

# EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY

## A: INTRODUCTION

The Sedos Board of Trustees (Sedos Trustees) considers that Sedos' charitable objects can only be fully realised if its activities - including the creative process and our activities, events and productions - are equally accessible to any person irrespective of race, colour, creed, ethnic or national origin, disability, religious belief, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, or class/socio-economic group.

Sedos Trustees further recognise Sedos' moral and legal duty to equal opportunities as embodied in The Equality Act 2010 and the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

Sedos is committed to treating every individual fairly and with generosity of spirit. In service of this, we operate a policy of equal opportunity for all those we engage with, and will actively challenge discrimination wherever it is found.

Sedos believes that discrimination in all its forms is wrong. But we also believe that how we live and work together is more than a set of rules. Sedos' Trustees understand that in order to create an environment where there is no discrimination - whether direct or systemic - Sedos must go further than merely complying with applicable legislation. It must be pro-active in recognising and removing barriers which people from all backgrounds may face in accessing or participating in our programme and activities.

Sedos' Trustees recognise their responsibilities in developing, implementing and monitoring this Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (**EDI**) Policy, and in creating a culture in which everyone can share equally in the joy of theatre.

## B: PURPOSE

- The purpose of this policy is to ensure Sedos:
- Provides equality, fairness and respect for all in pursuit of its charitable objects;
- Does not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of the Equality Act 2010 protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (including colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origin), religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation;
- Opposes and avoids all forms of unlawful discrimination; and
- Designs its activities and decision making processes specifically to encourage and support participation from people who face disadvantage in society, including women, black and minority ethnic people, disabled people, LGBTQ people, and people on low incomes.

## **C: DECISION-MAKING**

The Sedos Board recognises that equality, diversity and inclusion is more easily achieved where there is diverse representation amongst those involved in decision making.

Sedos Trustees will seek to develop representation at Board level and in its day-to-day management structure to reflect a balance of racial origin, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief.

Sedos Trustees recognise that this is a process that cannot be achieved overnight and will therefore review Board and Management Committee membership and representation on at least an annual basis. The Board will take proactive action to improve diversity in its decision making where necessary and appropriate.

Should a Trustee retire or resign suitable applicants from underrepresented backgrounds will be particularly encouraged to consider Board membership.

Sedos Trustees seek representation that is not tokenistic and recognises that it should therefore draw on people whose knowledge and expertise enable them to speak authoritatively on and support Sedos' core activities.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion will be a standing item on the agendas for both the Board of Trustees and the Management Committee.

## **D: SERVICE DELIVERY**

Sedos' principal activity is the production of live theatre. Sedos is committed to achieving equality of opportunity and a creative environment free of discrimination in its main areas of work.

Sedos will:

- Ensure that the process and product of theatre making is relevant, accessible and appropriate to the audience;
- Create a working environment within its spaces that is welcoming and free of discrimination;
- Ensure programming for each season takes into account issues of diversity, equality and inclusion, including those outlined in this policy and the prevailing casting and storytelling guidance from London Drama Societies<sup>1</sup>;
- Ensure that, so far as is practicable, its activities are delivered by production groups that reflect the diversity of, and are sensitive to the particular needs of, the participants and, where applicable, the subject matter addressed in individual productions;

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<sup>1</sup> London Drama Societies is an association of three of the largest amateur dramatics societies in Central London: Sedos, Centre Stage, and Geoids. The group formed in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 to address what could be done to take action, create change and establish template policies that would ensure diversity and inclusion is properly considered in their societies.

- Review, evaluate and consult with members, participants and audiences to allow them to express their views;
- Ensure that activities are affordable and provided at the most appropriate times;
- Disseminate information about our work as widely as possible, and where necessary targeted to particular groups to ensure maximum awareness.<sup>2</sup> Where practicable, provide information in the most effective medium using languages, print, images, audio-visual, etc;
- Develop and encourage participation through consultation with users and non-users and seek to remove barriers to their participation; and
- Partner or collaborate with other organisations where this will enrich both our artistic programme and our operational approach.

