

## **Report from Brass Bands England's Equality Diversity & Inclusion Roundtable**

**held 23 July 2020**

### **and the subsequent EDI Survey**

Invited guests from organisations including Pride Brass, the Bandspeople's Alliance to Negate Discrimination (B.A.N.D.), the Kinetika Bloco performance group, Leicester's Drum and Brass, and other individuals from a diverse cross-section of those less well-represented in banding met at a virtual roundtable meeting on 23 July 2020. Hosted by Brass Bands England (BBE), the main purpose of this gathering was for BBE to listen, to hear their experiences, anecdotes and personal stories of diversity and inclusion, both positive and negative within brass banding. This activity was part of the first strand of the BBE EDI working group's initiative to explore:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- How will we get there?

with regard to equality, diversity and inclusion within banding.

Members of the panel were asked to share their experiences, both positive and negative, of equality, diversity and inclusion within brass-banding. The following points were noted.

Bands should be reflective of the communities in which they are based and be proactive in ensuring inclusion. Kinetika Bloco is an example of a multi-cultural organisation with role models, support and mentors, which could be mirrored in brass banding. It has a leadership programme to develop young people to be participants and then progress into leadership. Younger people can see people like themselves in roles to which they might aspire.

There appears to be a high prevalence of white heterosexual middle-aged men of a certain age, particularly in high-level banding organisations.

Some might argue that diversity and inclusion is not a problem.

Those few individuals in the minority who have made it to the top in banding have had to perhaps turn the other cheek to negative comment.

People shouldn't be too polite to call things out, and call a wrong 'wrong', whilst others should stand up and support them. Bands are welcoming in general, but jokes and banter can be hurtful and this might not be acknowledged as homophobia. People would say they are not racist and this is generally the case, but can unwittingly say the wrong thing.

The BBE Youth Champs is an example of an event to shout about that is getting it right. When talking about EDI, we should engage with young people who are free of preconceptions based on lifetime experience and are free to not look back. We should learn from the generations to come. There may be a disconnect between hubs and bands with perhaps a reluctance to recommend progression into bands where youth may not be accepted, or where the make-up of the band does not reflect that of the young person.

The formation of the Bandspeople's Alliance to Negate Discrimination (B.A.N.D.) organisation has brought the diversity issue to the forefront of banding and received overwhelming support. This momentum needs to be continued and developed.

Anyone should be able to progress to any level within banding based on their merit alone. Conversely, there is a danger that individuals are asked to take on roles because of the diversity they represent rather than their own merit. For example, seeking out a female composer/adjudicator to be involved in a project or contest for the sake of ticking a box.

The creation of a BAME band was discussed and whether it would be feasible to find enough BAME players to actually form a band – a sign of the current situation.

The make-up of the audience is also a sign of the lack of diversity within banding. Suggestions were made to change the music, make it more fun and enjoyable with a programme to attract people who would not normally attend band concerts. However, we should add to what's existing rather than change completely.

Banding should reach out to other organisations who have forged ahead in tackling EDI issues to see how they have approached the matter and learn from them.

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Following the Roundtable event, BBE opened up the conversation to a wider audience through an online survey. What follows is a summary of the general responses and notable comments that arose from the survey grouped under the headings from BBE's EDI initiative. (12 responses between 6.8.20 and 6.10.20)

### **Where are we now?**

Responders were asked to share their positive and negative experiences of diversity and inclusion within banding.

There was thought to be a general lack of understanding by many in the banding community as to what truly inclusive banding would look like. Racism, homophobia and sexism had been experienced by some individuals and there was a general feeling that jokes and low-level banter are still common place in many band rooms.

The responses indicated that "looking at the banding demographic at competitions it's not very diverse" and that "many bands do not have inclusion and equality policies". "Few women have corner seats". "Inclusion for players with disabilities at contests is generally completely below par". It was also felt that more respect should be shown to young players.

As well as comments on the negative experiences of diversity within banding, survey responses highlighted positive activity. Tamzyn French from Kinetika Bloco commented that "Everything is better if you are inclusive - the music is better, the culture is better, the turn-out is better, the performances are better. If you have an inclusive environment where everyone is welcome, feels valued and important then you will get a stronger, healthier more exciting band".

