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MEDIA IN EAST LONDON

*Mapping Media Mentorship in
East London's Creative Ecosystem*

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Introduction

01



“Culture has the power to transform communities and to bring people closer together.”

*By Sadiq Khan,
Mayor of London*

East London is known for its creative pulse, where innovation meets tradition and culture is presented in its most raw, energetic form. From Shoreditch's street art to Walthamstow's film festivals, East London is a creative hotspot. Having lived in East London for a year as an international student, I've experienced its unique blend of diversity, modernity, and the lasting legacy of the 2012 Olympics, which together shape a vibrant and colourful lifestyle for its residents. Despite being relatively new to this area, the dynamic media industry has left a lasting impression on me. I've witnessed how it nurtures talent and fuels the region's creative identity, sparking my interest in exploring the **mentorship** programs that are paving the way for the next generation of media professionals.

This report, crafted in collaboration with **local communities**, delves into the crucial role of mentorship in shaping media talent across UCL's neighboring boroughs—**Newham, Tower Hamlets, Hackney, and Waltham Forest**. Rooted in East London's rich cultural landscape, these mentorship programs go beyond skill-building; they act as essential support systems for emerging creatives eager to break into the industry.

Through this research, we explore how these mentorship initiatives contribute to the growth of a thriving, inclusive media ecosystem. By engaging with **local media organizations, educational institutions, government bodies, and community leaders**, we map out the structures, strengths, and opportunities for improvement within this mentorship network. The insights from East Londoners highlight how mentorship bridges the gap between theoretical education and the practical demands of the media industry, while also addressing the challenges faced by underrepresented groups entering the field.

Who Were Our Survey Respondents?

02



The research for this report is based on primary data collected through in-depth interviews with professionals across the four East London boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets, Hackney, and Waltham Forest. In each borough, we interviewed two professionals from different sectors involved in the media mentorship ecosystem, including media companies, educational institutions, community interest companies (CICs), and local government initiatives.

All interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, lasting approximately 30 minutes each. Open-ended questions were used to encourage deep, reflective conversations. Although the interviewees were professionals, they frequently shared firsthand stories of the young media talents involved in their programs. These real-life anecdotes provided a deeper understanding of the impact of mentorship, especially for disadvantaged or underrepresented groups.

Media Mentorship Ecosystem

03

The media mentorship ecosystem in East London is a key pillar of the region's creative industry, helping emerging talent—typically with less than three years of experience to enter the media sector. This report highlights mentorship programs designed to support young media professionals by offering resources, industry insights, and hands-on training. These structured programs connect mentees with seasoned experts, providing real-world experience and helping them develop essential media skills. Explore the interactive map [here](#), which showcases the various media mentorship programs currently active across East London's boroughs.



The strength of this ecosystem lies in the collaboration between universities, media companies, community interest companies (CICs), and government bodies. Each stakeholder plays a crucial role:

★ Mentors

Experienced media professionals who provide guidance, share industry knowledge, and offer practical advice to mentees. They are instrumental in bridging the gap between theoretical education and the demands of the practical media industry.

★ Educational Institutions

Universities and local colleges, such as UCL, partner with media companies to offer mentorship programs, work placements, and hands-on experience, providing students with an essential bridge from academia to industry.



Media Companies

Organizations within the media sector collaborate with mentors and educational institutions to offer internships, networking opportunities, and real-world work experiences, helping to nurture emerging talent.



Local Government

Initiatives like the Good Growth Hub and the Waltham Forest Creative Industries Hub provide vital frameworks and funding, ensuring that mentorship opportunities align with regional development goals while contributing to East London's economic growth.



Community Interest Companies (CICs)

Nonprofit organizations like E17 Films focus on underrepresented groups, offering mentorship and skills development to individuals who face barriers to entering the media industry. Their programs play a key role in promoting diversity and inclusivity.

