

# HEADLONG'S JUSTICE PLAN:

## LGBTQIAA+

At Headlong it is our firm belief that making great art is inextricably linked with the pursuit of justice. This document outlines how we plan to make our work and organisation more inclusive to members of the LGBTQIAA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Agender, Plus) communities, whom have been underserved by the industry and historically at Headlong.

We acknowledge that the experience of being LGBTQIAA+ is not separate from other areas of identity and we aim to take an intersectional approach. This document has been co-created by the Staff Justice Group at Headlong to work in conjunction with our plans on Race, Women, Disability and Socio-Economic disparity. The Staff Justice Group includes the majority of our staff members and is diverse in gender, sexuality, class, religion, disability and ethnicity. Headlong would also like to thank Milk Presents for their consultation and time on this document.

For the purposes of this document, we are using the term LGBTQIAA+. Occasionally we use the word 'queer'.\* We recognise that vocabulary around LGBTQIAA+ identities is constantly evolving, and that the use of the word queer is not yet a settled question for all people in the LGBTQIAA+ communities. We will treat this document - and our use of vocabulary - as a work in progress and continually review it. At present, we are using the terms LGBTQIAA+ and queer interchangeably and with equal weight in this document.

\*Headlong subscribes to a non-normative definition of queerness that recognises the broadest and most fluid definitions of sexuality, gender identities and expressions.

### ACTIONS:

#### 1. Transparency

In order to protect the anonymity of our freelancers, staff and board, we will not be publishing the data regarding LGBTQIAA+ employees on our website. This is to ensure the safety of our employees.

If any questions should arise regarding transparency, please contact us via [info@headlong.co.uk](mailto:info@headlong.co.uk) and we will do our best to address any concerns.

This Justice Plan will remain on our website and be reviewed regularly.

#### 2. Who is making shows at Headlong?

We have been fortunate to work with excellent queer artists at Headlong over the years, however more work needs to be done to ensure that Headlong is actively attracting LGBTQIAA+ talent.

- Headlong will always cast trans and non-binary actors in trans roles. We have co-signed the [Trans Casting Statement](#) and are grateful for this work in accelerating our thinking.
- We will employ queer artists (and paid consultants where necessary) in every stage of production when making LGBTQIAA+ work; across the writing, designing, rehearsal, and performance periods.
- When making LGBTQIAA+ work at least 50% of the Creative Team will be queer.
- Over a two-year cycle *at least* one lead creative on our shows will be queer (i.e. either writer, director, designer, lead actor).
- Over the next 18 months we will meet with and get to know the work of *at least* six trans artists, in order to widen the pool of artists with whom we work. We will make sure these artists represent intersectionality.
- We will endeavour to encourage and include LGBTQIAA+ artists and perspectives in all our work, and make sure that these artists are able to make their best, most honest work.
- We will always research and actively reach out to the communities and artists who see themselves in the stories we tell.
- We currently have LGBTQIAA+ representation on our board, our goal is that we will always have queer representation on our board.
- We currently have LGBTQIAA+ representation in our core staff team, it is our goal that we always have queer representation in our core staff team.

These commitments are designed to intersect with the commitments of our other Justice Plans, to provide an intersectional framework for progress at Headlong.

### **3. What stories are we telling?**

As a theatre company, we present new plays alongside reimagined classics. Our ambition is for Headlongs' work to represent the world around us. In the past, this work has had relatively few LGBTQIAA+ characters and stories.

- In the next two-year cycle, beginning 2022, *at least* one mid-scale show will have a queer lead character.
- In the next two-year cycle, beginning 2022, *at least* one commission out of eight will be a LGBTQIAA+ story.
- In the next four-year period, beginning 2022, we aim for *at least* one mid-scale touring show to be a queer story.
- In a two-year cycle it is our aim that *at least* 25% of the writers we commission will be LGBTQIAA+ (we currently commission four playwrights a year).
- In a four-year cycle, beginning 2022, *at least* 25% of our Writers in Residence will be queer (there is one each year).
- We want Headlongs' programming and commissioning to be more inclusive of new LGBTQIAA+ stories and queer interpretations of old stories. We will do this by making

sure we are regularly seeing queer work and meeting queer artists, and also where possible that LGBTQIAA+ voices from our staff team are involved in programming.

#### **4. Who is Headlong making shows for?**

We recognise that the experience of queer audiences in 'traditional' venues can be othering, and sometimes threatening. As we work to include LGBTQIAA+ artists and stories more at Headlong, we will strive to make sure that queer audiences feel comfortable while watching our shows.

We have some thinking to do on analysing the effectiveness of our points of entry for those who are traditionally excluded from the theatre. This includes reviewing how we invite audiences (the offer), how we build the bridge with disenfranchised audience members (packaging the offer) and how we welcome the audience (environment at the event or performance). We aim to serve a wider range of audiences by presenting queer stories and working with LGBTQIAA+ creatives.

- We will work with our co-producers to improve the queer audience experience. This will include making sure toilet signage and audience announcements are inclusive, and that Front of House is a welcoming atmosphere.
- When marketing a show, we will avoid using text and imagery that perpetuates LGBTQIAA+ stereotypes or unconscious bias.
- When making queer work we will engage with partners, co-producers and facilitators who can bring us into conversation with LGBTQIAA+ audiences and communities. We will start these conversations as early as possible.
- If there is anti-LGBTQIAA+ heckling during a performance, Headlong will take this extremely seriously and work with the venue to deal with it in a way that prioritises the safety and mental health of our queer artists, including after care.

