

**Andrew Lloyd Webber  
Foundation**

## **New report finds progress made to increase diversity at UK drama schools, but still a long way to go**

- Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation's **Centre Stage 2021** report finds that, since 2016, the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of drama school intakes has slowly improved. Yet, in drama schools and across the wider theatre industry, there is still a long way to go.
- Written during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Black Lives Matter protest, the report cautions that already-fragile diversity initiatives may be at risk as the arts industry recovers from the devastating impact of the pandemic.
- With personal reflections from, amongst others, **Kwame Kwei-Armah, Idris Elba, Cynthia Erivo, Giles Terrera**, *Centre Stage 2021* advocates for building back better, through investment, management and sustainability, with funding and diversity at senior management level.
- In the report's foreword, **Andrew Lloyd Webber** says that "opportunity in education is the only way to unlock diverse talent so it can succeed in the theatre." He calls on "anyone who really cares about diversity in theatre" to support the work of Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation and "consider funding a scholarship."

**LONDON (10am March 15th, 2021):** Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation today releases a new report examining diversity within UK drama schools. As a follow-up to the Foundation's 2016 *Centre Stage* report, *Centre Stage 2021* examines, through surveys and interviews, how 15 leading UK drama schools have addressed challenges highlighted in 2016 to build a more diverse and inclusive intake. The report uses its findings to set out recommendations that will continue to drive progress for students from ethnically diverse or low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Key research findings suggest that, since 2016, drama schools have seen the diversity of their student intake has slowly increased from **14% in 2016 to 21.5%** in the 2019/20 academic year. However, diversity in some student cohorts is in single percentage figures.

**Positive signs of progress** include:

- **64%** of drama schools have appointed special advisors to improve the reach of their audition and application processes.

- **57%** of drama schools have reviewed and enhanced their access and outreach participation teams.
- **60%** of drama schools have appointed diverse candidates into management and academic roles.
- **76% of drama schools have partnered with state schools, regional theatres and other community organisations** to reach under-represented groups.
- A **direct correlation** is clear between those schools that used regional auditions, fees for which were waived for the most disadvantaged groups, and those with the highest increase in the diversity of their student intake.

Researcher Danuta Kean has found that three central recommendations made in the Centre Stage 2016 report have driven improvement:

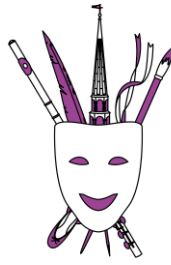
- Fee waivers for applicants from the poorest backgrounds
- Regional auditions to reduce attendance costs;
- Investment in partnerships with state schools to challenge perceptions about inclusivity in the theatre.

However, whilst celebrating this progress, the report makes it clear that **there is still a long way to go:**

- In 5 years, the diversity of the student population has only improved by 7.5 percentage points and diversity in some student cohorts remains in single percentage figures.
- The target of 50% of places to be funded by scholarships and bursaries has been achieved by **three** of the 15 drama schools surveyed.
- There remains a low representation of people of colour in academic and management positions across UK drama schools.
- The Covid-19 pandemic represents the biggest threat to ongoing diversity efforts, including the sustainability of outreach and inclusion programmes due to shutdown or diversion of money from donor organisations.
  - **All 15 drama schools said funding aimed at improving inclusion had suffered.**

Written and researched during 2020, the report calls for the momentum seen around the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer in the UK to be a catalyst for ongoing and meaningful change, particularly as the industry builds back from the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Notable industry figures share their perspectives on what diversity brings to the UK theatre industry and how we can make meaningful change for generations to come. This includes **Artistic Director of the Young Vic, Kwame Kwei-Armah; Golden Globe winning actor, writer, producer, DJ, Idris Elba; Emmy, Tony, Grammy award winning actress and singer, Cynthia Erivo; Hamilton star, Giles Terrera, Chief Executive Producer of Shed in New York, Madani Younis and Lion King, Cinderella actress, Gloria Onitiri.**



## Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation

**Andrew Lloyd Webber**, in the report's foreword, said: "Five years ago my Foundation commissioned a report on diversity in the theatre, or rather the lack of it, with the conclusion that theatre was "hideously white". Five years on there has been change, but not nearly enough.

