



'You cannot be what you cannot see' is an oft-used phrase to indicate how a lack of representation holds diverse talent back from joining certain industries. By bringing younger, more socio-economic and ethnically diverse creatives into the classroom, young people from these communities are much more likely to engage with their stories. It is a low-cost, immediate action that will go a long way towards creating a stronger sense of interest among more diverse groups for exploring their ambitions.

Here, as part of our spotlight on the creative sector, we take a look at how one of the recommendations in our Manifesto for Change was brought to life for one young person.

## Recommendation 1

Co-ordinated action to bring creative industry role models from diverse backgrounds into schools and colleges across London to raise awareness of opportunities

## RESPONSE BY: TASCHA VON UEXKULL

"I didn't personally have access to creative employers at school, but my brother remembers painter Guy Noble coming into his school (William Ellis School, Highgate) to discuss his work and career. This was an opportunity granted to only a select few students from my brother's year group who were singled out for their particular interest in art. Having experienced disappointed reactions from teachers when my brother stated his intention to pursue studying art and subsequently work as an artist when he was so 'academically able', he remembers finding this talk quite inspiring. After all, here was a successful artist who was making a living primarily through his creative practice alongside teaching art. It gave insight into how an artistic career could be realistically and successfully handled. My brother recalls Noble joking that he suspected no one in the room had heard of him, which probably was the case, but this was reassuring to the students in emphasising that being an artist could just be a career like any other and didn't necessarily need a famous name attached to it. More than the actual content of the presentation was the very fact that this path was being presented as viable and indeed desirable. It gave my brother a renewed sense that pursuing an art foundation course, as opposed to going straight into a degree in another subject, was genuinely what he wanted to do.

I definitely think it is important to be introduced to creative role models in schools because it is the stage at which you are making decisions that will shape the rest of your life. Being told that creative subjects such as Media Studies were 'not academic enough' by my teachers meant that I was more inclined to pursue essay-based disciplines for instance, though in retrospect subjects such as art and media were far more in-keeping with my interests and subsequent aspirations than subjects like Geography.

I know from my experience of extracurricular activities like youth collectives in museums how important early exposure to the creative industries is. Without these spaces to learn about different roles with

cultural institutions, I would never have discovered my passions for museum learning. More than this, I would never have known such roles existed.

Having lived in London my whole life, a city with one of the richest and most diverse selection of creative industries, it seems bizarre that arts and creative disciplines are not referenced more in schools. I think it's vital that alternative pathways are introduced at this stage and the best possible way to achieve this is through inviting creative role models into schools.

It's important to discover from a young age that there is no correct route through life and that very few people take a linear journey. I only learned this through subsequently talking to creative professionals after I'd finished school and I found it reassuring, not daunting. It also struck me as an intense shame though. At school I was never exposed to alternative pathways into creative industries and every student was presented with only one possible next step: university. When I later discovered the myriad of other possibilities like apprenticeships, I was genuinely shocked.

Introducing creative professionals into schools would offer students a realistic view of pursuing a creative career, like my brother's experience of Guy Noble, as well as allowing students to make complex decisions about their futures so they won't be left thinking, as I often do, 'What if I'd...'

*Tascha von Uexkull is a workshop facilitator based in London who prior to lockdown delivered arts and crafts workshops for many institutions, including the Victoria and Albert Museum and Little Artists London. She is currently in a temporary role as learning coordinator for architecture charity Open City and has recently set up a youth collective called Assemblage. She enjoys writing articles and poems for her blog Tashtastic, making collage, and reading about phantom architecture. In the future she would love to work in the learning team of a museum, expand the scope and ambitions of her collective, and publish a collection of her poems.*

