



Contemporary Visual Arts Network East Midlands

Audit Report

November 2021





Contents

Introduction	3
Methodology	3
Recommendations from the review	4
Research findings	5
The Visual Arts sector in the East Midlands	5
Findings from the Steering Group	8
<i>Involvement of independent artists</i>	8
<i>Location representation</i>	9
<i>Demographic diversity</i>	9
<i>Skills and experience</i>	9
<i>Size of the steering group</i>	10
<i>Engagement of steering group members</i>	10
<i>CVAN Identity</i>	10
Arts organisations in the region	11
<i>Approaches to equity, equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)</i>	11
<i>Approach and examples of work with groups & communities</i>	12
<i>Commitment to equality and diversity</i>	12
<i>Culture of co-production and decision making</i>	13
<i>Skills, experience and training available to the team around EDI</i>	13
Appendix I: Interview guide for steering group interviews	14
Appendix II: Survey for organisations	14
Appendix III: Examples of worked with groups/communities	15
Attenborough Arts Centre/University of Leicester	15
Lincolnshire County Council	15
LU Arts/University of Loughborough	15
NN Contemporary	16
Primary	16

Introduction

With funding from the Art Fund, *Contemporary Visual Arts Network East Midlands* (CVAN EM) delivered a period of consultation and activity between July and December 2021. The project focused on establishing a firm foundation for CVAN EM to positively impact on public programmes and commissioning of visual arts in the East Midlands. Crucially, this project will be a catalyst for urgent work that addresses inequalities and under-representation in the region's sector, starting with CVAN EM.

The project addresses the knowledge, experience, and skills found in organisations across the East Midlands, with a focus on the CVAN EM Steering Group. Activity included a network audit to inform targeted recruitment to make decision-making more representative of the region, emphasising equity, transparency, and inclusivity.

Earthen Lamp delivered this consultation project for CVAN EM to understand the gaps in addressing diversity and representation in the visual arts sector in the East Midlands. This report presents the empirical findings, as well as recommendations on the next steps.

Methodology

Earthen Lamp conducted four interviews with current steering group members. The semi-structured interviews were themed to inform the recruitment of new steering group members. They covered the current situation of the steering group, as well as perceived gaps of knowledge, experience, skills, and spheres of influence, with a particular focus on increasing representation within the sector.

Additionally, *Earthen Lamp* reached out to arts organisations in the region to learn about their approaches to equity, equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and understand what strengths and weaknesses exist in the sector in the EM. The organisations were asked to respond to an email survey covering the following areas:

- The organisations' approach and examples of work with groups & communities
- The organisations' commitment to equality and diversity
- The organisations' culture of co-production and decision making around programming, commissioning, and organisational change
- Skills, experience and training available to the team around EDI

The findings of these two qualitative approaches are supplemented with findings from a UK wide study into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related lockdown on the visual arts sector. This study was commissioned by Contemporary Visual Arts Network (CVAN), working with other UK based visual arts sector support and professional bodies.



Recommendations from the review

Although this review was focussed on arriving at a clear plan of action with regards to diversifying the steering group of CVAN EM, there are a few areas that first need to be considered by the team. The review of information about visual arts workers in the East Midlands, interviews with current members of the CVAN EM steering group, and information provided by visual arts organisations in the region has led to unearthing some bigger questions about the motivation, timing and process needed to diversify the CVAN EM steering group.

The first area to focus on is **what diverse and representational mean** in this context. The review shows that currently the sector in the East Midlands appears demographically homogeneous. Does the steering group need to be representative of the sector or is it more important to have varied perspectives, opinions and lived experiences? Who is considered an authentic representative/spokesperson? Does CVAN EM have defined priorities on which characteristics are vital for the organisation? Is it about ethnicity/abilities /medium of practice/knowledge and experience/sector representation, etc.?

The second question to consider is **why diversification is needed at the current time**. It was universally acknowledged that currently the membership of the steering group is depleted, and more members are needed for the group to be more functional and effective. Additionally, the current state of the sector and context might also link to gaps and, hence, the types of diversity CVAN could focus on. It is recommended that CVAN EM agree on what perspectives of diversity are relevant to the organisation at the present time before more members are recruited. It may also be worth considering an advisory group to support the work of the steering group.

The third question relates to **the role CVAN EM wants to play with regards to EDI within the wider visual arts sector**. Is the organisation modelling their response on other CVAN regions and, if so, which ones, or do they want to take a more leadership role in this regard?

The fourth important area to consider is the **need for more tangible and clear articulation of the terms of reference** for the steering group. This needs to be formalised internally, as well as communicated externally to the sector. Is more clarity needed about the roles, motivations, and outputs of this group before more members are recruited? Do these need to be more clearly communicated to the sector as a whole so that more relevant members are attracted to the roles? The review shows that freelance artists are probably more reluctant to join due to a lack of understanding of the time commitment involved and that this time commitment is not financially picked up by an institution like it is for the current members.

