Appendix 6: Venue Partner Consultation

* 1. Introduction

Eight venues within communities in the North, East and West of the city were designated performance spaces for the ‘Back to Ours’ festivals.

Table X: Partner Venues

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| NORTH | Kingswood Academy |
| Winifred Holtby Academy |
| North Point Shopping Centre |
| EAST | Freedom Centre |
| Archbishop Sentamu Academy |
| WEST | Sirius Academy West |
| Hymers College |
| William Gemmel Club |

* + 1. Venue Partners

In order to gain feedback from Venue Partners, consultation was undertaken at various stages throughout the project – particularly before and after festivals one and three.

Online questionnaires were sent via email to each venue and more detailed feedback was gained through depth interviews with at least one representative from each venue at key points in the project’s delivery.

Most interviews took place over the phone, but some were carried out face-to-face. The template for the interview is provided in Appendix 7.

* **Venue Partner Pre-Festival 1 Survey:** carried out as an online survey (5 respondents)
* **Venue Partner Post Festival 1 Depth Interview:** carried out via telephone or face-to-face (9 respondents)
* **Venue Partner Post Festival 3 Survey:** carried out as an online survey (7 respondents)
* **CPT Post Festival 3 Depth Interview:** carried out face-to-face (10 respondents)

The focus of this research was to undertake two types of evaluation:

* **Process Evaluation:** motivations; involvement in the development and delivery of the project; key learnings, successes and challenges; and the effectiveness of the partnership with Hull 2017 and the broader team.
* **Outcomes Evaluation:** overall response to the festival; response to how the festival helped them think about using their venue for arts and cultural activity in the future; skills and knowledge development; confidence working on similar events in future; collaboration and partnership development; and perception changes towards their venue in the local community.

Partner Venue staff had a variety of day-to-day roles in their venues, including General Manager, Operations Manager, Lettings Manager and Marketing Lead. Staff also had varying amounts of input and involvement with the project due to their own commitments and capacity and this should be taken into consideration when interpreting the feedback summarised below.

* 1. Process Evaluation

In order to inform the planning, development and delivery of the remainder of the ‘Back to Ours’ festival and reference for future projects, a series of questions were asked linked to the process of ‘Back to Ours’. These concentrated primarily on:

* **Motivations:** What attracts partners to get involved in projects such as ‘Back to Ours’?
* **Project Development and Delivery:** How were Venue Partners involved in the development and delivery of ‘Back to Ours’?
* **Learnings:** What were the key learnings taken from working on ‘Back to Ours’?
* **Partner Performance:** How did they feel Hull 2017 performed as a partner throughout the course of their involvement and how could this be improved?
  + 1. What was it about ‘Back to Ours’?

Venues got behind the concept of the ‘Back to Ours’ festival, and understood its purpose was to bring arts and culture events to disengaged audiences using local venues they are already familiar with.

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

*“I liked the fact it was going out into different areas.”*

This commitment to the concept of ‘Back to Ours’ is further demonstrated in survey results whereby Venue Partners were asked to rate their agreement with a series of statements on a scale of 0 -10, where 0 means disagree completely and 10 means agree completely – see Table X.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| STATEMENT | AVERAGE SCORE (0-10) | |
| **Pre-festival 1** | **Post-festival 3** |
| Back to Ours will create opportunities for disengaged local people to get involved with the arts | 8.2 | 7.9 |
| Back to Ours will help to break down barriers to getting involved in the arts | 8.4 | 8.0 |
| Back to Ours will help to increase pride in the local area | 8.0 | 8.0 |

Table X: Value Statements

Venue Partners hVenue Partners had strong links with their local community and were committed to developing opportunities in their area – this appeared to be one of the main motivations to take part in ‘Back to Ours’.

