

CIRCUIT NATIONAL PROGRAMME REVIEW

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

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- INTRODUCTION



PROJECT FOREGROUND: FUNDING CONTEXT AND APPLICATION PROCESS

Circuit was a four-year programme running from March 2013 – March 2017 connecting 15 – 25-year olds to the arts in galleries and museums, working in partnership with the youth sector. The programme was supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (the Foundation / PHF).

The programme brought together eight organisations: Tate London (comprising Tate Britain and Tate Modern); Tate Liverpool; and Tate St Ives, along with five national partners selected from the Plus Tate Network.

The national partners were invited to apply by 2 November 2012 and were required to describe how the project aligned with their learning strategy and regional priorities, and how they would approach the delivery of the four core strands of the programme (see section 2 below). The selection process was conducted by a steering committee involving Tate and independent experts in the field of youth learning.

The successful applicants were Firstsite, Colchester; MOSTYN, Llandudno; Nottingham Contemporary; The Whitworth, Manchester; and a partnership between Wying Arts Centre and Kettle's Yard, Cambridge.

The programme was implemented within an increasingly fragile funding context, as noted in the second Annual Report for *Circuit*:

The second year of *Circuit* has presented many wider economic challenges such as continued cuts across the cultural and youth sector. This has affected the potential for partnership building as well as budget cuts to resources and infrastructure within cultural organisations.

1.2 PROJECT PARTNERS

The partner galleries' starting points at the outset of the programme are summarised as follows:

- Firstsite, Colchester: Firstsite is in Colchester, Essex. The gallery was established in 1996 with a new building opening in 2011. Young people frequent the area that surrounds the building. Prior to *Circuit*, Firstsite received the Experimental Community Grant from Paul Hamlyn Foundation in 2011. This two-year project set up the Young Art Kommunity group "Y.A.K" to run a peer programme.
- Whitworth, Manchester: the Whitworth is part of the University of Manchester. It opened in 1889 and underwent a major capital development programme which was completed in 2015. The gallery is located in a park within Moss Side, a part of Manchester facing diverse social and economic challenges. Prior to *Circuit*, there was no established peer-led practice group and irregular programming for young people.
- MOSTYN, Llandudno: MOSTYN opened in 1902. The gallery's vision is to develop as a hub for community engagement, but prior to *Circuit* had no history of working with the 15-25-year-old age group. The gallery's vision is to develop as a hub for community engagement.
- Wysing Arts Centre and Kettle's Yard, Cambridge: Wysing Arts Centre is a contemporary arts residency centre and campus for artistic production, experimentation and learning located twenty minutes' drive South of Cambridge. It was established in 1989 and underwent a capital development in 2008. Wysing partnered with Kettle's Yard, an Art Gallery and House which was given by its founder, Jim Ede, to the University of Cambridge in 1966. Kettle's Yard also underwent a major

capital programme, re-opening in 2018. Before embarking on *Circuit*, the two galleries did not have a history of working together and did not have pre-existing young people's groups. Both organisations put artists at the centre of what they do and approach working with young people as supporting artists of the future.

- Nottingham Contemporary: Nottingham Contemporary opened in 2009 and is one of the largest contemporary art centres in the UK. The gallery has presented between four and five exhibitions of the world's major artists since its inception, but prior to *Circuit* had yet to establish a programme specifically for young people.
- Tate London: following Tate Liverpool's lead delivering informal learning programmes aimed specifically at young people in 1994, peer-led practice was established in Tate Modern in 2000 and Tate Britain a year later. The vision for *Circuit* grew from this, including the four programme strands that each *Circuit* gallery delivers: peer-led events produced by young people for young people throughout the year, one large-scale festival during the four years, sustainable partnerships with the youth sector and creation of new digital work and archives.
- Tate St Ives: Tate St Ives opened in 1993 and underwent a redevelopment programme that was completed in 2017. A young person learning programme, Young Tate, was established in 2008. Early research showed that the gallery was perceived as a place that holds little relevance to the lives of the young people in the area. In November 2012, just prior to *Circuit*, the Curatorial and Learning Teams combined to form a programme team which targeted young people as a key developmental audience.
- Tate Liverpool: Tate Liverpool opened in 1988. The gallery had been working with young people since the Young Tate group began in 1994. This later developed into Tate Collective, which is the name now used across all four Tate sites. Prior to *Circuit*, a priority for Tate Liverpool was to further diversify the offer and therefore those engaged, to better reflect the local profile of young people. Young people were working closely with and within several departments, including marketing, press and curatorial.

1.3 REPORT BRIEF

Analysis and evaluation of *Circuit* to date includes:

- A review of evaluation structures and practices by Hannah Wilmot
- Critical friend report by Roz Hall
- An evaluation of organisational change, by Angela Diakopoulou
- A doctoral thesis by Nicola Sim

These reports describe in detail the processes involved with and the outcomes arising from *Circuit* and provide invaluable reflections on the learning from this programme of work.

This Review focuses on the structural aspects of *Circuit* to inform funders and galleries about how programmes may be approached in future. There are inevitably some overlaps with the findings of the reports mentioned above, and synergies are cross referenced in footnotes within this document.

The objective of this Review is to:

- Assess the strengths and weaknesses and identify the learning from the overall programme.

The following areas were considered:

- Programme structure
- Governance structure
- Partnership working across the 10 settings
- Planning, communication, reporting and administration
- Evaluation and research
- Roles and responsibilities
- Delivery and capacity

This is shared publicly alongside other research papers on the *Circuit* website, <https://circuit.tate.org.uk/>

1.4 METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

The methodology involved a review of all project documentation followed by structured in-depth interviews with 30 project stakeholders. The sample was chosen to represent all the partner galleries involved in *Circuit*, and to provide a balanced mix of perspectives from across the governance and delivery structure.

To maintain confidentiality the quotations in this report are not attributed to individuals, but are credited according to individuals' involvement with the programme:

D Gallery Director (6 Gallery directors were included in this sample)

B Project Board Member and funder (4)

SG Project Steering Group member (6)

WG Project Working Group Member (6)

N National Team (4) and consultants (4)

All the quotations used in this report are those of project stakeholders, and do not reflect the opinions of the evaluation consultant.

1.5 CONSENSUS AND DIVERGENCE

Perspectives of the strengths and weaknesses of the *Circuit* programme inevitably depended on respondents' roles, together with the longevity and level of their engagement with the project. They were also influenced by the position of individuals in their respective organisations, their operational setting, and the geodemographic context within which they were working.

There areas where most consensus emerged were:

- Programme concept, structure and timescale
- The partnership
- Evaluation and reporting

There was more divergence about:

- Governance
- Programme organisation
- Budget and sustainability

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



2.1 STRENGTHS

- The main strengths of the *Circuit* programme were the clarity of its vision, aims and goal and its bold ambition. It was taken from a pre-tested model, and the peer led and festivals strands were powerful. The experience, track record and responsiveness of the National team were recognised. Some of the consultants' roles became clearer over time, and they provided a strong mix of expertise and independent viewpoints. The PhD contribution was a particular strength.
- The mix of operational scales and contexts, the spread of locations, and the knowledge of staff across the partnership were assets. Project stakeholders shared problems and had opportunities to visit other organisations and work together.
- The governance model was familiar to PHF and to Tate, and the active presence of the funder added weight to the programme, ensuring the buy-in of Directors across the partnership. The Project Board had a close relationship with Tate and the membership consisted of a strong mix of expertise. The Steering group was well chaired, and its membership was inclusive: over time, it emerged as a good sharing network. The Working group became an honest place for reflection and involvement of young people.
- Evaluation was a priority from the outset, combining an experimental approach with support from an experienced evaluator. It was an opportunity to gain hard evidence as well as to develop skills.
- All the individuals interviewed were aware of and acknowledged the scale of investment by the PHF, and the consequent weight and profile that this gave to *Circuit*. For one organisation it was the only reliably funded strand of work, and for another it injected resources at a time of substantial financial insecurity.

Strengths

- It is too early to measure the long-term sustainability of the investment in *Circuit*, although the learning from the programme has already been embedded in some partner organisations. Directors were better able to identify these benefits, which included commitment to continuing engagement with young people, involving young people in governance, and wider organisational change. New partnerships have been cemented and two galleries are now committed to investing in support for young peoples' programmes within their core budgets. The legacy funding proved to be important in sustaining *Circuit* for partners who were awarded this support.

