# Flood Evaluation

## Peer Assessors Report

A number of professionals working in the arts sector were asked to contribute to the evaluation of *Flood* as peer assessors.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three individuals after each part of the four elements of the production, although only two took part in the final interview. Their feedback is summarised below.

## Quality metrics

The table below shows how peer assessors rated *Flood* against each of the Arts Council’s quality metrics. This is an average across all four parts. Any notable differences between parts are discussed below.

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| **Quality Metric** | **Overall** |
| **Concept**: It is an interesting idea / programme | 8.2 |
| **Local impact**: It is important that it's happening here (in Hull) | 8.0 |
| **Presentation**: It will be well produced and presented | 7.6 |
| **Relevance**: It will have something to say about the world in which we live | 7.6 |
| **Rigour**: It will be well thought through and put together | 7.3 |
| **Enthusiasm**: I will come to something like this again | 7.2 |
| **Challenge**: It will be thought-provoking | 7.0 |
| **Risk**: The artists are really challenging themselves with this work | 6.9 |
| **Originality**: It is ground-breaking | 6.7 |
| **Captivation**: It will be absorbing and will hold my attention | 6.6 |
| **Excellence**: It will be one of the best examples of its type | 6.3 |
| **Distinctiveness**: It will be different from things I’ve experienced before | 6.3 |

All the quality metrics were given a rating of at least 6 out of 10. The concept for *Flood* was given the highest rating overall, largely because the scale and multi-platform nature of the project was so ambitious.

“It is a very complex idea to use a mixed media approach to tell the story - especially with the episodes over such a long period of time. To have live elements and to intersperse these with the televisual elements, I’ve never seen anything like it, it really is very clever and interesting.”

Peers felt it was important that *Flood* happened in Hull because it was an artistically significant project. It also exposed new audiences to outdoor theatre, and explored topical issues in a way that resonated with local people.

“It felt like the show was really speaking to local people, in voices they would recognise. It was clearly a significant piece of work that I perceived local audiences would be proud to host in their city.”

Peer assessors praised the production and presentation of *Flood*, and the production values for *Part Four: New World* were considered to be particularly high.

“Part Four: New World’s production values were excellent and it was streets ahead of all the other parts. Given the scope of the timeline involved, it is understandable that the cast, crew and technical team - in fact everyone involved in every aspect of Flood will have learned on the job for the other parts - and they were clearly able to take that knowledge and experience into Part Four: New World”.

There was a feeling that Slung Low had taken plenty of risks with *Flood* – both in terms of the physical production of each part, and the range of issues it sought to explore. Whilst peers admired their ambition, they felt this approach was ultimately to the detriment of the project.

“It was thought provoking with many agendas covered: climate change, refugee crises, fear of 'the others', family feuds, same sex love. But there were too many issues and that made it rather overblown.”

Whilst there was a feeling that the issues weren’t presented in a particularly new or innovative way, the storyline was absorbing. The outdoor setting also helped to hold the audience’s attention.

“I enjoy being in outdoor settings where I am free to move when I want to and view things from different stand points specially as I have a tendency to fall asleep when I am sitting down in a theatre. This experience was certainly refreshing! The setting in the dock in particular was evocative and this held my attention.”

However, there were some misgivings about the script, which some felt was convoluted. They praised the writer’s ambition to include a wide range of issues, but there was a feeling that this had prevented them being explored in any great depth.

“I can see how the writer wanted to flesh out the characters by introducing dramatic stories about relationships, sexuality, immigration, diversity, murder, torture, religion, political intrigue and more but it did feel a bit like a soap opera at times. Maybe this was intentional and part of an exploration into using different genres – especially as TV was part of the experience. But I found myself feeling less engaged with that aspect of the show and at times it felt like the writer was throwing in yet another ‘issue’ that never quite got properly explored.”

