Appendix 3: Core Creative Team Consultation

* 1. Introduction

The Core Creative Team (from heron in CCT) were responsible for delivering the ‘Back to Ours’ project at all levels, including developing the concept, commissioning and supporting the artists and managing production.

* + 1. The Core Creative Team

In order to gain feedback from members of the CCT, consultation was undertaken both before and after delivery of the first ‘Back to Ours’ festival in February.

Feedback was gathered via a pre-event online survey, followed up with an in depth face-to-face interview after the delivery of the first festival. The templates for the survey and discussion guide are provided in Appendices 3A and 3B.

* **CCT (Pre-Event) Survey:** carried out as an online survey (1 respondent)
* **CCT (Post-Event) Depth Interview:** carried out a face-to-face (3 respondents)

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

* **Process Evaluation:** motivations; creative development; artist commissions; venue locations and project and production management.
* **Outcomes Evaluation:** artistic quality of the event; audience profile, reaction and feedback; skills and knowledge development among stakeholders; collaboration and partnership development among stakeholders.

* 1. CCT Demographic Profile

As a key funder of Hull 2017, Arts Council England (ACE) are not only interested in the demographic profile of the audiences for ‘Back to Ours’. They also wish to know the demographic profile of the creative team involved in delivering the event, to inform the Creative Case for Diversity.

As such, all members of the CCT were asked to complete an Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form. Five out of six members of the CCT gave their details.

All five members of the CCT who gave their postcode data were Hull residents.

The group ranged in age from 20-44 and four members were female and one was male.

Diversity was lacking in terms of ethnicity; all respondents identified themselves as ‘White: Welsh / English / Scottish / Northern Irish / British’.

No one self-identified as disabled (as per the definition provided by the Equal Opportunities Act 2010), however one respondent disclosed that they had a learning disability.

Figure 1: Age of Creative Core Team

Figure 2: Gender of Creative Core Team

* 1. Process Evaluation

In order to inform the planning, development and delivery of future projects and the remaining two festivals, a series of questions were asked linked to the process of the ‘Back to Ours’ events. These concentrated primarily on:

* **Creative Development:** How was the concept of the project conceived and to what extent did partners get on board with this?
* **Artistic Programme:** How were relationships with artists managed? What was the level of input from Venue Partners?
* **Venue Partners:** How were relationships with Venue Partners managed? What were the challenges and successes of working with these venues?
* **Project and Production Management:** What were the strengths and weaknesses in relation to the project and production management of ‘Back to Ours’, and what would be done differently as a result?
  + 1. The Concept

The primary purpose of the ‘Back to Ours’ project was to create opportunities for local audiences to experience the arts within their own neighbourhood. The aim was to transform community venues that disengaged audiences are already familiar with and feel safe in, into an inspiring performance space.

Feedback from the CCT suggests that the artists and venues easily got on board with the concept of ‘Back to Ours’ once it was explained to them.

*“I think the best thing about their attitude was that they completely and totally understood what we were trying to do.”*

* + 1. Venue Locations

The CCT cast a wide net to find suitable venues within the community to ensure that the project was accessible in the North, East and West of the city. The team first approached schools because they had the size required to receive productions on the scale of what was in mind for the artistic programme.

According to the CCT, not every school was in a position to become a partner for various reasons, such as lack of theatre space or lack of staff support. After the school venues were on board, the team then approached other spaces, including pubs, community centres and North Point Shopping Centre.

The team found it difficult to find community venues like pubs with a large enough performance area, but eventually had a definitive list of eight venues that were to become partners throughout ‘Back to Ours’.

*“Pubs in communities like Bransholme were difficult as none of them had a focal point for a performance. We looked at lots of social clubs but some struggled with committing space alongside existing activities.”*

Table 5: The ‘Back to Ours’ 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. Artistic Programme

When putting together the artistic programme for ‘Back to Ours’, the CCT wanted to provide a broad range of entertainment that would be appealing to the local community.

The team involved the Venue Partners in the development of the programme, asking for feedback around what they thought would work in their spaces. Initially, the CCT needed to build a level of trust in order for the Venue Partners to feel comfortable in letting the team make artistic decisions on the programme.

*“But we had to build up that trust with them, so we spent a lot of time looking at clips because we didn’t have time for everybody to go and see some of the work because it was touring and it wasn’t do-able.”*

Feedback suggests that the Venue Partners generally agreed on the programme suggestions put forward, however there was a discussion around the suitability of Mark Thomas’s ‘The Red Shed’. Some Venue Partners were slightly worried about the show having too much of a political focus, although the CCT tried to reassure them that it was a piece of theatre that would resonate with a local audience.

