
University of Hull – Associate Artists Scheme

Overview

The University of Hull wished to commission local artists to become Associate Artists. Six artists, selected through an application process, identified ideas they wanted to explore and develop, and participated in workshops to share their practice and methods.

The aims were to:

- use the process as a piece of research to explore what kinds of relationships exist, or might be developed, between participatory arts in the University context and in the City context
- test a model for a professional development programme linking artists with the University environment

The artists involved were encouraged to identify future activities (whether professional development, practice or other) which they might like to pursue in some collaboration with the University.

How the work sought to address the issue

This initiative sought to build strong and supportive links between the University of Hull and local artists engaged in participatory settings. It was premised on two central issues that the team had identified:

- artists need access to CPD and a relationship with a university can support this in a range of ways
- universities need artists to inform their curriculum development

The project was a collaborative attempt through practice as research to generate a model for creative learning and continuing professional development. Creating an open creative and discursive space placed the artists' knowledge and experience at the centre of the process, which was led through a cumulative investigation of areas of common concern.

How the work sought to address the issue cont.

The roles were advertised and applying artists were encouraged to think about what support they might like from the University in return for acting as 'consultants' to the academic team. The 25 applications showed a high demand for the opportunity. The six artists selected identified the skills they wanted to share or explore and were offered support to turn these into workshops, which provided an opportunity to share ideas and skills in an open and supportive peer forum. Reflection (written and oral) was built into the programme, looking at both the workshops and the emergence of themes. Each artist developed a statement based on their experiences on the project and perception of what they learned.

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What it achieved

The team wanted two concrete outcomes from this project:

- to develop a research-based articulation of the relationship between participatory arts in the University and the City
- to build a postgraduate/CPD programme which was creatively led and catered for the needs of local artists

Artists have not yet taken up the invitation to develop projects via the University's facilities, but two are employed with the University as part of the scheme.

Concrete outputs include:

- a scholarly paper on creativity and learning, entitled 'Sublimely useless: Creativity and the capacity for change'
- the development of a pilot Professional Doctorate programme in Arts and Society
- the early development of a modular part time Masters programme, directly serving the community of artists working in participatory settings in the East Riding and Humber region

Lessons learned

Learning for artists included the value of time and space to explore a range of different skills and practices which they all felt would impact on their work in the future. There was particular interest and excitement around the ideas and methodologies that were transferable, or could be adapted, between disciplines. This underlined the importance of cross fertilisation which has the potential to complement, or possibly supersede, conventional practice.

The project highlighted the possible interventions by, and collaborations between, the cohort that might provide a holistic approach to community engagement or participation designed and delivered by a team of multidisciplinary practitioners.

The project suggested ways of collectivising skills and resources for 'the greater good' and how the involvement of the University and City Council could provide the organisation and infrastructure to capitalise on these.

The idea of 'community' (of both practice and participants) was a recurring theme. Arts practice tends to militate against the collective design or delivery of projects, as the artist is often working alone and coming from a single perspective. By bringing artists from different disciplines and communities together, new ways of working with and building relevant communities could be found.

What other stakeholders are/should be doing with the learning

The project highlights a model for how higher education institutions (HEIs) and artists can collaborate for mutual benefit. It was relatively simple and cost effective to set up and reveals an appetite for HEIs to explore connections outside formal programmes, such as associate/affiliation schemes, co-creation, short courses and other kinds of potential CPD. The role of Associate Artist was created and implemented through this project. This is in itself significant as it marks the start of a formal relationship between local artists and the University.

However, working in this way may require changes in the organisational infrastructure of HEIs to support the types of creative opportunities piloted in this project. The project team in Hull were committed to shifting the balance to mutually benefit arts practitioners and HEIs. Taking the work forward will require institutional support and change.

What is happening with the learning now

The long term aim is to develop the University of Hull as a hub in the region, with an exchange of creative and research projects facilitated by a porous set of roles and collaborations. Concrete projects such as the Modular MA and the Professional Doctorate will help to accrue projects and ideas for the development of this hub. The Associate Artist scheme will be included in the design of these programmes as a way of supporting artists to develop skills in teaching and opening the University to the sorts of knowledge that the artists are developing. The University will grow and diversify the pool of Associates and is developing a range of other initiatives that have stemmed from the project.

The recent announcement that Hull will be City of Culture 2017 will open up a range of possibilities and opportunities. Developing work and themes initiated through this ArtWorks project could be crucial going forward. Hull will inevitably grow as a cultural hub and local organisations, artists and practitioners should be at the centre of thinking, planning and delivery over the next four years.

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