

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WARWICK**

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THE WARWICK COMMISSION

THE  
FUTURE  
OF  
**CULTURAL  
VALUE**



**TALKING ABOUT CULTURAL VALUE:  
VOICES FROM THE ARTS COMMUNITY**

## INTRODUCTION

During the deliberations of the Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value, there has been a desire to ensure that the views of arts practitioners working at local and regional levels as well as nationally and internationally, was present in the debate initiated by the Commission. Therefore, as part of the gathering of evidence and opinions, there was a focused attempt to elicit views from the arts community of the West Midlands region where the University of Warwick is based. Interviews were carried out with artists, arts producers and programmers working in film, visual arts, theatre, dance, combined arts, radio and television, literature, and jazz; survey questionnaires were completed by a small group of dancers; and an Open Space discussion was organised with a group of theatre practitioners. Their thoughts and comments have been brought together in this publication under the four theme headings of the Commission: Investing in Culture (p2), Valuing Culture (p9), Education and Talent (p24), and International Trends (p34).

There are strong arguments for bringing the voices of regionally-based artists and arts producers into the debate on cultural value. Arts practitioners are only rarely acknowledged by cultural policy researchers as being significantly engaged in policy debates, and there is still a tendency to focus on the most high-profile organisations and individuals from the arts community when policy issues are being considered by decision-makers. However, recent research (Woddis, 2005, 2013; Glinkowski, 2012) has shown evidence of wide-ranging policy involvement by arts practitioners, and a strong desire by artists and arts organisations to contribute to policy debates. The voice of a more diverse arts community will help to broaden and deepen understanding of the many issues arising when considering the future of cultural value.

The artists, producers and programmers contributing to this collection are all based in the West Midlands. While much of their work is carried out in, and often informed by, their local or regional area, most also have significant national and international reach and reputations.

The interviewees:<sup>1</sup>

- Pogus Caesar, OOM Gallery Archive
- Pearl Chesterman, Director for Learning, Birmingham Royal Ballet
- Helen Cross, Author
- Jonathan Davidson, Chief Executive, Writing West Midlands
- Ian Francis, Director, Flatpack Film Festival
- Piali Ray, Director, Sampad South Asian arts
- Roxana Silbert, Artistic Director, Birmingham Repertory Theatre
- Justine Themen, Associate Director, Belgrade Theatre
- Mary Wakelam Sloan, Programme Manager, Jazzlines
- Jonathan Watkins, Director, Ikon Gallery
- James Yarker, Artistic Director, Stan's Cafe

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<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank all those who gave their time to be interviewed, surveyed or to take part in the Open Space discussion. Pogus Caesar and Jonathan Watkins were interviewed for a separate piece of research undertaken by Jane Woddis, but kindly allowed relevant extracts from those interviews to be used in this publication.

In addition, short questionnaires were completed by dancers of Birmingham Royal Ballet, and a discussion was held with a group of theatre writers, actors, directors and producers at an Open Space event of mid\*point network for West Midlands theatre makers.

Jane Woddis

## 1. INVESTING IN CULTURE

### Public and private funding

**Roxana Silbert:** “I think subsidy is tremendously important (and I've worked in countries where there is no subsidy). It does have a tremendous effect; because what the little amount of subsidy does in this country is have enormous impact on culture, both on the fringe where there is no subsidy and in the commercial theatre, and in television and film. But if you took the subsidy away, you would find that film, television and commercial theatre would all suffer quite significantly. So I think what works with subsidy is that a company like ours, because we're subsidised, can support fringe and grass-roots work, and can feed commercial work. I have a company of actors downstairs, one of whom is a television star, one of whom it's her first professional job. And the fact that I can put both those people in one show in this theatre says everything about how subsidised theatre is a meeting point and a nucleus for all dramatic arts. And so, if you keep shaving away at the subsidised, you basically kill the grass-roots; you don't feed the commercial; and you don't get the actors or the creative teams that go on to make the films and the television. But having said that, I also think it's really important that we keep in mind that we should be providing excellence for the people in our regions. We are not simply a feeder for London; that's insulting to the people who work in the regions, but it's also unjust to the people who pay their taxes in the regions and deserve as great an art as anybody else.”

**James Yarker:** “The culture that makes the money is clearly the commercial end of cinema, the commercial end of West End musicals, or certain blockbuster books genre. Those are the cash crops if you like. But we need the alternative scene, the subsidised scene. Danny Boyle's a great example; there's someone who started in subsidised theatre and moved into film (and I imagine *Trainspotting* probably had some BFI or Channel 4 money in it). Then he becomes a big Hollywood person, and then where do you turn to when you want someone to direct your Olympic super-show? Well, someone who's got a grounding in alternative theatre and understands how theatre works. And I think it's interesting that Sam Mendes' *Skyfall* is the best-box-office-grossing film in British cinema. Subsidised theatre is his background. [...] But it's very difficult to calculate those things in advance - 'well, let's put some money into this young lad Danny Boyle now because I can foresee in 30 years' time we going to need those skills'. What would have happened to Sam Mendes if he'd had to start straight away trying to make commercially viable stuff?

“I think the most exciting art is speculative; and the idea of getting people to invest in a speculative venture, a non-profit speculative venture, seems much like the least attractive investment opportunity that you could come up with. [...] Corporations either want to be attached to something prestigious or worthy, and ideally both; but there's a lot of the arts ecosystem that is neither

prestigious nor conspicuously worthy. Or you might know a lot about Stan's Cafe and be keen to support Stan's Cafe, but we don't know what our next show's going to be so why would you put money into that?"

**Roxana Silbert:** "Our theatre seats are highly subsidised, so even though people might be paying £20 a ticket, the cost of that show is £60 a ticket; which is why when you go to the West End it does cost £60 or £70 or £90; that is what it costs to put on a show. So when you are playing to an audience that can afford £80 or £90 to see a piece of theatre (and that's excluding baby-sitting costs, and travel and dinner and all the rest of it); then you're playing to a certain strand of society, and you are only producing work for them; you are not producing work for the broad range of society. And in a city like Birmingham – a very diverse city, a very young city – I would say 90% of the people would not be able to afford to see that kind of work. So you would be making work for the 10% that can afford it; and that means you're making a certain kind of work, and you're making it with a certain kind of artist."

**James Yarker:** "I think we're encouraged to be as efficient as we possibly can be, quite rightly, and yet reducing public funding and trying to replace it with private giving seems like the least efficient way to proceed. At the moment, if we can get a good wedge of money from the Arts Council, then we can just get on with doing our job, which we're best at: making theatre. Because we're an organisation of three people and two of those jobs are principally about the arts, it means we have only one person really concentrating on the admin. So if we get that money in from the Arts Council we can get the most value out of it. But if we're halving that money coming in and trying to look to replace it from other means, then we'd need to double our admin just to chase that money, which is wildly inefficient."

### **'Connections and disconnections' in the cultural policy infrastructure**

**Ian Francis:** "I think there's definitely quite a good deal of disconnection between the people who we get money from. I'm not sure there's much of an overall strategy that they're all signed up to. They all have quite different agendas and that's part of your understanding when you go to them for funding: each bit of money has its own set of expectations attached to it, so I think sometimes that can generate more work. [...] I could look at it from a Birmingham arts organisation's point of view or as a UK film festival, but in each case I'd say we're probably not making the most of our opportunities - we're collaborating in lots of informal ways but maybe on a wider strategic level we're not doing a very good job of making our voices heard. I think piecing that together is very difficult when everyone is used to getting on with doing their own thing and everyone's very pre-occupied with delivering their own projects. So if you're talking about adding another layer of strategy and longer-term work to that, then it becomes an extra, a kind of onerous 'oh we've got to go to that meeting'. It's quite hard to remind yourself of that bigger picture."

**James Yarker:** "Rather than all us tiny arts organisations being encouraged to go out on our own to find this private giving, would it be possible to organise a kind of not-for-profit bond-holding thing where donors say 'OK I want x shares in this bond and I'm just going to be promoted as one of the bond holders'. So it all goes into a big pot and then the holders of the pot say 'OK Stan's Cafe can have ten grand towards making a new show and credit the bond-holders as a bloc'; and then you don't have the situation of one organisation having its name wholly attached to one project that may or may not fail, may be more or less controversial, but they get the kudos of supporting new

innovative work across the board. And you get economies of scale where Stan's Cafe only has to apply to the bond trust, and those organisations spread their risk. Maybe we've been looking at the wrong model. If we *are* going to be forced to live in the corporate world of finance, maybe we should find a model that's more suited to our aims.”

**Roxana Silbert:** “I think the ecology of the infrastructure is very sophisticated and it's been built up organically, and so I think what happens when you're facing serious cuts is that it's quite difficult to cut in a way that is sensitive to that ecology. [...] A lot of the subsidy goes to London; but also London is in a position to attract philanthropy in a way that the regions aren't. So this idea that the Arts Council has, guided by the Government, that somehow we are going to make up the deficit through an American philanthropic system, might have a chance of working in London; it has *no* chance of working in the regions, and some regions are very poor. So it's almost ridiculous to suggest it.”

**Ian Francis:** “If funders all agreed on a form of data capturing and measuring that was shared across the board, then organisations could sign up to the same thing. They're all looking for slightly different things though they're all largely similar, so it would make reporting to them all a lot easier.”

**James Yarker:** “I had a very provocative conversation with a funder. I went to argue for some help, and she came back saying something like 'There's an argument to say that if Stan's Cafe was ever going to make it you would have made it by now, and you haven't made it; so maybe we should cut you and give someone else a go'. She framed it as: 'I'm going to say something provocative now. What would you say to someone who said this?' And it's an absolutely legitimate thing to say, but you have to be able to answer that. And our argument at the time was 'Well what are your criteria for 'making it'? Measured by our criteria we *have* made it', and subsequent events proved that we might have been right then, but certainly a few more years later, it would be much more difficult to argue that we hadn't made it. So maybe we hadn't made it then because later on we definitely *had* made it. It's interesting: how much support is it legitimate to give an artist on the expectation that they *will* get better?”

**Ian Francis:** “There's a certain amount of meeting in the middle that needs to go on; but I often feel like the small organisations are having to go quite a long way towards the bureaucratic infrastructure. It's very hard for big bureaucracies to talk to small organisations; they just find them too diffuse and frustrating, and I can understand that to a certain extent. I think we could make it a lot easier for them by providing a sort of conduit for lots of those small organisations and talking with one voice a bit more clearly; but it's also part of the point that they're all quite diffuse and diverse and independent. And that's a particular strength of Birmingham.”

### Relation of subsidised to commercial sectors

**James Yarker:** “We make a very conscious effort to make shows that are purely speculative and do not make sense commercially at the time that you're making them. Looking back over our history we've recognised that those things that we've been most free in the making of have ended up being the things that have generated us the most profit in the long-run. And actually if we'd gone in trying to second-guess profitability, we would never have made the things that ended up making us the money. Even tracking back to when we made *The Just Price of Flowers*: that was made on a profit-

share. Obviously our company was subsidised, but the actual production within that was on a profit-share. [...] We just did three performances, and then a year or 18 months later, Birmingham Rep agreed to co-produce it, still at our space, and we got a load of their audience in, who were really excited by it, who have subsequently followed our shows. We're recognising those people coming to other shows we've made and we've just done our *Anatomy Of Melancholy* at the Rep and it's done really fantastic box office; and I think that relationship really owes its strength to that really experimental punt earlier on. It was built from then. *Of All The People In All The World* is a classic example of something that was possible because we made that in our first year of having revenue funding, where we were able to spend £600 on a ton of rice, because [...] we didn't have to say in advance, 'Please could we have some money to buy some rice because we've got an idea that might be interesting'. We just thought, 'It sounds interesting, get it out of that pot of money that's to make interesting stuff with.' And it's just earned us a huge amount of money profitably around the world; and that's really unexpected, and has opened up loads of really interesting relationships."

