

# Lunching with Governance

In the autumn of 2010 / spring of 2011 a group of pairs of chairs and CEOs from cultural organisations attended four lunches, each of which featured a different guest speaker and topic. They were organised by Clore Leadership and funded by the Cultural Leadership Programme. All 4 conversations can be found [here](#).

1. Change
2. Young people on boards
3. The board and the SMT working in partnership
4. The board's role in artistic risk

## 2. Young people on boards

*With Baroness McIntosh (acting chair) and Dave Gamble (young trustee) of the Roundhouse held on 11 November 2010.*

When Sir Torquil Norman laid out his vision for the Roundhouse, he put engagement with young people firmly at the heart of its existence. This uncompromising vision made it possible and necessary for young people to be a part of its governance.

Young people have been on the board since shortly after the Roundhouse reopened in 2006. It's something the Roundhouse are proud of but key lessons have been learnt along the way. Drawing on her own experience, Jenny McIntosh suggested a series of questions boards should consider:

- **Why do it? Who is it for?** – Is it about providing important learning experiences for young people, or injecting the board with new and different insights that help keep the mission close? Ideally it's about both, and to test your rationale you will need to ask "how will I know when I am achieving these objectives?".
- **Where will you recruit them from?** – The Roundhouse has a ready-made pool of young people to draw from through structured progression routes: participating in the activities, sitting on the youth advisory board, and then applying to join the full board. Recruitment can be tough but use of social networks is a powerful and cheap way of recruiting young people.
- **What expectations will you have of your young trustees, and how will you support them to ensure their voices are heard?** – Initially the Roundhouse board were concerned that to expect someone in their late teens to take on all the responsibilities that go with being a trustee was too big an ask. They considered a 'trustee-lite' version but in the end took the view that it has to be all or nothing. This decision had to be backed up with good induction processes and ongoing mentoring support so that the new trustees were fully aware of what their role entailed. The board also had to collectively ensure that their processes didn't inhibit new members' ability to listen and be heard. This requires skill, modelled by the chair.
- **When? How long will their terms of office be?** – The Roundhouse wanted a high turnover of young trustees in order a) that the learning experience is distributed regularly and b) to allow for young people's mobility, be that university or a new job etc. The initial cohort term of office was two years and that has now been reduced to a year.
- **How will you follow up and give feedback? What are your general appraisal processes and how will you flex them to suit people who don't stay long and may have a different range of expectations?** The Roundhouse sees the value in encouraging all parties to be as effective as possible through an iterative process of feedback.

## Dave's journey to the Roundhouse board

Dave Gamble was introduced to the Roundhouse eight years ago as a twelve year old, on a school's 'taster day'. He got involved in regular TV and radio initiatives and worked his way through various creative activities to lead on some higher profile projects. He was clear that his role as a trustee was enriched by his love and first-hand knowledge of the venue and its programmes.

The Roundhouse youth advisory board (RHYAB), which comprises young people aged 16–25 who regularly use the venue's studio academy, is the mechanism through which the young members' views are represented on the board by two young trustees. It took a while for the organisation to get RHYAB operating as an effective decision-making entity with a direct line to the board. It needed to learn how to work around the transitory nature of young people and their lives, and also how to instil a sense of purpose in RYHAB's membership so they felt they genuinely had a role to play in affecting decisions.

As a RHYAB member, David successfully applied to be on the board, for which you must be 18+ in order to be legally recognised as a trustee by the Charity Commission. He was one of five applicants who Jenny says "were all excellent, we could've appointed every one".

He had a full induction with the CEO and chair and felt that the board worked hard to ensure he was consulted and involved. He was clear that his role on the board worked precisely because he is not only representing his own views but also those of the RHYAB members. Also, he and his fellow young trustee brought specialist knowledge. For example, at a recent social media presentation to the board, they were able to ask pertinent questions as the only trustees who found the use and potential of social media 'obvious'.

He warned however, that any tokenistic use of young people on a board would fail. Young trustees must be seen and utilised as people who will enrich the governance. Being one of two young trustees was useful for mutual support. When issues arose in board meetings into which he felt unable to input, he enjoyed sitting back and watching the decision making process unfold. Learning how to ask great questions amongst a room full of quick thinkers was something Dave considered to be an excellent learning experience. "Where else can you sit with such an esteemed group of people?"

## Creating space on the board

If the board is full, but the intention is to bring younger members in, could they be co-opted as observers? Jenny suggested that whilst having young observers is better than no input at all, you are unlikely to enjoy their full participation as they are unequal players in the room. Better to change the Memorandum and Articles or move others on.

## The importance of a good induction

Confidentiality is a key part of the mandate given to all board members, but particularly needs stressing to young people who inhabit a world of frequent mass communication. In the induction process, Jenny was able to focus on the need to observe certain protocols and be clear about what may and may not be discussed outside the board room.

Sarah Taylor, a recently recruited young board member to Bright Space, talked about her weekend long induction which she found over-whelming in information but very beneficial. She met the staff and some board members, and this was followed by a session after the first board meeting to unpick the process and check understanding. She is still absorbing information, particularly the finances and is grateful for being given this time to learn before

being expected to contribute. Her recruitment came through Birmingham City Council's Young People on Arts scheme which had been running for six years. Unlike the Roundhouse model, their policy around terms of office is more relaxed depending on the availability of the individual.

### **Avoid assumptions**

Young people on boards require ongoing mentoring support, but no assumptions should be made about their needs and expertise. A young trustee could know nothing about social media but bring a wealth of experience in classical music.

### **The skill of the chair**

The chair needs to encourage all board members to park their hobby horses outside the door. It's having the ability to deal with these issues effectively with each individual that matters. To do this, you need to understand what makes people tick, young and old. There is a natural 'checking-in mechanism' that a good chair employs, which needs stepping up a little with the younger trustees.

So has the culture of the board changed since young trustees have joined it? Jenny feels it hasn't, certainly not in the way the dynamic changes with the arrival of a new chair.

### **Influencing the sector**

There may be a need for more schemes like Birmingham City Council's or board banks which actively train up young people. Jenny acknowledged that the Roundhouse may soon have a responsibility to assist their growing cohort of young people experienced in governance to consider further positions in the sector.