These questions arise in light of the other organisations' responses to this review. Currently LGBTQ groups, mental health issues and Black communities appear to be of interest for engagement for organisations in the region. Organisations are aware that they want to address "EDI issues" and have related policies, but no clear sense of why they are doing it. For CVAN it is therefore more important to define a goal in this regard and also identify the systemic barriers related to engagement in the region. It is essential not to be reactionary but have a more strategic approach to defining and then embracing diversity that is fit for purpose for the steering group and CVAN EM as a whole.

Research findings

The Visual Arts sector in the East Midlands

In 2021, CVAN UK conducted a UK wide study into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related lockdown on the visual arts sector. This study was developed with other UK based visual arts sector support and professional bodies. It was the second study of its type and a follow on from the study conducted last year during the pandemic and related lockdown in the UK. In May 2020, the first study acted as a rapid action tool to understand the position of the workforce dependent on freelance gig economy in the visual arts sector in the UK at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. This second study provided evidence on the current situation of the workforce in the visual arts sector in the UK. The study was conducted through an online survey available in English and Welsh. The survey, hosted by *Earthen Lamp*, was circulated nationally to visual arts workers through established networks of the partner organisations. The online survey was live in August and September 2021 and a total of 674 completed surveys were received in that period.

This section of the report presents the data for the East Midlands region that was collected as part of the UK wide study and compares the regional findings to the national picture. Of all 674 UK wide responses, 48 respondents identified as East Midlands based, which is 7% of the national data set (see figure 1).

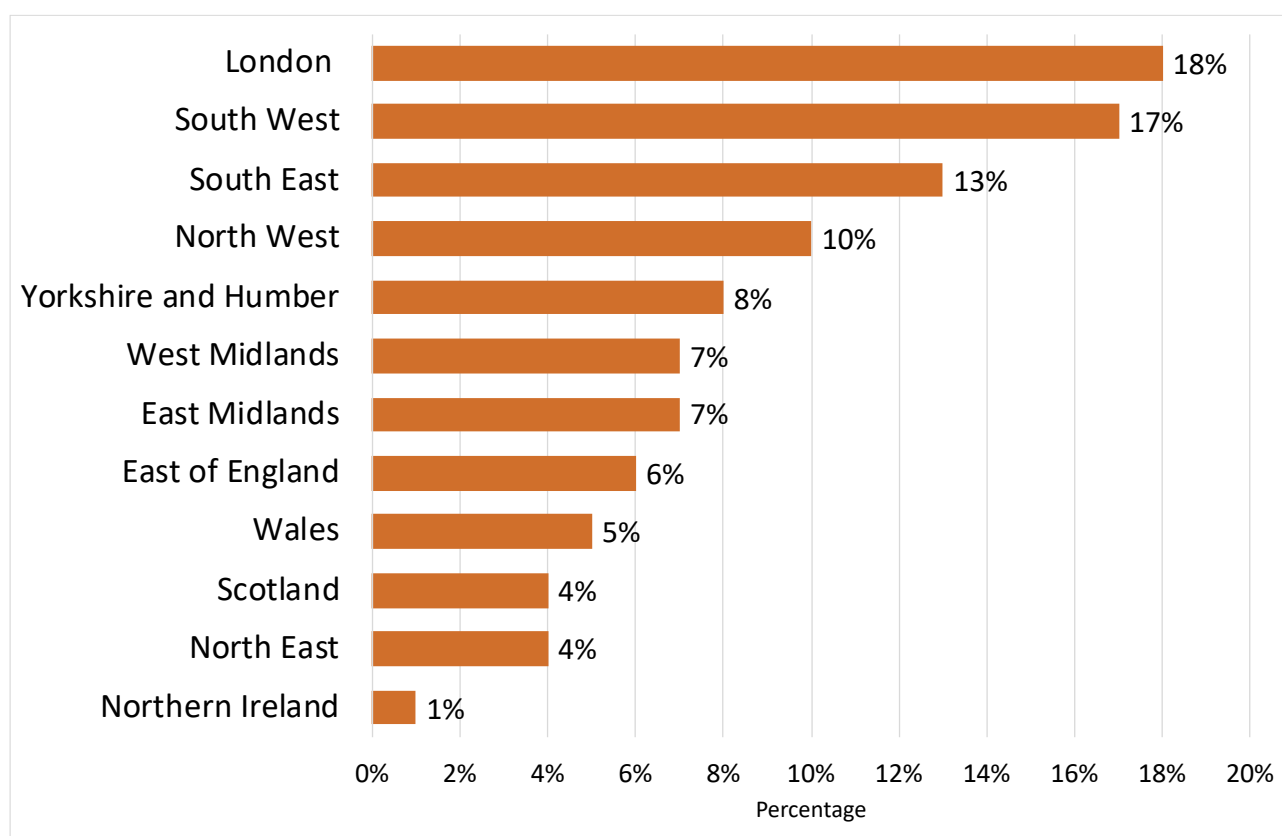


Figure 1 Regional distribution of responses to UK wide survey

Demographic distribution of EM visual arts respondents

All but one respondent identified as White, 41 respondents identified as White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British and five as other White ethnicities (White mixed European, White European, Gypsy or Irish Traveller). Compared to the national data set (80% respondents identified as White), the EM had fewer non-White respondents.



