

Diversity and anti-racism at West Dean College

We passionately believe that every arts education organisation should ensure that its work draws on and reflects the full range of backgrounds and perspectives to be found in our society. A diversity of voices, perspectives and experiences, enriches creative practice and is vital in a flourishing, inclusive arts community.

To achieve this at West Dean College, we must exercise strong leadership with a strategy and a workforce that reflects this diversity. We must reinforce our commitment to improving and expanding access and participation in the creative and applied arts, recognising that opportunity does not readily exist for everyone.

This remains true to our original charitable purposes, as defined by our founder Edward James:

"an educational foundation where creative talents can be discovered and developed, and where one can spread culture through the teaching of crafts and the preservation of knowledge that might otherwise be destroyed or forgotten."

Where we stand today

The turbulent and troubling events of 2020 have shone a spotlight on human frailty, on inequality and on racism. This last year alone, the killing of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and too many others, triggered a tidal wave of horror and outrage across the globe. At West Dean we were appalled and angered by these killings. We still are.

Importantly, this outrage has prompted many organisations, including our own, to critically reflect and question how we tackle and dismantle institutional racism.

We recognise our responsibility to address structural disadvantage and put in place immediate and long-term actions that bring about meaningful and lasting change. Not just within our own institution but in helping influence and change the arts, craft and conservation sectors of which we are part.

Words must never replace actions. We are very white as an institution; historically, artistically, culturally. We have a lot of work to do and many lessons to learn. To be successful we are looking inward at our own systems and processes, as well as beyond our walls in our collaborations with artists, industries, audiences and partners.

The action we are taking

- **Equality and diversity strategy** - we are currently auditing practice across the entire institution and will be publishing an Equality and Diversity Action Plan in early 2021. We will set stretching targets and report on our progress in achieving them.
- **Strengthening leadership** – we are predominately white as an institution. From our Board to our teaching staff. We recognise that in the long-term to dismantle structural racism people of colour must be at the centre of our decision-making. We have created a Diversity & Inclusivity Working Group, with Board, staff and student representation, in order to address inclusivity at every level. We are including diversity as a standing agenda item to embed progress monitoring across our governance structures.
- **Improving access** – we will be expanding our diversity bursary programme for all levels of study at the College, with a particular focus on recruiting BIPOC artists and conservators. We are providing residency opportunities to give BIPOC artists and authors' access to the College community and Collection. Our recent partnership with New Writing South will ensure at least 50% of our author residencies in 2020/21 will support BIPOC authors.
- **Rethinking the West Dean Collection** – as part of *Whose Heritage?* a research project set up to re-evaluate the colonial narratives around the West Dean Collection we are working with BIPOC artists and the arts charity Outside In to explore the display of artefacts starting with the African Collection.

What comes next

These actions are a step forward on a journey that is ongoing. We are committed to making strategic decisions that deliver impact over time, rather than chasing quick wins or ticking boxes.

All our actions need to be meaningful, measurable, purposeful and bring about the difference we want to see. We are challenging ourselves to make this change happen, and we will be open in how we go about it and how we will achieve it.

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature is 'Alexander Barron' and the second is 'Francine Norris'. The signatures are written in a cursive style.

Alexander Barron ACA FRSA, Chief Executive

Francine Norris BA (Hons) MA FRSA, Principal & Deputy Chief Executive