2.2 WEAKNESSES

- The scale of *Circuit* was daunting for some partnership members, who overestimated their organisational capacity to deliver. Further, the Tate model was not appropriate to all scales of operation. There was a lack of clarity about expectations for the festival strand, and the digital strand was not well defined. There was also a lack of clarity about where and when to involve young people. The focus of the first year was designed for research and development, but some partners went straight into delivery mode: this was partly because of lack of experience, and partly because of internal pressures to deliver core activity at the same time as engage with *Circuit*.
- The dual role of the National team within Tate combined with internal pressures caused pinch points, along with difficulties in managing both risk and relationships. The prevalence of 'Tate' language and culture led partners to remark on assumptions made about capacity and terminology. The consultants' roles were sometimes blurred and / or overlapping. Respondents to this Review felt that *Circuit* lacked a critical friend. There was a lack of facilitation to ensure that partners truly benefited from their diverse settings and organisational cultures.
- The governance layers operated separately and were complicated. Although the purpose of each group was clearly defined at the start of the programme, project stakeholders were confused about their roles. The reasons for this were lack of governance experience for some of those involved, changes to representation within the groups over time, and 'agenda creep' at meetings. The Board lacked representation from a national youth organisation and by young people.
- The evaluation framework was unwieldy and there was a lack of organisational capacity and experience to deliver the required evidence. Reporting requirements were perceived to be cumbersome and inflexible, and there was a lack of organisational capacity to deliver the required outputs.

- Investment on this scale has been so rare that the partner galleries were clearly keen to embrace the project and be part of delivering *Circuit*. With hindsight, interviewees questioned the wisdom of allocating the budget equally across all organisations. Seven project stakeholders described how this impacted negatively on their strategic organisational objectives since they lacked human resources to deliver their core programme as well as to deliver *Circuit*.
- Sustainability across the partnership is patchy. Six interviewees queried the degree to which the legacy of *Circuit* could be embedded in their organisations. They recalled difficulties in managing up and advocating the programme to their colleagues. Two Directors of partner galleries questioned whether it is possible to sustain *Circuit*, with one describing the ending of the programme as like dropping off a cliff edge. There were also two individual remarks about the distribution of the legacy pot, which included an opinion the original principle of fairness across the partnership had been compromised.
- A feasibility process at the start could have explored what kinds of support partners needed and tailored financial and human resources accordingly. It could help partners to explore the meaning of a project of this scale, the potential impact on their organisations, the terminology involved, how to foster sustainable partnerships with youth organisations, and how to shape the model to suit their own contexts.
- Inclusion of national youth organisations in the governance structure would have helped to inform the programme as it developed. Partner input into the governance could draw on best practice from elsewhere and inform a less onerous reporting process. External facilitators could support the governance establishing best practice in team building, agenda setting, group behaviour, shared purpose, and effective delivery. More clarity about the funder's precise role in the governance structure in future would be helpful.
- The National team must have enough capacity and authority to lead such a complex project, not only in terms of budget and people but also in terms of skills, experience, support and mentoring. Secondees from 'regional' organisations could bring complementary learning from different programme models and contexts.

- One gallery appointed their own critical friend to support the process which proved to be very helpful. Another established a diagonal slice team to manage the project, which again provides a useful internal model. Commissioning regional critical friends and mentors would be beneficial in future and would help staff both to advocate the project and navigate internal processes and politics.
- *Circuit* partners understood, in principle, that this programme was about experimentation and learning from trial and error. More time early on to explore what it means to trust the process, to think rather than to do, was advocated. Likewise, a programme of coaching / CPD would have helped gallery staff to reflect, share and learn together.
- There were question marks around the volume and types of partners involved in *Circuit*, with one suggestion that a smaller grouping could have delivered in more depth and been truly transformational. Another approach would be to identify a portfolio of organisations where there is already alignment with aspects of the model and therefore builds on existing practice. Alternatively, it could accommodate a balanced portfolio of some organisations with fertile ground partnering others needing significant intervention. Either way, the feasibility stage would assess resourcing levels required (money, people, skills) and tailor support to organisational need and capacity.

3 CONCEPT, SCALE, STRUCTURE AND TIMESCALE



3.1 THE *CIRCUIT* PROGRAMME

Circuit's core values were:

- Making a positive difference
- Young people's ownership, agency and authenticity
- Social, cultural and creative diversity

Circuit's core aims were to:

- Make a positive difference with and for young people
- Improve access and opportunities for harder to reach young people
- Develop and change practice within and across cultural organisations
- Change attitudes and behaviours towards and about young people

At the outset, the application and selection process ensured that partner organisations were aware of the level of funding to be provided and the expectations for delivery of the four main strands. These were developed directly from the aims, which each partner worked towards and reported against. They were designed to interlink and impact on each other. The strands were:

- Profile and engagement – Festival: a high-profile festival or similar event for and by young people aged 15 – 25 years; one per partner in one of the four years, attracting up to 3,000 young people per annum
- Embedding work with young people – Peer Led: a sustained programme of peer-led projects engaging up to 50 young people per annum for four years
- Building Sustainable Networks – Partnerships: development of new relationships with up to four local youth organisations leading towards project activity engaging up to 20 young people per annum in years 3 and 4

- Reaching wider audiences – Digital: development of new digital content to empower and engage young people, and share practice across the gallery education sector

3.2 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES: CONCEPT, SCALE, STRUCTURE AND TIMESCALE

The principle strengths and weaknesses of these aspects of *Circuit* were identified as:

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Concept and scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarity of vision aims and goals An appealing intellectual concept with tangible outcomes Bold and ambitious: setting the bar high 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daunting: overestimated organisational capacity Lack of handover / organisational continuity Lack of clear marketing and audience development objectives
Project structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taken from Tate model: pre -tested and clear Peer-led strand was powerful, and Festivals were valuable the interdependences of strands became clear over time Terminology was already familiar to some partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Tate model was not appropriate / lacked flexibility for some partners Smaller organisations found it complex and hard to support four strands Lack of clarity about expectations, particularly for festival strand Digital strand was not well defined Lack of clarity about where and when to involve young people
Timescale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Four years considered appropriate by three of the partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timescale did not allow for review, refreshment, reflection

3.3 CONCEPT AND SCALE

There was consensus that the vision for and goals of the programme were clear. *Circuit* was variously described as being *an appealing intellectual concept* (B) and one that *set the bar high* (N).

The initial meeting with all partners helped internal project stakeholders to understand the aims and goals. It enabled stakeholders to appreciate the sheer ambition of the project and its aspiration to secure commitment from the Directors of the partner organisations involved:

The Directors and PHF Board members were very clear and consistent in the idea that this is not something for the learning team: they were insistent that involvement was at Director level

(D)

The project had such ambition – it had an incredible vision

(N)

However, that *intellectual concept was abstract for some* (B), and the scale of the programme brought with it several challenges. Although they had knowingly and willingly gone through the application process, two people remarked that while Tate had experience of this kind of model, it was unfamiliar for other partner organisations:

The ambition of Circuit was set with Tate's history and ambition in mind

(D)

Tate had already been programming like that for six years

(N)

Aligned with this issue, project stakeholders often stated that the concept came with assumptions about partners' organisational capacities, previous experience, and operating contexts (see also 2.6 below):

It was very ambitious: the sector needed to shift up a gear. But in practice we overestimated institutional capacity. We were naïve in our expectations ... it was a huge learning curve

(N)

Our organisation hadn't worked with hard to reach young people before, so it was hugely challenging

(SG)

Young people and staff benefited from the scale through friendships and connections, but maybe what was bundled in was too big – a lot of money but lack of people, too big an ask for the people

The longevity of *Circuit* meant that it was difficult to maintain focus on and understanding of its original goals, particularly within organisations that restructured during this period and / or managed staff succession:

Not many organisations gave enough importance to handover when staff left: the concept of documentation and handover notes was not in place

(N)

Two stakeholders also commented that there were no specific marketing and audience objectives to support the project vision.