Nearly a quarter of respondents (11 out of 48) identified as a D/deaf or disabled person or said they have a long-term health condition. Two respondents preferred not to answer this question. Across the UK 19% of the respondents identified as a D/deaf or disabled person or said they have a long-term health condition.

The age group distribution of the EM respondents (figure 2) is widely similar to the UK wide picture; however, the survey did not collect any EM responses from the age group 18–24.

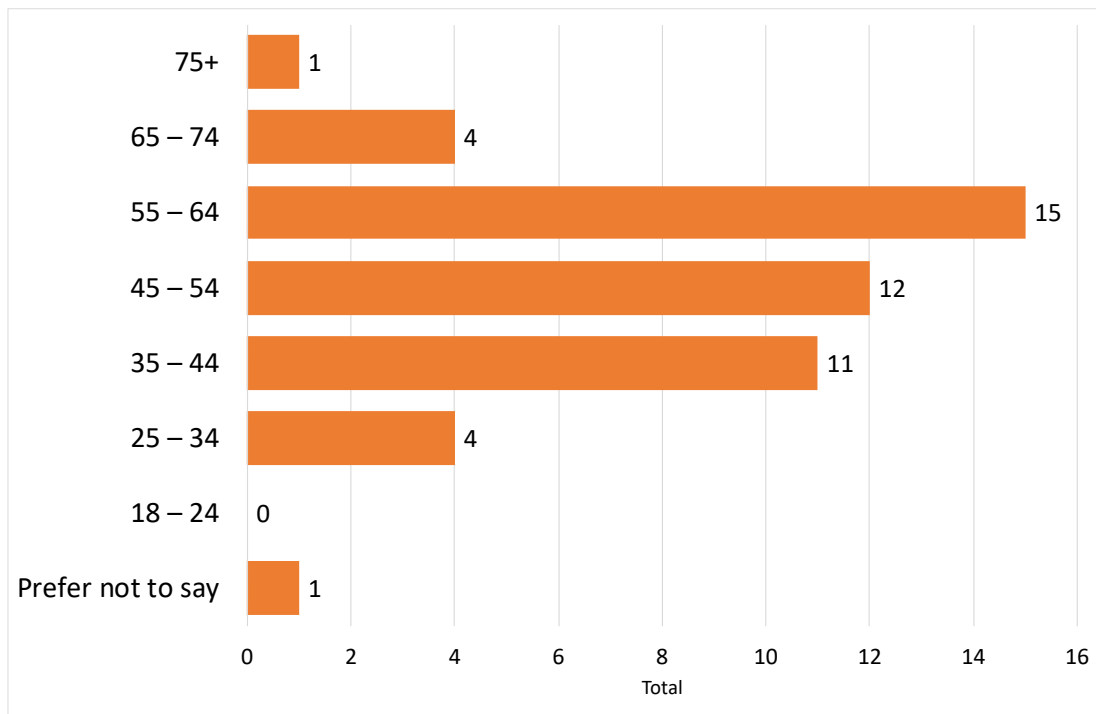


Figure 2 Sample distribution – age groups

The map below (figure 3) indicates where the respondents live based on the postcodes they provided.

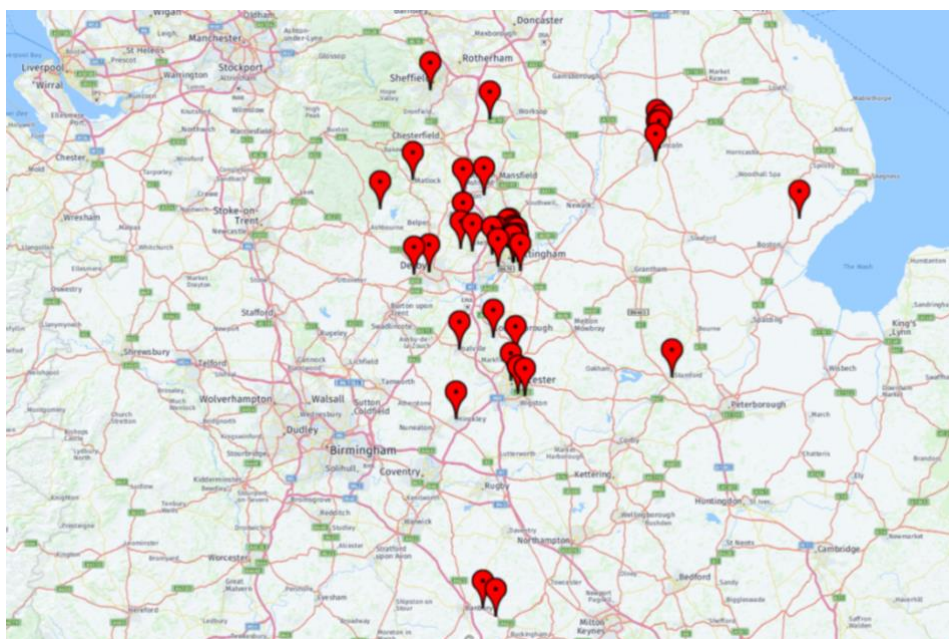


Figure 3 Location of residence according to postcode data

Type of practice of EM visual arts respondents

The vast majority (35 out of 49) of EM respondents were artists, makers, and arts practitioners, and four photographers (see figure 4). These findings are similar to the nationwide data with the largest group identifying as artists, maker, or arts practitioners (69%), followed by photographers (11%) and curators, producers, and project managers (9%) by a considerable margin.

