

UNION

FAQs

What do you mean by Creative Activism?

The use of creative approaches to achieve political or social change.

Activism is all about challenging and changing power relationships; creativity provides perspective and narrative on the world around us. Put the two together and it's a powerful mix.

Who is UNION for?

We want to support the next generation of creative activists. But where will they come from? UNION is aimed at people who may arrive from two different routes—firstly people who would class themselves as artists and are really interested in working with people in social and community settings. And then there are people who start from the political/community/social activism side of things but recognise that using creative approaches is a key tool in achieving change.

What do I get out of it?

We aim to provide the opportunity to:

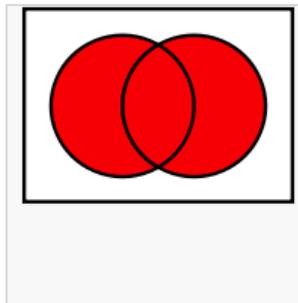
- Gain knowledge and understanding about developing work and a career as a Creative Activist.
- Learn directly from people who work across all aspects of the sector.
- Get one-to-one support from trained professional coaches to identify your own personal pathway.
- Be part of a supportive and forward-looking community of artists and activists in the North of England.
- Find out about possible work placements, mentors, project opportunities...

Am I emerging?

That's kind of up to you to decide and explain to us! UNION isn't for people who have been doing this kind of stuff for years and years. But at the same time it isn't for anyone who is still in formal education (school, college, university). It is for those in the early part of their career either working for an organisation or working for themselves as a freelance artist, organiser or activist. People who feel that there are still things for them to learn and would fancy some support in moving their work forward. And of course that doesn't necessarily mean you are in your 20s. Some people change careers or find their vocation in their 30s, 40s, 80s whatever!

Why UNION?

Lots of reasons. Union is about actively joining together; or creating an association formed by people with a common interest.



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And who is running UNION?

UNION is being coordinated by Leeds-based organisation—Heads Together Productions. [Heads Together](#) has been running for 32 years developing work under the banner *Creativity with Purpose* and currently its work is focused on developing [Chapel FM Arts Centre](#). As an organisation we have been talking with people in our sector, within higher education, funding bodies, with network organisations (well anyone really) about the best pathways for people to develop the skills and understanding they need to develop into really effective creative activists.

UNION has come out of those conversations and we've put together a great team of trainers, coaches and activists from across the region to lead UNION:

- [Adrian Sinclair](#), Founder and Director of Heads Together Productions will oversee the whole programme
- [Chris Taylor](#) will be overseeing the 5 weekend workshops. A Director of the Oasis Foundation, Chris has been involved in radical and social change since the 80s, and spends much of his time running programmes to develop the next generation of change-agents. He will be teaming up with local facilitators in Manchester, Leeds, Hull, Doncaster and Middlesbrough to deliver the workshops.
- [Linda Strudwick](#), former Development Worker at Heads Together and now freelance Consultant and Fundraiser will oversee practical arrangements and support for all participants.
- Our coaching team is led by two trained coaches: [Sara Domville](#) (formerly Creative Producer at Community Arts North West and now at Curious Minds) and [Vickie Bissett](#) (former director of Artlink Hull and now doing a PhD on Socially Engaged Arts at the University of Hull)

And we have a steering group of associate artists, activists, teachers and organisations from across the region.

Why are you doing it?

Some of the young people we have worked with on the estates of East Leeds were really interested in doing this kind of work as a career and asked us what was the best route in. It felt ridiculous that we couldn't really answer. We always imagined that someone else would set up the perfect pathway but it got to the point when we realised that we were pretty well positioned to take it on ourselves, especially as we had such good links in to both the arts and the community development/activism sectors.

We secured some initial funding from the [Paul Hamlyn Foundation](#) to pilot the idea and some additional funds from the [Arts Council of England](#). It's time to give it a go.

Is this the first time you've run UNION then?

Indeed it is. We have spent a lot of time and energy thinking this through and talking to a range of people and organisations. We have also based some of our thinking on an organisation called the [Writing Squad](#), which has been developing young writers in the north for the last ten years. We are confident this will be a great opportunity but we will be evaluating and tweaking the format as we go along, and we are committed to a co-design process.

The publicity mentions “a diverse group” of participants. What do you mean by diverse?

We really do mean diverse ie showing a great deal of variety. From different places, differing lived experiences, backgrounds, cultures, ages, classes, (dis)abilities... In the end we believe passionately that the more diverse a group, the more interesting the learning experience—there is so much to learn within the group as well as from what is taught by others. We are also only too aware that this area of work, as with many cultural and political forms, is dominated by a white middle class elite and part of our activism is to change that.

What if I need additional support for any reason?

There are many reasons you might need support and we are committed to responding to that. We have one team member dedicated to making sure you get all the support you need. They will talk to you about any practical things we could help with eg arranging travel or checking access; whether you have any caring responsibilities; about what we could do to create the best environment and support for you to learn; and about recognising emotional needs and putting in appropriate support mechanisms.

Of course it will help us if you can explain what support would make it easier for you to be a participant and we will do our utmost to provide that support in a timely and effective way.

What commitment will I have to make?

Your time and energy. You need to attend five weekends over the year and a minimum of three one-to-one coaching sessions. The weekends are pre-booked as follows:

- 12/13th January 2019,
- 6/7th April 2019,
- 6/7th July 2019,
- 31st August/1st September 2019,
- 11/12th January 2020 (final evaluation and next steps session).

