



ArtWorks  
Cymru

Summary of Key Findings: Insights from practitioners in Wales on  
the value and impact of the *ArtWorks Cymru Quality Principles*  
for professional practice and development

March 2021

We'd like to thank all of the practitioners across Wales who gave their time and effort to complete this survey and for providing such detailed and considered responses.



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## About this Report

The material presented in this paper was gathered during June-August 2020 via an online survey of practitioners in Wales using the *ArtWorks Cymru Quality Principles toolkit and framework*. A total of 18 practitioners returned detailed survey responses, representing a range of arts organisations in Wales as well as professional and student freelance practices (listed at the end of this report). The survey sought to capture details of how practitioners have applied the quality approach at the heart of the toolkit, and where and how they see value in it for their practice.

The survey in Wales was conducted as part of a larger study including Scotland and Portugal where practitioners in participatory arts have adopted a quality approach similar to the *Quality Principles* in Wales. For a full report detailing findings across all three countries, please see: *A Holistic Approach for Quality In Participatory Arts: Impacts On Practice Experienced By Artists In Scotland, Wales And Portugal, QMU Working Paper 2020/3*, published in December 2020 by Rachel Blanche.

The report you are about to read presents headline findings from the sector in Wales, with a special focus on the toolkit's value for and impact on:

- Organisational Practice
- Training and Development in the sector (including support for emerging artists)
- Community Engagement Work

## 1/ Whose experiences are we reporting?

Of the 18 respondents who provided the information reported here:

Half (nine) were reporting from organisations in the sector, including:

Arts Active Trust • Borough Theatre Abergavenny • Head4Arts  
Impelo • Literature Wales • Mess up the Mess Theatre Company  
Operasonic • Wales Millennium Centre

Five were employed in their own freelance practice (of whom three also lecture in participatory arts)

Three were studying at the time of the survey at Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD) and University of South Wales (USW).



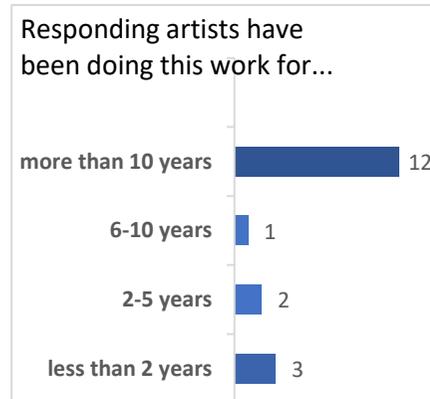
Between them the 18 respondents registered 65 overlapping ways of defining their own practice, the most prevalent being Participatory Practice, Creative Learning, and Socially Engaged Practice. Other terms noted by respondents include: Arts for Health Practitioner, Inclusive Music Educator, Music Therapist, Community Artist and Youth Artist.



This map charts the location of the survey respondents across Wales. Half (nine) of the respondents were in the Cardiff (CF) postcode area, with others in the Swansea (SA) and Newport areas (NP) as well as other parts of the country (LD, LL and SY postcodes).

The majority of the responding practitioners are highly experienced in participatory practice: two thirds have done this work for 10 years or more.

Findings are also reported from practitioners who are new to participatory work: 1 in 6 respondents have worked in the sector for less than 2 years.



The External partners that respondents work with include:



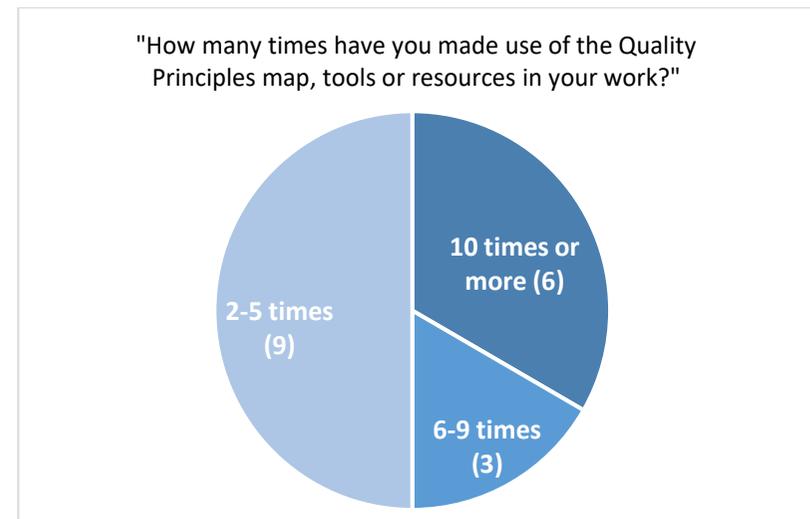
## 2/ Awareness and Usage of the Toolkit

Two-fifths (seven) of the responding practitioners had been introduced to the toolkit via a training session organised and delivered by ArtWorks Cymru and a further three had been party to the initial development of the framework and toolkit led by ArtWorks Cymru.

