



The Floors Should Be Made Of Chocolate

Minister launches report on the consultation of primary pupils to design a new £13m theatre

16 August 2005, London: Beverley Hughes, Minister of State for Children, Young People and Family, together with local children from Southwark, today launched *The Floors Should Be Made Of Chocolate*, a report on a unique three year consultation with primary school pupils to build the new £13m Unicorn Theatre.

The new Unicorn Theatre is the first ever purpose built professional theatre for children in the UK. Unicorn is currently being constructed on Tooley Street, Southwark, and will open by the end of 2005 and play to over 100,000 children per year.

The Minister hailed the report as leading the way in encouraging the authentic consultation of children, taking their views into consideration around developments in their community and helping them become active citizens.

Beverley Hughes, Minister of State for Children, Young People and Family said:

"This project highlights the importance of consulting with children and young people and the benefits for them in terms of their own creativity, personal skills and academic achievement. I hope that the report will promote not only the greater involvement of young people in their local communities, but also improved partnerships between culture and education. It's vital that such partnerships continue to develop if theatre, music and art are to be a real part of every child's life."

Unicorn's education team started the consultation in 2001 with a class of 30, eight year old pupils from Tower Bridge Primary School. The consultation ran for three years working with the same children as they moved through the school. The project was funded by the Pool of London Partnership.

The consultation was carried out to better understand how children experience theatre and ensure their thoughts were taken into account for the designs of the new theatre. The consultation was guided by Articles 12 and 31 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, about listening to the views of children, and encouraging participation in cultural life and the arts.

The children involved have developed firm links with the theatre and are to act as Unicorn ambassadors during Unicorn's opening week, showing guests and visitors round the building to which they contributed their ideas.

The consultation provided unparalleled learning experiences for the pupils. By the end of the consultation the children had:

- ❖ Been involved in 38 interactive sessions at the school with the Unicorn team;
- ❖ Taken part in a residential project, in which Unicorn worked at the school for four days a week for three weeks to produce a film: *Transformations*;
- ❖ Helped select one of the public artists for the theatre;
- ❖ Saw five Unicorn productions, visited the Design Museum and various theatres across London including the Royal Court and the National Theatre;
- ❖ Worked with the Unicorn's architect, Keith Williams, principal, Keith Williams Architects;
- ❖ Worked with architecture students from South Bank University to create 3D models of Unicorn's foyer;
- ❖ Worked with a range of artists to create art, poems and stories about theatre and the Unicorn;
- ❖ Had their artwork displayed on the hoardings around the construction site.

The children had a direct involvement in the design of the seating and the appointment of one of the public artists, David Cotterrell, for an installation in the Foyer of the new theatre.

Frances Magee, *The Floors Should Be Made of Chocolate*, report author and former Director of Education, Haringey Council, said: *“The Unicorn’s approach has been daring and trailblazing. The lesson is that consultation with children can be authentic. The architect, the theatre company, and all adults involved say that the children’s influence has pervaded the development of the new theatre.”*

Tony Graham, Artistic Director, Unicorn Theatre, said: *“For many of the children working with us it was their first exposure to theatre and they were hugely enthusiastic. We were able to harness their energy and sense of wonder through dialogue and creative activities that linked in with schoolwork and directly helped us in forming the designs for the new Unicorn Theatre.”*

Dominique, Unicorn Young Consultant: *“Before the work with the Unicorn some of us couldn’t face up to people if they said anything different to what we thought. Now we’ve got the confidence in our own ideas, confidence to express them and confidence in myself.”*

Ambir, Unicorn Young Consultant: *“The Unicorn gave me the confidence to talk with other people. It was my first time ever interviewing someone [the public artist] and if someone gave me the chance I would do it all again.”*

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Further information

Pictures and further information on the Unicorn Young Consultants

Pictures of the Unicorn Young Consultants in action can be found at: http://www.kallaway.co.uk/unicorn_pictures1.htm. Information on the Unicorn Young Consultants can be found at: http://www.kallaway.co.uk/unicorn_children.htm.

Report

The Floors Should Be Made of Chocolate, was written by Frances Magee, former Director of Education, Haringey Council. Copies are available from the Unicorn Theatre's Education Department at £2.50 each.

Contacts

Unicorn

Alison Barry, Education and Youth Director, Unicorn Theatre, 020 7700 0702, education@unicorntheatre.com.

William Kallaway, Kallaway Ltd, 020 7221 7883, william@kallaway.co.uk

Department for Education and Skills

Janet Coulltrisc, Chief Press Officer, DfES, 020 7925 5721, janet.coull-trisc@dfes.gsi.gov.uk

About the Unicorn Theatre

Unicorn is the foremost producer of theatre for children in the UK. Founded in 1947, Unicorn has been creating theatre productions and running arts education programmes for 4 - 12 year-olds throughout the UK for over 57 years. It aims to produce theatre with the power to transform a child's understanding of the world around them and provide spectacular learning opportunities. All children are welcome. Unicorn runs programmes for deaf and hearing-impaired children as well as those from disadvantaged communities. Its AccessWorks programme has enabled over 15,000 children in financial hardship to see productions.

About the new £13.3m Unicorn Theatre

Unicorn is located on Tooley Street, close to the GLA building and Tower Bridge. It is part of the More London development, which is part of the Foster & Partners masterplan for the area. Unicorn is designed by Keith Williams Architects and Mansell Construction Services is lead contractor. Other companies involved include:

- Theatre Projects Consultants - Theatre Consultants
- Charcoalblue - Theatre Consultants
- Bucknall Austin - Quantity Surveyors
- Arup Associates - Structural, Service and Mechanical Engineers
- Arup Acoustics - Acousticians
- Buro Happold - Access Consultants

Unicorn's plans and models have been exhibited in the Theatre Museum, Covent Garden along with other ground breaking theatre designs and, in 2003, it won the Architectural Review/MIPIM Award for Future Projects.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Article 12

- 1 States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in a manner affecting the child, the view of child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Article 31

- 1 States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
- 2 States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities.