

Written evidence submitted by Creative Diversity Network

CDN's response: Impact of Covid-19 on DCMS sectors

'A broadcasting industry with equality at its core'.

CDN's (Creative Diversity Network) purpose is to enable the UK broadcasting industry to increase diversity and inspire inclusion by:

- Capturing diversity and inclusion data. Ensuring every part of the UK Broadcasting supply chain understands the diversity and inclusivity landscape. We do this through the Diamond system
- Uniting the industry by sharing best practice and creating the forums for collaboration, to identify and celebrate the actions that improve diversity and inclusion.
- Supporting the industry with honesty and openness to ensure that actions are undertaken for measurable progress

CDN has a small but dedicated executive team who work with and for its members: BBC, ITV, Viacom/CBS, Sky, Channel 4, S4C, Screenskills, Bafta, Pact, and ITN

Our response focuses on the impact that COVID-19 is having on the diversity of television – both content and those who make programmes – in the UK.

What has been the immediate impact of COVID- on the sector?

1.1 The lockdown has been catastrophic for UK TV production and has meant shutting down almost all UK TV production, with most programmes immediately cancelled or postponed indefinitely. Whilst a small number of programmes have been able to continue in an altered format, and great efforts are being made to provide safe environments to get some shows up and running again, the reality is that the industry will be making far fewer productions for the foreseeable future.

1.2 At CDN we manage Diamond, which is a system collecting demographic data about those making programmes for the 5 main Broadcasters (BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5/ViacomCBS and Sky). In *Diamond: the Third Cut*¹ report published in February 2020, we reported that there is still a lack of representation by a many protected characteristic groups amongst those making TV in the UK, particularly off-screen.²

1.3 Prior to COVID-19, Diamond data had been spurring on broadcasters and producers to raise their game when it comes to commissioning and producing more diverse programmes. From the data that Diamond has collected since 2016, we can see that progress is happening but that it is slow.

¹ <https://creativitydiversitynetwork.com/diamond/diamond-reports/diamond-the-third-cut-report/>

² <https://creativitydiversitynetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Diamond-the-Third-Cut-press-release-FINAL.pdf>;

1.4 The full impact of COVID-19 on the diversity of TV programmes will become apparent in our monitoring and reporting over this year and the next. **However, there is already evidence that diversity is slipping yet further down the agenda, with previous gains now being lost.**

- (i) Our Doubling Disability project - aiming to double the number of disabled people working in off-screen roles by the end of 2020 from 4.5% to 9% - has had to pause. The work that we have been undertaking to redress these imbalances is unable to be transferred by broadcasters to the productions that are still running, thus demonstrating an uneasy incompatibility between steps to increase the diversity of crew, with kick-starting the sector.
- (ii) It has been a tremendous feat for the industry to get new COVID-19 production protocols³ in place. We welcome the consideration within these to protect the vulnerable, as well as a consideration for mental health and wellbeing. However this seems to be there more in the spirit of risk assessment and health and safety, rather than due to an acknowledgement that diversity and inclusion are fundamental building blocks to starting up production.

Advice within the protocols such as 'using local cast and crew where possible', can provide additional barriers for people to being employed in the sector. There is also no advice in the protocols about how to ensure that new working arrangements are accessible. For example, the use of tape to denote a 2m distance is not suitable for those who are blind or partially sighted (unless the tape is textured or raised).

- (iii) A lack of dedicated time and resource are often cited as the main barriers to diversifying crew, especially amongst smaller production companies who rely heavily on freelancers. The increased financial instability and the working limitations brought about by COVID-19 will only exacerbate this, especially if diversity and inclusion are not incorporated automatically into new production guidelines and requirements, but remain an additional 'nice to have'.

• How effectively has the support provided by DCMS, other Government departments and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?

2.1 UK TV production relies heavily on freelancers, many of whom have reported that they have been unable to take advantage of government support⁴ at this time.

2.2 Freelancers already operate with reduced rights and protections in the UK (compared to PAYE employees), and the consequences of this have now been clearly brought to the fore, in this industry the wider creative industries and beyond.⁵

2.3 Organisations such as Pact and the industry's unions have had to work hard to achieve better outcomes and at least some financial security for some of the tens of thousands people working in the industry. However, many remain unsupported.

