1. Process Evaluation
   1. Introduction

In order to inform the planning, development and delivery of future festivals within the ‘Back to Ours’ project and the wider Hull 2017 programme, a series of questions were asked linked to the process of ‘Back to Ours’. Respondent groups targeted with these questions were:

* Core Creative Team (CCT);
* Venue Partners; and
* Audience.

A full write-up of the research and consultation undertaken with these groups is provided in Appendices 1–5.

In terms of these respondent groups, the focus of the Process Evaluation included the following:

* Motivations;
* Concept and Creative Development;
* Project Management;
* Production Management;
* Marketing & Communications
* Audience Satisfaction; and
* Accessibility.
  1. Motivations

Hull’s ‘UK City of Culture’ status was clearly a significant motivation for Venue Partners and many audience members when choosing to be involved with or attend ‘Back to Ours’.

In the post-event audience survey, 71% of respondents selected ‘Because it’s part of Hull UK City of Culture 2017’ when asked for their main reasons for attending. This motivation was also clear in the ‘Chat with Nan’ research. When respondents were asked why they decided to attend, many stated that they were trying to see as many City of Culture events as they could during 2017.

*“You’ve gotta go for it when you’ve got something like this, it’s a once in a lifetime opportunity so you’ve gotta go for it.” (Chat with Nan: Audience member)*

*“What we decided to do this year was to try everything and anything. And if we can get tickets for it, we’ll do it.” (Chat with Nan: Audience member)*

*“City of Culture show-wise, I’m trying to see as much as I can.” (Chat with Nan: Audience member)*

In terms of Venue Partners, although one partner said they wouldn’t have taken part in ‘Back to Ours’ without Hull 2017 backing, feedback from others suggests that although they were certainly influenced by Hull’s City of Culture status, it wasn’t the ultimate deciding factor.

*“I think that’s a bonus for it isn’t it? Because everyone wants to be part of it, but I don’t think it was the deciding factor.” (Venue Partner)*

Venue Partners also had strong links with their local communities and felt that being involved in ‘Back to Ours’ would help to develop opportunities within the local area – a further motivation for being involved.

With audiences, other reasons for attending included the fact that ‘Back to Ours’ was ‘something different’ and a ‘unique experience not to be missed’. Indeed, these were the second (51%) and third (37%) most popular responses to the audience survey question, ‘What were your main reasons for attending ‘Back to Ours’?’

*“It was nice to come out and come somewhere different.” (Chat with Nan: Audience member)*

*“Something out of our comfort zone.” (Chat with Nan: Audience member)*

*“I wanted to come and experience something new with my family.” (Chat with Nan: Audience member)*

In terms of the CCT, being involved in ‘Back to Ours’ was seen as a way to develop skills and gain experience of working on a large-scale project.

* 1. Concept and Artistic Programme
     1. The Concept

It was recognised by the CCT that there were several barriers preventing local people from engaging with the arts:

* **Financial barriers:** The ticket cost or entry fee associated with attending arts and cultural events is seen by a barrier for low-income families in deprived areas of the city.
* **Geographical barriers / mobility:** The city centre location of many arts and culture venues is a barrier in itself. Many disengaged families do not have access to their own vehicle and rely on public transport to access the city centre – which can also be seen as an added cost. This, along with an unwillingness to travel from the local area is a significant barrier.
* **Attitudinal barriers:** There is also a feeling of alienation when it comes to the arts in more deprived areas of the city. Many are disenfranchised with arts and culture events and carry misconceptions of art forms that are perhaps unknown to them.

In order to overcome these barriers, ‘Back to Ours’ aimed to create opportunities for those who are disengaged to experience the arts within their own community, at an affordable price. The project set out to create a series of temporary performance spaces in local settings in the East, North and West of the city, transforming existing venues into spaces that can cater for arts and culture events.

The long-term view of the project is that audiences engaged through ‘Back to Ours’ will become audience members at other venues in the future – including those in the city centre.

