# FloodEvaluation

# Appendix 6: Artists Consultation

In addition to Slung Low, who were responsible for the production of Flood, two further artists were commissioned to support the delivery of the project.

As part of the project evaluation, artists were invited to share their views via an online survey and an in-depth interview. Templates for the surveys and discussion guides are provided in Appendices 6 – 8.

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

* **Process Evaluation**: motivations, creative process, and project and production management.
* **Outcomes Evaluation**: artistic quality of the event; the extent to which diversity was explored and / or represented within their work; the presentation; audience profile, reaction and feedback; skills and knowledge development; collaboration and partnership development; and perception changes towards Hull.

The following report provides an analysis of the feedback from this consultation.

## Involvement & Motivations

Slung Low were approached by Hull2017 to deliver a multi-platform, year-long theatre epic as part of the City of Culture programme. Having collaborated on a number of previous occasions, Slung Low approached playwright James Phillips to help develop the concept and write the script.

The Digital Producer came on board much later in the process, following provocation by one of the project’s funders, The Space, to develop the digital strand. The team advertised for a Digital Producer role, which attracted the attention of Brett Chapman due primarily to its association with Hull UK City of Culture. With little knowledge of Slung Low, they explored their previous work, which heightened their interest in the project. At interview stage they got on well with the CPT and were excited by the themes and ambition of the project.

“I was really excited to be involved in something that was kind of new ambitious and was about stuff that I actually care about.”

## Conceptual Development

According to the writer, *Flood* was in many ways a continuation of the work delivered by Slung Low in creating epic, political theatre. This was the natural next progression in terms of it being significantly bigger in scale and more ambitious (i.e. across different mediums). It was reported that Slung Low had started with the title ‘Flood’ and the concept grew from there.

The CPT pushed for more ambition from the creative team but allowed them space and freedom to develop the script. They were very positive and encouraging throughout the conceptual development process. Martin Green was particularly influential in encouraging the creative team to think big.

As the script developed, the Slung Low team started including new techniques and introducing new technology. They wanted to do something no one had ever done before – deliberately pushing themselves to test the boundaries of what was possible.

From the Digital Producer’s perspective, there were a number of conversations early on about what Slung Low and Hull2017 wanted from the online platform. In collaboration with the CPT and Lung Low they developed a rough delivery plan for digital content, but as they were based on-site, it gave them the flexibility to react to how the project unfolded.

It was reported that decisions about the content for the online platform were steered largely by Slung Low. They indicated that they weren’t used to this lack of control, but they felt it was the best approach for the project.

“We sort of developed a schedule of work that we knew we were gonna produce throughout the year. That left space to add in new stuff and create new stuff as we went, and I personally think that worked quite well for us.”

## Delivery

All four episodes were given largely positive feedback. *Part One: From The Sea* was considered intriguing and well-made, although there were concerns that there were multiple versions of the video on YouTube.

“I thought that was a great piece of work and it was really well made, I think it set the story in a really intriguing way and left a lot of questions to be answered.”

 “I think it gave a slightly skewed vision of how many people had seen it.”

*Part Two: Abundance* had provided a strong connection between the real and fictional worlds within the narrative. It, too, was well-made.

“It was the bridge between the fantasy world that James was creating and the setting of Hull and the real world that it was in”

There was a feeling that *Part Three: To The Sea* was the most challenging piece in terms of creating a piece of theatre that was suitable for TV.

“It was its own challenge because we were trying to produce a piece of theatre, that was really theatre but we also knew had to go on TV and the BBC were trying to produce a piece of TV that had to be theatre, which is always going to be a challenge I think. But ultimately I think it's one that everybody rose to and we ended up making something that we ought to be proud of.”

*Part Four: New World*’s narrative had been effective in tying up all the various plotlines. According to the Digital Producer it was also the most professionally developed and produced.

“Part four for me was like we'd all just, we all knew what we were doing, we'd all definitely found our feet, we were a team, we were like this well oiled machine that could do it by then.”

They felt that one of the strengths of the concept was that it tackled current, topical issues which were particularly relevant to communities in Hull, such as immigration. Overall they felt that audiences had enjoyed it and it appealed to people who wouldn’t normally be into theatre.

