



# CREATIVE CAREERS ACADEMY PLAYBOOK

**Sharing practice and learning on tackling  
under-representation in the creative sector  
workforce**

Commissioned by the Engagement & Skills team,  
Somerset House Trust

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**SOMERSET  
HOUSE**

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# FOREWORD

**BY JONATHAN REEKIE  
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All of us in the arts have been a part of the sector debating and trying to address under-representation in its workforce for years. As initiatives come and go there's been a growing sense of frustration and discomfort that the pace of change is all too slow. The discussions usually focus on why it's important and perhaps not enough on the "how do we make change?" Taking part in these discussions two themes kept recurring. Firstly there is a huge desire to tackle this. Secondly that the sector has traditionally been quite precarious, with ad hoc entry and progression routes resulting in the talent pipeline being too white and support functions like recruitment being under-resourced. This means that the ability of individuals or small organisations to deal with a problem that is systemic and that starts in the education system is limited.

Somerset House, as home to the biggest creative community anywhere, seemed a rare and excellent opportunity to try collective action. Out of this was born the Creative Careers Academy, which was launched in 2017 with the aim to attract young diverse talent into the sector with placements paid at the London Living Wage and the chance to gain work experience in two different creative organisations over a nine month period. We've now had two cohorts who have both shown the value and energising effects of diverse voices to those lucky enough to have worked with them. This is helping to drive and inform change

in our own organisation and the participation and advice of some of our resident organisations has made the programme even stronger. Of course we're scratching the surface of the problem but you've got to start somewhere and we're committed for the long term.

We won't know the real impact of the Creative Careers Academy and Somerset House's broader Creative Careers Programme for several years to come, but we all fervently want it to succeed, hopefully spawning imitations and different versions, and in doing so enriching the lives of the participants and the sector as a whole. This report is intended to share our experiences so far and to offer our peers and colleagues across the cultural sector frank insights into lessons learnt and feedback from the Academy members themselves, which we hope might provide a useful toolbox for others setting out with similar aims.

I'd like to thank all the participating organisations, the Somerset House Engagement & Skills team, and the funders who have made it possible for us to run the programme. Above all I'd like to thank the past participants who have so enriched Somerset House as an organisation and creative community, and are now forging ahead in their new roles in the sector, bringing badly needed change.



# INTRODUCTION

The UK is home to some of the most creatively rich and forward-thinking cultural organisations in the world. Those who work in the arts often align themselves with progressive politics and issues of social justice. And there is a shared commitment across the UK creative sector that the arts should be open and accessible to all. But in every creative field – from the visual arts and theatre to dance and music – the workforce is consistently unrepresentative of broader society. This is detrimental on many levels. If an arts organisation’s workforce does not represent diverse voices and lived experiences then the cultural output of that organisation is narrowed and less interesting as a result. If colleagues look, sound and behave the same, organisations reduce the possibility for hearing different perspectives and generating challenging debate. And if arts organisations strive to be spaces of equity and inclusion, the composition of staff and governance teams must reflect this ambition.

The issue of workforce under-representation is not new in the creative sector, but pressures have been building in recent years for organisations to move beyond the promise of “we’re working on it”. The 2018 Panic! report (Brook, et. al) and Arts Council England’s NPO data reporting have in particular acted to provide a wake-up call for organisations and funders to push for action and change. The global pandemic and subsequent lockdown,

and the eruption of international Black Lives Matter protests prompted by the killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis have brought an even sharper focus to the issue of representation. The pandemic has forced arts organisations to reinvent their working practices and reflect on some of the more unhealthy aspects of the sector’s expectations for its workers. The hope is this is not temporary. The Black Lives Matter protests (which sparked an outpouring of statements of solidarity from cultural organisations) have also thrown the spotlight on structural racism and other forms of symbolic violence within the cultural sector.

Programmes like Somerset House Trust’s Creative Careers Academy are attempts to take positive action by shifting typical processes of recruitment and seeking out candidates for paid placements who are under-represented in an organisation’s workforce. These programmes are not a solution in and of themselves but they can provide important learning about what it means to recruit differently and foster a more inclusive and diverse workplace. This document shares selected insights from the independent evaluation of the programme’s second year (2019-2020), and sets out a series of good practice recommendations, which will hopefully be of use to future stakeholders in the programme and other employers in the creative sector who run (or are thinking of running) similar initiatives.



# CONTEXT



The Creative Careers Academy emerged out of frustration with the persistent lack of diversity in the creative sector workforce, and the sector's seeming inability to properly grapple with this issue, despite years of debate. The marginalisation of creative subjects in schools, the perseverance of unpaid internships and the short-term nature of targeted initiatives are all factors that have flattened the diversity of young people coming into the arts sector. The team at Somerset House Trust also noticed that alongside these factors, the small-scale operation of many arts organisations has historically meant there is often limited HR capacity and time to focus on improving recruitment practices. As home to hundreds of small arts organisations, Somerset House felt it could be uniquely placed to harness the collective determination for change and to make an intervention that could have a broader impact.

Somerset House's Creative Careers Academy programme aims to break down barriers to entry-level, administrative roles, to encourage young people from a wider range of backgrounds to start a meaningful career in the arts. The scheme does this by offering paid placements and development opportunities to talented young people (aged between 18-25) who are under-represented in the creative and cultural sector. Based on external data, the programme identifies under-representation in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, disability and sexual orientation. There is a particular emphasis on recruiting candidates from Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds and those from 'lower socio-economic backgrounds'. The programme is targeted towards people who have faced barriers to employment in the creative sector, who are

resident in greater London and who have had no significant experience in the sector so far. Five Creative Academy 'members' are recruited to experience two full time placements (for a total of nine months) in organisations that are part of Somerset House's resident community.

In late January 2020 the Creative Careers Academy completed its second cycle of placements, following an initial pilot year in 2018-19. The 2019-20 employers included two touring dance companies, a theatre company, a music education organisation, and an organisation that provides financial products and services that support the creative industries. They also included Somerset House Trust's own Visitor Experience and Residents and Retail teams. Organisations paid a contribution of £3,000 towards the funding of the placement and they agreed to host a Creative Careers Academy member for four and a half months.

The programme is one part of a larger offer of careers provision for 18-25 year olds at Somerset House. From 2021, this offer exists under the new title: [Upgrade Yourself: Creative Careers at Somerset House](#). Alongside the work placements, (now referred to as [Upgrade Yourself: Industry](#)) this programme has multiple strands to support young talent, including online talks and workshops with high profile industry voices, networking opportunities and a peer exchange programme led by members of the Somerset House creative community. The central ambition of programme is to create fresh platforms and unlock pathways to upskill and develop talent, while diversifying the future workforce of the creative industries.

# 2019-20 Creative Careers Academy Host organisations

### **Akram Khan Company**

An innovative dance company with an artistic vision that both respects and challenges Indian kathak form and contemporary dance.

### **Creative United**

An entrepreneurial community interest company that supports the arts, cultural and creative industries through business growth programmes and membership schemes.

### **Fuel**

A leading independent production organisation working with artists across the live performance sector.

### **Hofesh Shechter Company**

A boundary-breaking dance company, producing exceptional work created by Hofesh Shechter and performed across the world by an extraordinary Company of internationally diverse dancers.

### **Somerset House Residents and Retail team**

A team that supports all resident organisations within Somerset House and oversees retail opportunities connected to the creative programme.

### **Somerset House Visitor Experience team**

A team that acts as the first point of contact for visitors to Somerset House and supports visitors' enjoyment of events and programmes.

### **Sound and Music**

A national charity with a mission is to maximise the opportunities for people to create and enjoy new music.

# METHODOLOGY

The independent evaluation involved interviews and a group discussion with four Creative Careers Academy members and interviews with four mentors, eight members of staff from employer organisations and seven (past and present) colleagues who either managed or supported the programme within Somerset House Trust. Staff participants included directors and managers. The Creative Careers Academy team were looking for honest, constructively critical feedback so it was vital that interviews offered a safe space for people to speak candidly, without any potential risk to relationships. For this reason most of the opinions summarised or quoted in this report are anonymised.



