



ArtWorks
Cymru

QUALITY PRINCIPLES CASE STUDY

Head4Arts: Broad Street Shopping Project

Kate Strudwick tells us about partnership working to deliver the Broad Street Shopping project in Blaenavon.

About the project

The project explored how the Quality Principles could be integrated into “inherited projects” that had been devised to other agendas. This project created an interactive touring exhibition involving older members of the Blaenavon community in discovering the history of Broad Street, Blaenavon’s commercial centre.

The project was a partnership between Head4Arts, Torfaen CBC (Blaenavon Town Centre Heritage Programme), Natasha James (Digital artist) and Penny Turnbull (Textile Artist).

How did you use the Quality Principles?

The Quality Principles provided us with a clear model of the elements that should be taken into consideration in the successful planning and delivery of a project and in providing the most positive experiences for all the participants, partners and artists involved. We used the Quality Principles to help to get the project “back on track”, so that we made the most of this opportunity to work in Blaenavon and maximise the impact and legacy of the work.

When we took on the commission, there was a focus on “just getting the job done”, and we used the Quality Principles to support our strategy of slowing the process down so we could make space for participant involvement in the decision-making, so that it became more aligned with “community arts” rather than simply “arts in the community”. We are also aware that commissions for arts projects do not always involve participatory arts experts and we used the Quality Principles resources to build these skills and confidence in our Heritage Programme partners.

Who was involved?

The Head4Arts artistic team – a combination of staff members, a volunteer and the two artists involved in the project. For the staff team it was to remind ourselves of the key elements of the Quality Principles. We often work by intuition, without more formal

consideration of the processes involved. The Quality Principles resources are a useful “checklist” that highlights areas that may not be as strong or as thought-out as they should be. It also gave us the possibility of looking at a snapshot of “where we are now” when we accepted the commission and “where we would like to be”, helping us focus on the areas that needed more attention. In this case, the biggest deficit was in the “People” section because the project plan had been put together without participant involvement. This helped inform the way we approached the project delivery, so that the project became more participant focused and led.

The Project Partners – the Quality Principles were introduced to the Heritage Programme’s Community Projects Officer at the first meeting. One of the first questions we were asked was “What will the exhibition look like?”. Our reluctance to answer this was supported by the Quality Principles, as it helped us explain why we didn’t want to determine this without the input of the participants involved in creating the work. The Quality Principles resources helped us build trust with our partners because it showed there was a professional framework behind our thinking.

What did you learn?

Although, ideally, the Quality Principles should be factored in from the start, we learned that it is possible to use the Quality Principles as an aid to “fixing” a project that may have been hastily designed or without proper consideration of all the elements needed to give a project its best chance of success.

We also found it useful to use the resources to support our staff team and artists to have a better understanding of the elements that they often just do as a matter of course, without reflecting on why they might be important.

We learned that it was useful for us to have a clear way of explaining our processes to our partners – and provide them with a model that they could easily replicate in the future, helping them create better project plans from the outset.

We learned that our project partners appreciated the clarity of the resources and they were happy to embrace the principles. We believe that it also helped them to regard us as “professionals” and increased their ability to trust us.

Top tips for using the Quality Principles

When you are working with partners whose agenda is not always the same as yours, it is useful to have the Quality Principles as a guide as to how we would be measuring success. This provides a context for discussing different perspectives and finding the common ground - and this is likely to aid better collaborative practice.

Find out more

head4arts.org.uk