

CIRCUIT: ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

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July 2018

Circuit was led by Tate and funded by
Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2013-2017.

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INTRODUCTION

Circuit was a national programme for 15-25 year olds, led by Tate and funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. From 2013 to 2017, ten galleries (Tate Modern, Tate Britain, Tate Liverpool, Tate St Ives and partners from the Plus Tate network:

Firstsite, Colchester; MOSTYN, Llandudno; Nottingham Contemporary; Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester; Wysing Arts Centre and Kettles Yard, Cambridgeshire) worked

in partnership with youth organisations, aiming to create opportunities for a more diverse range of young people to engage with art in galleries and to steer their own learning.

The programme reached over 175,000 participants through events and projects.

Activities were delivered through four strands: Festivals (large-scale events); Peer-led (a core group of young people producing and leading activity over a sustained period of time); Partnerships (work with the youth sector and young people with the least access); Digital (content produced for the website, which offers a variety of entry points for participants at differing levels of support and progression).

The programme was delivered by the Learning departments at each of the partner galleries and was supported by other departments, including Marketing, Curatorial, Visitor Experience and Press.

Circuit aimed to understand the extent to which the programme developed and changed practice. With this in mind, research was undertaken after the end of the programme, to understand the effects of *Circuit* on facilitating organisational change within and across the ten participating galleries.

This report presents the key research findings, which are based on ten in-depth interviews conducted with Directors (n=5) and Senior Learning Managers (n=5), responsible for the delivery of *Circuit* at partner galleries. Fieldwork was conducted between September and November 2017.

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS



CHANGE

At times of financial austerity and cuts in arts education, *Circuit* provided informal learning opportunities for young people, fulfilling the delivery of a youth programme for partners in a sustained and strategic way, with some galleries starting it and others re-energising it, aiming to reach a wider demographic of young people. Irrespective of partners' history or size of provision for young people, consensus was that *Circuit* introduced new ways of working to organisations.

"It shown us a way of working with young people and how they can help to steer the programme."

MADE YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE LEARNING DEPARTMENT MORE VISIBLE

Circuit prompted galleries to provide a new series of opportunities to young people, in a more consistent manner than they have ever done before. These varied between galleries and included the provision of studio or gallery spaces to create or showcase work, the staging of events or the creation and distribution of online content interpreting galleries' programmes.

"It has changed how we operate. We are very much focused on ensuring opportunities for that young age range."

The public facing nature of these activities, enhanced the profile of young people within institutions and made the work of the Learning department more public and explicit.

"Organisationally, it helped young people to be much more visible."

"The programme made young people visible within organisations. We are less behind closed doors. The work is more visible and public and participatory."

The requirement to produce a festival for and by 15-25 year olds, which would be of a high profile, attracting up to 3,000 young people at each site, and which would in turn reflect on the image of the institution, provided an opportunity to young people to be seen and heard and attracted senior management attention.

"There is something about profile. When something raises its stakes, everybody rallies around it. The Director wants it, it affects the reputation of the organisation."

"The benefit of the festival was extraordinary to be able to give them an equal platform and place them in a more advisory capacity for us."

INCREASED INTER-DEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION

The needs of the programme and the requirement to attract large size audiences to the festival, also necessitated the support of the whole organisation, which in turn galvanised conversations between departments and consistent collaboration among teams and in particular between the Learning and Marketing departments.

● *“We had a large-scale event, and the whole organisation had to get behind it.”* ●

“The festival was very public. There was a clear requirement to bring in 3,000 people. Investment had to be there.”

At varying levels of success within different organisations, closer links were also forged between Learning, Press, Visitor Experience and Exhibitions, creating a more integrated approach to programming and audience development.

“The Learning curators were working more closely with the Exhibition curators and Public Programmes and Front of House.”

● *“It [Circuit] made it easier to bridge the worlds of Learning and Exhibitions. They were seen as separate before.”* ●

ENCOURAGED AN AUDIENCE FOCUSED APPROACH TO PROGRAMMING

Before *Circuit*, the programme for young people was developed by gallery professionals 'for' young people, guided by the galleries' interests and priorities, which were often not relevant for reaching new audiences. *Circuit* enabled the programme to be informed through the young people's groups and partner galleries to develop deeper understanding of how to better connect with young people in a more constructive way than previously done.

