

# ArtWorks Scotland

## Research Summary

### *Quality Perspectives, Artists and Partners: Research Background and Key observations*

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## 1. Background to the Infographic *Quality Perspectives, Artists and Partners*

In 2012 research was conducted with the ArtWorks Scotland supported Peer to Peer Networks (PPNs)<sup>1</sup>. This research had aimed to gain a clearer understanding of the PPN membership and their practice as artists in participatory settings. In particular:

- their journeys into working in participatory settings
- their diverse roles as artists working in such settings
- the factors that they felt supported quality in relation to their work in such settings

This led to the development of a number of 'factors' that artists felt were important to support high quality work. These factors were tested further in 2013 in order to understand the perspective of project 'partners' – people who work with artists as employers, managers, commissioners or co-ordinators such as teachers, Creative Learning Network members and staff from the NHS, Community Development and Scottish Prison Service. The central criteria was that partners were not artists. The 2013 Partners' survey asked precisely the same questions about quality that had been put to the PPN artists, with participants asked to respond to these quality factors in terms of importance and how often they happened in projects they have been involved in. Partners were also asked to reflect further on the usefulness of these factors and suggest any others that they thought were missing.

The infographic visually represents some of the findings from this and by presenting the views of partners on the existing quality factors alongside those of artists, the infographic is intended to help illustrate some of the convergent and divergent thoughts about how important the factors are to both artists and partners and how often they happen in practice.

## 2. About the research approach

- Interviews and Reflection

The research role in ArtWorks Scotland (AWS) is embedded into the evolving AWS programme and is responsive to it, enabling links with the work and research of ArtWorks UK. An important part of the research role is building relations with those that AWS are developing links with, in order to illicit learning from those individuals and groups. This area of AWS research is not intended to make broad, generalised claims but as a tool for learning about and sharing learning from those AWS are working with.

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<sup>1</sup> The Peer to Peer networks are made up of 5 distinct networks of artists; all are artist led. Research was conducted with the PPN's in 2012, see Dean, F. (2012). *Learning from ArtWorks Scotland Peer to Peer Networks*. [http://www.creativescotland.co.uk/sites/default/files/editor/Fiona\\_Dean\\_AWS\\_Report\\_Oct\\_2012.pdf](http://www.creativescotland.co.uk/sites/default/files/editor/Fiona_Dean_AWS_Report_Oct_2012.pdf)

The quality factors arose from this approach and involved in-depth interviews with 10 artists who were the main contacts within the PPNs. These interviews were analysed, categorised and represented for survey to allow wider response from targeted groups of artists and partners. The question around quality was reflective; not trying to define what quality is, but reflecting on a project that was vivid and memorable and considering why it was being recalled - what mattered about it. Sometimes the reflection was because of its effect on an artists' own practice or on participants at which the point the questions would move back to considering what had been in place to allow certain things to happen. This gave rise to observations such as ability to take risks, and again the questions stepped back to ask what factors allowed that risk to happen; the responses were bound up in ideas of trust, time, resource, an open brief etc. It was this stepping back that shaped the quality factors.

- Analysing and categorizing for survey

Responses were analysed and categorised into 15 factors for the survey. The numbers of returns in each survey - Partners and PPN - was the same; a total of 46 targeted respondents coming from both the PPN artists and Partners. The Partners' survey was devised to be focused at identified 'partners', in order to test and gain the perspective of those employing artists to work in participatory settings on their views on the artist generated quality factors. The term 'partners' was arrived at and agreed after some discussion in terms of who to involve and why. A concern of ArtWorks UK and AWS is to engage with employers and commissioners of artists. For the 2013 survey, the AWS team decided to use the term 'partners' as a more helpful term for the research. This referenced Seidel et al (2009) and their approach of categorising - or, in this case, as we did, asking individuals to categorise themselves - in terms of their proximity to the work of artists that they might be employing. The work of Seidel et al with Harvard's Project Zero focused on a range of participatory contexts and identified 3 different groups of decision-makers who influence quality, categorized by how 'close' they are to the artists' activity. 1. 'in the room' - i.e. teachers, assistants, participants who work in the room/activity with the artists 2. 'Just outside the room' - i.e.. administrators, coordinators, managers etc who may visit the art activity but are who are not mainly, directly 'in the room' with the artist. 3. 'Furthest from the room' - Funders, Politicians, Policy-makers etc who rarely if ever enter the room or activity<sup>2</sup>.

The main focus of the Partners survey was the quality factors, however, other questions are asked which aimed to establish understanding about the kinds of participatory contexts worked in or with (i.e. health, housing etc); number of years developing opportunities for artists to work in participatory settings and principal art form areas supported. In addition, space was ensured for respondents to comment and feedback on the factors and whether they felt these were useful and/or needed additional factors for consideration.

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<sup>2</sup> See Seidel et al. (2009). *The Qualities of Quality. Understanding Excellence in Arts Education*. Boston, USA: Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education. See <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/arts-education/arts-classroom-instruction/Pages/preface-the-qualities-of-quality.aspx>

A further intention for the research was to draw together partners and artists to discuss the findings and consider if and how these factors might usefully be used; where, by whom and in what form. This process was begun at the 2013 ArtWorks Scotland conference, which hosted a session around the quality factors research, involving respondents from the survey reflecting with others on the usefulness of the factors in practice to their area of work.