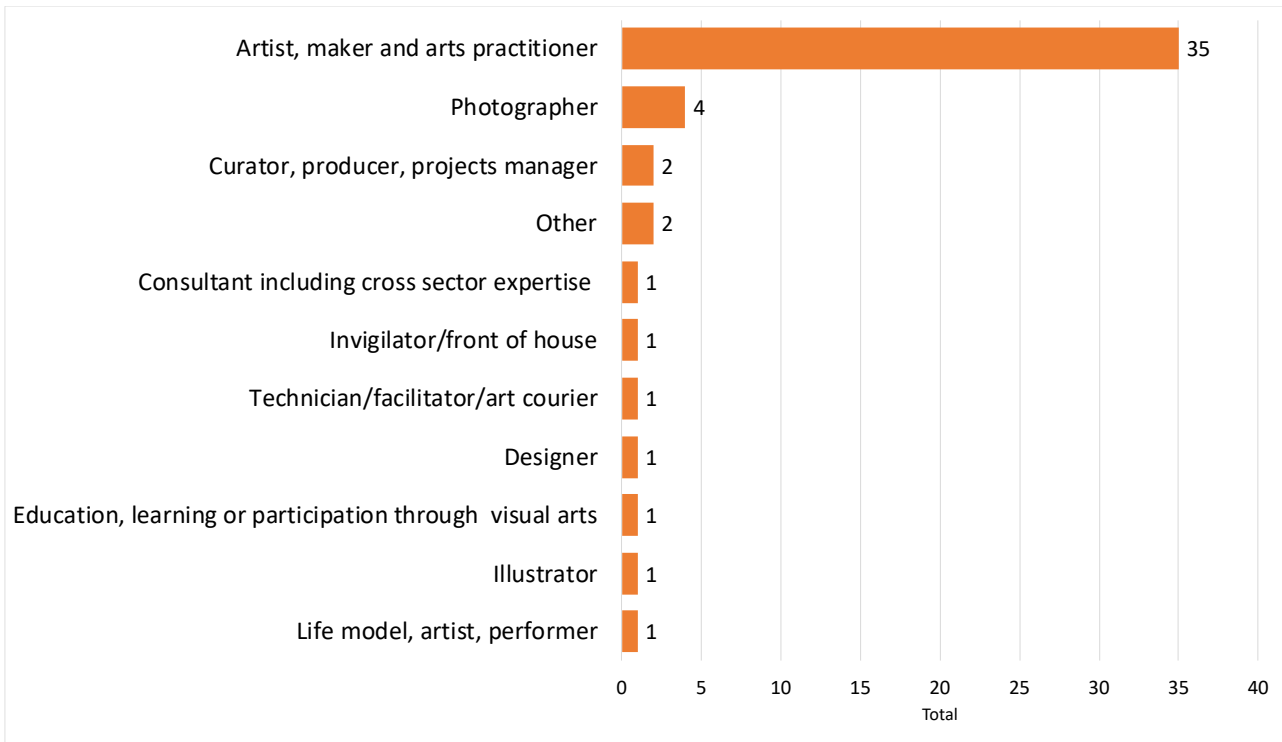


Figure 4 Primary role in the visual arts sector

Nearly half of the EM respondents said their livelihood is 100% dependent on the visual arts sector, this is similar to 41% of respondents across the UK.

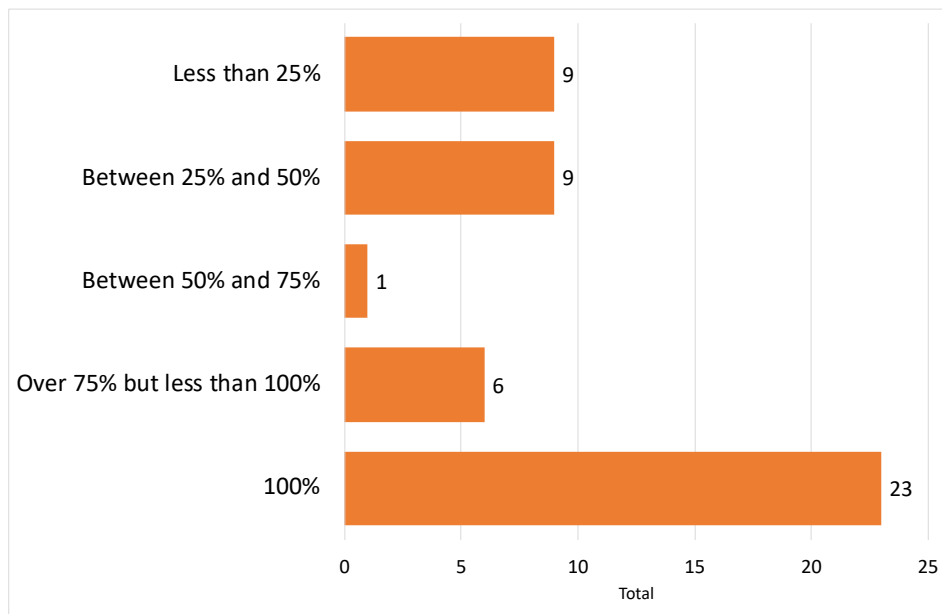


Figure 5 Percentage of your overall livelihood dependent on sector

The vast majority of EM respondents (35 out of 48) have worked in the visual arts sector for more than ten years, only four have worked in the sector for less than three years. This is similar to the national picture which showed that 74% have worked in the sector for more ten years, while 6% have for less than three years.