“If you listen to some of the dialogue in the, specifically the stage play segments…it refers to this idea of dying in docks and dying cities and you were able to literally refer to areas that were visible around the dock… when people that maybe have never left that place, they see foreign people come it. It seems like a very easy target to blame for the state of their city, their home.”

 “I think that was really rewarding to hear because anything that gets the general public more interested in culture and the arts and creating stuff is really important.”

There was recognition that some people hadn’t enjoyed *Flood*, but this was indicative of the more challenging content and style of the piece.

“Not everyone can enjoy the same content and not everyone enjoys the same style and I think if we were getting universal praise from every audience member from everyone that saw it I would be concerned.”

*Flood* was rated highly for most aspects of the production, namely the sound quality, sets, visual aspects and quality of filming for *Part One: From The Sea.* The lighting across all episodes and the quality of Part Three were given the lowest average ratings.

Table 1

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **How would you rate the following aspects of Flood's Production?**  | **Average rating (n=2)** |
| The sound quality across all four parts of Flood | 5 |
| The sets used across all four parts of Flood | 4.5 |
| The other visual aspects across all four parts of Flood (e.g. projections and props) | 4.5 |
| The quality of filming for the online video | 4.5 |
| Positioning of audiences to view live performances | 4 |
| The lighting across all four parts of Flood | 3.5 |
| The quality of the live BBC Broadcast | 3.5 |

Both respondents felt that Victoria Dock was the right place for the production, despite it not being representative of Hull’s wider population.

“You could argue that Victoria Dock might not be super representative of Hull....but...I can't see many other places where something like this could have worked.”

There was a feeling that the team had been fairly successful in producing four episodes which could be enjoyed and understood on their own, although experiencing all four parts would offer the most rewarding audience experience. The repeated phrases and motifs within the script were an example of just one of the devices used to connect the episodes together.

### Digital Platform

Offering digital content alongside the performance elements was considered to have worked well. The website provided interesting content for members of the public, provided effective refreshers on the narrative, and gave a real insight into how theatre is produced. The podcast for *Part Two: Abundance* was well-received and seemed to be effective in getting people up to speed with the storyline.

“It got people up to speed on the story we were telling but also gave them information about the world behind it which I think a lot of the, like the big behind the scenes film that we've done

However, there was some criticism of the site itself, which was difficult to navigate and old-fashioned.

“It's just one big long scrolling website that frankly, I don't think looked great. I think it looks a little old fashioned.”

Archived content has now been moved to a new website ([www.floodsurvivalpack.com](http://www.floodsurvivalpack.com)) which they feel has better access and navigation. It allows people to *“search and find content and relive their own experiences.”*

In terms of content, the weakest element of the digital content was the semi-fictionalised film blogs because the team didn’t have the time or budget to be able to promote it effectively.

“I think the ones that we made worked pretty well, but I think early on, no one was watching them which was slightly disheartening but then also just in terms of that type of storytelling, I think we were very ambitious in trying to make a semi-fictionalised version that really relied on having a lot of time and probably money spent in the market in of it.”

There was a sense that the digital platform would have benefited from more input from the Hull2017 team but that other parts of the project were rightly prioritised.

“There were parts of it that were more important than others and I think the most important ones ultimately got served.”

### Community Engagement

Community engagement was seen as one of the project’s major success stories. The community cast were integral to the production, and respondents were impressed with how Slung Low were able to engage with local residents. They managed people’s expectations well and were generally responsive to their needs.

“What we did with Flood is genuinely include the community via our community chorus within the play, via our relationship with people on Victoria Dock who, if they came by and said, "Does anyone want a cup of tea?" they would genuinely feel like a part of our production, like they're really helping, and they were.”

Having staff in place to manage the community relationship was a key reason why this element of the project worked so well., but Slung Low reportedly did this effectively by ensuring they had dedicated community engagement roles in place.

“Slung Low achieved that by having something amazing associate directors like Sally Proctor, who was working with the community chorus to make sure that everyone's happy, everyone feels like they're involved and that they're getting stuff out of it.”

The on-site team were reportedly respectful and showed gratitude to local residents for allowing them to use their community space. They were also able to respond quickly to complaints or concerns raised by residents, which built up a level of mutual trust and understanding.