In East London, the ecosystem thrives through these collaborations. Media companies and educational institutions work closely to provide students with practical, real-world experience. Organizations like **Arebyte Gallery and E17 Films** not only offer mentorship but also create platforms for young talent to showcase their work, thereby fostering stronger industry ties. Local government plays a key role by providing funding and support to CICs, not only protecting disadvantaged groups but also fostering connections within the local community, helping to shape a shared cultural identity.

Inclusivity and Accessibility

One of the most powerful aspects of East London's media mentorship ecosystem is its commitment to inclusivity. Recognizing the challenges posed by the media industry's tendency to favor individuals from privileged backgrounds, many mentorship programs in the area are designed to actively counter this bias. These programs focus on selecting mentees from diverse, underrepresented communities, ensuring broader participation and equitable access to opportunities.

Mentorship initiatives like E17 Films, offering tailored support to marginalized groups, including the **LGBTQ+ community** and individuals with **disabilities**. These initiatives not only teach valuable media skills but also offer a supportive environment for personal growth and build self-confidence.

Opportunity and Impacts

05



What opportunity does media mentorship offer?

Interviews revealed that media mentorship offers significant opportunities for young media talent, contributing greatly to the development of the creative media industry.

Three key themes emerged as central to these opportunities: **technological advancement, innovation and community engagement**. These areas highlight how mentorship programs not only equip emerging talent with essential skills but also promote broader innovation and community participation within the media industry in east london.

1. Technology Advancement

“Our programs include training in AI systems, and teaching participants how to use Unreal or Unity for video game world-building. Additionally, we offer 3D modelling courses using Blender.”
By a managing director (art gallery) in Hackney



Media mentorship programs offer young talent the opportunity to gain technological and industry-relevant skills. Mentors, often professionals from the media industry, bring expertise in the latest technologies and methods, ensuring that participants stay current with **industry trends**. By providing hands-on guidance, these mentors help bridge skills gaps, **“addressing the needs of employers and organizations in the area,”** and enabling participants to adapt to the rapidly evolving media landscape.

In addition to technical expertise, mentors also impart essential **transferable skills**, such as project management, teamwork, and communication. These **soft skills** are valuable across various industries and are key to **success** in the media industry.

Some mentorship programs allow participants to take on real projects, guiding them from planning to execution. This experience not only enhances their technical abilities but also teaches them how to effectively collaborate and communicate within a team. The combination of **hard and soft skills** acquired through mentorship is invaluable to young media professionals as they begin their careers.



Fashion designer Barbeline Lusandu is based in Trowbridge Gardens and received Creative Enterprise Zone funding



*"A lot of the work involves listening to the opportunities and problems our partners have and seeing if there's an opportunity to pair them with relevant work or research happening at the university."
By a programme manager*

*"Our School worked together with a neighboring college to develop a business builder program, aiming to support local businesses and provide practical entrepreneurial training."
By a Broker*

Mentorship programs focus on both enhancing technical skills and fostering **entrepreneurial abilities**. These programs help artists and professionals connect with business leaders, enabling them to collaborate and **commercialise** their creative products, creating new pathways for career development.

Additionally, mentorship programs often involve partnerships with various industries, bringing in experts from different fields to broaden participants' perspectives. They may also collaborate with schools or other organizations to provide additional opportunities and resources, further supporting the participants' growth and success.

3. Community Engagement

“We working with the community centre, so we have been able to reach more local residents and offer creative skills training that they are interested in. This not only increases their participation but also fosters collaboration and exchange within the community.”
By a Community Interest Company Runner

“Annually, we shoot documentary story locally.”
By a Community Interest Company Runner



Community engagement plays a vital role in the success and **sustainability** of mentorship programs by fostering a sense of belonging and collaboration within the local area. These programs work closely with residents to offer creative skills training that aligns with the community’s needs. By involving local residence and local culture in creative projects, mentorship programs help transform the community into an active, vibrant space where creative expression and social interaction thrive.

