

Briefing: Promoting fairness and opportunity for graduates from low income backgrounds

Championing graduate talent in 'left-behind Britain'

Both government and opposition have spoken of their commitment to addressing fundamental inequalities in our society and tackling what the Social Mobility Commission called the phenomenon of 'left-behind Britain'.ⁱ

This briefing sets out the experience of the Weston Jerwood Creative Bursaries – a programme giving graduates from low income backgrounds an alternative to the unpaid internships which have made our publicly-funded arts organisations a preserve of the privileged.

It proves that, by working with employers, paying graduates a living wage for work placements and creating opportunities to nurture their talent, the programme is helping create a new generation of socially mobile graduates and transforming the recruitment practices of the arts sector.

The inequalities of unpaid internships

Britain's tradition of unpaid internships has been branded a 'modern scandal'ⁱⁱ which is penalising graduates from low income backgrounds and perpetuating the disadvantage which Universities UK identifies as the most significant driver of inequality in terms of access to and outcomes from higher education todayⁱⁱⁱ.

Within the arts and creative industries, surveys show not only that more than 75% workers hail from middle income backgrounds^{iv} but that almost 90% of staff have had to work for free at some point in their careers^v.

The arts sector's dependence on unpaid internships impacts on tax payers too, inadvertently supporting discrimination through public funding for arts organisations which continue to rely on unpaid internships as a recruitment mechanism.

Creating a fairer and more talented arts sector

The Weston Jerwood Creative Bursaries programme recognises that excellence in the arts and fair access to employment go hand in hand.

It gives graduates from low income backgrounds new opportunities to enter into employment in the arts and, by helping them build their leadership skills, support the future leaders of the arts sector.

It is directly supporting arts organisations by funding placements with a salary that meets national and London Living Wage standards, and by helping them develop more diverse recruitment practices, building their capacity for ever more outstanding artistic production.

Launched in 2010, it has already funded bursaries at 84 arts organisations. It is now in its third edition and currently investing £1m over two years to help a further 40 arts organisations from across the country host 40 placements for recent arts graduates from low income backgrounds, taking the total placements so far to 124. It is now working with the British Council to give the cohort international work experience too.

Working in 14 of the most disadvantaged areas identified by the Social Mobility Commission^{vi}, the programme is encouraging the 40 employers to permanently adapt their recruitment practices to attract and retain low income graduates and to build the leadership potential of their placements so they, in turn, can increase diversity at all levels of the sector and grow the leadership talent available to employers in the arts.

Sustaining a fairer arts sector

The Weston Jerwood Creative Bursaries programme has been a success on all fronts - providing new opportunities for graduates from low income backgrounds, influencing recruitment practices of the host arts organisations and developing a new generation of leadership talent for the sector.

Evidence shows that:

- 60% of employers in the programme's second edition extended contracts with placements, or made them permanent, once the year-long placement ended^{vii}.
- 98% of second edition hosts are considering ways in which they can target future job opportunities towards low income graduates.
- Alumni from low income backgrounds are reaching leadership positions across the arts. They have gone to become: Executive Director of Chisenhale Dance Space in Tower Hamlets, London; Artistic Director of Birmingham's Fierce Festival; Assistant Curator at the Hepworth, Wakefield; Curator at the Whitworth Gallery in Manchester; Producer with the English Touring Theatre and Classical Music Programme Manager for the British Council.
- The programme's insistence on paying a living wage is encouraging host organisations to increase the salaries of existing staff to ensure fairness across the board.

Policy support for a fairer arts sector

Public funding and policy can make Britain fairer for recent graduates from low income backgrounds by including socio economic background – alongside ethnicity, gender and disability within key definitions of diversity.

These should include Arts Council England's reporting requirements for the workforce of NPOs and MPMs and Higher Education Institution's post-graduation surveys.

You can find a full list of the host organisations and placements for this edition of the programme [here](#).

Please read the full Weston Jerwood Creative Bursaries Evaluation Report 2014-16 edition [here](#).

ⁱ www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/nov/28/social-mobility-stark-postcode-lottery-too-many-britain-left-behind-alan-milburn-commission-report

ⁱⁱ www.theguardian.com/money/2017/oct/23/public-backs-ban-on-long-term-unpaid-internships-social-mobility-commission

ⁱⁱⁱ Universities UK Social Mobility Report

^{iv} www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/nov/23/middle-class-people-dominate-arts-survey-finds

^v www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/nov/23/middle-class-people-dominate-arts-survey-finds

^{vi} www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/569410/Social_Mobility_Commission_2016_REPORT_WEB_1_.pdf

^{vii} www.jerwoodarts.org/projects/weston-jerwood-creative-bursaries-2017-19/

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