

HEADS TOGETHER—Changing the Conversation Research Project for Artworks PROJECT: “The View from Below”

Final report on the project

1. What did we aim to achieve?

What did you intend to get out of the project? Where did you start from – what was the context/motivation for the project?

The motivation for the project came from attending the Changing the Conversation conference in April 2013 and coming away wondering what sense it would make to the young people that we work with, particularly those involved with our established community radio arts project in East Leeds, a disadvantaged area of Leeds. Several of our long-term teenage volunteers had expressed an interest in developing a career in the arts, some quite specifically in community arts; yet we weren't clear what was the best advice in terms of training pathways.

The project aims as identified in the Self-Evaluation form (see appendix) were:

- To investigate the opportunities for training in participatory arts from the point of view of young people
- To gain an insight into the key issues affecting young people's choices of training opportunities
- To consider how this links with the competencies expected by employers in the sector when looking to offer work opportunities to young people

2. What did we do?

What were the inputs/resources for the project? What were the activities and processes which you used?

- A. We initially worked with a group of 11 young people, all of whom are currently considering training pathways post 16, and conducted a series of discussions, group and individual interviews
- B. Two young people, one who is on a temporary contract in his gap year, and the other an intern, recorded phone interviews with senior staff of five regional employers in the Community Arts sector
- C. We arranged group visits to Trinity College, Leeds; Manchester School of Art; and Liverpool Tate to consider Higher Education opportunities and traineeship/apprenticeship opportunities in the sector
- D. We then worked with a further group of 12 young people who are at an earlier stage in looking at career and training pathways. They hosted two radio programmes on ELFM¹ which gave them an opportunity to start their own discussions about their future and talk to higher education students and tutors, careers advisors and others...

¹ Both programmes are available on listen again. Search for “Changing the Conversation” on www.elfm.co.uk or follow direct links: <http://www.elfm.co.uk/listen-again/changing-the-conversation-opportunities-for-young-people/> and <http://www.elfm.co.uk/listen-again/next-gen-2-changing-the-conversation/>

3. What happened and what did we learn?

A Initial cohort

The group ranged in age from 15-19 years old and included

- young people in GCSE year making decisions about 6th form/college choice. Most of whom had in their mind the idea that they would then look at HE as a preferred option
- young people studying AS/A levels making decisions about possible HE choices
- two young people who had just started in HE; and one who had decided not to go down the HE route

Some of the themes and issues that came from those initial discussions and interviews:

- There was a split between people who had active parental support and those that didn't. This seems to be a particular advantage when it comes to choosing Higher Education routes. One of the young women said:
“Well put it this way I haven't visited a university without my mum yet—and my dad's come to some of them too. It's my decision but they have been very good at pointing out things that I wouldn't have thought about otherwise”.
This compares with some other young people of the same age who really appreciated the trip to Manchester University:
“I've never been to a university before and it was great to just be able to talk to people there, particularly some of the other students”
- Most of the young people are considering University as their preferred option. However financial considerations were mentioned by many as a worry, and particularly as the reason for those that had ruled out Higher Education as an option (money rather than inappropriateness of courses, or academic ability etc). And for one young person who also lacked parental support and involvement:
“There's no way I was going to get into that much debt and have no one to help me out”²
- Out of the group of 11, 8 were looking to progress in the creative arts and 5 wanted to find a training pathway that would definitely give them the option of gaining employment in community arts in the future.
“I've really enjoyed what I've done with ELFM and I would love to do that kind of thing for a living”
Of the 5, only 1 is specifically looking to get on a community arts focussed course; 3 are just looking at a degree in their favoured arts discipline; and one is now working as a teaching assistant. Finding the appropriate information was seen to be a struggle:
“I must have spent about 8 hours on the UCAS website trying to find out which courses would be good for someone like me wanting to do community music”
- Apart from the decision about whether to go to University or not, there was little awareness of other possible training pathways. There was discussion about the advantages of taking time out to work or volunteer before making a decision about Higher Education courses. This was enthusiastically backed up by talking to some young people who were doing or had done just that:
“Everyone should spend at least a year in the industry they want to work in and from there get an idea of what area to specialise in and find the right uni course to do that” (Interview with young woman on a traineeship with the Tate Collective under the Skills for the Future initiative funded by HLF)

² The ability to take risk, whether financial or otherwise seems to be key here, For this young woman, even the possibility of applying for an internship with ELFM seemed to be too much of a risk to contemplate an open application: “I'd rather keep ELFM as something I like doing rather than not getting the job and being disappointed.”

