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Clore Leadership-AHRC Online Research Library Paper **Bridging Gaps in Arts Provision: Exploring Collaborative Partnerships in Response to Local Government Arts Budget Cuts**

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Year paper completed: 2024

Leadership Content Theme/s: Leadership Styles, Hard Skills, Sector Insights

AHRC Subject Area/s: Policy Arts Management and Creative Industries

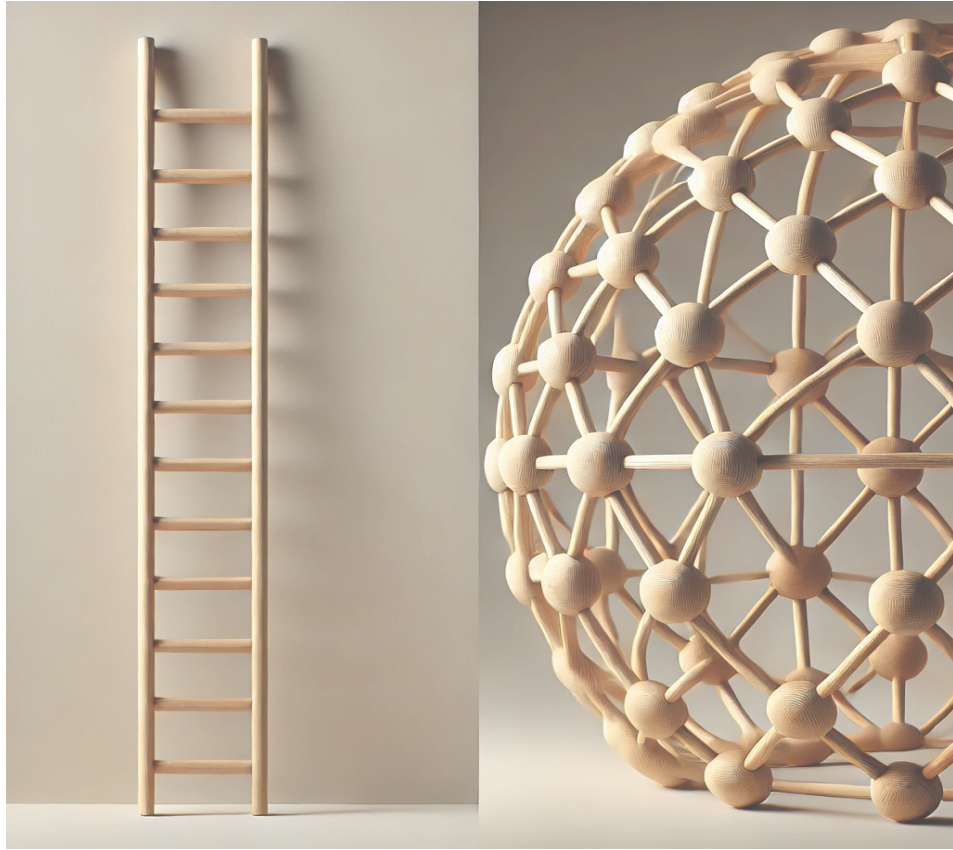
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Bridging Gaps in Arts Provision: Exploring Collaborative Partnerships in Response to Local Government Arts Budget Cuts

Jo Bradshaw

September 2024 - March 2025

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my huge thanks to the following people and organisations for their support in the development of this research project;

Dr Pegram Harrison, for his kind, encouraging and confidence boosting supervisory support throughout the process.

Clore Leadership and the Arts and Humanities Research Council for the opportunity and financial support of this project.

Helen Kemp for being the best sounding board, supporter, and instant idea-understander you could wish for.

Elizabeth Bradshaw for her invaluable, and sadly not inherited, proofreading skills.

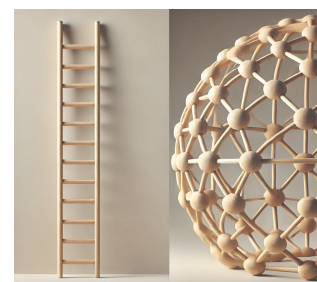
The National Trust, for allowing me time to work on this project.

And, the numerous cultural sector colleagues who gave their time to be interviewed.