*“Back to Ours will help me educate a community on the arts and culture.”*

“*Offer the local community opportunity to see productions on their doorstep.”*

*“I wanted to use the Culture Year as a way of educating the community into go and see as much as you can.”*

The City of Culture status also appeared to be a draw for venues and one venue said that they wouldn’t have taken part without Hull 2017 backing. Other venues were certainly influenced by the City of Culture status, however 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.”*

When asked on a scale of 0-10 how much Hull being UK City of Culture 2017 influenced their decision to work on ‘Back to Ours’:

* 1 out of 6 gave a score of 4 out of 10
* 1 out of 6 gave a score of 5 out of 10
* 3 out of 6 gave a score of 8 out of 10
* 1 out of 6 gave a score of 10 out of 10

This led to an average score of 7.2 out of 10 in regard to the influence of UK City of Culture status as a motivation to be involved.

Another key motivation was the opportunity to raise the profile of their venue and gain exposure in the local and wider community.

*“[Back to Ours] Will raise our profile and get us a good reputation as a place of varied entertainment.”*

*“Exposure for the venue is really good.”*

*“[Back to Ours] gives us that gateway to interact with people.”*

Other motivations for getting involved included the chance to participate in the Hull 2017 celebrations and the opportunity to increase revenue.

* + 1. Project Development

Most Venue Partners were very happy with their level of involvement throughout the planning phase of ‘Back to Ours’. Indeed there appeared to be a sense of surprise that the venues were given such a high level of input.

*“We were involved every step of the way.”*

*“I felt really involved really, because I went to the meetings, and we all talked it through.”*

*“The amount of involvement they give us, I think that surprised me.”*

In the beginning of the project, some venue staff expressed a degree of nervousness when handing over decision-making power to Hull 2017, as they were accustomed to having entire control over projects in their day-to-day role. This was more common in those who had said that they had run arts and culture events in their venues in the past, perhaps because they had their own ideas about how things would work. It could be said however that this was to be expected to a certain extent when working on an entirely new project with a new team.

*“As venue managers ourselves, it's hard to let other venue managers come in and take over your space.”*

This nervousness appeared to ease as the year progressed however, and Venue Partners became more comfortable with the routine of the live delivery of the festival.

*“I think it's easier and less stressful each time.”*

In the beginning, one Venue Partner felt as though they were too involved with the smaller details of the festival planning, for example arranging the licensing for their venue. Having a demanding full-time role at their venue, they felt that they had little time to get involved with the ‘nitty-gritty’ of the project, therefore took a step back in the planning process for future festivals. As a result, other staff in the venue offered their support to the project.

Some Venue Partners felt that the catering for the festival was a challenge, with staff feeling unsure how to plan and deliver this. Another Venue described how they had set up a tuck shop for a performance only to receive complaints from the artists who didn’t want food to be taken into the performance area. It was suggested that this was an area where the Core Project Team could potentially offer more support or better communication going forward.

*“The catering side of things and things like that, I know some of that’s been a struggle.”*

* + 1. Programming

Venue Partners reported that they had plenty of opportunity to share ideas and feedback on the programming of ‘Back to Ours’. All venues felt as though they were involved in the decision-making of the artistic programme when they were asked pre-festival one and post-festival three.

Table X: Level of Involvement

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “I felt as though I was involved in the artistic programme decision-making across the Back to Ours festivals.” | Pre-Festival 1 (base 5) | Post-Festival 3 (base 7) |
| Strongly agree | 2 | 2 |
| Agree | 3 | 5 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 1 | 0 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly disagree | 0 | 0 |

*“They actually to listened to our opinions which was good.”*

*“We had quite a bit of input which was nice.”*

Qualitative feedback however, suggested that the level of involvement in the programming decreased with each festival. One Venue Partner suggested that this was because the Core Project Team had a better sense of what would be successful after experiencing the first couple of festivals, therefore needed less input.

*“I think initially, after our first discussions, there was quite a lot of meetings, quite a lot of discussion, a lot of offerings on what do you think of this? And I think that's got less and less as the year's gone on.”*

*“I think Louise and the team know what's best. By now, I think we all sort of do know what has gone down the best in the venues and things like that. I'm guessing that's maybe why the involvement is slightly pulled back for us.”*

Some venues felt that it would have been helpful to see the performances themselves, in order to make a more informed decision about what would be suitable for their venue.