The coaching sessions are more flexible and will take place near to where you live, maybe in a quiet cafe or similar space.

Then there will be opportunities for further learning, mentoring, work placements etc between the formal sessions. As with anything, the more you put in...

What will it cost me?

With support from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Arts Council of England we are able to make the course free for participants.

We reckon the value of the training is about £3500 for each participant but we are really pleased that the funding means that we can offer the course for free—the training, coaching, food and accommodation for the weekends.

The only thing we ask is that you pay for the travel to get to UNION weekends (though we do have a fund to help with train fares if you need it).

What if I am working for an organisation?

We will want to know whether your organisation is supporting you to take this course and see it as appropriate professional development. If they do then we will want to have a conversation about how it works and whether they would be prepared to contribute something toward the costs.

Where is UNION based?

We work from Leeds and one of the weekends will be there. We are planning each one of the five weekend sessions to be in a different place—Hull, Manchester, Doncaster, Middlesbrough...

On each of these five weekends you will be hosted by a leading community arts organisation. You'll meet their staff and the people they work with locally so you get a close-up view of different approaches to creativity and activism. We hope this will also give you a taste of what careers and pathways are possible across the region. And your coaching sessions will be arranged in a city near where you live or work.

What kind of issues/themes would we work on during the programme?

We will be taking broad themes for each of the weekends and relating them to the place we are in and the people we have input from. And we will leave space for the co-design element of the programme (see below). But some of the overarching themes that we will consider are:

- Working with people. How important is empathy? What does genuine co-production feel like?
- Working in communities. Some of the ideas behind community development, community arts and asset-based approaches. What is the role of artist as catalyst?
- Understanding Social Action. How can we change anything? How do social movements build? What role does creativity play?
- Being More Me. Where do I fit into the work? What is my unique approach? What drives, constrains and motivates me?
- Planning and strategies. How do you decide what to do next? Where is your path leading you?
- Practical skills and competencies we need. And how do we best develop them?

What do you mean by co-design?

Simply to leave space for all participants to define what the programme contains. We have designed the initial structure and broad content that we feel will be appropriate, having spent much time talking with a wide range of people including potential participants. Once the group is formed, we are determined to allow the group to influence the direction, the content, the style of the programme. As such we haven't come up with a detailed 'syllabus' to be achieved, but starting points which will allow possibilities for co-design during the year. Even to the extent that we haven't firmed up all of the five weekend locations...

What is coaching?

This is a one-to-one process where you will work with one of the UNION team who has been trained in the process of helping you to define your future pathway. The coach will listen to your ideas, encourage, support and challenges you to identify what you really want and explore how you might achieve it. It's an opportunity to really plan your objectives and how you might achieve them. There's a lot on the internet about coaching—[this one](#) is a commercial one from the US, but it does give a pretty good idea about what we mean by coaching.

What kind of places will we be staying on the weekends?

It won't be posh hotels! More like university campus rooms, hostels, possibly home-stays etc. Again let us know if there are particular issues for you in where you will be staying.

What do you mean “across the north of England”?

Well the far northern bit is fairly well defined by the border with Scotland but we would agree where the north becomes the Midlands is a tricky one—parts of Derbyshire are further north than Sheffield. And then where does Lincolnshire fit in? Again we may have to leave this one for you to self-define.

How do I apply?

We will give you a number of questions that we want you to answer to make an application and we will want to get an idea of your background by going through your cv or portfolio. But we've decided that you can choose how to answer the questions and present your cv/portfolio. Of course you can just write the answers; or you might feel more confident making a simple recording or filming your answers; or you can get in touch with us and meet with one of the team (either face-to-face over a coffee or by skype) to present your answers. One way isn't better than another, we just want to make sure that you find the best way to present yourself to us.

How will you choose?

We aim to make the decision from the information you communicate in your application, but, if we are not sure, we may ask a candidate to meet face-to-face with someone in the team. Again we will keep it simple and informal. We will also ask for you to nominate someone who knows you and could give you a reference.

What happens when the year with UNION finishes?

Well first off we are committed to making sure that you benefit from your time with UNION. Beyond that we can't promise anything at the moment but we will be working with the group towards the end of the process to determine what further support we can provide to 'graduates' of UNION.

More questions? Many of these questions have come directly from people interested in being part of UNION. Please feel free to ask more! Email linda@headstogether.org

Application 'form'

To apply we need two things from you:

1. A simple cv or portfolio to explain your journey so far
2. Answers to our questions

We've decided that you can choose how to answer the questions and present your cv/portfolio:

- You can just write it all up and email it;
- or you might feel more confident making a simple recording or filming your answers and sending to us;
- or you can get in touch with us and meet with one of the team (either face-to-face over a coffee or by skype) to present your answers.

One way isn't better than another, we just want to make sure that you find the best way to present yourself to us.

The questions:

1. What's your name, address, phone contact, email?
2. What are you doing at the moment? (work, career, volunteering etc)
3. Why do you think UNION would be a good opportunity for you?
4. We are looking for as diverse a group as possible, what will you add to the mix?
5. Can you commit to the core programme of weekend workshops and coaching?
6. Is there any particular support that you feel would help you participate in the programme?
7. Have you got any questions or worries about UNION?
8. If we wanted to have a chat with someone about your experience to-date and your future potential (someone who would give you a reference) who would that be?
Please give us a phone contact and email if possible.