A further four respondents had the *Quality Principles* and tools introduced to them by a colleague or peer practitioner, and four started using it after being introduced through a university course.

Once aware of the toolkit people working in the sector have tended to use it multiple times

At the time of the survey, a third of the respondents reported having used the toolkit *more than ten times* in their practice with the remainder of all those surveyed having used it 2-9 times. Nobody had used it only once.



### 3/ Impacts on Organisational Practice

The tools have been used in a number of ways both internally and externally that respondents feel have enhanced their practice.

All of the responding practitioners have used the *Quality Principles* internally in their team or organisation, specifically:

- to help with Evaluation (16 out of 18 respondents)
- for discussions about Quality (15 out of 18)
- for project Planning and Design (15)
- for Reflection (14)

However not all of the respondents had used the *Quality Principles* externally at the time of the survey.

Almost three quarters of respondents have used the *Quality Principles* externally for collaboration or to guide discussion with:

- Project delivery Partners (9 out of 13 who had used them externally)
- Project Participants (6)
- Project Commissioners (3)

For seven respondents, using the *Quality Principles* has changed how they now engage with partners, and 8 practitioners said that the tools have helped them 'to explore and agree on the nature of a new collaboration'. They affirmed that it specifically 'creates a structure for discussing quality with project commissioners or funders' (7 respondents), and 'helps to get partners on the same page with shared vision and language' (9).

Eight respondents say that using the toolkit has changed how they now work with participants.

*It amplifies the participant voice in the planning phase.*

*Sometimes we are commissioned to deliver projects where plans have been developed previously before our involvement. We are now more committed to making an effort to try and ensure that participants have more say in the design of a project.*

Value is attributed to the tools for their role in consolidating internal organisational practices, establishing shared understanding between colleagues and agreeing desired quality standards.

Specifically, users highlight their use for:

- **Communicating within teams**

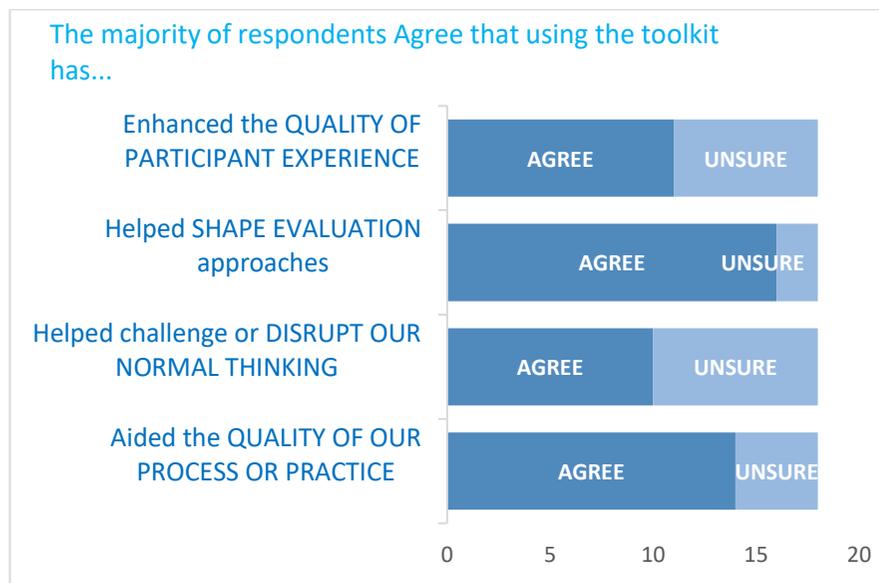
*The Quality Principles have been important in raising awareness amongst all staff of the requirements of good project planning, especially those who are not generally involved in project planning.*

- **Inducting new staff**

*[They are] positively used as a training resources for new staff and artists.*

One respondent highlighted an important opportunity for ArtWorks Cymru to train "whole organisations" in the use of the *Quality Principles* and tools, thus enabling "more results and impacts" through the principles becoming embedded more deeply within organisations. The respondent noted that a challenge in applying the quality principles is establishing "routine in using them". This is echoed by a second respondent: "[a challenge is] just remembering to use the tools, as it is new way of working".

