

The National Gallery's Reflective Response to the 'Evaluation of the Education and Community Strategy for The Madonna of the Pinks 2004-2007' Report undertaken by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG), University of Leicester

The National Gallery is delighted to have been involved in such an important piece of research focusing on the relevance of a specific Renaissance painting to young audiences today. Fundamental to all National Gallery Education activities is to encourage people to use their own knowledge and experiences to interpret paintings: therefore the research questions asked by RCMG in the case studies into what people gain from a sustained engagement with one painting reflects our interests and other evaluation work undertaken by the National Gallery Education department in recent years, including the current research project into our nationwide primary school scheme Take One Picture.

We are pleased to see that the overall impact of the three educational activities considered by RCMG, namely the Family and Teenage workshops based at the National Gallery, the informal education outreach project in partnership with the National Museum and Gallery of Wales, Cardiff, and the formal education outreach project in partnership with the Bowes Museum at Barnard Castle, County Durham, have mainly had a positive effect on the participants. It is also encouraging to read that 'The research shows that age, ability and previous knowledge of art are not pre-requisite for engaging with paintings like 'The Madonna of the Pinks' (p30). This observation very much supports what we believe.

Various areas have been highlighted in the interim and final reports which will be used to inform future National Gallery partnerships and outreach work.

Since 'The Madonna of the Pinks' projects a list of Education Central Guiding Principles has been formalised and shared at senior management level. The document is in the process of being discussed and agreed as an organisation with the aim of promoting an understanding across the Gallery about the aims and objectives of Learning and Access, forging stronger working relationships between departments and for communicating our practices clearly to the outside of the Gallery:

The National Gallery strives in its Educational work to:

- Give people opportunities to engage with the nation's collection of Western European paintings in ways which are meaningful to their own lives
- Develop an enthusiasm for learning

- Encourage the widest diversity of learner and recognise the impact that cultural activities can have on building a sense of achievement and community
- Address issues of disadvantage
- Make the learner a partner in learning and not a passive recipient
- Maximise the life chances of a wide and diverse public by building partnerships with communities through learning and social institutions

The following steps are in the process of being taken:

- Striving to reach more diverse audiences with our services for Families:

Since September 2007 the Gallery has prioritised Family audiences by doubling and streamlining its services for this group of visitors. Now free artist-led workshops are on offer for 200 people every Sunday of the year and during school holidays, as well as teenage workshops held throughout each half-term and Summer and Easter vacations. The Family mailing list will shortly cease to be the means of communicating information about activities to this group. Instead working closely with the Gallery's Communication department Education services will be advertised in a variety of places where a more diverse audience will be encouraged to participate. These activities are also now advertised prominently within and outside of the Gallery building.

- Planning of an education outreach programme to accompany future UK touring exhibitions:

The National Gallery Exhibitions and Education departments will work closely together to ensure that any future learning programme is fully developed in collaboration with their colleagues in each tour venue. It is important that enough time is given to the development of imaginative programmes to engage a wide and diverse local audience. These programmes will have clearly measurable aims and defined learning outcomes.

There are circumstances which are beyond the control of organisations receiving grants from the HLF. The primary issue for concern is the short notice in which proposals for projects need to be implemented. For this reason any such future projects undertaken by the National Gallery, with the same time constraints as potential of developing audiences in new areas of the country that can be offered opportunities to engage with paintings through education projects. However, by prioritising longer-term partnerships we believe higher quality services will result. In addition the sustainability of such outreach work, in terms of changing peoples' attitudes towards museums and galleries, will also hopefully be greater.

October 2007