“We always felt like, although we were part of this community on Victoria Dock, we were also their guest.”

“I mean there was certainly like odd bits and bobs where around the dock maybe if a piece of equipment had been left out or something and a resident came and said like, "Oh, you can't ..." it would be dealt with immediately”

Being based on-site was not only important for community relations, it ultimately influenced the creative direction of the entire production.

“I think me being there that regularly allowed us to integrate some of the content into the show in a way that maybe if I'd have been working remotely we wouldn't have been able to do.”

Both artists were impressed with how the community cast were engaged by Slung Low, and how the cast themselves responded to the responsibility they were given.

It was noted that it was important for the community to have such a prominent role in the production because it covered so many issues relevant to communities in Hull, such as immigration and the UK’s relationship with Europe.

## Measures of Success

There was a strong feeling that the project shouldn’t be judged on audience visits or website views – because the project had never been driven by commercial goals – but on whether it achieved artistic merit.

“For me personally and this might stand in contrast to what a lot people with the title of like digital producer would say. It's not about likes, views, or impressions. It's about the success of producing something that shares a perspective and that is real.”

“How satisfied are the people that set out to make a piece of art, with the art that they ended up with? Because really if I'm being honest, that's what matters to me mostly. Did you make something that was authentic, real? Did you put it out into the world and are you happy with the story that it told. That should be primary and then if the audience enjoyed that, that's amazing.”

They were proud of how Flood had challenged perceptions of theatre not only for audiences, but for the industry as a whole.

“In my opinion Flood was, and will remain, a landmark piece of theatre, and something of a game changer for the industry. It is the most extraordinary thing I have yet done and I am grateful to all who made it possible.”

There was disappointment that *Flood* didn’t get more recognition in the national press and within the arts sector, which ultimately would have raised the profile of all involved.

“I'm of the opinion that if something like this had've been simply done in London for example everyone would have heard about it because it's such an ambitious, slightly crazy thing to attempt…so yeah, I just think it deserved to be better represented in the press nationally.”

“The only real sadness is how little it was discussed as a serious and significant piece of new writing in the national and online press. Similarly that I was never asked to do an interview/piece/press of any size about it is a fact I still find bewildering. Flood was the centrepiece new dramatic work of the UK's Capital of Culture year. It was a national project on national themes, and the person who created it was never really asked to talk about it. Although that fact has cost me professionally the problem is much more than that: it means the work as a serious piece of new work was not allowed the stature it might have achieved. And that cost all of us who worked so long to make something so new and difficult. Hull '17 did the biggest and most ambitious piece of pure new writing that anyone in the UK did in 2017, or for many many years: and almost no-one knows that.”

## Project Management

As shown in the table below, communications with Slung Low were considered excellent by both artists, however communications with Hull2017 were rated much lower. This appears to be indicative of the project management structure, as both artists said they worked much more closely with Slung Low than Hull2017. However, the Digital Producer mentioned that they would have liked more direct contact with Hull2017 team.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Q: How would you rate the following on a scale of 0-5?**  | **Average rating (n=2)** |
| Communications between Slung Low and yourself | 5 |
| Contracting, including the explanation of your role and responsibilities | 4.5 |
| Development meetings, including frequency and quality of opportunities | 4 |
| Communications between Hull 2017 and yourself | 2.5 |

Both artists felt that roles and responsibilities were well-defined although it was mentioned that this wasn’t the case at the start of the project.

“Certainly early on it was unclear and undefined who really are you was directly answerable to.”

Overall project management was rated 4.5 out of 5 on average.

As shown in the table below, the CPT were effective in supporting artists, providing resources and facilitating communications with other key partners.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Q: How much do you agree with the following statements? During the project…** | **Average rating (n=2)** |
| ...Slung Low and Hull 2017 have helped me access the people I needed to talk to, to inform my work | 4.5 |
| ...Slung Low and Hull 2017 have helped me access the information / resources I needed to inform my work | 4.5 |
| ...I have been able to deliver my work to a high standard because of Slung Low and Hull 2017’s support | 4.5 |
| ...Slung Low and Hull 2017 provided me with sufficient time to produce my work | 4 |
| ...Slung Low and Hull 2017 have enabled me to communicate with other partners on the project when I needed to | 4 |

“Slung Low have been magnificent at every stage of the process, and through every challenge the project offered; and Martin Green has been a superb and inspiring leader for the entire Hull 17 project, and for me personally.”

