

PSYCHIC FISH


MANCHESTER MUSEUM

Science Uncovered Manchester



Friday 28 September
5-9pm

Free entry

Proud to be part of

MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester

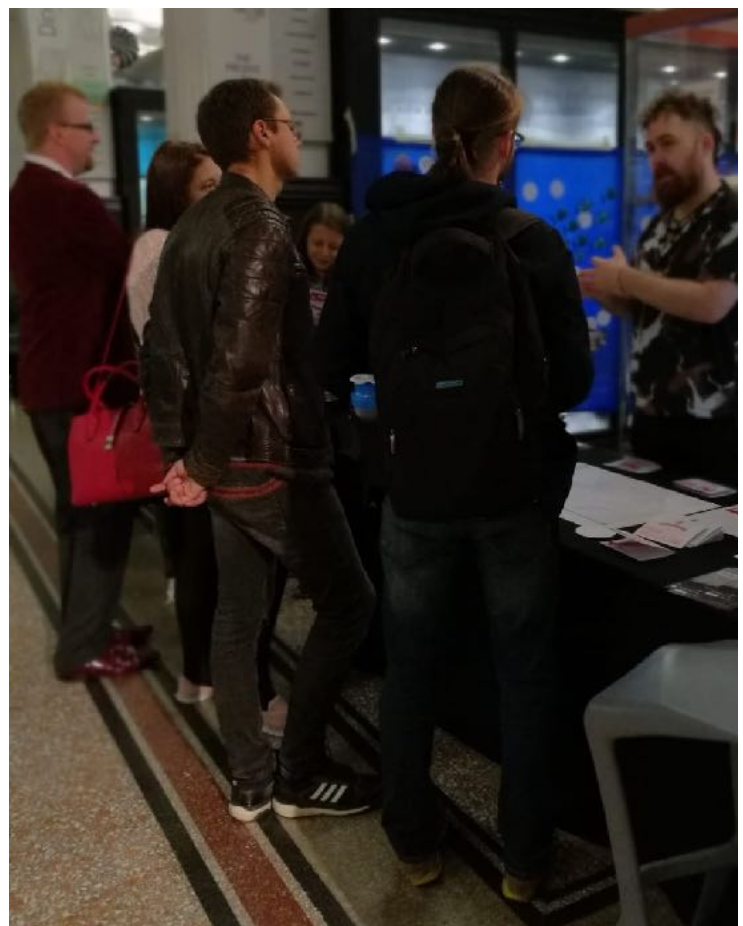


Activities

- Psychic fish
- Plotting care v capacity
- Fishy thoughts

Number of people engaged - 100 approx

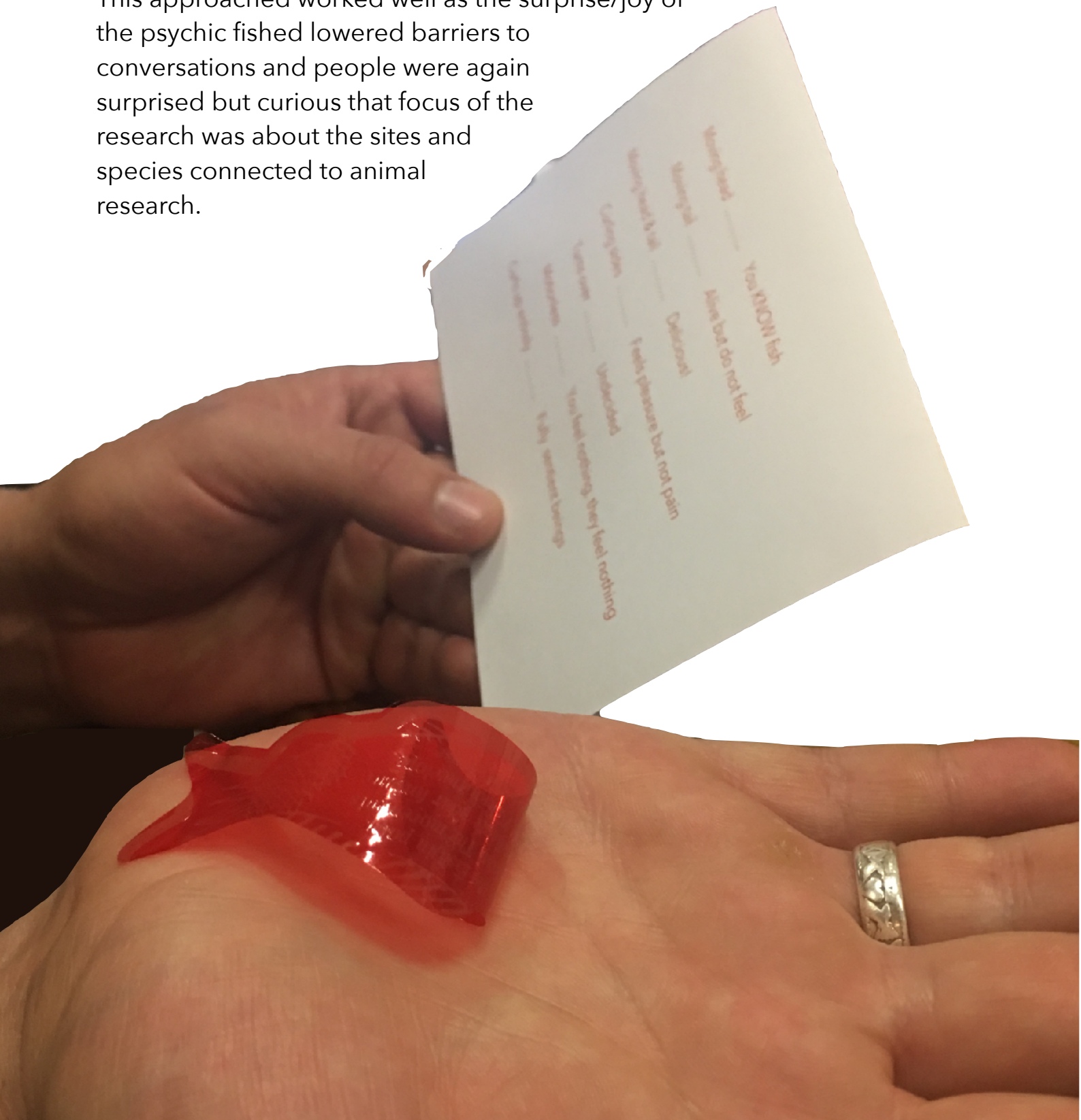
Participants were diverse in ages, ethnicity and physical abilities.