## **E: STORYTELLING**

Sedos recognises the importance of diverse storytelling, both in terms of individual productions and at the level of its programme of productions as a whole. We are committed to broadening the range of stories we tell, and ensuring we bring embed diversity in how we tell particular stories.

We will ensure that creative teams reflect and are sensitive to the diversity of the stories we seek to tell.

We are committed to thinking up-front about any diversity issues in our productions, including in our production selection process. In doing so, we will not shy away from telling challenging or sensitive stories but will consider how best to do so.

We will discuss any concerns with members of the society with personal knowledge about what may or may not be considered offensive/problematic, and will seek advice from other theatre societies or professionals with experience in this area where necessary.

We will make any decisions taken in applying this policy clear to our members and non-members, as appropriate.

We will always consider the most appropriate way to portray storylines and characters. Where considered necessary and feasible, we will have discussions with rights holders about minor edits or script adaptation.

## **F: CASTING**

We are committed to promoting and maintaining the excellent standard and quality of actors cast for Sedos productions.

We champion diversity in all forms within casting decisions and we are dedicated to creating a safe and supportive audition environment where actors are empowered to do their best

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<sup>2</sup> Note such dissemination should not amount to targeted casting calls.

work. We are committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all actors regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, age, physical ability, faith or economic background. We understand the importance of visibility and representation onstage and we want to reflect the diversity of our city in our work.

We will operate an open audition process for all our productions. We will openly advertise all auditions online, through social media and direct marketing to members, newsletter subscribers and to a growing selection of community and interest groups. We aspire to make EDI progress by widening the network of these advertisements beyond our usual outlets to reach the widest possible population.

We are committed to the principle of open casting, meaning that all directors will cast with an open mind, without prejudice and with maximum flexibility around personal characteristics. We acknowledge that the predominantly white makeup of theatre in the UK means that we must pay particular attention to this in our work, and within any prevailing EDI action plan and casting and audition policy. As a general principle we will start from a position of neutral casting for all roles where specific characteristics are not specified within the script, regardless of preconceptions from professional productions. Where specific characteristics are central to the story, we will make this clear in audition notices and make according consideration.

## **G: MARKETING**

Sedos recognises that marketing can help improve the diversity of its membership and audiences but that, to truly create a step change in diversity, marketing to diverse auditionees and audiences should not be confined to show specific communications.

We believe that marketing to diverse groups (i.e. those beyond Sedos' immediate membership) should be an ongoing concern and part of our regular communications.

We will consider what our regular communications – such as our website, member newsletter and social media – says about the diversity of our society and our commitment to improving diversity.

If specific characteristics are required in a particular show, this must be raised by the production team during the pitch process, alongside a plan for addressing this. If this production is programmed, the Management Committee and any other relevant Sedos representative will agree this plan and we will support the production team to execute it.

Where specific outreach is needed for roles where a given characteristic is required, the marketing should be aimed at communities and not individuals.

## **H: AUDIENCE AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

We aim to attract new audiences and encourage repeat attendance and loyalty. We will seek to broaden our local and regional reach, thinking about different marketing strategies to reach out to all sections of our community.

We will strive to make our building and our performances as accessible as possible, and will seek to remove barriers to participation where practicable. We want to be open, friendly and welcoming and provide an environment in which we all come together to make and experience the best theatre.

## **I: IMPLEMENTATION AND EXPECTATIONS OF MEMBERS**

The primary responsibility for implementation of this policy rests with the Sedos Board of Trustees and, on a day-to-day basis, its Management Committee.

Sedos will seek to collect relevant data to help it measure delivery against this policy.

Where considered appropriate and necessary, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion sub-committee of the Board will propose EDI Action Plans to address specific issues, for approval by the Board of Trustees. Such EDI Action Plans will propose specific activities to help Sedos fulfil its commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Sedos expects each individual member to support and implement this policy and will respond seriously to any acts that breach this duty and conduct a full investigation to ensure there is no recurrence.

Production teams are expected to consider and apply this policy throughout their productions, and should expect the support of the Board of Trustees and the Management Committee in doing so.

