

Music and Social Justice Policy

Guidance

‘The support that we give to creative practitioners, particularly D/deaf and disabled people, those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, women, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, either at the beginning of their careers or at moments when they are seeking to test different paths, can provide essential time, space, and affirmation precisely when those things are needed most. For individuals, the significance of such support may not become clear until years later, but collectively, its impact across the cultural sphere is profound.’ – Arts Council England Strategy 2020-2030

girls and young women, especially from BAME backgrounds, are often unable to event cultural events in the evening because parents and caregivers felt it unsafe for them to be too far from home. It is important to attend to how factors like gender and ethnic background work together in people’s lives, in order to make the arts inclusive for everyone.

When discussing inclusivity in the workplace, the phrase ‘getting in and getting on’ is often used. It isn’t enough to make sure that people are able to attain entry level positions within the creative industries; everyone should have equal access to the promotions, training opportunities, collaborations and etc.. This provides a framework we can apply outside of industry as well. Policy changes in service of social justice should not just make sure that people can access the arts, but rather that everyone can get equal benefit from sustained arts engagement.

Summary

A just society is just from top to bottom, in every aspect of every person’s life. From the young to the elderly, in education, in the workplace, in private and communal life, from the local to the national; music can drive social justice in all these areas.

Often, the exclusion and injustice is multifactorial. A report by the Beatfrees consulting agency found that

Key Points

Multifactorial

Creativity and culture for all is a goal in its own right, but it also drives other important benefits. Economic development, social cohesion at a local and national level, mental and physical health improvements have all been linked with access to the arts.

Measurable and quantifiable

Transition to a New Public Management approach to public services in the 1980's lead to an increased focus on accountability. Wave Hill's Social Impact Framework Review found that this heightened focus on easily quantifiable economic and participatory measures, at the expense of measures of wellbeing and community cohesion.

Whilst economic and participatory measures remain useful, many strategies have been developed now for tracking and evaluating less obviously quantifiable improvements.

Challenges

Hugely polarised context

Public discourse around social justice is notably polarised, and this makes the policy context challenging. Elected politicians are increasingly uneasy about publicly supporting social justice initiatives.

Awareness is not directly translating into change

Arts Council England's 2020-30 Strategy finds that whilst 'awareness of the issue is greater than it used to be', there nevertheless 'remains a persistent and widespread lack of diversity across the creative industries and in publicly funded cultural organisations.

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 is in place to prevent discrimination on the basis of nine protected characteristics. These are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

The Act establishes a legal framework for establishing when discrimination has taken place through its description of a series of ‘prohibited acts’. It is then the legal framework through which social justice is assessed and developed in the UK. Policy work aiming to further social justice goals should therefore be in keeping with the Equality Act. It is a good idea to frame policy arguments with reference to the Equality Act

Outcomes

As well as a positive in its own right, progress toward social justice can stimulate several other positive outcomes. It will be important to pay attention to where your intervention intersects with such outcomes, and include this where appropriate in any policy work. You might consider:

- Wellbeing and fulfilment.
- Access to work and economic contribution.
- Social and community cohesion.
- Mental and physical health.

Creative, Inclusive Places

The AHRC recently published a report linking feelings of attachment to place with positive economic outcomes, senses of community, environmentally-conscious behaviours and engagement with local planning and democracy. Feelings of connection to place can help build inclusive and engaged communities.

Scales of wellbeing

Social wellbeing happens on different scales. In their 2020-30 plan, Arts Council England identify ‘Creative People’, ‘Cultural Communities’ and ‘A Creative and Cultural Country’ as their three intended outcomes. Everyone should feel supported personally, welcome in local communities, and a part of the national culture and economy.

These three scales interlink and overlap with each other. Feeling welcome in our local area is powerful in helping us feel welcome on a national, societal level. For this reason, a lot of national policy on wellbeing is enacted on a local scale. Pilot schemes with local authorities can therefore be excellent models for national programmes.

Digital Inclusion

The arts are not always accessed in person. A recent report from the Good Things Foundation highlighted the importance of ‘digitally inclusive’ practices. According to Lloyds Bank’s UK Consumer Digital Index, 11.7 million in the UK lack ‘Essential Digital Skills’. Whilst online content can be more accessible for certain groups, it is important not to assume that digital content is easily accessed by all.

Social Evaluation Frameworks

It is important to have frameworks that allow for interventions to be evaluated in ways that incorporate non-economic benefits. But it has historically been difficult to quantify such benefits, and thus to make evidence-based policy recommendations that aim toward social justice. Lots of work has been undertaken recently to provide evaluation frameworks that remedy this issue. An ACE funded Social Impact Framework review surmised from the latest evaluation guidance from HM Treasury that ‘the government increasingly views a more diverse range of evidence as important in informing decision making’. Alongside quantitative measurements, there is increasingly a willingness to accept qualitative evidence. A survey commissioned by the report’s writers found that the most common evaluation frameworks used to convey social impact were:

The Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)

A survey that can be used to ascertain wellbeing levels and track over time. Is well-used and respected in industry and policy contexts. Available in a 14 question and a more concise 7 question format.