Psychic fish

Initial activity was to see how people feel about fish. The psychic fish “reveals” how a participant really feels. The conversation is opened up by asking if the result is true.

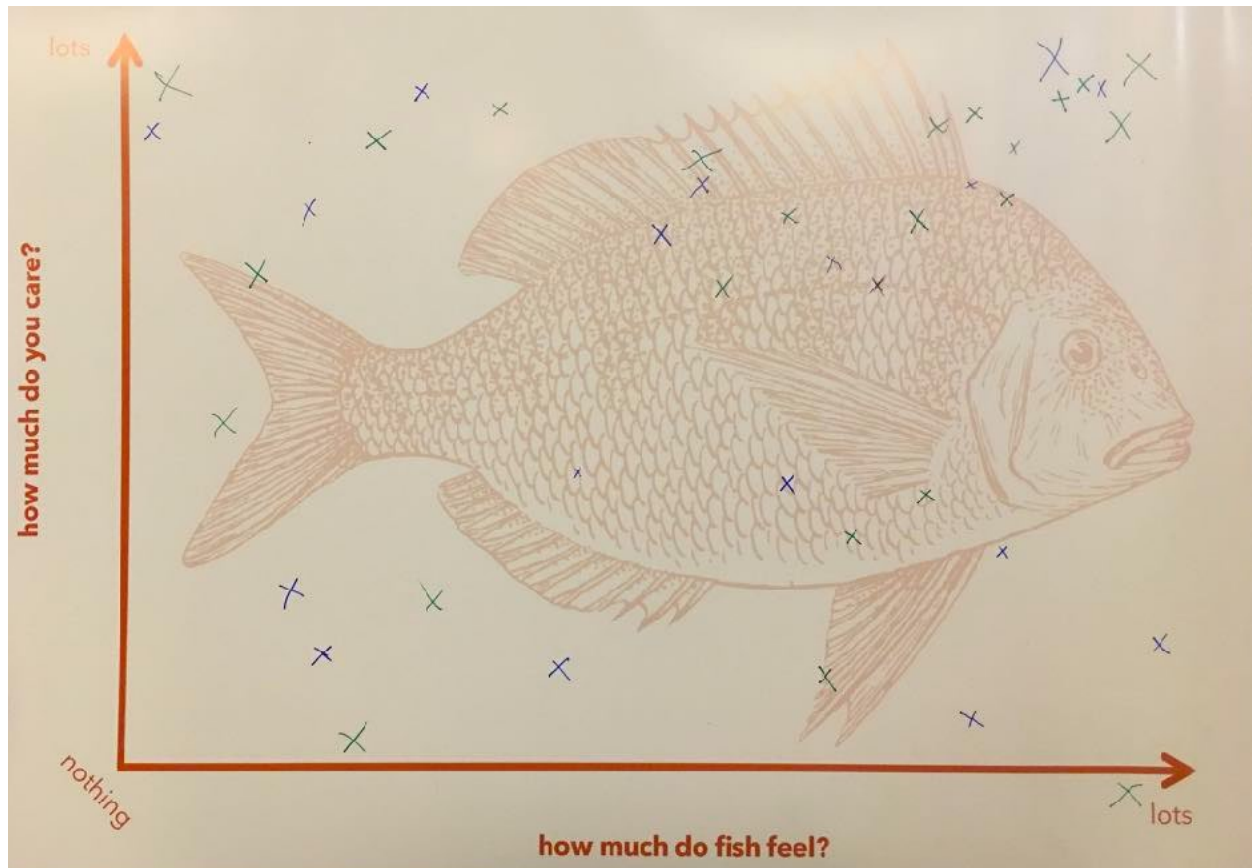
This approach worked well as the surprise/joy of the psychic fished lowered barriers to conversations and people were again surprised but curious that focus of the research was about the sites and species connected to animal research.





Moving head	.....	You KNOW fish
Moving tail	.....	Alive but do not feel
Moving head & tail	.....	Delicious!
Curling sides	.....	Feels pleasure but not pain
Turns over	.....	Undecided
Motionless	.....	You feel nothing, they feel nothing
Curled up entirely	.....	Fully sentient beings

Plotting care



People plotted how much they cared about fish against how much they thought fish could feel.

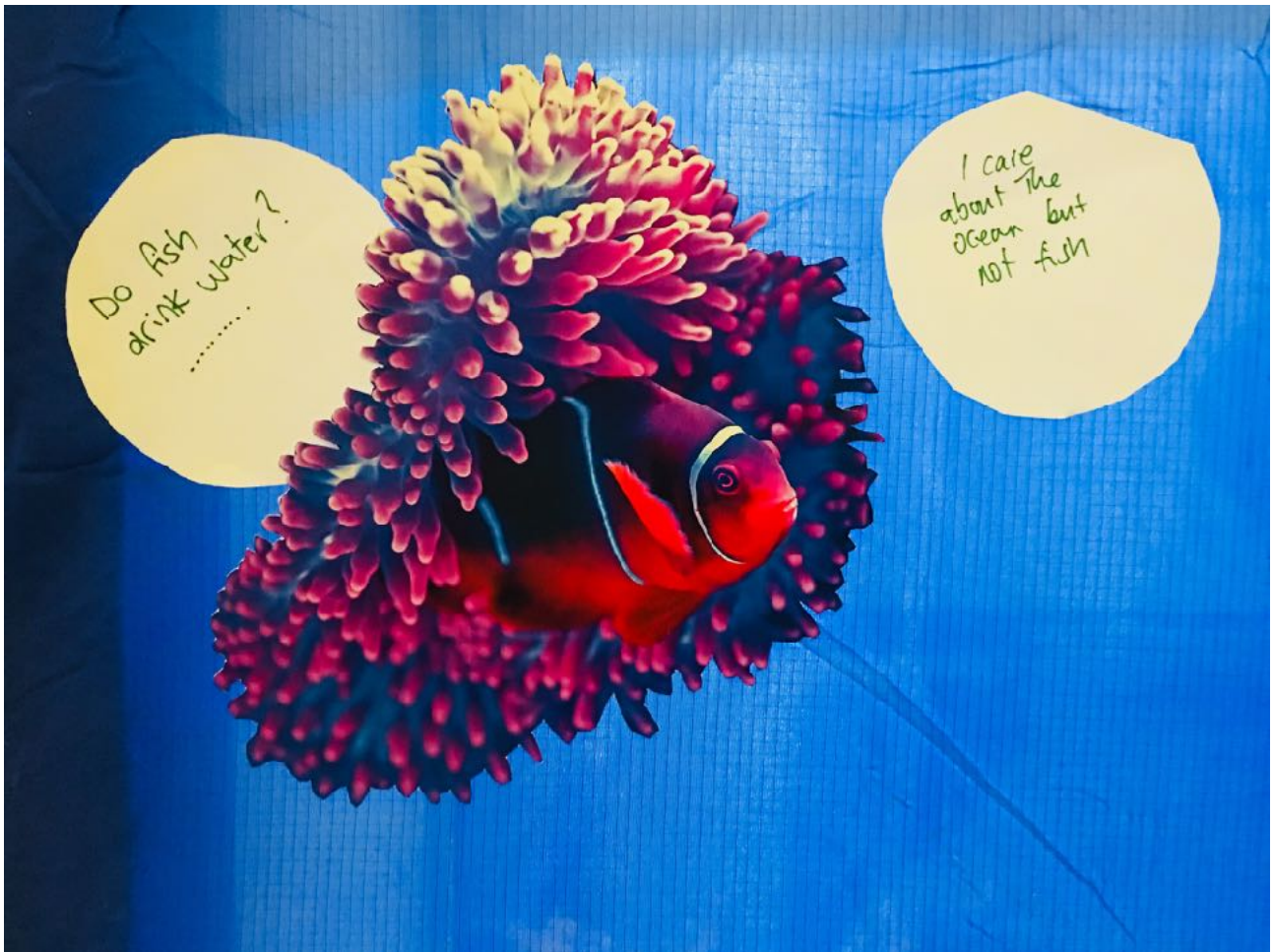
Spearman's rank coefficient calculated the R value as 0.277 indicating that there is no correlation between these two variables.

This may suggest that the people's perception of fish's capacity and sentience neither limits nor increases their ability to care about them.

However, this was not designed to be quantitative but to facilitate a conversation around somatic empathy, if you need to care *about* something to care *for* it, and what implication these have on welfare and caring within the laboratory.

In this respect the activity worked extremely well.

Fishy thoughts



Do fish feel pain?

If so, how does this change the way we treat them?