# USING THIS REPORT

The evaluation findings and recommendations are divided into five core themes. These theme headings have been devised by Hodan Ibrahim, one of the 2019-20 Creative Careers Academy members who has since worked with the Engagement and Skills team and has played a key role in the programme rebrand.

The themes turn the findings of the evaluation into action points that are relevant for organisations, staff and programme participants and they are intended to be useful, or at least thought-provoking for colleagues across the cultural sector more generally. The message behind the themes is that everyone is on journey of learning and development and every stakeholder in a programme has the capacity to enact change in themselves and their organisations.

**Introduce Yourself**  
**Upgrade Yourself**  
**Prepare Yourself**  
**Promote Yourself**  
**Challenge Yourself**







# INTRODUCE YOURSELF

First impressions count. What is the first impression someone might get from a job advert? And from visiting an organisation like Somerset House? How might they feel stepping into the grand courtyard? Who do they see staffing the desks? How do they navigate the building? When someone comes for a job interview, what is their experience? And if they secure a job, how do they acclimatise to their new workplace?

All of these questions relate to the important introductory experiences a potential candidate has when they embark on finding a job. At each of these steps there are possible barriers to overcome. Some of these barriers are obvious, while others may go unrecognised to those who feel included and 'at home' in arts organisations.

It goes without saying that the palatial grounds of Somerset House are loaded with symbolic wealth and status. As a space it is intimidatingly large and complex and its architecture is steeped in histories of British social elitism and colonialism. As is the case with most arts organisations, Somerset House is a place that is imbued with white, middle class codes and behaviours. And the Trust's workforce does not reflect the socially and ethnically diverse city of London in which the organisation is based. Many people likely exclude themselves from applying to work at cultural organisations such as Somerset House, based on an assumption that they either wouldn't belong, or they wouldn't be recruited.

And across the cultural sector as a whole, these assumptions are justified. Young people looking

# Introduce Yourself

to forge a career in the sector have to compete for limited opportunities that are modestly paid but highly coveted. Candidates for entry-level arts positions are often academically over-qualified and able to demonstrate a history of voluntary work experience. And as we heard in conversations with Creative Careers Academy members, it is typical for applicants to receive regular rejections. All of these factors mean that even if an applicant is committed to pursuing a career in the arts and is talented, the obstacles they face are entrenched and multiple.

The Creative Careers Academy programme was conceived as an attempt to address some of these challenges through offering a proactive invitation to people who are under-represented in the arts sector. This section looks further at the barriers to entry in small-scale arts organisations, and at how the programme staff, employers and members navigated the crucial introductory moments of the programme – from the application and recruitment process to the introduction of successful applicants to their new work environments.

## Understanding under-representation

The organisations that took part in the 2019-20 Creative Careers Academy programme came from different artistic fields, so their workforces each had different forms of under-representation. Some of the organisational staff members felt there was a relatively good track record of diversity within their teams, but others did not.

While women seemed to be over-represented in some offices, employers did note that there are some sections of their field (e.g. choreography and composition) where women are under-represented. Several of the employers work internationally, so their team of core staff and freelancers reflect this, but many organisations said they have a predominantly white workforce. Some employers admitted that while there is more diversity at the junior end of their team, their senior management is not diverse.

**“In terms of my team, we are basically majority female, white, middle class. We do have one male, who we recently employed, but there’s not a huge amount of diversity. Even in culture or age, it’s all pretty much the same, and they are all pretty much the same age as well. Every time we recruit, I get the same people.” (Employer)**

For employers then, the programme presented an opportunity to be introduced to candidates who may not otherwise apply to roles in their organisations. It also provided employers with the chance to meet peers in other organisations who were negotiating similar issues.

### Recommendations:

- Understand the composition of your workforce by surveying staff to generate accurate data on workforce demographics. Include questions on social class (see Jerwood Arts’ Socio-economic diversity and inclusion in the arts: Toolkit for Employers for advice on how to measure this).
- Collect equal opportunities data from applicants and ensure the findings are collated, analysed against regional and national data and shared across your organisation.
- Identify where there is under-representation, both in the existing workforce and in your applicant pool. Examine why this is the case and plan action.

## Inclusive recruitment

The Creative Careers Academy recruitment process was specifically designed to be as far-reaching and inclusive as possible, in order to break down barriers for people who may otherwise not apply for roles in the organisations. The following recruitment strategy outlines how the opportunity was promoted:

### Recruitment strategy:

1. Somerset House hosted a Creative Careers Application Surgery, programmed as part of their Creative Job Studio, with colleagues on-hand to talk about making a good application and offering insights into the opportunity.
2. Members of staff from the Engagement & Skills team led talks and workshops for targeted community groups.
3. Sour Lemons, a youth leadership organisation who were based at Somerset House, were commissioned to send young leaders (who match the eligibility criteria for the placements) out into their community to run a social media campaign and direct outreach in youth centres and cultural hubs. This was piloted successfully in 2018.
4. The programme ran advertising through like-minded organisations and local schemes working with the target demographic.
5. The programme also posted job adverts on more conventional platforms (including social media) but they omitted adverts in some 'industry standard' places in order to prioritise applications from under-represented people not 'in the know' about where to look.
6. To make the application process as easy and accessible as possible, a two-step process was introduced, where candidates initially needed to complete a form confirming their eligibility, sending a short CV and providing a short statement about why they would benefit from the Creative Careers Academy.

7. A scoring process prioritised applications against the agreed criteria. Placement hosts were invited to review and feed back on the selection to make sure they had a good range of candidates. 15 candidates were invited to a final selection day, where they had a chance to meet each other informally, to engage with the placement hosts and Somerset House, to explore the site and to take part in an accessible activity that enabled staff to assess their potential within the scheme.



The poster features a purple background with a white Somerset House logo in the top left corner. Below the logo is a photograph of three young women looking at a smartphone together. The text 'CREATIVE CAREERS ACADEMY' is written in large, bold, yellow letters, with 'APPLICATIONS OPEN NOW' in white below it. The bottom section of the poster contains white text on a purple background, detailing the program's purpose, eligibility criteria, and application information.

**SOMERSET HOUSE**

**CREATIVE CAREERS ACADEMY**  
**APPLICATIONS OPEN NOW**

The Creative Careers Academy offers London Living Wage work placements and skills development for talented young people who are under-represented in the creative and cultural sector.

Lasting nine months, the placements offer a broad insight into what makes a creative organisation tick, offering you the chance to gain direct experience of working practices in the sector.

**Are you?**

- Aged 18-25 (at the time of application)
- Currently resident in Greater London
- Not in full-time education
- Qualified at Level 3 or BA level in a creative subject?
- Seeking a first employment experience in the creative sector?
- Committed to working full-time for nine months?

**APPLY NOW** [somersethouse.org.uk/creativecareersacademy](https://somersethouse.org.uk/creativecareersacademy)

Applications open until **Sun 3 March**. Visit the Somerset House website for full details on what's involved and how to apply.  
Any questions? Email [creativecareersacademy@somersethouse.org.uk](mailto:creativecareersacademy@somersethouse.org.uk)

What worked:

- The team found that by taking these steps they were able to attract a diverse pool of candidates. Commissioning peer leaders from Sour Lemons to make direct contact with target groups was particularly helpful, as was social media promotion.
- Members commented that the opportunity really spoke to them and their needs at the time and the information made it clear that you didn't need a lot of experience to apply. All of the members interviewed said they liked the application form for its brevity and the "personal", "meaningful" nature of the questions.
- The members interviewed all liked the informal, friendly approach of the assessment day. Candidates had a chance to get to know one another through a group activity and "bond" with their potential employers over short conversations at a series of stalls.