Story of Change

A workshop based approach which begins with a project’s vision, and plans backward by breaking into achievable goals whilst keeping in mind various stakeholders. Can break abstract social intentions into goals that can then be tracked; progress can be recorded in a way that is easy for policy makers to understand.

CultureCounts

Platform providing a wealth of tools for analysing cultural impact. Allows for the creation of surveys through selecting questions and modules grouped by intended outcome, type of event/institution/project, and so on. Also provides tools for analysing responses.

Outcomes STAR

Is particularly attuned to measuring successes in person-focussed services. Provides evaluative toolkits to be worked through in conversation with participants that help measure their progress toward significant outcomes.

Important Bodies

Department of Health and Social Care

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Department for Education

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Ministry of Justice

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Arts Council England

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Arts Council of Wales

Academy of Social Justice

Works with the Ministry of Justice to organise events and knowledge exchange for those interested in social justice.

Office for Equality and Opportunity

Government office leading on equality policy, often distributing calls for evidence with a direct view to policy reform. Contains three sub-units: Disability Unit, Race Equality Unit, and Women and Equalities Unit.

Social Mobility Commission

Advises the government on questions of social mobility. Publish useful research, arrange events, and facilitate networking.

The National Lottery Community Fund

Awards money to community projects across the UK. Often support projects aiming to improve social justice.

Centre for Cultural Value

Research group based at the University of Leeds, focussed on translating cultural research into policy influence. Has lots of useful resources for evidence-based cultural policy work.

Useful Documents

Arts Council England, 'Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case: A Data Report 2019/20'

A report on diversity within the workforces of ACE's National Portfolio Organisations and Major Partner Museums. Also covers grant recipients and audiences.

Arts Council England, 'Equality and diversity within the arts and cultural sector in England: Evidence and literature review'

A broader report commissioned by ACE, summarising a large amount of evidence on diversity in the arts and cultural sector. Covers participation as well as employment.

DCMS, Taking part focus on: Diversity Trends, 2005 to 2015/16

Summarises ten years of change in diversity within the arts. Soon to be superseded by a 2015 to 2025/6 report.

EW Group, 'Making a Shift – Disabled People and the Arts and Cultural Sector Workforce in England: Understanding trends, barriers and opportunities'

Explores how disabled people are able to get in and get on in the cultural industries. Covers barriers, but also enablers, before making some conclusive recommendations.

Creative Industries Federation, 'Creative Diversity: The state of diversity in the UK's creative industries and what we can do about it'

A great analysis of diversity in the creative industries, angled toward making a 'hard economic case' for diversity in the workforce. Is keenly multi-factorial, showing for example how the concentration of creative jobs in London obscures diversity issues elsewhere.

EW Group, 'Every child: equality and diversity in arts and culture with, but and for children and young people'

Summarises evidence on barriers to inclusion in arts and culture for children and young people, in accordance with appropriate protected categories from the Equality Act 2010.

Arts Council England, 'Subjective Wellbeing Evidence Review'

Summarises evidence on how wellbeing measures can be used to assess the success of policy interventions alongside typical economic measures.

Wave Hill, 'Social Evidence Framework Review'

Covers approaches to measuring the social impact of investment into creativity and culture.

Office for National Statistics, 'Young people's wellbeing in the UK: 2020'

A statistical report reflecting the circumstances, views and well-being of people aged 16-24. Can provide important context for justifying a policy intervention.

Creative Industries Policy Evidence Centre, 'Beyond growth: promoting inclusive development of creative clusters in the UK'

A report on how the financial and social benefits of the AHRC's Creative Industries Clusters Programme can be made available to diverse groups and those in social mobility 'cold spots'.

APPG for Creative Diversity, 'Creative Majority'

Makes a series of extensively developed policy recommendations for 'good and effective practices in recruiting, developing and retaining a diverse creative sector'.

Social Mobility Commission, 'Socio-Economic Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit: Creative Industries'

Guidance currently offered to employers in the creative industries on socio-economically inclusive hiring.

Sutton Trust, 'Elitist Britain'

Background on elitism in the UK.

The 93 Percent Club, 'The Big State School Survey 2025'

A survey tracking further education, employment and social mobility outcome for those who attended a state school.

Sony Music, 'Social Justice Fund UK Impact Report 2022'

The Sony Music Social Justice Fund has funded many social justice focussed projects in the UK. This report gathers information on how all of them have progressed, and contains many good examples of successful projects.

Rhys Lawrence, *Music and Social Justice Policy Guidance* (University of Southampton, 27/10/2025), [<https://doi.org/10.5258/SOTON/P1249>].