The CCT also recognised that they needed to manage the expectations of the Venue Partners when it came to programming, as some made suggestions that were unreasonable when it came to cost and budget.

*“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.”*

*“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.”*

* + 1. Relationships with Venue Partners

The CCT generally felt that they had built positive relationships with the Venue Partners, although acknowledged that it did take time to build up a level of trust.

It was suggested that there was a couple of ‘challenging personalities’ within the Venue Partners, which could easily change the dynamic of a group meeting. Overall however, relationships with Venue Partners were positive and constructive.

The team acknowledged that the main challenge when working with the Venue Partners, was to manage their expectations around various aspects of ‘Back to Ours’, for example ticket sales and the programming of the festival.

Venue Partners expressed their concerns around the lack of tickets sales pre-festival, despite the reassurances of the CCT. One member of the CCT said that they understood the concerns, as it was a new project and the Venue Partners clearly wanted it to succeed.

*“I didn’t want them to be worried but it was nice at the same time that they were just so passionate about it.”*

*“It was good that they were all so passionate about it but on the other hand it made them worry as well. As you do when you’re involved in a project you want it to work.”*

*“One venue was really worried about the press picking up on ticket sales.”*

There was also a certain level of conflict between the CCT and Venue Partners when it came to the marketing of the first festival. One Venue Partner had a background in marketing and had their own suggestions on how things should be done.

*“There’s one person who’s got a marketing background so very vocal on how this has been marketed and felt at certain points that things should have been done differently.”*

A learning that that CCT took from this was to give Venue Partners more of a role in the marketing of the festival, to 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.”*

Although the CCT felt that communication with the Venue Partners was good, they agreed it was challenging to keep everyone in the loop – partly due to the number of people involved.

*“There were so many people involved in it and managing the communication between all those people was probably the hardest part of it.”*

The CCT recognised the importance of regular updates however – particularly when members of group were feeling worried or nervous. One of the learnings taken from this was to increase the level of communications with Venue Partners, to help put them at ease during the run up to the live delivery of the next festivals.

*“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.”*

It was also suggested by one member of the CCT that it would be beneficial to conduct more site visits to the venues during the planning stage, to ensure that details aren’t missed.

*“I think it would be more beneficial for me to get out of the office and look around the venue in more detail.”*

* + 1. Working with Artists

The CCT were keen to develop a positive relationships with the artists to help develop a good reputation for the ‘Back to Ours’ project further afield.

In the initial contact with artists, the CCT had to explain the background of ‘Back to Ours’. The team found that artists were open to the concept of the festival and took it as an opportunity to reach new audiences with their work.

*“The artists that we worked with absolutely bought into it.”*

In terms of the contracting of the artists, the team felt that everything went smoothly, although in some cases took longer than expected.

During the planning of the festival, the CCT recognised that the artists had to make certain compromises due to the limitations of the venues that don’t usually act as performance spaces. This wasn’t seen as a negative by the artists however, and didn’t detract from the quality of the shows.

*“I think they all made some sort of compromise.”*

The team felt that the artists responded well to the venues and were impressed with the spaces. A member of the CCT said that one of the artists felt that Winifred Holtby was easier to work in than any theatre they had been to before.

*“They were really surprised at how great some of the venues were.There was one company that said Winifred Holtby it was easier to get in and get out for them from that theatre space than any theatre they’d worked in before.”*

When it came to the set up of the shows, the CCT felt that the artists were confident in the production team’s ability.

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

* + 1. Planning and Organisation

The CCT felt that the planning process of ‘Back to Ours’ went smoothly, considering the complexity of the project.

*“Whilst we were spending time building up the programme and how the festival would be delivered there was a lot of time spent on the production side of it and technically how would it work and how would we make these shows go up and be as professional and as good a quality as what they should be.”*

The team felt that one of the main successes of the planning and organisation of the first festival was the production schedule. It was recognised that having an accurate schedule was vital to the success of the project, due to the touring nature of the festival. When planning this, the team made sure to build in extra time as a contingency in case anything came up that would affect the rest of the schedule.

*“If something kind of disastrously went wrong in one area it would have a knock on effect in a different area, so it was really important to have that tight.”*

*“In a lot of cases it did work like clockwork in terms of one thing to the next.”*

One member of the team felt it was challenging to keep to budget during the planning stage of the first festival, particularly when they were scoping out what equipment each venue had. The CCT were pleased however with how the Venue Partners worked together to share resources, which helped to keep costs down.