**"All my interviews were about, "Why do you need this?" etc. rather than it being like, "What have you done before?" Bring us the experience. It felt like you didn't really need experience to do it." (Creative Careers Academy member)**

- Organisations felt they were well matched with their candidates and that they had a voice in this process, but they were glad that several aspects of the recruitment were taken out of their hands.
- At least one employer said that as a result of the recruitment process, they were matched with someone they wouldn't have typically recruited themselves because they seemed unconfident in their interview. Putting their trust in the Somerset House staff and seeing this person excel in their placement made the employer recognise the genuine benefits of an alternative, more inclusive approach to recruitment:

**"It completely paid off. It was so rewarding because by the end of it, [they] were so much more confident, they learned so much stuff. For**

**me, I guess we have certain perspectives. I think that the unknown factor is a good thing about the scheme." (Employer)**

What was challenging:

- Some members implied they were not sure what was meant by the line in the job advert: 'young people who are under-represented in the creative sector'. Some people thought this just referred to young people in general.
- While efforts were made to ensure the assessment of applications was fair and balanced, staff found the scoring and shortlisting process lacked clarity. This meant that some organisations were shortlisting against different priorities and sometimes staff were having to make assumptions about people's backgrounds and eligibility based on their CVs.

Recommendations:

- Be clear about eligibility criteria and be transparent if your programme is actively seeking particular under-represented applicants. This will not only encourage applications from people who may not otherwise apply but it will mean people self-eliminate if they do not meet this criteria.
- Consider including a question on the application form that invites candidates to self-identify any barriers they have faced in progressing their career.
- Review the accessibility of your application documents. Consider inviting people to apply in different ways and to outline their access needs (see Unlimited's Ten top tips for accessible recruitment for more advice (Verrent, 2019))
- Always include details of payment and any other benefits on the application form. Make it clear that you can meet people's access needs (e.g. paying travel expenses) for interviews.

- Make sure your opportunity is promoted through multiple channels and proactively make contact with partner organisations and peers working with under-represented groups.
- Consider commissioning external organisations that specialise in inclusive recruitment and youth sector engagement to support the advertising and recruitment process.
- Invest in anti-racism and unconscious bias training, review and adapt your selection criteria and ensure selection panels are diverse.
- Devise an assessment day that will be enjoyable and useful for all candidates - even those who are not selected. Think about how to break down the formality of the interviews and ensure candidates feel looked after. Recruitment days can't (and shouldn't be) completely free of intensity or pressure. Candidates should have an experience that is indicative of the type of conditions they might expect in the placements.
- Offer swift feedback to shortlisted candidates who are not selected.

## Inductions

The cohort worked in roles that covered operations, education, finance, customer service, communications, development and project administration. Some members had no prior experience in this type of work so their introduction to the organisation was critical on several levels. In some settings they were able to do one-to-ones with most of their colleagues very early on, and they generally felt welcome and supported. One member spoke of there being a clear “mutual respect” from the beginning of their placement, which they appreciated.

“I was treated like part of the team quite early. I was given room to grow. Then me and my manager made sure we had a weekly catch up,

which was pretty useful.” (Creative Careers Academy member)

A couple of members attended auditions and performances as part of their induction so they could gain insights into the creative outputs of the organisation. This was important for the members as some were exposed to experimental art forms that they had never previously experienced or considered as a context they'd like to work in.

The working culture in some of the placements seemed to run at a pace of “100 miles an hour”, but a couple of members said their line managers were vocal about encouraging them not to get sucked into the unhealthy working culture. A couple of members said they felt able to “screw up” and to not work over lunch or answer emails late at night as some of their colleagues did.

Members talked of having “freedom and trust” in many placements, but they also appreciated their colleagues' guidance. Line managers and members tended to have weekly or bi-weekly one-to-one catch ups, where they would check in on workload and wellbeing.

“Something that I really liked was that they were very open to praise and criticism. If I did something well, they would tell me. If I needed something improving, they would tell me. They would also not just say, “This is wrong.” They would show me how and so it was quite a nice balance of actually feeling part of the company already.” (Creative Careers Academy member)

By taking care to give a considered induction to the roles and teams, employers were able to get the most out of the members and they spoke with enthusiasm about the speed with which many of the members were able to pick up information and manage complex, important logistics, and engage effectively with freelancers, clients, participants and customers.

“I think we expected people to be fresh out of school or college, but the people that we've seen actually participate seem like they should be in entry-level roles. I'm saying that not as a criticism of the programme at all, or the pool of

## Introduce Yourself: Inductions

candidates. It's just I think surprising for us that actually you've got this wealth of talent that is struggling to find a door into working in the industry." (Employer)



### Recommendations:

- Introduce placement participants to all members of the team and allow time for one-to-ones where possible.
- Schedule in a pattern of regular catch-ups to review progress and support needs.
- Ensure your new colleague feels quickly part of the team and is aware of workplace expectations and flexibilities.
- Invite participants to spend time experiencing some of the more creative aspects of the organisation, even if their job is administrative.
- Offer clear guidance and relevant training and don't assume your new colleague is familiar with seemingly basic office tasks.

It is important to note the significance of the members being part of a group of peers who are all different but who share some similar experiences, as well as the common experience of being part of the programme. The 2019-20 group built a very strong and mutually supportive group dynamic. Being part of a group meant individuals were not isolated and they could feed off a collective confidence that came from being members of a cohort.

**“We'd always have that space at lunch, to give ourselves a break and actually discuss those things that were a bit hard for us or a bit tough for us. That's really nice knowing that you have these peers, people who are like you, and sometimes you're able to challenge each other and push each other to do a bit better.”**  
(Creative Careers Academy member)

## Ongoing introductions

Introductions in the Creative Careers Academy programme do not begin and end with the initial induction period. This is a programme about continued introductions – to peers, arts professionals, mentors and other contacts and communities. One of the key reasons why the arts workforce is not diverse is because ‘who you know’ is a powerful hidden tool that perpetuates a cycle of support and opportunity for those with existing connections (Arts Emergency, 2019). The Creative Careers programme at Somerset House is a platform for emerging and experienced arts professionals to meet, and staff in the organisation are actively encouraged to offer their time to this platform.

Through the programme, members were able to take part in the Somerset House Creative Job Studio, where they could meet creative freelancers and other professionals to chat about skills development. On the last Friday of the month the group would also go on field trips to different institutions, where they would meet other arts professionals for conversations.

The group communicated that their access to advice and insights from staff members (including directors) from Somerset House Trust was excellent.

“I emailed loads of people and all of them wanted to speak to me, which was really great. Also heads of programmes, very, very busy people would speak to me. I think the access you have is really quite incredible.” (Creative Careers Academy member)

There were instances where there was a slight overload of introductory meetings, and members suggested that it would be useful to have support to digest and retain the information.



### Recommendations:

- Create opportunities for connection-building and make introductions with colleagues at all levels of the organisation
- Ideally ensure that your new colleagues have peers they can buddy up with and space to offload.

A key lesson to take away is that carefully thought-through introductions are immensely important to breaking down initial barriers and supporting more diversity in cultural organisations. Introductions can profoundly affect a person's experiences, so time and planning need to be built in to ensure these experiences are positive and fair. Somerset House Trust seems to have fostered a non-hierarchical, friendly working culture that means introductions happen organically as well as through pre-arranged meetings, and there is institutional recognition that informal networking and mentoring is an essential part of everyone's jobs.



# UPGRADE YOURSELF

One of the core agendas behind the Creative Careers Academy (and the broader careers programme at Somerset House) is to support the professional growth of early career arts workers. ‘Upgrade Yourself’ is a call to boost knowledge, enhance skills and improve practice. The Creative Careers Academy offers members the opportunity to learn and develop through hands-on work, mentorship, skills workshops and advice sessions. And it is important to reflect on the nature of this development, and what difference the programme has made to individuals personally and professionally. But it is also essential to highlight the clear mutual benefits this type of programming has for staff members and organisations.

This section looks at what members, mentors, and other staff gained from this year’s programme. It also explores the potential tensions created by the merging together of a promise for a developmental experience with expectations for members to do real work – and work that is generally administrative. In programmes such as the Creative Careers Academy, balancing the needs of members and the needs of participating organisations is a tricky act. There have to be demonstrable benefits for all agents if these programmes are to have meaning and be sustainable.