Overall, all respondents report some form of impact on their practice from applying the *Quality Principles*, whether ‘early or initial impact’ (6 respondents), ‘noticeable and useful impact’ (11), or a ‘large and transforming impact’ (1).



Practitioners using the toolkit report that it has changed how they now evaluate the quality of their work (14 respondents); reflect internally (14) understand the quality of their work (13) and report externally on or advocate for their work (7). Fifteen respondents affirmed that it helps them to recognise where good practice exists and to celebrate it.

*The Quality Principles have been mainly used to highlight the importance of quality project planning and partnership working within the organisation, but also shared with all participatory artists we have worked with as a guide to best practice.*

Three quarters of the respondents have recommended the *Quality Principles* and resources to others that they work with, specifically:

- Project partners including non-arts partners (i.e. housing associations, community development teams)
- Colleagues and other arts organisations, locally and internationally
- New staff
- Artists starting out in participatory practice
- Volunteers

When asked how they think the *Quality Principles* and tools have worked well for them, respondents have highlighted their transferability, inclusivity and flexibility:

*I think the categories are very suitable for a range of creative projects and can be easily transferable. For this reason they worked really well for me. I found the worksheets great for planning. I think the principles represent inclusivity and critical thinking / planning which is very important in overall presentation and execution.*

*They are precise and comprehensive but not tick box prescriptive. They are open and promote reflection and conversation not conformity to a system or particular methodology of practice.*

## 4/ Value of the tools for sectoral training & development

Users of the *Quality Principles* toolkit have highlighted its value as a platform for consolidating good practice in the sector through a shared understanding of what represents quality in participatory arts. The common language and conceptualisation provided by the toolkit lie at the heart of this.

Many respondents see the toolkit as a very welcome platform for training new staff and developing artists at all stages of their careers.

The experienced respondents in the survey dataset reported benefits from the toolkit for their own reflection and for underpinning their own practice, but also as a resource for supporting emerging practitioners.

*It has been a great tool to signpost artists new to participatory practice towards, to help them plan projects successfully and reflect on their progress.*

*The principles help as a reminder (check list) to focus and plan all projects to the highest standard. They are extremely useful for new participatory artists to act as a template for successful project planning.*

*It gives a reassurance and context to creative practice that may seem challenging or not in line with traditional preconceptions about making creative work, particularly performance.*

*[It's had] a noticeable and useful impact within my own practice and as a tool for my students it offers a user-friendly and 'validated' approach to consider questions of quality. It is very applicable to practice and is 'sensible' and manageable.*

*It has reassured me that my practice is well-considered, participant-centred and responsive. This is really helpful when working independently on long-term initiatives.*

*[The Quality Principles are] a 'go to' tool and resource for any artist.*

Respondents valued feeling professionally equipped with endorsed tools, language and practical resources, especially when interacting with external or non-arts partners.

*I think it makes participatory practice more tangible and professional - we have a framework that we use to help shape our work. The more people that use it, the more recognised it will become.*

*I normally bring copies of the paperwork to the early meetings with new project partners. It helps set the context of what we are aiming to do.*

*The principles are fresh in my mind when being offered work, like a check list of things that need to be in place and questions to ask before starting.*

*I would say that as a result of teaching the principles to our students as part of professional Practice it has also professionalised my freelance practice, especially my planning for evaluation.*

Significantly, six respondents reported that having the *Quality Principles* and associated tools has 'helped them to feel empowered to address quality with partners, commissioners and funders' commenting:

*[A large and transforming impact has been having] a tangible framework to discuss quality with stakeholders with shared language. It enables me to advocate for the work more confidently and effectively.*

*It has emphasized and given importance to the amount of preparation and planning needed before putting a project in place (even if that project is just a couple of workshops). It has also given me the confidence to ask to be paid for prep time in my contracts.*

Respondents have also welcomed the opportunities provided by the *Quality Principles* tools for initiating sectoral dialogue on good practice:

*Training opportunities also provide a form for sector exchange and discussion and to learn about other practices and projects.*

*[As a] definition of quality, [it provides] a template for good practice in approaching and planning participatory work.*

*The process of inquiry that [the Principles] take you through makes discussing Quality as a priority. It is sufficiently flexible to accommodate a wide range of practices, disciplines and approaches but sufficiently focused to ensure key aspects of quality are diligently reflected upon.*

In terms of what additions practitioners would welcome to the ArtWorks Cymru quality resources, the responses centred around the continued provision of training for practitioners, and shared examples of good practice in using the toolkits and delivering participatory arts work.