B Telephone Research with Employers

The questions to regional employers focused on entry level opportunities; key skills and qualifications that would make a difference; and advice regarding learning pathways. Some of the key themes were as follows:

- A range of formal and informal ‘internship’ and volunteering opportunities are on offer to young people over 18 starting off on a career in community arts, but only one organisation was planning to trial apprenticeships aimed at 16-18 year olds under the Creative Employment Programme (others mentioning that the fact that only partial funding was available put them off).
- All organisation indicated that people would need to demonstrate a passion for the arts (and that an art form degree would be one way to evidence that commitment although other evidence was acceptable).

“I wouldn’t put any bars in place at the moment. It all feels a bit random to be honest. Someone can come along with a PhD and have no common sense whatsoever, and I wouldn’t find that very helpful!”

- No-one identified as a positive advantage someone who had a higher education qualification that was specifically focused on community/participatory arts. Organisational and communication skills were mentioned by many as well as honesty and punctuality. The facilitation/teaching/ participation skills needed were less easy to define:

“To be able to be “right” with people is really important to us. I think there is an important balance to be found between the artistic competency and the ability to work creatively and constructively with people, which is sometimes a more important, elusive skill”

- Three of the organisations mentioned Arts Awards as a good indicator of experience and understanding (all three organisations have been involved in Arts Awards delivery themselves!)

“Someone who could show Silver or even Gold Award would be able to demonstrate long-term commitment to an arts activity”

- All organisations expected potential recruits to be able to show a history of volunteering and getting involved in arts and community development projects:

“Volunteering, turning up and being around is very important”

“When it comes down to it you need to have got on-the-ground experience by shadowing and observing other experience people who are leading workshops and projects”

“Get involved with everything you can, including us!”



C Visits to Manchester, Liverpool...

The visits to Manchester and Liverpool were essentially quite practical introductions for our young people. They were able to see the places, ogle the technology available and interview/talk with staff and (current and former) students and trainees. They felt the most useful thing was to talk to other young people, particularly when they realised the range of backgrounds they came from and the range of attitudes to what they could get from their courses:

“I was one of only three people out of a hundred at the foyer who went to university—most people didn’t finish college. None of my family went to uni, but that make me more determined to go.”

“Everyone should spend at least a year first working in the industry that they want to work in and from that they will get an idea of what area to specialise in and find the right uni course to do that”

“Even if you don’t leave and get that high paid job, you’ve just learnt the skills that you need to live. You learn to live on your own and, to be honest. I think everyone should experience the first couple of years of partying—it’s fun!”

D Radio programmes with the Next Generation (2) group

We hadn’t planned to involve one of our other groups, most of whom are a bit younger—14-16 years old. But they were planning some broadcasts and wanted to look at opportunities for young people as a theme, having been doing some creative writing on the subject:

“What if I could make a plan. A plan to get me where I want to go. A plan that I could take to like a blanket, wrap it around myself so I know that I am safe—that my life is worth living. When I think about the future, I need to know that this, all of this, whatever this is—is worth it.”

So we took the opportunity of asking them to produce a couple of radio programmes with the title “Changing the Conversation”; with reports on the visits to Manchester and Liverpool; a chance to interview degree students and tutors at Trinity College and to talk with a Careers Advisor. What had come from our discussions is that, at that age, many of the young people felt a pressure to choose a pathway, but little idea how to choose or where to get support. One of the realities of the Careers Advice system at school age is that it is now up to individual schools to provide careers advice and that the provision is patchy. Having a completely independent and disinterested careers advisor on the programme, allowed discussion of a range of open questions:

”If you’re scared of the future, how do you handle that?”



4. What next...?

The impact of the project for us

For us as an organisation, the biggest impact has been to open up a dialogue about career and learning pathways, with respect to community arts but in a more general sense too. That dialogue has involved young people aged anywhere from 14 to 23; has given the opportunity to ask the open questions and specific ones. It feels a bit of an ‘elephant in the room’ moment where we have all realised that this is something that we haven’t been discussing which is both crucial and really interesting. And that although there are no easy answers with high youth unemployment; the introduction of very high university fees; and all the issues connected to growing up in an area of poverty and worklessness; the first step is to openly discuss it.