### Members' positive developmental experiences

The overwhelming message from the Creative Academy members was that they learnt a huge amount from their placements and had some incredibly rewarding experiences. Those who worked in larger organisations enjoyed seeing behind-the-scenes of a complex workplace, and those who worked in smaller organisations enjoyed how much responsibility they and colleagues were able to take on. The most successful placements seemed to be those that supported members to participate in different aspects of the organisation's work and that invested in the members' training and development. During their time on the programme the group were also offered one-off sessions around professional skills and career development, including a session with a life/career coach which was seen as a major highlight.

Being on the programme allowed several members to be more "analytical" and "considered" about what they were doing and what opportunities they wanted to pursue or steer away from. Some of the members felt they became "more picky" about what they want to do in the future as a result. They suggested that it was important that programmes like the Creative Careers Academy structure in moments to check in on (and respond to) how participants are feeling about their professional goals at different review points. Building in an element of flexibility with the placements and job roles may be difficult, but leaving open the possibility for alternative shadowing/work opportunities as participants become more discerning would be worthwhile.

#### Recommendations:

- Training and development opportunities are highly valued and can increase skills and morale.
- Recognise that participants will become more discerning as they progress through their placement/role. They may change their mind about what they want from their experience so incorporating some flexibility is recommended.

### Positive impacts for employers

The employers also gained a lot from working with their Creative Careers Academy member. Some of the Academy members brought their own expertise around technology and social media to their roles, and took part in developing strategies for their organisations' social channels.

"[They] had an impact and continue to have an impact on the company and how the team is. They're very joyful, full of resources and very creative. Definitely, they have a fresh eye as well." (Employer)

One employer said having a youthful voice in their team generated new ideas and questions about how they function:

"I found having a younger person's fresh approach on things to be quite good because we do get very stuck in: "This is the way the institution works," and we just keep delivering it and we've got to do it fast. It was nice to have someone go, "Why do you do this?" Really come with that attitude of: "Why?" Or "did you think about this?" (Employer)



Some of the employers also had members of their team either line manager or mentor Creative Careers Academy members. This provided them with an opportunity to give a mid-career level colleague some management experience and to build their management skills.

### Recommendations:

- Share the benefits of your placement programme across your organisation to advocate for this way of working.
- If hosting a short-term placement, think carefully about who would make a suitable line manager. Sometimes mid-career level colleagues have more time to dedicate than those at a senior level.

## Balancing needs

While the Creative Careers Academy programme is framed as being about 'creative careers', the nature of the work is largely administration-based. The Engagement & Skills team at Somerset House have to be cautious about miss-selling the opportunity, but they also want to lift the lid on the reality of careers in the creative and cultural sector, and the pathways people can or have to take to work in the field. Many of the programme's additional activities are geared towards accumulating skills and

learning to "hustle", in order to work towards professional goals.

Another complex balance that has to be held within the programme is the degree to which the members are expected to fulfil a professional role, and the degree to which they should expect a developmental experience. Members are there both to meet a "business need" and to develop personally and professionally. In some placements in the second year this balance would shift up and down and there were instances where members felt there was not enough focus on the developmental.

"I really believe in the dignity of work and interconnectedness with the wider mission of an organisation - it should be business-related. It should be something that people need, otherwise it feels like it's tokenistic or it's playing at it. But unfortunately, sometimes what is needed is not necessarily what someone wants to do." (Somerset House staff member)

Employers were also very conscious of the "tension" between the way the scheme is promoted as being linked to creativity, and the type of highly administrative work they were planning to offer. While employers recognised the developmental nature of the placement, some managers also felt strongly that it was important the members understood the administrative reality behind many seemingly creative positions.

"The last thing you want to do is create a model that sends people out in the world with unrealistic expectations about what working life is like. That's reality for all of us. That's the way our team operates so it would be unfair for



the other members of my team to treat that individual completely differently.” (Employer)

The most harmonious placements seemed to be those where Academy members were given some agency to build on their personal interests and strengths, and where the work was varied and challenging.

### Recommendations:

- The nature of work offered by a placement should be clear in the initial job description, or before an offer is accepted.
- A good balance needs to be struck in temporary placements between giving participants an authentic experience of work, and providing developmental opportunities. These opportunities (e.g. shadowing, external visits, training, meetings and workshops) should also ideally be structured into a regular schedule so these are seen as an integral part of the placement.
- Expectations should be set out at the beginning of a placement so there is a shared understanding between colleagues.

## Mentorship

Every Academy member is allocated a mentor from Somerset House Trust for the duration of their time on the programme. Staff members are invited to volunteer themselves to be a mentor, and selected people are matched and provided with training to carry out this role. Staff at any level of seniority could volunteer, but most who did were at mid-career level. A specialist in inclusive recruitment led the mentorship training, which supports mentors to reflect on their own privileges and barriers in order to think about how their life experience might impact on their relationship with their

mentee. Some mentors were matched with mentees with quite contrasting creative interests, while others had more similarities.

While the pairs were given the freedom to decide how to structure the mentoring conversations, they were offered guidance and provided with a template to take notes. The mentors were encouraged through their training to avoid more personal territory in mentoring conversations, so the relationship did not get misconstrued as “therapy”.

Mentors met with their mentee every month, sometimes sitting outside at Somerset House, or in one of the on site cafés. Most of these conversations were semi-structured and they would cover a range of issues, from dealing with office dynamics to managing workload. Mentors would boost their mentee’s confidence to approach certain staff members and sometimes mentees would share feelings of exhaustion, having taken on too much work, and needing advice to put boundaries in place. In the meetings towards the end of the programme they would look over CVs and cover letters for job applications, discuss employability skills and suggest resilience strategies for dealing with rejection. Mentors also supported members to think about how their experiences are transferable to other contexts, to expand their thinking around potential job opportunities. On a few occasions, mentors were approached by their mentee outside of their meetings to ask for their advice on a work problem.

The mentorship experience was spoken about as having been enormously positive from the perspective of both mentees and mentors.

“The mentoring was amazing. It was something really new for me. My mentor was a great listener and the meetings were confidential. I think it’s going to continue until the end of July. After that, I would really love to seek another mentor or continue because I really I feel I just need one forever.” (Creative Careers Academy member)

One mentor spoke of how they and their mentee initially bonded over talking about hair,

and they noticed how it made a difference to the relationship, as they were both women of colour, that they had some similar lived experiences. While it is also possible for mentorships to flourish between people with very different life experiences or career objectives, having some shared interests in common seems to be beneficial.

Members also received informal mentorship and advice from members of staff from the Engagement and Skills team. Having key contacts in this team alongside mentors meant members had a small network of trusted, supportive colleagues who sat outside the employer-employee placement relationship.

What worked:

- Mentors found the training invaluable. The mentorship experience also provided good training for mentors in learning how to support a more junior member of staff.
- The note-taking template acted as a useful reminder to document the meetings.
- Putting clear boundaries in place helped to keep the conversations focused on career development and the placement experience.
- Members liked that their mentors were “not so far removed” from their own early career position, and that they felt able to talk to them about even “minor”, “silly” things, without holding back as they might do with a more senior mentor.

What was challenging:

- One mentor sometimes found it difficult to stay on track and not divert towards asking their mentee about their “story”.
- There were plans for the mentors to meet together regularly as a group but busy workloads made this difficult.
- One mentor felt they needed more communication from the organisation when their mentee was having a challenging time.

### Recommendations:

- Fostering opportunities for mentorship across your organisation can be beneficial for staff at any level. Consider starting a mentorship scheme internally or alongside other organisations and contacts. There are many different types of mentoring relationships, e.g. traditional mentoring of a junior worker by a senior figure; co-mentoring relationships where there is more parity, and reverse mentoring, where an experienced staff member listens to and learns from an early-career colleague.
- Giving people a degree of agency in the process of selecting their mentor can be powerful, as they will be able to articulate what they want from the mentorship.
- Mentors should also be people who really want to mentor, and are committed to putting in the time.
- While the mentoring relationship should have some independence from the programme and placements, programme managers should aim to stay in touch with mentors and keep them updated if issues arise (within the boundaries of confidentiality and data protection).