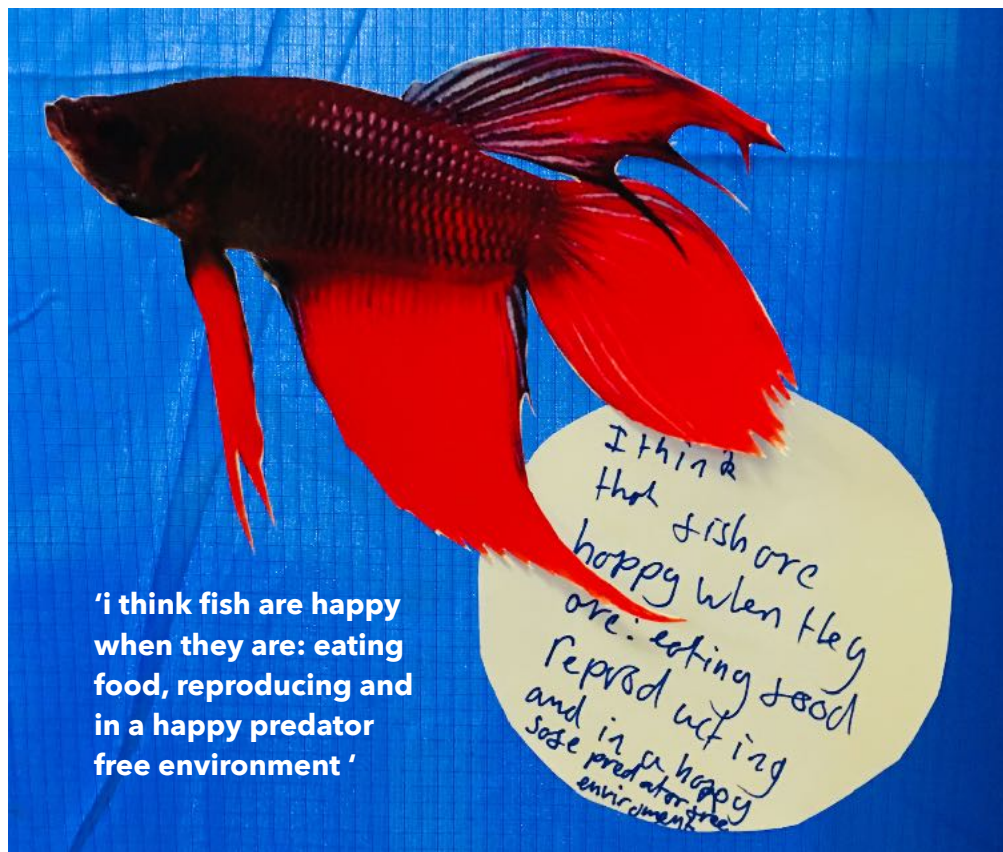
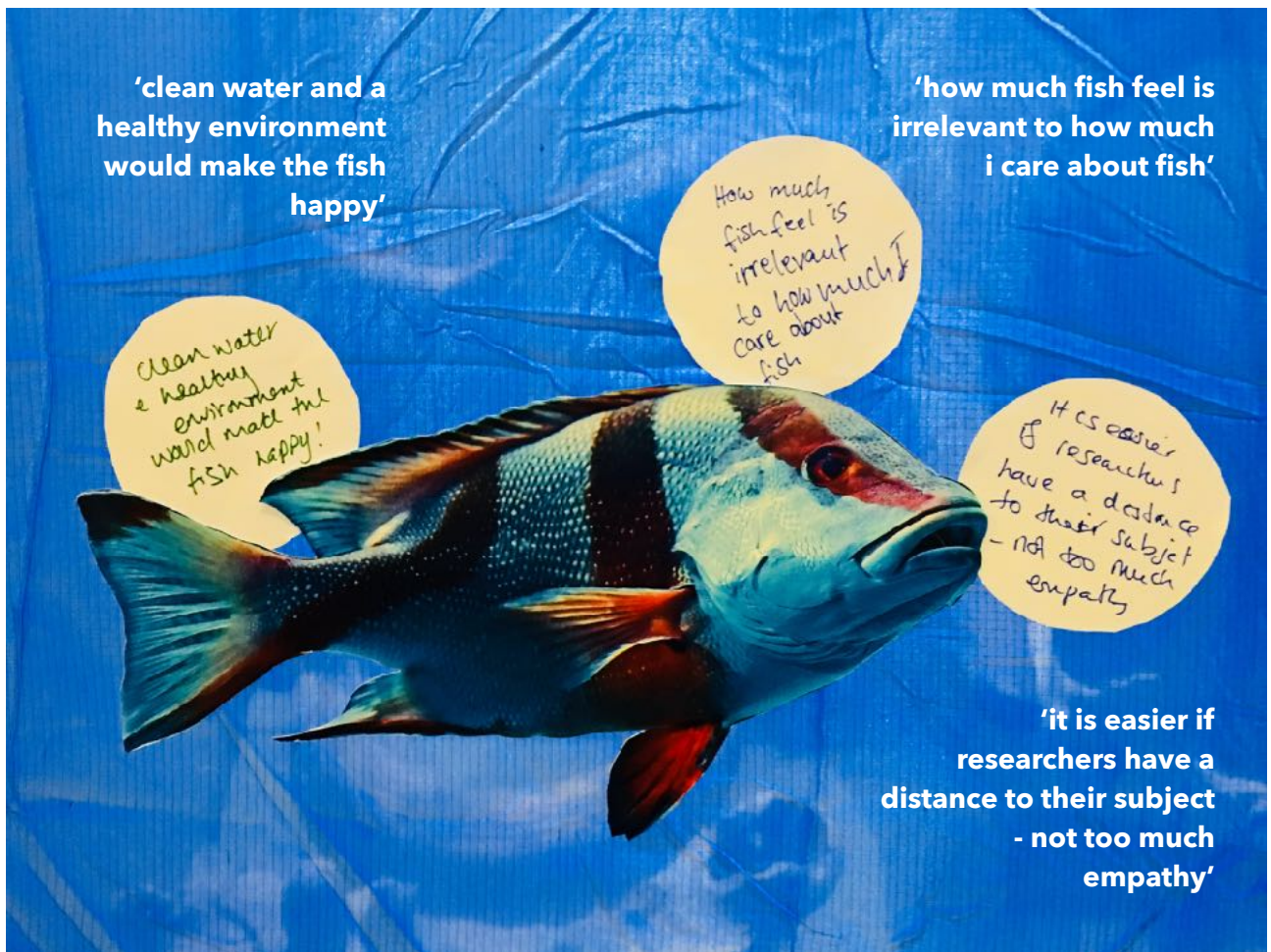
Are fish sentient?