The tools have been useful for practitioners in recalibrating practice during the Covid crisis.

The reflective model for designing work around defined quality principles has been noted by some practitioners during the Covid crisis to consider what quality looks and feels like under radically adjusted circumstances, demonstrating the value of the *Quality Principles* as a development tool for calibrating practice for any context.

*I am currently using [the toolkit] to generate questions around the translation of some of my freelance work onto Zoom. This is very useful as a framework around which to reflect on issues such as equality of access, how the medium challenges the practice etc with a focus on quality. This is on-going as so much is changing at the moment.*

## 5/ Specific findings from early career respondents

Survey responses were provided by five practitioners who may be considered early-career. Three had been practicing for 2 years or less (all studying at the time of the survey), and two were less than five years into their respective employed and self-employed practice.

All had used the toolkit multiple times for Discussions about Quality, for Project Planning and Design, for Reflection, or to help with Evaluation. They were less likely to have used the tools externally but where they had, they did so with Project Participants only.

The responses suggest that for early career practitioners, the tools help them to develop important practice insights into what makes a high quality participant experience, as well as providing a mechanism for actively engaging participants for planning and session design, and for evaluation.

Early career practitioners commented that:

*Planning for workshops is more thorough when using quality principles for guidance and for alternative points of view. [This] helps to better mould workshops to participants' needs.*

*I feel by using the quality principles I now have a more rounded approach to devising my workshops. I am planning the workshop more carefully. Through considering the workshop as a multi-faceted entity, I am ensuring my activity is suitable for a range of participants and will challenge and engage them. I have considered inclusivity more and am*

*now more reflective of my whole creative practice thanks to using the principles worksheets.*

*A greater understanding of all the principles and elements required for successful workshops has led to a more rounded approach to planning, ensuring that all the principles are considered in the process.*

*I feel the participants are part of the design now. I let them take the workshops into their own direction and have ownership over what they create.*

For those introduced to the tools through their professional learning at university, they report that the *Quality Principles* have “become a very important staple in our degree work.”

In the words of another student respondent, the toolkit fostered a more inclusive approach towards constructing a understanding of quality:

*I used the principles when planning primary school music workshops. For me, unlike previous things, I wasn't just thinking of one plan for a workshop and what personally I thought would be the best way forward. I was able to take this and then transform it into something better by critically assessing my ideas; considering what would make my workshop engaging and inclusive.*

This respondent ended by stating: “*I believe this was only truly made possible by using the principles*”.

All five of the early career practitioners reported that the toolkit had helped them to:

- Recognise where good practice exists and celebrate it
- Gather information for evaluation, and

- Identify and fix potential project glitches before they undermine quality for participants.

Four of the five agreed that using the toolkit has aided the quality of their process or practice.

*The principles definitely helped me to enhance the quality of what our participants experienced. This is because I used them to think carefully about the different roles both the workshop leaders and participants would have. I ensured that our activities were built up in stages by using the principles. I considered roles of our team using the framework so we were flexible and would take extra care to accommodate all.*

## 6/ Enhancements relating to Community Engagement

Ten of the freelance artists/organisations responding to the survey listed 'Community learning and development agencies' among the external partners they work with. The responses from this segment have been extracted from the dataset to explore ways in which having the training from ArtWorks Cymru and using the toolkit has specifically enhanced practice and engagement with communities.

Seven of the 10 respondents who work with community development agencies are more than 10 years into their career in participatory arts practice; the remaining three have been working for more than two years.

Nine of these experienced ten respondents had used the quality tools internally for discussions about quality and for evaluation purposes, and all ten had used the tools for reflective learning. Eight had also used the tools internally for project planning and design.

Of the ten, 60% had used the tools externally with project delivery Partners and 30% specifically with Commissioners. Four (40%) had used them with their participants. [These figures are significantly higher than in the full dataset, where the proportions are 50%, 17% and 33% respectively.]

The comments and observations from this group of practitioners belie the often complex nature of their partnership dynamics, with projects often involving multiple stakeholders, partners and delivery agencies.

In answer to the question 'What is different (if anything) in your planning or practice now as a result of applying this quality approach?' one respondent commented:

*Using the QPs with external partners and commissioners helps to map projects and makes sure everything gets discussed. It also helps to see the bigger picture of the project journey. I find quality to be a difficult thing to discuss but the QPs give a framework and language to have that discussion within.*

*I also used them to create a practice ethos with a group of practitioners who were delivering a large scale project together. We considered them before the project began and then used the ethos we had created to reflect & evaluate at the end. This was extremely useful. It meant we were all the same page and understood what quality looked like in the project we were all delivering.*

This illustrates that a benefit from the tools is facilitating joint planning and communication. Likewise, another respondent noted:

*Many of our partners are organisations that are nothing to do with the arts. I think the Quality Principles help them understand better what we do and what we could be doing. It also supports a context where we can nurture trust.*

9 out of the 10 agreed that using the toolkit has helped shape their evaluation approaches.