Given the project management setup, the relationship with Slung Low was discussed in more detail than their relationship with the wider CPT. Both artists said the team were helpful, supportive and approachable.

 “I found working with Slung Low a really pleasant experience.”

“They were my main area of support and generally where I went to if I had a question or I needed a bit of extra assistance with something.”

Any problems were shared and addressed as a team.

“I never felt like, ‘I can't go to them and get this, or I don't know how to ...’ we'd always find a solution together to get there.”

Having the whole team on-site seems to have really helped in forging these working relationships. It also enabled the team to develop and expand on elements of the live performance, like the projections that were used on each of the islands in Part Four.

“By working together it was able to make some new stuff that otherwise wouldn't have been there.”

“Having the writer of a piece there constantly, I thought was great.”

It was mentioned that one of the strengths of Slung Low was that they build their expertise by ensuring continuity within their team, whilst also bringing people into the process who were highly skilled and hard-working. Their management skills and their dedication to artistic quality were also praised.

“With Slung Low I found it for maybe the first time, a company that only wanted to produce quality rather than quantity…everything they put out was to serve the story and not to serve some marketing requirement.”

Both respondents were impressed by their ability to place the community at the heart of the project. They were reportedly friendly and open to conversations with local residents, and were discernibly grateful to the people that contributed to the project.

“I went to Open Doors in Hull and ... I went and filmed twice but I went like four or five times around that and got to know some of the volunteers, some of the people that they support, people that use the service. And we were able to give them a bunch of complimentary tickets to come and see the show as well…which I thought was a really nice touch as well.”

## Partnerships

According to the survey data, both artists said they had developed existing partnerships and established new partnerships through the project. Specifically, the Digital Producer reported engaging with a wide range of people and organisations through the process, including:

* Other filmmakers to create content and deliver special effects;
* The University of Hull, to explore the possibility of future flooding in Hull
* Volunteers working at Open Doors Hull, a church-based charity, and a number of refugees they support.

It was also mentioned that Slung Low had expanded their network of actors, including some who were Hull-based.

## Impacts & Outcomes

Both respondents felt it had been an amazing opportunity for them to work on a unique and ground-breaking project. The scale and complexity of the project had provided arguably the most valuable learning experience.

“Working within the structures of such a huge undertaking was something of a learning experience for me but also just rewarding to see how those system work and where information and decisions and stuff like that comes from. That was a good thing for my own personal professional development I think.”

“The partnerships that I made with the creative heads of department in Slung Low were really useful in terms of the work that we produced here but also beneficial to me just as a creative seeing how these people that are the top of their craft work.”

Community engagement skills were also improved. For example, the Digital Producer spoke to local residents about their experiences and attitudes to flooding, which informed the development of the digital content for the website.

Both respondents said their confidence and ambition had grown throughout the project.

“My confidence in what we could do video-wise and in terms of what I wanted for us to try and do with stuff in the show certainly grew as well.”

This was supported by the survey data (Table 2) which showed that both artists strongly agreed that their confidence in working on site-specific theatre projects had improved.

The project had much less of an impact on their profile and their professional future; something which may be linked to the limited recognition that the production received in the national press and within the arts sector.

Table 2

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?** | **Average rating out of 5 (n=2)** |
| I am more confident working on site-specific theatre projects | 5 |
| I enjoyed working with a wider creative team | 5 |
| I successfully reached more diverse audiences for my work | 4 |
| I am more confident about my professional future | 3.5 |
| My profile has improved | 2.5 |

They were both proud of their contribution to the project, and felt a sense of achievement when they saw how their work had contributed to the final output.

“I'm just proud to have been involved in it and all of the people that came together to make it.”

 “Because I was a Digital Producer but really a film specialist as well so I was able to contribute to the actual show. And content went both online but also in the show as well, which was quite rewarding.”