"Excellent initiatives are indeed taking place. Get Into Theatre, the online careers resource funded by my Foundation and produced in partnership with The Stage, steers young people from underrepresented backgrounds to where they can get help.

"Opportunity in education is the only way to unlock diverse talent so it can succeed in the theatre. Education costs money. My Foundation funds up to thirty scholarships annually. They are awarded strictly on the basis of need and talent. It speaks volumes that 70% of the current scholars are people of colour. Theatre schools need more scholarships, not just for performers, but for every discipline. I implore anyone who really cares about diversity in theatre to consider funding a scholarship. "

Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation suggests that this change should be focused around;

- **investment**, into funding support for a wider range of artistic roles;
- **management**, needing to reflect the diversity of its students;
- **sustainability**, specifically maintaining the pressure required to keep diversity top of the agenda.

Diversity at senior management level is seen to be the most important catalyst for change.

**Mark Wordsworth, Chair of Trustees at Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation said:** "Our Centre Stage 2021 research was about listening, understanding and setting a challenge for us all to do better. The report shines a light on achievements made and examines the further steps necessary to ensure there are no barriers for the brightest talent to succeed. We sincerely hope that others reading this research will feel compelled to act on the recommendations it makes. This is not about pointing fingers. It is about pushing the bar and striving for us all to achieve more."

Centre Stage 2021 includes reflections from numerous Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation scholars about their experience of diversity at drama school and how they view the industry that they have recently entered.

- Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation currently provides **30 performing arts scholarships every year** for talented students with financial need, and diversity is now a key criterion for this funding: **70% of their funded scholars are people of colour.**

Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation continues to carry out research, spark conversations and champion the importance of diversity of all kinds through its work. If you want to be a part of creating positive change, please seriously consider funding a performing arts scholarship and support talented students from under-represented backgrounds to grow and thrive. For more details on how Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation can help you fund a scholarship at no extra cost, contact Sarah Miller [enquiries@andrewlloydwebberfoundation.com](mailto:enquiries@andrewlloydwebberfoundation.com)

---

### **Notes to Editors**

For more information, please contact

**Catrin Harris**

Milltown Partners

[charris@milltownpartners.com](mailto:charris@milltownpartners.com)

07732 693 920

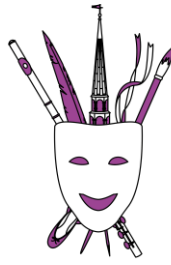
Centre Stage 2021 report can be read in full [here](#).

### **About Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation:**

Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation was set up by Andrew in 1992 to promote the arts, culture and heritage for the public benefit; since inception Andrew has been the principal provider of funding for all its charitable activities. In 2011, the Foundation embarked on an active grant giving programme and has now awarded grants of £22 million to support high quality training and personal development as well as other projects that make a real difference to enrich the quality of life both for individuals and within local communities. The Foundation is also a founding supporter of the Get Into Theatre careers website [www.getintothetheatre.org](http://www.getintothetheatre.org)

Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation exists to:

- **champion** wider access to the arts and heritage by supporting projects that reach diverse communities and those who would not otherwise be able to participate
- **prioritise** projects that enable people to develop their abilities and careers, by providing professional education, training, apprenticeships and workplace experience in all areas of the arts, from stone masonry to youth orchestras and stage electricians
- **promote** excellence in all areas of the arts, culture and heritage



## Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation

- **continue** our role as high profile champion of the benefits of engagement in the arts and heritage and the importance of diversity in the sectors

