

WAOS and WOW Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy Strategy – members only document

The WAOS and WOW Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy has a list of five objectives for the society's future. In order to reach these objectives, some action will be required. This Strategy and the related policy should be reviewed by the committees at a maximum of five-yearly intervals, to ensure the continued relevancy and helpfulness of both and encourage the incorporation of new ideas.

The measures within this Strategy are to be trialed until the first review of the Policy and Strategy. This enables the societies to be flexible in their adoption of any new practices, as their existence is not yet public knowledge. Any measures that are trialed and considered successful by the committees will thereafter be incorporated into the Policy itself, as they will formally become part of WAOS and WOW practice.

Proposed measures to achieve our aims

NB - Some of these measures, such as inclusive casting, already exist within the societies. However, by making such a measure part of official policy rather than unofficial guidelines, any director seeking to bypass the societies' standards would be forced to provide a convincing case for doing so.

Some other measures mentioned here may be beyond our means at the current time, but it is worth being aware of any measures that might help us in the future.

- **Casting** – the societies will practice meritocratic, incidental casting *when reasonably possible*. This means that the person who gives the best audition wins the role, regardless of any characteristic which might make them an unexpected fit for the part. There are two cases when this might reasonably be considered impossible by the audition panel:
 - i) when an auditionee is so physically opposite to the character as written that the meaning of the character and therefore the show itself would be significantly changed by the casting,
 - ii) when the script has made it clear that a character has a particular characteristic, such as a specific age or racial background, auditionees with the relevant characteristic might reasonably be given some preferential treatment under the Equality Act (2010).
- **Additional needs for casting** – if someone wishes to audition and makes it known that they have any atypical physical or mental health needs, then regardless of whether they consider themselves disabled or not, they are protected by the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and the Equality Act (2010). In this case, if the societies are aware of their condition, the societies must go to any reasonable lengths to accommodate their needs. It is for the committee to decide what is 'reasonable', but it should be noted that if a person feels that they have been directly discriminated against then they are within their rights to complain or even take legal action, in which

case it would be for the courts to decide. If they are cast in the show, the societies must continue to accommodate these needs, and it is suggested that regular meetings with the Director and Member's Representative will help to achieve this.

- **Backstage hiring** – the same rules apply for backstage members as cast members, with the acceptance that there are cases where strong physical abilities are paramount. If someone enquires about a post that they are not physically suitable for, such as a stage hand, then it is reasonable to deny them their request. However, it would be prudent to offer any willing backstage helper an alternative role, as these are many and varied.
- **Special circumstances form** – this is an optional form for new members who would appreciate some additional support. Similarly to at work, members may have a personal circumstance that they would like to disclose on a 'need to know' basis, in order to feel protected if they have difficulties. This might be, for example, diabetes, an ongoing divorce or a gender reassignment. Such members would fill in a form (see attached) giving details of their particular circumstances, such as who to call in a time of crisis, what medication they take, etc. These forms will be put into a folder and shared with the Director, Musical Director and Members' Representative only, if the member is in the cast, or shared with the lead of their relevant team if they are a member of the backstage team (such as backstage manager, make-up lead, as appropriate). GDPR law requires that a named person is responsible for such data, so it is recommended that a committee member of the Director be responsible. The information shall not be shared with anyone else without the express permission of the member in question: failing to abide by this rule could be considered indirect discrimination under the Equality Act (2010) and a breach of GDPR law. It is policy that the Director/relevant backstage lead will discuss the information on the form privately with the member. In this discussion they will decide on any actions that need to be taken to ensure that the member's needs are being met, in order that they may be made to feel comfortable and included in the show. Directors ought to consider the needs of every cast member in every scene, and if the member in question has concerns about their representation, they are encouraged to approach the Director, the Member's Representative, the Equality and Diversity Lead or any member of their societies' committee. Forms will be destroyed at the end of the show run.
- **Members Representative** – a new role. The Representative will volunteer for the post and be agreed upon by members and the committee. The Representative has a borderline 'parental' or 'friend' role and is not a member of the committee. They will make their presence known in rehearsals as someone who can be approached with any members' concerns. 'Concerns' could include anything from dancers feeling overworked in rehearsals, to suspicions of bullying, to worries about the script. The Representative may also have a comments box available at rehearsal, so that anyone wanting to voice a concern anonymously can use this. The Representative will be a voice for those who are feeling less confident and will bring issues that cannot be easily resolved to those better able to resolve it (Director, committee, etc). The role may be especially important to younger members of WAOS and members of WOW, as well as those with characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010, as they

might feel less confident advocating for themselves in times of need. For these reasons it is recommended that there be two Members Representatives in WOW, in order to ensure the right people get the role, and the Representatives themselves, as young people, feel they have support and are not alone in an adult position. With the introduction of this role, the societies intend that members' voices are heard and everyone feels they have a chance to ask for help if they need to.