³ <https://www.pact.co.uk/news-detail.html?id=pact-and-uk-broadcasters-introduce-new-industry-wide-guidance-for-producing-tv-safely>

⁴ <https://www.screendaily.com/news/two-thirds-of-uk-film-and-tv-freelancers-receiving-no-government-support-warns-survey/5149957.article>

⁵ <https://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/freelancers/dcms-lambasts-government-on-lack-of-freelancer-support/5150381.article>

2.4 The consequence will be that those talented individuals, in particular those who do not have the financial security to 'wait it out', or those who are being disproportionately affected by COVID-19 itself and the measures taken to control the virus, will leave the industry. Those reported to have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and lockdown include many protected characteristic groups: women, disabled people, and those who are BAME, as well as older people, and younger people earlier on in their career (the 'lockdown generation'). The effects will be greater for those from more than one of these protected characteristic groups. The impact will be an even less diverse industry.

• What will the likely long-term impacts of COVID-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?

Loss to progress made

3.1 There is a very high probability that the progress and inroads made over the past decade or so to diversify the UK TV workforce will be lost. With the fragmentation and retraction occurring in the sector, there is a risk that, at best, we return to the 'piecemeal' and 'additionality' approach to diversity which the sector previously adopted, with shorter-term and ad hoc initiatives and schemes.

3.2 With increased financial uncertainty and with the knowledge that further lockdowns could occur, it will be more difficult for the industry to commit to the longer-term structural and transformative action required that projects such as Doubling Disability were bringing. However, it is this systemic change which is necessary to bring about long term and sustainable changes to the broadcasting and production workforce.

Shrinking sector, reduced diversity

3.3 The industry already has many exclusionary working practices embedded. For example a reliance on personal networks for allocation of work and progress in the industry, working conditions characterised by long-working hours, the need to often work flexibly and on a mobile basis, the London-centric nature of the industry and a white, male, middle-class culture to 'fit in' with.⁶ These barriers to entering and maintaining a career in the industry are set to increase in number and magnitude as the industry contracts. Competition will be even fiercer, favouring those who are already well-established in the industry, or those for whom there are fewer barriers.

3.4 In the rush to get productions up and running, there is a shorter rather than longer term approach being taken, and there is a risk that the short term solutions by default become the new 'normal'. Shorter term solutions will inevitably most suit those who are lucky enough to be on-board from the start. It then becomes more challenging to shift mind-sets and ways of working, and argue for the financial investment required to create a more inclusive work place and environment in the future. Projects like Doubling Disability requires operating differently, yet the instinct for many will be to retreat to a comfortable norm that, either consciously or unconsciously, maintains a secure status quo.

⁶ <https://www.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/bfi-workforce-diversity-in-uk-screen-sector-evidence-review-2018-03.pdf>

3.5 In addition, some will now find themselves unable to work due to the changes in industry working practices brought about by the Government's response to COVID-19 and/or who now have additional caring responsibilities (due to school closures for example), or who are forced to shield for medical reasons. These individuals may well need to leave TV production, in search of work in other industries which can offer more contractual stability and more flexible working arrangements, for example regular working hours, or the ability to work from home.

Financial impact will lead to smaller budgets and less appetite for 'risk'.

3.6 Advertising revenue and other income streams that some Broadcasters rely on will have been impacted by COVID-19, and there will undoubtedly be pressure to deliver things quickly and more cheaply in order to make money go further, an approach which often reduces the likelihood of inclusive working practices. This approach may also lead to a reduced appetite to take perceived 'risks' like programming new content or talent.