This audience driven approach to programming opened up visual art organisations to other media, with more emphasis placed on music and performance, leading to a more diverse, cross-disciplinary and participatory programming and thus attracting a wider range of audiences who had not had opportunities to engage before.

"People were coming with lots of different ideas and attitudes and new media."

"It shifted the appetite for more open and risky programme, less precious and a little more cross-disciplinary."

"The way we are programming now is much more responsive to a more diverse group of young people."

Importantly, the benefits *Circuit*'s model of programming brought to galleries, encouraged a more outward and audience focused approach to curatorial processes, with some organisations adopting it in other areas of work, beyond *Circuit*, to engage with a wider range of audience groups.

"It started from Circuit but trickled through other parts of the organisation. We became less self-centred, and set up external steering groups with representatives of the community to give their input and integrate that thinking in our curatorial process. It makes it easier to engage. And we continue to integrate this to our approach."

"Other areas of programming within the gallery have the stamp of Circuit."

SHIFTED THE MODEL OF WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE FROM A 'TARGET' TO A 'RESOURCE'

Young people's voices being heard and fed into programme delivery, combined with the support given to core groups by gallery professionals, resulted in the production of quality and authentic programming, which in turn attracted large audiences and challenged public stakeholders' (e.g. University, Local Authority) preconceptions of art organisations.

"Organising something large and very visible changed people's thinking that we primarily do exhibitions for a white middle class audience."

The success of the peer-led events and festivals, increased trust towards young people and willingness to hand over more responsibility.

"We have shown we can draw audiences in successfully and nothing goes wrong."

Internal perceptions of young people changed. Whereas before *Circuit* young people were invited to create art or were used to reach their peers for audience development purposes, through *Circuit*, they were encouraged to become cultural practitioners and were seen as part of the organisation.

"Before Circuit, young people were interesting and valuable for our organisation but not instrumental in our future application. Young people's experiences and opinions are valued. They get involved in diversity meetings and staff meetings so that their voices are heard."

Circuit increased understanding about the importance of young people for the future of institutions not only as audiences but as valuable contributors to producing programming and to governance.

"There is much more awareness of young people as curators and cultural producers and future audiences."

"What Circuit enabled us to do, it influenced other parts of the organisation, not to forget young people."

Shifted the model of working with young people from a 'target' to a 'resource'

The programme outcomes built organisational confidence that the model of empowering and supporting young people to play more active roles within institutions is achievable and mutually beneficial.

“With the confidence it built, it showed me the quality it can achieve, the promise of something dynamic rather than being a theory or a nice idea but that it was unachievable.”

“The shift in having the confidence to believe that if we invest in young people in the right ways, they will deliver.”

The consensus was that as a result of *Circuit*, there has been an increasing demand for young people to be consulted about audience development, digital innovation, events, curatorial and planning processes of organisations, often stretching the Young People's programmes. New areas of work have been created for young people within institutions which have resulted in paid employment opportunities, outside of *Circuit*, for a number of *Circuit* alumni.

CONTRIBUTED TO STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Circuit contributed to staff professional development in a number of ways. For staff directly involved with *Circuit*, the national network offered invaluable professional development opportunities.

The ethos of *Circuit* to place young people in the heart of organisations, and peer-led programming provided opportunities for dialogue between young people and professionals and enabled relationships to develop. These brought new knowledge and perspectives to institutions as to what and how to communicate with young people.

“In arts institutions there tends to be a second guessing in terms of what young people think. It may seem a simple step to ask them. Now it feels like ‘ask them.’”

“Before Circuit, we were making assumptions about things. Unless you have an in-depth relationship, you can’t understand the challenges young people face.”

The programme increased the experience of gallery staff, outside the Learning department, to work with young people and to adapt their practices, thus increasing their confidence to work with 15-25 year olds who do not typically engage with culture.

“Some members of staff hadn’t come across people from different backgrounds in a work environment. By the end of the programme there was greater tolerance and understanding.”

“Departments outside Learning learned a lot. They had to be patient and confident in the process and how they could talk to funding prospects about something, when they did not know what the outcome would be or how to develop marketing around programme which they did not know how it would look like.”

