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## Lincoln Voices – Artist in Residence Proposal

### Statement of Interest – *Lincoln Debates* (working title)

This residency naturally follows on from a personal project celebrating Magna Carta 800 in 2015: over 6 months I published a series of books juxtaposing texts from 1100 to 2000 which pre-date or build upon its legacy. They exist as online books and as downloadable PDFs; printed copies were sent out to subscribers and a special edition of 50 bound in red silk.

<http://gileslane.net/2015/01/27/magna-carta-800/>

The Great and Little Charters have occupied a special place in the democratic imaginary since 1215, and more specifically since Sir Edward Coke's 1629 Petition of Right. Since then, they have been the foundations of the long struggle for equality before the law, self-determination and enfranchisement, as well as access to the resources of the kingdom for all to do more than survive. These two documents are both the foundation of our just democracy and the welfare system.

My proposal is to use the residency to stimulate a dialogue with young people and others in Lincoln about their experiences of justice, empowerment and access to resources now, framed and contextualised by the expertise available in the university. This will lead to an artwork that gathers their voices and is collaboratively 'public authored' using hybrid digital and physical media.

### Research with the School of Political and Social Sciences

I propose to explore the forces today which leave people, and in particular young people and newcomers, feeling powerless and without access to resources. To what extent has the bureaucracy and apparatus of the modern State replaced the despotic monarch with a system of intervention and interference that we feel unable to effectively counter? A system that exerts control over people's lives in both direct and indirect ways – through total surveillance, the benefits system, constant assessment and sanctions, work and health?

The young have always been the demographic least likely to vote. As children they are subject to the authority of parents, teachers and others. From 16 on it is a journey of self-discovery to understand democracy – let alone feel it in action or appreciate its effects. What kind of social contract might be necessary, or possible, in the contemporary world and for our future generations to re-balance our sense of agency, autonomy and of being a part of the just democracy we believe our country to be? And how do we incorporate those who reside here but have no vote?

What resources today could provide the modern equivalent of the rights to forage for food and gather fuel provided by the Charter of the Forest? These were active pursuits not handouts, guaranteeing access to resources but leaving it to people's own initiative to make use of the resources in their environment. What kind of framework today could offer dignity *and* access to the kinds of resources people need to make a life?

### Experience of Youth Engagement

I have extensive public engagement experience with people of all ages, including young people. I have managed a youth placement scheme at Proboscis (employing 18-25 year olds on 6 month training) and have run workshops and facilitated creative events with young people in primary and secondary schools, youth groups and clubs and NEETs in community settings. I have facilitated intergenerational workshops and events that are focused on building community cohesion and communication. I have done this in the UK, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Japan, Papua New Guinea & Vanuatu.

### Approach

My work is highly participatory, involving collaboration, co-creation and co-design at its core. As an artist I have developed a practice around collaborative publishing – using technologies which I have developed over many years, but not being beholden to them as the final output or artwork. Working with young people, I have found that they enjoy using digital media, but become particularly engaged when there are concrete physical outcomes, such as printed books and material artefacts. Having something tangible which they have been a part of creating provides meaning and can increase engagement exponentially.

My approach would be :

- to devise workshops and events involving young people and others in Lincoln (facilitated through local youth groups, clubs and programmes, where they exist) to gather and share their voices about how they feel about these issues.
- to engage people in acts of collaborative 'public authoring' (using digital media and material artefacts) that locate and embed their concerns and aspirations into the fabric of the city, and which have the potential to resonate a new future for civic empowerment for another 800 years
- to host a series of *Lincoln Debates* exploring what a new social contract, or constitution might be.