#### **5. Who is reviewing?**

It is vital to us that our work is reviewed by as wide a range of people as possible, and we aim to challenge the hegemony of reviewing culture by making space for less traditional forms of reviewing. We recognise that theatre critics of the mainstream media are not diverse, and that some publications have an institutional history of anti-queer rhetoric.

- We will consistently invite publications with queer readership to review all our work.
- When working with LGBTQIAA+ artists, we will be conscious of who we invite to review our work to mitigate any bias reviewing.
- We will challenge prejudice in reviews of our work and we will support artists who experience this by providing access to external mental health support if required.
- Where necessary, we will communicate the pronouns of the cast and creative teams with reviewers, to guard against misgendering. We will always prioritise the safety and privacy of the individuals we work with.

- Where necessary, we will correct any misgendering by reviewers. We will always prioritise the safety and privacy of the individuals we work with.
- We have a plan of action for handling anti-LGBTQIAA+ press and/or public harassment surrounding our productions, and look to consult with other companies who already have a robust policy in place.

## **6. How will Headlong support the next generation of queer artists?**

At Headlong we want to create career opportunities that are as inclusive as possible to LGBTQIAA+ communities.

- Our early career opportunities will not have an age restriction in order to acknowledge the barriers to entry facing the queer community that make it harder to sustain or begin a career in the industry from a younger age.
- We commit to making the recruitment of our artist development scheme, Headlong Origins as inclusive and accessible as possible for LGBTQIAA+ artists. This includes ensuring that the shortlisting panel and interview panel will never be overly representative of one identity, and will include queer representation.
- On our Headlong Origins programme in a two-year cycle we will aim for *at least* one of our artists will be LGBTQIAA+.
- We will always promote our artist development opportunities as widely as possible, to ensure we reach LGBTQIAA+ communities, including reaching out to queer networks.

## **7. How will Headlong better support employees going forwards?**

Headlong is fully committed to the professional support of LGBTQIAA+ communities in theatre, and we acknowledge that there are many barriers and risks that need urgent addressing. There has been a worrying rise of LGBTQIAA+ hate crime, with recorded homophobic and transphobic hate crimes having jumped every year since 2015, and with an estimated four in five still going unreported. The threats to LGBTQIAA+ rights continue with changes in legislation post-Brexit. There is a current prevalence of transphobia online and in the press/media. LGBTQIAA+ employees may be carrying previous negative experiences when they come to work with us. To fully support them at Headlong is to acknowledge these battles and institute practical safeguards.

- When working in co-production with other companies and venues, we will advocate for our partners to align with our LGBTQIAA+ justice values.
- We will welcome and normalise the use of pronouns in our office as well as in all our rehearsal rooms, and we acknowledge that some people will not want to share their pronouns and that is okay. We will always prioritise the privacy and safety of individuals that we work with.
- We will signpost our staff and freelancers to platforms where they can get LGBTQIAA+ information and support.

- With each production, we will review our safety policy for company members to ensure a bespoke and specific plan for each show, in recognition that a one-size-fits-all approach is not adequate for queer colleagues. (For example, considering dressing room allocation, travelling safely at night, safety in digs, quick changes during a show.)
- We will develop a plan for handling online abuse, and look to consult with other companies who already have a robust policy in place.
- We will make sure our Equality, Diversity and Dignity at Work policy is communicated clearly to all employees and freelancers.
- We are committed to providing safe, discrete reporting options for staff and freelancers and we are clarifying all our policies and procedures to ensure this.
- We are establishing feedback loops so we can hear about how queer people are finding working with us in order to improve.
- We acknowledge that gender and sexuality is transient, and can change multiple times in someone's life. We are committed to cultivating a safe and supportive environment for anyone experiencing change or in a place of questioning.

#### **8. How will we hold ourselves accountable to these actions?**

- We hold internal weekly justice meetings at Headlong (the Justice Group), which all staff attend. This group scrutinises possible exclusion and the systemic structural issues that allow biases to be perpetuated within our processes and comes up with solutions. We commit to continuing these weekly meetings and we will collaborate with external consultants who have expertise in best practice as we work through specific topics.
- We currently invite board members to attend the Staff Justice Group on a regular basis, and will continue to do so in order to ensure that conversations around change are joined up and implemented at every level of our organisation.
- We will ensure that Justice is kept at the top of the agenda at all levels at Headlong and will continue to discuss justice at every board meeting. A staff member from the Staff Justice Group currently attends every board meeting to contribute to the discussion and will continue to do so.
- The staff and board at Headlong will undergo training designed to combat systemic biases, which will help us explore our own understanding, as well any limitations in our existing systems and how to best prevent those limitations from pervading our structures in future.
- We will create a 'Justice checklist' as soon as we know that a production is taking place to embed this plan into our producing processes.
- We will debrief after every production to assess how we did with our justice goals and create an action plan for how to meet any goals that we have fallen short of.
- We will annually hold a meeting to review what justice goals we did and didn't meet over the year, and create an action plan of how to meet these goals for the year ahead.
- We will rigorously review our recruitment processes and ensure with immediate effect that at least one recruitment panel a year has LGBTQIAA+ representation.
- We will ensure that sufficient human and financial resources are allocated for all our Justice Plans to be carried out effectively.