For young mentees, these engagements offer valuable opportunities to apply their skills in real-world contexts, often through **community-led projects** such as local films or public art displays. This approach not only strengthens participants' practical experience but also enhances the sense of ownership and pride within the community, building a stronger, more connected neighborhood. In turn, the creatives contribute to making the area more dynamic, creating a mutually beneficial relationship between mentorship programs and the local community.

Challenges and Recommendations


Despite the undeniable benefits of media mentorship programs in East London, they are not without their challenges. This section highlights some of the key obstacles faced by stakeholders, ranging from funding shortages to inclusivity issues and skill development gaps. By addressing these challenges head-on, we can provide actionable recommendations to improve the effectiveness and accessibility of mentorship programs, ensuring that young media talent receives the support they need to thrive.



1. FUNDING SHORTAGES

Participants or runners in the mentorship programs frequently highlighted funding as a critical challenge for them. They raised concerns about the difficulty in securing adequate financial resources to support both the operational costs and the participant needs. Many mentors and program coordinators noted that while these programs are highly beneficial to local inhabitants, the lack of **stable funding** often limits their reach and impact. This issue is particularly acute in programs targeting **disadvantaged or low-income participants** who may require additional financial support for travel, materials, and other participation costs.




Funding shortages not only affect the availability of resources for young media talent but also place a strain on the mentors and coordinators who must often go above and beyond their regular duties without additional compensation. For example, sometimes program managers had to pay for the ticket and lunch for those disadvantaged with unstable income. Many mentorship programs are provided by charities and Community Interest Companies (CICs), which often rely on limited funding and donations. This makes securing consistent financial resources even more challenging.

-  Developing a comprehensive funding strategy that is accessible with more different stateholder, includes applying for government grants, seeking private sponsorships, organising fundraising events, and collaborating with philanthropic organisations.
-  Implement structured budgeting practices and transparent financial management to maximise the use of available resources. Create detailed budget plans, regularly review and adjust budgets, and establish a financial oversight committee.
-  Increase outreach efforts to recruit more volunteer mentors who is industry's expert. Highlight the benefits for media companies participating in mentorship programs, such as enhancing their corporate reputation, fulfilling corporate social responsibility, and seeking potential media young talent.

2. RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND INCLUSIVENESS CHALLENGES

Ensuring inclusiveness and equitable resource allocation in mentorship programs is a significant challenge. Individuals with higher degrees or connections to well-known media companies often enjoy priorities or privileges that create barriers for others. These entry barriers and information gaps are particularly challenging for disadvantaged groups and low-income individuals, who have fewer resources to access the media industry. To address these issues, media mentorship programs must ensure fair opportunities and support for all participants, regardless of their background, while managing limited resources and high demand. challenging.

RECOMMENDATIONS

-  When students enter the mentorship program, eliminate unnecessary barriers such as the requirement for a university degree or previous work experience. These requirements often depend on having networks and financial resources, which can exclude disadvantaged individuals.
-  Mentors should include mandatory regular workshops and training sessions on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). This ensures that mentors are well-equipped to support students from diverse backgrounds without bias.
-  Consult with teachers with specialised training in special education and so create individualised support plans for students with disabilities, outlining specific accommodations and support mechanisms required beforehand.

3. SKILLS GAP

Media mentorship programs sometimes face challenges in addressing the skills gap, especially in relation to the development of soft skills and the need for individualised support. Media mentorship could teach students the newest technologies and skills. However, soft skills like communication, collaboration, teamwork, and networking are equally important but much harder to develop. Soft skills development is a slow and ongoing process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Organise workshops and practical work trials to give students hands-on experience.

Collaborating with different roles can help students practise and develop their soft skills in a practical scenario. More trials for practical work provide opportunities to apply their learning, make mistakes, and make reflection and improvement in a controlled environment.

2 Develop individualised mentorship plans that cater to the unique needs and circumstances of each mentee. By understanding and addressing the specific challenges and goals of each individual, mentors can provide more effective and personalised support that enhances both technical and soft skills.



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