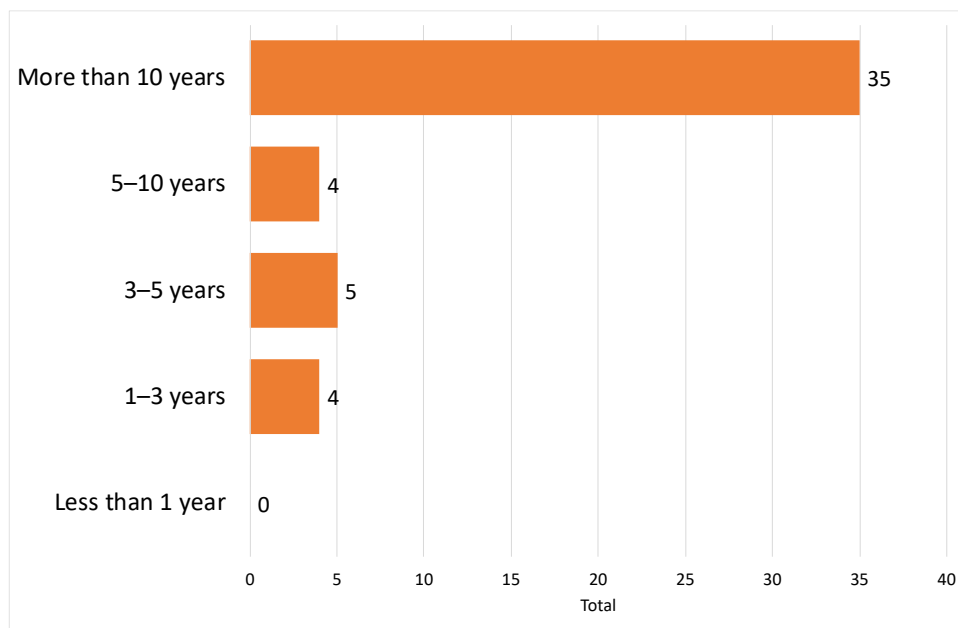


Figure 6 Years working in the sector

Findings from the Steering Group

This section of the report summarises themes that emerged from the interview with four steering group members. The interview guide for these interviews is included in Appendix I.

Involvement of independent artists

A recurrent theme across the interviews was that artists unaffiliated to an institution were not represented on the steering group. It was noted that two of the steering group members currently work as artists, but they also work in an institution in addition to this. There was some discussion as to why independent artists may not have joined the steering group; it was suggested that factors could include not feeling as though they have a place to speak as a lone voice, and that institutionally aligned members could attend meetings as part of their work, whereas freelance workers would have to juggle this commitment alongside their work.

“Solely individual artist is missing. One member is an early career artist who works in an organisation, so they have both worlds. However, the group is missing the voice of an independent artist who isn't in an organisation.”

“There's room for an artist who doesn't have an organisational hat - all of the artists on the group also work in institutions.”

“More practicing artists need to be represented, as well as a range of creative practitioners from different career stages.”

Location representation

Several responses refer to the representation of different geographic areas in the East Midlands. In general, respondents indicated that rural areas of the region were underrepresented and gave reasons as to why this may be the case. It was understood that rural arts networks and communication channels may differ from those in urban areas, and that limited public transport options may hinder involvement at in-person meetings. In addition to rural areas, specific areas of the East Midlands were named as potentially being underrepresented e.g. Northamptonshire, Leicestershire and Lincolnshire (though it was noted that current steering group members work in Derby, Leicester, and Nottingham).

“It could be hard to reach rural organisations and artists. Perhaps the call out for members misses their channels, and we need to find alternative marketing strategies. Targeted representation could be an option. Public transport in rural areas is poor and could be a barrier to joining the steering group.”

“Regionally, rural arts aren't the same as cities. It would be great to get involvement from rural areas.”

Demographic diversity

Although there were some comments that the steering group was representative of different demographic characteristics, as well as skills and experiences, respondents frequently noted that some demographics felt underrepresented within the group. Respondents recognised that demographics had not necessarily been disclosed to the group, in particular disability, and so they did not always feel able to comment on the current steering group. Several group members noted that the group was predominantly White, and that greater diversity of race would be beneficial. In addition, a greater degree of disability representation was encouraged by interviewees, with one noting that "conversation often happens from an able-bodied perspective". Some interviewees advocated for a greater range of class backgrounds being represented in the steering group. It was also common for respondents to make a more general comment advocating for a wider spread of "cultural backgrounds" or "factors" to be represented in the group, which perhaps indicates a sense of wanting to see greater diversity in the group without this appearing tokenistic.