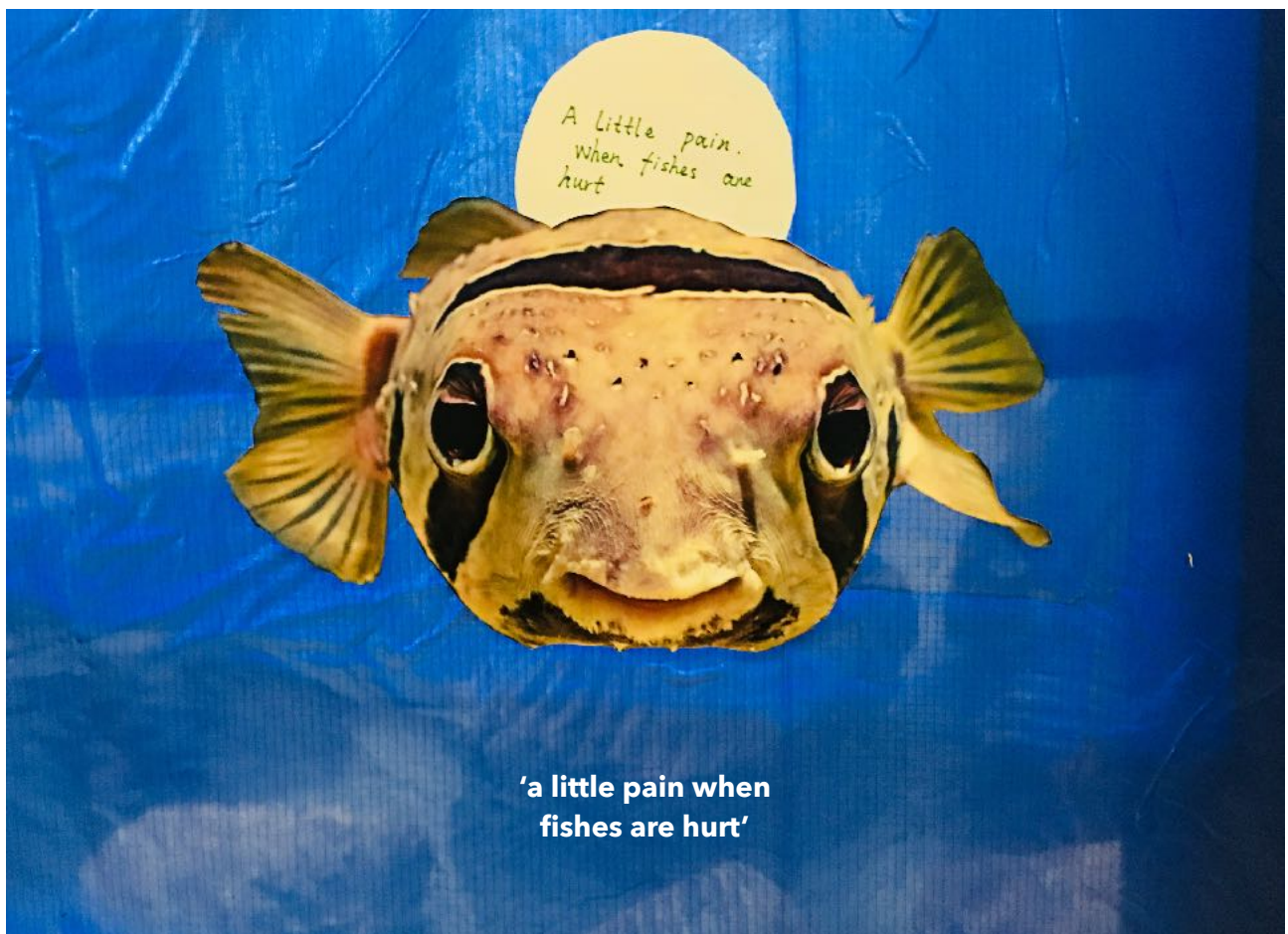
If not, does that make it preferable to experiment on fish rather than on mice?