Feedback suggests that audiences, Venue Partners and artists alike were supportive of the concept.

*“I think the best thing about their attitude was that they completely and totally understood what we were trying to do.” (CCT member on ‘Back to Ours’ artists)*

*“Bringing culture to the area is, it’s a really good move I think.” (Venue Partner)*

*“I liked the fact it was going out into different areas.” (Venue Partner)*

Feedback from the ‘Chat with Nan’ research suggested that audience members felt more relaxed and less intimidated in community venues; reaffirming the project concept of engaging people in spaces they feel comfortable in.

*“You didn’t feel intimidated by anything.” (Chat with Nan: Audience member)*

*“Intimate, cosy. It was lovely.” (Chat with Nan: Audience member)*

*“It was nice because it was more intimate than what I was expecting.” (Chat with Nan: Audience member)*

*“It felt quite cosy despite being in such a big place.” (Chat with Nan: Audience member)*

* + 1. The Artistic Programme

The aim of the programme was to provide a broad range of entertainment that would be appealing to all ages within the local community.

The artistic programme was developed through initial consultation with groups of people that represented an area of Hull, using a card game created by the CCT. This created a starting point for the programme to take shape and gave an indication of what people would be willing to pay for tickets.

The artistic programme was then finalised by the CCT in collaboration with the Venue Partners.

Venue Partners were given the opportunity to share their thoughts on the programme suggestions put forward by the CCT, offering feedback on whether it was right for their space and local community. Although the majority of Venue Partners were positive and even surprised at the amount of input they had into the development of the programme, one venue felt as though their feedback wasn’t taken into account.

*“I think I would have programmed something slightly different. I would have gone for a family show here.” (Venue Partner)*

A couple of Venue Partners felt as though it would have been helpful for them to experience the performances themselves rather than watching video clips, in order to make a well-informed decision.

*“I would have felt more involved if we had maybe seen some of the programme rather than watched it on YouTube.” (Venue Partner)*

During the development of the programme however, the CCT felt that Venue Partners had slightly unrealistic expectations of what could be booked in terms of cost and budget. The team recognised that they may need to manage these expectations during the programming of future festivals.

*“Little Shop of Horrors – insanely expensive to put on, but kind of without that understanding that actually if you do put something like that on, you take a much bigger financial risk.” (CCT member)*

*“Around the table when we were programming that (music) people were like well we want famous people, so it was just kind of managing that.” (CCT member)*

Anecdotal feedback from those that took part in the ‘Chat with Nan’ research suggests that the programme was well received by the audience, with many making positive comments around each performance.

*“I don’t even think I thought of anything else the whole time I was there, I was completely mesmerised by her.” (Chat with Nan respondent: Audience member on Joan & Hekima)*

*“I thought it was amazing, I wasn’t really expecting that. I thought the puppetry was incredible. Like how they made all the little gestures, it was all just with their hands.” (Chat with Nan respondent: Audience member on Meet Fred)*

*“Thank you for the show because it was super duper good!” (Chat with Nan respondent: Audience member on The Story of Mr B)*

* 1. Project Management

Project management for the first ‘Back to Ours’ festival was widely considered to be a success.

On the Venue Partner pre-event survey, the Hull 2017 team scored highly on statements relating to their project management skills, including frequency of meetings, explanation of roles and responsibilities and communication overall.

Most venues felt that they were given opportunities to offer feedback throughout the development of the project.

*“We had enough opportunities to sort of put our hands up and say if we didn’t like things.” (Venue Partner)*

*“I had regular meetings so everybody knew what was going on.” (Venue Partner)*

The majority Venue Partners felt that they received adequate communications from the team throughout the project, although the CCT acknowledged that there were times when they feel they could have been better at this – particularly when individuals were nervous on the run up to the delivery of the shows.