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

*“It’s hard to judge the show based on, I don’t know, a 20 second trailer.”*

In response to this, the Core Project Team suggested that some of the Venue Partners visited the Edinburgh Fringe Festival prior to ‘Back to Ours’ festival 3, to experience shows more fully.

*“We went to Edinburgh to look at and to assist a group with looking at potential shows to come up.”*

One venue stated that although they were involved in the discussion around various acts for the first festival and were given the chance to say what they thought would work and what wouldn’t, their feedback wasn’t taken into account when it came to their specific venue.

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

Other Venue Partners were happy to have less involvement in the programming of the festival and would have preferred Hull 2017 to take more of a lead in this.

*“It would have been nice for them to take the lead a little bit and say well this is what we’ve booked or this is what’s going to be happening and we’d like to put it in your venue.”*

Feedback on the programme was generally positive on the whole, with Venue Partners praising the variety of art forms and the quality of the performances, which exceeded what they would have been able to fund if they had booked these independently.

*“I think they've done well at bringing things to suit everybody.*

*“The shows we’ve had have been brilliant.”*

*“The venue has seen acts we could never afford to invest in. It has been a huge positive for us.”*

*“ [Back to Ours has] Brought shows to the venue that we wouldn't be able to fund normally.”*

The Picture House shows were considered the least successful by Venue Partners, who put low ticket sales down to an element of competition with newer films at the cinema, combined with half term deals. It was acknowledged however that these shows were improving with each festival.

*“It's a hard sell really when it's out on DVD or the kids have seen them.”*

*“I think the least successful was the picture house, but I think that was generally across the board.”*

*“Picture Houses went down better this time, the last time round. I think it’s the more people get to know it, the better it’s getting.”*

There was also negative feedback around the finishing time of the Secret Gig during the third festival, with the Venue Lead stating that the act finished much earlier than expected, leading to disappointment in some audience members. This was discussed with the Core Project Team, who addressed this in the planning of the fourth festival by adding entertainment before and after the Secret Gig to extent the duration of the performance.

* + 1. Partner Performance

Generally, feedback was very positive regarding partnerships with Hull 2017 and most Venue Partners developed a good working relationship with the Core Project Team. Some suggested that the Core Project Team made them feel like they were part of the team, involving them in key decisions about programming and the development of the festival.

*“I can’t fault them at all.”*

*“We were treat as part of the team.”*

*“I know it's not your job to be part of the team, but you become part of the team. You feel part of the team.”*

Survey data suggests that the project management of ‘Back to Ours’ by the Hull 2017 team improved throughout the year. When asked to rate the project management of ‘Back to Ours’ where 0 was ‘poor’ and 5 was ‘outstanding’, the team received an average score of 3.8 pre-festival one and 4.6 post-festival three.

The majority of Venue Partners felt that the level of communication with the Hull 2017 team was good and this was consistent throughout the project. There was positive feedback about the frequency and organisation of the meetings, and venues felt that they were given opportunities to offer feedback throughout the planning and development of the project.

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

*“I had regular meetings so everybody knew what was going on.”*

Most Venue Partners were very positive about how contactable the team were and praised their response time if they ever had any questions that needed answering.

When asked to rate the Hull 2017 team on several statements relating to their project management skills, Venue Partners scored the team highly on frequency of meetings, explanation of roles and responsibilities and communication overall (see Table X). Similar to the overall scoring for project management, this showed a slight improvement between festival one and festival 3.

Table X: Project Management Rating

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Communication criteria | Average rating 0-5 (0 = poor) 5 = (outstanding) | |
| **Pre-festival 1** | **Post-festival 3** |
| Explanation of your role and responsibilities | **4.2** | **4.4** |
| Meetings, frequency & quality of opportunities | **4** | **4.1** |
| Communications between Hull 2017 and yourself | **4.4** | **4.4** |

A couple of venues however, felt that communication from Hull 2017 staff could be improved, with one Venue Partner stating that it was sometimes hard to keep up with developments in the project and that the gaps between meetings were sometimes too long.