**Ian Francis:** "I think your money is expected to go further perhaps; everyone's more squeezed so they want to see every pound accounted for and often want more for their cash. [...] When you're conscious that you have to increase the proportion of your overall budget coming from box office, it does make you think 'oh well let's put on another classic silent movie in a cathedral', or whatever. There are certain events that you know are bankers that you are inclined to put on; I think it's just a constant balance really. The more straight arts stuff like commissioning someone to do a video installation that's going to cost three or four grand and bring in nothing from box office; it's harder to do that kind of thing, but we're still very much committed to doing it because it's an important part of our work and because we're getting Arts Council money. I think if we were getting Arts Council money and then turning round and putting on lots of live sound tracks that brought in lots of punters they would look at it and say why do you need us? I think it's really important that we are giving opportunities to artists."

### Political visions driving investment in culture – what they are and what they should be

**Roxana Silbert:** "To me, what's very important is this: the idea of regional theatre emerged out of the Second World War, the idea that there is a human right to culture. And that is why individuals should have proximity to culture in their own regions; [...] it is better for most people to have access to very good culture than very few people have access to excellent culture."

**Justine Themen:** "The Belgrade has a strong tradition of engaging with its local communities, including in 1965 the birth of theatre-in-education at the theatre. I think the whole way in which it was set up as a theatre post-war was in the spirit of bringing art to the city, to the whole city. Currently we build on that tradition."

**Helen Cross:** "There are many initiatives being taken, but it's hard to reach people who are hard to reach; and it probably comes down fundamentally to a lot of things about education, about confidence, about access. But those things are very expensive to provide, and genuinely provide."

### Funding difficulties and livelihoods of artists

**Piali Ray:** "Funding is an issue – it always is – for what we can do; because we use freelance artists who have to be paid. So if we don't have money we can't do the work; it's as simple as that. [...] And all that experience is now sitting idle because they're not being employed."

**Ian Francis:** “What with the city council selling off large assets and cutting left, right and centre, I don't see it improving any time soon. It's not really just about money, they're not even going to have the time or the staff to devote to things like this, I don't think. So in terms of cultural infrastructure, we're talking about a completely different sort of landscape where we have to be very entrepreneurial and find money from all sorts of different places. I do feel like there's a lot less risk-taking post-cuts; I think there's talk of 'we're going to continue to experiment', but at the same time they're not supporting individual artists in the same way as they used to. [...] It's the people coming through who are really going to struggle I think. I know that there are start-up festivals that manage to get support from people like the Arts Council, but I think generally the proportion of the funding that goes to that kind of stuff is drastically reduced, and I do think there's a big danger of it becoming a case of just retrenching and saying 'we've got this much money so let's just lop off all the bits that stick out and concentrate on the core'.”

**Jonathan Davidson:** “We're aware how really impossibly difficult it is to make a living as a freelance, professional writer, unless you're fortunate enough to have some high-value back-list that you can live on, or you're working in one of the small number of niche areas which pay reasonably well. But if you haven't got to that stage or you're not working in those areas, it's really difficult; and we know that they are having a classic portfolio life, doing all sorts of things.

“If they're doing literature-related things, they're typically being paid not to write but to talk about writing or to get other people writing. Ironically, a lot of writers are paid to generate more competition for themselves; so they are busy, understandably and very pleasurably, encouraging people to write good novels which will then be up against their novels in future years. It's a strange kind of economy. So one of the things we like to do is to encourage them to act collectively and to understand the influence - the small influence - they have on their own market-place: not to do things for free. I say 'You know, you are taking the bread from your fellow workers if you do that. OK, when you're starting out, maybe some free workshops to get yourself established, (if you're a student, possibly), but in ten years' time you will resent the students who come and start offering free workshops in schools, because that's your bread-and-butter and they are doing it for free; and *they* don't realise that in ten years' time, *they're* going to resent it'. So I don't want a closed shop, but I do want people to understand that actually, giving your artistry away for free doesn't help you in the long run; it takes a bit of nerve - so actually I've spent a lot of time telling people how much I think they should be paid, and how much *we* pay people.”

**Mary Wakelam Sloan:** “There are different pathways with jazz to earn your bread and butter. You can go into pop and function bands as a performance musician; but if you're asking about jazz, there are obstacles because it's underfunded comparatively to classical music and theatre - you look at the Arts Council's NPO list and you look at how much they get, and how much music gets, and then how much jazz gets and then how much jazz gets outside of London; and you've got an issue there. So that comes down to value, to cultural value as a whole. [...] There's not a clear pathway for a jazz musician such as a graduate scheme for jazz. That's not going to happen, because it's a creative industry where those sorts of formal placements don't exist. You have to really go and find them. You can go and do internships, but that feels wrong to me, making people do stuff for free. But then you know that within this profession you're not going to be paid very much, but you have to pay now outrageous amounts of fees to do your degree and then you're into an industry that doesn't pay. I feel that's just terrible. At least in other professions they know they're going to be able to pay



it back or get a job, hopefully; whereas in music it's all about the dedication: you're valued on the amount of dedication that you can just keep on pushing through because it's in essence what you do, it's creative, and that's who you are and how you live. You have to be really mature to be going, 'Right this is what I want to do, I'm going to do this and that's it'. I think that's really admirable for jazz musicians."

**Helen Cross:** "I would be a wealthier and more successful person if I'd written some crime novels, quickly. A lot of people nowadays in publishing are advised to write crime because a lot of people like reading crime novels; but I don't want to write that. I'm quite firm in what I want to do. [...] I don't really try and please anybody, but if you want to make a lot of money you have to please the markets. And if you decide not to please the market, you have to accept that you're not going to have a lot of money. That's Okay, I don't mind that too much."

**Mary Wakelam Sloan:** "Jazz musicians do a lot of teaching. Certain ones of my contemporaries go into a bit of promotion as well and a bit of academia. It has to be a mixed bag of jobs, because a lot of it is freelance, unless you go into a route like I have, where it's the other side of things – the management of it rather than the creation."

### Trends in audience and public engagement with culture

**Ian Francis:** "Over the 15 years I've been doing festivals, I guess one of the most striking, fundamental changes is the flourishing of niches; how much easier it is now to align yourself with a particular niche interest. Whereas when I started out, because there was barely any internet, you'd have a small community of interest that didn't really stretch any further than your town or maybe your region and now those people can find each other across massive distances, and you suddenly become a lot more confident in programming for those audiences, who would have seemed very rarefied and specialist (with interests in manga-anime or skateboarding or town-planning) because you know that they're a bit more visible than when you just have a handful of them. [...] There's a down-side, in that people can burrow into a particular area and are less likely to sample across lots of different types of stuff; but the job of magazines and festivals and so on is to encourage people to try other things out. We gather up all these different niches and try and make connections between them. That's the whole point really: it's putting on things that people wouldn't have got to see otherwise."

**Roxana Silbert:** "There are several trends I would say. One is that audiences really like 'event' theatre; so they like theatre in which they can participate, which is theatrical in the sense that it can't exist on television and film. People want to be more interactive in their experiences; they're less willing to sit and just receive theatre. The unusual, the site-specific, the interactive is trending amongst a younger audience. What's interesting amongst an older audience is that – the idea that you had to have a well-known actor in a play to attract an audience probably started about 12, 15 years ago; that in order to sell a show in the main house to a thousand people a night, you had to have someone that they recognised. Now you find that it's not just that you have to have a well-known title with a well-known actor; you probably have to have a well-known title with *two* well-known actors to sell a thousand tickets. So people's need for feeling safe in something they recognise, gets stronger and stronger. However, I don't think that age is a good denominator any more of what people will come to, because you have some older people who are much more adventurous than younger people."



**Jonathan Watkins:** “I hate ghettoization – the idea that you go to this place because it’s reflecting you, just reinforcing what you know about yourself and feel strongly about yourself. Instead, look at things that don’t sit comfortably, that you haven’t seen before. It’s really interesting: one has an idea that young people are more experimental and older people are the ones who are more conservative. Our experience at the Ikon is very often the opposite.”

**Ian Francis:** “We started with a core audience which was young arty types who were interested in film, music and design and other stuff. And then it was a question of keeping that audience loyal and fresh and interested, but also broadening it out so that we weren't just preaching to the choir; and that's always been through putting on as much of a variety as we can really. [...] I think we have lots of different audience members in our head while we're programming, and we're constantly thinking ‘What have we got for so and so, what have we got for the experimental film person or the local history buff or whatever?’ I guess it's just trying to make sure you're keeping it open, you're not narrowing in your mind, self-censoring and deciding who your audience is.”

**Roxana Silbert:** “The fact that we're a very diverse and very young city, we would like to reflect in the audience engagement. The reality is that most people who come to the theatre are in a certain educational and certain wage bracket, and of a certain age; and I think that will always be the majority of people who go to the theatre. But we try and programme in such a way that we reflect back to the region the demography of the region.”

**Helen Cross:** “In a recession, the arts are not to the fore of anybody's sense of priorities. Whereas when the economy picks up again, it will become a good generator again. So I don't think there's necessarily any desire to exclude anyone from the arts; it's just that when it becomes very dependent on a thriving economy, it will go and up and down as the economy goes up and down. And initiatives to bring in new audiences and find new attenders for those things will suffer when the economy isn't strong. And that's a great shame. [...] I think middle class people do very well out of the arts; working in it often, being administrators, marketing managers, community development managers. These are lovely jobs for middle class people to do. And often the job involves saying how many new working class people we would love to get involved, which is quite problematic isn't it? Because you're being paid in a way to redress a balance that you're benefiting from. I think it is a ruthlessly middle class arena; but that isn't going to change in the middle of a recession. Whether it will ever change, one doesn't know.”

### **Audiences crossing boundaries**

**Ian Francis:** “They don't really fit into neat boxes. There's about a third of the audience that will go to just one thing, and then there's 15% or 20% who go to six plus things across the festival. There is a real mixture of people in that group, and they say in feedback ‘We trust what you put on, even if we've never heard of the director, or we don't know anything about what's in there’; ‘It sounds vaguely interesting so we'll come along’; ‘I'll just block out my week for Flatpack’. So I guess that one of the big advantages that festivals have is that you'll get people to try out things that they wouldn't if they were just going to the cinema on a Tuesday. If you're going to make one distinct trip to the cinema then you kind of do your research to make sure you're not going to be wasting your money perhaps. People take a punt a bit more with festivals.”

**Roxana Silbert:** “What’s been surprising to me is because I thought that those audiences, those young very diverse audiences would come mainly to the work in the Door and the Studio; but they’re coming to things that I would never consider that they would find attractive. It is quite interesting standing in the foyer and you see these groups of audiences and you try and guess who’s going into which theatre, and then you see a little posse of teenagers with enormous trainers wander into *Daytona* because they’ve got cheap tickets, and then come out and be really interested and talking about it. And I find that really gratifying because they will move between the stages. An older audience tends to know what it likes more and tends to go ‘OK I know that I’m going to like that’. But then, we did the Kate Tempest piece in the Door and it was full of an older, white, middle-aged audience who clearly really found it very moving. And we have these Foundry Nights, that are scratch nights for young artists, which we assumed would be filled with other young artists. I mean, it’s a young artists’ night, it’s a fiver, you get a free drink, you’re going to get other young artists coming to support; and then you get a very broad range of people. [...] I love that about regional theatre and I love that about having the three spaces: that some of your audience will go across. Most of them will stay in their safety zones, but some of them will go across. So that’s all really exciting.”

**Jonathan Watkins:** “It’s interesting to know who’s going to any kind of exhibition that we do. But if, for example, you’re Pakistani, we haven’t surveyed you going to a Pakistani exhibition. Although I do know – I’d be silly not to realise – that if you put on an exhibition of Indian photography then probably you will get more Indian people there, or if there’s an exhibition of a young British artist, we’re going to get a younger, groovier, more student audience. It is interesting to find out what audiences are coming to the gallery and interesting to know where they’re coming from. In a city like Birmingham, which is very multicultural, it’s nice to think that it’s not just middle-class, middle-aged white people coming to see it. I really am committed to the idea of audience development, but it doesn’t mean that I want people to come and see things that they simply think are just about them.”