3.7 Support required:

- **With the partial dismantling of the industry caused by COVID-19, there is an opportunity to rebuild an industry which incorporates more inclusive working practices. However, a commitment and requirement to build diversity and inclusion into new production protocols and guidelines is required.**
- **Recovery plans are more likely to have diversity and inclusion embedded if there are a diversity of individuals setting the new path for recovery.**
- **Certain new ways of working that have resulted from lock down measures, such as increased online networking replacing face-to-face networking and pitching are perceived to have had a 'levelling' effect. The industry should be encouraged to build on these positive outcomes of the lockdown where they have occurred and maintain these more inclusive approaches in the 'new normal'**

• What lessons can be learnt from how DCMS, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with COVID-19?

4.1 The complexity of supporting non-PAYE contractors has been challenging for the Government to respond to and provide adequate support. The heightened acknowledgment of the vulnerability of the many freelancers who are critical to the success of the industry has been a wake-up call for both the industry and the government. It is precisely this precarious nature of freelancing which poses an additional barrier to some people from entering and sustaining a career in the industry. Hopefully this will be a catalyst for both the industry and government to work together to look at improving the long-term status, rights and protections of freelancers, finding better ways to build an industry which is more attractive and navigable to a more diverse range of talent.

4.2 We recommend that DCMS commissions a report which provides us with a better understanding about freelancers working in the industry, including economic inequality in the industry.

4.3 The industry has adapted with admirable speed and optimism to the lockdown, especially with regards to the continuation of news production. However, it is apparent that diversity and inclusion are not embedded in the new approaches being taken to production. This prevents inclusion in the short term and will make longer term inclusion even more difficult to achieve. **The future success of the industry relies on diversity being at its core.** We recommend that government commits to

ensuring that every task force, roundtable, enquiry, new piece of regulation or legislation, has had appropriate input from a number of D&I specialists covering the broad range of skills and experiences required (across all protected characteristics and intersections of these) to ensure that the decisions being made now, will support a diverse workforce for tomorrow.

4.4 If this approach is already being taken, then industry and government should be more explicit about how their decision making has been influenced by this input, and how decision making is ensuring that solutions are being designed with diversity and inclusion in mind. This will ensure that there is trust and confidence in the decisions being made.

- **How might the sector evolve after COVID-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation to deal with future challenges?**

5.1 Restarting TV production presents an unprecedented opportunity to set out the 'new normal'. Those still in production have had to quickly adapt their working practices and the technology they use, and have learned that sometimes alternative ways of working can be just as effective as the industry norm. Hopefully this will lead to more flexible working practices in the future industry, which can support greater diversity.

5.2 The industry should openly recognise that some people may be shielding or unable to work due to new limitations and restrictions posed by the pandemic and the country's approach to controlling the virus. This will lead to a cohort of individuals leaving the industry altogether, or taking up other opportunities within or related to the industry which offer more flexibility or economic certainty. Inevitably it is more likely to be those from protected characteristic groups who are more likely to leave, at a time when we were trying to increase the diversity of the industry. Diamond monitoring will provide a key contribution to our understanding of whereabouts in the industry the diversity drain is most acutely felt.

5.3 Diamond data tells us that the industry already lacked diversity in the influential and decision-making role. We would encourage DCMS and the government to therefore support initiatives where diverse members of the industry are empowered to lead on shaping the 'new normal', to ensure diversity is at their core. Disabled people, those from low social economic backgrounds and those from ethnic minority groups know, in particular, what it is like to live with ambiguity, and are used to managing the societal and workplace barriers that they face on a daily basis. These groups of people have the knowledge and experience required to help the industry arrive at inclusive solutions to restarting the sector. It is a wasted opportunity to deprioritise diversity at a time when involving a greater diversity of people would undoubtedly lead to even better and more inclusive solutions to restarting the sector. This approach would centralise diversity and inclusion rather than continuing to compartmentalise it as an add-on, which may or may not be incorporated.

5.4 We would welcome a DCMS led challenge fund similar to Innovate UK's Business-led Innovation in Response to Global Disruption Fund⁷ but industry specific, such as ensuring the future diversity and sustainability of the industry. It would be an opportunity to further the needs of the sector already addressed in the industrial strategy's sector deal, ensuring creative jobs remain open to people of every background.⁸

⁷ <https://apply-for-innovation-funding.service.gov.uk/competition/583/overview#summary>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industries-sector-deal>