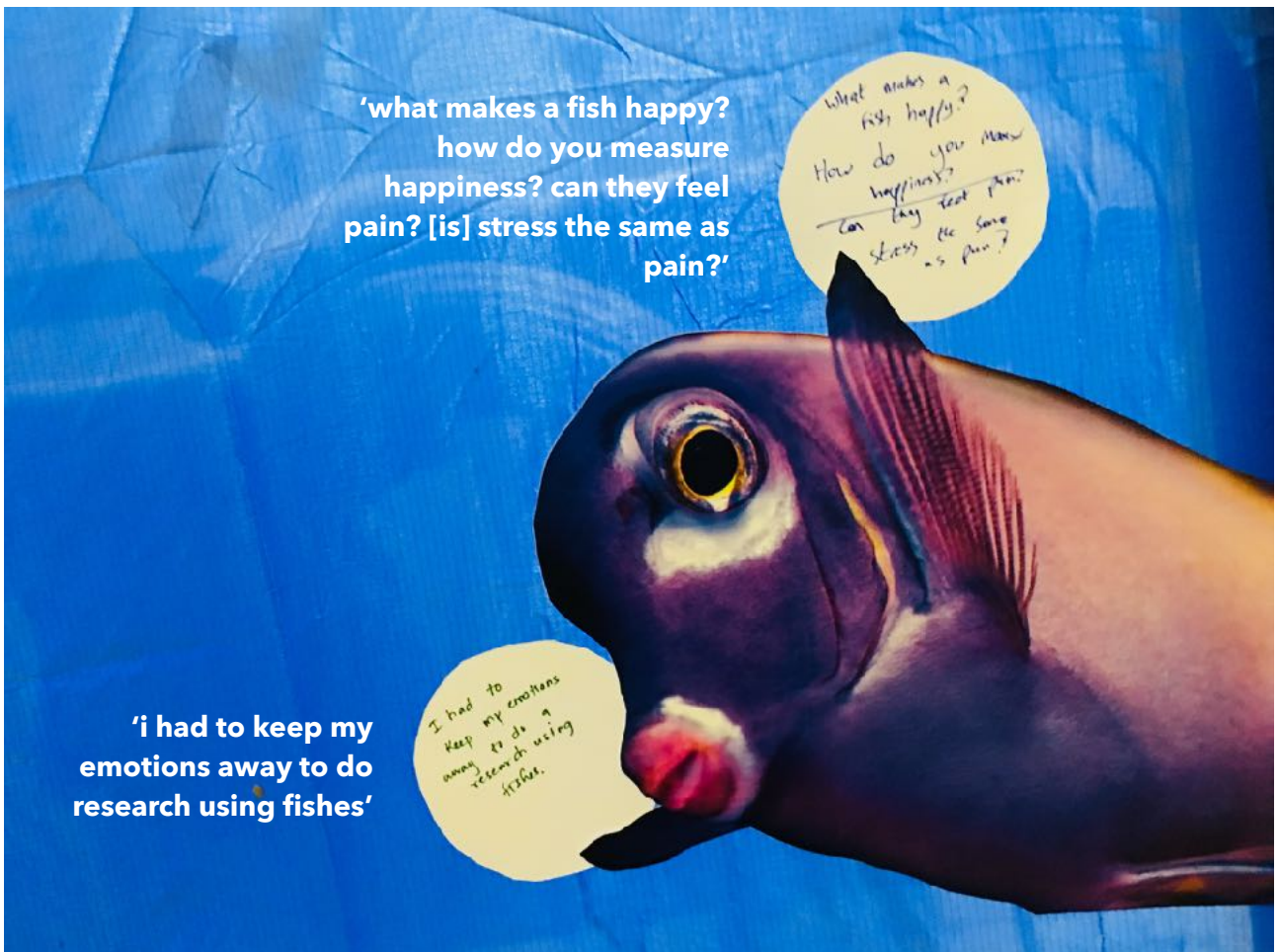
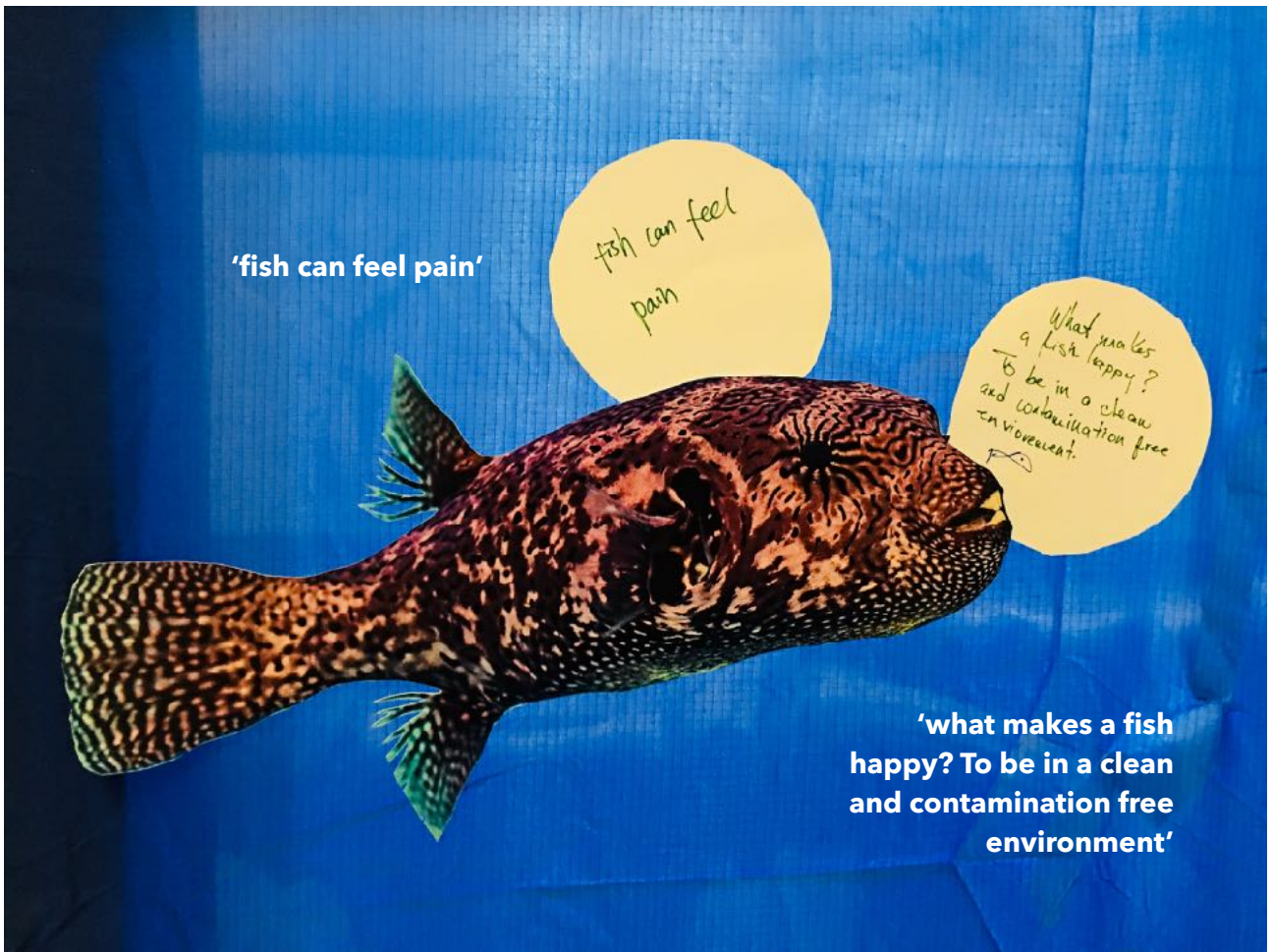
What makes a fish happy?

