

Changing the Narrative: Older Women and the Cultural Sector 18 May 2018

Conference report

'It was a really interesting day and has made me rethink some of the negative reactions I had to being eighty. Thank you for that, and for the experience of seeing so many powerful women in one place.'

'The speakers were excellent and from very diverse backgrounds which made the day very interesting ... it was also great to meet the other delegates who were all interesting women. I hope that this will be the only event on the theme'

'what an awesome line up of folk with excellent thought provoking presentations'

'so much food for thought, wisdom and provocation - a privilege to be there'

This conference was organised by Virginia Tandy, a doctoral researcher at ICP in SALC. It was financially supported by Arts Methods and also received helpful advice from MICRA. It was held at the Graduate School in the Ellen Wilkinson building.

The starting point for this conference was the lived experience of women now in their 50s, 60s and 70s. Women in this cohort entered the workforce in greater numbers and for some this brought opportunities to work at a higher level taking on influential and professional management and leadership roles. What are the expectations of older women today? Drawing on academic and empirical research in gerontology, sociology and business and the personal experiences of older women working in the cultural sector, this event brought together current work in this multidisciplinary field with the express purpose of improving public understanding.

The speakers and chairs were all leaders in their fields and included Professors in a range of disciplines from both the University of Manchester and MMU, the Head of Architecture at Edinburgh a senior researcher at the Centre for Ageing Better, the Director of the Clore Leadership Programme and a leading community artist.

The conference was well attended – 55 including speakers. The audience, which was female, was drawn from all over the country. Ages ranged from 35 to over 80 and included many past directors of major cultural institutions, a small number of academics, current staff from cultural organisations, practising artists, and a couple of representatives from cultural funding bodies. The conference presentations and discussion were filmed and once edited will be added to the website along with copies of the papers and slides that were presented on the day to create a lasting resource.

<https://changingthenarrativeconference.wordpress.com/>

Learnings

Restricting conference grant spending on catering to only 50% of the award created significant budgeting and administrative challenges, given the numbers attending the conference. It would have been impossible to cater for over 50 people for a full day on £375. A conference fee was charged for attendance to cover additional catering costs but this then required the setting up of a new finance account, an estore account and liaison with the finance team, which all took considerable additional time. Despite being

responsible for the budget, I was unable to independently access the sales or finance reports to help me keep track of income and had to request them.

All the staff I worked with were extremely helpful, but I was disappointed that the functionality of estore does not allow for the generation of attendance lists or email lists from the system. This all had to be done manually. I also found the process for allocating wifi accounts while efficient, in terms of the speed at which they were created, gave a very unprofessional image and was not user friendly as each conference delegate had to be given a piece of paper with an individual account name and number along with complicated instructions.

Some thought on the above issues might assist everyone in their conference organisation and ease the burden on organisers.

Virginia Tandy

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