Distinctiveness received the lowest average ratings, partly because the peer assessors had seen elements of the production elsewhere. However the significance of producing this type of show in Hull was again highlighted.

“As a production it has links to outdoor theatre presentations I’ve seen at Derry-Londonderry, Edinburgh and in Greek and Roman theatre settings in Europe – but it is certainly very different for Hull!”

Excellence also received a relatively low score. Whilst peers were generally positive overall, they again felt the narrative had been confused with the introduction of too many themes and storylines. One person also felt the ‘headphone’ experience had detracted from what should have been a communal theatre experience on Victoria Dock.

### Notable differences between episodes

*Part Three: To The Sea* (the film shown on BBC2) received notably lower ratings for captivation (4.3), risk (4.7) and excellence (3.7), which brought the average score down for these three metrics. There was a feeling that showing this part on TV made it far less immersive and engaging than Parts One and Two, whilst the writing and acting styles were less suited to this medium.

“The experience of watching Episode 3 on a TV screen was very disengaging, I felt. The style of acting that the actors were driven to use because they were in a dock was quite a broad style of acting – and not conducive to TV close ups. And the writing, for me, was not strong enough to make the characters engaging and so I didn’t feel an emotional connection to what was going on the screen. If I hadn’t seen the other two parts, if I hadn’t been invested in carrying on with the journey I think I would have switched off within about a minute.”

## Diversity

Peer assessors felt that diversity had been successfully represented through the narrative, which explored issues associated with migration and integration, contained an LGBT plot line and portrayed encounters with disabilities. The cast were also diverse.

“It was good there was a racially diverse cast…there was a good mix of ages and a story that touched upon the lives of people in different classes of society and explored a same sex relationship without making an 'issue' of it. There was a good gender balance. It felt like access needs of audience members were well supported by the team.”

## Perceptions of Hull

Following Parts Two and Four, all but one of the peer assessors said they would speak more positively about Hull to someone else. For some, this was driven by their experience of visiting the city, meeting friendly, local people, and exploring areas like the Fruit Market and the Marina. Others felt the city was playing a valuable role in helping to develop and promote art forms like outdoor theatre.

“Apart from seeing the show in its dramatic setting I was able to spend more time in Hull than I had before and see more areas of the city, the vista of the Humber, the Marina, the Humber Street Gallery and pop-ups that were very vibrant. I was on my own but talked to local people who were friendly and helpful, including the taxi drivers. I met audience members and chatted with them, and City of Culture Volunteers who were very helpful and charming. I look forward to visiting again.”

After *Part Four: New World*, one peer assessor said they would not change how they talk about Hull to someone else, but only because they didn’t have any negative impressions of the city beforehand. They did, however, feel that the project, and the wider 2017 programme, had boosted the city’s self-confidence.

“I think it might be more the case that people in Hull think differently about themselves and the place since the City of Culture and productions like Flood have come to Hull.”

# Summary

According to Peer Assessors, the strongest elements of the project were:

* The ambition of the project in terms of attempting to deliver a multi-platform performance across a whole year;
* The intrigue generated by *Part One: From The Sea;*
* The technical skill required to deliver the outdoor theatre performances;
* The concept, which resonated with local audiences, particularly those who had first-hand experience of the floods in 2007, whilst the displacement of people ties in with the political history of the abolition of slavery and Wilberforce;
* It addressed a wide variety of issues such as racism, bigotry, migration and division, and how people respond to tragedy and fear;
* The communal, immersive, outdoor theatre experience at Victoria Dock.

Some of the weaker aspects of *Flood* included:

* The introduction of too many sub-plots and themes, which meant that issues weren’t explored in any great depth;
* The experience of watching *Part Three: To The Sea* on TV - the elements which had been pivotal in engaging audiences in Parts Two and Four (i.e. the communal atmosphere, the Victoria Dock setting) had been completely lost on TV;
* The headphones required for Parts Two and Four took away from the experience of arts in a public space.