*The Quality Principles serve a useful purpose in checking / reflecting on project planning and evaluation. I do find myself folding them in to a Story of Change at the outset of a project. They are a way of keeping what's important in sight.*

*It has given a structured way to evaluate with regard to the quality of the work. Where previously we might have only discussed what went well and less well - with regards to the participants and the project itself.*

*We used the quality principles not only to find the highlights and improvements to the projects but able to prove the elements of quality in the work and where to take it next. We were able to discuss the benefit of*

*doing this project with other youth organisations in the future and would be able to share the quality process and result of the project to them clearly.*

8 out of the 10 agreed that using the toolkit has aided the quality of their process or practice

*[What is different as a result of applying this quality approach is a] greater level of engagement with partners and delivery teams at the planning stage of a project. [And] greater reflection on the work with participants as it is in process.*

6 of the 10 recognised that it has enhanced the quality of what the participants they are working with experience (with the remaining four unsure).

When asked 'has applying the Quality Principles increased the number of different voices involved in the design and delivery of your projects?' half of this segment answered Yes. (This proportion is marginally higher than in the full dataset, where 8 out of 18 answered Yes). The additional stakeholder voices reported by this segment are those of partners and participants.

*[We now have a] Stronger voice from the participants. Sometimes we are commissioned to deliver projects where plans have been developed previously before our involvement. We are now more committed to making an effort to try and ensure that participants have more say in the design of a project - even where we are adding this retrospectively. Redressing an initial imbalance. Previously we would have just delivered a "good project" and involved participants in the decisions going forward.*

4 of the 10 agreed that using the toolkit has deepened their working relationships with their project partners.

*Co-design and co-production with participants and partners has been central to how we work now for a number of years, however, the principles are a great resource for managing expectations and prompting discussions on shared values.*

*It has helped us guide project partners into a more participant-focussed approach and enabled us to change plans for the better. Having the resources assist amicable discussion and helps them understand that we are striving to make it the best possible experience for all.*

*It's so easy to slip into doing the same way as we always / usually do them, particularly when working with regular partners. It keeps us on our toes.*

6 of the 10 felt that using the toolkit has had a noticeable and useful impact on their work so far (with the remaining four recognising some early or initial impact).

Nine of the 10 have recommended the toolkit to others.

Together these findings suggest that the value and benefits of the *Quality Principles* tools have been particularly significant within community engagement settings.

## 7/ Next steps from ArtWorks Cymru

Based on the findings in this report and ongoing conversations with the participatory arts sector in Wales, ArtWorks Cymru will work towards the following actions:

- Developing the tools and resources available to support those using the Quality Principles and those interested in learning more. This includes: creating case studies featuring organisations who have experience of using the Quality Principles; producing a visual introduction to using the Quality Principles; and improving the site map of the ArtWorks Cymru website to make it easier to find the information and guidance you need.
- Promoting the Quality Principles further with partners across Wales, in particular with groups, organisations and artists who are new to delivering participatory arts activity.
- Continuing to bring together partners across the sector to share learning and best practice. The ArtWorks Cymru partnership is recognised as a valuable network for its members: meetings and training days provide a forum for organisations and artists to get together and discuss sector developments, share experiences from recent practice and support and develop their work.
- Using the report's findings in discussions with partners about the future programme of work. This report provides valuable evidence in planning the next stages of the ArtWorks Cymru programme, in particular in the area of ongoing training and professional development for organisations and artists on using the Quality Principles and in developing practice in participatory settings.

The practitioners who responded to this survey, many of whose comments are cited in this report, are:

Alan, Wales Millennium Centre	Amanda, freelance practitioner
Louise, Literature Wales	Beth, freelance practitioner/ lecturer
David, Borough Theatre Abergavenny	Bethan, freelance practitioner
Joanne, Mess Up The Mess Theatre Company	Heidi, freelance practitioner/ lecturer
Bryony, Arts Active Trust	Heloise, freelance practitioner/ lecturer
Rhian, Operasonic	Ella, student practitioner
Amanda, Impelo	Megan, student practitioner
Kate, Head4Arts	

A further three respondents requested anonymity in this reporting.