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

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

*“But often the steps between the two meetings...a lot has happened in the gap. So it's almost like you're playing catch-up some of the time.”*

One Venue Partner felt that there wasn’t enough communication around ticket sales and how many people that were expected at events, stating that they only ever received this information on the day of the event itself. Another stated that they didn’t receive any notification about when they should expect marketing materials and they were often dropped off at the venue without prior warning.

*“And there is that thing that we never have the final ticket numbers until the day, So you never really know until we get here on the day how many we're setting for.”*

*“Sometimes they'd just be dropped off without actually telling us that they were coming. But obviously having them is great. We can distribute them if we've got them, it's just a case of knowing when they come in.”*

Venue Partners were also asked to what extent they agree or disagree with a number of statements relating to the Hull 2017 team’s project management; a breakdown of responses are shown in Tables X-X below.

Table X: Explanation of Project

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Hull 2017 have explained the Back to Ours project well” | Pre-Festival 1 (base 5) |
| Strongly agree | 3 |
| Agree | 1 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 1 |
| Disagree | 0 |
| Strongly disagree | 0 |

Table X: Accessing People

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Hull 2017 have helped me access the people I needed to talk to.” | Pre-Festival 1 (base 5) | Post-Festival 3 (base 7) |
| Strongly agree | 1 | 2 |
| Agree | 3 | 4 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 1 | 1 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly disagree | 0 | 0 |

Table X: Accessing Information

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Hull 2017 have helped me access the information / resources I need” | Pre-Festival 1 (base 5) | Post-Festival 3 (base 7) |
| Strongly agree | 2 | 2 |
| Agree | 2 | 4 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 1 | 1 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly disagree | 0 | 0 |

Table X: Level of Support

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “I have been able to deliver my work to a high standard due to Hull 2017’s support” | Pre-Festival 1 (base 5) | Post-Festival 3 (base 7) |
| Strongly agree | 1 | 4 |
| Agree | 3 | 1 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 0 | 2 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly disagree | 0 | 0 |
| N/A | 1 | 0 |

Although the majority of venues reflected positively on their relationship with the Core Project Team, a small number of individuals felt as though their working style didn’t align well during the early stages of the project. One venue felt as though 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 appeared to be limited to the first festival however, and relationships were improved throughout the remainder of the project.

* + 1. Partnerships

Through working on ‘Back to Ours’, Venue Partners developed positive relationships with other venues across the city. It was acknowledged that some of these relationships would have been very unlikely if they hadn’t have come about through the project, as some of the venues are geographically far apart and have very different functions.

*“We’ve been working with the other schools and the Freedom Centre and the Gemmell Centre and all those types of places, so we’ve got those links now.”*

School Venue Partners felt that the update meetings were a great opportunity to catch up with other schools to compare their experiences and discuss any potential solutions to problems. Other community venues were also sharing ideas for community engagement within their own neighbourhoods.

*“It's nice to hear how other schools are doing and how they're dealing with their issues, whether we have the same issues, whether we have the same thoughts, and whether they've managed to cut to it the right audience.”*

*“I'm really close partners now with North Point Shopping Centre. I get on really well with Louise the manager there, and we're looking at each other's ideas for community engagement.”*

Venue Partners also described how they had shared equipment and facilities with other venues during the festival, which helped to keep costs down.

*“I know that a couple of the other venues have helped each other out and things and we lend our stage in pieces out to other venues.”*

* + 1. Ticketing

Venue Partners saw the low ticket cost as a real draw for ‘Back to Ours’, particularly for shows appealing to families and children.

