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| *My Culture,  My London* |  |
| Young People Workshop report  5th August, 2014 |  |

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Background

What we did

Following on from the original ethnographic research in the My Culture, My London programme, two workshops have been convened, one with stakeholders from the arts, one with young people.

This is a write up of the young people’s workshop, held at the ICA on July 29th. The workshop was an investment in seeing whether a group of young people committed to the arts could take the momentum of MCML onwards and contribute ideas to deal with some of the core barriers that the original ethnographic research revealed.

Twelve young people were engaged to take part, and in the week before the workshop, they completed a blog task in order that we could warm them up, introduce them to the different types of engagement profiles that came out of the ethnography, and start generating ideas.

Two of the young people present were also at the workshop with stakeholders, adding a degree of continuity to the debate, and bridging the two audiences. There were also four stakeholders from AND who served as an audience for the ideas presentations.

There were two core sections to the workshop – one was ‘wish’ generation session, capturing lots of things young people wished could be true about the arts and then sharing them to create a ‘heat map’ of strong and popular ideas. This was followed by voting, to establish common areas of enthusiasm. Finally, the three leading areas were divided between the three tables of young people and developed from a single thought to create a straw man initiative. These three ideas (developed in more detail below) were presented back to members of AND and discussed and debated together.

Who we met

Firstly, all the young people in the workshop had actively responded to a call that was put via AND’s own network. The young people we met are all fully engaged with arts and culture in London. Their artistic interests and endeavours are paramount and form the backbone of their day-to-day living. They cram as much of their creative pursuits into their day as possible. In addition, these young people have a strong work ethic and are resourceful; they continually push themselves to further their development and expertise to fulfil their creative ambitions.

This determination has been born out of awareness: they understand that they need to work hard – and fight hard – for what they believe in. They recognise from a young age that a career in the arts is seen as the underdog to the more traditional professions.

As part of the blog exercise, we asked the young people to create a collage about how they would define success and a few of their outputs are reproduced below. The point of this exercise is to provide some wider life context within which we can understand the place that the arts holds for them. It’s immediately apparent that when it comes to the meaning of success, this cohort of young people is driven by experiences and overall wellbeing. Inner happiness, pride in their work, independence, making a living from what they enjoy are all essential traits. Five year plans and more formal career paths don’t feature here.

Success defined in collage





I wish/how to statements

Altogether, the young people in the room generated over 100 individual ideas, all created independently of one another. Inevitably, there were some strong areas of crossover, so the notes in this section represent the main clusters, which show where all the energy is. The first three areas (in bold) resulted in the highest quantity of voting, which indicates the most amount of pure enthusiasm.

1. **Increase the diversity of the arts community so that it is more reflective of young people in London and their lives (in particular, more representation of ethnic minorities and of disabilities).**
2. **Elevate the status, creativity and quantity of arts subjects in schools.**
3. **Give young people a meaningful way to express their opinions on the direction of the arts.**
4. Make the arts more affordable to young people.
5. Increase the breadth of what is defined as the ‘arts’. (Slam poetry and street art, as well as painting and theatre).
6. Make galleries more interactive and interesting for young people to visit.
7. Reduce the barriers to making a career in the arts (e.g. paid internships etc.).

In their own words…

*“I think the first thing I would do is try get young people to understand that art is not inaccessible. Art is everywhere literally”*

“In an ideal world I would like the arts to be treated like youth sports clubs, uniformly accessible and regular. I would like to see big art institutions partner with local youth clubs/libraries etc. to deliver year long projects in every borough.”

*“Engaging young people with the arts can be difficult to achieve if there is a misconception about its relevance and lack of easy access. Young people need to be given opportunities to discover how diverse and attractive art can be; they should not need to seek it out themselves.”*

“Drama teachers need to be in the loop about which drama organisations are offering which opportunities at what times if their students are to have their horizons broadened.”

*“Stop calling it "the arts" for a start, it makes people think in a hierarchical way and creates a "not-for-me" attitude!”*

Ideas explored

1. A digital platform

(NB. Although this idea didn’t spontaneously arise in the brainstorm session, it was introduced into the debate because of its appearance in the stakeholder workshop, and many of the young people agreed that they would have voted for it if it had cropped up in their session and therefore it was deemed worthy of being worked on further.)

In a nutshell

A flexible, digital platform that would offer listings and tips to young people about events and cultural opportunities in London

More on the idea – the what

* An app that lists cultural events, their location, and prices, as well as a range of other opportunities in the arts, from workshops to work experience
* Search option, allowing young people to find events by date, location, price and type
* A systematised and layered approach, beyond pure listings, to encourage more uptake and cross-fertilisation across events:
  + Recommendations – based on where you’ve been
  + GPS element – reference to other events nearby – a Tube map equivalent
  + Option to download leaflets/brochures/guides, etc that are usually only available in hard copy
* Users could be given access to free shows to incentivise them to both sign up and use the app

More on the idea – the how

* Would need to work in offline mode, so that it isn’t data intensive
* Crowd-sourced entries – i.e. anyone can feed events in
* Opportunity for young people to write reviews of the events
* Tonally, friendly and warm, not exclusive. A service created by young people and for young people
* Would need to be differentiated from ideas that are currently already operating in a similar space, such as the Im@ app.