*“The venue managers are really helpful, because we could use their resources and because we’ve made this little community of these from across the city.”*

*“That was definitely a huge success how they worked together so they were lending each other chairs and things like that.”*

There were several unexpected challenges during the live delivery of the festival – although it was accepted by the CCT that these challenges were unavoidable to a certain extent. One of these challenges was the cancellation of a Pigeon Detectives performance, however the team continued to set up the stage as if the band were to arrive, to test that the schedule worked correctly. A member of the CCT praised the way that the communications were handled around this and felt that the wider team supported them extremely well.

*“Everybody came together to sort that out so I felt really comfortable with that.”*

The team experienced another challenge due to the late set up of The Red Shed at Archbishop Sentamu. This was influenced by several factors, including an inaccurate plan from an external source, and the time consuming construction of a scaffolding tower, which was used to set up the lighting for the performance. Although these factors caused a delay in the schedule, the CCT felt that the complications were dealt with in the best way possible.

*“I think it was Archbishop Sentamu venue when we had the Red Shed arrive the schedule was knocked back significantly because there were complications with the design.”*

Logistically, the team agreed that travelling from one venue to another was a challenge during the live delivery of the festival. Due to the locations of the venues across the city, the team felt that a lot of time was wasted in transit between venues.

*“Geographically, the venues are quite challenging to work with.”*

*“Getting from one venue to another was really difficult.”*

Another unanticipated challenge during the live delivery of the festival was that the radios that were used to communicate between the different venues, did not work. The team overcame this problem by communicating using their mobile phones and Whatsapp.

*“Things like the radios we didn’t know they were going to go wrong on the first day.”*

**Learnings**

The team acknowledged that they expected the first festival in the ‘Back to Ours’ project to be a big learning curve, and have listed several adaptations that they will carry forward in the planning and delivery of future festivals.

*“There’s a huge amount of learning in terms of what works, what maybe works less well or doesn’t work and we could only have really have known some that from actually delivering the festival.”*

One suggested change was to have the support of extra team members during the live delivery of the festival. The team spent a lot of time travelling around the city to different venues and felt that their time would have been better used elsewhere. As such, they will ensure that there are more staff members on hand to act as ‘runners’ between venues if needed.

The team also felt that the use of iPads would help with the smooth delivery of the festival, as the team could use them to communicate with each other, access digital documents and box office reports and support with all elements of admin.

After the break down of the radios, the CCT agreed that Whatsapp was an excellent alternative, and will continue to use this throughout the remainder of the project.

It was also suggested that at certain performances, there were too many volunteers present for the size of the audience and venue. The team felt that after experiencing the first festival, they were in a better position to tailor the volunteer request for each show

*“I felt we had too many volunteers. It felt a little bit overwhelming, because the roles were front of house. So there were a lot of blue jackets when you arrived.”*

*“I think the experience we’ve had with volunteers this time round will maybe inform that training better when it comes to the second festival.”*

Overall, the CCT were confident that the delivery of the next festival would be easier due to the initial groundwork that has been put in place for the first festival.

*“For this first one yeah we’ve spent a lot longer in terms of planning it we won’t need to spend as much time on the other ones because we’ve got things in place now.”*

* 1. Outcomes

In order to record the impact of ‘Back to Ours’, a series of questions were asked around the outcomes of the first festival. As a reminder – this research was conducted after the first of three ‘Back to Ours’ festivals, so is not a full reflection of the final project outcomes.

Questions were based around the following topics:

* **Skills and knowledge:** How has the project impacted on professional development of the CCT?
* **Audience profile:** Did the project engage with the intended audience? How did the audience react to the performances and venues?
* **Venue Partner Legacy:** What will be the legacy of ‘Back to Ours’ for the Venue Partners?
* **Measures of success:** What do the CCT consider to be the main measures of success for the ‘Back to Ours’ project? What are the hopes and expectations for future delivery of the project?
  + 1. Skills and Knowledge

The research looked at the personal and professional impact of the ‘Back to Ours’ project on the CCT.

The team generally agreed that the scale of the project and the level of their involvement was much larger than anything they’d worked on in the past. One member of the team said that although they had worked on bigger projects in the past, it wasn’t in such an integral role.

*“I’ve worked on bigger projects but not at such a key level I think.”*

*“For me personally, it’s kind of one of the biggest thing I have ever done and the fact that it all went well and it all went smoothly, was the biggest achievements I have ever done.”*

Another member of the team said that ‘Back to Ours’ gave them the opportunity to be involved in a large project from start to finish, experiencing a variety of different roles.