## 2. VALUING CULTURE

### The usefulness and problems of economic measures and ‘proxies’ for economic valuation

**Jonathan Davidson:** “I should start by saying that I’m not against economic valuation of culture. What I am against is valuing culture across a very short period of time. We have a situation at the moment where return on capital is demanded over a short period of time, increasingly so. [...] It could be argued that when local authorities invested in public libraries in the 1870s, they were looking for a return over a hundred years, and actually they’ve certainly had their return. In fact they’ve had an extremely good return over a hundred years. So I like to feel that all valuable cultural investment will give a return, but it may be over an extremely long period of time. So the issue isn’t about whether we should use financial values, it’s about what demands you place on the rate of return.

“The values I see in terms of cultural investment and the return we're looking for, particularly of literature, are a little bit financial, yes. I'm very keen on keeping writers alive and keeping them fed and keeping them in the region (good writers; bad writers are free to go). I also believe that there are some quasi-economic benefits, values; for instance, the value of the region as a location of idea generation. That can transform into financial return or into other forms of return. And writers are clearly the oil that lubricates that particular engine, particularly because so much imagination is communicated via writing. It is the art form that interprets all other art forms. It is the art form that interprets so much of human life. And we're getting return on things like tourism. I don't run the Birmingham Literature Festival to generate tourist income. But, if there is that return, I'm very happy to gather that.

“We won't know for decades whether some of these things have worked, if we ever know. So the young writers we're investing in who are 8 or 10 or 16, who come to our young writers' groups, I'm not looking for a return from them directly and if nothing happens with them tangibly then that's absolutely fine. But if at some point in the future some of them have written the novel that changes our views, or written the non-fiction work that changes our views, or have just written a very fine piece of writing which entertains and engages people and challenges them, then that's a return for me.”

**Justine Themen:** “I think economic measures are useful as ways of thinking more broadly about the way what we do has impact, but I think ultimately they're quite reductive. [...] For me, part of the problem is the huge amount of time and resource that goes into doing it when you just have to talk to individuals involved in the programme or involved in arts activity, and they're so articulate about what the benefits are for them.”

**Theatre makers group:** “The economic value of arts has been shown time and again; for instance, the government receives more in VAT from theatre than it pays out in subsidy to theatre. Does government focus on economic arguments because they don't want to focus on the spiritual role of theatre?”

**Justine Themen:** “Yes, it's about economic impact, such as if you have a theatre in a city then you're more likely to have people thinking that there's a good standard of life in the city, and so they'd be happy to live there; and I'm one of those people [that] if there wasn't a theatre in the city I'd feel like there was a lack of heart in some way. So of course there's an economic benefit to be attracting people who are educated and thinking, and have ideas for growing and developing a place. But it just feels like it captures such a limited part of the impact.”

**Roxana Silbert:** “I think most people's formative or most people's critical moments in life have come through accident. You know, the things that really change your life are very rarely planned. So I think that when you ask people what they might pay for a show, that's not to say that the answer won't be valid; but what they won't know is what they would pay for the show they *don't* know about. The whole point about theatre is that it lets you go into what you *don't* know.”

**Justine Themen:** “It struck me that we are always having to justify what we're doing in very concrete terms: in relation to employability, in relation to health and well-being, and fundamentally we keep saying the same things. And there is a massive level of frustration that I'm sure everybody feels: that 50 years on, and actually a lot longer on from these ideas developing, we're still needing to try and

explain to people why the arts are important, and at what point do we recognise that they have both intrinsic and applied value, and just work with that instead of wasting resources on having to prove it all the time?"

### 'Measurement' - a useful or problematic term?

**Ian Francis:** "I am very dubious about looking at these things purely numerically - it's much like with the whole cultural origin thing: 'how diverse is your audience?' I can see why it's important to measure these things, but I just think the tools that we have to measure them at the moment are incredibly limited and clumsy. And whenever we're asked to find out the cultural origin of our audience, presenting your audience with a two-page questionnaire about their cultural origins is just a massive turn-off and most of them don't get filled out; so the ones that *are* filled out don't reflect the wider breadth of your audience."

**Roxana Silbert:** "I feel very strongly that as we take the taxpayers' money, therefore we have to be transparent and it has to be clear that the money that we take from people is being put to good use. So I understand the need to measure. But you can't measure the thing that's most important about the theatre [i.e. space to reflect, to question, to be playful, etc.]. How do you measure that stuff? Everyone wants to make things into facts; we live in a world where for some reason facts are supposed to be better than instinct or fact is meant to be more right than the feeling, and I just don't believe that, I don't believe facts are better or more useful than the whole rest of us. We all have the rational and the logical, but we also have the sentimental, the instinctive and the intuitive, and I think there's too much of an attempt to try and 'box' the sentimental and the intuitive and the instinctive into logical fact. You just can't do it, it's impossible."

**Theatre makers group:** "Evaluation needs to identify benefit, but we also need to show we've learned from negative feedback or it won't be taken seriously. Evaluation should also help those involved to understand the impact and benefit to them of the experience they have had, and not just be about meeting funders' needs."

**Justine Themen:** "Seeing the very individual impact it has on participants or audiences - I don't know how you measure that, when it's so various. You can go to all of those people and ask them how it impacts on their confidence, or how much they would pay if they had to pay for doing it; but that doesn't gather the unique impact of engagement with the arts for that individual."

**James Yarker:** "I feel that Stan's Cafe is good value for money. We do work really hard and we produce a lot of stuff. We try and help a lot of people; and we don't leap in black cabs to get from A to B, or pay ourselves excessively. So I do believe that arts should be value for money, although I defend the right that occasionally you just have to throw money at something. I think the arts should be efficient, but in a way it seems a lot easier to measure the cost than the benefit because you can very readily see the cost of something in pounds, but to see the *benefit* in pounds is much more difficult."

**Ian Francis:** "It's finding a more nuanced, clever way of measuring. If you look at social media as a means of taking the temperature of your audience, that's weighted towards a particular kind of person who uses Twitter and so on; but we do now have a sense of an audience voice that's far more authentic, vivid and diverse than we had 10 years ago before social media when we were just

relying on comment cards and questionnaires. It's looking at the technology I think to try and create ways of bottling the experience that those arts events are offering, immersing the measurer in the event so they come out with a distilled version of what that event has offered people. There's a grey area between evaluation, documentation and PR. People say they're spending money on evaluation but really they're spending money on a glossy document that gathers lots of effusive quotes about how good your event was, and it's not really evaluation. I think there ought to be some kind of objective, critical vision applied because it's public money and it ought to be spent well; but at the moment that judgement's being applied in a very kind of mechanical and slightly distanced way. [...] I'd hate to think that we would set up some kind of arbiters of what constitutes good culture, and we'd end up with a cultural version of Ofsted coming and inspecting our events. But at the moment I don't think it takes any account of all those intangible things that social media throws up, other than just gathering a bunch of quotes from Twitter. It would be nice to see measuring tools that use that technology."

**Theatre makers group:** "Arts organisations *have* measured social return on investment, but are these accepted by those you are trying to convince? Are they always willing to hear them? Individual case studies can go a long way and often have more impact than big data studies. [...] There is also the question of who is allowed to articulate the impact or value. Does having an academic eye or independent evaluator give a better voice? Or can we say the value of what we did ourselves? All dimensions of articulating evaluation are valid – academic, practitioner and audience or participant. Certainly we as arts workers are expert and our expertise should be contributed to the debate and valued."

**James Yarker:** "It was fantastic to see the Choir with No Name at the Birmingham Rep; it's a choir of homeless people who'd been invited by the Rep to sing at the opening of their festival about mental health. You can look around on their website and it's really evident the huge value to those people of singing in that choir. It was very valuable for them to be performing at the Rep because of the status and profile of that, and it was really valuable for the Rep to have them there, and for the audience. It was a great combination, but I'm not sure how you price the value of that. It's difficult being drawn into those arguments because it means you are then on the territory of saying that's a legitimate ground to have your discussion on, and the art for its own sake is no longer a viable argument, and I think that's not the case."

**Theatre makers group:** "If access to theatre can be seen as a democratic right; then there is a difficulty in bridging the gap between that and the idea of theatre as an economic multiplier."

**Ian Francis:** "We will sometimes have a Twitter feed, and there's a collective memory that comes up on the blog after the festival every year. I think collective memories are quite a nice way of summing up the festival experience. The audience knows more about the festival than the festival organisers do really. Whereas historically we would just get it from anecdotal feedback, now we have all of this: links to blog reviews, Flickr slide shows and people's videos. People post on their own blogs. Now we often end up spending the weeks after the festival finding out what the festival was like through their accounts. It's not official collective memory; it's not people posting on our blog, it's just sifting Google for references to Flatpack Festival. If you collate Flickr, Facebook, Twitter, blogs and press reviews, you do get a nice fully rounded sense of what the festival was like; because everyone picks out different aspects of it."

**Jonathan Davidson:** “I would love to have clear evidence, though that pre-supposes that those people who fund you want that kind of outcome, that they want happiness or engagement with politics or a change of view on x, y and z. Obviously quite a lot of them would sooner that people just stayed at home and watched television and *didn't* have their views widened or changed.”

**Jonathan Watkins:** “We do different kinds of surveys, quantitative and qualitative. It’s difficult though for an art gallery, unlike a performance space which is ticketed. We can’t take a lot of personal details as somebody is entering into our space, and we probably wouldn’t want to anyway, because it would feel inappropriate as somebody was walking freely into this free space and then they were asked what their postcode was - the kind of questions that are asked of those who are subscribing to a concert series for example. So it makes it harder for visual arts organisations. We do it through questionnaires; and a small percentage (but we would like to think a representative sample) is surveyed. People do it willingly, but then of course you *are* taking surveys of those who are happy to undertake surveys.”

**Pearl Chesterman:** “Capturing responses is always a difficult one. There were always those endless smiley face forms or tick sheets; but actually now we do it ‘learning history style’, so we have open conversations with them. At any point we might say ‘Here’s a card, write down your feelings’. So we’re gathering all of this information and then we sift it, and look at the themes that are coming out. [...] And then there’s a commentary of what it is that we’ve learnt from all of these comments, rather than us asking ‘Do you think it’s given you confidence?’ and they answer ‘yes ’ or ‘no’. It’s more open than that; it’s not even open-ended questions, it’s just a conversation and you’re picking up all the time what people are saying and jotting those notes down. And then you’ve got that real evaluation that covers everything I think, rather than that moment when you sit down and say ‘OK, we’ve got to evaluate it now’. And that’s something we’d like to be able to do with I-pads or phones, to get that quick and easy conversation, gathering evidence; because then you’ve got photos, you’ve got tweets, texts, Facebook comments; everything is there. And that’s such rich evaluative material because they’re not worried about what it is they’re saying; it’s coming from the heart at that point.”

**Ian Francis:** “There is a lot of interesting stuff being done with data visualisation and I always thought it would be nice to go to the extent of following lots of dots on a map and seeing where people come from and converge and make a kind of timeline. But then again there’s lots of nonsense in data visualisation; like a lot of statistics it’s telling you what you want to hear sometimes. I’m aware of how malleable it is and how quickly it could just become a PR tool. I suppose why I’m talking about a cultural Ofsted in a way is because it should be developed with the support of the cultural organisations but it should be done from outside them in some sense. There’s room for an innovative project that uses new technology to capture exactly what cultural events add to people’s lives.”

**Justine Themen:** “There’s something interesting in understanding the huge range of ways in which engagement with arts activity, whatever that particular engagement is, affects us as human beings. And to measure economic impact is such a minor part of the impact that it has for us as human beings and the whole idea of quality of life and the space to reflect on what we think and do that feels to me at the heart of it; and to communicate with others, and to try out things that we think but maybe don’t dare say in other contexts. To try out either through watching other characters do them, or through improvising them ourselves, understanding our place in the world, learning.

There's one kid, when we did work on immigration, who interviewed a woman from Zimbabwe who'd escaped a situation of domestic abuse, and this girl was just absolutely flabbergasted. She said 'I thought what the papers said was true; we've got to get out there and tell this story of why people want to come and live in England, what they're escaping from'. Those things just feel so much more massive than measuring economic impact."

**Ian Francis:** "I could do a top ten of intangible benefits for our audience but it would get quite waffly; that's the tricky thing. It's genuinely felt but I can totally understand the quandary that policy-makers have in actually attaching that to hard-and-fast figures. I know there's a clear value that we add; but as soon as I start to quantify it for people I struggle; as soon as I start to write my zappy paragraph about what's so great about Flatpack, I do end up falling back on nice press quotes and audience stats and crude signifiers like that."