The new and young audiences *Circuit* attracted into the building encouraged the adoption of a warmer attitude towards young people. The opportunities the Partnership strand provided for gallery staff to collaborate with youth sector organisations, also provided learning opportunities for staff of partner galleries, to benefit from youth sector knowledge and practices, especially around the welcome for young people.

The increased visibility of events by young people, made the work of the Learning department more public, opening it to public judgement, which Learning staff had to develop skills to deal with and respond to.

ENCOURAGED EXPERIMENTATION

The emphasis of *Circuit* on reflective practice, developed staff's analytical skills and triggered a step change in the way Learning programmes were delivered, encouraging a more self-reflective and self-critical approach.

“Enabled everyone involved, those delivering it and those leading to question quite a lot, ‘why we do it’, ‘how we do it’ and ‘where it is taking us.’”

Through this process of questioning, staff learned how to shift practice, thus changing internal attitudes towards risk taking and allowing for more experimentation and continuous improvement.

“Before it had to be right the first time. There is now a sense of trying, testing and changing.”

“It has been a massive impact on me personally, in terms of how we programme and evaluate, we don't fear mistakes, we are a lot more open about taking risks, less focused on numbers for judging the worth of something. We try to unpick why things work or don't work and try to do things differently. It is a different way of working. It feels different and it is more enjoyable, ambitious and exciting.”

INCREASED NON-HIERARCHICAL EXTERNAL COLLABORATIONS

The strand structures of *Circuit* and the Partnership strand in particular, enabled partners to develop strong relationships with the youth sector. Interestingly, it also shaped the nature of these relationships and shifted the way galleries cooperate with youth sector organisations with the relationship becoming more collaborative and less hierarchical.

● *“It changed the sense of working with partners, we are feeling freer to hand over the reins. We are thinking of ourselves as collaborators, working with external partners.”* ●

CATALYSTS

A number of factors sparked change within organisations.



CATALYSTS

Desire for change

Wanting to work with young people, in new ways through a sustained, strategic and more visible delivery of programmes, to create new knowledge within the organisation, was a necessary starting point.

Staff support of young people

The skill, energy and dedication of the Learning staff to undertake in-depth work, develop relationships with young people and enable them to produce quality work was instrumental for prompting change.

“The members of [Learning] staff are very skilled. Young people needed to be able to learn and understand in order to produce what they did. The staff got to know them really well and were able to be flexible in terms of what they wanted to do but also offer them a level and framework of support for specific processes to happen.”

Level of funding and length of commitment

The high value financial commitment made by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, acted as a catalyst for a number of reasons. It firstly conveyed internally and to senior members of staff in particular, the importance and seriousness attached to the programme and the recognition of the high quality of work undertaken with young people by Learning teams. The connections to governance *Circuit* established and the commitment from Leadership, were powerful for effecting change.

“Money speaks... when high value is placed onto something from the centre, people notice.”

Secondly, due to funding structures within art organisations, Learning projects depend more on income from Trusts and Foundations, resulting in temporary contracts and unstable teams. The four-year nature of the programme led to stability, long term programme planning and delivery which enabled young people to produce work and experiment.

“We were given sufficient time and money to one of these projects that are traditionally underfunded and side-lined.”

“It gave them [young people] financial resources they never had before. They could travel and could work with different artists.”

CHALLENGES

Organisational changes brought on by *Circuit* were not achieved without difficulties. Participants raised a number of issues that had to be overcome.

TIME AND CAPACITY

The amount of time it takes to navigate a complex and ambitious project and implement change needs to be acknowledged.

“It took one year to figure out what Circuit was and then we had two years to complete it and deliver a festival.”

Capacity within art organisations and the demands on time to develop collaborative working internally, was also challenging.

“There is a nervousness within organisations about young people getting involved. People think ‘how much time is it going to take me to work with young people?’. The natural default setting is to ‘do it myself’.”

Understanding the complexity of working with young people and their needs, requires time. The nature of core groups, consisting of young people often with conflicting interests, engaging with the programme on a voluntary basis and sporadically due to their own time limitations or fluid lives, can lead to delays in programme development, which can't often be accommodated by gallery timeframe requirements.

“Departments realising if you have a group of young people who are not normally working together, they all have conflicting demands and do most of the work on a voluntary basis and it takes a long time to finalise programming.”