“Here is a fairly diverse spread of demographic characteristics, including class, ethnic group and career stage.”

“The steering group is very white. Different cultural backgrounds included in the group would be good. Conversation often happens from an able-bodied perspective, so a disability perspective would be useful.”

“There's only one group member who isn't white, which feels like a poor ratio. Intersecting factors should be better represented, like a wider spread of class backgrounds.”

Skills and experience

Interviewees indicated a range of skills and experiences that informed their work on the steering group. It appeared that the current membership had a wide range of institutional experience which they wanted to use to support the regional visual arts sector through CVAN EM. Some interviewees indicated that the substantial experience offered by steering group members was beneficial to the running of the group. When asked about representation, it was common for interviewees to speak of the diverse professional backgrounds which group members have. There were some recommendations for professional experiences



which could be represented on the steering group, namely technicians, artists including early-career artists, and those from larger organisations.

“The steering group needs more people on it, including organisations and technicians.”

Size of the steering group

Respondents commented that the current steering group has too few members. Although it was noted that a smaller group makes for easy discussion and agreement, it was also remarked that there had been occasions in which there were only three steering group members present for a meeting. The group has decreased in size over time, in part owing to people leaving their roles during the pandemic. At the same time, respondents report that there has not been a recruitment drive for several years, and recruitment is now a priority. In general, respondents would like to see an increase in group membership.

“It is a very limited group. It used to be up to ten people, of whom 2-3 would be artists. There are a mix of disciplines but not a huge number of artists.”

“The group is small, but that's not necessarily a bad thing for getting things done. The group is going through a period of structural change, and it's easier to get a smaller group of people to agree to something or to arrange a meeting.”

“The current steering group is too small. There are only five members, plus the director. People left the group owing to furlough.”

Engagement of steering group members

Several interviewees referred to an issue with previous group members not attending meetings and subsequently being removed from the group and expressed a desire for future steering group members to engage fully. The recruitment process was considered by some respondents to not only find qualified candidates but also ask the candidates to affirm their commitment to joining the steering group. One respondent acknowledged that steering group member capacity to engage in projects and activities is limited owing to their working commitments, and that this can cause delays in taking action. Overall, it appeared that there was a perception by steering group members that the group has limited capacity, in part owing to the low membership. There was also a perception from one respondent that other networks have more funding to support additional staffing.

“When recruiting, you have to ask for a commitment - in the past, attendees haven't turned up for meetings or contributed to the group. Perhaps more regular meetings are needed to ensure people stay engaged.”

CVAN Identity

A topic that was raised on a few occasions was that of CVAN's identity, nationally and regionally. Some interviewees perceived that CVAN nationally was in a state of flux and that, as such, it could be hard to identify the network's identity. Additionally, some interviewees noted that CVAN EM was in a period of transition, from one director's leadership to another's. Lack of funding to support staffing and activities such as programming were all raised as concerns and as limits to CVAN EM's work.

“At the moment, there's a move from an old regime to a new regime which is trying to assert its identity. The national network has an identity crisis, too. Arts Council England doesn't seem to want to support CVAN EM. CVAN nationally doesn't have a cohesive voice - every group is trying to do different, cool things.”



Arts organisations in the region

This section gives an overview of East Midlands based arts organisations and their approaches to equity, equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). The five arts organisations in the region that were consulted were:

- Attenborough Arts Centre/University of Leicester
- Lincolnshire County Council
- LU Arts/University of Loughborough
- NN Contemporary
- Primary

Approaches to equity, equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)

All organisations mention their commitment to the EDI topic in their mission statements or have written policies to address matters of EDI explicitly. The two arts organisations that are part of universities are also covered by the wider policies that are implemented on campus.

“LU Arts is committed to the stand against racism and that we take individual and collective responsibility for ensuring that our operation and activity is inclusive to all and representative of the community we serve.”

“Breaking down barriers to the arts, we are inclusive, radical, and ambitious. Bold in our creativity and action, we are citizens of change.”

Some of the institutions have policies that emphasise their awareness of EDI issues and stress their commitment to create an inclusive workspace for everyone. These statements are either included in business plans or separate documents, e.g. LU Arts’ “Race Equality Statement” or Primary’s “Equity, Diversity and Inclusion - Strategy and Action Plan” and “Equal Opportunities Policy” or Lincolnshire County Councils’ “Diversity and inclusion policy”, which starts off with the following statement:

“We encourage a supportive and inclusive culture. People from different backgrounds, cultures and experiences bring value to the workplace. We believe that diversity and inclusion bring benefits. We work better and improve services if we have a supportive environment. Everyone has visible and non-visible differences, by respecting these differences, colleagues, customers, communities, and other stakeholders can feel valued. “

These policy statements are translated into procedures to encourage departmental diversity through its’ hiring and recruitment processes. One organisation includes a regularly revised and updated commitment in their recruitment that says:

“We positively encourage people from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds and those who self-identify as disabled to apply to join our team as they are under-represented within our workforce and in arts jobs nationally. We guarantee to interview any candidate from a Black, Asian and ethnically diverse background and/or who self-identifies as disabled who meets the essential criteria for the role.”

