

A Community Arts Academy—an emerging outline

A sector-based coaching programme for emerging community artists and social activists across the north of England.

Background

The Community Arts Academy idea has been developed by established community arts organisation Heads Together Productions, which currently runs Chapel FM Arts Centre in East Leeds. Having been involved in the Artworks Initiative we were determined to develop better pathways for the next generation of community artists, particularly those from diverse backgrounds.

The idea of a Community Arts Academy has been awarded Explore and Test funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and we are currently having discussions with interested parties as we develop a network of people and organisations who are interested in the approach¹.

Pilot Programme

We are planning to recruit a diverse cohort of 20 participants for a 12-month programme starting September 2018. The programme is aimed at young emerging artists who have completed their formal education and are entering the workforce.

The programme is a blended approach of critical thinking and practical learning, some face-to-face and some distance learning. It will be a combination of group work alongside individually defined learning pathways and will include an element of co-design with the participants to define the developing direction of the programme. The aim is to support young workers in their first steps in the sector, rather than train people for a particular type of work or for a single organisation or place.

We are planning a core programme plus a menu of opportunities that are available as appropriate to each participant:

- The full group will come together for 5 intensive 1-3 day sessions during the year; all in different locations with differing themes and objectives. The sessions will be the cornerstones of the course and will take place in September 2018, January, April, July 2019 and a final evaluation and next steps session in September 2019. We will arrange key speakers/trainers/provocations for each session but will leave space to ensure that co-design remains a core principle.
- There will also be a virtual workspace for the group eg Basecamp, Slack etc to continue the learning and peer work between sessions. We will also continue the interactions between participants using online meetings/webinars and coordinating interactive discussions and provocations.
- At the heart of the programme will be individual coaching sessions for each of the participants (minimum of 3 face-to-face plus additional sessions via Skype). These sessions will define an individual plan for each participant that will prioritise key learning elements from the menu...
 - Identifying appropriate mentors and work placements/opportunities (local, national and international)
 - Exchange/visits/small group projects/research to progress ideas and peer-learning eg sub regional, themed
 - Possible formal learning/training opportunities for individual participants eg Participatory Arts MOOC, Award in Education, Gold Arts Award

¹ Discussions have included individual community arts organisations and the Artworks Alliance, small scale community-based venues, social action and community development organisations and networks, and higher education researchers and institutions.

Practicalities

We will be recruiting in the early summer for the course starting in September 2018. We have set ourselves the task of ensuring that we have a diverse group of participants and we are considering how we do that eg a combination of open application and nominations from key sector partners.

The training will be free for participants and costs will be paid (travel, accommodation, food etc)

Next steps

Whilst keeping the pilot manageable we are looking to open up the development process and intend to continue the conversations with interested people and organisations, potential participants etc.

Please get in touch if you have thoughts or suggestions on any aspect of the project. Or you might be able to offer practical help, for example:

- You can link us in to potential participants;
- You might be interested in joining our reference group or becoming a partner;
- You could offer opportunities during the pilot programme eg host one of the intensive sessions, offer mentoring or work placement opportunities to individual participants...

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