3.4 STRUCTURE

When it came to the different strands in the project, there were benefits to using a framework that had been developed and tested by Tate previously:

All galleries working together was a real strength. It laid out the way we work in a clear fashion. The model gave so much clarity about purpose and who we were aiming to work for and why

(WG)

It gave us a good framework; scope to work. Peer led was obvious, festivals and partnerships also obvious

(WG)

However, representatives of four partner organisations recalled how they struggled to apply this to their own operational models, and felt that it was prescriptive rather than flexible:

I understand the need for a defined structure but a lot of the time it felt alien within our context: so much was top down. Even the recruitment of young people was challenging

(D)

As one member of the Project Board observed, it was challenging to *Design a programme up front but also move and shift when changes are needed*

(B)

All of those interviewed observed that a longitudinal project such as *Circuit* needed inbuilt flexibility to accommodate organisational change. It also needed to be adaptive to different contexts and adjust to shifting agendas. One member of the National team described how a more flexible approach was adopted as the programme developed, and four representatives of partner galleries acknowledged that they gained confidence to shape the project strands to their own operational models as time went on (see also 3.2 below):

The context in which it operates changes over five years: it had inflexibility within the programme. We need to understand how to move milestones, scale, scope – it wasn't geared up to thinking about the education context; even the curriculum changed within this period

(D)

At the beginning the galleries were all told to work to the same outcomes; a flexible outlook developed over time, for example working out individual diversity contexts and targets in years 2 and 3

(N)

Some *Circuit* stakeholders felt that the stranding created false divisions, and some also felt that the strands operated separately. Three individuals observed that the interdependence between the strands only emerged over time and with experience¹:

It was good to establish strands as areas of work, but we consciously separated them too much. One focus might have been easier

(SC)

The strands fitted well with existing things – a natural fit. Peer led and partnership needn't be separate as these were somewhat unnatural divisions

(SC)

It became clearer as it progressed. It was hard to distinguish between peer led and partnership at first – it wasn't always as clear cut as the strands make it sound

(WQ)

¹ See 'Natural allies or uneasy bedfellows? Investigating the geographies of partnership between galleries and youth organisations', Nicola Sim, November 2017, summary document

Partner organisations' abilities to support the different strands varied widely according to their individual starting points and the geodemographic contexts within which they were working. Representatives of four galleries reported that they were able to build on existing practice and embed the work into their overall programme. For others, particularly the smaller institutions, *Circuit* became the focus of their activity:

Circuit was part of a wider programme for some, and the main objective for others who had to develop this from scratch

(N)

Peer-led working was a familiar concept for five of the partner organisations, whereas for others this was completely new:

We got used to the peer-led idea but needed support and expertise

(D)

The peer led strand was very important – it's what we do

(SG/WG)

Some of the difficulties that individual galleries had with embracing the structure stemmed from terminology (see also 3.2 below). For example, two interviewees remarked that they were not familiar with peer-led as a concept, but realised that they had engaged with this area of work in the past²,

Likewise, as the first quotation below suggests, the word festival created certain assumptions.

Festivals threw up fears and questions, the expectations of what the scale should be. And the structure of the programme raised questions about audiences, workload, and organisational buy-in

(N)

I disliked the festival strand at first, so much budget going to a one-off; but, we reviewed it and thought it was brilliant

(WG)

² See *Circuit* Data Analyst – Final Report, April 2017, by Hannah Wilmot, section 1.2 for more detailed analysis of the evidence

There was consensus among representatives of partner organisations that young people should have been more involved in *Circuit's* governance (see also section 2.4 below). There were also question marks about the degree to which young people were properly and appropriately involved in programme design and evaluation activity (see also 2.5 below)³:

Circuit really struggled with where and how and when to involve young people – we never really got to grips with this

(SG/WG)

Another area of consensus about the design of the programme was that the aims of the digital strand were unclear, and that the boundaries between digital and marketing activity were blurred:

Digital was never really defined – it became more about programming; having it as a separate strand didn't really help

(SC)

The digital was the least well defined – website, comms, artwork.

The digital producer's role evolved well, but there were no clear aims

(N)

Digital was the most challenging as it made demands on things like marketing

(D)

³ See Critical Friend Report, Roz Hall, for detailed analysis of ways in which young people were, and could be, involved in programme production and evaluation

3.5 TIMESCALE

Three individuals representing partner galleries, all of whom were familiar with large scale projects such as festivals and were well versed in working with young people, felt that the timescale for *Circuit* was appropriate. They believed that a longer time period would have resulted in a loss of focus and diminished momentum.

However, most of those interviewed for this review commented that more time would have allowed for a proper feasibility study for each gallery at the formative stage, and could have involved partners in a more realistic scoping of the project:

We could have taken the first two years as a scoping period – just having conversations with people you didn't know

(D)

It took us a couple of years to understand the context and to relax with it. We would like to have been part of an iterative conversation from the start

(D)

We needed time to reach the young people first; our organisation hadn't worked with the hard to reach before and it was hugely challenging

(SG)

The focus of the first year of the programme was on developing partnerships and laying the foundations for the delivery, and the Foreword to the 2013/14 Annual Report for *Circuit* described how the first year of the programme focused on building foundations and shared practice across the national programme. However, as a member of the National team commented¹:

¹ See *Circuit* Data Analyst – Final Report, April 2017, by Hannah Wilmot, section 2.1; and Critical Friend Report, by Roz Hall, section 3.2

Some galleries went straight to delivery: it was a while before teams were learning from the partnership.

(N)

The reasons why some galleries did go straight to delivery were complex, and included some or all the following factors:

- Understanding of this process at Director level but lack of buy-in from staff members responsible for implementing the programme
- Lack of experience in / confidence to undertake research and development
- Changes in personnel leading the programme during the period between the original application and the rollout of *Circuit*
- Pressure to deliver core activity while simultaneously engaging in *Circuit*

A longer timescale would also have allowed for more review and reflection, enabling staff teams to adjust during the progressive stage, and to absorb the impact of organisational changes:

This was a ten-year project. The pressure put on institutions to work with staff and engage in organisational change takes longer than five years

(N)

After year two we should have had a gap, a break for reflection should have happened, to understand where you are going, test and reflect

(SC)

It could also have facilitated more embedding of the learning and evaluation at the summative stage:

A legacy year – this needs to be understood by all partners. We need to disseminate to the wider sector. The Steering Group should still be meeting to drive the legacy but now we have lost the collective voice.

(SC)

An amazing process to live through – wish there had been more dissemination as we mustn't get too far away from it

(SQ)

There were also five comments that a longer timescale would have helped to ensure that the budget was spent at a more considered pace (see also 7.1 below), and to ensure *Circuit's* sustainability in the longer term (see also 7.2 below):

Shift the funding model over a longer time period would help with sustainability and get better outcomes

(SQ)

4 NATIONAL PROGRAMME ORGANISATION



4.1 THE *CIRCUIT* TEAM

A National team based cross-site at Tate Modern and Tate Britain was in place to support all partner sites and oversee the programme as follows:

National team

- National Lead
- National Manager
- Assistant
- Digital Producer

Consultants

- Critical friend
- Evaluator
- Marketing consultant
- Press consultant

The programme was also supported by a data analyst and was the focus of an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership jointly hosted by Tate and The University of Nottingham, which used *Circuit* as a context for critical enquiry.

4.2 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES: NATIONAL PROGRAMME ORGANISATION

The main strengths and weaknesses of the infrastructure that was put in place to organise *Circuit* were identified as follows:

	Strengths	Weaknesses
The National Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience, track record and authority • Clear roles and responsibilities • Helpful, responsive, providing follow-ups • Individuals' understanding of different contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dual role of Tate team • Pinch points and internal pressures • Difficulty in managing both risk and relationships • Tate language and culture
Consultant Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some roles became clearer over time • Strong mix of expertise and perspectives • Provided independent viewpoints • PhD contribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultant roles blurred / overlapping • Some partners unsure how to work with consultants • Assumptions made about capacity and language • Lack of a critical friend

4.3 THE NATIONAL TEAM

Project stakeholders appreciated the expertise of members of the National team, respecting their organisational experience and track record in delivering complex projects. They commented on Tate's brand, leverage, scale, and ability to embed, as well as the closeness of the relationship with PHF:

If Tate hadn't done it, it wouldn't exist

(SG/WG)

Partners were clear about the roles and responsibilities of the team, and highlighted the lengths to which the *Circuit* Programme National Lead went to understand their operational contexts and to provide them with support:

Their visits to us were important: interesting to see how people were talking in our space, the National team coming to see us

(WG)

I felt the Tate team were incredibly supportive and encouraging. I wouldn't have wanted an independent agency doing it

(D)

Other strengths of the National team's operation included their ability to manage the risk of the project and, as the programme progressed, the development of an increasingly responsive and flexible attitude.

Members of the project Steering and Working groups were aware of the complexities of managing as well as delivering a project and remarked on internal tensions that arose within the team. There were also observations about the National team's own challenges in advocating for *Circuit* among their peers.