## **J: TRAINING**

The Sedos Board of Trustees and the Management Committee are expected to have read and understood this policy, and to implement it in their work with the society.

Where considered necessary, Sedos commits to ensuring that it provides appropriate training to Trustees, those involved in the day-to-day management of the society, and to production teams.

The Sedos Board commits to ensuring that appropriate and proportionate resources are made available to support any identified training needs.

## **K: MONITORING AND REVIEW**

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy will be monitored annually to measure effectiveness of the policy.

Monitoring will be carried out by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion sub-committee of the Sedos Board, and will consider amongst other things:

- Progress against any Action Plans that are agreed from time to time;
- Data about those participating in Sedos' activities;
- The pitch and production processes;
- Sedos' marketing and communications;
- Any complaints or disciplinary issues that arise; and
- More general feedback from members, audiences and supporters.

In any event, the policy will be reviewed by the Sedos Board of Trustees at least once every two years.

Approved: 10 Oct 2022

## **ANNEX 1**

### **LONDON DRAMA SOCIETIES: CASTING AND STORYTELLING GUIDANCE**

“We want stories to be told from a diverse range of life experiences and perspectives”

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Diversity is a broad topic and covers many intersectional facets. The main discussion of this document and recommendations made are around racial and ethnic diversity, representation and portrayal. We have laid out some recommendations for societies around the types of stories we tell (storytelling) and who tells those stories (casting), as well as some recommendations to bear in mind when choosing a show to perform.

These elements are important for ALL shows, not just shows with “perceived issues”. Racism is systemic and therefore is prevalent even when not direct. Every play and every vision of every play should be considered to avoid harmful pitfalls.

#### **AN OVERVIEW**

***Diverse Storytelling*** – Diverse storytelling involves thinking about how a play fits our current context, from a global/societal level through to individual audience members, performers and team members. It is important to understand who wrote the piece and the context that it was written in and using that to guide decisions on if to/how to stage a production.

***Diverse Casting*** – It is about making conscious decisions about how a show can be cast, and not following a “traditional” model which repeats the same things we have seen 100’s of times before and has created the issues we are facing.

#### **NOTES ON CASTING**

***Non-traditional casting*** – Casting not based on race, ethnicity or traditional “look”. (n.b. can be known as “colour-blind” casting, but that phrase has its own connotations and can cause issues. See section 2.D for more about language.)

***Race/ethnicity driven casting*** – Where race is a key component of the story. Productions need to assess how to appropriately and with authenticity cast the show.

***A non-white “other”*** – Do not treat white as standard and diversity as “other” in how we cast. Lots of shows are written leading us into this, we need to catch ourselves.

***Stereotyping*** – A specific issue surrounds including cultural stereotypes. Looking out for these stereotypes when they are obviously present and what previous production might set a bad precedent. Shows like Anything Goes or the The King and I come to mind. How these

are going to be dealt with whilst upholding the values of a Society and the desire to avoid cultural stereotypes would be a key thing to address in order to avoid causing harm or upset.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

These recommendations are not designed to specifically discourage the performance of any particular piece but are recommendations of the things that should be considered.

We have broken the recommendations into different points in a show's evolution and the different issues that could arise and suggestions of things to think about/take into consideration.

### **1. SELECTING SHOWS/PITCHING PROCESS**

#### **STORYTELLING**

- a. Don't assume you know the show being put forward – make sure that you're across any potential pitfalls; particularly in relation to minor characters/secondary plotlines
- b. Think about whether you can cast all of the parts from your membership/usual outreach programmes. For example if a show has a particular role that needs to be performed by a person of a specific ethnicity, do you have people who are likely to audition? If not, think very carefully whether you should be performing the show. It may be that, if a show has particular racial themes, and you believe it may have interest to people from that ethnic minority, it may encourage broader participation in your society. That might be a positive outcome, if you believe you can welcome and sustain this broader membership in subsequent shows. However, if one ethnic minority role is required to supplement a predominantly "white" show, and you don't have suitable people in your membership already, then consider very carefully – bearing in mind that it is generally not appropriate to make a specific outreach effort for just one ethnic minority role – you should already have diverse performers in your membership to be able to fill one ethnic minority role.
- c. Think up-front about any diversity issues in a play/musical and list them out for open discussion.
- d. Where concerns, discuss with members of the society with personal knowledge about what may or may not be considered offensive/problematic. Maybe seek advice from other theatre societies/ or professionals with experience in this area.
- e. Think about what audiences will perceive – i.e. will an ethnically diverse audience be comfortable with the play and the portrayal of all the characters.
- f. Beware of old classics which may have racist tones; and beware of well-known pieces, particularly where based on films, where there may be a tendency to cast in a certain way, purely because that is how the film was cast.