2. Increase the status and breadth of arts taught in schools

In a nutshell

Schools hire an artist in residence who becomes an integrated part of everyday school life

More on the idea – the what

* Dual benefits of:

1) showing the arts are central to school life and not a peripheral ‘hobby’ separate from academic subjects;

2) giving young people access to a mentor who can introduce them to new art forms and help them with their projects/careers.

* An integrated approach:
  + Expose the work of artists (which may otherwise remain hidden) - students to observe the process of creating new art
  + Use art across different subjects, e.g. medical drawing in the sciences
* Fixed term post with a constant cycle of artists/art forms to ensure exposure to a broad range of arts, not just those that have a place on the syllabus today (e.g., spoken word vs Shakespeare)
* Mentoring - artists help young people create portfolios and give career advice

More on the idea – the how

* Interviewing structure required to ensure alignment with artists and schools in terms of overarching objectives, both academic and pastoral

3. Giving young people a voice within arts organisations – an arts parliament

In a nutshell

Create one central platform that allows the views of young people are heard and listened to by arts organisations

More on the idea – the what

* At present young people’s views are represented through a selection of heterogeneous, often ad hoc committees that are different from organisation to organisation. This idea would create a central committee or contemporary ‘parliament’ that represents the views of young people across different organisations and disciplines.
* The idea is that centralising young people’s voices in one high profile committee may lend them more influence and weight.
* The committee would act as an open forum for representatives to express their opinions about young people and art, both in relation to specific projects and more broadly.
* The committee should be high profile enough that people would want to get involved in order to access networks and other opportunities.
* It would need to be genuinely representative of young people and have a system that ensured fair and representative (and diverse) selection.

More on the idea – the how

* Consider an ‘open pitch day’ approach for people to bring their ideas to the parliament in order to ensure more diversity in subject matter and art form.

1. **Increasing the diversity of representation within the arts in London**

In a nutshell

Ensure that there is an equality of opportunity and access to the arts for all young people in London, not just the committed or wealthy few

More on the idea – the what

* It’s obvious that many people that would love the arts feel excluded, for reasons of ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and gender.
* There is no one action that needs to happen, but more a multiplicity of different things, all of which together will make a difference

More on the idea – the how

* Schools – resident artists; more trips out to theatre etc.
* Establish quotas for theatre roles
* Much more commissioning of newer, representative drama, rather than the classics which represent the established white community
* Ticket price discount schemes for disadvantaged families and young people
* Specific funding and active support of underrepresented writers, directors and performers
* Dedicated competitions
* Increase the number of signed and relaxed performances

Appendix

Online panel participants’ ideas for increased engagement with arts and culture in London

1. Make arts and culture more accessible  
2. A massive free festival - a cross between West End Live and the Southbank Festival  
3. Treat arts like youth sports clubs - make them accessible and regular to every borough – not just Central London

4. Have big arts institutions partner with local youth clubs, libraries, etc.  
5. More programmes in schools and colleges, beyond the national curriculum to promote awareness   
6. Make art more public, e.g., graffiti walls and urban art  
7. Young people's areas in galleries to hang out, network, etc.  
8. Galleries to offer mentoring or curating opportunities to young people  
9. Stop calling it 'the arts', i.e. modernise perceptions – make it contemporary, open, friendly – not stuffy and highbrow  
10. Encourage young people to experiment more

11. Financial support and cheaper/free passes to events, gigs, theatre etc.

“I feel like everything just needs to be demystified so going to a museum feels the same as watching TV.”

*“My secondary school was a performing arts and humanities school which made dance, drama and music compulsory in years 7-9 and one option in GCSEs. What’s more I had a youth centre five minutes away from my house, which did a wide range of activities. I wonder if this is available to most young people in London. What are youth centres like these days?”*

*“Perhaps there needs to be publicity around alternative art so people do not feel the need to dismiss art as posh, 'cultured', stuffy.”*

“So maybe we can open up art by saying you don't need to be an artist to enjoy art! The audience of the future should not be practitioners alone.”

“*For sports there are all sorts of competitions, and highly funded schemes for getting youth involved, which motivates people in a way that is not provided by the arts; people may have an interest, but not know how to get involved. I think that wider advertising would really help, especially in schools and on social networks”*

*“Wouldn't it be great if there were Leicester Square ticket kiosk equivalent for arts events?”*



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