*“Trying to sort out stuff with children ends up costing so much money doesn’t it. You know, something like that that’s £2.50 each, it’s a fraction of the price of taking them to a normal cinema.”*

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.”*

*“We'd just imagine everything to sell out quickly, obviously like the fireworks, on the first day of 2017, sort of set the standard very high.”*

It was recognised however, that the worries around ticket sales were partly due to the nerves surrounding the first festival and that this was a natural response. Indeed as the project progressed, the Venue Partners were much more positive about the level of ticket sales and were really pleased to see shows sell out across the venues.

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

In the first festival some venues felt there should have been more opportunities to buy tickets within the community due to the lack of Internet access in their local area. Provision for this was increased in the following festivals, however some Venue Partners felt that this could be improved further. Ensuring that the local community had access to tickets was a clear priority for Venue Partners.

*“Trying to increase the number that we can sell locally and keeping them off being online. I think as soon as they're online then you obviously dilute your local audience.”*

*“I think the ticketing, making sure the tickets go to the community is key.”*

* + 1. Marketing

Initial concern over ticket sales was further heightened by a lack of confidence in the marketing activity for ‘Back to Ours’. Venue Partners generally agreed that the marketing materials – including programmes and banners, were sent out too late, which didn’t give people enough time to plan or save for tickets. Indeed, there was a general feeling that *‘everything was quite last minute’*, including the programming of the festival, which had a knock on effect on the marketing. Although this was an issue throughout the project, Venue Partners noticed a definite improvement as the year progressed.

*“The programming could be done a little bit earlier to give us venues enough time to use our own social media links to get it out there a bit.”*

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

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

One member of staff who came on board with the project after the planning of the first festival, said that they hadn’t heard about ‘Back to Ours’ until they got involved, even though they lived in close proximity to one of the venues. Another said that they were disappointed that there wasn’t ‘a buzz’ around the festival, and put this down to a lack of publicity.

*“I can’t say that I felt that there was a buzz.”*

It was suggested that the lack of publicity earlier was due to the amount of alternative arts and culture events in the Hull 2017 programme, which detracted from ‘Back to Ours’.

*“That I felt sometimes 2017's focus was maybe on more of the bigger events.”*

It was generally agreed however, that the marketing of ‘Back to Ours’ showed a great improvement throughout the year as the team reacted to learnings and feedback.

*“I think the marketing has got better throughout the year.”*

*“We’ve learnt from that and with each one it’s got better and better.”*

*“I think the marketing has improved and it's shown a lot.”*

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.

*“Really get out in the community and talk to lots of people about what’s going on and that, what they can access.”*

*“I think really simple straightforward posters would do a lot better.”*

*“I think they relied too much on the social media aspect and not doing posters in local shops and you know at the venue.”*

Venue Partners acknowledged that different marketing methods were effective in different venues, for example North Point Shopping Centre use social media heavily, whereas the William Gemmell Club prefers to advertise events on a noticeboard within the venue. Sirius Academy West suggested that an assembly dedicated to ‘Back to Ours’ would be an effective way to reach children within the school.

Some Venue Partners felt as though their own channels and spaces could have been utilised better by the team, and wanted a bit more of an input on how the festival was publicised. One venue suggested that they could help more as venues, perhaps by using their own social media channels.

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

Venue Partner’s levels of involvement in the marketing of the festival differed according to experience and capacity however, with some preferring to leave this to the Core Project Team to manage.

*“I don't really get involved too much in that side. There's professionals for that.”*

* 1. Post Festival

Overall, Venue Partners felt ‘Back to Ours’ was successful, despite any worries and concerns during the initial development of the project.

*“Everyone was brilliant, all the audiences were great and everything went well”*

*“Everybody really, really enjoyed it.”*

There was a general feeling that the success of ‘Back to Ours’ increased with each festival and this was due to a combination of factors, including better marketing and programming and the development of a good reputation across the city.

*“I suppose it needed the first one to sort of prove to anyone who was sceptical.”*

*“ I think as the year's gone on things have improved.”*

* + 1. Audience

Venue Partners felt that one of the main successes of ‘Back to Ours’ was audience reaction to the venue. Particularly for the school spaces, Venue Partners felt that ‘Back to Ours’ provided an opportunity to showcase their building and facilities to people who were unlikely to have had the chance to see inside before.