# PREPARE YOURSELF

Hiring new colleagues who are ‘under-represented’ in the workforce is not in itself a solution to creating a more diverse creative sector. People and organisations have to foster a genuinely inclusive workplace environment if colleagues are to thrive, have agency and feel a sense of belonging. Creating an inclusive organisational culture takes considered preparation. In some organisations this work is done through training, critical self-reflection, working groups and active policy-making. While preparing to be inclusive is especially important in the context of these programmes, all staff members stand to benefit from the development of a working culture that is welcoming, supportive and flexible. However in the context of the arts, where small teams are often dealing with an intense workload, inclusive practice and pastoral support is often not prioritised.

Simultaneously, when starting a career in the arts, young people need some level of personal preparation to enable them to navigate and survive this professional space. One of the

key considerations in the Creative Careers Academy programme is the degree to which members’ career journeys and personal journeys overlap, and to what extent interventions should be made to support their placement experience. Starting a new job as an employee in a high-pressure, prestigious work environment is emotionally as well as professionally demanding. If this is someone’s first experience of a job in the arts, or an office job in general, then acclimatising to this new landscape can be a significant adjustment. Programme organisers and employers have a dual responsibility to participants to ensure they gain a nurturing and realistic experience of the workplace.

This section looks at how organisations and programme participants learned from challenging experiences about the preparations necessary to cultivate successful placements. It also explores the important work of engaging with host employers and looks at how peer learning and training builds collective preparedness for difficult situations.

### Inclusion and pastoral support

Ideally all organisations should have systems of pastoral support in place for all staff to engage with when required. But in small arts organisations, where time and resources are stretched, this provision is not always available. Programmes that seek to enable under-represented young people to secure jobs in the arts arguably have a particular obligation to put support structures in place to meet the access needs of recruits.

At Somerset House there is growing acknowledgement of the ways in which the organisation can practice institutional care, including through improving its provision for people who may be dealing with external issues, workplace stress and other mental health concerns. There is an Employee Assistance Programme that is now open to all resident organisations, and which provides up to six counselling sessions for employees. There are now also ten mental health champions within the organisation who have received mental health first aid training.

Aside from responding to the more obvious presentations of mental health issues, programmes such as this also have a responsibility to stay alert to other, more subtle mental pressures and microaggressions that are sometimes felt by participants who are under-represented in the workplace.

While the Creative Careers Academy members felt welcome and supported by their employer colleagues, there were times when they felt unable to reveal how they were feeling, particularly around workload pressures and stress. Operating in small, busy teams, the members observed the feeling of being “constantly wired”. The group also talked about the additional pressures of being in an entry-level, temporary role, where you want to impress and appear highly competent so you can secure a good reference or potentially be hired in the future.

“Especially when you’re in an assistant role or junior role, you’re constantly wanting to show your best self. You’re like, “I’ll do it. It’s fine. It doesn’t matter.” I know for me, I reached a point where my body gave in. I’ve already got an autoimmune skin condition, so that flared up. In my head I was like, “Why’s it flaring up? I don’t get it. What’s happening?” It took my mum to be like, “You’re stressed.” (Creative Careers Academy member)

A couple of members said they worried about telling their line managers when they were struggling with anxiety, in case they thought they were making excuses, or they perceived them as “entitled” young people, which is a stereotype people have heard.

One member spoke of one of their placements that was particularly inclusive, with “flexitime” built in, and a relaxed structure to the day that they found was “really good” for their mental health:

“Me coming in early on days when I can, me coming in a bit later because I can. That’s what’s really important. They were really understanding. I never had to tell them about my health conditions or anything.” (Creative Careers Academy member)

Behaviours that might feel very normal if you are conditioned and socialised into feeling comfortable in these environments, might also feel alien to someone who hasn’t had this exposure. A couple of members talked about either being recommended to smile more, or noticing that smiling regularly was expected of them.

“That workplace etiquette, like smiling at people, stuff like that in general - I think that’s potentially going to be got rid of in our generation. It’s so formal and so strict. Who are we putting on that act for? We’re all working together. I don’t understand. Who’s watching us? Is this Big Brother? I never understood it.” (Creative Careers Academy member)

Some members feel that implicit workplace expectations like this encourage people to suppress their real emotions.

“It’s exhausting. You’re human. You have a life outside of work. You have this going on and that’s you. It’s intrinsic to you. I don’t agree with the fact that you should just switch off life in general to come to work.” (Creative Careers Academy member)

Instances of members being “quiet” in the office were also highlighted as examples of this potential suppression:

“I don’t think people or organisations quite realise why someone might be quiet. There is so much more to just hiring someone new. And I don’t think sometimes people realise what it’s like to be the only one, or a minority in a workforce and the impact that has on you and your mental health and your productivity and all that stuff. Imposter syndrome is a big thing and sometimes you think, “How am I here and how am I maybe the only one from my community to actually be able to access this space? Why am I here? Why me?” These are all questions that are not covered in your training or when you’re applying for jobs or when you’re getting work experience.” (Mentor)

This mentor identified the importance of employers taking the time to reflect on why someone might seem withdrawn and whether more could be done within their office environment to ensure that difference and diversity of thought/behaviour is valued.

What worked

- Office environments that supported ‘flexitime’ were seen as very inclusive.
- Having the support of the Engagement and Skills team meant there were colleagues to confide in if concerns arose.
- Some employers said hosting their Academy member made them reflect on their own cultural capital. Being part of the programme encouraged them to recognise how much more proactive work an individual has to do if they haven’t had the same exposure or privileges.

**“I come from a family that listens to Radio Three all the time and has acres of books. I could walk into the Royal Festival Hall. I know my way around backstage. I can speak the lingo.” (Employer)**

What was challenging

- In some placements employers felt they would have liked more communication from members about their support needs.
- The chain of support was not always completely clear so there was sometimes uncertainty over who was responsible if issues needed to be escalated.
- Protocols and practices were not consistent across arts organisations.



### Recommendations:

- Plan an internal strategy for dealing with personal issues, including deciding on the chain of responsibility. Clearly outline what is available in terms of wellbeing support through an employee handbook and through inductions.
- At the outset of a placement, and in a safe way, invite participants to share if they have any access/support needs that require adaptations in the workplace.
- Discuss workplace protocols and expectations and encourage colleagues to communicate if they are struggling with workload/mental health.
- Schedule regular check-ins.
- Consider training up staff in mental health first aid and having mental health champions within your organisation.
- Reflect internally on your workplace culture and what behaviour is normalised in the office. Debate this culture openly with colleagues and evaluate whether things could be done differently. Consider engaging an external consultant or organisation to help you interrogate your workplace environment.
- Research and do training around inclusive practice to better understand the mental toll of being in a minority in the workplace and to take action to be more inclusive.
- If resources allow, appoint someone in the organisation to lead on inclusive practice, accessibility and diversity. This paid role would ideally operate across different teams to ensure this work is embedded at every level.
- If working in a multi-sited programme like the Creative Careers Academy, share experiences and best practice with peers in structured sessions.







# PROMOTE YOURSELF

The ways that placement programmes and their participants are promoted and discussed, both internally and externally, are critically important on several levels. Communications around the Creative Careers Academy have been contested and debated since its inception, and use of language in particular has been shown to have deep effects on members. There are common linguistic tropes that have circulated for years around targeted arts programmes that tend to frame participants as lucky beneficiaries and arts institutions/funders as generous benefactors. Sometimes programmes are spoken about in one way internally and to supporters, and in a different way to participants. And when dealing with issues of race and class in programmes, there is often awkwardness and confusion around accepted terminology. All of these issues leave open the possibility for mixed or problematic messaging.

Having agency around how you are represented by programmes is vital for participants. Workers that are in a minority in terms of their race, class or disability status are typically extremely knowing of their perceived value to the institution (as a symbol of diversity) and are

wary of being commodified or tokenised. Some practitioners very deliberately promote their class background, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation as a part of their professional identity, while others do not. And some practitioners feel pressure to tactically position themselves in ways that they might not actually be comfortable with. As one Creative Career Academy member pointed out: “Yes, our existence is political, but it doesn’t always have to be.”