### Relationship between audience numbers and the kind of experience encountered

**Roxana Silbert:** "I think that in the drive for efficiency actually it becomes incredibly *inefficient*. What we all spend our time doing, is what we think we need to do for our theatre companies, and then trying to re-describe that in a way that is acceptable. That takes up an awful lot of time and man-hours, and that's why our staff numbers grow exponentially and it becomes more expensive to run theatres. We could all scale down if we didn't have to constantly be filling in forms that explain how what we're doing is useful. I think that what we *could* do is write reports about why some things have been successful and others not; or why it was important that *this* show played to one person a night and what that meant, which doesn't make it less valuable than the show that played to 900 people that night. You're measuring [there] for different things. But that would require a culture in which one could be open and honest; and the government has not created the conditions for that culture to exist."

**Ian Francis:** "We could get a larger audience by doing more of our events in a multiplex and putting on lots of big mainstream previews; we could bulk up the audience quite easily, but it would just be a completely different festival. So it's spelling out why having small intimate venues is a really important strength of the festival. We're not doing paltry numbers by any means. Eight or nine thousand over ten days is perfectly respectable, but there are other festivals that could boast double the numbers. It's arguing that we're just as important, if not more so in terms of taking risks and showing a wider range of stuff, and using venues in a really fresh way. We've set up a model of a festival that doesn't make a great deal of financial sense, in that not only do we show films but we put on artists as well. So we've got the artists' fee bill, the film fees, shipping all the films, hiring venues and setting up lots of venues that are not designed to be used for film screenings, so there are lots of technical costs there. We could quite easily just sit in a cinema and put on films. That's why I think the whole value for money criteria can potentially be screwy and unhelpful because it could quite easily just lead to loads of identikit generic festivals."

**James Yarker:** "What it seems to me is that you can measure quantity but not quality in terms of numbers. I've been in shows where there's a crowd of 400 people and I've forgotten the thing that I saw the moment I stepped out of the door, and it meant nothing to me and was worthless beyond the diversion - it entertained me for that hour. And on the other hand, you can be in an audience of 30 with a thing that profoundly moves you and is one of your life experiences that you then draw on for the rest of your life. And the one potentially looks like a success because so many people were



there, and the other one looks like a failure because so few people there; but if you added the gross amount of life-value from the two experiences, I would argue that 30 people profoundly moved is worth far more than 400 people mildly diverted. So how you get into measuring those things is an absolute nightmare isn't it?"

**Jonathan Davidson:** "We're not a mass-market festival. Boutique is a horrible word actually, so I won't call it a boutique festival; but we're definitely much more specialist and our artistic policy means that these days certainly we tend not to have celebrity chefs or famous people from TV who've written a book about walking. [...] Most literature festivals are *not* in cities; they're in those destination-locations, so in fact they're selling the festival alongside the destination experience. And that is automatically ruling out a whole bunch of people who do not do weekends away, because they're not of that life-style. But at our festival we get people coming to our events who would never go and hire a cottage for a festival; it's just not what they do, or they can't afford it. So that's the trade-off: we get fewer audiences but we probably get audiences who genuinely wouldn't have gone to these other places to consume literature; so we are making it possible for them to have the highest quality of writers and that quality of debate."

**Ian Francis:** "Part of the reason for a small venue is that there are certain things that are never going to get more than 40 or 50 people in a city like Birmingham, but they're still important things to put on. Just like supposedly everyone who was at the Sex Pistols in Free Trade Hall went away and formed their own band, we can't really prove that's happening for every film we show, but it can have an impact beyond the total number of admissions. If you're talking about, say, discussions, it's just a very different atmosphere if there are 300 people in a lecture theatre or 50 people in a lot of the spaces we use around this area which are not going to fit more than a hundred people in, but lend themselves perfectly to the kind of work we're putting on. As soon as you try to fill a 500-seater theatre, then it changes the kind of work that you have to put on. We've worked with big venues in town occasionally, but much as they'd like to take risks the whole logic changes straightaway. You've got to account for everything and you've got to be confident that you're going to sell x number of tickets; and that's why the programme ends up being conservative in a lot of cases. [...] I think if our cultural policy is all about maintaining the big culture palaces, then it will end up being very predictable and homogenous, just because there are only certain things you can put on in those big spaces."

### Articulation of values in and through artistic work

#### A) What are the values you think are important and that you are trying to develop in your work?

**Roxana Silbert:** "One doesn't go into the arts because for every £1 that's invested in it £4 goes back into the society. One goes into the arts for very different reasons. I think that what theatre does brilliantly is help you think and feel outside of yourself; you watch a piece of theatre and you see the choices that other people are making, and their reasons for making those choices are revealed to you. I also think it taps into the playful and creative child in you. In my main house I have 900 seats, and for me comedy is very important because when 900 people belly laugh together, there is a sense of being one race, and that is I think very important."

"Theatre is the space *still* (and I think this is one of the great things about British theatre) where you allow an individual voice to flourish; a voice that maybe sees the world and articulates and expresses

it on a new and unheard-of perspective, but also just in terms of the way it pushes language forward and our use of language. Our language changes all the time, and our way of seeing changes all the time. Theatre can bring what is basically a social change, onto the stage. It gives people the space to reflect about their lives outside of the grind of daily life. I think it's about joy and if I think of all the shows I've seen here, the heart of them is something about choosing a way of living, whether that's social, political, personal, romantic. I think it allows you to re-engage with those fundamental questions about 'Why am I here?', 'What am I doing?' and therefore 'Why are we here and what are we doing?' And 'How do we want to best organise our lives and our society?' It's one of the few places where it's still possible to ask awkward questions and be critical, and look at things from the outside. So I think it's *more* important even in a conservative time than in a liberal one."

**Jonathan Davidson:** "Personal and collective well-being, which comes from being able to express yourself effectively, imaginatively and pleasurably through an artistic use of language. And that's the kind of bottom line of all we do. So we're looking for the art form that we invest in to both engage and challenge; and it needs to do both. Writing that just engages, that is attractive because on the surface it's immediately fun and thrilling shall we say, I'm not enormously concerned with that; and I'm not enormously interested in writing which is purely challenging because it seeks to shock or to disturb people. But if things are combined, if it both engages and challenges, then to me that becomes the best writing because what it gives people is the opportunity to see the world differently. So - in terms of cultural value - I'm looking for writing that can allow people to think differently, or cause them to think differently; and a lot of that causing people to think differently is by giving them the opportunity to empathise, through understanding, with other individuals or with other societies; and indeed to empathise with their own selves, to understand themselves better. So if you go out from that statement then you've got the benefits of community cohesion, understanding your neighbours better.

"Beyond cultural cohesion, I think there is the opportunity for political debate. So one of the returns for investing in writing is the means to an end approach, which is that we get writers to write because they will provoke and they will get other people to either write or to talk or to act in some way. And I think my trustees of Writing West Midlands won't mind me saying that we have (with a small 'p') a political impulse with our organisation. We are there to occupy the third space and give people an opportunity to discuss things in the third space."

**Jonathan Watkins:** "The major issue is one of relevance, and by that I mean that the exhibitions that we choose to make are somehow part of an international conversation. We're very much in the business of communication. It's not art for art's sake, and certainly it's not 'truth and beauty'; that's not what we're on about. [...] We have to be on an edge of a conversation. I like the idea that our exhibitions could be thought of as the development of an idea or the contradiction of an idea that somebody might have about something going on in the world. One is also thinking very much about the local context – not to be parochial, but to think about what would be interesting for audiences here."

**James Yarker:** "The values Stan's Cafe are trying to develop in our work is alternative thinking really. It's just about opportunity to explore the world in a way that isn't the everyday, isn't bound up in straightforward value, isn't just entertainment."

**Theatre makers group:** “Theatre has a beneficial impact on society – it is everyone’s right to access it. You cannot have a society without storytellers; but theatre is also the jester, the critical voice, rather than simply the story-teller. No one questions investing in (elite) sport; but theatre is different as often it is quite critical and contrary. People should be given the right to access theatre so as to question the society we live in.”

**Jonathan Davidson:** “We pay all our writers if we’re charging fees for their events, unless there’s some particular reason why we should not; but generally-speaking we do. So we’re trying not to exploit the writing class as sadly so many other literature festivals do. We’re looking to try and offer equality of opportunity for engaging with our work, to serve everybody as equally as possible, and to try and redress those imbalances that come because of various marginalisations: socio-economic class, disability, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. So the other return on value we are looking for is greater equality, which sounds like an enormous statement to make and we’re only a very small part of that; but writing has always been used as a mechanism for alerting people to inequality and a mechanism for helping them gain equality through their writing, through the considered communication that comes with it. So we’re part of that process as well.

“We increasingly work with the writers directly. We tend not to work with publishers because what they want out of a literature event is often very different from what I want; they’re looking for profile and for sales, and I’m looking for artistic experience. I’m looking for the quality of the question-and-answer session, for the sense of surprise and delight that audiences have from meeting writers and hearing ideas discussed and being able to ask Germaine Greer a question or Will Self a question, and have an argument with somebody in their own city, in their own region. [...] So it means we can talk to a writer and ask them to do something for us in a certain way which makes it Midland-centric or Birmingham-specific. With the people we’ve invited to speak in the Cathedral to give our urban sermons, it’s not just coming to an event; you’ve got to do something which is going to work in this space, it’s a privilege to be there. You’ve got to be sensitive to the history of the Cathedral and the people who’ll be there. But also you can preach from the pulpit, which not many writers get a chance to do. So we think very carefully about who we offer that opportunity to. And whatever happens, it will never be repeated in quite the same way; and it could never happen anywhere else in quite the same way. It will have this feeling of ‘only in this city at that moment’, which is very important for us all collectively validating our existence, because so much of what we see in the arts and culture, particularly in literature, is about *not* validating our experiences, in fact ignoring them and not hearing writers who come from anywhere other than those enclaves of North London, Oxford, Cambridge, and so on.”

**Justine Themen:** “We’re very committed to making work with our young people, and with all of our community groups, that is of a quality; because we see theatre not just as important for their personal journey but also in communicating issues of marginalised communities or communities that don’t communicate. Theatre’s a tool of communication, so we’re committed to making high quality pieces of work about resonant issues. We always work in partnership with our community groups and artists to create the work. So each year, we have a programme of productions made by all of our community groups that speak to issues of resonance for them in the city. [...] So the creative output, the products, are very important to us as well as part of the process of empowerment, communication and dialogue. Sometimes people say to me ‘So you’re more interested in the process than the product’ and I don’t understand really that you can separate the two. A young person

knows if they're stuck on stage and doing something that's just all right, or if they're in something that is really good and people appreciate it for being its own thing rather than 'quite good because they're young people'."

**Ian Francis:** "An open mind, the urge to create something yourself perhaps: that's quite a hard thing to quantify. We've always felt there should be a permeable boundary between the artist and the audience; you come to one of our events and feel 'I'm going to make more of my own work, develop my own practice'. A lot of it is about a sense of place, and feeling part of the place that you're in. Somebody said to me the most important subject of a festival is the place where it happens, and I think that's really true; so not just civic pride but feeling like you're part of the city you're in or the town that you're in, that it's not just an anonymous bus ride between your place of work and your home. You're visiting lots of venues, and feeling connected to different kinds of people. Yes, all sorts of insanely touchy-feely things that would be impossible to nail down in an evaluation form probably."

**Justine Themen:** "We do have values as an organisation: open, honest, down-to-earth are the values that the organisation espouses. Brand is about what you sell to people rather than what you are. I think it's much more useful to talk about values, and then the brand is how you express them. I think in terms of what we communicate with our work and with our process, 'open' is fundamental, it's about wanting to know what young people think, and sometimes you have to think about what the questions are that you're asking, and sometimes you need to ask quite narrow questions to enable young people to feel able to answer. If you ask quite big questions, they come up with something more pat sometimes if they don't feel confident or don't understand what you're asking. So I think the openness is really important, wanting to know what our communities think and experience in order to be able to make work that resonates. And so that's openness in making the work, but also openness to a range of opinions, and trying to shape the work in response to that, rather than being dictatorial."