*“People came through the door that wouldn’t necessarily normally come through the door, and they were amazed at the space.”*

*“Once they came through that door, they were gobsmacked”*

*“A lot of people who came and couldn’t believe that this was a school.”*

Other Venue Partners felt that there were somewhat negative preconceptions around their venue and ‘Back to Ours’ helped to lift these.

Given that one of the primary aims of Back to Ours is to engage with local communities who are currently not engaged with the arts, some Venue Partners did not feel convinced that their audiences were from the local area.

*“They weren’t your typical locals, but without seeing their postcodes, I’m not sure a lot of them live locally if anybody did at all.”*

*“The people that I saw coming to the events were not what I would describe as local community.”*

*“I’m not sure how well we engaged locally.”*

Engaging the local community was seen as a key measure of success for Venue Partners and this continued to be a clear priority for future festivals. It was recognised however that it would take time for the festival to become well known and as the reputation of ‘Back to Ours’ builds, this would help to attract a local audience moving forwards.

It was suggested that one way to increase the local audience in the school venues specifically, would be to encourage more staff and pupils to attend, as they generally lived nearby. Venue Partners stated that although they had seen a small number of staff and pupils, there was a huge number still to engage.

*“We had a few staff come but not very many. And not very many kids either from what I saw.”*

**1.3.1. Technical and logistics**

Venue Partners were pleased with the efficiency and delivery of the technical and logistical aspects of ‘Back to Ours’, and particularly praised the planning schedule that was put in place by the Core Project Team.

“*When we received our schedule, they had planned it out pretty thoroughly, as to when they’d be arriving setting up and when they were leaving, which was quite good.”*

*“There is a great team in place who make the whole thing cruise along”*

Venue Partners generally expected to be more involved in the technical set up of the day and were pleased when they found that this was taken care of by the Core Project Team and HPSS – the company contracted to deal with staging and lighting.

*“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.”*

*“I didn’t have to worry about anything.”*

*“They seemed to have every angle covered.”*

Staff at one Partner Venue however, felt that HPSS were generally unprepared for their visits to the site, which meant that they had to help them out on several occasions. Another criticised the organisation, for not carrying out the correct risk assessment before an event. This was brought to the attention of the project team so this could be addressed with HPSS.

*“There’s been external companies brought in to do the tech, not always been perhaps as smooth as it could have.”*

Throughout the live delivery of the festivals, there were a number of minor external challenges that affected some of the venues, for example a bad storm delayed the arrival of one of the acts had to cancel at short notice and one of the technical plans for a venue was incorrect, causing set-up to take much longer than planned. All affected venues however, felt that these challenges were somewhat unavoidable and were pleased with how they were dealt with without affecting the success of the shows.

*“It’s a huge project, all these brand new venues that have never had touring companies, logistically, it’s a bit of a nightmare isn’t it, and every single one is unique and different and doesn’t have their own crew. So it went well. All shows went up on time, all the performances were a success, so we did good.”*

In terms of internal challenges specific to the venue, some Venue Partners felt that at times it was difficult to juggle the venue’s primary purpose with it’s function during ‘Back to Ours’. School venues in particular cited concerns around safeguarding and being able to ‘lock down’ certain areas to prevent audience members roaming around the building. There was also an issue with the high levels of security in the building, which sometimes made it difficult for audience members to enter and exit the venue. One school also venue mentioned the difficulty in maintaining flexibility in reacting to changing demands of performances when their primary function requires them to follow strict regulations.

In addition, as Archbishop Sentamu is a Church of England school, the team felt there were further considerations to be taken into account – for example when operating the bar, it was important that the school logo was displayed on anything that was advertising alcohol.