Two people queried whether it is possible to be both manager and partner in a programme such as this. Illustrative comments were as follows:

The dual nature of the Tate team with responsibility for reporting was challenging: it is complicated where a partner is also acting in a lead role
(SQ)

The National team was managing the risk as opposed to the relationship
(WG)

The first voice is Tate. It's very difficult to find a true partnership: I'm not convinced Tate can ever be neutral and transparent
(N)

Some criticisms arose because representatives of partner organisations expected members of the National team to have all the answers, when in fact these individuals were also on a learning curve:

They had internal pressures they were trying to navigate; they perhaps needed more independence and authority
(D)

They were feeling their way, under a lot of pressure
(B)

The perceived dominance of Tate language and culture was a recurring theme of interviews with representatives of six partner galleries and two members of the consultancy team:

We didn't know what an 'action research' project was until the very end. It's a very Tate thing
(WG)

The terminology used was often unfamiliar for partners, including words such as: ‘diversification’, ‘reflective practice’, ‘festival’, ‘peer led’, ‘hard to reach’. These perceptions also related to vastly different scales of operation, organisational cultures, and working contexts¹:

The National team saw Circuit as a mini model of Tate itself – but our structures are so different: for example, we had no marketing department
(WG)

There were assumptions about what ‘hard to reach’ meant, using the London context. Elsewhere it meant young farmers
(N)

I wouldn’t have used the term ‘festival’ as a strand: we spent three months discussing what a festival is. Rather, it’s a large scale public event
(WG)

¹ See *Circuit* Data Analyst – Final Report, April 2017, by Hannah Wilmot, section 2.2 for the debate about ‘hard to reach’

4.4 CONSULTANT ROLES

Project partners and members of the National team appreciated several aspects of the consultancy team appointed to support *Circuit*. These were the combination of practical and academic expertise; the added value achieved through specialist marketing and evaluation skills and working with young people; and the involvement of consultants in the governance structure.

Members of the National team appreciated the consultants' close involvement in *Circuit*:

Good to have everyone talking candidly and openly, with complementary insights... a lot of expertise: practical, academic, learning as a professional and expanding experience

(N)

Positive to include them in the governance and draw on their expertise

(N)

The work of the doctoral researcher was highlighted as a positive part of the process, as well as a valuable contribution to *Circuit*'s legacy:

The PhD is a massive and positive contribution; (she was) embedded and detached, asking the right questions

(SG)

It was also clear that individual galleries benefited from the expertise of individual members of the consultancy team, whether this was around evaluation, marketing, or facilitation:

We did some interesting work around data, which was informative and very helpful

(SG)

Marketing was wonderful, the process, making marketing very clear for me, opened up a process and learnt how to engage young people

(WQ)

The facilitator was very patient and ran the Circulate group which members enjoyed

(WQ)

Overall, however, *Circuit* partners felt that there was a lack of clarity about and distinction between the various consultancy roles. They remembered some duplication, particularly when it came to reporting requirements (see also section 2.5 below):

Consultants can be invaluable, but we didn't know enough who they were and what they were doing; the momentum became ever more complex, eating up a lot of energy

(SG/WQ)

They seemed to appear and disappear – not clear who they were or what they were doing; a sense of things being done to us

(D)

A lot of the communication was hard to decipher – and some overlap between consultants and team members: learning reports, activity report, evaluation, data capture, it all took a long time to find our feet

(SG)

There were also frequent criticisms of one size fits all models, and the lack of tailoring to individual galleries. This resulted in additional workloads for some organisations, particularly those lacking experience in areas such as evaluation and those with small staff teams (see also section 2.5 below)¹:

Could have been more bespoke for each gallery, especially the evaluation – could be overwhelming for us

(SG)

¹ See *Circuit 2013 – 2017, A review of the evaluation structures and practices*, September 2017, by Hannah Wilmot, section 4

Came with their own agendas and pressures

(D)

Consultants were brought in without flexing to the content and the scale and time frames – needed to be more adaptive

(D)

The marketing felt too imposing; the evaluation was quite intense but not particularly relevant to our young people

(WG)

One member of the project board queried whether *Circuit* had achieved maximum value for money from its investment in consultants, while the consultants themselves expressed their own frustrations. One member of the consultancy team recalled how the original intention for a ‘critical friend’ role shifted over time, and another echoed project partners’ comments about the blurring of roles². They questioned the usefulness of the number and content of meetings, and described how administrative processes that inhibited their ability to respond directly to partner galleries and thereby achieve their own goals effectively³:

It was an experimental project and very interesting to work on, but also unusual and frustrating.

(N)

Too much talking about processes rather than outcomes.

(N)

We were prevented from contacting the galleries directly

(N)

² See *Circuit 2013 – 2017*, A review of the evaluation structures and practices, September 2017, by Hannah Wilmot, section 4; Critical Friend report, by Roz Hall, 6.2 describing more bespoke processes and tools developed through Circulate

³ See *Circuit 2013 – 2017*, A review of the evaluation structures and practices, September 2017, by Hannah Wilmot, section 4

Five other interviewees also commented that the project lacked a critical friend:

Maybe missed having a traditional critical friend – there were not many mechanisms to critique the programme along the way

(N)

X's role was invaluable in helping young people create internal evaluation models, but this was not a critical friend: there was a lack of challenge

(SC)

5 PARTNERSHIP WORKING



5.1 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES: PARTNERSHIP WORKING

A synthesis of views about the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership between the 10 different organisations involved in *Circuit*, and the ways in which they worked together, is as follows:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mix of scales and operational contexts• Spread of geographic locations• Combined expertise and knowledge• Shared problems• Opportunities to visit other organisations and work together	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scales and settings too diverse• Lack of facilitation• Scale of project diluted sense of collective endeavour• Took time to understand and work with different contexts• Financial barriers to travel for young people

5.2 MIX OF SCALES AND CONTEXTS

Circuit involved ten partners working across very different scales and contexts, and partners appreciated the geographical spread involved. The programme provided opportunities for partners to learn from one another:

We all benefited in different ways – it was a good geographical spread and different starting points

(WG)

Great to visit other settings

(SC)

Visiting other venues and understanding different learning environments

(SC)

Members of the National team, and consultants, were able to identify complementary differences as well as commonalities that the partner organisations shared. Active members of the Steering and Working groups appreciated the combined experience and knowledge that the partnership brought together:

There is a specificity to working in different locations, but some key issues face everyone, especially when talking to other national organisations such as the youth sector; people's experiences overlap

(N)

Opinions about a sense of community and shared endeavour between partners varied greatly. Four stakeholders who were actively involved in the Steering and Working groups testified that a core sense of partnership emerged over time:

There was a sense of community and values, we valued one another

(WG)

Young people and staff benefited from the scale, friendships and connections
(N)

However, most people interviewed for this review felt that differences outweighed commonalities. The scale of the project, and the divergent needs of the partners, prohibited the growth of a sense of community and common purpose. Governance structures were also perceived to contribute to difficulties in sharing the challenges and difficulties encountered (see also 5.3 below):

It never felt like WE
(SG/NG)

Too enormous – too many places and partners
(D)

I'd have been more hand-picked about it
(D)

Five stakeholders also remarked that the partner organisations could have benefited from more shared learning as *Circuit* developed – a point that links with the observations on the need for more time to reflect and review (see 2.4 above):

There could have been more opportunities to learn from each other
(N)

I would have liked more facilitation between galleries
(SG/WG)

I would want more facilitation between the galleries early on, especially for the young people to travel and see other settings
(SG)

6 GOVERNANCE



6.1 *CIRCUIT* GOVERNANCE

The governance of *Circuit* operated through the following national groups:

- *Circuit* Programme Board: providing support and challenge, receiving and responding to reports
- National Evaluation Group: the National team and consultants brought together to review progress and determine action
- Steering Group: heads of learning, also attended by members of the National team, senior learning staff from Tate, the *Circuit* evaluator and the Director, Grants and Programmes from the PHF
- Working group: for *Circuit* co-ordinators, also attended by *Circuit* programme manager and critical friend
- Sharing sessions: held twice a year for the National team, gallery and partner staff and young people from galleries to come together

The **Programme Board** met twice a year, and its Purpose was as follows:

Governance

- The Board will receive programmatic, evaluative and financial updates from across the programme twice a year.
- The Board will review the performance of *Circuit*, to ensure that allocations of resources are being delivered to the required standard to meet the programme's ethos, aims and objectives.
- Discussions will cover use of financial resources, a summary of activity on all strands and processes, and the outlining of any risks identified by lead staff.
- The Board will make decisions for allocation of resources for the *Circuit* National Programme
- The Board's recommendations and decisions will be disseminated to all partners following the meetings.

Finance

- The Board will monitor finances as described above.
- The Board updates will be used as the basis for the March and September reporting meetings with the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, through which funds will be released to the programme.
- Any major proposed financial changes will be brought to the Board for discussion and recommendation before they are taken to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for approval.

Support

- The Board will also provide support and recommendations to achieve the long-term goals set by the programme.

