

Arts Council of Wales Quality Framework Research

1. Introduction and Context

This paper has been commissioned by Arts Council Wales to sit alongside a series of meetings that is seeking to create a shared understanding of what quality means in participatory settings. The brief for the paper was to explore current research around quality and to look particularly at the existing frameworks for participatory arts. This research will shape the next meeting that is due to take place in December 2014.

However, I must be clear at the outset that this paper has only scratched the surface of the available research and writing on quality and how to define it in participatory arts. I have taken two recent pieces of research as my guiding lights in producing this paper: Mary Schwarz's Working Paper 8 for the PHF ArtWorks Special Initiative (Schwarz 2014), which pulls together the research from the five pathfinders involved in the Paul Hamlyn Special Initiative, ArtWorks: Developing Practice in Participatory Settings; and the recent research paper written by Rachel Blanche (Blanche 2014) for Creative Scotland which is extremely impressive in the depth and breadth of work that it pulls together.

The concept of a quality framework and quality assessment has the potential to pull in influences from a wide range of sectors and organisations, and the challenge of all studies is to find the work that has a meaningful relationship to the context of participatory arts. There are also many existing reports and evaluations within the participatory arts sector that have already explored this issue.

In writing this particular paper, I seek to outline the key debates and point readers to the key texts in the debate. I also seek to add a Welsh perspective to the research already done, look at what exists around quality in the Welsh context, and correlate it with noted the frameworks and reports that are influencing the UK debate.

2. Definitions of Participatory Arts

Any possibility of creating a quality framework assumes that there is a clear view of what is understood by arts in participatory settings. This paper does not aim to set strict boundaries on this work, as it is clear that the sector is extremely wide-ranging in what it delivers. However, it is useful to point to certain pieces of research that are expanding thinking around the issue.

Toby Lowe's work for Helix Arts (Lowe 2011) sets out a continuum of practice that draws on the debate between Professor Grant Kestler and Claire Bishop, two academics from the visual arts world who have been engaged in ongoing debate around socially engaged art. This continuum explores the different types of agency and authorship of the participants and artists involved in projects, and makes a core assumption that an artistic process is being made.

It is also worth noting the James Irvine Foundation Report *Getting in on the Act* (Brown 2011), which lays out a spectrum of audience involvement which moves from the receptive to the participatory and explores the participant's level of creative control.

Blanche (2014 p.35) brings both of these pieces of work together and creates a spectrum that places arts in participatory settings firmly in the co-creation / co-authored / participant as artist end of the scale.

3. How do we understand quality?

There has been much debate and research around quality in participatory settings in the last five years that lay out useful explorations of different ideas of 'quality' that are extremely instructive and present a good basis from any discussion to begin.

Starting again with my two touchstone studies, In Chapter three of her study Blanche (2014) looks closely at definitions of quality as a concept and draw on the work of the British Chartered Quality Institute. Blanche's research leads her to advise that a quality outcome is a shared responsibility (2014 p.47), does not happen accidentally, and must be planned in advance and managed through delivery. She sums up as follows (Blanche 2014 p.47)

This strengthens the rationale for the focus to be on providing conditions for quality to occur, and recognising where responsibility can reasonably be placed.

She further suggests a move away from quality control or assurance towards quality management and continuous quality improvement (Blanche 2014 p.48-49). She also suggests that the term quality is reductive, and we should instead focus on qualities, reflecting the fact that many different factors exist (Blanche 2014 p.50). Finally she leads the reader to a considerations of principles as follows (Blanche 2014 p.49):

It is recognised that any assessment of quality must stem from a set of overarching aims or principles for the work. Defined principles are considered essential to establish a common understanding of what is desired before being able to judge whether quality has been achieved.

Schwarz (2014) overviews the breadth of research that has been done across the ArtWorks Special Initiative and concludes that (Schwarz 2014 p.38)

as a dialogic practice, everyone involved shares an articulation of the intention and quality factors of work; as a situated practice, those factors are context specific and sensitive; and as a reflexive practice, everyone undertakes 'reflection in action' to inform, evaluate and improve the quality of work.

Schwarz also advocates the development of continuous quality improvement – "asking the right questions, in the right way, at the right time, of the right people in order to understand, reflect on and improve quality work." (Schwarz 2014 p.39)

4. Key Quality Issues for Arts in Participatory Settings

So the search for quality takes us towards the creation of a set of principles or a framework for discussion that can help us towards a shared understanding. But the sector itself is extremely diverse and encompasses a wide range of practice and context. So whose values and agenda do we work to when considering the quality of the work? What are the key issues that we need to consider when moving towards a framework for quality?

Matarasso says an arts programme "cannot be judged good (or bad), unless the concept of 'good' is defined. Good for what? Good for whom? Good in comparison with what?" (Matarasso 2013 p.4) Useful research has been done that takes us closer to our goal.

ArtWorks Scotland quality research (Dean 2013) has explored quality factors from the perspective of artists and partners. Their work uncovers a gap in understanding between the two stakeholders

when it comes to supporting the artist to reflect and develop through the project. Partners and artists both see this as important, but artists report that it happens rarely, and this finding is backed by the DHA ArtWorks Evaluation Survey of Artists (dha 2014) which undertook a much larger survey of artists across the UK.

This is an important issue, as reflection leads to learning, and this must be a key part of any continuous quality improvement model. This need for self-assessment and shared learning is something that also comes through in both the ACW Strive to Excel publication (2009) and also the recent Welsh Assembly Government Arts in Education Review (2013). It is clear that this is an area that needs more strategic attention, and one of the key publications to come out of the ArtWorks Special Initiative has focused on Learning Approaches. In the introduction Burns says (2014 p.14): “Artists, employers, training providers and funders all share a wish to ensure the best quality possible in the practice. One way to achieve this is through investment in continuing professional development.”

The ArtWorks Special Initiative has undertaken wide consultation with artists across the pathfinders, culminating in the dha Survey of Artists (dha 2014). The survey found that artist had a strong commitment to training and development, often paying for it themselves, but formal practice models were less likely to be used by artists. The Survey (2014, p.46) concludes:

The majority of artists say that they feel they know from experience what is required of them, and don't use codes of practice and standards. Respondents says that they would be more likely to use codes of practice and standards if employers / commissioners recognised and required them.

Matarasso (2013) considers quality as a process and looks at five stages: conception, contracting, working, creation, and completion. He works through his ideas by focusing on the Helix Arts project *Creative Progression* and questioning their work in each stage. His approach to this exploration leads naturally to the idea that a set of questions that leads to self- assessment and reflection at every stage would be a useful tool, and also that the answers to these questions will vary depending on the project and the context. He concludes (Matarasso 2013 p.12)

What matters then is the quality of self-awareness and critical reflection artists bring to their work: that is central to all truly honest creative practice. But when they work with others, particularly in community-based or participatory contexts, there is a further challenge of ensuring that the critical reflection, and the definition of success, is opened to all participants.

Another study that points us to a key issue is *The Qualities of Quality* (Seidel et al. 2010). In his work on decision makers, Seidel identifies three groups of decision makers: those in the room, those just outside the room, and those furthest from the room. This work is a key contributor to Blanche's conclusion that there is a shared responsibility for quality, as it can be influenced from outside of the room as well as inside. Commissioners, funders, employers, project managers and administrators all contribute to ensuring quality through setting budgets, booking spaces, creating contracts, scheduling sessions, etc. Blanche (2014) extends this concept further and suggests five key lenses on quality: artist, participant, partner, setting and facilities.

Jackson (2014) also picks up the way different stakeholders feed into ensuring quality in her evaluation of the ArtWorks Cymru programme. She conceptualises how the commissioner, the artist and the participant feed into creating a quality project through their “resources, expectations, perceptions, beliefs, personality and constraints” (Jackson 2014). She points out that little research

has been done into the participants' understanding of quality, although the small study undertaken by ArtWorks Cymru and ArtWorks London (Sellers 2013) did begin to look at how participant quality factors correlate with the ArtWorks Scotland Quality Factors (Dean 2013). There is clearly more to do in this area, as the participant experience is an extremely important part of the quality discussion, and a focus on it should have a place in any framework developed.

5. Existing Frameworks across the UK

There are number of existing frameworks that have been developed across the UK, and I have looked at a selection of the most current and influential ones as part of this report (see appendix 1). In comparing them together (see appendix 2), I find myself coming to the same conclusion as Blanche (2014) does – that there is general consensus. Each framework articulates their indicators slightly differently depending on the context of the work, but many of them can be grouped under broader headings.

In her extensive study, Blanche (2014) has synthesised key pieces of research to suggest a set of overarching conditions and principles for ensuring quality in participatory arts (see appendix 3). She goes on to explore how a quality framework for Scotland might work and what support mechanisms would need to be in place to make it deliverable. She proposes a model which encompasses all influences on the qualities of the work produced and captures the idea of shared responsibility for quality with a number of key tools supporting a continuous dialogue (see appendix 4). This work would be a valuable place to start for the development of a quality framework for Wales, and it would be advisable to keep close contact with developments in Scotland.

6. Other influences in Wales

It is useful at this point to look wider than the arts and consider some of the other quality tools in the public sector in Wales that have been developed to assure or structure quality delivery.

Estyn have a strong set of resources based around school inspection. The Common Inspection Framework (Estyn 2010) lays out the following key quality indicators:

Outcomes	standards & wellbeing
Provision	experiences, environment and teaching
Leadership	resources, strategy, quality & partnership working

They also put a strong focus on self-evaluation when it comes to delivering quality. A suite of Case Studies sit on the Estyn website to help inform what best practice looks like, and each educational setting is accompanied by guidance around how inspection works.

The Framework for Post 16 Learning in Wales (DCELLS 2009) also puts a strong emphasis on self-assessment and the creation of a community of practice which will aid benchmarking, share good practice and enable peer to peer mentoring. In terms of setting 'indicators' for best practice, it commits to a small number of core indicators – learning outcomes, responsiveness, leadership & management - aiming to make the framework flexible and user friendly, to reflect the diversity of provision, and deliver outcomes for learners and employers.

The Social Worker (Care Council Wales 2009) offers practice guidance to social workers. At its core is The Code of Practice for Social Care Workers, and it is assumed that workers are registered for practice. The guidance goes into great detail around the different elements that social work entails

and what the expectations are in terms of contexts, the work itself, the client and the worker themselves. It pins down a person-centred practice which is bound inextricably into the care system of the state. Many of the guidance points that it outlines could also apply to arts in participatory settings, for instance, confidentiality, planning, reflection, learning culture.

In terms of Youth Work, there are several tools that aim to crystallise what quality looks like in this context. Youth Work in Wales Principles and Purposes (Youth Work Wales 2013) talks about the purposes of the work, the behaviours that are appropriate, and sets out a series of principles which it distils into five pillars of youth work: educative, participative, expressive, inclusive and empowering. The Youth Service Quality Mark (ETS Cymru 2013) aims to spur organisations to work towards attaining it, and assesses their work through a series of quality indicators, which include content, planning, workforce development, participant experience and quality assurance. The National Children and Young People's Participation Standards for Wales (Children in Wales 2014) is unusual in that sets its standards out from the participant's view point, encouraging children and young people to think about their rights and what should happen when they participate.

From an arts participation perspective in Wales, there is much less in the way of formal guidance around what quality looks like. What does exist is personal reflective work, and guidance and evaluations related to specific projects.

The Reach the Heights Evaluation (Arad Research 2013) looks at what worked across the range of projects within the programme, and its findings focus on the participant experience and partnership building. Welsh National Opera's project booklet, South Wales Valleys and Cardiff Bay: 2007 – 2010 (WNO 2010) sets out a series of learning outcomes, and these also focus on the participant experience and partnership building. There is a mention of high quality product, but no real reflection on how quality was achieved. How Red is Red (Engage 2010) is a guide to good practice in visual arts work with Foundation Phase groups. While the guide does not formally create a framework, it covers participant experience, ideas for process, resources and materials, artist practice, partnership working and project management issues.

There have also been a number of reports and research studies commissioned by Arts Council of Wales that are relevant to this report. Two think documents that explored community arts were commissioned in 2009 as part of the last investment review. David Adamson (ACW 2009) argued that community arts was contextual and that participant experience was a key part of the work. He also suggested that the intrinsic and instrumental drivers for community arts were both important parts of the story and should always be considered together. Elen ap Robert (ACW 2009) explored community arts through her experience at Galeri Caernarfon, and touched on the balance of process and product, the need to consider context, and to give ownership. For ap Robert, quality was achieved by being realistic, giving sufficient time and working with the highest calibre of tutors and artists.

7. A Way Forward for Arts in Participatory Settings in Wales

Exploring quality for arts in participatory settings in Wales with both key sector stakeholders and the funding body is an exciting process. The outcome of this process could lead to a framework for ensuring quality that will benefit everyone involved. It will provide artists and partners with a way to articulate the qualities of their work, and will lead to a more informed discussion at the point of assessment from funders.

It's clear from this brief overview of research and studies that there is a sound basis on which this work can be developed. This report is designed help to focus the discussions proposed on 10th

December, and give attendees a view on where Wales sits with regard to the wider UK quality debate.

What we need in Wales is a process that allows us to ask the right questions and have the right conversations across the different sectors where the work is made and between the different stakeholders who hold the practice. It needs to be nuanced and flexible enough to work across a range of different practices and contexts, but also to be useful and user friendly. Schwarz (2014) identifies a huge range of resources and guidance from which quality approaches can be created, and suggests the way forward would be to “encourage and support artists and arts organisations to action those approaches within the fundamental framework of continuous quality improvement.”

Rhian Hutchings, November 2014

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Appendix 2 – Conditions and Principles (Blanche 2014)

Conditions for Quality

- Sufficient resources, including fit for purpose environment
- Sufficient time, for planning, building relationships and implementing project
- Designed and resourced for participants’ needs and support
- Opportunities to reflect, adapt, evaluate
- Realistic aims
- Understanding of artist and partner roles
- Buy-in and Trust by all parties
- Clear and realistic expectations
- Democratic decision-making (artist-partner-participant)

Figure 9: Summary Quality Principles

NFER Principles adopted by ACE <i>... in context of children, young people and arts education</i>	Common quality principles synthesised through this research <i>... in context of participatory arts</i>
1. Striving for Excellence	1. Artistic distinction and professionalism
2. Emphasising authenticity	2. Authenticity and social relevance
3. Being inspiring and engaging	3. Inspiring, engaging
4. Ensuring a positive child-centred experience	4. Participant-centred
5. Actively involving children and young people	5. Purposeful, active and hands-on
6. Providing a sense of personal progression	6. Progression for participants
7. Developing a sense of ownership and belonging	7. Participant ownership
	8. Suitably situated and resourced
	9. Properly planned, evaluated and safe
Lord et al (2012); ACE (undated)	