**Jonathan Watkins:** "I think it's very important that we talk. The idea of art as communication is crucial and I am obliged as the director of a public gallery to talk, account for what it is that we do. And if anybody has a question I should be able to – if not answer it – address it."

**Helen Cross:** "This country I would say is probably one of the most divided countries in the world, in that we have people who are very highly educated and confident about their abilities and people who have had very poor life chances. There may be people who are doing a degree, but they still have low confidence in their ideas and in what they might do next. So I think the arts can do an awful lot to try and redress that balance; and that's very important to do because if we don't, the only voices we'll hear in society are privately educated, white, often male. I'm interested as a writer in hearing the voices of other people who live in 21st century Britain. So I think by encouraging people to speak their stories and know what is their material, it is socially helpful and it's also very creatively helpful for the sort of creative output that we want to have in the bookshops or on the theatre stages."

**Justine Themen:** "We acknowledge two things. One is that it's prohibitive for some communities to come into the theatre, especially when they're not used to engaging with the theatre. So we take work out to communities that we want to engage with and introduce to the theatre or reconnect with the theatre; and we also appreciate the value that this city-centre building, the city's theatre,

gives to work with the community. So in some instances actually bringing it in is very empowering. So we kind of operate in a dialogue between the two. Actually at the moment a lot of it does happen in the theatre, but as a result of quite a lot of outreach work and getting to know the city.”

**Piali Ray:** “Where we are wanting to achieve excellence, one has to absolutely focus, whether it's ballet or a violin, a sitar, a tabla or Kathak. If you want to achieve excellence, that's what you're doing for ten hours a day and 20 years; so there are artists who will do that, are doing that, and who are achieving that. But we're also seeing art as a collaborative process of learning, sharing and valuing. So both need to co-exist.”

**Pogus Caesar:** “I hope that people who view the work can read into it more than just ‘Here’s an interesting photograph or a strong photograph’. I want the viewer to read the image: people’s eyes, nose, lips, the hair, because once you start to read into subjects you start to see that you’re not so dissimilar to other people. So without me having to write those long pieces of text about every photograph and what it means, I'm just trying to push people into being inquisitive about identity. [...] The mixture that I’m trying to explore is how different cultures actually came to be living and working amongst each other. Culture is about how we all fit into the environment and how we shift and change as life bends us. As a documenter, I travel around creating images. Being located in Birmingham, I’m able to go and visit diverse communities not just here but around the world, and people engage and give me permission to take photographs. Being able to bring images of communities back to England, back to Birmingham, to decipher and put them back out there for the public to gauge, that is my contribution to community.”

**Jonathan Watkins:** “I’m in the business of match-making, not only match-making with respect to this global conversation, that is to say what is the right time and place to say something; and matching if you like a gesture with circumstances, historical circumstances; but also there’s the question of matching an exhibition or a project or an event with a particular kind of audience or a particular kind of space. That’s not the same as targeting to particular audiences – that’s kind of like a game of snap and I don’t like that idea. That is to say, ‘Here is an Indian artist for an Indian audience’. I don’t think that’s particularly sophisticated, and that’s not real audience development. I don’t think it’s a question of holding up a mirror to an audience so they can see themselves in an exhibition; it’s a question of confronting people with difference. For example, when we exhibit an artist from Morocco, it’s not because there are many Moroccans in Birmingham, but I do think that what she’s saying could apply to many people here, or many people will understand where she’s coming from. Also, there’s the idea that you’re confronting somebody with difference. So, ‘Have you thought about this?’ or ‘There’s another way that something could be done. These people are not like you, the way they do things; the way they think is not the way things are conventionally thought of in our culture right here, right now’.”

**Helen Cross:** “What I do in my creative work - I probably don't know what I set out to do, just to write things that are true. My novels tend to be about relationships between characters, but also those characters' relationships with society as well. So I suppose I'm looking at how society creates characters. [...] It's harder as a creative person to set out to know what you're doing; I think that's not necessarily the best way to go about it. You end up with what you've got and then it's up to other people to say what you've done. Beyond this, I don't really think there's any point in saying what you've done once you've done it; you've just done it, and it's meant to be an act of generosity:

that you've handed over your thing to other people. They may like it or not like it, and what they take from it usually is a surprise to me.”

**Pogus Caesar:** “As time goes by I see recurring formats. It’s about faces, it’s about people, that directness of the subject matter and the audience. Where possible I prefer eye contact. I like for you to be my eyes. There’s that one second, two seconds, maybe three if you’re lucky that then decides whether or not people see you as some kind of iconic imagery or how people read you. It’s only how I’ve caught you. It’s about looking – and sometimes looking at things which can be quite challenging; but not challenging in hate, screaming ‘Look at me because I want you to fear’. It’s the little subtle things in photographs that fascinate me. I’m not interested in just taking beautiful photographs; it’s nice to get that accolade, but to me it’s much more than that. Within each photograph there’s a real human story. It’s up to the viewer to decide what that is. I can explain the conditions that the image was created in but I shouldn’t dictate.”

**Roxana Silbert:** “When I was running Paine’s Plough I thought that my job was to create an environment that supported new talent. I worked very hard to try and agitate for a proper fringe, as opposed to the fringe being a sort of try-out for the West End; so that it should be genuinely experimental, new voices, new stories, trying to do things in a different way. Then I went to the RSC and I felt that what the RSC should be is a centre of excellence for Shakespeare productions; the best producer of Shakespeare in the world. And here at Birmingham REP I feel it’s very different, because I feel that we have a responsibility to the region, that we have a responsibility to engage or provide experience for lots of different types of communities. And I might look at a play and think it’s not the best play in the world, but there’s an audience there that would absolutely love this, and who would feel it spoke to them. It might only be a hundred people a night, but it’s really important because it tells their story, or it is a new story that hasn’t been heard. Because this is a community that is changing a lot all the time and new voices are coming through all the time. So you’re either looking for something that is brilliant or you’re looking for something that maybe gives a voice to a group of people that haven’t had their voice heard on stage before, or that is very particular to this region. It doesn’t mean that you’re not also looking for the best but you’re also allowing other things that have a different purpose. I do feel that regional theatres are so rooted in the place where you are, that it’s part of the political and social fabric of the region.”

## **B) What is it that you think audiences and participants value in your work?**

**James Yarker:** “The biggest thing we get when we show *Of All The People In All The World* is people saying it makes them see the world in a new way; there are things they didn’t know that they now know or things that they thought they knew but hadn’t realised quite how shocking they were. A classic one at the time would have been that 100 million people (or whatever it was) in the United States were without health insurance. People sort of know that but then when they saw the actual pile of rice that represented that, it really brought it home to them. So in that show there was an educational perspective and also a sort of reflection or a questioning about statistics, and how statistics work, or how reliable or not they are. You can see the world through different lenses.”

**Ian Francis:** “I think we make people want to live here, we make it a more interesting place to live.”

**Justine Themen:** “The vision for the Belgrade Theatre’s produced work is also to be telling local stories; so we do that both in the community education context *and* in the professional. So for

example, *One Night in November* is a local story, and hugely popular because people are hearing their own story; people whose own parents died in the Blitz are coming to see the show. The work that we make in terms of local stories, stories of immigration and so on, is very much in that spirit.”

**Pearl Chesterman:** “Engaging communities takes a long time, but you get such a deep relationship with those groups. When you go to communities you've got to spend a lot of time chatting to people, engaging with them. It might take you ten minutes to get people from sitting round the edge to come into the centre, and again at the end, you can't just say 'Right, OK, we'll do the cool down and off you go'; they want to stand and chat, so you have to factor that into the amount of time you've booked the hall that you're working in and transport issues and all sorts of things. But it does build to that much more meaningful engagement with them. [...] One lady had had a stroke so she couldn't use one arm, but she was using the other arm and she said 'Oh it's been great. It's something that I look forward to each week'. Those that came to the day centre said it was the thing that got them out of the house and they wanted to come, and that they found that their hip problem or their knee problem was better because they'd been doing that exercise, so they determined to keep it up when they got home. The ladies who were in an Afro-Caribbean Ladies group also saw the benefits. It had got them into talking to each other; so now they were going to go swimming and they were going to do other things. So there's that knock-on effect. And the care home said they definitely want to do more, but it's just fitting it in; you just can't fit it in - there aren't enough days and hours. But it has a massive impact.”

**BRB dancer:** “It gives them a chance to be inspired and taken into a world that's not daily life.”

**Ian Francis:** “There's something quite special about a one-off physical event that still carries a lot of weight, and increasingly so now that people are more and more on their laptops or their mobile devices. It's actually increased the primacy of the gig and the live experience rather than diminishing it. And so I think it's finding a way of taking all of that fertile online culture but putting it in a communal space where people feel welcome and where it still has the sense of a real-life thing.”

**Pearl Chesterman:** “I think there's something about the escapism. You're in a different world. You sit there and it goes dark, and if you let yourself you can be engulfed, enveloped, into that world. You are just completely immersed in beauty and the spectacle of what is on the stage and the amazing things that people can do, and the music. I think if you come to ballet you've got lots of things, lots of senses. You're watching and you're listening and everything's all coming at you so you're having to decipher it all. So maybe it's that it's more senses being engaged in one thing that causes it to have the impact. And then if you've also had a back-stage tour and you've touched and you've felt and you've smelt and you've done everything else, that's the bit where we know everybody goes back going 'Oh yes it's amazing', because you've heard it, you've seen it, you've felt it.”

**Mary Wakelam Sloan:** “Creativity; the live, unexpected and joyous element of what jazz is. It's the joy of - what it is for me, probably is for other people - it's that joy when something really special is happening between all those musicians and they're really talking to each other; and I suppose that's part of humanity, isn't it? Watching that happen is magic. But unfortunately the barriers of complexity can be off-putting to certain audience members because it's so alien. What we're trying to do in our small way is take them on a pathway via our programming, because some of it is complex stuff that might not appeal to everyone. Through our programming and through



our education work, and through working now as Town Hall and Symphony Hall, there's a wide range of different music that you can say 'This is all part of this music as a whole'."

**Pearl Chesterman:** "I think that if you participate, there's something about ballet that is so centred and so much about your posture, it's about thinking. [If] you're in a class where people at the front are standing properly, it gives you that awareness of your body. It's that link of the awareness and the fitness with that sense of escapism. Well-being is the word that's bandied around and I don't know whether that's the right word but it's something about that: it's the whole package that has the impact. There's not many things that I go to that you lose yourself so completely in as you do with ballet. You don't have time to think about all the niggly worries. I think for working people, stress is a big factor; the escapism helps you to deal with the stress. With participation, if you're having to learn steps and remember them and think about where your body is at that time, you haven't got time to think and worry about what you're having for tea or that you haven't paid the mortgage this month or whatever it might be, because you're just so fully concentrating on what you're doing; there's no time to think about anything else. Just being involved in the watching is one thing; but if you're involved in the doing, that's when it totally absorbs everything else because you can't concentrate on anything else, you've got to fully think, and I think that's when people get the benefit out of it. When they're completely and totally absorbed in what they're doing, that's when that deeper learning happens and the impact happens. If you're just doing it but your brain is on something else then you don't quite get that. You've got to be immersed in it, focused in it. It *is* that focus."

**Jonathan Davidson:** "When we ask people why they take part, why they come along, they tell us sometimes very prosaic stuff which is fine, and then sometimes very revealing stuff such as, 'This was a wonderful experience that has got me writing my own life story', or 'It has made me see'. [...] And the other thing we've had with young writers is their parents telling us about the kids. Quite a number of parents saying 'My child was phenomenally shy and reserved; didn't like school, didn't like engaging with other people. This has completely transformed him or her. She's now reading her work out in front of a group of other young people, in front of strangers; she would never have done that in a million years.' So that makes me think yes, there are definitely personal development benefits from being in a young writers' group."