*“I think if we’d kind of given them much more of an update on things like that, they’d have something to hang their expectations around.” (CCT member)*

A couple of Venue Partners agreed that communications could be improved and that they didn’t feel fully aware of what was going on at some points during the planning stage.

*“It did feel a bit like we still didn’t really know what was going on until the day.” (Venue Partner)*

*“I know we had the monthly meetings and there were emails going around but there could have been a little bit more communication.” (Venue Partner)*

Although the majority of venues reflected positively on their relationship with the Core Creative staff, a small number of individuals felt as though their working style didn’t align well with the Hull 2017 Team. One venue felt that they were being told what to in their own space on the evening of a performance and another said that they felt ‘patronised’.

These negative experiences could be damaging to the effective relationships that were developed during the planning phase. As such, a recommendation for future project delivery is to ensure the Hull 2017 team keeps in mind that they are operating in a venue that is managed by another team for the rest of the year. It is important that the team remain respectful and considerate of this, to avoid alienating the existing venue staff.

One Venue Partner felt as though they were too involved with the smaller details of the planning, for example arranging the licensing of their venue. They expressed that they had a demanding full-time role at their venue, which left them little time to get involved with the ‘nitty gritty’.

With this in mind, it is recommended that the CCT tailor the involvement level of venue staff according to their individual capacities and interest.

* 1. Production Management

Production management of the first ‘Back to Ours’ festival was seen as a success by both the CCT and Venue Partners.

The production schedule received positive feedback from all parties and was considered to be very efficient given the complex nature of the project. Venue Partners felt that the CCT had the technical and logistical aspects under control, which helped them to feel more at ease during the live delivery of the shows.

The CCT also felt that the artists were confident in the ability of the production team.

*“I was expecting to be running around and switching things on and off and such like, but I didn’t have to do a thing, everything was taken care of.” (Venue Partner)*

*“I didn’t have to worry about anything.” (Venue Partner)*

*“The artists seemed really comfortable and confident that we had a good handle on the technical specifications for their shows.” (CCT member)*

Although the delivery of the festival was a success overall, the team experienced a number of unexpected challenges during the live delivery:

* Bad weather caused a delay in the arrival of Ceri Dupree to the William Gemmel club. Although the show started late as a result of this, the team didn’t feel that it had a negative effect on the experience of the audience.
* The Pigeon Detectives cancelled their performance at North Point Shopping Centre. The team felt that they were well supported by the wider Hull 2017 comms team throughout this, which helped to avoid a negative reaction from the public.
* The set up of the Red Shed performance at Archbishop Sentamu Academy was late due to the fact that the team had been given an incomplete lighting plan from an external source and the time consuming construction of a scaffolding tower.
* The radios used for communication between venues didn’t work, so the team dealt with this by using Whatsapp and their mobile phones.

The CCT felt that these challenges were unavoidable and unanticipated and were happy with how they were resolved.

The team acknowledged that due to the complexity of the schedule, they expected that the first festival would prove to be big learning curve. A number of learnings were taken on board for future project delivery:

* **Whatsapp:** After the breakdown of the radios, the team agreed that Whatsapp groups were an effective alternative to communicate with different teams across sites.
* **Staff support:** The geographical locations of the venues across the city meant that it was hugely time consuming for the team to travel between them during the festival. As such, they felt that the support of more staff to act as ‘runners’ between venues would mean the CCT would waste less time travelling.
* **iPads:** The team felt that the use of iPads would help with the smooth delivery of the festival as they could be used to communicate, access digital documents and box office reports and support with all elements of admin.
* **Fewer volunteers**: Both the CCT and Venue Partners acknowledged that there were sometimes too many volunteers present for the size of the audience and venue. After experiencing the first festival, the team felt that they were in a better position to tailor the volunteer request according to the performance.
* **Site visits:** The CCT felt that incorporating more site visits to the venues during the planning stage would ensure that details are not missed.
  1. Marketing & Communications

The Hull 2017 website (hull2017.co.uk) was the principal way of communicating with audiences about ‘Back to Ours’, with over half of respondents finding out about the festival through visiting the site (52%). Indeed, online channels overall were an important source of information, with 65% of respondents finding out about ‘Back to Ours’ through other digital channels, including social media and email.