One of the organisations have included compulsory training sessions in their recruitment processes. This means that a minimum of one member of a selection panel must have attended recruitment and selection training. Everyone involved in recruitment and selection to safer recruitment posts must have attended safer recruitment training.



Approach and examples of work with groups & communities

All organisations indicated that they work with different groups and communities in their programming and commissioning. The following groups and communities were specifically named:

- “Communities of interest” that group around shared interests and particular projects
- Age UK Northamptonshire
- Campus community
- LGBTQIA+ Youth Groups
- Northamptonshire Black History Association
- Northampton Carnival Arts Consortium
- People suffering from mental health issues
- People with disabilities
- Schools and Universities

Primary stressed that they did not develop separate engagement or education programmes, choosing instead to devise and deliver all outward facing activity as part of a coherent public programme. The programme paid close attention to context, responding to, and also influencing Primary’s developing building, and the surrounding neighbourhoods. They devised programme structures that enabled the development of long-term relationships to be developed with artists, partners, and communities. Short case studies and example of current work undertaken by the organisations can be found in Appendix III.

All organisations have identified areas of further engagement and have ambitions to work with other groups and communities in the future. Apart from a wish to engage more with local residents and the communities the organisations are surrounded by, they mentioned that they wish to work more with:

- LGBTQIA+ communities
- Artists with disabilities
- People with disabilities
- Young people and families
- Black audiences

Commitment to equality and diversity

The organisations shared various examples that showcase their organisations’ commitment to EDI through different activities and formats.

LU Arts hosts a Race Equality Steering Group. These regular meetings with a group of students from different ethnicities helps them to inform programming and marketing. This has resulted in changes to content in terms of activity and also the images they might use in marketing, promoting an inclusive campus via various arts projects that seek to engage and give visibility to different groups within the university community.

Attenborough Arts Centre are currently working with the British Museum on a project that seeks to extend their work with the LGBTQIA+ communities. They have taken on four Kickstart employees with the intention to support young unemployed people into careers in the cultural sector.

Primary have initiated a bespoke training approach for staff and Board through facilitated sessions with Teresa Cisneros (the Inclusive Practice Lead at the Wellcome Collection) in autumn 2020. This outlined an approach to develop understanding of inequality/oppression (including intersections between race, class, gender, disability, neurodiversity), how this plays out in Primary, and how they can enact change. They undertook the first part of this in 2021 and will be continuing this process over the coming year. They



developed this approach as they felt that one off training on EDI would not be adequate to create the change needed in the organisation and the sector.

NN Contemporary hosted an online event earlier in 2021 called Access, Power and Visibility. In this talk, they focused on unravelling the design provocation presented by the Social Model of Disability – a key framework in the Disability Rights Movement – for the collective reimagining of access to protest and space. Grounded in their collective practice, Arjun Harrison-Mann, Benjamin Redgrove and Kaiya Waerea proposed a series of provocations, both conceptual and practice-based, that will explore the role of the proxy in shifting the dynamic between power and presence, understanding the nuances of visibility under lockdown, and the importance of foregrounding anti-ableist aesthetics.

Most organisations are currently working on dismantling access barriers (physically and digitally), as well as updating contracts and agreements to align with new EDI policies.

Culture of co-production and decision making

Most organisations do not have an official lead on the EDI issues; however, they could nevertheless name individuals who are considered most knowledgeable and engaged with this topic within their teams.

“The senior staff team reviews and updates our EDI policies, procedures, and action plans with input from Board members. The full staff team are involved in conversations about EDI, input into the areas of work that relate to their roles and take part in training.”

The organisations described collaborative formats through which they review and monitor organisational policies and processes with regard to their impact on equality and diversity. The decision managing competency lies with senior management, in case of the campus-based organisations the universities have responsibility for wider policies which the organisations have to adhere to.

Skills, experience and training available to the team around EDI

All organisations encourage their staff to engage in training that addresses EDI issues. Topics that have been addressed in previous training were:

- British Sign Language (BSL)
- Disability awareness
- Diversity and inclusion
- Gender, identity, sexuality
- MAKATON
- Neurodiversity
- Safeguarding
- Unconscious bias

One organisation indicated that further sector-specific training would be greatly appreciated, and they would find networking with wider groups useful, as they are currently working to diversify voice and ownership of decision making within their programming and decisions, but they are aware that there is much more to do.

The organisations promote a greater awareness of equality and diversity issues through their programme and commissions by programming work that addresses certain topics or supports a diversity of artists.



Appendix I: Interview guide for steering group interviews

Introduction

- Tell us about your experience of being on the Steering Group
- How long have you been and why did you decide to become a member of the steering group of CVAN East Midlands? How did you join or who approached you?
- What do you think is your greatest strength / contribution to the steering group?

Current situation

- How would you describe the current composition of the steering group?
- Please think of a recent discussion of the steering group, how did this conversation develop?
- Identifying gaps: Knowledge/Experience/Skills/Sphere of influence
- Thinking of the current steering group, what do you regard as the most crucial Knowledge/Experience/Skills/Sphere of influence that is missing?
- Can you recall a situation during which you thought: It would be good to have [...] at the table? What was this?