**Helen Cross:** "People say that they're better at writing than they thought they would be. I've taught creative writing for about 20 years, so my starting point is usually 'What can you get out of people?'. I know there are certain exercises that work with people who feel they can't do any writing. I usually can get things out of them that they are surprised they are able to do. So that in itself is energising for them. They're surprised they've written something, and then they're surprised they've made a little poem. They've surprised themselves. [...] Writing is about change; stories are about change. A story where no-one changes isn't a story. So really what you're asking people to do - they don't know you're asking them to do this - but really you're asking them to work with the idea of change, because that's what stories are. And that in itself is quite empowering for people's lives. That if you can create a change for a character, perhaps you could create a change with your own life. That's why societies tell themselves stories, because we're thinking about how we can change as people and how we can change the world. [...] The arts tackle on a very fundamental level your confidence as a person to say who you are and to speak your truths, and to expect them to be listened to or honoured within a group."

**Justine Themen:** “We have figures and we've tried using quantitative research, but the thing we find still when we're presenting this or talking about the findings or the work that we do is the individual stories. We can say that 'Yes, the WEMWBS (Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being) scale measured a growth in well-being or happiness or whatever it is the government wants to measure, for almost every individual who participated on the programme'; but the thing that people really get is when I talk about the woman who comes with a Zimmer frame, spent most of her time indoors at home, was very dependent, had somebody coming in doing a lot of things for her. Now that she's engaged with this programme she's much more active, more independent, doing her own thing, not needing people to help her so much. She goes into other people's homes to help them. She's started writing, and she writes poetry for the productions that the group makes. She's 80. That's the story that makes the difference rather than gathering all the quantitative data.”

**Ian Francis:** “There are ever-increasing numbers of films getting made every year, but people are completely flummoxed by the range of choice. So there's an increasing role for the gate-keepers and middle-men. I think there is scope for crowd-sourcing curation as well and getting people to pick their own, to programme their own events in a way. But I think that's a lot more difficult. The suggestion that because everything's democratised and on-line, we don't need curators or gate-keepers or sifters any more, is nonsense I think.”

**Theatre makers group:** “Just as value means different things to different people, so does theatre. Theatre offers a huge range of experiences; and these different theatre experiences can have different values. Not every piece of theatre changes people's lives, so let's not try to make theatre this great saviour for everything. Also, it's a question of taste – some things may just not be to some people's taste. [...] There is a lot of fear about going to theatre from those who are not familiar with it. One answer to this is to see the value in transitional spaces, in taking theatre out of theatre spaces in order to connect with people. And then we shouldn't feel that we always have to 'convert' these into conventional theatre audiences. At the same time, people can have a sense of theatre as a place to go to and will be disappointed in these other spaces that they have not experienced 'real theatre'. We need to consider this – to recognise what they value.”

### C) What is it that you value yourself when you're performing or creating?

**BRB dancers:** “The chance on stage to perform to people. The chance to escape into a different character. The challenge and the feeling of achievement. Knowing that you can always do better and more, and wanting to prove to yourself you can.”

“I value the release I get when on stage. I get to forget my problems for a while and be someone else!”

**Roxana Silbert:** “Almost every show I've ever done, I've had a letter from someone - I've had *lots* of letters (some people like things, some don't), but there's always the one letter where it's meant everything in the world to that person, and for lots of reasons. And those are the things that keep us going; that's why we do what we do.”

**Justine Themen:** “I think collaboration is an issue. There's still a tension between the vision of artists as being people who need to express their own ideas and inspiration, and people who are in service to their community in the same way that firemen are in service to their own community. And I think

it's really important – the idea of an artist being in service to their community. So there's a struggle there for young people coming into our programme of work to really think about how to work collaboratively, and there's a tendency then to swing either to being very 'auteurial' in how you make work, and say 'I'm going to make it like this and put it on the young people!'; or the other way is 'Well this is what the young people want and this is what they say so we're going to do it', and then it's not interesting to watch and so people disengage.”

**Theatre makers group:** “Being able to take artistic risks is very important. If we make something to meet some people’s sense of ‘value’, will this reduce the amount of risk taken by theatre makers?”

### 3. EDUCATION & TALENT

#### What role does education and participation play within your work, and how does it relate to your ‘main’ programme of produced work?

**Piali Ray:** “Education is really at the heart of what Sampad does and, as I sometimes say, it's a big ‘E’ and sometimes a small ‘e’; because even when we are not in a formal education setting - we could be doing a performance somewhere, or an exhibition - I still feel it helps develop people's ideas and minds, and informs their thinking. So there is a small 'e' education that is inbuilt into whatever we do.”

**Mary Wakelam Sloan:** “Originally, when we were Birmingham Jazz, we did more programme work, but now because we've been able to raise the funds to develop this education work I'd say it's becoming more evenly balanced. And I think one can't exist without the other [...]. I'm always looking for the opportunities to engage the young musicians in Birmingham as well as the artists flying in and then flying out. It's all about creating an ecology within the city that is enriching the artistic product that comes out; so we're well-connected within that jazz world and hopefully can increase the amount of education opportunities for people. The summer school is growing and growing, and it's in partnership with Birmingham Conservatoire which is good.”

**Pogus Caesar:** “In the early days my encouragement to people to participate in the arts was about trying to encourage young West Indians to become involved, because the arts were something many could not see as a profession. I've been lucky to be involved in the arts at varying levels, so one has to say that it's actually important to try; because you can go through life wishing that you'd done something. The hands of time don't turn back. The creative sector is an unstable environment; it's very unforgiving and this can break your creative spine. Trying to encourage people is something I've always wanted to do, whether it be through sitting on various boards, equal opportunities boards, being Chair of Birmingham International Film & TV Festival, lecturing at Birmingham University, through producing and directing for television and inspiring young people to work with great teams of highly motivated individuals. As the years have gone by, I try to encourage *all* people to participate in something because it's important to document what we witness, life goes by in a such a flash. With my film camera I'm stopping that life for a second, click and there it is. But also, if you have a way of participating in it, do so. You don't have to practise seven days a week, but there's a way in which you can be of benefit. So if you're in a position where you can make a difference it's

important to do so. I'm in there to try and challenge, but also to enable the betterment of the wider community."

**Jonathan Watkins:** "We're a free organisation, we're open during the day and on weekends and anybody can come in. It's not like going to the opera or to a symphony concert – I'm a great fan of classical music, but if you look at the audience there isn't much diversity there, not as much as you get here."

**Justine Themen:** "The community programme is very much seen as at the heart of the work of the theatre, and I think that's largely manifested by us being able to develop our programme independently of the main programme. That independence from the programme in the two theatres is about enabling us to respond to the needs and issues of the groups that we're working with, rather than having to make work that responds specifically to the themes of the shows that are being programmed and produced. [...] We have quite a significant sum of money that's put aside from our core grant from the Arts Council and the city council that goes into the community and education work; which is fundamental I think to the scale of work that we're able to produce, because it means we *know* we have the money to cover our staffing costs, the costs of the core team and the core delivery, which enables us to be more flexible and fleet of foot in terms of responding to requests.

"We're much more now getting visiting artists who are coming in with shows, to run activities with our existing groups, which I think helps their agendas as well because it means they're offering an input into groups who are in a process of development rather than a one-off input. And the actors who come in on our home-produced shows now have it written into their contract, to do one workshop for us as well if we want it. [...] Some of the actors from *One Night in November* came into our new acting-out group for the young at risk of exclusion from schools, to do a workshop on just how they prepare for a show; because these kids were just starting off on the process of doing their first project and were asking why did they need vocal warm-ups and why did they need physical warm-ups, and how do they develop their characters? And then that afternoon they went to see the show; so there's some really nice links even though they're not always that visible."

**Jonathan Watkins:** "We're publicly funded, so we have an obligation to develop audiences and to account for what it is that we represent. There are expectations from our funders, but I think they're reasonable expectations; there's a match between what they want and what we want. We're taking initiatives that feel natural to us, whereby for example we take a project to a hospice in Erdington, or we're thinking of working with Winson Green prison. We're taking our work into places that are hard to reach."

### **What benefits do you think participants receive from the education and participation work of artists and arts organisations?**

**BRB dancers:** "It helps people get an insight into the life of a dancer, and more understanding of ballet itself."

"You get a more in-depth idea of what we do. You get a working professional who can broaden your views of a professional ballet company. You can understand more fully the work we do and how we go about doing it."

**Pearl Chesterman:** “We've got a group of ambassadors at the moment that started with us in 2008 in a big project. They would all say that they wouldn't be doing what they're doing now (i.e. at college or university), if it hadn't been for that project and what they were doing with BRB; because it gave them the confidence to speak to people that are outside their own little circle, how to relate to other people, how to accept when people were telling them things or giving them things which they weren't used to. So it's had a massive impact on them and they're all the biggest ballet fans that you can possibly imagine now. It's not just the performances; one of them is helping us chaperone on a Dance Track [training] programme; another one is helping us with social media, so she comes in two days a week while she's at university to help us with that. So it's life skills as much as anything else. When you get that sort of project where you're with people for a long time and you build up that trust, you can change lives. We always say it sounds very pompous, but we *know* we can change lives and we've proved it time and time again. It's just having that opportunity and for the young people - or *anybody* that's involved - to seize that moment, see it and say 'Right OK, I'm going to be open-minded enough to go along with this'.”

**Justine Themen:** “The interaction of the young people's groups is very good, partly through things like Christmas parties and through the young company. But also our festival work is quite key. There are festivals where each group makes a piece of work and then they're all presented together. So they're inevitably having a connection with each other and seeing each other's work. So for example, if we're developing a narrative through the black youth theatre which is about black immigration to the city, you can't really play that story without white characters. In some instances we've found a way of playing it with an all-black company because it feels important to give that group the roles; and in other instances we've co-developed it with the senior youth theatre. So there's a lot of cross-fertilisation.”

**Mary Wakelam Sloan:** “Jazz is still a very new music comparative to classical music, and we need to develop an interest in jazz in young people where they're learning instruments, so they don't bypass it into other musics because it's not available. Jazz is such a relevant music because it draws in so many other musics and it's always changing. It is creative, that's absolutely of its essence; so therefore it's always evolving, and that makes it always pertinent to modern cultural life. [...] I think jazz is relevant to everyone. It can have that esoteric perception and reputation, but if you've been able to listen to it from an early age and it's not just plonked on your lap as some mad contemporary music, it can appeal to everyone in its different forms.”

**Piali Ray:** “These are formative years for young people, and what they experience is going to shape their thinking, their imagination, their opinions. So if they're not encountering any form of art; if they're not encouraged to be inquiring and inquisitive, creative and provocative, then those faculties are not developed. And that's what art does. I'm not undermining language, mathematics and sciences, but I think the arts do have a very strong role to play in shaping individuals' characters; and to create opportunities for them to debate and think laterally, think differently; be informed through different channels. We try and open up a view of the world that they don't get to see otherwise, to introduce them to aspects of society or the world that they were not aware of.”

**James Yarker:** “We've really valued working with young people, and with schools. Working with young people, it seems like you're doing at least two if not three jobs simultaneously; that you're hopefully expanding their skills, their life skills, their confidence and ability to use their imaginations

and speculate, appraise and revise, and their tenacity in working. Then to a lesser extent there's the thing in there of them being trained to continue as professionals, which I'm less interested in. But then I think there's also the argument that you're introducing them to the arts where their parents may well not do. I was introduced to alternative theatre at university and that really transformed my life. And I think if I'd gone through university and not found that, then I wouldn't have engaged with that world at all. It's brilliant the number of schools that you see coming through the cultural institutions in this city. It's hugely valuable that young people have that experience, and the insight that when they go past that building again, they know what happens inside, and feel it's possible for them to go in again. If you don't introduce children to those opportunities, then they're really missing out and the art-form's missing out and the country's missing out."

**Piali Ray:** "As someone who used to be in and out of classrooms as a peripatetic dance teacher and dance animateur for many years, I know how enjoyable the workshops have been; so I've seen how enthused young people can be, how creative they are."

**Justine Themen:** "We really try and sell the work as theatre by young people for young people; not youth theatre for parents, but work that's being made by the youth of the city *for* youth of the city."