- g. Many shows do have potential pitfalls; especially around racial stereotypes. Be aware of these issues and how they are to be addressed to avoid furthering negative stereotypes. Ensure that a Director will address such issues.
- h. There could be conversations with rights holders in order to approve minor script edits; or maybe there is another way to portray the characters.
- i. If looking at script adaptation to make a show work around stereotypes think about how this act is potentially a racist act, to brush the ugly bit under the carpet might be perpetuating an issue.
- j. Avoid racial stereotypes or at least give very clear thought and discussion – eg Donkey in Shrek.
- k. The creative team selection is important. Where a show has a particularly racial theme or elements, ensure that there is diversity within the directorial team.
- l. Ensure that the opportunity to pitch productions that tell diverse stories from diverse creative teams exists and is followed through.
- m. Where putting together a season, try and look at the diversity of productions, from the types of stories through to the production teams and casting.
- n. Remember issues can be prevalent throughout the production, dance and music as well as language and
- o. Societies could set themselves benchmarks to hit to hold themselves accountable.

## **CASTING**

- p. Societies need to try and ensure a balance of repertoire and actively encourage shows:
  - i. That will give opportunities to tell stories from diverse perspectives so that we are hearing stories centring different experiences.
  - ii. That can be cast in a diverse manner regardless of traditional casting – and be conscious of the desire to do so.
- q. Ask the question - can the play be cast in a non-traditional manner, or are there certain characters who need to be cast in an ethnically appropriate way. The Director should have a clear answer about this, or support may need to be given to get to a clear position.
- r. Any decisions on casting approach needs to consider the impact on audiences, the shows cast and team, and then how realistic it is for the society to be able to actually cast appropriately.

## **2. ADVERTISING AND CASTING PROCESS**

- a. Potential cast members may have pre-conceived ideas about certain characters in a show (for example, Elle Woods in Legally Blonde). Audition materials should make it clear if the team is genuinely open-minded in their casting.
- b. If for reasons within the play a role is only open to people of a certain race/ethnicity/look, then be explicit – and this includes where only a white actor will be considered. I.e. it shouldn't only be roles where eg only a Black or Asian actor will be considered, but should be for all roles.
- c. Encourage diverse casting teams – i.e. so that the panel is more reflective of society. Representation matters throughout the process.
- d. Be careful and thoughtful about language used in audition materials. For example, “colour-conscious casting” is the much preferred industry standard with calls to cut “colour-blind casting” entirely.

## **3. IN PRODUCTION**

- a. Create an open environment where it is possible to challenge production teams on potential issues.
- b. Making all cast and team members feel included and ensuring that all cast-members have the opportunity to input into and ensure that they feel comfortable with their own and everyone else's portrayal on stage.
- c. Where there are particular racial issues, make sure that the cast fully understand those issues and have the opportunity to explore them and understand the racist issues that might be present and being portrayed. In-depth cast workshops to address those issues to be encouraged to ensure everyone's voice is heard.
- d. Ensure that where a cultural stereotype is present in the script this is dealt with in a sensitive way. And ask the cast including the actor playing the role how comfortable they feel and ask the question will all of the audience feel comfortable with the portrayal.
- e. Don't expect a BAME cast or team members to have to be the full moral conscience of the production. It is everyone's job, and whilst the creative team have to own it, this should be in a fully collaborative manner.

Adopted: 13 December 2023