



**BFI REVEALS COMMITMENTS TO DISABLED FILMMAKING COMMUNITY
AT 'BUSTING THE BIAS'**

BAFTA-winning screenwriter Jack Thorne in conversation with Adam Pearson for a candid discussion about disability on screen

LONDON. Wednesday 5 February 2020. The BFI's **Busting the Bias** forum which aims to break down barriers for disabled talent in the production industries, has outlined a series of commitments to the disabled filmmaking community to help drive a stronger and more inclusive industry. Headlined by BAFTA-winning screenwriter **Jack Thorne** (*His Dark Materials*, *The Aeronauts*) in conversation with actor and activist **Adam Pearson** (*Under the Skin*), Busting the Bias saw creatives and practitioners call yesterday for improved access for disabled talent to work in the screen industries, as well as the importance of creating authentic on-screen representation and leadership off-screen.

The commitments have been fostered through the BFI's Disability Advisory Board, formed in 2018, which not only tasks the BFI to address key challenges facing disabled talent, but also provides ongoing guidance on the best and most effective way to positively engage with the community.

On the issue of 'cripping up' referring to the practice of nondisabled actors playing disabled characters, the BFI restated that it will seek to avoid this practice on all the production it funds and will ensure projects are authentically and mindfully cast across all roles. The fundamental message from the Advisory Board is that the approach to casting and auditioning needs to change to enable disabled actors equality of opportunity to play a wide range of roles, not just disabled roles. To address this, the BFI will support the industry with guidance and tools to improve disabled representation on screen, to increase opportunities for actors to secure roles regardless of disability.

Other commitments are to continue to grow strategic partnerships with the disabled filmmaking community to ensure the principle of 'nothing about us without us' is adhered to; work with industry to improve access on film and television sets; support the call for fair pay for disabled talent; and strengthen guidance to help projects meet the BFI Diversity Standards in relation to disability.

Speaking at the event, **Andrew Miller, Chair of the Advisory Board and the Government's Disability Champion for Arts & Culture**, commented on the current discussion on diversity around the BAFTA and Oscars®: "We view the debate on gender and people of colour with full solidarity, but also with envy, because at least there is a debate, which the disabled community are completely absent from. This must change."



Jack Thorne also spoke of his disappointment at the pace of change for disabled talent being too slow: “I’ve seen change happening – in the faces and the stories you see on TV as a result of pressure from the broadcasters and commissioners – but this is not happening in terms of disability as the same pressure isn’t there. There is also a lot of fear of making mistakes and an enormous amount of ignorance, so addressing the issue is avoided. There are some good things happening – I’m not saying doors are not being kicked in, but they aren’t being kicked in fast enough.”

Adam Pearson said: “Events like Busting the Bias are greatly significant for our industry - in a climate that has boiled down the issue of diversity to just BAME and gender, disability also deserves a seat to the table. It’s equally crucial that these events are regular, and aren’t just a ‘one hit wonder’. As our industry continues to evolve the diversity landscape will evolve to keep pace. The more diverse voices that shape that evolution, the better our industry will be for it. Disabled creatives don’t want a hand out, we want a hand up - that is the nature of equality.”

Actor, writer and director **David Proud** (*Verisimilitude*, *Secret Diary of a Call Girl*) said: “I’m delighted that the BFI, the biggest ally to disabled artists, is taking a stand on the outdated practice of ‘cripping up’. Film is a sensitive medium and any outright ban would be counter-productive, it’s about us all moving forward and retraining our brains to think about disability inclusion from the start. Crippling up historically was used because there was no talent; we now have an abundance of talent, let’s celebrate that. The BFI has set the bar, I’d love to see others commit to the same.”

Jennifer Smith, BFI Head of Inclusion said: “I sincerely thank the members of our Disability Advisory Board, for your continued engagement, but more crucially, your critical friendship. We have been actively working to strengthen our work to with D/deaf and disabled people and the neuro-diverse community, and we’re learning much in the process, but there is much more that we must do to support disabled talent, workers and audiences.”

Busting the Bias was hosted by **Kim Tserkezie**, actor, writer, producer and Managing Director of **Scattered** Pictures (*Obsession*). Other speakers included **Neena Shea**, **National Theatre** Creative Diversity Project, who gave an update on **ProFile**, the video database of D/deaf and disabled actors for use by casting directors and other professionals across film, television and theatre; **Jessica Loveland**, **Head of BFI NETWORK**, who outlined plans for a new mentoring programme for disabled talent in partnership with BAFTA which will launch later this year; and **James Weddup**, **BFI Film Fund**, who detailed the support available to filmmakers and organisations who need assistance with completing applications to the BFI due to access requirements.



As part of the event Kim also hosted for a lively and frank Q&A session, inviting the audience to 'Ask anything you wanted to know about working with disabled people but were too afraid to ask' on stage with actor and performer **Dan Edge** (*Outbreak*), screenwriter and producer **Kyla Harris** (*The Other Screen*), founder of 104 Films, **Justin Edgar** (*The Marker*, *Unrest*), and **Adam Pearson** (*Under the Skin*).

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Notes to Editors

ABOUT THE BFI

The BFI is the UK's lead organisation for film, television and the moving image. It is a distributor of National Lottery funding and a cultural charity that:

- Curates and presents the greatest international public programme of world cinema for audiences; in cinemas, at festivals and online
- Cares for the BFI National Archive – the most significant film and television archive in the world
- Actively seeks out and supports the next generation of filmmakers
- Works with Government and industry to make the UK the most creatively exciting and prosperous place to make film internationally

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter. The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Josh Berger CBE.