

OPENING UP T@E

# WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH BAME PERFORMERS FOR THAT- AND OTHER MYTHS

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## DISCUSSION NOTES

**What have the BIPOC community experienced within creative communities generally?**

- Working-class students are deterred from creative industries because of financial difficulties and the pressure to find a job that pays
- There is a stigma surrounding the creative arts within ethnic communities and, as a result, it is common that BIPOC will not have had much experience with the arts before university
- BIPOC communities are not seen on screen/ represented in the media

**What have the BIPOC community experienced within Exeter's theatre community and creative societies?**

- Most have felt like they cannot thrive within these societies
- Multiple people have been deterred from joining these white circles
- The inaction and constant lack of effort from the theatre communities to engage with BIPOC has resulted in this vicious cycle of exclusion

- There is a clear disparity between Theatre at Exeter and the BIPOC community
- Creative societies have only ever reached out to the BIPOC community when it has suited them - the example of only messaging Exeter's Black community during Black History Month was used
- There needs to be a joint effort between theatre societies and cultural/international societies to encourage discussions and links between the theatre and the BIPOC community at Exeter
- Roles regarding race were the topic of discussion. Creatives should not be put off from casting ethnic students in roles because of a show's historical context. Creatives should interrogate the original staging of a show and adjust their approach through a modern lens. BIPOC should not only be cast in roles with a plotline surrounding race issues.
- Worries about 'taking risks' with shows must stop- whether that be out of fears of not finding a diverse cast to fit roles or staging a show that may not be as well-known or popular- there should not be a money incentive/ focus on ticket sales
- Establishing diverse circles should not be limited to casts, must be extended to other creatives and committee members
  - **IDEA: A push with the marketing of audition week- people who have done shows before know when audition squashes are, but those outside of theatre circle do not know- importance of casting a wider net**

- The problem with diversity extends beyond Exeter's theatre community to other creative societies. References were made to other music and dance societies. Legion (formerly known as Urban dance) formed as a result of limited BIPOC representation within Exeter's Dance community, formed to celebrate culture - the community that you build is important.
- Within theatre there are no opportunities to join in without committing to a show - a space for other theatre can be opened up
- A discussion regarding a new, unauditioned society was brought up. However, **existing** societies must do more if there is to be a tangible change- needs to be an active effort to increase inclusivity
  - **IDEA: An access team should be formed within T@E, working specifically to inform BIPOC on auditions/creative/tech opportunities**
- There is an intense, scary atmosphere, particularly within Theatre societies - Interviews and taster sessions need to be more welcoming. They are made to feel intimidating
- Too many shows are put on back-to-back, societies must rearrange how they distribute their time
- Bristol University: put on singing workshops and an unauditioned cabaret- encouraged more diverse participation
  - **IDEA: unauditioned workshops and talks from industry creatives should be held on a regular basis**
- Societies should make an open and public commitment to diversity
  - **IDEA: A committee role could be put in place for organising workshops, managerial roles - having a small committee can be limiting**
- Opportunities need to be made clear at the start of the year

- Societies do not cater to the needs of Postgraduate students/students who may have less time- postgraduate BIPOC students do not have the same opportunities, must cater to their needs
  - **IDEA: An alumni network for those who have lost opportunities so they are still involved in creative initiatives**
- There is a legacy feeling to T@E, electing people into committees can have an unconscious bias or favouritism
- Several people discussed the potential to rebrand Freshers' Week. Committees must engage in conversations about making theatre an enjoyable experience. Freshers' Week may be online- great opportunity to use media platforms to widen their reach
- Term 3 theatre shows were the topic of discussion. They provide opportunities for students who may not partake in large-scale shows and could be a good opportunity, going forward, for new people to engage with theatre. The issue of building access for non-drama students was highlighted.
  - **IDEA: Greater marketing of Term 3 shows**

## PUSHING FOR CHANGE POINTS

### ACTION PLAN

- Societies should make an open commitment to inclusion
- They should aim to **continuously** engage BIPOC communities with existing societies- takes the pressure off of Freshers' Week
- There must be new opportunities to join a weekly club/ partake in workshops
- Societies should stage a smaller volume of shows/ have a greater variety and volume of smaller opportunities
- There is an individual change that people need to make- committees should encourage directors to have open mindsets
- A centralised system or body working specifically on inclusion and diversity within all theatre/music societies should be established. It should be an independent body, separate from existing creative circles, and should aim to hold the creative community accountable. This should also create connections between the creative community and cultural societies- should reach out to the BME network, BAME and BIPOC societies for suggestions on inclusion
- Roles should not be limited to drama societies. The push for inclusion must be extended to other existing music and dance societies
- Change should not be performative and roles should not be 'tick box'
- Societies must communicate changes, plans and pledges as the new academic year starts

- There should be greater support from the Students' Guild
- The Guild must be held accountable for a lack of action and response to racist behaviour- members of equality and diversity panels within the Guild should be utilised
- The Guild must pay external anti-racism experts and facilitators to train committees. Improvements must be made to the existing EDI training.
- There should be greater clarity with the Guild's plans for change going forward
- Performances should not be limited to the Princesshay Shopping Centre. Workshops with Exeter college/ locals schools are encouraged to give purpose to productions and provide societies with the opportunity to contribute to the wider community
- Marketing should be refocussed to attract new participants beyond Exeter's existing theatre bubble
- There should be greater communication between societies so that opportunities are marketed to a wider audience