Appendix 1: 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 1: Venue Partners

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 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 before and after the delivery of the first ‘Back to Ours’ event that took place during February half-term.

A pre-event online questionnaire was sent via email to each venue and more detailed feedback was gained through depth interviews with at least one representative from each venue in the week following the festival.

Most interviews took place over the phone, but one was carried out face-to-face. The template for the interview is provided in Appendix 1A.

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:** 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 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:** What variety of ways 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 the pre-event 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 2 overleaf.

Table 2: Back to Ours Statements

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

Venue 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.”*

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.”*

Other motivations for getting involved included the chance to participate in the Hull 2017 celebrations and the opportunity to make some money.

* + 1. Project Development and Programming

Most Venue Partners were very happy with their level of involvement throughout the planning phase of ‘Back to Ours’, and felt that they had plenty of opportunity to share ideas and feedback on the programming. Indeed there appeared to be a sense of surprise that the venues were given such a high level of input.

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

*“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.”*

This is supported by the pre-event venue survey; when asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement ‘I felt as though I was involved in the artistic programme’:

* 1 out of 5 selected ‘Neither agree nor Disagree’
* 3 out of 5 selected ‘Agree’
* 2 out of 5 selected ‘Strongly agree’

In terms of the programming, some venues felt that it would have been helpful to have seen the performances themselves, in order to make a more informed decision on 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.”*

One venue stated that although they were involved in the discussion around various acts 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.”*

Some venue staff also 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 preconceived ideas of how things would work. It could be said however that this is to be expected to a certain extent when working on a project for the first time.

When one venue staff member was asked what the most challenging part of working on ‘Back to Ours’ to date was, they responded:

*“I guess handing my venue over to other events teams. I'm used to doing all my own events.”*

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’. Another Venue Partner wanted Hull 2017 to take more of a lead during the planning of the programming.

*“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.”*

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

* + 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 Creative Team. When asked to rate the project management of ‘Back to Ours’ by the Hull 2017 team, where 0 was ‘poor’ and 5 was ‘outstanding’:

* 1 out of 5 selected 2
* 2 out of 5 selected 4
* 1 out of 5 selected 5

*“I can’t fault them at all.”*

The majority of Venue Partners felt that the level of communication with the Hull 2017 team was good. There was positive feedback about the frequency and organisation of the meetings, and most 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.”*

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 3).

Table 3: Communication Criteria Scoring

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

A couple of venues however felt that communication from Hull 2017 staff could be improved, and that they didn’t feel fully aware of what was going on at some points during the process.

*“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.”*

In the pre-event survey, 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.

When asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement “Hull 2017 have explained the Back to Ours project well”:

* 1 out of 5 selected ‘neither agree nor disagree’
* 1 out of 5 selected ‘agree’
* 3 out of 5 selected ‘strongly agree’

When asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement “Hull 2017 have helped me access the people I needed to talk to”:

* 1 out of 5 selected ‘neither agree nor disagree’
* 3 out of 5 selected ‘agree’
* 1 out of 5 selected ‘strongly agree’

When asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement “Hull 2017 have helped me access the information / resources I need”:

* 1 out of 5 selected ‘neither agree nor disagree’
* 2 out of 5 selected ‘agree’
* 2 out of 5 selected ‘strongly agree’

When asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement “I have been able to deliver my work to a high standard due to Hull 2017’s support”:

* 3 out of 5 selected ‘agree’
* 1 out of 5 selected ‘strongly agree’
* 1 out of 5 selected ‘N/A’

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 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 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 usually managed by another team for the vast majority of the year. It is important that the team remain respectful and considerate of this, to avoid alienating the existing venue staff.

**Marketing and Tickets**

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.”*

Some venues weren’t happy with the way the tickets were distributed and sold, 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.

There was recognition in the Venue Partners 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.”*

Concern over ticket sales was further heightened by the lack of confidence in the marketing activity for ‘Back to Ours’. Venue Partners generally agreed that the marketing materials - including guides and banners, were sent out too late, which didn’t give people enough time to get on board with the concept of the festival. 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.

*“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 at a later date, 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.”*

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.”*

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.”*

* 1. Post event

Overall, Venue Partners were pleased with how the events ran in their respective spaces, despite the worries and concerns of the planning and development stage.

*“I think for the first go it was really, really good.”*

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

*“Everybody really, really enjoyed it.”*

* + 1. Audience

Venue Partners felt that one of the main successes of the first ‘Back to Ours’ festival 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 likely hadn’t 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, most Venue Partners did not feel convinced that their audiences were local. Although they had not seen postcode data for visitors, there was the general feeling that audience members were not necessarily from the target 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.”*

It was suggested however that as the festival increases its visibility in local areas and awareness is raised about the concept, this would help attract a more local audience to future festivals.

**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 Hull 2017 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.”*

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

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

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

There were several external challenges that affected some of the venues, for example a bad storm delayed the arrival of one of the performers, 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.

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

*“For me it was how to try and do both at the same time.”*

Overall however, venues felt that they didn’t face any major challenges and the delivery of ‘Back to Ours’ went smoothly on the whole.

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

*“I don’t think we’ve faced any particular challenges ourselves, because we’re used to doing events.”*

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

* + 1. Volunteers

Although it was recognised that they were a useful resource, some Venue Partners felt that there were 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 as though the planning around volunteer staffing would be improved for future festivals after having experienced the first one.

*“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.”*

* 1. Outcomes

Although ‘Back to Ours’ is a yearlong project, Venue Partners have already reported a series of outcomes after delivery of the first of three festivals.

Some Venue Partners reported that overall, working on ‘Back to Ours’ has been an enjoyable experience that’s given them the chance to get involved in something different. One Venue Partner in particular said that being involved in the festival has made her want to personally experience a wider variety of arts and culture events.

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

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

* + 1. Skills and knowledge development

Some venues reported that they had learnt something new as a result of working on ‘Back to Ours’. These learnings include:

* Greater insight into how touring productions work
* A better awareness of the arts and the different types of entertainment available
* Opportunity to network with other venues across the city and in the local area
* 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.”*

* + 1. Reputation of venue

One of the main reported outcomes after the first ‘Back to Ours’ festival 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 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.”*

* + 1. Hopes and expectations

There was the recognition that ‘Back to Ours’ is a large project, and that the team had taken learnings from the experience to apply to future festivals. There was a general acknowledgement that all venues anticipated the next festival to be easier to manage and deliver, due to the learnings gathered from the first one.

*“The next one will be a bit more chilled hopefully.”*

*“Now we’ve got everything installed for future stuff, so we’re kind of good to go really.”*

*I think they have learnt from things that didn’t quite work, and I think the next one will be better.*

* + 1. Legacy

Although there are two more ‘Back to Ours’ festivals left to go, Venue Partners are already starting to think about what the legacy of the project might be.

The research suggests that Venue Partners have now built up a level of confidence to continue the concept of ‘Back to Ours’ by putting on performances in their spaces. Indeed, one venue has already staged a performance as a direct result of the success of ‘Back to Ours’.

*“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.”*

*“I think it’s a really good project and hopefully we can put things in place to continue it beyond.”*

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.”*

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