### 3. Selected observations about the findings

This brief analysis of the data focuses on factors that were stated and shared by a majority of respondents - over 70%. In relation to artists, 5 of the factors were noted by over 70% of respondents as being 'essential' to supporting quality:

- Having time to think and reflect as part of a project
- Feeling professionally valued within the project
- Having Adequate resources - financial and other - to support planning, delivery and evaluation were the highest, with 78% of PPN artists indicating these were essential factors;

These 3 factors were noted as essential by just over 78% of artists. Followed by:

- Realistic expectations of what can be achieved in the time and resource, almost 74%
- Having 'buy in' and trust between all partners/participants, almost 74%;

In terms of Partners' responses to these factors, while a number of factors were noted as essential and important by a high percentage, only 2 of the factors were highlighted as essential by more than 70%; both were in line with PPN artists. These were:

- Artists feeling professionally valued within the project, almost 83% (slightly higher than the PPN response at just over 78%)
- Having 'buy in' and trust between all artists/partners/participants almost 74% (the same as the PPN response)

While, as these selected factors highlight, there appears to be more of a shared view in terms of importance of the factors, there is greater variation in terms of views on the frequency of factors actually happening, with partners suggesting that the factors happen in practice more often than the artists suggest. For example, *Artists feeling professionally valued within the project*: a little under 35% of artists often felt professionally valued in projects, while almost 74% of partners indicated that this did happen often. In terms of *buy in and trust*, around 26% of artists indicated that this happened often, with just over 56% of partners suggesting that this happened often.

This can be seen and is more pronounced in the following selected factors:

- Adequate resources - financial and other - to support planning, delivery and evaluation is indicated as rarely happening by over 51% of artists and sometimes, by 43%, and often by only some 4%. While over 30% of partners indicated that having adequate resources happened often, over 56% sometimes and 13% rarely.
- Artists having time to think and reflect as part of a project, less than 9% of artists felt this happened often and almost 48% felt this rarely happened and just over 43% that this sometimes happened. 43.5% of partners suggested this happened often, 43.5% that this happened sometimes and just less than 9% felt this rarely happened
- Realistic expectations of what can be achieved in the time and resource, over 30% artists indicated this rarely happened, sometimes, just over 56% and often 13%. For partners just under 9% felt that this rarely happened, almost 48% sometimes and 43.5% felt this happened often
- Numbers of participants are realistic in terms of time, budget and aims, less than 9% of artists felt this happened often, and almost 22% rarely, while with partners just over 52% indicated this often happened, and only a little over 4% rarely

These variations over frequency of how often these factors appear to happen in practice occur in a number of factors and is where the potential dissonance appears to lie. It may be that the partners involved in this research do put these factors in place often and that the artists involved may be referring to experiences of working with different partners, hence the distinction; or perhaps there are different perceptions between artists and partners of how often these factors actually happen in practice. This introduces issues for discussion between artists and partners in that while there may be some consensus on the importance of the factors, there is a suggested disparity in sense of frequency of these factors happening in practice, and that for artists, factors that are seen as essential and important to support quality, may have potential to happen more frequently.

While the statistics and infographic are a useful tool for visualising some of the findings, they are one facet of the research. The narratives reinforce that contexts are more complicated; contexts and findings are not one-dimensional and factors such as time, trust and resource presented as distinct categories overlap and are more dynamic as can be seen in the following interview fragments about the meaning of resource, in this case, reinforcing the idea that time, trust, and buy in are integral to one another.

*"It's not always money, but willingness, everyone buying in to this idea and what it can be there's a small group I work with. I work in a room with nothing; we don't have money; only ourselves and there's some astonishing pieces of work - high end quality, no one sees it but me and the others; but the organisations support it, they believe in it." (Dean, 2012: 29)*

*“Often [...] you give to yourself last in the chain of things - bust your gut trying to come up with an idea, do all this work, the hard work the bit that can go wrong and you do that for free in your time from your bedroom in your pajamas - you do that rushed - that's the bit that'd be good to have time.” (Ibid: 37)*

The factors were shaped by practitioners' narratives; categorised and tested further with partners - organisations - that artists work with. They are practical, nuts-and-bolts like and many individuals and organisations will work on projects with these factors and more, already in place. Some may have less experience particularly about the planning and delivery of projects and may find these useful. The factors are not presented or intended to be fixed, or a singular set of criteria that could form part of a tick box, which is a noted and recognised tension but a means of sharing what others have said about the kinds of factors that they have found to be important to have in place a project. Suggestions and decisions about if and how these might be used and made useful in practice remains open. Perhaps for some these have no use; for others they may have potential as a tool for discussion and planning; a way of more easily entering into dialogue about what is meant by risk, openness, trust, resource or different expectations and understanding. That has to happen in ways that feel trusted; artists raised this during the interviews and partners also pointed to this in the survey; the need to ensure that something potentially of use and useful to projects avoids rigidity, and always has space to move, develop and be responsive.