.

2 Recognition: There has to be a new conversation that attempts through various means to resituate diverse artists, both historically and theoretically, at the centre of art – whether that be the performing arts, the visual arts, music or literature.

3 A new vision: There also has to be the construction and application of a new framework for viewing diversity, one that takes it out of a negative or deficit’ model, and places it in an artistic context. Diversity becomes not an optional extra, but part of the fabric of our discussions and decisions about how we encourage an energetic, relevant, fearless and challenging artistic culture across the world.

The aim of the Creative Case International is twofold: firstly, to initiate and stimulate international discourse on a new approach to Diversity and Equality in the Arts. Secondly, to provide a forum that will support the new generation of artists, arts administrators, programmers and policy makers in increasing their knowledge and understanding of diverse practices as well as encouraging them to broaden their artistic influences and experiences.
The creative case for diversity was developed by Hassan Mahamdallie while he was senior strategy officer, diversity, at Arts Council England (ACE), the public funding body and development agency for the arts in England. It was launched at a 500 strong conference in Manchester, UK, in 2011. Nike Jonah ran the Decibel Performing Arts Showcase at ACE, which became a living model for the creative case. They have both teamed up with Monique Martin, City Parks, New York, to present the creative case at APAP 2014.

**How do we apply the Creative Case?**

Our guiding principle is that inclusivity of outlook and practice creates a better, richer and more dynamic arts sector. We need to build understanding and explore all possibilities at an international level so that we can learn from each other and enrich our understanding.

At the heart of this is the development of shared discourses, a bank of case studies and critical debate, led by artists, arts practitioners and audiences.

We are keen to set this new direction into the wider context of a rapidly changing and diversifying arts world, in which one-size-fits-all and top-down approaches are inappropriate. Organisational development should be based on models of openness, mutual exchange and democratisation of decision-making.

We all have to continue to dismantle the barriers that exclude the widest participation and access to the arts. Issues of class, gender, race and disability discrimination or stereotype have prevented working-class people, women, Black and minority ethnic and disabled people, lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgendered people and other groups from enjoying quality artistic experiences as creators and thereby growing their professional reputations.

But we have to know why we are driving for greater equality – the creative case provides a platform for a mutual un

**erstanding** of why these changes need to take place, thereby motivating change.

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**Resources list:**

www.creativecase.org.uk The creative case website is full of short films, blogs, articles, case studies and downloadable publications. Hassan will be blogging on the site during APAP 2014.

Heads up! A series of short videos by arts leaders in the UK provide a great introduction to the creative case and can be found on the creative case site.

www.dao.org.uk Disability Arts Online is the UK’s disability and art online presence

Kwame Kwei-Armah & National Theatre UK’s Black Plays Archive www.blackplaysarchive.org.uk/

What is the Creative Case for Diversity, Hassan Mahamdallie (downloadable from website)

The role of diversity in building adaptive resilience by Tony Nwachukwu and Mark Robinson, commissioned by Arts Council England (downloadable from website)

Beyond Cultural Diversity: The Case for Creativity, Third Text 2010

Access all areas Live Art and Disability, Live Arts Development Agency 2012

Ways of Seeing, John Berger 1972