**Helen Cross:** "The arts are very important for encouraging social diversity, encouraging a greater social mobility as well. I think the arts probably are the most powerful way that people can develop confidence; people from non-traditional backgrounds can develop confidence around their own voice, within their own ideas, start to understand what it is about them as a person that is valuable, and can contribute socially. So I think encouraging people to find their creative voice - to be able to speak their ideas, to be able to talk about what is interesting to them and interesting about them - I think to do that through drama or through creative writing or life writing is enormously, socially important."

**Piali Ray:** "We look at making links with significant events and personalities, historically, that will be important in shaping (particularly young people's) understanding of history, and who they are, what they can bring and what they can achieve."

**James Yarker:** "The idea that 'We're a theatre company, we can do a play here, right here' is amazingly empowering. I think that's why school plays are fantastic for community bonding: the company working with the teachers in a different way, working together, the parents being part of that communal endeavour, the pride they feel at their children being on stage, the confidence of those children to speak in front of people. And when we work with them, it's about not just them doing the script that has been given them - 'These are the words we want you to say' - but 'What do *you* want to say? How do we say this together?' Those seem like hugely valuable things. Well I know they are, because I've been told."

**Helen Cross:** "It depends what group you're working with. Older people tend to be more marginalised, so they love the fact that they've come out and they've got together with other people, and they've made some new friendships. It has much more of a social element for older groups. And I worked with army wives and they also talked about how being on a barracks is quite lonely, they often don't meet other parents other than maybe at a playgroup when the kids are there, so it's quite hard to talk. So the social bringing together to create a group, the creation of a circle of people who are listening to one another, is very important, because places where people

might have met 50 years ago are not maybe there in our more atomised culture. Groups are quite difficult for some people to be part of; but when they work well they can be very empowering for people because other people have to listen to you and you have to listen to them. [...] And then I think there are other people who just value being part of something, not necessarily within a group; but the idea that 'I'm part of a project' can just be interesting for people. I think they feel like they're inside something rather than on the outside of everything. The danger with the arts is that it selects because it's expensive on most levels to access. It selects those who can afford to go. So I think by creating social projects around other cultural experiences, people feel part of something they might not have felt part of otherwise."

**James Yarker:** "One of the most profound things that I've experienced in our education work was when we went into a school in Leicester to make a version of our *Steps* series and worked with a small number of students and three or four teachers, and by our standards we felt that it was a pretty prescriptive process. We'd had really limited time and resources, so it wasn't as collaborative as we'd normally want. But the feedback we got was really telling: the thing the teachers had been most amazed by and had caused them to reflect on their practice most urgently, was the fact that we didn't have the answers, and when we'd sat round a table (us, the students and the teachers) and said 'What do we do now?', there would be periods of silence while we all thought. They said that initially it was crucifying them, the fact that no-one was saying anything and there was silence, and they found it incredibly uncomfortable. And then they realised that it was because everyone was *thinking*, and it made them realise how little time they put aside for thinking in the classroom, because there's so much emphasis about bubbling along, and 'Let's be active, let's be doing, let's be talking ', and 'I'm going to give you two minutes to come up with the answer for this', and actually maybe it takes a lot longer than two minutes, and can we be brave enough to just be quiet and think? And I think that's amazingly powerful, and it's aside from the art, but wouldn't have happened if the art wasn't there. So how do you measure that?"

**Justine Themen:** "It's about remaining flexible, open and supporting people to find their own way, rather than pushing them and if they won't be pushed into a certain frame, then deciding they don't know how to engage. So for me there's a massive thing about being flexible, about how we operate as an organisation as well as how we make work. If we really want to be accessible, we can't expect everybody to follow the same path."

### **What are the problems concerning education and participation in the arts?**

**Mary Wakelam Sloan:** "There's a very clear indication that women aren't choosing to go on jazz courses as instrumentalists or vocalists; they are in the minority. We need to address that. Is it because jazz doesn't appeal to women? Or because when they're in the big band situations in youth ensembles, or earlier on, something is changing their minds and they don't want to go into it? Maybe it's because you have to stand up there and improvise and that takes a lot of confidence, and if all the people around you are men doing that, then you might not develop a further confidence than if women were helping you out. There is that gender imbalance and we want to know why. We want to challenge it in a productive and constructive way for those young women that are involved in jazz at that moment."



**Pearl Chesterman:** “When I first started here, the majority of the work [of the Department for Learning] was with schools: lots of primary work, lots of secondary work. And then probably two years ago there was a big shift and now it's a real struggle to get into schools. I think that's the pressures within school, the changes in the curriculum, the finances, a whole range of things. So we are working much more in a community setting and out of school hours, including with the youth service.

“I think for some of the teachers it's been the unknown, not knowing what's going to be expected of them, and education changes that have been implemented quite quickly. Many of them can't relate a dance project to helping something else that they might be teaching. And teachers are quite often scared when you say dance, and particularly ballet; so they're thinking if *they're* worried about it they're not going to buy it in for their children because (a) there's still the stigma that they think it's not for boys, and (b) that it's an art-form that's only for the upper classes. And we still have to battle those things.”

**Justine Themen:** “All of our work at the moment is open-access, although of course that's been challenged in the current economic climate.”

**Roxana Silbert:** “One of the problems is that government asks the arts to colour in the gap that should really be filled by education. I think you can't suddenly pick someone up at age 25 and turn them into a literate, functioning human being through doing some theatre workshops with them; that has to start a lot earlier. And I think it is one of the things that is very problematic about the government's approach to arts and the idea that if you don't give young people access to art, they're suddenly going to be able to work in it or find it or engage with it when they're 25 years old. It's very rare that that happens. So I think the cuts in education are absolutely devastating, and I think the fact that you can't go and do a degree in the arts without spending £30,000 on fees is just devastating.”

**Justine Themen:** “When starting the conversation with Age UK, for example, about trying to engage more with older people, I could tell that they thought 'I don't see how on earth you're going to do *any* of that'. But they were brave in saying 'OK, we'll do it, we'll go in partnership with you for 11 months and see what happens.' And they came and saw the show at the end of 11 months and they were completely won over, which is wonderful. So it's wonderful that going through that kind of process does genuinely convince people; but it's also very frustrating because actually if this work was embedded in schools and philosophically embedded in how we communicate with kids, we would see the benefits of that and the new generations growing up would understand and feel the benefits of it.”

**Piali Ray:** “There are a lot of young people who are *not* connecting with anything that's cultural and creative. We're just another conduit, which they may or may not use; some do, some have done well and others have not. So we're only a part of the picture that can solve the problem.”

**Justine Themen:** “You know this should be the sort of thing that *all* young people have the opportunity to engage with, and they don't. So the benefits we can offer the young people we work with are huge; but still, to try and offer that to all of them with all their very different needs is very difficult. So I think there's a massive gap.”

**Helen Cross:** “Some people really in this society cannot afford a day saver to go into the middle of town. You know it seems extraordinary to say that: £4 just to go into town and come back, and the arts activity would be free and you could take a sandwich. But to some people that is just too much. [...] Really reaching the very disadvantaged is very, very difficult. These little things are big barriers for people, and I think because most of us don't experience that, we feel it's almost a bit patronising to say 'Do you want us to pay your travel?' So it often doesn't happen. The little things don't happen. People say 'It's free! Come!' and then they wonder why people don't come; and the reason they don't come is because they can't afford to get here. Whereas when we did a little lunch for them, and paid their expenses, paid their car parking; we made it feel very easy to access.”

**Justine Themen:** “There's talk about how to empower your audiences and to get them to make a more active contribution to a piece of work; but still for me that is not really engaging with who our full community is, it is still just performing to the converted or wanting to activate or activate the people who are already engaged. I'm not feeling critical of that shift, I think it's exciting and interesting, but it's not genuinely thinking about how we service our communities.

“I think there's also a mistaken route into participatory work, which is about charity rather than about empowerment. So if you're going in to do good, it's not particularly a drive to make good work, it's to help people feel a bit more warm about themselves. Not that that's in itself a bad thing, but it's not empowering participants. If you're empowering participants then you've got to be empowering them to make interesting work and you've got to be interested in their voices. So it feels to me quite a fundamental misunderstanding of the power of the work. I think in people's own practice, when they encounter engagement with young people, with community groups, it's *hugely* stimulating to the creative process. I think that is shifting; people *are* engaging more across those boundaries.”

### **What is the value for you and your organisation of being involved in the education and participation work that you provide?**

**Pearl Chesterman:** “I've got a team that absolutely love what they do and they're all passionate about it, so the biggest difficulty I have is getting them to take the time off in lieu because we rack up so much time with evenings and weekends.”

**BRB dancers:** “For me all the work I do with the education adds an extra layer to me as a dancer and an artist. Not only is it a great opportunity to engage with the people who come to watch you perform, but it also gives me a different perspective on my work and I really feel I am continuously learning new skills.”

“I love opening the door to ballet for people who have never had the chance to see it before.”

**Mary Wakelam Sloan:** “On a blunt level, you look at our core, ticketed audience and it's ageing, and that's the case across the country and probably in the US as well. Europe is better; more young people get involved in listening to jazz at least. So it's about audience development. Getting younger audiences to concerts and engaging with it is actually allowing them to be part of the music at that stage – in schools and at family events and festivals. And gradually they may well play music or they may not, but if they've been introduced to it they'll become the audiences in the future.”

**James Yarker:** “Working with young people, we get to make work we wouldn't otherwise make and we get to think in ways you wouldn't otherwise think. I think the art-form benefits. It's part of the recruiting process I think, part of letting them know that there such things out there that are theatre companies, that you can make art; you don't have to be a consumer, you can be a producer. I think there's a huge pressure on young people to be consumers – consumers of cartoons, consumers of computer games, of music, magazines, web-sites; and to be passive, be acceptors of these things. I think there's a huge value of us going in as artists into those environments and saying 'We can make something here, we can make something of value that speaks about your world, the world we share. We don't have to leave that to other people, we don't have to accept what's given to us.' To me, that's the huge value of theatre.”

**Justine Themen:** “Actually I think if we all paid much more attention to participative work and work with young people, the work that we made beyond that would have much clearer values and be much more responsible to its community, rather than trying to make something that's over here and try and drag the community to it. If you're centred around your community and build work from that, you can still get to that same production, but you're taking the community with you or it's evolving out of an interest and need that you're identifying within your city, rather than making something and trying to get bums on seats. [...] I think we should be running a theatre as centred in its community: a community of artists, community of participants, of audience, of citizens, and build a programme out from that, rather than the other way round.”

**Pearl Chesterman:** “There are almost bespoke packages for every group we work with because they're all very slightly different. You do have your core elements of things, but there's a personal touch as well that creates that welcoming environment. And that's nice for us too, because you're not churning out the same thing all the time, it's always different; and the reaction you get with whatever you do is always different. You can go with the same workshop, but what you get out at the end is completely different, and that's what's lovely about it, there's never a day where you do the same thing twice. You just have to - pardon the pun - but you have to be on your toes because you never know what's coming next.”

### Is enough being done in England to nurture creative talent and cultivate passion for the arts?

**Piali Ray:** “No not at all. I think the arts have always been at the bottom of the list and any investment in the arts is criticised by the press, by the public; so arts is seen entirely just as an entertainment element, as not necessary. That message I think gets compounded by the government de-prioritising the arts, by the schools de-prioritising the arts. So the message comes from all quarters that it's not essential, it's not important, it's not serious. When that's the message – that it's not important in society, in a civilised society – then it's a problem.”

**Mary Wakelam Sloan:** “Music and education aren't valued that highly in the current government. It's pretty distressing really because I don't know what they think will happen in the next generation if they do that. [...] In terms of classroom teaching and the value of that, I think we're in serious trouble; because if you're not valuing it at that point where it *is* accessible to everybody (because in schools all kids can participate regardless), then what on earth are we going to do?”

**Justine Themen:** “Drama, music, art: I think all these things are there because they're how we as human beings express ourselves. And what we seem to do in the education system is push kids into

conformity and to receiving facts and regurgitating facts, and then – at whatever level their school or university happens to engage with it – suddenly expect them to be able to think. I remember the time when I was suddenly allowed to think, and that wasn't until university, and it was so hard. I used to stay quiet all through the first year of my tutorials because I didn't know what to say and I felt I hadn't read enough literary critics. In the second year my tutor wouldn't let me read any of that kind of territory and just kept saying 'But what do *you* think, what do *you* think?' And then you find your voice and that's the most wonderful experience. So I think that's a massive problem with our education system, that it doesn't teach young people to think. Kids have - we all have - the potential within us, and you need to be given the opportunity to explore it; and art is a wonderful way to explore it, rather than to be told things and to regurgitate. So I think it's a massive thing philosophically about how we bring up kids, but also just how we communicate with each other."