Diversity & representation

- Thinking about the contemporary visual arts sector in the region and the current steering group, do you see any gaps in representation?
- Why do you think [...] is currently not represented?
- What do you think could be done to attract [...] to join the steering group?
- Could you give us an example of a Visual Arts organisation/network or CVAN region that is doing well in terms of EDI and representation on the board?

Future

- If you could ask anyone in the world to join the steering group, who would that be?
- Is there anything else you would like to share on this topic?

Appendix II: Survey for organisations

Organisation's approach to equity, equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)

- If your organisation has a mission statement concerning EDI, please tell us about it.
- Does your organisation have EDI policies and procedures in place, e.g. to encourage departmental diversity through its hiring and recruitment processes or public events programme? If yes, please tell us more about it.

Organisation's approach and examples of work with groups/communities

- Please give us a brief overview of which groups/communities you are working with. Is your approach comparable to that of another cultural organisation?
- If applicable, please give us two case studies/examples of when you worked with groups/communities that you are proud of.
- Which groups/communities would you like to work with in the future?

Organisational commitment to equality and diversity – beyond compliance

- Please give us a couple of examples that showcase your organisations' commitment to EDI.
- Are there any areas you are currently working on/issues you would like to address in the future?

Organisation's culture of co-production and decision making around programming, commissioning, and organisational change

- Within your organisation who is the lead on the EDI issues? (e.g. Role or named individual)
- Within your organisation, who reviews and monitors organisational policies and processes with regard to their impact on equality and diversity and, where appropriate, making recommendations for change?

Skills, experience and training available to the team around EDI

- In relation to EDI, what training (formal or informal) is available to the team.
- Are there any other ways in which your organisation promotes a greater awareness of equality and diversity issues?

Appendix III: Examples of worked with groups/communities

Attenborough Arts Centre/University of Leicester

"Our SENSory Atellier project has worked over the last 3 years with SEN schools in Leicester. Our Inclusive Youth Arts Programme has worked with severely disabled children outside of the school setting."

More at <https://unlockingtheworldblog.com/>

Lincolnshire County Council

"These include our Young People's group (ages 16-25), where as well as working with local schools, colleges and universities, we work with commissioned charities such as Development Plus and The Network to ensure that this fully-funded programme of workshops, trips and decision-making programming opportunities is open to as many young people across the county as possible.

In response to the pressures and difficulties that pandemic created, we have also recently run artist-based projects and collaborations with the groups EDAN Lincs; Lincolnshire County Council's Day Services for adults with disabilities; and Lincoln Foodbank. During 2020 and 2021 we have run individual and bespoke participant-led projects at these sites and centres around the county, which have not only had significant impact on the communities but also encouraged us to think more in-depth about the way we run our community projects."

LU Arts/University of Loughborough

"Ian Giles working with the student LGBT+ Association: <http://www.iangiles.co.uk/projects#/lets-gather-to-remeber/>

Radar 'What Makes This Image Trans' project: <https://www.lboro.ac.uk/news-events/news/2021/may/radar-explores-lived-experiences-trans-people/>"



NN Contemporary

“Northamptonshire Digital Black Archives is a project developed by NN in partnership with the Northamptonshire Black History Association. It involves the digitalisation of the archival material assembled by the Association and three artist residencies responding to it. The project will provide a platform for preservation and analysis of the historically significant material documenting past Black histories in the region and facilitate the creation of artistic research relating to the contemporary experience of Black communities. The Northamptonshire Digital Black Archives digital platform comprises an accessible, online archive and the end results of artist residencies. The Digital programmes team is responsible for this project. In 2018, NN proudly held an exhibition 'A Manipulation of Terms' by artist Dylan Fox. As part of the public program, Dylan hosted the symposium When Art is Not Enough: Activism for the Transgender Community, in order to expand upon the themes of the exhibition and address these in a more direct way. Dylan’s practice explores the physical, medical, emotional, and social aspects of gender transition, specifically, the frustration felt with inefficient transgender healthcare pathways. The exhibition title, A Manipulation of Terms, stems from the inflated truths within many forms of advertising and signage at British seaside towns. These ideas of manipulation, miscommunication, and false advertising relate back to Dylan’s experiences of transition within the UK healthcare system. His works may be seen as both autobiographical in nature as well as representing the wider transgender community. By displacing aspects of seaside iconography in this way, and re-situating these in the Midlands, the artworks can take on new meaning and become relatable to an even wider public. The Artistic Director is responsible for this exhibition.”

Primary

“The Engagement Curator leads on socially engaged work, with input and support from the wider programme team.

You can read about our long-term Making Place programme here: <https://www.weareprimary.org/projects-archive/making-place>

An example of a co-produced project is here:


<https://www.weareprimary.org/projects-archive/chimera-plantarium-project>”

Earthen Lamp exists to bring bright thinking to cultural and heritage organisations and creative businesses. What sets us apart is our straight talking approach, our experience, and attitude to tackle any challenge with gusto. We believe that simple ideas and solutions can light up the darkest corners and solve complex issues.

If you would like to discuss the dark corners in your organisation or business, or just fancy a chat to see how we can help, drop us a line.



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