- **Wider advertising** – the societies represent Witham, and the Equality Act (2010) states that societies must aim to be culturally representative. We may never be an accurate statistical representation of the town's cultural strata, but if we want to reach more people, especially those from groups we have not targeted for membership previously, we must advertise more widely. Although our societies are based in Witham, many of our members are from neighbouring villages and towns, so it is reasonable to advertise in these as well. Our members may have contacts in many diverse groups, so the committee will consider using these contacts when planning marketing campaigns. Also, when we advertise for shows, we will make it clearer that there will be pre-auditions for our next show in the near future. We might consider using business cards, flyers and short performances/flash mobs as advertising, taking into account finances, practicality and members' availability. Potential locations for advertising might include: pubs, doctor's and dentist's surgeries, hairdressers, schools, children's centres, art galleries, Essex gay pride, village halls, the town centre.
- **Bursary** – bursary places do and have existed within the societies, to enable those members of the community who might not otherwise be able to participate to join the societies. The existence of these might be mentioned on our social media pages before auditions and at pre-auditions. Current members should know that, if talking to a potential new member, money need not be a barrier to membership.
- **Committee diversity** – as well as increasing the diversity of the general membership of the societies it must be a priority to diversify the committees of the societies. When a committee member steps down, the role ought to be advertised with particular encouragement to those who meet any of the protected characteristics of the Equality Act (2010).
- **Equality and Diversity Lead** – this is a committee member who exists to ensure that everyone feels fairly treated, discrimination is being avoided, standards are kept current and policies are being considered. The responsibilities included in this post could be picked up by an existing member of the committee if it were deemed appropriate.
- **Show choice** – when considering which shows to pick, the societies must consider whether it's a story they want to tell and to be seen telling. Scripts cannot legally be censored by amateur societies or performers and it is not our responsibility to rewrite history. There are many excellent shows with positive messages of inclusion and diversity which also include outdated or unkind stereotypes. This is especially common in cases of racial stereotypes. In such cases, the consequences of causing potential damage through the perpetuation of negative stereotypes needs to be weighed up against the relative good of the show. If the relative good of the show is considered greater and the show is chosen, then the potential damage still needs to be considered

and addressed explicitly in some way, rather than ignored. Although we may mean well, banning all potentially 'uncomfortable' shows without discussion only adds to the problem. Although it will enable us to avoid potential controversy, it will also shrink our pool of attractive potential show choices considerably, and if multiple societies engage in such a well-meaning practice it may result in the erasure of many characters that are non-white, non-able, non-heterosexual etc, which prevents such characters from being seen on the stage. This might occasionally result in actors playing roles that they have no first-hand understanding of, in terms of race, disability, or another characteristic, but that will not be ignored by the Director (see point below, 'explicitly addressing uncomfortable characters in shows').

- **Explicitly addressing uncomfortable characters in shows** – the societies must accept that it is better to address a problem rather than ignore it and hope no one will mind. The Director, actors in question and Equality and Diversity Lead discuss how to realistically portray the character/s maturely, preferably by consulting with people with the relevant characteristic and/or conducting research into the character's history. It may be accepted that the character cannot be improved, but our societies can avoid worsening matters. The character's costume might be made particularly realistic, or their accent changed or their time on stage lessened. The programme might make mention of this character and acknowledge it with a short paragraph on the changing depiction of social groups in media.
- **Social media policy** – a simple social media policy will be created. There must be some law maintained by the societies on their own social media pages to protect those in WAOS and WOW social media groups who feel harassed or hurt by comments.
- **Bullying policy** – this will be much like the social media policy and will discuss what measures to take in cases of one member or a group of members bullying, discriminating or harassing another. In the first case, each incident should be logged, and brought to the attention of the committee.
- **Regular feedback** – this will be sought from members and other local groups on how we could improve. Informal and formal methods for feedback may be considered. This will be undertaken by the Equality and Diversity Lead every two years.
- **Measures for specific instances:** as long as they were well-advertised, attracted the people who needed them most and gained the interest and attention of the local press, adding extra measures to help specific groups could help us attract a wider audience and improve the level of inclusion felt by our existing audiences. Each of the measures below will require market research to determine the likelihood of success and financial viability. These are only some of the measures we could take, considering the specific needs of various groups, so measures such as these ought to be reviewed regularly by committee.
 - i) **Signing the show at the matinee** – sign language might help some audience members to understand the performances.
 - ii) **Limited number of large print programmes** – large print appeals especially to older people, to those with serious sight problems and to those with dyslexia.

- iii) **Warnings about stagecraft** – the Director will itemize any special effects (such as dry ice, loud explosions and strobe lighting) which might have negative effects on those with particular medical conditions, so that a warning over loudspeaker at the beginning of a show would give these people time to prepare. Mentioning these elements on the online booking screen and over the phone when booking would give them even more time.

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