We reviewed the CtC project with our young people at a meeting just before Christmas. Sixteen young people were there; some at school; some at College; some on traineeships; some at University. The young people shared experiences and talked about their varying ambitions; about changing track following disappointing exam results; forced and elective gap years; day release for apprentices; wage levels; social life; internships; part-time work; stress and mental health; revising in holidays...

“I’ll tell you what’s important in life. It’s not how far you manage to get with a few bad GCSEs in subjects you didn’t even like. It’s who you love and how you love. And being genuine. To stand in the middle of nowhere and feeling insignificant in such a huge world. And saying—no as long as I am still here, I may as well do what makes me happy. The future is a terrifying thought but...”³

We feel that talking about it is one of the steps that will make it less terrifying. We are committed to continue talking about it and realise that involving younger teenagers in those discussions is a positive thing (rather than assuming that schools will be able to provide appropriate information now they have individually been given responsibility for careers advice).

Learning for others

I am looking forward to the opportunity of putting some context on our project by talking with the other CtC projects in April. Some of my starting points would be:

- There is obviously a deal of uncertainty from the young people we were working with regarding career pathways. Learning by practical opportunities to talk with other young people who were on a pathway was valued highly.
- In particular, information and understanding of the pathways for young people with a real interest in participatory/community arts don’t seem easy to access: basic generic information about possible pathways and specific comparative analysis of training options—do they exist?
- Work needs to be done with employers to convince them that qualifications and training pathways exist!

Adrian Sinclair
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³ From the creative writing written by the young people for the CtC radio programmes

Appendix—Self Evaluation Template completed at beginning of the project...

ArtWorks Development Grants Ref 3793/27770
 Heads Together Productions—Changing the Conversation “The View from Below”
 Self-evaluation template

Aims	Context	Inputs (Resources)	Mechanisms	Participants	Outputs	Outcomes	Contribution to ArtWorks’ Aims
<p>To investigate the opportunities for training in participatory arts from the point of view of young people¹</p> <p>To gain an insight into the key issues affecting young people’s choices of training opportunities</p> <p>To consider how this links with the competencies expected by employers in the sector when looking to offer work opportunities to young people</p>	<p>There are no clear progression routes for young people looking to develop a career in the participatory arts sector.</p> <p>There are limited opportunities to gain impartial advice about appropriate progression routes.</p> <p>There are few qualifications that are generally accepted as evidence of competence by employers in the sector</p>	<p>Existing resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Heads Together’s experience as an employer o A group of young people facing these choices <p>Partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o FE, HE and apprenticeship providers willing to share information and be interviewed <p>New resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Using radio tools and skills eg research, interviewing, etc to make a series of features and programmes looking at the issue 	<p>Initially to set up a focus group of 8-12 young people to discuss the issues.</p> <p>Work with the group and with training providers to arrange visits to find out about training; interview trainers and trainees.</p> <p>Also conduct a range of interviews with local employers in the sector.</p> <p>Create some radio features/ programming about the possible training routes & the issues that the research has uncovered</p>	<p>We will be working with young people from our East Leeds FM project; particularly those who we have been volunteering with us for a couple of years and are on our EFM Graduates programme. They will be at the point of making decisions about their own training pathways</p>	<p>12 young people involved in researching possible training pathways.</p> <p>Audio resource— radio features and programmes</p> <p>Written report detailing process, learning and outcomes</p>	<p>The group of young people get a better understanding of a range of training pathways.</p> <p>Training providers get a better understanding of the key factors for the young people in determining which training pathway to choose.</p> <p>We will also look at how we can scale the project; in terms of giving young people the tools to investigate the courses on offer & how the training providers can better communicate and respond to their needs.</p>	<p>One of the key aims of Artworks is to improve ‘initial training’ of participatory artists.</p> <p>Apart from simply improving the content/quality of the training on offer, there is a need to make sure that the right people find the right training. That’s where this project links in to the overall aims of Artworks.</p>

¹ We are particularly looking at young people as they make decisions at the point of leaving school ie 16-18 years old