The time it takes to build external relationships with youth sector organisations and develop joint working was also a challenge, especially in light of the pressure the youth sector is under.

“Even a small-scale project can be draining.”

“It took a while to build relationships and they did not always work.”

Similarly, it took some time to work out how to attract and retain ‘Hard to Reach’ young people whilst negating risk and being able to deliver a ‘shiny’ public facing programme.

Staff resistance and change of attitudes towards young people and their role within galleries was also a challenge. Although young people are seen as a key audience focus within art organisations, traditionally, work with this age group is perceived as the remit of Learning, with other departments often feeling uncomfortable or not having the interest or the experience to work with 15-25 year olds or expecting to engage with young people 'on the gallery's terms'.

"Young people can bring in a disruptive presence. Not all the gallery assistants were happy."

"They don't really like young people, don't enjoy working with them and are suspicious of them. There are issues around front of house, they are not particularly welcoming, especially with 'Hard to Reach' people."

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES

Inherent difficulties within visual art organisations, large institutions in particular, to move beyond the boundaries of departmental workings, roles and responsibilities, remains a challenge. It was claimed that whilst curatorial involvement with *Circuit* grew through the life of the programme and there was a more open approach in terms of the interpretation needs of young people, there is scope for closer and mutually beneficial collaboration between Curatorial and Learning.

It was argued that more could have been done during the life of *Circuit* to bridge the gaps between Curatorial and Learning and for curatorial expertise and resources to benefit young people's programmes, whilst the needs of 15-25 year olds feed into galleries' core programmes. The extent to which young people feel welcomed to Galleries' core programming and whether the Galleries' core offer is relevant to a wider group of young people, remains a challenge.

"The Learning team was leading it and it still feels like a Learning or an Education project. Across the museums' sector there could be closer collaboration between Education and Exhibitions. Circuit could have grappled with it more, in the end it did not do much. Within each organisation could have insisted that a curator was involved. The main point of contact was a Director and Learning."

"I was disappointed that the Conference was not pitched more strongly to curators."

Whilst progress has been made in moving young people's programmes towards the core of organisations, more needs to be done to position Learning in the centre of the galleries' offer rather than the periphery of their functions.

SUSTAINABILITY



SUSTAINABILITY

There was apprehension that post *Circuit*, reduced capacity in terms of financial and human resources galleries can allocate to young people's provision, can threaten the sustainability of newly found ways of working with young people. This is particularly true for smaller organisations where the financial support received for *Circuit* was disproportionate to their overall budget.

"Budget will be a big part of it. How do we achieve the same impact without the same level of funding?"

Concerns were also expressed that time could erode the impact of *Circuit*, especially after the departure of key members of staff who worked on the programme. Institutional memory and the extent to which *Circuit*'s values and processes will be embedded within organisations, through policies and changes of structures and processes, could affect continuity of provision for young people. Again, this is particularly relevant for smaller galleries, where programme delivery depends on a small team, and therefore would be more likely to be affected by staff turnover.

"My fear is that over the next five years the knowledge of Circuit may become more historical and lose all the learning that happened through it."

Encouragingly, some partners suggested that the experience from working on the project, its legacy and reputation locally, has already created new opportunities to secure new funding, expand the programme and work with new groups.

It was also argued that *Circuit* has conceptually built organisational capacity that will enable galleries to continue the work they started. As a legacy of *Circuit*, there is now greater sophistication within galleries about the positive effects of engaging with young people and positioning them in the heart and soul of institutions.

"The idea of young people being audible within an organisation is a way forward. Understanding what young audiences might need."

Similarly, there is a realisation that effecting long lasting change and doing things ‘for’ and ‘with’ young people, does not only rely on budget but also on changing attitudes and opening up to young people what organisations are already doing.

Retaining the changes brought by *Circuit*, such as the spaces within galleries where young people can programme, the relationships with the youth sector and the involvement of young people in decision making processes will be important.

“Retaining these spaces where young people can programme and experiment and have a voice.”

“Trying to sustain the youth sector relationships we have developed.”

● The highly skilled and mobilised *Circuit* alumni from the young people’s groups will be of benefit to galleries and the regional arts infrastructure to support provision for young people. Offering apprenticeships and more opportunities for young people, who are not following academic educational routes, to become involved with art organisations on a more sustained basis, would be advantageous. ●

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CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL WORKING

Increasing awareness and understanding about the work of the Learning department, and engaging in more cross-departmental working, beyond high profile events, would also be beneficial.