The **Steering Group** met three times a year and its purpose was as follows:

- To ensure the programme strategic aims and outcomes are being reached on budget, on time and delivered with effective management of resources.
- To make strategic decisions for recommendation to the Board
- To monitor progress across partners and steer activity and plans in line with aims and values of the programme
- To maintain an overview and delivery of the evaluation framework for *Circuit's* national programme
- To provide input and contribute to *Circuit's* national programme direction
- To resolve issues and challenges that arise across the national programme

The **Working Group** met three times a year and its purpose was as follows:

- To report on national activity, evaluation, finance and planning
- To provide support across partners for programme planning and delivery
- Work collaboratively to share best practice that develop and influence programme
- Contribute to defining key areas of focus that are fundamental to enhancing *Circuit* programme aims

6.2 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES: GOVERNANCE

The key strengths and weaknesses of the governance structure were identified as follows:

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funder involvement • Familiar model to funder and to Tate • Various levels of experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance layers operated separately • Complicated / over governed • Presence of funder • Various levels of experience
Project Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close relationship with Tate • Good sounding board • Mix of expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role unclear • Ad hoc representation from project partners • Lacked representation of a national youth organisation • Lack of young people
Steering Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well chaired • Improved over time • Various levels of experience • Representation across all partners • A good sharing network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terms of reference unclear • Tactical rather than strategic focus • Unclear who should attend • Intimidating • Took time to mature • Various levels of experience • Risk register
Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Became an honest space for sharing challenges • Involvement of young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Took three years to build trust • Lack of focus

6.3 STRUCTURE

Across the 30 interviews conducted for this review, there were considerably more criticisms of than support for the governance model of *Circuit*. There was a prevailing view that the governance layers operated separately, and that this generated perceptions of an impenetrable hierarchy¹:

There were issues with the structure as it established an automatic hierarchy

(D)

Some things didn't get cascaded down to the working group (e.g. the learning from the project)

(SG/WG)

Three members of the Steering group and one member of the National team referred to a complex and inflexible structure, which limited the ability of partners to influence the project:

It was complicated, over governed

(SG)

The governance layers operated separately

(SG)

The governance was laid down by Tate, with not much space given to all partners to steer

(N)

It was hard to challenge structures and protocols; a couple of sessions with the Steering Group and Working Group were not particularly good

(SG)

1 See *Circuit 2013-2017*, A review of the evaluation structures and practices, September 2017, by Hannah Wilmot, section 3; see also 'Natural allies or uneasy bedfellows? Investigating the geographies of partnership between galleries and youth organisations, Nicola Sim, November 2017, Summary document

One consultant remarked on the irony of a programme that aspired to mitigate barriers being governed by a hierarchical structure. This comment was supported by observations that the formality of the governance proved to be a barrier to openness and shared learning:

We want you to be honest – but governance got in the way, it lacked external facilitation

(WG)

The programme encouraged learning rather than accountability, but there were targets and some galleries were reluctant to share difficulties

(N)

The active involvement of representatives of the PHF on both the project board and the Steering Group resulted in polarised responses. On the one hand, eight individuals highlighted this engagement as a positive aspect of the programme, since the PHF was learning directly from the *Circuit* model as it evolved:

It was a test programme for PHF so they were very invested in it, providing very helpful insights

(N)

PHF were more flexible to context than the partners expected

(D)

PHF was very clear, very consistent. The idea that this is not something for the learning team: insistent that involvement was at Director level

(D)

They also highlighted PHF's role in maintaining the focus of the project and providing support:

PHF kept reminding us of the core aims; this was very useful

(D)

Very positive role, very supportive – taking risks, tolerate failure

(N)

On the other hand, ten interviewees found the level of PHF involvement challenging. There were two reasons for this. The first of these was the inability of all project partners to interact equally with PHF:

It set up a strange hierarchy: a weird relationship whereby partners did not have to report directly to the funder, and some missed direct interaction with PHF

(N)

It would have been nice for the funder to come to us: we would have liked a more direct line, to be trusted, but we had to go through the National team

(SG)

The second and more dominant reason was that most project partners had not experienced this level of involvement previously and were unused to sharing problems with a funder. Their default position had been to advocate successful outcomes rather than explore challenges openly with a funder:

Take risks and tolerate failure was the dominant discourse, but this was a new discourse for people

(N)

Early on the PHF presence made people nervous

(SG)

The presence of the funder was not always comfortable

(B)

Although the original purpose of the different groups was clearly defined at the outset of *Circuit*, membership of the governance layers brought together vastly various levels of experience and expertise. Some representatives were attending a Steering group or Working group for the first time in their career, whereas others were more well versed in formal governance structures and procedures. While this mix was positive in principle, in practice it meant that these two groups suffered from a lack of clarity about their respective roles, and less experienced individuals struggled to find their voice:

The Steering group took a while to find its feet, perhaps never really did. There were no clear terms of reference or how much responsibility it had
(SG/WG)

I remember feeling nervous about the meetings; the formality was intimidating, which improved over time
(WG)

It took time for partners to behave as members and colleagues
(N)

The purpose of the different groups was also blurred over time, with different representatives of partner organisations attending meetings, and a degree of 'agenda creep' because of prevailing issues. Three respondents involved in this Review were members of both Steering and Working groups, and recalled some overlap between their respective remits.

6.4 PROJECT BOARD

Stakeholders involved in Project Board meetings observed that its membership brought together a complementary mix of expertise, and considered it to contribute helpfully and provide a good sounding board:

Constructive conversations at Board level – can't think of another way
(D)

Useful meetings provided strategic direction and most people contributed usefully
(N)

However, two Board members and two members of the National team were unsure what role the Board was fulfilling. They questioned whether its main purpose was to ensure accountability, to steer the project, to provide a sounding board – or all three. Three members of the Steering group were unsure how the Board worked and how the outcomes of its discussions informed the project. There were also difficulties in understanding the Board's reporting requirements:

I wasn't sure what the project board was meant to be doing – it was more like a Trustee Executive than a project board
(N)

I'm not sure it was the best vehicle – it took time to find its purpose and focus: it was a group of grownup people with views
(B)

The National team struggled to know how to report to the Board
(N)

Six interviewees observed that there was insufficient representation from senior figures within the youth sector at Board level¹:

The external representatives on the Board already had an established relationship with Tate, but there was not representation of a national youth organisation

(N)

The youth sector and young person representation were missing – I would include that now

(N)

Board members themselves also thought that partner galleries were under represented at this level of the governance structure:

The voice of partner regional galleries didn't come through

(B)

Partner galleries could have been used more on the Board

(B)

The representatives of regional galleries were slightly like observers – juniors can be quite defensive

(B)

Allied to the third of the comments above, two Steering group members who did attend the project Board found the experience compromising:

I was invited to speak at the project Board and it was good to have Tate Trustees there, but I'm not sure the knowledge and understanding was there. It was incredibly formal

(SC)

¹ See *Circuit* Data Analyst – Final Report, April 2017, by Hannah Wilmot, section 2.4; see also 'Natural allies or uneasy bedfellows? Investigating the geographies of partnership between galleries and youth organisations', Nicola Sim, November 2017, Summary document

6.5 STEERING GROUP

Members of the Steering group described this as a good sharing network, and one which combined a good mix of expertise and partner representation. They enjoyed being able to understand the totality of the *Circuit* programme:

I enjoyed the meetings, it was useful to get a sense of the larger programme, talking between the galleries

(SG/WG)

Interviewees recalled that the group was well chaired, and that it became more effective over time as members developed their understanding of the role of the group and a sense of shared purpose grew:

It ended up as an effective group making recommendations on spend

(N)

It improved as it went on, checking in, gave a level of seriousness

(SG)

A lack of clarity about terms of reference at the outset was one of the reasons why this group took time to become effective, and why some galleries were clear who should attend and others were not. The Steering group required more time and support for members to understand the role of the group and how it could work effectively:

It was challenging to get the Steering Group to understand its role and really lead – this was achieved by the final year

(N)

I remember going to two meetings, but I wasn't sure why I was there – it wasn't clear what it was for or where it fitted

(SG/WG)

Some gallery representatives had not previously been part of a formal governance structure, and found the experience intimidating, including the format of meetings. Others were not used to informing the strategic direction of a project. For these reasons:

The Steering Group struggled to be a steering group – it tended to be more about practice sharing than steering

(N)

It was a formal table, and we didn't want to be the gallery on the risk register; it was hard to share difficulties, not empowering

(SC)

Again, with hindsight, the group needed more time and support to create an environment where partners could share openly and honestly¹:

Huge levels of coaching and management were required to help people open up about their own contexts and problems

(N)

Further, the introduction of a risk register created nervousness and competitiveness, rather than nurturing honesty and shared learning:

The setup of the Steering group was intimidating, with so many people involved, and the introduction of things like the risk register

(N)

I felt the energy was going into Tate – the risk register was a blunt instrument, not finessed, we felt we were being done to

(SC/WG)

A lot of comparing together is natural, and a traffic light system is fine, but calling it a risk register is crazy: I don't know where that came from but it became competitive

(SC/WG)

¹ See *Circuit 2013-2017, A review of evaluation structures and practices*, September 2017, by Hannah Wilmot, section 3

6.6 WORKING GROUP

Perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of the Working group were similar to those of the Steering group, with members enjoying learning from one another and meeting representatives of partner galleries. One particular strength of the group was the involvement of young people from partner galleries:

It was good to highlight regional differences and we realised we could assist colleagues

(WG)

It was useful, I brought along a young person and also took along our own critical friend

(SG/WG)

Individuals in this group felt that it took time to mature, and there were issues with building trust among the membership. Three members of the Working group also felt that the meetings lacked focus and could have provided better outcomes to inform the project:

It took a while for trust to be built. Having Tate National there felt we were being looked at – it took three years to build the trust to be open

(WG)

It should have been more thematic or problem solving and we could have thought how to use the time better

(WG)

7 EVALUATION AND REPORTING



7.1 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES: EVALUATION AND REPORTING

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A priority • Experimental approach • External expertise • Opportunity to gain hard evidence and skills • Peer led evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusing / consultant overlap • Unwieldy framework • Lack of organisational capacity and experience • Language • Inappropriate tools
Other Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from National team • Catch-up calls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cumbersome • Lack of organisational capacity • Lack of flexibility • Lack of feedback

7.2 EVALUATION¹

Members of the National team appreciated the focus on evaluation as a core part of the *Circuit* programme, and felt that

It's now a given for people, and instrumental in organisational change

(N)

Three interviewees appreciated the external expertise provided, and four others identified the peer-led evaluation as particularly valuable. These same individuals explained that they valued the evaluation process in retrospect, although at the time it was challenging to implement:

We did learn to embrace the evaluation

(WG)

The evaluation framework was a monster. It was really important, but took at least a year to understand ... it is brilliant to look back and focus

(SG)

Individual consultants and National team members also remembered how varied starting points of partner organisations were, and how relatively limited their experience of evaluation had been previously. On reflection they observed that the requirements had been too onerous for most galleries, that there had been limited time for true reflection, and that some partners understood the experimental process whereas others did not:

The driver for evaluation was coming from Tate, an opportunity to gain hard evidence. But we didn't realise how little people understood about evaluation and reflection, and asked too much

(N)

¹ See *Circuit 2013 – 2017, A review of the evaluation structures and practices*, September 2017, by Hannah Wilmot, for a detailed analysis of the evaluation approach, structures, support and reporting

A pure approach that partners were not geared up to deliver: it was a learning curve, but sometimes more is not OK

(N)

It was all such an experiment, allowing us to explore, but not all partners understood this; there were 'penny drop' moments, but others hadn't really got it. They thought they were learning and evaluating but they weren't

(N)

Three interviewees reported coming across terminology with which they were unfamiliar, and there were numerous criticisms of the framework being unwieldy and inflexible. It tended to be regarded as an imposition, rather than a tool that could be adapted and embedded in organisational practice:

The evaluation was rather exhausting and multileveled

(D)

The massive evaluation framework was unwieldy and there was no conversation about it at the steering group. Evaluation reports turned into learning reports – this was stressful, doing it outside of the day job

(SG)

Members of the Steering and Working groups also commented that evaluation was just one of a range of several types of reports and feedback required by members of the National team and consultants, with requests for information sometimes overlapping (see also 6.3 below):

It felt like being sent a different framework for something every week. Different people in our organisation dealing with different things. A lot of the communication was hard to decipher – and some overlap between consultants and team members: learning reports, activity report, evaluation, data capture, it all took a long time to find our feet

(SG)

This was the one thing that took the edge off – writing endless reports for all different people was a treadmill. Evaluation, sub reports, not sure where they were going

(D)

Four people also mentioned the inappropriateness of the tools they were required to use, particularly when it came to iPads and / or paper questionnaires for young people:

We were required to do a great amount with the groups we were working with – iPads and forms didn't sit well with young people

(WG)

7.3 REPORTING

The previous sections of this Review highlight differences in perspective on several issues, but the one area where there was wholesale consensus was the amount of reporting partner galleries were required to deliver. There were appreciative mentions of the support provided by the National team, particularly the catch-up calls. A member of the National team also observed that some organisations embedded the discipline of reporting and reflecting, and two Steering group members felt that reporting against the project's aims worked well.

However, project partners complained about the volume of reports required, reporting templates and changes to these, and lack of understanding about exactly what was required:

Reporting was really odd; we owned it in the first year but the template later on was laborious and completing it online was awful. It's Tate's version of what information looks like, but it needs to work for us

(SG)

The activity reports changed. They loved tables! A lot of compartmentalising – I never understood what was read

(WG)

There were remarks that requests for information were not always timely and that twice yearly reporting caused major pinch points, while there was a lack of feedback on some reports submitted:

It came in fits and starts – lots of emails from different people

(WG)

It followed that partner galleries struggled to find the human capacity to provide the reports requested. One gallery Director likened it to reporting to another Board. Adjusting to the required formats and providing the level of financial detail that was needed were particularly time consuming:

The amount of feedback was burdensome; we need the methodology to be easy. Somebody reasonably senior spent vast amounts of time doing admin which was not the best use of talent

(D)

An incredible amount of resource and capacity was needed – data collection and reporting were not aligned with our existing systems so we had to do it twice. It needed a full-time administrator

(WG)

Overseeing commitment logs, transactions, extra deadlines combined with the high volume of delivery – so much work was peer led, they required receipts in small denominations

(WG)

8 INVESTMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY



8.1 INVESTMENT

PHF invested a total of £5m in *Circuit* from initial start-up in 2012/13 to completion in 2017/18. Of this, 35.5% was invested in the National team, and 64.5% divided equally across the ten delivery partners.

Circuit took place within an increasingly fragmented funding landscape, as noted in Executive Summary of the project's 2014 - 15 Annual Report:

This second year of *Circuit* has presented many wider economic challenges such as continued cuts across the cultural and youth sector. This has affected the potential for partnership building as well as budget cuts to resources and infrastructure within cultural organisations.

8.2 INVESTMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY: SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Project stakeholders' opinions about the key strengths and weaknesses of *Circuit's* levels of investment and subsequent sustainability are summarised as follows:

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle of fairness • Substantial investment by PHF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot of money but a lack of people / time • Pressure to spend • Impact on core organisational objectives and resources
Other Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedded learning • Shifts in attitudes in some organisations • Integrating into core programme in some organisations • Legacy project helpful for continuity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change partial not wholesale • Return to core budgets without additional support

8.3 LEVEL AND DISTRIBUTION OF INVESTMENT

All the individuals interviewed were aware of and acknowledged the scale of investment by the PHF, and the consequent weight and profile that this gave to *Circuit*. For one organisation it was the only reliably funded strand of work, and for another it injected resources at a time of substantial financial insecurity (see 1.1 above for a description of the funding context):

It felt huge to start with, but was incredibly helpful to get people on board, especially at director level. It made people think

(WG)

Well, we had no money for anything else (other than Circuit) – Circuit was the only stable thing amongst everything else

(SG)

Investment on this scale has been so rare that the partner galleries were clearly keen to embrace the project and be part of delivering *Circuit*. However, with hindsight, interviewees question the wisdom of allocating the budget equally across all organisations within the same timescale.

Seven project stakeholders described how this impacted negatively on their strategic organisational objectives since they lacked human resources to deliver their core programme as well as to deliver *Circuit*:

The amount of money was driving the doing, and we wanted to take advantage of it while it was there... but with this level of money we could have bought TIME, a researcher or facilitator

(SG)

It was a vast amount of money; the capacity for a smaller organisation was a massive issue, even for recruitment

(SG)

The budget sat oddly with the rest of our organisation – the Circuit team was by far the biggest team

(D)

The differing organisational contexts and capacities have been a constant theme of this Review, and representatives of smaller gallery partners reflected on *Circuit's* impact this had on their existing infrastructure. For example, the budget represented 50% more than one organisation's annual spend on learning:

There was real pressure to spend the money – it was completely out of kilter with our whole programmer budget; I'd recommend less money or extend it over a longer period

(SC)

A huge amount of funding at a tough time – this was seductive; we didn't look long and hard enough at the impact this would have

(N)

Should have been half the money for twice the time; it was so much money that we had a rolling surplus and felt such a responsibility to save it well – so many projects are about SAVING money, we needed a really long time to spend this properly

(WC)

Three people also commented that opportunities to stop and reflect, and perhaps to reallocate the financial resources, would have been beneficial:

The amount of money was driving the doing, and we wanted to take advantage of it ... we did the festival too early as we felt we had to do it. More time to reflect and listen early on would have been good then doing the festival later.

