

### Key discussion points in the participants' consultation

15 December 2015, Cardiff

#### Courses

All participants spoke very positively about all three courses. They were impressed by the opportunities that the course had afforded them and felt the courses offered a very valuable opportunity to extend skills that were essential to gaining a broader range of work in the sector. They felt strongly that the courses delivered what they promised and were particularly complementary about the range of high quality guest artists who facilitated on the courses. They liked the different opportunities that the courses provided (eg more of a focus on Shakespeare on one, the opportunity to learn supporting entrepreneurial skills on another). Three of the six participants specifically credited the courses with enabling them to secure employment in the sector and the other three participants all said that the courses had assisted them to find employment in new fields.

All participants agreed that they valued the skill sets that the courses enabled them to develop but had not valued these particular range of skills either when they were at university or immediately on graduation. They all said it had taken them some time to realise that the skills offered by the courses were invaluable in relation to community work and were very glad that they had been able to find courses to meet these needs. However they also said that they felt offering the course to people who had not been on a degree programme was also very important as many of the younger people who had been volunteers (eg on MUTM programme) were now coming to a point where they would benefit from facilitator training and could embark on this without having taken part in Higher Education.

#### Course participants

A range of comments were provided about participants who took part in courses. Three points were particularly notable:

1. All participants liked having people from a range of age groups on the course. They particularly valued having older people on the courses – even if they had no prior experience of the arts –because they brought invaluable life-experience to the programmes.
2. There were mixed feelings about the process of selection for courses. There was a feeling that in some cases course participants were ‘the usual suspects’ – people who they knew from other programmes or courses. They commented that this made the networking opportunities offered by the courses rather limited (as they were talking to people they already knew). The main networking benefit they identified and found invaluable was the opportunity to meet and interact with the guest tutors (particularly those provided by Fio).
3. Some participants suggested that on courses where course participants were attending the course for different reasons (ie as volunteer, support workers or trainee facilitator) greater clarity about aims, outcomes and course content would benefit everyone involved (course participants and tutors alike) as there was perceived to be

too little differentiation within the course, with the results that some participants were very challenged while others were not challenged enough.

4. In a few rare instances participants suggested that tutors or course organisers should have been more pro-active in managing some participants' behaviour as there was a tendency for a few participants to dominate proceedings which had a negative effect on other learners.

## **Cost**

All participants commented on the fact that the courses are offered free of charge. Three of the six participants said they would not have been able to afford to pay for the course if it had not been free. One participant said they would have paid for the course because of the high quality of facilitators and the opportunity to network with members of the sector that they would not otherwise have had the chance to interact with. Participants discussed the perceived value of the course to some participants and generally agreed that some people under-valued the course because it was free. They wondered whether a minimal charge (such as the £10 per week charge that the National Theatre of Wales (NTW) are currently charging for a course) would deter people who would not commit to a free course, but all agreed that there was a risk that this might deter some people from signing up to it.

## **Tutors**

It was noted that the need to secure good course tutors was very important and that whilst they could be an enormous asset, they could also detract from the overall quality. Two examples were given when tutors on different courses had struggled to provide adequate support to course participants. This had caused dissatisfaction and concern amongst course participants. It was noted that both course providers had recognised the problem and addressed it, but it was noted that choice of tutors was crucial to the success of the courses.

## **Marketing**

Those taking part in the consultation commented about marketing for the courses. They agreed that the individuals who took part in courses were an under-used asset. They thought that the majority of people attending courses heard about them as a result of word of mouth. They placed a very low value on flyers. They also suggested that course providers might wish to reconsider the way they described the courses in marketing materials. There was a suggestion that current marketing implied that would-be course participants needed some experience or interest in the theatre or youth work and that this might put off people from taking part in a course that would provide them with useful, transferable life skills which they might then choose to apply in to a theatre / drama context.

## **One course or more?**

Participants thought that the three courses shared common values but were adamant that they did not want the three courses to merge in to one as they all felt strongly that each course had very different things to offer – despite their shared commonality. They also liked having the opportunity to do one course, then move on to another when they had the personal time to engage in more learning. They suggested that if the courses wanted to develop a structure that enabled them to work more closely they might consider offering

different 'units' where participants could select a specific area of expertise that they wanted to develop. They noted that the three organisations work very closely together already with a cross-over of tutors between courses already occurring.

### **Qualifications**

Participants had mixed views about attaching a qualification to any of the courses. One of the six participants said that if she had thought there was a qualification attached to the course it would have put her off participating in it as she would have been concerned about the process of assessment she would have to go through. Other participants shared the view that some of the 'hard-to-reach' participants might also be put off a course that led to a qualification because it might be perceived to be 'too much like school'. However, these conversations revealed the participants' clear suppositions about the nature of assessment related to qualifications (ie a written test), which is not necessarily the method of assessment that course providers or qualification awarding bodies might want to adopt.

The general consensus was that qualifications were useful because they:

- Provided evidence of achievement (in this case in the field of facilitation) which they felt was valuable in terms of drawing their skills to the attention of potential employers
- Provided the qualification holder with external acknowledgement of their own abilities, thereby reinforcing their levels of self-confidence
- Could provide more detail about the content of the course to potential employers

All participants attending the consultation had a first degree. Five of the six participants said that they would have liked to have a qualification linked to the course. When asked about potential qualification levels participants were again uncertain about what qualification level might be appropriate in relation to the courses and found it difficult to dissociate the concept of qualification level with the amount of time spent working towards the qualification. One participant said that they would not be interested in a course or qualification that was lower than Level 4 and suggested that Level 4 or 5 might be appropriate. All participants agreed that ideally they'd like to see a variety of qualification levels available as a result of participating on the course so that the qualification level could be tailored to the level of participation (ie volunteer, trainee facilitator etc), as this might provide some people with their first opportunity to gain a qualification.

All participants agreed that if any qualification was offered it was essential for it to be one that was nationally recognised, and not one issued by the course providers themselves. They felt strongly that all the course providers had an excellent reputation within Wales but one of the primary reasons for wanting to have a qualification was to evidence their skills and knowledge beyond the immediate geographical location. They wanted a qualification that would be transferable to different geographical contexts within the theatre sector.

### **Course accreditation**

Participants were equally split on issues relating to course accreditation. Some participants felt that accreditation should be awarded by a sector-specific organisation – one that could speak with authority about the value of the course to the profession (the example given was the National Theatre of Wales). Other participants felt that accreditation should be awarded

by an organisation that was recognised for its authority in relation to learning (ie a university). All participants acknowledged that there were pros and cons for accreditation from either of these routes.

All participants stated that their ideal would be to have an accredited course that led to a nationally recognised qualification that was recognised and valued by the industry.