Taking lessons from specific experiences in the Creative Careers Academy programme, this section looks at the importance of clear communications around the aims of placement programmes, and the care that must be taken around the promotion of individual participants. The section also examines how Creative Careers Academy members were promoted (or promoted themselves) in the post-programme phase. The transition to exiting a programme is another time when promotion of the individual is crucial to their next steps and future success.

### Communicating the core agenda and positioning participants

The institutional motivation behind the Creative Careers Academy focuses on systemic under-representation in the arts and the structural barriers that particularly marginalise people of colour and working class practitioners. In the application form to the programme, applicants were informed that the programme was seeking candidates with no significant experience in the creative sector and who were also under-represented in the sector – ‘particularly those from BAME and lower socio-economic backgrounds’. However, when in their roles, the Academy members reported that there were public moments in the programme where they were referred to by individuals as “disadvantaged”. While these were relatively limited and isolated incidents, members said this language made them feel embarrassed, and “like Oliver Twist”.

“We would be referred to as disadvantaged, but none of us would describe ourselves as disadvantaged.” (Creative Careers Academy member)

Terms like ‘disadvantaged’ do get used across programmes and funding bodies and it is obviously true that structural and personal disadvantages often lead people to be excluded from arts careers. But the issue with how this language is often used is that it appears to individualise the problem and homogenises people’s experiences. These well-meaning narratives around disadvantage are often used in a fundraising context, as they are more emotive and less complex. But these narratives underplay the barriers created by institutions themselves and instead emphasise philanthropic concepts of institutional benevolence. When applied to actual people in front of peers and colleagues, the impact of this language can be damaging and disempowering.

One reason these disparities in language continue to persist is because programmes are not always specific, internally or externally, about the people or issues they are trying to

target. This hesitancy around language appears to be related to much wider institutional debates about how to talk about diversity and under-representation. A couple of staff members at Somerset House mentioned that issues of class and race are often clothed in the more bureaucratic language of “socio-economic status”, and “BAME” for example. These terms are derived from governments and so are adopted widely in institutions. But a consequence of this is that messages become muddy and issues become disassociated from human experiences.

“I sit on the Diversity Action Group. We talk a lot about “BAME” and “people of colour” and what we use. There’s a lot of disagreement, but fundamentally it’s about race and class, and I think those are the two words we should be using in reference to those two groups. In the same way that you say “gender”. (Somerset House staff member)

This staff member argued that people should be able to self-define, and that programmes should be listening to participants to determine how to talk about them. It is true for example that terms such as “working class” can feel loaded, and this is not necessarily a measurable or fixed characteristic, but for many people who identify as working class, this is an signifier of their heritage and cultural sensibility as much as an indicator of their social or economic position. Considering these attributes as valuable assets to organisations is one way to reframe the discourse away from the narrative of personal deficiency.

Another way that institutions can inadvertently reproduce inequality is by directing excessive praise or attention towards individuals recruited as part of placement schemes. In the pilot year of the programme it was reported that the first cohort were initially treated with institutional adulation, almost as if they were a “pop band”, according to one staff member. This practice of spotlighting individuals and holding them up as special is symptomatic of the kind of treatment that is sometimes found in arts organisations, where people who are identified as representing diversity are singled out and promoted. In the second year, efforts were made to tone this

## Promote Yourself: Communicating the core agenda and positioning participants

attention down, but members still felt they were sometimes treated as a “showpiece”.

“The lens that they got put under was with good intent but was perhaps never helpful.” (Somerset House staff member)

It is absolutely important that programmes such as these are celebrated and not siloed, and that staff members at the most senior level recognise their value. However being in the limelight can also put undue pressure on individuals and can lead to a sense of feeling commodified. Some of the directors I spoke to acknowledged the potential problems of this approach, not only for the members but also in terms of how this is perceived by other colleagues. One director suggested that the programme raises questions about how arts organisations like Somerset House enable the progression and development of all early career staff members.

### Recommendations:

- How programmes and individuals are talked about and profiled publicly are considerations that need regular analysis, and this analysis should be done in consultation or collaboration with participants themselves.
- Initiate an open conversation with staff about the principles, motivations and values that are important to your programme.
- Discuss and agree a glossary of terms amongst people involved in the programme, and those advocating for it at a senior/trustee level.
- Create a programme framework with an outline of the core programme objectives and values, which can be shared internally, with funders and with participants.

### Post-placement promotion

The period of time when Creative Careers Academy members are ending their final placement and making their next steps is a crucial phase in the programme, where self-promotion and promotion into new roles is foremost in people’s minds. There is a danger in these types of intensive placement programmes that participants leave, support structures quickly disappear, and the entrenched issues that originally prevented them from securing work in the arts continue to persist.

In the Creative Careers Academy there are a number of actions taken to aid this transition away from the programme and into other work. During the ‘reset week’ between placements and towards the end of the programme, members are encouraged to update their online presence, work through CVs and job opportunities with mentors and create individual ‘flight plans’. The members also work together on a professionally produced film, which is screened at a final celebration event and made available online as a document of their time on the programme and as a promotional tool to engage future applicants. Members are framed as ‘Associates’ to the programme for at least six months after they leave their placements, and the mentorship also continues during this time.

### What worked:

- The programme and careers advice enabled members to think deeply about their future plans and ideas for their own creative companies.
- All Creative Careers Academy members secured further fixed term work with their organisations after their placements ended. This is evidence that the programme had a longer-term effect on the workforce of organisations and the career prospects of individuals.
- Members valued having extended contact with their mentors after the programme ended.
- Having an end of programme celebration brought together staff members, funders, friends and peers to mark the achievements of the participants in a high profile way.



## Promote Yourself: Post-placement promotion



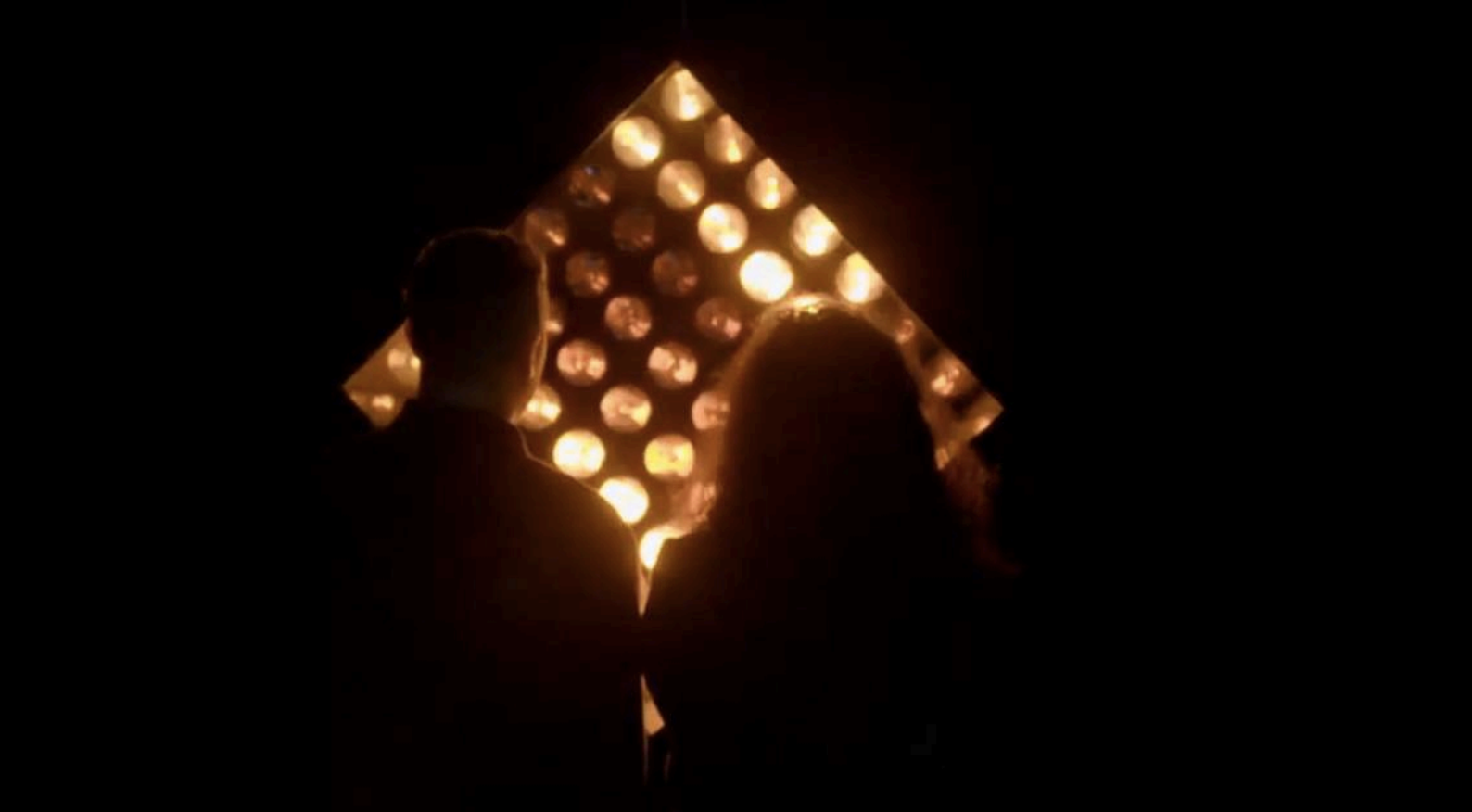
What was challenging:

- The end of the programme coincided with a busy time for the programme and staff changes, so there was not as much focus on supporting members' career planning as was intended.
- Some members found the film too staged and the process quite stressful.



Recommendations:

- Any legacy documentation (e.g. an online film) has to be carefully and collaboratively handled. Online content can't be easily erased so it is important for someone's future professional reputation that documentation presents them in a way they feel happy with and that they have some authorship over.
- Ensure that the momentum doesn't trail off towards the end of a placement or programme. Participants should ideally feel well equipped to move on to new opportunities, and have a clear personal plan for their immediate and longer-term future. Consider working with a career/life coach who could advise on this process.
- Support participants to make the most of their final few weeks by encouraging meetings/drop-ins/shadowing opportunities where possible.
- Mark the end of programmes/placements in a way that feels appropriate to participants. Find time to reflect as well as celebrate. Aim to give participants a platform to be heard if they want this.



# CHALLENGE YOURSELF

The Creative Careers Academy programme sets out to challenge early career arts professionals to try out roles in organisations they may never have considered working with before. The placements test perceptions of what a career in the arts means and they encourage members to develop new skills and contribute to the life of a busy organisation. The programme also pushes organisations to explore more inclusive ways of recruiting and to employ candidates who bring diverse lived experiences and cultural capital to the table.

But there is also a clear impetus for this type of programming to embed learning and drive longer-term change within organisations and the broader sector. For any of this work to have long-term effects, organisational change arguably has to be one of the programme's central objectives. These programmes provide a live way of testing what it means to be diverse and inclusive, and it is through the difficult lessons learnt along the way that it is possible to hold a mirror up to organisations and reflect on the change that is needed. Adopting a

position of humility and openness to improving practice is powerful both for peer organisations and members to see, and it encourages others to also strive to do better.

This final section interrogates the motivators and blockages around broader organisational and sector change and suggests ways that institutions can take action to create a more representative workforce in the longer term.

## Organisational change

Somerset House Trust is an example of an arts organisation going through an enormous journey of change on many different levels. In the last few years the organisation has been refining its vision, overhauling its structure and business model and expanding its offer to artists and small cultural organisations. Staff members liken the Trust to a start-up or a fashion magazine, where work is fast-paced and exciting and “everything moulds and changes all of the time”. This culture of growth, innovation and constant movement is familiar to many cultural organisations, and it is one of the reasons why arts careers are seen as attractive. However one drawback to this fast-paced, ambitious way of working is that there is little “digestion time” and staff are often stretched. Without time to reflect, the scope for making fundamental, difficult cultural shifts in behaviour is reduced.

For Somerset House and many of the other resident organisations, the Creative Careers Academy Programme is one part of broader organisational efforts to promote inclusion and diversity in the work place. In recent years Somerset House has invited a diverse community of artists and other creatives into the heart of the organisation through Somerset House Studios and explicitly through its Somerset House Exchange bursary programme. The organisation has also committed to providing training to all staff on Unconscious Bias, Valuing Diversity, Respect and Inclusion and Dignity at Work, and it has instituted a safe space policy across its events. Somerset House also collects and reports on equal opportunities data from applicants and has made public statements about its need to improve representation. The Trust’s diversity action group is also intended to be a force for change within the organisation. But there is recognition that there is much more to do - particularly at senior management level. One important point made by a few staff members was that because of their accent, race, sexuality or appearance, they were often assumed to be “diverse” and able to identify with people from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds. These staff members pointed out that they were actually relatively

privileged and their career trajectory had been fairly traditional, therefore their presence perhaps didn’t represent the institutional progress that other people might perceive.

These experiences underline the importance of subtlety and nuance when it comes to discussions about diversity. It can’t be assumed that because someone is from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background that they are an authority on inclusive practice. The labour around organisational change should be something that everyone in an organisation takes on, particularly those with the power to make a material difference. There were instances in the placements where a few of the Academy members were invited to come up with strategies or ideas around making their organisation more accessible and diverse. But members problematised the idea that as individuals (who were new and temporary) they could have any real impact on changing practices in their organisation.

This is not the first time some individuals have felt the pressure of responsibility to speak for diverse communities as the one under-represented staff member in the room. While members were interested and engaged in issues of equality, they also said they find it tiring to have to come up with opinions in different working contexts:

*“You don’t want to constantly have those conversations because it also alienates you.”  
(Creative Careers Academy member)*

In their working lives members want the same privileges as other people to focus on their creative interests. They were also keen to be asked more questions about their thoughts on programming, and their perspectives as young people more generally.

The despondency that some of the group felt around these matters is connected to the slow pace of change and the distance often observed between talk and action in organisations. One member felt that there was a “laughable” disconnect between how diversity was talked up as a “number one priority” for an organisation, and how lacking in diversity their

majority-white workforce actually was.

“I go about my day looking through the whole organisation, and there’s not many people who are actually diverse, and I question how are we meant to go into manager roles or director roles when at entry level there’s not that many people who are diverse. So how do you then climb up?” (Creative Careers Academy Member)

Sometimes there is a general assumption in organisations that by recruiting someone of a particular class, race or disability status that diverges from the dominant demographic, that an organisation becomes more welcoming of difference. While this can be the case, it is important to acknowledge that often the opposite is true, and that in order to fit in, people can feel that they have to modify their behaviour. Change can’t happen through one individual, or even through an action group alone. As the members suggested, there has to be a consistent commitment across the whole of an organisation to talk regularly and openly and to action change, and for diverse voices to be represented at every level of power.

Some members of the group were optimistic that organisational change will happen when current and future generations of young people ascend into positions of power.

“The generation after us, I think they’re not going to care. I think they’re just going to literally bring the culture.” (Creative Careers Academy member)

Members also emerged from the programme with a critical perspective on the accessibility of careers in the arts sector. One member reflected that the programme had made them think carefully about whether they even wanted a future in the arts.

