



ArtWorks: A call to action

How we can collectively strengthen practice in participatory settings

March 2015

Opportunities for all

In the UK, we have a rich tradition – stretching back over 50 years – of artists working across health, education, criminal justice, youth and community settings. This work, variously described in terms such as community art, dialogical art, socially engaged art or participatory art, has become an integral part of life for all those involved in its delivery – artists, arts organisations, employers, commissioners, funders, further education colleges, higher education institutions, training and development providers – and for countless participants.

78% OF ARTISTS REGULARLY **DEDICATE TIME TO DEVELOPING THEIR PRACTICE**

Source: DHA 2014, 1083 artists sampled

The practice of ‘arts in participatory settings’ has evolved in recent years. Such work is a positive career choice: many artists see it as fundamental to their practice. But participatory work has not enjoyed the status it deserves. It has rarely been taught, either in formal or informal settings, or as part of artists’ ongoing professional development. And because of this lack of infrastructure, and the wide range of different art forms and practices encompassed, practitioners have not had the opportunity to express a collective voice.

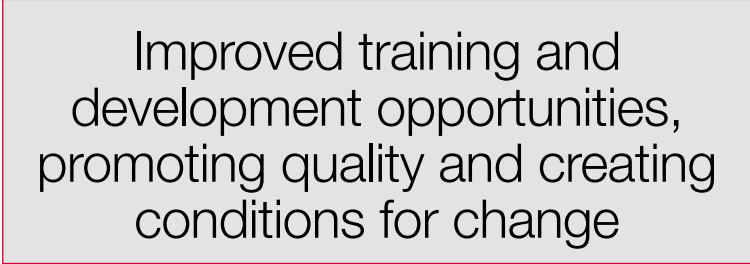
So, for all of the achievements over the decades and the extraordinary range of participatory settings in which artists now operate, we need to see some changes. Through the research carried out by ArtWorks, and the learning of others, we know there are opportunities to deliver more value for investments in the arts in participatory settings, gain new validation and respect for participatory work and, above all, deliver even better experiences for the people taking part.

These are not just opportunities for artists and arts organisations. They are opportunities for everyone involved – commissioners and employers of artists, the higher education institutions and further education colleges that provide initial training of artists, providers of ongoing training and development, and funders.


First we must acknowledge that truly valuing participatory work means valuing the artists who deliver it. Working together and building on this shared understanding, we can raise arts in participatory settings to new levels of confidence, recognition and ambition, developing a strong collective voice to match strong collective practice.



SUPPORT FOR ARTISTS IN PARTICIPATORY SETTINGS



Improved training and development opportunities, promoting quality and creating conditions for change



A more secure and confident sector, with a stronger collective voice



Better experiences for participants

The ArtWorks programme: what we've learned

Over the past four years, *ArtWorks: Developing Practice in Participatory Settings* has been working with groups of organisations around the UK to explore new ways of operating so that the practice of arts in participatory settings can be developed and the sector strengthened. It was set up by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, which has been funding participatory work in the arts for more than 25 years.



The findings from ArtWorks are presented in full in *ArtWorks: Reflections on developing practice in participatory settings*, drawing on evidence from action research and evaluation undertaken during the initiative, and wider commissioned research. Within the report our learning – along with a series of recommendations – is grouped into three main areas:

Training and development

Artists engaged in participatory work are expected to deliver results in a rapidly increasing range of settings with little or no training support. There are too few dedicated courses, or course modules, to prepare artists for work in participatory settings. We found that only half of higher education institutions offering arts courses in the UK supported emerging artists to work in participatory settings. Many do not meet the needs of artists or their employers – either because of the course content or because of the way in which courses are delivered. There are also major gaps in training and development opportunities at different stages of artists' working lives and a lack of any clear career paths for them.

We have learned that artists want a mix of informal and formal, taught and self-taught learning opportunities, which are reflective, situated in practice, involve artists from across art forms and career stages, and which give them opportunities to share learning with others.

Promoting quality

We all have our own ideas about what constitutes a quality product, a quality production, a quality experience. It is perhaps unsurprising then, that we found there to be a lack of a shared sense of what 'quality' really means across arts in participatory settings.

It causes misunderstandings between people working on the same project and, even more fundamentally, makes it difficult for anyone to measure the success of the work in which they have all invested.

Above all, it contributes to the widespread perception that arts in participatory settings is somehow a 'second class' activity. This image problem is a major barrier to realising greater benefits for all involved and elevating arts in participatory settings to new levels of confidence, ambition and recognition. Artists invest a lot of time and commitment into their projects. They do not deserve to see their work undervalued and misrepresented.