(D)

8.4 SUSTAINABILITY

It is too early to measure the long-term sustainability of the investment in *Circuit*, and one member of the National team commented that:

It still feels as if we're looking back rather than looking forward

(N)

However, individuals interviewed for this Review have identified several ways in which the learning from the programme has been embedded in their organisations. Respondents who were Directors were better able to identify these benefits than others involved in the programme.

Five Directors commented on their organisational commitment to continuing engagement with young people, ways in which young people were now involved in governance, and wider organisational change:

It was significant. We are carrying it on and making it work – our commitment is to carry it on. Circuit feels like part of the family on a different relationship

(D)

There's still more we should do – we are establishing a community panel for everything we do. The question for us is the balance between one off projects and consistency ... Circuit could be at the forefront to break down the idea of paid staff and 'doing' – participation as the best way of learning

(D)

The emphasis grew across the programme, people embraced it; it is possible to identify change in each organisations – all Directors have highlighted something

(D)

We are looking at a Young Peoples' advisory council, community liaison group and ways of involving YP in our governance

(D)

Three Directors, together with members of the National team, also observed how new partnerships had been cemented:

New partnerships have come on board and are now embedded, and we are combining with other funding to make sure it has a wider impact

(N)

An unpredictable outcome is the long and deep relationship with the third sector; this is embedded and we will channel these

(D)

Two Directors explained how their galleries had now committed to investing in support for young peoples' programmes within their core budgets, and one also described integrating this work within their wider community programme:

We have confirmed a part time permanent post running the Tate Collective group and programming activity as well as external partnerships

(D)

We needed to identify where it might meet core programme objectives rather than bolting on. It has now turned into a community programme, gained momentum because it's become part of the core

(D)

The legacy funding proved to be important in sustaining *Circuit* for partners who were awarded this support, and there were three examples of ways in which galleries had resourced activity from existing budgets:

We now have core funding for a young people's programme and a shift in attitudes. But we could have had more Director support

(WG)

*It's been really great, especially the legacy funding made us really think we can offer training, rolling the work out ... we are still running *Circuit* in many ways*

(D)

We've chosen to sustain this work as a priority but are taking money off something else. There's no way we're going to lose the momentum

(SC)

However, sustainability across the partnership is patchy. Six interviewees, who were members of the Steering and/or Working groups, queried the degree to which the legacy of *Circuit* could be embedded in their organisations. They recalled difficulties in managing up and advocating the programme to their colleagues across the galleries¹. Their perspectives on the sustainability of *Circuit* were at odds with those of their Directors:

The wider organisation gets it more but is still resistant to substantial change

(SC)

A lot of pressure on managing up – it's easy to get tokenistic; we made great change but could have made more. We expected Directors to come on board earlier. They take the money but not thought long term about how this activity could be built into core funding

(SC)

It worked well with the learning team and embedded well, but in terms of overall organisational change it's not going to happen ... we try to make small changes within our team

(WC)

Two Directors of partner galleries questioned whether it is possible to sustain *Circuit*, with one describing the ending of the programme as like dropping off a cliff edge:

We can't sustain it – the relationships we've built up, because of the funding; an 8 – 10-year period could have been more sustained

(D)

I don't know how the partners can sustain the work – are they able to continue without funding? Perhaps best to fund to a lower degree in some places to maintain the work

(D)

¹ See 'Natural allies or uneasy bedfellows? Investigating the geographies of partnership between galleries and youth organisations', Nicola Sim, November 2017, Summary document

These comments are echoed by members of the Steering and Working groups and include representatives of Tate galleries as well as smaller partners. One member of the National Team also observed that the momentum achieved by *Circuit* has not been maintained:

The promise to keep it up wasn't there – my successor is only part time now
(g)

We were secure for five years but then the drop off at the other end was such a shock
(SC)

The commitment to continue hasn't really happened; sustainability was not achieved
(N)

There were also two individual remarks about the distribution of the legacy pot, which included an opinion the original principle of fairness across the partnership had been compromised:

We had to negotiate the legacy pot which felt unfair, as it should have been for everyone thinking about what organisations needed
(SC)

He (the PHF) giveth and he taketh away
(D)

KEY LEARNING POINTS

This section of the Review draws together the main themes that emerged during the 30 conversations reported above. It also extrapolates from those conversations respondents' suggestions and ideas for future partnership programmes.

9.1 “THE LARGEST YOUTH PROJECT IN THE COUNTRY” (D)

The ambition and consequent scale of *Circuit* was commendable, setting the bar high and demonstrating the seriousness of intent through the high level of investment. This drew buy-in at Director level within the partner organisations, although not all were consistently involved in helping to drive the programme and embed it within their respective organisations.

More time at the formative stage and / or support to ensure that galleries really bought into and understood how to go about research and development could have helped partners to explore the meaning of a project of this scale, and the potential impact on their organisations. This would also have enabled partners who were new to this area of work to foster sustainable partnerships with youth organisations at an earlier stage, and to shape and flex the model in accordance with their own cultural values and operating contexts.

Inclusion of representatives from a wider variety of national youth organisations in different rungs of the governance structure would have helped to inform the programme as it developed, and supported progress towards building sustainable networks.

9.2 DISTINCTIVENESS OF SETTING

One size never fits all, and in *Circuit*'s case this was repeatedly demonstrated, whether it came to delivery of the four strands of the programme, getting to grips with a programme-wide evaluation framework, or the nuts and bolts of reporting.

Interviewees for this Review advocated allowing time for a feasibility stage at the start of the programme. Year 1 could be a conversational year, exploring partnership working, establishing parameters, and assessing organisational capacity and experience.

This would allow for consideration of the applicability of the received model, and ways in which it could be adapted to shine a light on the local and regional contexts, and to tap into the distinctiveness of the different settings in which *Circuit* was delivered.

The same goes for the support provided by specialist consultants: a feasibility period would enable an exploration of the support individual partners need and identify commonalities and difference. This in turn would inform what kinds of generic and specialist consultancy skills were required and inform the briefs for these. It would also inform the content of a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) plan to support the programme¹.

¹ See 'Natural allies or uneasy bedfellows? Investigating the geographies of partnership between galleries and youth organisations, Nicola Sim, November 2017, Summary document

9.3 LANGUAGE AND STRUCTURE

This Review has highlighted several linguistic assumptions which caused alienation in some quarters and confusion in others. This applied as much to the governance structure as to the concepts within the programme.

Interviewees advocated more time at the start of the programme to unpick the terminology and ensure that there was a collective understanding of what was expected, and how expressions such as hard to reach could be interpreted within different demographic contexts. They also suggested more frequent sharing sessions, perhaps in regional clusters, so that as staff came and went the dialogue was refreshed.

Partners suggested that their input into the proposed governance structure could have drawn on best practice from elsewhere, delivered a less formal and complex structure, and established a more equitable spirit. It could also have informed a less onerous reporting process. They also advocated more regular representation from partners at Board level to ensure that different voices influenced decisions.

There were also recommendations that external facilitators be commissioned to support various levels of the governance ladder: this would assist with establishing best practice in team building, agenda setting, group behaviour, and effective delivery. It would also help to develop a stronger sense of shared endeavour, and ensure that each group focused on the original purpose for which it was convened.

9.4 MANAGING UP, DOWN, AND SIDeways

Despite some negative perceptions of **them and us**, interviewees for this Review commended the hard work of the National team and appreciated ways in which individuals within that team supported the partner organisations on the ground. None questioned the appropriateness of the National team being based in the lead partner organisation.

Project stakeholders did emphasise the need to ensure that the National team had sufficient capacity and authority to lead such a complex project, not only in terms of budget and people but also in terms of skills, experience, support and mentoring. There were suggestions that senior staff from partner '**regional**' organisations might be seconded to the National team, bringing learning from different programme models and contexts.

The evaluation and critical friend reports commissioned by *Circuit* describe a very rich range of outcomes from the programme across all partner organisations. And, as with this Review, they also highlight the issues that co-ordinators and other staff members encountered internally when delivering the project.

