

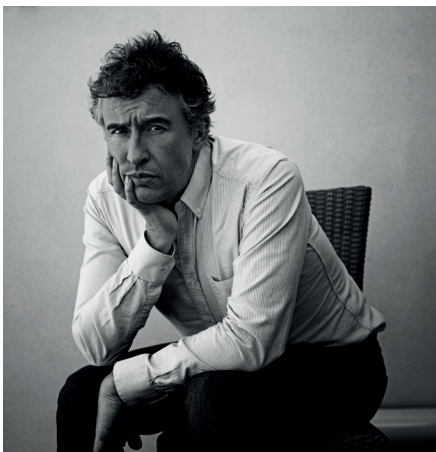


ACTING UP REPORT

Labour's inquiry into access and
diversity in the performing arts

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“IT’S NOT ENOUGH BEING
TALENTED, THESE DAYS
YOU NEED CASH.”



STEVE COOGAN

“It’s not enough being talented, these days you need cash.” Steve Coogan’s observation is all too true in Britain’s film, TV and theatre world.

When Tom Watson, Labour’s Deputy Leader and Shadow Culture Secretary, commissioned Tracy Brabin and Gloria De Piero to lead this inquiry in early 2017 it was in response to increasing concern about the inequalities in the cultural sector and in particular within the performing arts.

Whether looking at actors on stage and screen, or producers or directors or other backstage roles, these industries are increasingly dominated by a narrow set of people from well-off backgrounds.

This lack of diversity matters. It matters because our performing arts, from TV to film and theatre, represent us as a nation and no classes or sections of society should be left out. It also matters because there are fantastic career opportunities in the industry and these should be accessible to everyone, no matter where you come from or what you look like.

This report is based on two evidence sessions held in Parliament and over 100 written submissions. We received testimony from senior figures across the industry including actors, commissioners, directors, writers, campaigners and representatives of drama in school and at HE level as well as individuals and institutions working in performing arts all over the country.

The report focuses on the key points in a career where barriers to access cause people to ‘fall out’ of the industry pipeline:

- Drama provision in schools
- Drama schools and training
- Poverty pay in the job market
- Underrepresentation, typecasting and diversity behind the scenes.

The report also looks at this issue of data and monitoring. Comprehensive diversity data can be a driver of change, as we saw through the recent BBC salary release, but diversity data is currently too patchy. There is also a big class shaped hole – with too few organisations collecting data on socio-economic background, which is an important element of diversity that intersects strongly with other characteristics such as race and disability.

ACTING UP

DRAMA IN SCHOOLS

Our key findings were that drama and other arts subjects are treated as inferior in schools and students discouraged from taking them; drama facilities and theatre trips were limited in many schools across the country; and knowledge of the career opportunities both on and behind screen and stage were limited.

The introduction of the EBacc performance measure in particular has led to the systematic marginalisation of drama and other arts subjects in schools. Research by the House of Commons Library for the inquiry found since the Ebacc was introduced in 2010 uptake of drama GCSE had fallen 15.9%, drama A Level by 26% and the number of drama teachers fallen by 1,700 since 2010.

Our key policy recommendations in response to these problems are:

- **Revamp the EBacc:** The EBacc has led to the systematic marginalisation of arts subjects, particularly drama, from schools. The measure should be revamped to recognise the benefits of creative subjects in tandem with the importance of core academic subjects.
- **Fund school visits to the theatre:** The Government should increase funding for schools to take students on school trips to the theatre, allowing more money for schools in more rural areas and small towns that need a coach to travel further

DRAMA SCHOOL

Key concerns around drama schools were the expensive and non-centralised application process, requiring multiple individual applications at a high cost and concerns about inclusion and awareness inside drama schools.

There was considerable anger that drama schools charge audition fees of up to £100 whereas interviews at universities are free. Those lucky enough to be accepted to drama school felt that there was not enough concern for inclusion and not enough support for student from diverse and underprivileged backgrounds. Cush Jumbo told us “it wasn’t until I went to Central drama school that I actually looked in the mirror and realised I was of colour” and that when there she was told “my accent was lazy, that south Londoners had lazy mouths and lazy accents.” We heard many similar stories.

Our recommendations are:

- **Reform of the application process:** Application and audition fees can be prohibitive and are not justifiable. A centralised UCAS based process should be introduced for degree awarding institutions with a flat application fee.
- **Reform inside drama schools:** Despite many positive initiatives drama schools still need to be more aware of difference and disadvantage inside their walls. Focus needs to be placed on diversifying teaching bodies, increasing support for students and better preparing students for the difficult job market and the widespread danger of exploitation.

