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Northumbria innovators shine a light on Ashington's future

A new piece of public art that brings a town's ambitions to life has been unveiled in Ashington. Entitled Town of Colour, it is the culmination of a programme of partnership workshops and activities organised by academics, graduates and students from Northumbria University to harness community aspirations in Ashington.

The project, involving hundreds of young people and their families, is an example of how academic, business and community expertise can collaborate to identify positive opportunities for the future. The artwork, along with an

accompanying exhibition, was revealed to the public on Thursday 27 November 2014 coinciding with Ashington's annual Christmas lights event. The Town of Colour project originated from a joint desire amongst partners to improve and develop Ashington through activities that are led by residents and particularly young people.

To identify opportunities, Northumbria University's Multidisciplinary Innovation (MDI) students talked to stakeholders in the town and held workshops with young people. The results of this dialogue were then presented to partners to identify new projects which could inspire change.

The idea of an educational arts project focused on a Town of Colour given the impending arrival of AkzoNobel – the parent company of leading brand, Dulux, which is building one of the world's most advanced and sustainable manufacturing plants in Ashington. It was then developed into a programme of workshops and family activities by MDI graduates James Shutt and Bradley Coulson with direct funding from the County Council and considerable in kind support through time and resources from the partnership.

Dr Nicholas Spencer, Programme Leader for MDI at Northumbria said: "This project is one of several that have been developed by MDI students and graduates at the Northern Design Centre in Gateshead.

"James and Bradley challenged children, young people and families to consider their vision for Ashington in 2020 using a range of techniques including art, photography and social media.

"It was evident through the delivery of the sessions that there was a lot of passion within the groups, and it was Northumbria's challenge to find a platform for this, and create a symbol of the town's ambition. That is the primary focus of the artwork – to celebrate and inspire the local community."

A dedicated family fun day was also delivered at the Surestart Centre, which attracted 150 participants. Ben Nightingale, an artist and MDI student at Northumbria, was commissioned to work with the children who attended to create sketches of themselves in their dream roles. The project culminated in a competition from which twelve winners were selected, four from each of the participating schools including Ashington High School, Northumberland College, Church of England Academy and the town's Surestart Centre.

It is these winners who will see their work on display as part of the public art and exhibition. They have also taken part in additional workshops at the NDC, and will each receive a Changing Rooms-style makeover of one of the rooms in their home, courtesy of Dulux.

Councillor Robert Arkless, Policy Board Member for Children's Services at Northumberland County Council said: 'It's great to see the end result of all the hard work that young people and their families have put in from across the town. Representatives from both School Partnerships, the College and the children's centre have combined with the expertise of the University to develop new ideas for the future. This demonstrates the considerable skills that local people have to offer and with the public display there's now an opportunity to continue a discussion with the wider community about the future of the town.

"The development of AkzoNobel's major new facility and their support for developing a Town of Colour has been a real catalyst showing that the town is an important place for industry both now and in the future. This is just one of a series of ways that the town is looking to the future and the council is focused on developing the town through the £74m Ashington Investment Strategy being led by ARCH, the Northumberland Development Company."

Dionne Clark, Learning & Community Development Manager, AkzoNobel said: "AkzoNobel is committed to working in partnership with its local communities on initiatives that will transform the environment and inspire people to achieve great things. All evidence points to the fact that using colour in an imaginative way can play a key role in achieving these goals. It is for these reasons that AkzoNobel is totally committed to the Town of Colour."

Partners to the project include Northumbria University, AkzoNobel, Northumberland College, Woodhorn Museum, ARCH, The Northumberland Development Company, The Northumberland Church of England Academy, Ashington Town Council, Ashington Learning Partnership, Ashington Children's Centre and Northumberland County Council.

To find out more about studying MDI, a postgraduate level course offered by Northumbria University, visit www.northumbria.ac.uk/pg

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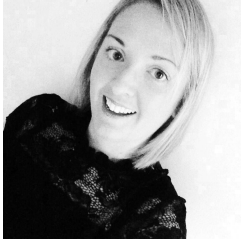


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