Managing up, down and sideways was a complex task, particularly for more junior staff members and for those who were new to established structures and ways of working. One gallery appointed their own critical friend to support the process which proved to be very helpful. Another established a diagonal slice team to manage the project, which again provides a useful internal model. Commissioning regional critical friends and mentors would be beneficial in future and would help staff both to advocate the project and navigate internal processes and politics.

9.5 BEING BRAVE, BEING VULNERABLE

Circuit partners understood, in principle, that this programme was about experimentation and learning from trial and error. More time early on to explore what it means to trust the process, to think rather than to do, was advocated during interviews for this Review. Likewise, a programme of coaching / CPD would have helped gallery staff to reflect, share and learn together.

The active presence of the funder felt transparent to some, and burdensome to others. This was unfamiliar territory for most of those interviewed for this Review and being honest with a funder in the room proved easier said than done. More clarity about the funder's precise role in the governance structure would have helped.

As reported in section 4, above, *Circuit's* governance and reporting structures and requirements set up barriers to the honesty and openness that is required for genuine shared learning. With hindsight, different settings and forums for reflection and sharing, supported by external facilitators, could have supported the process.

9.6 STOP – PAUSE – ENGAGE

When reflecting on the *Circuit* process there was consensus that the whole pace of things should have been more measured. While the National team emphasised the need for partners to stop and contemplate, this was not often realised. In some organisations this was because of lack of experience and a prevailing culture of being seen to deliver, and in others it was because of the pressure of supporting core activity alongside the *Circuit* programme.

Most interviewees advocated a longer time-scale for such a major project. Again, coaching and facilitation to support a reflective process was proposed. The need to stop and pause for longer and with more frequency also applied to the governance layers within *Circuit*, as well as to the roles and remits of the National team and consultants.

9.7 SO MUCH MONEY, SO LITTLE TIME

Another common theme was an imbalance between budget and human resources, along with an equal allocation of grant to each partner. As previously stated, one size did not fit all: the amount of money had a negative impact on core activity in some organisations (and on the wider team) and there was no likelihood that activity could be sustained. For these galleries, spreading the funds over a longer time period could have assisted.

Interviewees again suggested that a feasibility stage could ensure that allocations are appropriate, and that funding levels are relative to need. This would also identify partners with specific human resource needs and enabled them to allocate funds accordingly.

9.8 THE FUND THAT BECAME A PROGRAMME

Circuit has remained funding dependent for some partners. As the comments in section 7 above illustrate, sustaining this work has proved challenging, especially where there has been organisational change and / or the programme was not embedded in the wider organisation.

Some partners have been able to sustain the programme, allocating resources from core budgets, and point to lasting outcomes from *Circuit* in their community programmes, governance structures, and partnerships.

There were question marks around the volume and types of partners involved in *Circuit*, with one suggestion that a smaller grouping could have delivered in more depth and been truly transformational.

Another approach would be to review criteria for the initial selection. This could identify a portfolio of organisations where there is already alignment with aspects of the model and therefore builds on existing practice; or it could accommodate a balanced portfolio of some organisations with fertile ground and others needing significant intervention. Either way, the resourcing levels would be tailored to organisational need and capacity.

10 REFLECTIONS



10.1 BREADTH AND DEPTH

This was a hugely ambitious programme supported by an extraordinary level of financial investment as all stakeholders acknowledge. It was a bright light amidst the gloom of funding cuts and austerity. But perhaps the breadth of the programme that evolved was at odds with the depth required to achieve the organisational change envisaged and deliver the serious intention behind *Circuit*.

Although the *Circuit* partners were fully aware of the scale of the programme, it is easy to give in to the temptation to follow the money without proper contemplation of the potential consequences. Besides, the sector is often prone to focus on doing rather than being, on outputs rather than reflection.

A mini feasibility study conducted as part of the application process would help to ensure that partners were equipped, or had the potential to be equipped, to embark on a challenge of this scale. This chimes with proposals for a longer timescale to allow for a period of exploration as to how best to invest the funding and to engage partners in proposals. It would also allow for a legacy year through which to share the learning.

A ten-year programme could look like this:

Year 1	Feasibility	Partner appraisals; partner activity proposals
Year 2	Establish Infrastructure	Governance structure; CPD programme; consultancy requirements; partner capacity building
Year 3	Trial programme	Pilot programmes; reflection and learning

Breadth and Depth

Year 4	Activity Year 1	Programme delivery
Year 5	Activity Year 2	Programme delivery
Year 6	Review and reflect	Evaluation and shared learning
Year 7	Activity Year 3	Programme delivery
Year 8	Activity Year 4	Programme delivery
Year 9	Review and reflect	Evaluation and shared learning Legacy identification
Year 10	Legacy year	

10.2 CORE AND SPECIAL

There were so many good things about *Circuit*, and it delivered so many outcomes, which are described in the evaluators' and critical friend's reports. The impacts will be manifested through the peer contacts contacts made, the projects shared, and the partnerships developed.

However, unlike some other partnership projects, it did not seem to create a spirit of truly shared endeavour across the ten galleries. In principle, the partnership comprised some more experienced galleries and those newer to the practice, on the basis that the former would support the latter. However, some project stakeholders found it difficult to see a programme such as *Circuit* through the partnership lens. This was partly due to the governance structure and to defensive attitudes engendered by tools such as the risk register.

It was also due to the fact that the model had already been tried and tested at Tate and was handed over to the galleries involved, some of which struggled to adapt it to their own contexts. A more bottom up approach, such as the Aspire partnership, or consortium bids to Arts Council England (ACE) whereby partners are involved in shaping the original proposals, helps to develop more ownership jointly and severally¹.

This was also a very big partnership, and while there is strength in diversity there can also be division – haves and have-nots, urban and rural, experienced and novices. Because of its scale and complexity, it needed not only more time but also more investment in infrastructure: a national programme of mentoring, and skills development. This would provide the glue that is needed to generate a sense of shared ownership. However, it is still questionable whether such a widespread partnership of ten can achieve the depth of relationship and learning that comes from a smaller grouping.

¹ See 'Natural allies or uneasy bedfellows? Investigating the geographies of partnership between galleries and youth organisations, Nicola Sim, November 2017, Summary document

10.3 FRAMEWORK AND FLEXIBILITY

All partnership projects benefit from a clear framework whereby core activities and goals are agreed and adhered to, but wriggle room needs to be built in from the beginning. This applies to the programme itself as well as to protocols for activities such as marketing and evaluation. The ability to flex the model did develop over time with *Circuit*, but not before some galleries had already struggled to apply it to their own organisational context.

One answer to this is partner involvement at the formative stage, so that the programme can build on and adapt to current working practices and expectations can be shared. Another is to provide enough breathing space early on to review what is working, any constraints that are impeding delivery, and contextual shifts that have occurred. Most importantly, project partners need to be supported to negotiate changes to their proposals with confidence, particularly in a change programme such as *Circuit*. This is now widespread practice with Heritage Lottery Funded projects, many of which develop over several years.

10.4 THE FUNDER IN THE ROOM

The PHF's level of investment and active presence from the planning through to the implementation and evaluation of *Circuit* provided a major opportunity for mutual learning. This was also a rare opportunity, since the funder is usually in the room metaphorically rather than physically.

However, the parent-child relationship between funders and client organisations is entrenched, and while the nurturing parent was appreciated by the project's partners they found it difficult to respond to the critical parent role. The relationship required mature and careful adult mediation.

10.5 SECTORAL READINESS

Linked to the comments made in 10.4 above, in retrospect it was naïve to think that such a broad mix of partner organisations would be equipped to participate fully in, and benefit fully from, such an inventive programme.

It is some four decades since concepts such as evaluation were introduced to the sector, so those who designed *Circuit* can be forgiven for expecting certain standards to be in place – but clearly, experience in this area is patchy. Partnership projects have abounded during that same period across all domains in the arts, and all the galleries in this programme have worked with multiple partners – but clearly, the learning is piecemeal.

While the *Circuit* model had been tried and tested within Tate and was informed by the inspirational Creative Partnerships programme of the early 2000s, there are still substantial opportunities for informing future partnership projects through collective learning. *Circuit* did not exist in isolation, as a read-across to the work of the Our Museum project testifies. But there is considerable potential to learn more from other domains, such as the long-term work undertaken by an organisation such as Youth Music or from partnerships such as the In Harmony programme.

10.6 A LEGACY OF LEARNING

The observations above should not detract in any way from the vast amount of personal and communal learning that has arisen from *Circuit*. The programme has been extensively and rigorously documented to the highest standards. It asked huge questions of individuals and institutions and demanded substantial interrogation and reflection. The collective legacy is largely in the learning, and it is imperative that this is used to benefit the heritage sector as well as the wider creative industries.



CIRCUIT

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PLUS **TATE**