We have no straightforward solution to this lack of consistency and understanding. Instead, our recommendations are a considered attempt at creating quality standards and frameworks. We have developed a holistic framework for quality that places the responsibility on all partners to create the conditions for quality to be achieved, and for continuous quality improvement to be embedded.

Conditions for change

The changes we are seeking cannot happen overnight. Change can only happen when the conditions are right. For change to be lasting, it takes time and commitment from everyone involved, and a recognition that systems also need to change.

In order to improve training and development opportunities for artists and promote quality, we will need to create new mechanisms to stimulate collaboration between us all.

We need to work in new ways to support a collective voice and represent the common interests of stakeholders. We need to connect isolated artists – many of them freelancers – with new networks. We need to establish cross-sector partnership working and dialogue to generate shared solutions and exchange of knowledge amongst all stakeholders. And we need to do all of this against a backdrop of changing policy agendas and constrained resources.

Without this strategic approach, the practice of arts in participatory settings will continue to be undervalued and fragmented.

Recommendations

We believe that the following actions must be taken if we are to see the changes our sector needs. Some of our recommendations are aimed at particular groups within the participatory arts 'system'. Others apply to us all.

Training and development

1. Employers and training providers (including further education colleges and higher education institutions) should work together to provide development routes for artists at all stages of their careers. These should support a lifelong learning continuum encompassing formal, informal, self-led and taught provision.
2. Funders should encourage and support the inclusion of paid continuing professional development in projects they support. Opportunities for continuing professional development for artists should be included in all project planning and design.
3. Employers and commissioners should share responsibility for providing continuing professional development and training opportunities for artists, including freelancers, working in participatory settings.
4. All parties providing training and development opportunities (employers and commissioners, as well as further education colleges and higher education institutions) should tailor provision to suit the way artists prefer to learn. The learning approaches we have developed through ArtWorks can be adopted more widely across the sector.
5. Everyone should respond to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's regular consultations on relevant subject benchmark statements to ensure the inclusion of participatory arts. This will encourage the inclusion of participatory arts within higher education course design.
6. Further and higher education providers should ensure that initial training courses support and prepare artists for a successful working life in participatory settings.
7. Everyone should play a part by collaborating with other players in the system to resource, design and deliver appropriate career development opportunities. This is a shared responsibility across the sector.

Promoting quality

8. Everyone involved in a participatory arts project should consider quality:
 - for every stage of planning, delivery and evaluation
 - in every aspect of the work, including processes, outputs, outcomes etc.
 - across all personnel

Good planning must be based on a shared understanding of what quality means within the particular context of a project.

9. Artists and arts organisations delivering work in participatory settings should strive for continuous quality improvement through regular review, reflection and revision.
10. We must all help create the right conditions in which high quality work in participatory settings can take place. ArtWorks has developed a holistic quality framework that can be implemented by artists, employers, commissioners and funders, working in collaboration.

11. Employers and artists should adopt common standards for work in participatory settings. Numerous examples exist, such as the ArtWorks code of practice principles, codes of practice from arts umbrella organisations, and the National Occupational Standards. Adoption of a code of practice is a powerful statement of commitment to quality in participatory work.

12. Artists and employers should work together to demonstrate how they adhere to standards or codes of practice, and build quality factors into project design.

Conditions for change

13. We must all help develop ways of working together locally, nationally and across sectors and art forms, to share and learn from one another's experience of participatory practice. By having a collective voice we will better represent the interests of everyone working in this field.

Everyone has a role to play. By working together, we can improve continuing professional development and training opportunities for artists; promote quality and shared values across the spectrum of the practice; and create the conditions within which change can continue to take place.

About Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Paul Hamlyn (1926–2001) was a publisher, businessman and philanthropist who was concerned about social injustice and disadvantage – particularly as it affected children and young people, and those ‘outsiders’ seeking to integrate into British society. In 1987, he set up the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for general charitable purposes and, on his death, he bequeathed the majority of his estate to the Foundation, making it one of the UK’s largest independent grant-making organisations.

The mission of the Foundation is to maximise opportunities for individuals to realise their potential and to experience and enjoy a better quality of life.

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Art Works

Developing Practice in Participatory Settings

About ArtWorks

ArtWorks: Developing Practice in Participatory Settings is a Paul Hamlyn Foundation initiative which has received funding and support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Creativity Culture & Education (supported by Arts Council England) and the Cultural Leadership Programme.

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