“The festival was very visible and all areas of the organisation got involved. Outside of that, there was a lot of Partnership work and events going on that a lot of staff were unaware. We were not sending newsletters or making clearer all the work that was going on.”

Better acknowledging the inherent imbalance within organisations between Curatorial and Learning would be valuable. The programming process in galleries remains traditional, with curatorial interest rather than audience needs driving the exhibitions’ programme. It would be useful to involve curatorial teams to reflect on the findings of *Circuit* and look at how institutions could change, to effect closer collaboration.

In the process of doing so, it would be beneficial to acknowledge the differences between the two departments, for example the disparate funding structures, Exhibitions through organisations’ own resources and Learning through Trusts and Foundations, and therefore the dissimilar rhythms of working, with Exhibitions working with longer and Learning with shorter term programmes. The differences in the nature of the work of the two departments, with Curators’ role finishing when a programme opens to the public and Learning’s requirement to support young people to keep programmes running need to be recognised.

The historic lack of relationship between Learning and Curatorial within organisations, with the emphasis of the former on engagement and the latter on artistic excellence, and the tensions of how ‘quality’ is defined within the scope of a learning programme, needs to be considered. It would also be beneficial to address intellectual barriers to young people, and the importance placed on knowledge rather than personal relevance, emotional engagement or the ability to question as a means of accessing collections.

NETWORK RETENTION

Maintaining the relationship between partner organisations to remind of the impact achieved and motivate the continuation of the work *Circuit* started, would be advantageous.

“There is something about those working in Circuit coming back together once or twice a year. Being able to share how it is going and remember and remind each other of the positive impact of Circuit so it does not get lost.”

Establishing closer working relationships at all levels within organisations, including senior management teams, especially between galleries that share common characteristics would also be valuable.

“I had no idea what was going on with other partner organisations. There was no mechanism in place to bring people together at directorial level. Within that network more could have been done with sharing or been buddied up.”

CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSIONS

The consensus was that *Circuit* had a significant impact on institutions, and brought a number of changes, which individually are small but collectively amount to big shifts. *Circuit* made young people more visible within galleries, facilitated collaboration internally and externally, contributed to the professional development of staff, shifted the model of working with young people from 'a target' to 'a resource', thus enabling an audience focused approach to programme delivery. *Circuit* led to a more diverse, cross-disciplinary and participatory offer, which attracted a wider range of audiences who had not had opportunities to engage with visual art organisations before.

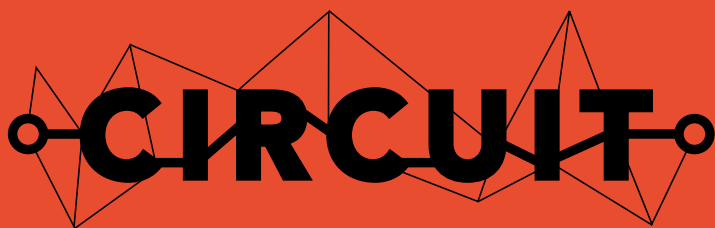
The importance attached to reflective practice, triggered a critical approach to the way learning programmes were delivered, encouraging experimentation and continuous improvement in the process.

The visibility and value placed upon the programme, raised awareness of the potential and possibilities of young people's programmes within institutions, within the wider context of organisations' output and not just for outreach.

Circuit permeated and stimulated conversations at various parts and levels of the partner organisations and provoked change, putting systems and structures in place to consistently deliver programming that is authentic and relevant to young people.

Embedding these systems within organisational structures, ensuring that the voice of young people is heard and is considered in decision making processes and programming outputs would be critical for sustaining the values and outcomes of *Circuit*.

Whilst *Circuit* contributed to affecting the ecology and hierarchical structures of institutions, progress still needs to be made to shift responsibility for young people from the margins to the core of institutions. Continued Leadership commitment and purchase from all staff of the importance of Learning and working with young people will be important. Continuing the debate, within the entire organisation, about the social value of visual art organisations and who holds authority, will be vital for reinventing museums and galleries as spaces of artistic visibility and excellence and social relevance for all.



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