Considering the primary aim of the project is to reach out to those who are disengaged with the arts, it could be said that those who found out about ‘Back to Ours’ through the Hull 2017 website are engaged with the artistic programme to a certain extent. This is because it is likely that these people visited the site directly to find out what’s on in the city. It is worth noting however, that over half of respondents completed this survey online (55%), which may have had an effect on these results.

Venue Partners expressed a lack of confidence in the marketing activity, and generally agreed that printed materials - including guides and banners, were sent out too late.

*“Well we were promised a banner for the fence for ages and then it arrived the day before the first production went out.” (Venue Partner)*

*“I think they left it too late to tell people what it was all about.” (Venue Partner)*

According to audience research however, 30% found out about ‘Back to Ours’ through advertising and printed material – a high percentage when compared to the 20% for ‘Made in Hull’ and 17% for ‘In With a Bang’. These results should be treated with caution however, due to the small ‘Back to Ours’ audience survey sample size.

As a number of the Venue Partners had experience in marketing, some offered feedback on how they feel the marketing could have been improved. Some venues suggested that the festival branding needed to be more visible in the community, using shop windows, bus stops and bus branding on popular routes in the local area. Another venue suggested that there should be more face-to-face engagement within the community to encourage word of mouth recommendations – particularly due to the lack of Internet access in their local area.

The CCT agreed that word of mouth was a key tool for raising awareness in the hard to reach local communities. Audience research shows that 38% found out about the festival through friends and family, either in person or through their own social media/email - or both, and the CCT expected this would naturally build after the first festival had taken place.

*“Hopefully it will gain momentum and more people will hear about it and it will kind of spread to those people that we wouldn’t necessarily be able to directly contact through social media marketing or any of that.” (CCT member)*

This was supported by an audience member who felt that take up in the local area was likely to increase due to recommendations from those who have already attended.

*“If I was to go tell my family who live nearby, they’d be more inclined to come here than travel into town to see something. And generally they don’t go to the theatre, so they’d be more inclined to come here.” (Chat with Nan: Audience member)*

*“I text people the next day and said it’s fantastic, you’ve got to go and see it, the other shows because there’s tickets – whether they have or not, I don’t know.” (Chat with Nan: Audience member)*

Venue Partners also suggested that their own channels and spaces could have been utilised better and felt that they could have more of an input in the marketing of the festivals. On reflection, the CCT felt that the Venue Partners could have been encouraged to give their own marketing support, which would help them feel more involved and in control.

*“I think there’s much more that we could have done to try to push them to give their own marketing support and to retweet things and be much more active on social media.” (CCT member)*

*“I had sort of expressed interest that we could help more as venues.” (Venue Partner)*

* + 1. Ticketing

Prior to the first festival, Venue Partners expressed concerns about the lack of ticket sales. One venue suggested that this was partly due to the publicity around sold out tickets at other high profile Hull 2017 events such as ‘In With a Bang’ and ‘Depart’, which created an expectation that ‘Back to Ours’ would follow suit.

*“Part of me thought like we’ll just wake up one morning and every ticket will be gone for this and that will be a job done. So then when it didn’t go that way I thought, oh no, maybe people aren’t buying into it.” (Venue Partner)*

Some venues weren’t happy with the way the tickets were distributed and felt as though there should have been more opportunities to buy tickets at venues in the community, due to the lack of Internet access in their local area. This was reflected by audience members during the ‘Chat with Nan’ research, whereby it was mentioned unprompted that it was difficult to purchase tickets. A couple of respondents stated that the tickets they purchased were through the pop-up box office, but suggested that this should have been available for longer.