POVERTY PAY

"I can always find work to keep me busy but rarely find money that can support me..." This sentiment was repeated over and over both by actors and those working in theatres. There is a chronic culture of low and no pay in which actors in particular but also other roles are paid far less than the minimum wage. This means that all but the most well off are forced to find work in other industries to support their acting work, or forced out of a career altogether.

We looked at adverts for work on Spotlight, a major hub for job adverts, and found acting jobs paying as little as £2.10 an hour. Even more shocking was that some of these projects paying poverty wages had received grants from the Arts Council.

Our key recommendations are:

- **An HMRC review of NMW enforcement in the performing arts:** The performing arts is one of the most unregulated sections of the labour market.
- **Public funds:** The Arts Council and others lottery distributors should amend their guidelines to make clear that projects in which performers are not be paid the minimum wage shall not receive funding.

CASTING, COMMISSIONING AND REPRESENTATION

In the words of Julie Hesmondhalgh 'if you can't see it, you can't be it.' If people of colour, or those with disabilities or from a working class background don't see themselves on screen or stage they won't aspire to be on them, or behind them.

We found that diversity off stage was critical to the problems of diversity on stage. Without a diverse set of writers, casting directors, producers, commissioners and other key decision makers we are unlikely to get diverse shows with diverse casts.

Networks and attitudes toward 'risk' were key to the problem with employers recruiting for roles like directors and producers, as well as the cast, through personal networks to minimise of making the wrong recruitment decisions.

We also found the dominance of London in the industry to be a barrier to access. Even shows being put on in Liverpool or Newcastle are often cast in London, squeezing out local talent.

Our recommendations in this area

- **Combatting bias:** Casting Directors should undergo unconscious bias training to help realise and mitigate against bias, and as far as possible casting calls should be race blind.
- **Regional Auditions:** Shows performed outside London that are funded by the Arts Council or lottery money should hold some or all castings locally, not in London.
- **Supporting behind the scenes talent:** Broadcasters, film companies and theatres need to do more to bring on and develop working class and diverse talent in all levels and roles behind the scenes. Lenny Henry has recently urged Ofcom to monitor the BBC's diversity behind the scenes, we should monitor across the broadcasters too.

ACTING UP

FACING THE FACTS – MONITORING DIVERSITY

The recent release of top BBC pay and the proof of the gender and BAME pay gap that many thought existed showed the power hard data holds. Sometimes you need the revelation of the facts of the matter in order to force change.

We need a clearer picture of diversity across the performing arts. Right now we do not have a breakdown of diversity in leading drama schools, in theatres, in film, or in television.

We also need data that provides a holistic picture of what is going on. Too often statistical data has focused on protected characteristics and ignored social class. Until we plug this hole and start producing comprehensive data including class we won't see change happen.

Our recommendations:

- Filling the class gap. Class data should be an essential part of all diversity data collection in order to get a true picture of access and diversity across the performing arts. Politicians should spearhead a move to recognise socio-economic disadvantage in law.
- We need more a comprehensive programme of diversity data collection across the industry, in film, TV, theatre and drama schools.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Revamp the EBacc:** The EBacc has led to the **systematic marginalisation of arts subjects, particularly drama, from schools. The measure should be revamped to recognise the benefits of creative subjects in tandem with the importance of core academic subjects.**
- **Reform of the drama school application process:** Application and audition fees for drama schools can be prohibitive and are not justifiable. A centralised UCAS based process should be introduced for degree awarding institutions with a flat application fee.
- **We need an HMRC review of NMW enforcement in the performing arts:** Poverty pay is the Government's business. The performing arts is one of the most unregulated sections of the labour market. We need a targeted review by Her Majesties Revenue and Customs, who regulate payment of the minimum wage, looking at ensuring the National Minimum Wage is paid to those entitled to it.
- **Supporting behind the scenes talent:** Off screen diversity is critical to on screen diversity. Broadcasters, film companies and theatres need to do more to bring on and develop working class and diverse talent in all levels and roles behind the scenes. Lenny Henry has recently urged Ofcom to monitor the BBC's diversity behind the scenes, we should monitor across the broadcasters too.
- **Filling the class gap.** Class data should be an essential part of all diversity data collection in order to get a true picture of access and diversity across the performing arts. Politicians should spearhead a move to recognise socio-economic disadvantage in law.

Acting Up Report

The Labour Party's inquiry into access and diversity in the performing arts.

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With thanks to Dr Sam Friedman, Dr Dave O'Brien, Deborah Williams, Bethany Taylor and everyone who gave evidence to the inquiry. Your contribution has been invaluable.

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