Executive Summary

This research explores innovative ways cultural institutions might respond to severe cuts in local government arts funding across the UK, examining particularly the potential for more collaborative partnership working within the arts sector. Inspired by the insightful metaphor of partnerships being too often a "ladder, not a lattice," the report investigates whether institutions could more effectively support audiences by shifting from hierarchical, one-to-one relationships towards more interconnected, collaborative networks.

The "ladder" model describes the traditional partnerships between larger cultural institutions and smaller community groups. While beneficial to certain groups adept at making these connections, it often excludes others, reinforcing existing inequalities. A "lattice" approach, in contrast, would involve multiple cultural institutions working collaboratively, intentionally pooling resources, data, and planning efforts around shared, audience-driven goals.




This research emerged from personal observations gathered over nearly two decades in the cultural sector, and further honed during my Clore Leadership Fellowship, notably regarding inconsistent provision for underserved audiences, trends in funding-led programming, and missed opportunities for genuine, long-term community engagement that builds cultural capital for participants.

The current arts funding crisis at local government level, underscores the urgency for more efficient, strategic collaboration. Significant budget reductions—such as a 48% drop in local government cultural funding in England—mean cultural institutions must innovate and pool resources rather than duplicate efforts. Without a strategic shift, underserved communities face further marginalisation.

Interviews and case studies from across the UK, Europe, and internationally highlighted inspiring partnership examples, though often limited in their focus on audience-led programming. Notably, regional UK examples (Bradford Heritage Hub, Nottingham's Transform Festival) show successful lattice-like collaborations built around clear audience-driven missions and strong leadership.

However, despite promising examples, widespread intra-industry programming partnerships remain rare, even internationally. Conferences attended (e.g., CIMIX Vienna 2025, Museum X Machine X Me, Tate Modern 2024) emphasized cross-sector (rather than intra-sector) collaboration, suggesting similar gaps exist globally. European and US examples offered valuable lessons but not definitive solutions.



Interviews with leaders across the sector highlighted three crucial factors for successful lattice partnerships: strong leadership, a shared audience-focused vision, and mutual investment.

Challenges in finding comprehensive, audience-specific programming data hinder strategic decision-making and resource distribution. Industry data often focuses on provision by art form, rather than audience. Enhanced data systems (similar to the European platform Artsmetric) could greatly improve coordination, identify underserved audiences, and support the provision of more equitable programming and decision making. This, combined with emerging large scale democratic citizen led decision making methodologies (such as Citizen Assemblies), could lead to real change.

Recommendations:

1. Further research to better understand and scale existing successful intra-industry partnerships across the UK and Europe.
2. Investment in improved data collection and analysis tools, emphasising audience-specific programming information, to better track and coordinate provision.
3. Encourage cultural institutions and funders to prioritize audience-led collaborative partnerships, supported by innovative leadership, citizen led decision making and funding practices.

In conclusion, transforming the current "ladder" system into a robust, equitable "lattice" of partnerships could significantly enhance audience reach and impact, even in a climate of reduced resources. This shift is essential to navigating ongoing financial challenges, increasing equity, and ensuring the sustainability and relevance of the cultural sector.

Introduction

'Its so often a ladder, not a lattice... isn't it?'... a perfect turn of phrase shared with me by my excellent colleague Sarah with whom I was discussing the problem of partnerships in the culture sector. Sarah neatly expressed exactly what I'd been ruminating on throughout my Clore Leadership journey, and what had inspired me to begin this research project.

The problem I'd wanted to explore was that too often when it comes to partnerships to provide public/cultural programming¹ cultural institutions partner up and down (in a ladder) - to a community group or service provider in their area and back up to themselves. Or sometimes out to the side - out of our sector, to work with say the Health sector, or universities and higher education. But, what we don't tend to do is work across the sector (in a lattice) to address an agreed audience objective together.

The downsides of the first kind of partnership (the ladder) are multiple. One being that some community groups get great at using those ladders, will make fabulous connections to the culture sector, and have access to cultural provision from a range of cultural providers in their area. Whilst others will never even set foot on the first rung.



Or, that community group might only ever use that one ladder, might only ever connect with that first cultural institution, never being able to access another provider who might have just as much to offer.

