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## Diversity: looking beyond quotas

4 November, 2014 | By Jimmy Akingbola



**For TV to reflect modern Britain, change must come from within, says Jimmy Akingbola**

Production companies and commissioners are now hyper aware of the issue of diversity; some are implementing quotas to make sure they start to make the change, wary perhaps of the exodus of BAME actors to the US, where even shows like *Under the Dome*, set in a small American town, boast impressively diverse casts.

But quotas are only part of the story. If not carefully implemented, they risk simply offering a change in palate, rather than a lasting cultural difference.

Of course, we mustn't ignore those who are working hard to increase on-screen diversity. The casting team on *Holby City* and *Casualty* have been leading the field for many years. I should know – I was part of the cast for three years.

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I've been part of this drive myself. My business partner Fraser Ayres, and I set up TriForce Promotions 11 years ago, to help improve access for all creatives into the industry: actors, writers, directors and producers. We're not a campaigning organisation, but prefer to work with the establishment to find solutions that help diverse creatives become part of the mainstream.

We aim to be the bridge between established industry and diverse talent. For us, diversity means just that: not BAME actors in a box, not women in a box, not disabled talent in a box, but a little bit of everyone - inclusivity, not exclusivity. On-screen and off.

All of our programmes focus on achieving real outcomes for the people who take part, whether actors finding an agent or offered casting through our national showcase competition, MonologueSlam UK, or writers offered development commissions through our writing competitions in partnership with production companies.

On 22nd November, we're taking over BAFTA with our third TriForce Short Film Festival, showing the work of emerging and established film-makers from diverse backgrounds at an incredibly prestigious venue. Last year's winner, Jane Gull's Sunny Boy, was broadcast on Channel 4 this summer and Gull is now working on her first feature film, My Feral Heart.

This year we've been helped by a substantial grant from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, which recognised us as arts leaders and cultural entrepreneurs. This grant has enabled us to develop the festival into a much larger programme.

Alongside the full-day film programme, we're holding several seminars on the important issues in the film industry, including diversity, featuring former BBC head of diversity Sue Caro; Danny Lee Wynter from campaigning organisation Act for Change; and representatives from Channel 4, Creative Access and Creative Skillset.

We're working hard to change things from the 'inside', with the added advantage of having access to a huge network of diverse talent that we've built up over 10 years.

There is ample appetite for change; it just needs some support to access the talent that will make that change. Those at the forefront of the industry must think outside the box, and realise that diverse talent can come through many different channels. By doing so, we can make that long term cultural change and our entertainment output can truly reflect the diverse makeup of the UK.

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» **Jimmy Akingbola is an actor and co-founder and chief executive of TriForce Promotions.**