Can "thinking like a fish" help us improve their welfare?

Participants were invited to answer any of the following questions or leave any other fish related thoughts they had







'sentience! =
intelligence.
some fish may be
absolutely
unintelligent, yet
they are sentient'



Sentience !=
intelligence. Some fish may
be absolutely unintelligent, yet
they are still sentient.

Pain is an incredibly useful
sensation. It's quite hard to live
without it, so I assume that many
fishes do feel pain.

'Pain is an incredibly useful
sensation. It's quite hard to
live without it, so I assume
fishes do feel pain'

'finding emo'

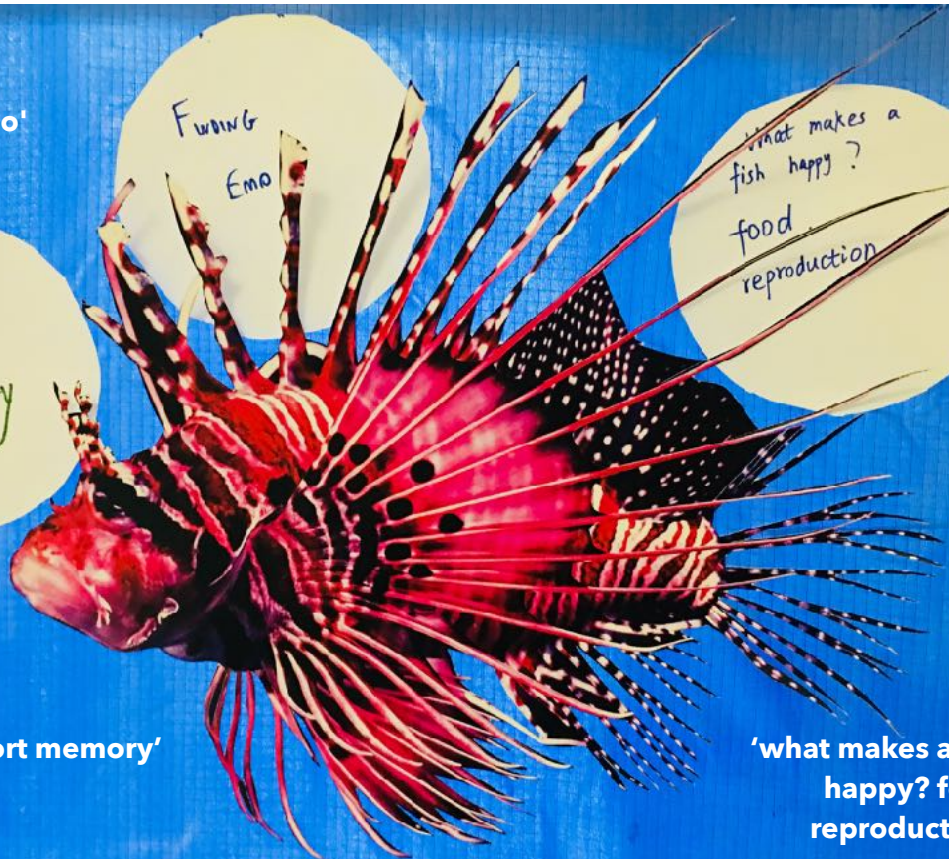
Feeling
Emo

short
memory

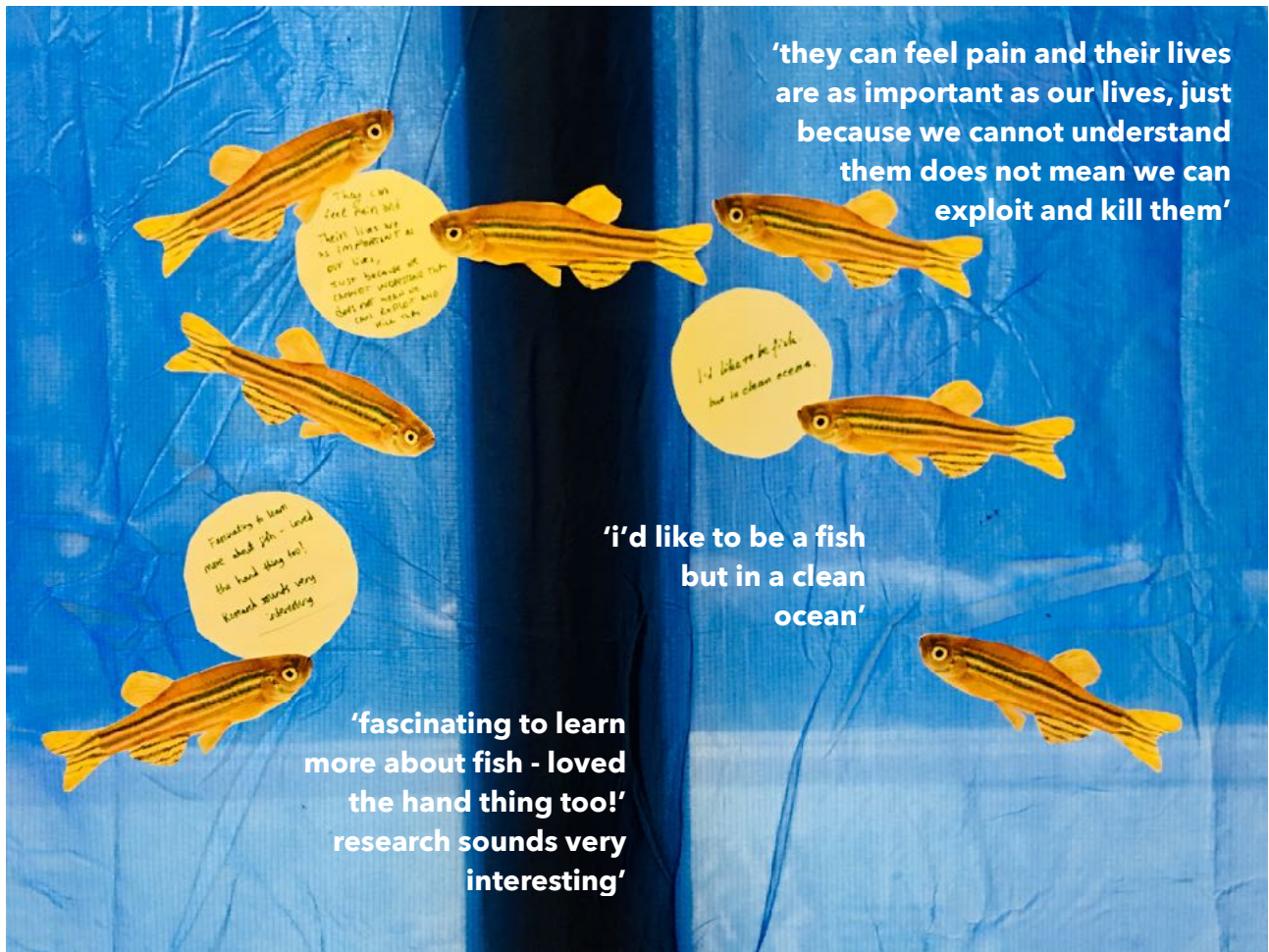
What makes a
fish happy?
food
reproduction

'short memory'

'what makes a fish
happy? food,
reproduction'









The freedom of the wall acted as an open (visual) question and elicited diverse and fascinating responses ranging from the deeply personal to wildly abstract. Some of these comments are representative of the conversations but other are not. The wall allowed people to share more on their own terms.

Including specific questions in the wall may reduce the richness of the responses and should be left open again, if repeated.

Reflections

We wanted to design and pilot a suite of activities to act as an invisible hook with which to catch people's imagination and gently guide their thinking from the open ocean, the lake, the plate, to the lab.

The framework needed to be loose enough to feel driven by curiosity and discovery while also establishing a sense of reciprocity. The participants explore their own feelings and then challenge them themselves by asking more questions about our research and approach.

