

The Art of Place – The Civic Role of Universities and the Cultural Sector Beyond the Pandemic

Next Monday will see us move to the next stage of the roadmap for easing Covid-19 restrictions which will mean that many cultural organisations will finally be able to re-open their doors and all University students will be able to return to campus for face-to-face teaching. The relationship between Universities and the cultural sector is well-established and in the past year has become even more important with arts organisations, museums and libraries have played a key role in supporting communities, bringing people together, creating thought provoking work and inspiring reflection.

It has been a tough year for everyone, but the cultural sector and freelancers in particular have been hugely impacted. As part of a series of partnership events the Civic University Network has been exploring the challenges faced by the sector and how we work together both to support a vibrant and growing sector, but also play our part in supporting wider economic and social renewal.

At our 'Art of the Civic' event in April we learnt about a number examples and heard from a number of speakers including Sukhy Johal, Director for the Centre for Culture and Creativity at Lincoln University, Darren Henley, Arts Council England and Andrew Barnett from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation reflecting on the relationship between universities and the cultural sector (Link). The importance of "place" really came through with examples from Vee Pollock, Dean of Culture and Creative Arts at Newcastle University describing the development of the Newcastle Compact, envisaged as a means for cities to work with the cultural sector to drive inclusive economic growth. The Compact is a multi-stakeholder consortium, bringing together the cultural sector, business, local government, NHS and community groups to develop a cultural strategy for the city, harnessing the transformative power of culture to support the revitalisation of our centre and health and well-being. Sarah Dance and Catherine Richardson talked about together about Creative Estuary, a £4.7m project funded by DCMS Cultural Development Fund to form a new future founded on creative energy and innovation along the length of the Thames Estuary. They were discussing the project from two sides – one of them inside HE and the other outside – and reflecting on the powerful nature of those partnerships, and what they can deliver for their communities.

Looking forward, as we emerge from the global pandemic, those partnerships will become even more crucial. Next week, as part of the Civic Universities Network Conference we will be having a dedicated session at next week's Civic University Network Conference on The Civic Role of Universities and the Cultural Sector Beyond the Pandemic. We will be hearing from Councillor Huw Thomas, Leader of Cardiff Council; Professor Vanessa Toulmin, Director of City & Cultural Engagement, Partnerships and Regional Engagement at the University of Sheffield, Kate Denby, Executive Director, Northern Stage and Dr Darren Henley, Chief Executive, Arts Council England. I hope you can join us.

Jane Robinson is Pro-Vice Chancellor, Engagement and Place at Newcastle University and Co-chair of the North East Culture Partnership.