### Key interview quotes:

#### Kwame Kwei-Armah

- On audience diversity: “Diversifying your cast is the easy bit. The hard part is diversifying your audience so it does not always see things through the prism of the white lens, but through the prism of Britain today. We need age diversity, we need cultural, gender and neuro diversity.”
- On pride in the UK’s arts sector: “The role the performing arts plays in Great Britain plc, not just economically and politically, but in terms of our standing in the world, must be recognised. You grow an extra inch when you say you are from the United Kingdom and that you work in the arts. If America has soft power in terms of the entertainment industry, we have soft power in the arts.”
- On subsidies: “If we combined the level of public subsidies that the performing arts in Europe receives with our own level of energy and innovation, we could create undreamed of things.”
- On racism: “The summer of racial reckoning and Black Lives Matter taught us that, whether you have a Black leader or not, an organisation can still be systemically and institutionally racist. We need to start in our primary schools, from the stories we tell our children to creative outreach teams and the bandwidth within our curriculum, and follow through to further education.”

#### Idris Elba

- On the generational difference: “It behoves us to be open to all cultural offerings, he says, ‘just as younger people are. My daughter is 19. That generation hasn’t seen race the way we have. They watch stories that resonate with them – and what resonates with them is a raceless, almost genderless society of storytellers.”
- On audience diversity: ‘If the tradition of risk versus the need for change is not really addressed, you’re going to lose audiences anyway. You just have to tell stories and include everyone.’
- On scholarships: “Another teacher pointed him towards the National Youth Music Theatre, for which he was awarded a £1,500 Prince’s Trust grant. He is unequivocal about the importance of scholarships and bursaries. ‘They are beacons. They are prizes. They symbolise the opportunity to go for something. They are a shiny piece of fruit on the tree.”
- On action: “It is the responsibility of people who want change to force change.”

SYDMONTON HOUSE BURGHLERE NEWBURY BERKSHIRE RG20 9NJ TELEPHONE 01635 278594 [www.andrewlloydwebberfoundation.com](http://www.andrewlloydwebberfoundation.com)

REGISTERED CHARITY NO 1015648 SETTLOR: THE LORD LLOYD WEBBER  
TRUSTEES: THE LADY LLOYD WEBBER LOUISE FENNELL PHILIP FREEDMAN EMMA MARSH KATHERINE REARDON  
DR SIMON THURLEY CBE MARK WORDSWORTH

### **Cynthia Erivo**

- On diverse curriculum: “I don’t think many drama schools considered racial or economic diversity when they were first set up, which was reflected in both admissions and curriculum. Due to a lack of understanding of people who came from different backgrounds, Black and Brown students often ended up playing characters that fit into stereotypical tropes, rather than characters that suited their strengths as actors.”
- On diverse syllabus: “Broadening the syllabus is great – the more difference in it, the better. The language of Shakespeare is very important, but we must expand the idea of ‘the classics’ to include writers like the American playwright August Wilson.”

### **Giles Terrera**

- On audience diversity: “You are not changing anything unless you really reach out to people who might not necessarily go to the theatre,’ he says. ‘That’s the power of something like Hamilton – getting people into the theatre who’ve never been there before. Seeing themselves up on the stage. Hearing their music up on the stage. That’s how we are going to reach diverse communities.”
- On the responsibility of drama schools: “Drama schools and institutions have a responsibility to demystify the industry. If you are a young person of colour wanting to get into different areas of theatre, you have to be made welcome. Otherwise you assume it’s not for you.”
- On diverse audiences: “The pandemic is a real opportunity for us to ask: “Who are our audiences and how do we bring them in?” Theatre needs to change and adapt in these most difficult of times. There’s a massive appetite for great theatre out there – you just need to put something on that speaks to people.”

### **Georgina Onuorah (2017 ALW Foundation scholar)**

- “All shows should be representative of the world we live in today. We are seeing more diverse casts across the board, but I believe there is still work to do.”

### **Nimshi Kongolo (2017 ALW Foundation scholar)**

- “I am optimistic about positive change regarding diversity, but it’s a steep mountain to climb. My hope is that young people don’t become too disheartened on their journeys because the more people who actually make the journey, the more chance of a fairer and balanced industry.”