The conversations emerged organically and followed many different paths to many different destinations. In this sense the psychic fish are bringing a nexus approach to public engagement, they allow multiple view points from a range of disciplines to be considered equally, offering up new ways of thinking to participants with which to reflect and dissect their own thoughts, assumptions, obligations and sensibilities.

Another important finding was the willingness of people to discuss animal research. There was nothing in the activity blurb or initial invitation that mentioned animal research. However, none of the participants demonstrated, voiced, or fed back any discomfort in accepting a playful invitation which lead to deep and serious conversations about animal research.

The depth and breadth of the conversations also demonstrated that the activity and underlying framework are pitched at the right level to allow meandering but productive conversations. It is fundamental to our approach and practice that we uncover peoples nuanced views and evolve the discourse away from polarised debates.

Conclusions

The original aim was to explore people's perceptions around fish use, sentence and how these shape and define assumptions around species welfare requirements.

It was important to create a space free from judgement or authority where participants were free to choose their level of engagement, to share personal beliefs and confront difficult issues and to leave feeling respected and stimulated.

The conversations sparked by the psychic fish were diverse but included topics that interlink with identity politics and personal ethics and morality. Since these arose here and were openly shared we can view this as a very successful pilot.

With thanks to Anna Bunney and the Manchester Museum engagement team.