One team member was pleased that they were able to be involved at a more fundamental level than they have in the past, which allowed them to develop existing skills. Although they felt it was a big step to take, they indicated that they had plenty of support from more senior members of the Hull 2017 team, without them being partonising or taking away any of the responsibilities.

*“They didn’t patronise me in any way, they didn’t come and try and step on my toes.”*

All team members stated that they’d done something new as a result of working on ‘Back to Ours’, from contracting artists to developing a production schedule.

*“It was the most amount of people I’ve ever worked with on one project before.”*

*“Some things I haven’t done before at all, and I’ve just learned how to do it.”*

Although the team acknowledged that ‘Back to Ours’ was a demanding project to work on in terms of commitment and hours spent, everyone gave positive feedback about the experience so far.

*“I’ve had a great experience from it and I’m quite excited about the next one.”*

**Personal Learnings**

When they were asked whether they had learnt anything new about Hull and its communities as a result of working on ‘Back to Ours’, one member of the CCT felt that they had realised that there is a real appetite for arts and culture events outside of the city centre.

One member of the team who wasn’t originally from the city, learnt more about the infrastructure of Hull and its neighbourhoods as a result of driving in between each venue, which in turn helped them to understand more about the barriers that the communities face.

**Venue Partner Skills Development**

The CCT were keen to develop skills in the Venue Partners so that they could continue to offer arts and cultural events in their spaces following the ‘Back to Ours’ project.

The CCT feel that one of the main successes in this regard, is that the perceived barriers to putting on shows at community venues have been broken down, and that the managers of these spaces have been surprised at what they can do.

*“That’s been a huge success because we there were a lot of barriers there to get into schools and using the spaces, and that’s been knocked down, that barrier, definitely.”*

*“I think a lot of the venues have been surprised by what their own spaces can do.”*

The CCT suggested that one Venue Partner was already interested in programming alternative arts and cultural shows as a result of the success of the first ‘Back to Ours’ festival, and that the team was able to support him in this. Similarly, another Venue Partner had spoken to a member of the CCT to ask their advice on licencing, so that they could put on performances independently in the future.

*“I think for him it’s about testing out other ways of working and for us to support him in doing that.”*

“*They were really keen to find out how they can do it more independently, which is fantastic.”*

**Audience**

Being on site at the events meant that the CCT received anecdotal feedback from audience members. One team member was pleased with the reactions of audience members to the venues themselves and felt that visitors were impressed with the spaces.

*“For the first show that went up in West it was the story of Mr B in Sirius, and I was there speaking to families as they came and they were just so impressed with the space because some people have not been in these new schools.”*

Based their observations and interactions with the audience at the events, the CCT had the general impression that the audiences weren’t necessarily from the area local to the venue. The team acknowledged that there was work to do in terms of attracting this audience and it was mentioned that the Venue Partners could help by using their own influence within the community to support this engagement.

*“I think there’s still an underlying bit of work to engage the communities that it’s actually landing in. And I think some of that needs to be negotiated through the partner venues we’re working with because they’ve got that relationship already.”*

The CCT generally agreed that a local audience was achieved at the performance at William Gemmel club, and that this event was one of the main successes of the first festival overall. The team felt that the William Gemmel performance achieved a diverse audience, which was described as a real ‘valuable experience’.

*“Having that kind of mish mash of people from all different backgrounds. I think there’s something really valuable about that experience.”*

*“By the end of it they were all having a conversation about it, it didn’t matter who they were or where they came from. It sounds really cliché but that’s exactly what we really wanted to do.”*

Word of mouth was seen as a key tool for raising awareness in the hard to reach local communities, and the CCT felt that this was something that would occur naturally 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.”*

* + 1. Measures of Success

When asked what they felt were the key measures of success for ‘Back to Ours’, the CCT referred to one of the primary aims of the festival – to engage new local audiences with arts and cultural events in spaces that they feel comfortable.

“*One of the measures of success is how we engage people who have never been to a City of Culture event, they’ve never been to Truck, they don’t go to things, they don’t go to the city centre. It’s trying to get those people to come along. And trying to get those people to come and along and also enjoy their experience and feel really welcome and to feel comfortable with it.”*

The team felt that another measure of success was the ability to take artistic risks to push people’s expectations with the festival programme. The CCT were really keen to encourage people to try something new through ‘Back to Ours’ and experience something out of their comfort zones.

*“Another measure of success is taking those artistic risks.”*

*“It’s how we develop things in ‘Back to Ours’ that isn’t already happening in the city, so that it is owned by the community more”.*