They also talked about a number of practical skills they’d learnt, such as:

* How to make a podcast (Digital Producer);
* How to drive a speedboat;
* Understanding technicalities of working on water (writer).

The survey reinforced the idea that both artists had gained and developed expertise in a number of areas, principally: creative / artistic skills; community engagement; production, and; health and safety skills.

Table 3

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Skills / knowledge gained / developed** | **n=2** |
| Creative / Artistic Skills (e.g. art forms, artistic techniques) | 100% |
| Community engagement | 100% |
| Production and / or technical | 100% |
| Health & Safety | 100% |
| Project Development | 50% |
| Project Management | 50% |
| Other skills or knowledge (specified as having a powerboat license) | 50% |
| Museums, Libraries and Archive Skills (e.g. working with archivists and archive materials) | 0% |
| Marketing and / or social media | 0% |
| Finance & Budgeting | 0% |

## Perceptions of Hull

Neither of the artists said they had any connections to Hull prior to working on Flood. Both said they would have described Hull in negative terms, as a city with little confidence or things to do.

“Prior to this project I'd probably have described Hull as a relatively drab place with not a great deal to do there.”

Both said they would now speak more positively about Hull, which was largely a result of their interaction with local people.

“Spending a great deal of time in Hull allowed me to meet a lot of locals and the pride they had in the city even prior to the events of last year made me consider it in a different way. Also, the work put in by the Culture team really did feel like it started to have a positive effect on the atmosphere of the city and the aspirations of some of the people in it.”

“The people of Victoria Dock- and of the Community Chorus- have been magnificent: loyal, dedicated, the right amount of stupidly brave, hard-working and inspiring.”

It was mentioned that their knowledge and understanding of Hull had improved, and their experience had dispelled some preconceptions they’d held about the city.

“Like a lot of northern towns you really only hear the negatives about places generally and I came to learn a lot about what Hull does have its problems, a lot of that actually isn't true and it's full of really interesting excitable people trying to make their city better.”

## Key Lessons

The Digital Producer said they would be confident in working on a project like *Flood* again, particularly now they understood its intensity. They felt that the level of flexibility in their approach to the latter stages of the project was key to responding to the ongoing conceptual development of the piece, rather than trying to stick too rigidly to a delivery plan.

“If you have a more reactive and open schedule of work especially on something like Flood where I feel like the actual story of Flood was being changed and developed as things went on…I actually think as we went on and we became more reactive, the quality of stuff we produced felt better… that way of doing it works and that as long as you've got a backbone of content planned, you should leave space to be reactive on a project like that”

If they were to do this again in future, they would push for more resource for promoting and disseminating the digital content in order to reach a wider audience.

“In terms of the content we produced I'm very happy with and proud of a lot of the stuff we produced. I just think that we could've better planned or executed how we got that stuff in front of an audience, specifically an audience that are consuming stuff digitally.”

# Summary

The writer and Slung Low were behind the conceptual development of *Flood*, who had always intended to create a piece of epic, political theatre. The CPT pushed for more ambition with the script but were reportedly positive and encouraging throughout the process, giving them the space and freedom to develop the concept.

The writer and Digital Producer both worked closely with Slung Low, and being based on-site with them allowed flexibility and responsiveness that the project required. It also helped them to integrate successfully with the local community.

The strengths of the project were:

* Production values;
* Themes – addressing a range of relevant political issues;
* Engaging audiences who might not normally attend the theatre;
* The location at Victoria Dock;
* Community engagement – both in terms of including the community cast, and how Slung Low interacted with local residents;
* Digital content, which was engaging and enhanced the audience experience.

The main criticisms / areas for improvement were:

* Although each episode could be enjoyed in its own right, the interlinking storylines and motifs made it a more rewarding audience experience for those who watched all four;
* Clearer, more defined roles and responsibilities at the start of the project;
* More could have been done to improve the usability and visibility of the online platform.

The project has made the following impacts on respondents:

* Increased confidence and expertise in working on projects of this scale, ambition, complexity, and level of community engagement;
* Knowledge and understanding of Hull and its communities;
* Increased pride and sense of achievement;
* Learnt how to produce a podcast;
* Improved understanding of the technicalities of delivering performances on water.