



# thematic review of the en-vision programme

Sheila Galloway and Julian Stanley, University of Warwick

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## Summary

The en-vision pilot programme prioritised young people who are in some way excluded or at risk of social exclusion, explicitly aiming to empower them through the activities generated within eight pilot projects. It sought to do much more than simply develop new audiences, and drew in a wide range of young people without depending on mainstream schools as the route to participants.

en-vision promoted an action-research approach which required project leaders and their partners to set out the questions which they wished to investigate, and encouraged risk-taking in how they went about that. Young people and adults were encouraged to feed back their reflections on the activities under way, to help shape the projects as they progressed.

The pilot projects produced much that was novel and exciting for young participants, project staff and their colleagues, as well as artists and others involved in the programme. The programme was an effective catalyst, enabling education officers, curators and other gallery staff to work alongside people from varied professional backgrounds as they explored new ways of working with young people.

The experience of en-vision provides fruitful ground for further development. Key aspects of the programme include:

- Some very successful partnerships developed within projects
- Over time it is possible for galleries to

develop the role that a group of young people can play in the gallery. This role can include curatorial, marketing, educational, mentoring, research and creative tasks. The capacity of young people to take on and successfully carry through these tasks depends on their education, motivation and maturity, the length of time they have been involved with the gallery, the group dynamics, the character of the support they are provided with, the design of tasks which they are given and the response of the rest of the gallery staff

- Young participants value these activities for the social, intellectual, personal and vocational benefits that they believe they have gained
- Galleries value the alternative perspective given by these young people and the opportunity to improve their own understanding and responsiveness to this age group
- en-vision demonstrates successful outcomes in recruiting and retaining young people by projects where the gallery had a relationship with organisations with a track record of working with such young people in other ways, and also where the gallery itself had experience of working with such groups
- Equally, en-vision shows that galleries which had not previously worked in this way have, within the lifetime of the programme, achieved successful outcomes. These go beyond just learning lessons from 'teething troubles' and preparing the ground for future work
- The action research approach allowed for

early planning which yet remained flexible enough to accommodate the ideas of the young people recruited to the project. In some of these projects, much depended on the commitment and resilience of the project staff.

- There is some evidence that vulnerable or socially deprived or marginalized young people can be engaged in activities in galleries though there is as yet little evidence as to the impact of participation upon such youngsters on a longer timescale.
- There is some evidence from these projects that designed mixed groups which combine more capable and more vulnerable young people may permit the twin goals of extending the voice of young people in the work of galleries and increasing social inclusion.

The en-vision pilot programme was an initiative with high aspirations which gave rise to a series of projects which were themselves very complex. It set out a philosophy and core values and has sought to implement them in the real world. It required galleries to develop partnerships, formulate key research questions and work on a social inclusion agenda which in most cases meant breaking new ground. This called for professional commitment and hard work from project leaders who were prepared to take risks and explore new territory.

The case studies show how hurdles were overcome to make possible some notable successes and some quite unexpected outcomes. In looking to future development of such work, the experiences of the en-vision pilot projects deserve to be studied by all those who are concerned with what galleries can offer for and with young people.