**Helen Cross:** "I think it is just very hard to genuinely give people access to the arts, but just because it's hard, it shouldn't be ignored. More effort needs to go into helping to find the people who don't have access, and evaluating whether they really did find the right people, and thinking of the impact on those people, and then changing it next time if it doesn't work."

**Piali Ray:** "We encourage the young ones a lot, because it's also one way of keeping them in the arts, otherwise we'll lose them. As it happens, particularly the South Asian people don't see the arts as a profession. But there are some who are coming through who do see the excitement of the arts and see their careers in the arts. [...] But if theatres are closing down, if schools are not employing artists and if you're not getting work, then you'll be working in Tesco. I know of artists who are doing that; so how encouraged will they be to stay in something that they know they're very good at, but nobody wants them? So it's not something that encourages people; and if I was a parent and I was advising my child, would I say 'Learn something, but I'm not sure you'll get a job'? No, I would say 'Learn something that will help you get a comfortable life' - that's the problem."

"I don't think the arts are seen as a viable career for many; it's still seen as a challenge and that you'll be in abject poverty for the rest of your life unless you get a West End contract, which very few do. I've auditioned people for productions, and many talented young artists have come. But we were probably just going to select three and we saw a hundred, and they were all skilled and talented. So I just feel there could be a much more exciting, thriving and buzzing arts scene in this country, that people will feel excited about, want to engage with, see as a viable career, and learn from. *That* I feel is missing, that buzz."

**Justine Themen:** "Well I suppose fundamentally that still feels like a class issue really. We look at it a lot in relation to ethnic diversity, but also more generally in terms of social diversity. I think it's still a real challenge to find a route through, and that's something we're really thinking hard about because the kids who aren't achieving to their full potential in mainstream schooling, actually can really start to shine here. But often when they go on to college, they struggle. The jump from engaging with us where there's a lot of mentoring and pastoral support (us in partnership with their schools); they really struggle then moving on to college, so let alone to university. And yet some of them have real potential and real flair. So it's about what the support mechanisms are. I think it's a challenge across the sector, and that's why we try and conceive of projects like Young Company, to try and think about how to offer people something that will maybe make them move into drama school which is a more practical route. But that can take several years. We've worked with one

young man - this is his third year in Young Company - and the first year he was so all-over the place, and a week before the show we thought he was going to drop out because of some of the difficulties and the lack of confidence, and he kept saying he couldn't do it; and he's with us now in the third year, and he feels like a different person. So I think it's about giving people the time and support they need to fulfil their potential; and that's different for each of them.

“With the black youth theatre there's a different kind of issue. They're very articulate about coming into a space where they're not the only one, and that's very empowering for them to become who they are and allow themselves to be who they are, and therefore engage with other people on an equal basis in this context of the youth theatre. Then I think the chances of you making the step into some kind of further training if not university, are much higher because you have the security in who *you* are.

“But there is still a massive gap because young people aren't getting this kind of provision in school.”

**Theatre makers group:** “People who go into theatre as a profession do so because they have been touched by theatre themselves – it's had an impact on them.”

**Justine Themen:** “We're really starting to look at this territory of emerging artists, which would make a link in terms of professional development. So we're trying to think how the diversity of the work that we do, which is so successful in attracting diverse participation in our activities, can start to feed in to impact on the diversity of the people working in the profession. We have a very successful apprenticeships programme. They're with us for 11 month contracts. I think they're with us four days a week and the fifth day they're at college, and at the end of it they come out with a qualification that helps them take a step up within the industry. So there is slowly a progression route that's not university. We've had a couple who have come through our youth theatres into apprenticeships; and we try and advertise in a way that those opportunities are really being applied for by young people from a range of backgrounds. [...] The idea is to try and attract people into different professions in the theatre that people might not associate with theatre. So there's one in wardrobe, one in LX (as in stage electrics – lighting and sound), there's one in community, and one in operations.

“We're looking as well at how we can start to support young makers to come through our programmes rather than just people who want to perform; and that's partly by doing scratch nights with our participants, with ideas that they have for making shows. Our programme moving towards the 50th anniversary of theatre-in-education is about trying to partner some of those young makers with some artists that we have coming in on residencies, to make work more collaboratively. We also run a programme called Critical Mass which is a playwriting programme targeting black and minority ethnic writers. We've been doing that for five years and a number of writers coming out of that are really showing some potential.”

## 4. INTERNATIONAL TRENDS

### Impetuses for working internationally

**Piali Ray:** “The driver for us has been to open markets for our artists, to open up the market for British Asian artists abroad. Otherwise, their ideas would be stagnant as this is not a big enough market for them if they're talented and skilled. But also, over a period of time, when I was attending conferences, I came across this generation of young people who were diaspora Indian communities, South Asian communities, who were skilled and not knowing where to go. Once they come out of their teachers' umbrella, then they're a bit lost because no other doors are opening for them, they don't know which route to go to. And I felt that from my own experiences, I can pick up the phone and speak to my peers in any country in the world and say 'Right, shall we do this? Shall we do a project?' And we can set something up or we can have that dialogue; we can support each other or create something that is of mutual benefit and interest. That needed to happen with the next generation. They should have a network where they were supporting each other. That I felt was essential, because they could not keep depending on us to create things for them, and they were leaving dance or music and so on. And they were hugely talented, amazingly bright, intelligent artists with so much to offer. [...] And after that there was huge mileage in making that connection between artists, and creating an infrastructure which would be supportive and keep them in their profession. And that has actually had an impact on those careers. So there came a time when I said, 'You don't need us to organise it, just do it yourselves'. And they're doing that, they're creating work for each other; they're helping tours, they're creating productions where they're inviting each other. So that new generation of artists is much more confident at creating their own marketplace; which is what we really wanted.

“When you are relating to another country, dialogue is extremely important. It's not just a superficial way of engaging, of putting in a studio two dancers and they're dancing to glory; that's not what it is about. It is really engaging in a way that is meaningful both to us and the other country, and there has to be a mutual gain through the project, otherwise it doesn't work. It can't be that we or they are the only people who are gaining from it. So there is a big learning process.”

**Jonathan Watkins:** “I'm very keen to strike a balance, and if I saw that there were too many bright young things and not enough artists who are more established, too many emerging artists and not enough senior artists, if there were too many men and not enough women, too many Brits and not enough non-Brits, all European and not enough from other parts of the world, I would feel that I was being negligent in terms of Ikon's identity very much as an internationalist player in the arts world.”

**Piali Ray:** “International work needs to sit comfortably within policy priorities rather than individual passion and whim. It really needs to be seen as something that will help the country or the region achieve what they want to achieve through their politics or their trade or whatever else; that this is assisting those things, rather than something that's happening on the side.”

### Contrasts with other countries

**Roxana Silbert:** “I've worked in countries without public subsidy of the arts. And then you have a very divided culture. You have people who get together and make work because they love and need

to; but can never make a living out of working in the arts, so they're not professional, and there's nowhere for them to aspire to be professional. So they are working very much on the fringe but often, that's where they'll stay - there is nowhere for them to go. [...] I think what's great about our system is that we have *some* subsidy, but the rest we make up through box office and other funding, which means that I have to produce work which people want to see. I can indulge myself a bit in producing work, I can take risks and think 'Well I *think* this has an audience', and I can try it and I might fail and it doesn't necessarily mean the theatre will close; but fundamentally I have to make work that people want to see. And I think if you live in an area where there is no subsidy, you *don't* have to make work that people want to see, so the kind of theatre that gets made can be amazing because it can be very rooted in the community and really meaningful. But it can also become very introverted, and disconnected from its audience. And I think that's also true if you get too much subsidy. There are countries where there's been an overflux of subsidy, and again, there is no need to have a relationship with the audience. But what the right level of subsidy does is it forces you to have a relationship with the audience, which means you *have* to be engaged in a conversation with the audience. I think too little or too much subsidy sort of gets in the way of that. And then, when you go to somewhere like America, you simply have no space to take risk whatsoever. So you can never really move the culture forward, because people are always looking for the thing that's going to be the hit and they're always looking backwards at what's *been* a hit, rather than forwards as to what might be the next step in the evolving language of the theatre."

**Helen Cross:** "I went on an international fellowship to the Banff Centre in Canada, which is an international arts centre in the Rocky Mountains. Canada is great because they give out so many awards and so much money to their artists. There was a great culture there of feeling empowered, confident, well-supported; facilities are marvellous; artists and writers are treated very wonderfully. There was great confidence amongst those people there because they've been given the money to do their work. It's hard to be creative if people don't have any money. It's kind of blunt, but true. There was a great sense of empowerment and valuing individuals, and wanting them to be in the best conditions to do their best work.

"Thanks to the British Council, I went to be writer-in-residence at the University of Mumbai for three months a few years ago. In Mumbai, there was *no* money for anyone to do creative writing classes. The course I set up at the University of Mumbai, no-one had ever done creative writing. So when I was saying 'Come on, tell me your experiences, let's talk about your childhood, let's write about what matters to you, let's do this exercise', they were just completely blown away. It had never occurred to them that anyone would be interested in what they had to say. It took them a long time to get their head round that idea; but you also knew as soon as I finished doing it, it would stop, because there was no outlet for it really. They were people who had to go and make money to support their families; they just wanted to get a job in a call centre or in a government department. They didn't have the luxury of pootling around doing creative writing, and though I stay in touch with lots of them via Facebook and things, none of them have gone on to do writing, though they all had fantastic stories. But it's a luxury, the arts, isn't it? – that most people can't afford. It's not a luxury in that we all need it; but we don't need it quite as much as those students in Mumbai just needed to make some money to buy some food on a very basic level."



## Learning through international collaboration – two-way influences

**Piali Ray:** “I do feel that initial dialogue and planning, the research, the R&D, are essential to ensure that the project will be maximised for both countries and both parties.

“International collaborations are very much the way we want to work. That's the way we can learn, and that's the way we can share. When I brought a South African company here, it was the model of practice that I was really interested in. The reason I liked their work was that they had brought together African dancers and Indian dancers in a very interesting way, and you could see how the cultures had meshed together. They had a South Asian and South African connection that I felt was needed in cities like Birmingham where these communities co-exist and don't always mix, and I wanted to create that model, to say: 'Look what's happening, what they are doing, and why can't we?' And I think it helped, because the schools absolutely opened their doors to them. So they did loads of workshops and went to many schools. So we absolutely used the company as much as we could. I very much brought them across not because they were the best dance company, but because of the way they practised, the model of practice, of cultural sharing, cultural collaboration, that they had started there.”

**Helen Cross:** “If you do anything on BBC Radio 4, thousands and thousands of people hear it. I did a story recently about bees disappearing from the world, and so many people got in touch, from all over the world. One woman got in touch and said 'I'm working on behalf of the pollinators in North America, please send me your story'. This is a question of technology, isn't it? In the past, no-one in different parts of the world would have been listening to Radio 4. Now you're amazed where the Radio 4 audience is coming from.”

**Piali Ray:** “I've been working with people in Canada since 1996; and they used to look towards Britain as a model of practice that they could learn from. I was invited on many occasions to go and develop their diversity policy; how Sampad works was seen as a model of practice which was inclusive, which was also able to be collaborative. So it was very much appreciated. They were very much interested in Birmingham, as Birmingham and Toronto have similar patterns of immigration and diversity – so how was this city dealing with it? The same way that I suppose we learnt from Amsterdam. In Britain or the UK, you have the Shakespeares and the orchestras and the Royal Ballets and the strong Euro-centric cultural forms that the country has developed and nurtures and showcases. But increasingly you also see Akram Khan and Talwin Singh, and us, going abroad; so they see how this country *has* nurtured diverse artists. Where Sampad and organisations like us come in is that we reflect what this country is about *now*; it's a country of diversity, and the arts, the dialogue, need to reflect that and show that.”

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