“If it’s hard to break the barrier of getting accepted for an assistant role, eventually I’ll have to turn my efforts elsewhere. Whilst money isn’t always a priority, I’ve realised being in a different industry and being able to similarly work with the community and for engagement, the pay is significantly more... The hierarchical structure in the arts sector naturally prioritises

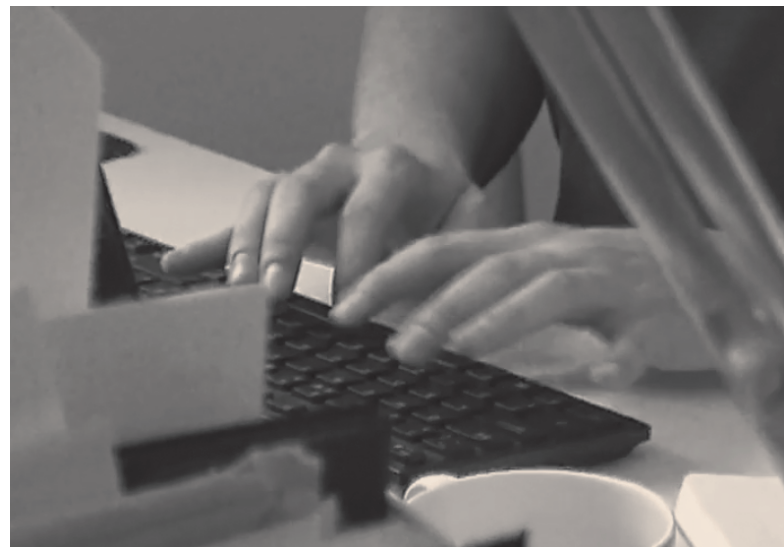
those with arts and museums backgrounds. This can be very demotivating for anyone looking to make a difference to the creative and arts sector from the ground up.” (Creative Careers Academy member)

What worked:

- Organisations involved in the Creative Careers Academy met around every six weeks to share experiences. The inter-departmental and cross-organisational working that the programme engendered was one of the most positive outcomes.
- Building in a substantial period of time between programme cycles to allow time to regroup, evaluate and prepare.

What was challenging:

- There was often no time to consider bigger picture goals and progress related to organisational change.
- Staff capacity was stretched.



### Recommendations:

- Include an objective around organisational change in your programme framework so this is an integral part of the programme's ambitions, and progress is tracked.
- Create a diversity, access and inclusion group and ensure this is representative of people across the hierarchy of the organisation. Meet regularly to discuss issues, policies and actions.
- Ensure that the labour of diversifying the organisation is not just put on under-represented colleagues. Support people in temporary placements to push back on unrealistic expectations around their ability to solve institutional diversity issues.
- Employ an independent critical friend or evaluator from the outset of placement programmes, who can challenge, advise and question at regular intervals. The broader organisation could also look to employ an external critical friend or advisory group who could hold the organisation to account.
- Work alongside colleagues to ensure that under-represented employees are given training and opportunities to advance into leadership positions.
- Make unconscious bias and inclusive practice training mandatory for all members of staff.

## CONCLUSION

Positive action programmes like the Creative Careers Academy are one important step towards creating a more representative sector. They can break down initial barriers to entry and start someone on a pathway to a meaningful career in the arts. But there are many other steps before and after someone makes it onto this type of programme that need significant attention. Youth programmes in cultural organisations usually aim to engage young people at an even earlier stage in their development, including young people who haven't ever considered creative organisations as spaces to visit and work. Much of this work is done through partnerships with youth and community organisations. This type of youth programming presents its own issues but it is just as important to focus institutional energies on this area of work, as it is to focus on recruitment initiatives. Similarly, if inclusion only happens at entry level, and people do not see themselves represented at more senior levels, including in senior management teams, the pathways to future progression look unclear and unreachable. It is even possible that programmes like this can drive complacency, and create a diversity divide, where the 'diverse' section of the workforce exists at the junior, temporary, insecure level, and the non-diverse section continues to hold the power.

Within placement programmes themselves, it is also vital to recognise that participants can experience feelings of exclusion, alienation and exhaustion if that workplace is not truly inclusive. With more inside knowledge of the creative sector, people taking on placements can actually be deterred from pursuing a career in the arts. There are those who contest that diversity initiatives make any difference and who call for much more radical change and an end to the gate-keeping power structures that have traditionally kept minoritised communities positioned as beneficiaries rather than leaders. So it goes without saying that all of this positive intervention work needs to be constantly reviewed, critically interrogated and questioned. These programmes have to be



## Conclusion

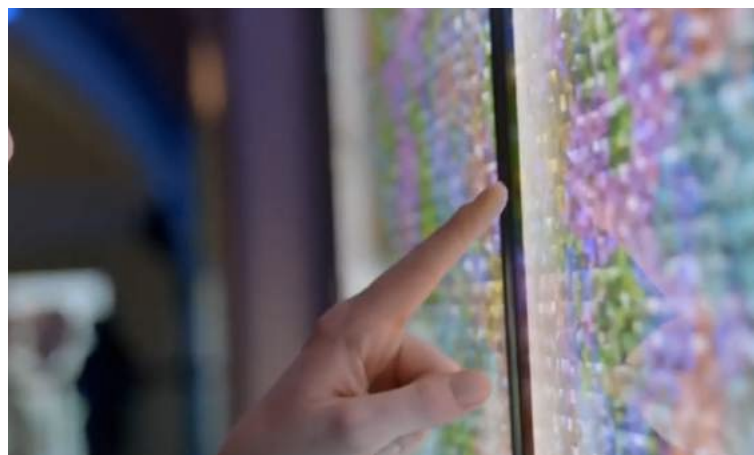
constantly alert to the possibility that they can inadvertently reproduce the very inequities they seek to tackle.

It is also important to note that inclusion should not be confused with assimilation, and the idea that people should be invited and included into the hegemonic (white, middle class, high-stress) norms of the arts institution. Rather these norms need to be fundamentally deconstructed and reimagined. To make this happen, those who currently work in the arts need to commit to a major rethinking of what constitutes valuable ‘capital’ in an arts worker. Rather than constantly prioritise the academic and cultural capital that is typically validated by the creative sector, organisations arguably need to prioritise lived experiences and alternative cultural capital in their hiring processes at every level. Programmes like the Creative Careers Academy can be spaces where institutions test this way of working, as long as participants are sufficiently supported to be themselves and are listened-to.

These are uncomfortable issues to address and they exist across cultural organisations around the UK. However being open, critical and vulnerable about these problems is a sign of organisational strength. The programme described here is an example of a scheme it is highly replicable, either for individual institutions or groups of organisations. But this programming requires huge intellectual, administrative, emotional and financial investment, as Somerset House and resident organisations’ staff have evidenced. Organisations should only enter into these types of placement programmes if they are genuinely dedicated to doing the difficult work of self-reflection and to contributing towards structural change across the arts ecosystem.

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## Relevant organisations and networks

A New Direction  
Arts Emergency  
Arts Thread  
Crafts Council  
Create Jobs  
Creative Access  
Creative Industries Federation  
Creative Mentor Network  
Creative Society  
Culture&  
Fair Museum Jobs  
If You Could Jobs  
Inc Arts UK  
Inclusive Recruiting  
Lecture in Progress  
Museum As Muck  
Museum Detox  
Pocc  
Roundhouse  
Routes In, Tate  
Screen Skills  
Shape Arts  
Sour Lemons  
The Dots  
The White Pub  
Unlimited  
Weston Jerwood Creative Bursaries

For more information about Upgrade Yourself:  
Creative Careers at Somerset House, or to discuss  
this report further please contact  
[upgradyourself@somersetshouse.org.uk](mailto:upgradyourself@somersetshouse.org.uk)

# ABOUT

## About Somerset House

Based in central London, Somerset House is an independent working arts centre with a year-round programme of exhibitions and live events. Somerset House is one of the largest communities of arts and creative enterprises in the UK, with over 400 resident organisations from the arts and cultural sectors and the wider creative economy. The building is also home to Somerset House Studios, Exchange and Makerversity - hosting resident artists, professional makers and freelancers in dynamic shared workspaces.

w: [somersethouse.org.uk](http://somersethouse.org.uk)

## About the author

Dr Nicola Sim is a freelance researcher and evaluator who works with galleries, museums and foundations across the UK to support critical reflection and encourage meaningful change. Specialising in collaborative and inclusive practice, she often works with artists, arts workers, youth and community practitioners, children and young people on long-term projects. Nicola completed a Collaborative Doctoral Partnership with Tate and The University of Nottingham in 2017 and is the author of *Youth work, galleries and the politics of partnership*, (2019, Palgrave Macmillan)

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# THANKS

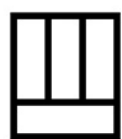
Somerset House is grateful to everyone who has worked on the first two editions of its Creative Careers Academy, especially to the members themselves and to all the host organisations.

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