*“It [box office] was one on Holderness Road for like one day. So unless you got there that one day, that was it.” (Chat with Nan: Audience member)*

*“The only thing that we found out, is where they were selling the tickets, we could only find it in one place, so it made it a little bit…that was the only thing.” (Chat with Nan: Audience member)*

The Venue Partners recognised however, that the worries around ticket sales were partly due to the nerves surrounding the first festival and that it was natural to feel that way.

*“I mean you’re always going to apprehensive if it’s the first time of anything aren’t you.”(Venue Partner)*

* 1. Audience Satisfaction

Interest in attending a similar event in the future was extremely high for ‘Back to Ours’, with 92% of respondents stating they would be ‘very interested’ and 6% stating they would be ‘interested’.

Furthermore, when asked on a scale of 0-10 how likely they would be to recommend a similar event to friends and family, two thirds gave a 10/10 recommendation and 95% of respondents gave a score of 8 or above.

97% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that ‘Back to Ours’ was an enjoyable experience, indicating a high level of audience satisfaction throughout the festival.

Audiences were also asked to feed back on staff and volunteer welcome. 91% said that they felt welcomed by Hull 2017 staff and 94% felt welcomed by Hull 2017 volunteers. This is particularly important given that the aims and objectives of the project are focused around making local audiences feel comfortable in attending arts and culture events.

* 1. Accessibility

One of the primary outcomes of ‘Back to Ours’ was to help disabled people participate in activities in the community. One Venue Partner received positive feedback from a parent of an autistic child who had attended a relaxed performance and had managed to stay for the full show – a new achievement for the family.

*“When a parent left she said that she’s got an autistic child and it was the first time that he’s gone to anything like that and sat through. And she was so pleased and thrilled about it, so that was a really nice bit of feedback.” (Venue Partner)*

It was also suggested by an audience member who attended the accessible showing of ‘Meet Fred’, that performances within the community are much more accessible for people with additional needs. The respondent spoke of a family friend with a disabled child who felt unable to see the ‘Made in Hull’ installations because of the large crowds. She went on to say that visiting something within the local community is something that would be easier for his family.

*“He didn’t go to see the projection thing because it was too much for him, but this would be far better. It brings it to him rather than…” (Chat with Nan: Audience member)*

*“He doesn’t like noise, so a lot of stuff in town is too much for him.” (Chat with Nan: Audience member)*

* 1. Key Learnings – Process
* Audience feedback shows that Hull’s City of Culture status was the main draw for attending ‘Back to Ours’ and this also proved to be an important factor for Venue Partners when making the decision to take part.
* All parties were supportive of the concept of ‘Back to Ours’ and audience feedback indicated that they felt more comfortable and less intimidated attending performances in spaces that were familiar to them.
* Effective relationships were built with Venue Partners and the CCT through the planning and delivery of the first festival, which has created a good foundation for future festivals.
* Although most Venue Partners were happy with their level of involvement in the project overall, some wanted more input into the planning process and some felt as though they were too involved. This suggests that a tailored approach to working with venues should be adopted moving forward to take into account different expectations.
* 65% of audience members found out about ‘Back to Ours’ through an online channel. Because of the lack of Internet access and attitudinal barriers in the target communities, the CCT and Venue Partners recognised that word of mouth recommendation was an important tool to reach more disengaged audiences.
* Overall, Venue Partners were not satisfied with the level of marketing for ‘Back to Ours’ and felt that they received printed materials too late to spread the word effectively. The CCT have suggested that Venue Partners have more of an involvement in the marketing going forward to help appease their concerns.
* Management of the production and technical aspects of the project was a success – particularly the production schedule. Several practical changes have been suggested by the CCT moving forward, based on a number of learnings taken from the delivery of the first festival.
* Feedback from audience members indicates that the ‘Back to Ours’ performances removed geographical barriers for those who have additional needs, making arts and culture events more accessible for people with a disability.