*“They’ve got to understand how schools operate, and how tightly schools have to operate.”*

*“Especially with this being a Church of England school, we've got a few more considerations that other places might not have to think about so much.”*

Other venues also found it a challenge to operate in their day-to-day role whilst hosting ‘Back to Ours’. The Venue Lead at North Point Shopping Centre spoke about having to wait until the centre closed before they could begin setting up for an event on the evening.

*“Obviously we are a shopping centre and we trade as a shopping centre, so for me it was how to try and do both at the same time.”*

It was generally agreed however that the Core Project Team were understanding and respectful of the primary function of each venue and that any issues were addressed and responded to early on in the project.

*“I think they've been quite good over the past year of keeping that respect for the venues and what we do as well.”*

Despite the issues mentioned above, venues felt that they didn’t face any major challenges and the delivery of ‘Back to Ours’ went smoothly on the whole. Venue Partners agreed that the technical and logistical aspects of the festival were improved throughout the year as the team became more experienced working in the spaces.

*“I don’t feel that we had any major challenges or anything.”*

*“As far as I’m concerned it went smoothly because they dealt with whatever they needed to deal with.”*

*“I think as we've gone through, I think we've ironed out some problems that we had from the start.”*

*“I think it’s honed itself over the year, I think they’ve got better as the year’s gone on.”*

* + 1. Volunteers

Although it was recognised that they were a useful resource, some Venue Partners felt that there were initially too many volunteers present during the events, which might be ‘off-putting’ for audience members.

*“You’ve got like line of volunteers waiting for people to come in, which can be a bit sort of off-putting for some people.”*

One Venue Partner felt that the planning around volunteer staffing improved after the first festival as the team learnt to get the balance right.

*“There were too many of them at the small performances and maybe not quite enough for some of the big ones. But I think in the next programme we can say ‘this is the show, this is where it’s going, this is the expected audience, I think X amount of volunteers would be good.”*

*“It started off where we maybe didn’t have enough, then we maybe had too many, then it’s just sort of getting the balance right.”*

* 1. Outcomes

Most Venue Partners reported that overall, working on ‘Back to Ours’ has been an enjoyable experience that’s given them the chance to take part in something different. A personal outcome for one Venue Partner was that her involvement in the festival has made her want to experience a wider variety of arts and culture events.

*“It kind of made me want to go and try something myself.”*

*“It’s just nice to be back involved with a bit of theatre really instead of being sat at my desk.”*

Some Venue Partners were really pleased that the project gave them the opportunity to be involved in the City of Culture celebrations rather than just experiencing it second hand.

*“[I] Felt fully involved with a truly special year in Hull's history.”*

*“I just found it exciting to be part of it. That's the thing, like our little contribution to the Hull city of culture and the fact that we've been able to have a part in it.”*

*“For them [the staff] to be able to say, well I’ve been involved in City of Culture has been a great thing for them.”*

* + 1. Skills and Knowledge Development

All Venue Partners felt that they had experienced something new as a result of ‘Back to Ours’, and all but one said that they had gained or developed new or existing skills. Some of the learnings that were reported by Venue Partners include:

* Greater insight into how touring productions work;
* A better awareness and broader definition of the arts and the different types of entertainment available;
* Opportunity to network with other venues across the city and in the local area; and
* Making relevant contacts in the industry to help continue using venues as a performance space.

*“I learnt that you’ve got to be a little bit more diverse, [when it] comes to culture.”*

*“I come from working in leisure centres, so it’s all very new to me.”*

When asked what specifically what skills or knowledge was gained or increased through working on ‘Back to Ours’, the most common responses were ‘Project Management’ and ‘Community Engagement’. A full breakdown of responses is shown in Figure X below.

Venue leads also reported skills and knowledge development in the wider staff team working on ‘Back to Ours’. Partners at one venue felt that the caretaking staff were much more open pushing the boundaries of what their spaces could host, whereas in the beginning of the project they had doubts and reservations. Other Venue Partners felt that ‘Back to Ours’ had given wider staff members a greater insight into running events and helped theatre technicians gain valuable experience through working with HPSS.