The setting up of the B.A.N.D. movement and the formation of Pride Brass were both seen as positive strides in the right direction, as well as an instance of a lower section band working to provide an inclusive environment for players with long-term health issues.

“As an older musician I have felt very privileged to learn from younger players.” Welcoming young beginners and great training was seen as a great asset of banding. “Banding is teamwork - youngsters can learn from older players and vice versa”.

It was noted that there are some female MDs and soloists, as well as not all-white bands.

### **Where do we want to be?**

The survey asked where banders would like the banding sector to be with respect to equality, diversity and inclusion, which generated the following responses:

“I think bands should be reflective of the community they work in”. “Everyone represents their band and the wider banding community both on and off stage, and as such is held accountable for unacceptable behaviour”.

Generally, bands should actively make everyone welcome and reach out to groups who don't traditionally engage. “People should be comfortable and safe in the bandroom”. “Banding should be open to all”. Bands need to reconsider their approach to diversity, welcome players and help guide them in the banding world rather than disregard them due to preconceived ideas about their abilities based on the colour of skin.

Enthusiasm was shown for the concept of a composite band rather than a permanent band, such as holding a Brass Pride Event where pieces by LGBT artists are performed.

### **How do we get there?**

The survey asked for ideas about how banding gets to a position of being diverse and inclusive. This raised the question that has to be asked to individual bands: “Do you want to be diverse and inclusive? And then if you do, why do you want to be diverse and inclusive? They have to have a legitimate reason for wanting to be diverse, if it's just done to tick a box or look good to the 'federation' it will never work”. The general agreement was that it has to be more than lip service. “If the band isn't all on board with the reason why and then all about setting the right environment for all to be welcome in, people will see straight through it and it will be meaningless. You have to decide what your values are as a band and then everyone needs to share them and live them”.

It was felt that all bands need to have equality policies and training for committees and band members alike. There should be safe reporting routes along with stricter repercussions for unacceptable behaviour. Also that top bands should lead by example. Safeguarding is essential to being inclusive. People need to feel physically safe before they can feel welcome.

Active outreach is needed, including the encouraging of youngsters to advance into more senior bands. It was felt that initiatives need to be run that promote the banding world and its benefits to a more diverse array of potential players. This could be by picking areas with more black and ethnic minority kids and making the music a bit more relatable. A suggestion was made to link up with Madrassahs to offer band lessons. Also, that more work should be done with schools and hubs and developing the youth network. Access to funding for diversity projects was seen as a way forward.

It was also noted that as part of EDI training, those involved in band organisation need to be fully aware of the Equality Act, the terminology to use, protected characteristics, and the use of exemptions to protect the safety, privacy, and dignity of band members. Issues can arise, for

example when booking accommodation for bands. Transgender musicians must be welcome in bands and the adjustments to accommodate them should not leave them out-of-pocket.

## **Summary**

- There is a general lack of understanding about equality, diversity and inclusion within banding. Education and awareness training is needed, alongside EDI policies
- EDI activities should not be carried out as a tick-box exercise and those from minority groups should not be included for the sake of meeting EDI requirements
- Banding should reach out to other organisations who are well ahead in this field to see how they have approached the issue of diversity and inclusion and learn from them
- Bands need to be reflective of the communities in which they are based and be proactive in encouraging inclusion
- Anyone should be able to progress to any level within banding based on their merit alone
- Role models from diverse groups are needed within banding and for audiences to see in order to attract the involvement of a more diverse group of people
- Banter and low-level jokes targeted at minority groups should not be tolerated with or without their presence. Others should speak out.
- There should be safe reporting routes along with stricter repercussions for unacceptable behaviour
- Organisations and events need to accommodate those with mental and physical disabilities
- Engagement should be made with youth to seek their views on the way forward
- Banding should be more open-minded, and broaden its music and activities to make it more fun, enjoyable and appealing to a wider cross-section of people to attract them to join
- The EDI momentum created by organisations such as B.A.N.D. needs to be continued and built upon

## **Conclusion**

Whilst there is no demographic data regarding the current make-up of bands, it is plain to see that members of bands, conductors, adjudicators, composers and those representing other banding organisations do not reflect the diversity of the society in which we live. As bands find it increasingly difficult to recruit members, they will need to draw members from all corners of society not only in order to survive, but to share the enjoyment and fulfilment that can be experienced through being involved with brass banding.