



There is a wealth of opportunities for companies and schools across our capital to connect and engage in creative sector career guidance activities. Unfortunately, many schools do not currently have any creative company partnerships in place, particularly those located outside central London. Many of the young people we speak to, having newly embarked on their career paths, comment on how their decision-making could have been made so much better had they had the opportunities to engage with creative professionals whilst still attending school.

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 school.

Recommendation 2

Increase engagement between creative industry employers and schools/colleges in underserved London geographies to build employability skills relevant for the industry

RESPONSE BY: HARRIS GIRLS ACADEMY EAST DULWICH, SOUTHWARK

Design for Performance Careers Programme with South London Schools

Overview

The secondary art, craft and design classroom is the starting point for many young people to develop the skills needed within the creative industries, but it is a space fraught with paradox. Although it has long been known that the creative industries are growing exponentially each year, faster than the national average (Bazalgette: 2017), the uptake in the arts at secondary is at an all-time low (NSEAD: 2017). Alongside this is also the knowledge that people of colour and/or under-represented groups are severely under-represented within this sector (The Creative Industries Federation: 2015), whilst London art, craft and design classrooms cater for the most diverse population in the UK (ONS: 2018).

Initial conversations

With this in mind, artist and designer Es Devlin instigated a conversation with Ian Thompson from the outreach and Foundation team at University of the Arts London (UAL) with the idea to develop a project with local schools in south east London. This led to Clare Stanhope, Head of Art at Harris Girls Academy East Dulwich and Matthew Spaul Head of Art at the Charter School being invited to partner in this initiative. After initial conversations, the following two aims became the focus of this endeavour:

- To encourage more students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic or working-class backgrounds to consider and progress into careers within creative industries and specifically design for performance.

- To pilot a local model with the potential to be scaled up through a collaboration between Es Devlin's studio, Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon Outreach and Foundation teams, Harris Girls Academy East Dulwich and the Charter School North Dulwich that gives students an authentic experience of careers within the field.

To consider how these aims can be met, there needs to be a discussion around what the barriers are to students from under-represented groups. From the secondary school context in south east London, where pupil intake draws from a multitude of diverse communities, the challenge becomes multi layered. With the rise of the Ebacc and the domination of the core subjects, the arts have been diminished. This situation is further troubled by consecutive education secretaries that admonish the subject as not being 'future proof' (Morgan: 2016). This problematic rhetoric compounds student life chances from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups as it removes the option to even consider such a career path. Another aspect that needs attention is the uncomfortable knowledge that curriculums are often based in colonial heritage. The arts are far from removed from this history. When we consider why there is a lack of diversity moving through from secondary education into university, and then future creative careers, there also needs to be a deep reflection on our curriculums and opportunities offered within them. This project offers a pause to reflect on how futures are being formed within the art classroom and an opportunity to disrupt, to re-invigorate and re-imagine the possible futures of our young people.



The project

The project is a collaboration between Es Devlin, UAL and two secondary schools in south east London. The idea is to develop a mentorship programme with specific students from identified under-represented groups. The merging of the industry with secondary arts education comes through working with artist and designer Es Devlin. Having contact with inspirational people such as Es Devlin, who can offer mentorships based in wide ranging knowledge and guidance from within the industry, means educators have a solid foundation upon which to advise pupils and parents/ carers. Most importantly, this opportunity also empowers the young people involved to make informed life choices based on experience. Working with innovative, industry-based practitioners grounds the project in the future. It projects our students beyond the classroom and envisages a concrete identity within the industry. But to achieve this, the process also needs to be broken down into manageable goals. Therefore, having the knowledge and expertise of Ian Thompson from the outreach and Foundation team at UAL, to support students in mapping out routes to achieving such futures, is vital. If parents and carers can see concrete future pathways for their children, then there is more chance of supporting students from underrepresented groups into this field. UAL is in London and is Europe's largest specialist art and design university. The University offers students pre-degree, undergraduate and postgraduate courses in art, design, fashion, media, communication and performing arts. UAL's outreach programme offers free opportunities for young people from under-represented backgrounds to experience life at the University by working with tutors, technicians and students on a range of projects across the year. The Design for Performance Careers Programme pilot is an exciting new way to promote creative careers to young people that uses a new partnership model as well as being complimentary to our existing progression support. (UAL 2020).

Supporting diversity in the industry

The hope of this project is to feed into the many actions that are currently taking place to address the inequalities that are prevalent within the creative industries. It is not only to support young people in realising their potential within the field, but it is an acknowledgement that the industry itself is less exciting, innovative and multi-faceted without these voices included. The project is currently based within two schools, but the collaborative, tentacular nature of creative practice is such that it always leads to opportunities to think innovatively. Hopefully this project will scaffold a practice that can be used across other schools and support other collaborations within the industry.

References

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