One Venue Lead stated that working on ‘Back to Ours’ had helped them gain valuable experience if they were to pursue a career in arts and culture in the future.

*“When we went to the head caretaker this time with the circus idea, he looked up and he went, "Yeah, great, let's do it." Twelve months ago, if you'd said this is gonna come into a space like this, people might've gone, "No, that's too much hassle, how do we know that's gonna work?"*

*“They've had an insight into what it takes to run the event or be part of an event. Help setting up, sitting and dealing with money, from food and things like that, I think that's been a great thing.”*

*“[Back to Ours has] Boosted my experience for future jobs in arts and culture.”*

* + 1. Reputation of venue

One of the main reported outcomes of the project was the positive change in the reputation of the venues. All Venue Partners suggested that ‘Back to Ours’ had helped to raise the profile of their space and develop a greater awareness of the capabilities of the venue. For some venues, this has already led to greater membership figures and increased bookings for the venue’s facilities.

*“That kind of lifts our profile everywhere, you see, so that’s really good for us.”*

*“So I’ve had bookings for private parties in the function room where the event was.”*

*“We do host our own events anyway but, I guess the people who came to Back to Ours wouldn’t have known that unless they would’ve come to see.”*

* + 1. Disability

One of the primary objectives of ‘Back to Ours’ was to help those with disabilities 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.”*

* + 1. Legacy

Venue Partners felt that they now know more about the capabilities of their own facilities, which has increased their confidence in hosting performances independently from ‘Back to Ours’. Venue Partners also reported that they had built a level of knowledge around the planning and organisation of arts and culture events and one venue has already staged a performance as a direct result of the success of ‘Back to Ours’.

*“ [Back to Ours has] given me a bit of an insight into what our potential is.”*

*“We’ve just had a show on the back of Back to Ours.”*

*“I’ve already started to kind of look at different kind of events myself now, that can attract different people.”*

*“I can try different events now. That’s what I was hoping to get out of it.”*

*“If I were to put a show on on my own, I'd know exactly where to go.”*

One Venue Partner felt as though the experience of working on ‘Back to Ours’ will help them to educate the local community on the different types of entertainment available to them. Another venue felt that ‘Back to Ours’ will help them to become a more open and accessible space within the community, indicating that the project will have some longer term benefits beyond its own life span.

*“Back to Ours will help me educate a community on the arts and culture.”*

*“I think it’s opened my eyes to a few more things that are going on out there, you know different acts and things like that that maybe I wouldn’t have looked into myself.”*

*“We’re really keen to make us as open and accessible as possible.”*

* + 1. Hopes and expectations

Venue Partners acknowledged that ‘Back to Ours’ got easier to manage and deliver with every festival due to the learnings gathered throughout the project.

*“The last few have felt easier, I think. We're sort of into the routine now.”*

When asked about their hopes and expectations for ‘Back to Ours’ in the future, most Venue Partners spoke about building on its success and continuing to provide opportunities for local communities to access the arts.

Qualitative feedback suggested that all venues were keen to stay involved in the project and some suggested adding more community venues to the circuit. When asked to rate on a scale of 0-10 how interested they were in continuing to be a venue for the ‘Back to Ours’ festivals in the future, where 0 was ‘not at all’ and 10 was ‘completely’, the average score across all venues was 9.1.

Furthermore, when asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statement ‘I want to take part in activities similar to this in the future’:

* 2 out of 7 said ‘strongly agree’
* 4 out of 7 said ‘agree’
* 1 out of 7 said ‘neither agree nor disagree’

*“And add more venues to the mix. Maybe spread a little bit wider into some of the harder-to-reach communities.”*

Venue Partners also expressed that they would like to continue to focus on a local audience moving forward and one partner suggested involving students at their school as a way of achieving this.

*“Maybe if we could get young people, I don’t know Year 10s and 11s maybe involved as well. We’ve got a really fantastic arts department, CPA – creative performing arts, and we’ve got ambassadors, and they’re probably the type of people as well that would carry it forward.”*