Press Release: 6 April 2011
FUSE event in Kensington Gardens demonstrates effective working with young people to inspire through arts

An evaluation[1] of the FUSE arts festival for young people in Kensington Gardens in July 2010 has shown that this experimental event, designed with a panel of 12 young people aged between 13 and 21, effectively established ways of working with young people to present an arts offer for their peers. Audience development agency Audiences London[2] (AL) was commissioned by The Royal Parks[3] to provide youth engagement support.

FUSE was a free, one-day arts festival initiated, organised and led by The Royal Parks (TRP) as an audience development initiative using the arts to attract young people to one of the eight Royal Parks. It was the first large scale free event in a Royal Park to specifically target this population group. *"Young people are generally poorly catered for regarding events and activities focused and designed for them specifically. We wanted young people to be the cornerstone of our arts policy, encouraging them to love the Parks and expect more from them. In turn they will be the Londoners charged with looking after the Parks for future generations,"* explains Alistair Raphael, Head of Arts, The Royal Parks. The event also had a 2012 Inspire mark.

The FUSE youth team advised on the development of the event, marketed the event to other young people and took on specific roles on the day, including talking to the press, interviewing audience members for a film and acting as compère in the performance tent. The young people, who were self-selecting to be involved, met from March 2010, with meetings increasing in frequency nearer the event. Their activities included choosing the event name, making decisions with the design agency and TRP about FUSE marketing, setting up and running the event Facebook page, watching performances by participating organisations ahead of the event and doing word-of-mouth marketing to other young people.

Participatory activities such as workshops and stage performances took place, in addition to information stands signposting young people to creative activities and opportunities; and covered a range of art forms from photography, film and animation to visual arts, performance, comedy, dance and fashion. Thirty-five arts organisations were recruited by TRP to provide activities for the day. They included voluntary and professional groups and seven national institutions[4]. Just over half of these organisations also directly involved young people in the delivery or performance of their work and twenty three of the organisations (68%) have a structure in place for involving young people in their work, such as a youth forum.

The model developed by Audiences London for effectively working with young people has been chosen by The English National Youth Arts Network, as one of their case studies for their National Campaign this year. [5] The engagement approach used for FUSE was based on three principles:

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1. Building Trust (achieved by working with partner organisations, enabling young people to make choices and negotiate, and maintaining contact with parents and carers).
2. Sharing Arts Experiences (achieved by attending events and performances together, sharing opinions and evaluations openly and recording thoughts via photo and film).
3. Connecting with Individuals (achieved by understanding each young person's individual motivations, skills and aspirations and offering appropriate opportunities in response).

Eighty seven percent of the audiences surveyed at FUSE claimed not to have been to an event of this nature before and 40% had encountered new arts organisations they had not previously known about. Just under a third of people (32%) profited from the event to try a new activity and 3% of people spoken to for the research said they had had not attended or joined in any other arts experience during the previous twelve months[6]. Young people are traditionally low users of Kensington Gardens, and the event attracted a wide range of young Londoners, with people surveyed coming from 24 of the 33 London boroughs. As the participating organisations are mainly based in either Westminster or Kensington and Chelsea, this was an effective way for them also to reach out to new audiences.

Engagement grew over the course of the project via word-of-mouth, with more young people asking to join the group at FUSE right up to and including on the day. The key measures of success in effectively engaging with the young people as co-producers were that all of the FUSE youth team rated the experience positively and would like to be involved in future work.

It's good to have young people, getting young people's thoughts and help to organize this because usually it's just other people doing it but they've actually given young people an opportunity to show their talents, show their ideas and that's what this is all about so thank you. Sharn, 18, FUSE youth team

Fuse demonstrated the strength of the arts community's commitment to young people and we were proud to help showcase the spectrum of activities on offer and encourage more young people to try something new. Alistair Raphael, Head of Arts, The Royal Parks

It takes time and energy to build the trust that underpins this kind of relationship with young people, which leads to such an effective event. I hope that The Royal Park's experience will inspire others to work in this way. Helen Ball, Head of Engagement Services, Audiences London

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Notes for Editors

For more information or images, in the first instance please contact Rachel Escott, Head of Audience Development Services, Audiences London, Direct Line 020 7367 0815, Main Line 020 7407 4625, rachel@audienceslondon.org

(1) The evaluation report, including information on methodology, was also commissioned from Audiences London, and is available the Royal Parks website http://www.royalparks.org.uk/about/publications/other_publications.cfm#FUSE_evaluation_report

(2) Audiences London (AL) is an independent, not-for-profit agency which exists to help arts, culture and heritage organisations build the stronger, larger and more diverse audiences that are the heart of a dynamic and sustainable arts economy. Audiences London receives grant funding from Arts Council England and London Councils.

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(3) The Royal Parks (TRP) is….. **The Royal Parks** is an executive agency of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and is the body responsible for managing the eight Royal Parks. Every year over 37 million people enjoy visiting the Royal Parks for free. The 5,000 acres of historic parkland provide unparalleled opportunities for enjoyment, exploration and healthy living in the heart of the capital. The Royal Parks are Bushy Park, The Green Park, Greenwich Park, Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, The Regent's Park and Primrose Hill, Richmond Park and St James's Park. For further information, please visit: http://www.royalparks.org.uk/

(4) The arts organisations involved were: AK arts; BAFTA; British Film Institute; Candoco Dance Company: Cando2; Chinatown ArtsSpace (Exodus Hip Hop Group); Crazie Productions; Digital Media Unit; DreamArts; Ebony Steelband Trust; English National Ballet; Flat Feet Dance Company; Glissandro Steelpan Orchestras; Jermyn Street Theatre; Just Dance showcase; London Transport Museum; London Youth Gospel & Metropolitan Choir; Mousetrap Theatre Projects; Photographers' Gallery; Poetry Society; RealDeal Theatre; RIBA; Royal Albert Hall; Serpentine Gallery; Shape; Sing London; Slambassadors; Soho Theatre; Tate Britain's Tate Forum; Theatre Royal Haymarket Youth Company; Union Dance & London Lucimi Choir; University of the Arts; V Inspired; V&A; Vital Regeneration's FreqOUT; Westminster City Libraries.

(5) The English National Youth Arts Network exists to raise the profile and support for youth arts within England, and by doing so create more opportunities for the creative and personal development of young people, especially young people at risk. Their national campaign for 2010-11 is "Youth Arts Transforms Lives- FACT!". More information is available at http://www.enyan.co.uk

(6) Using the definitions of an arts experience, as used in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's national Taking Part survey.