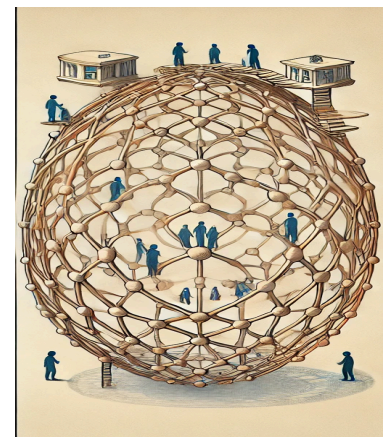
And of course, if this image of a ladder based partnership sounds hierarchical, it's because it is. In the instance of a two partner model where one partner is a large cultural institution, and the other is a much smaller community group or charity the hierarchy is almost inevitable, and the power dynamic this brings is extremely challenging to up-root.

In a lattice model, cultural institutions would agree to work together to maximise their programming impacts for audiences. This could be through simple steps like mapping which community groups each were working with to ensure one wasn't being over served at the expense of another, or checking that we aren't all programming our youth out of hours events on the same day, or comparing notes on how much provision we were all offering across a range of audience types.

¹ By public/cultural programming I mean anything a cultural institution offers to the public that targets a particular audience for example; youth programmes, community programmes, disability access programmes, late night openings etc

At the more collaborative end of the spectrum, a lattice type partnership model would look like a range of cultural institutions across a location agreeing to work together on a shared, audience led goal, through their programming provision.

From autumn of 2024, to early spring 2025 my research project set out to search for this imagined lattice model, interrogate other existing cultural partnership models, and test my assumptions about their benefits and deficits.



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Context

This research project came about through reflections across three timespans; **past**, **present** and **future**.

The first consists of my personal reflections on what I've observed over the **past** nearly 20 years in the arts, culture and heritage sector as the gaps and lost potential in programming and partnerships that could have been transformative.

The second was a cold hard look at the **present** funding crisis in the UK arts sector, particularly at the level of local government culture funding.

And the third was a deep professional and personal desire, and increasing public demand, for greater equity in arts provision across the UK now and in the **future**.

Past - My observations

Early in my career I was fortunate enough to work at the National Portrait Gallery as the Access and Outreach assistant for a brilliant, forward thinking boss (Hi Lucy!). One task that always stuck with me was when Lucy asked me to survey our colleagues across other major cultural institutions to find out what programming they were offering for audiences with disabilities and underserved communities - and which community groups they were typically working with. This task stuck with me not only because I had to get over my millennial fear of phoning people to talk to my peers across London, but because I couldn't believe this data didn't exist anywhere already. At the time there was little standardisation of disability access programming across the sector, and sadly that is still the case.

What also became apparent was that many of us were working with the same handful of well networked community groups - I'm reminded of a charismatic and enterprising elders group leader from Southwark who I would see with her group at venues across London over the next several years. This leader had managed to establish ladders from her group to a range of programming providers, whilst many of her neighbouring groups remained unconnected.



Over the next few years I would continue to observe this strange lack of join up and consistency in community and access provision, noticing in particular how dedicated programming for particular audiences would appear to come in and out of 'fashion' with similar programmes popping up across the industry for a year or two and then fading away when funding, or industry trends moved along. I was always left wondering - but what about those audiences? And.. why are we (as cultural programming workers), always starting from scratch when it comes to audience building and outreach? I'll refer to this as the 'funder led programming problem'.

Whilst at Tate Modern in 2011 I supported the busiest British Sign Language (BSL) public arts programme in the UK, with our monthly Friday night BSL tours attracting 50+ guests. I noticed that colleagues across other institutions would often struggle with attendance, partly because we all used the same small handful of BSL speakers and interpreters, and partly because the events were often programmed for the same day and time - effectively causing competition rather than collaboration.

Through this work I became aware of previous attempts to collaborate to solve this challenge including the establishment of the MAGIC network. MAGIC - Museums and Galleries in the Capital² was a mechanism established to provide information to the D/deaf community on accessible programming across 14 museums and galleries in London in the

² www.artspromotional.co.uk/magazine/53/article/essential-audiences-disability-and-new-audiences

early 2000's. This collaboration now seems to have ended, and whilst I was in post never seemed to go beyond shared advertising towards embedded partnership working across the institutions.

These, and many similar observations, drove me to question why aren't we working better together? Why aren't we sharing audiences, planning our programming together, and building a network of opportunities for those with whom we have engaged?

In 2023 I spent my Clore Fellowship exploring some of these thoughts further, culminating in my article '*Where to next? The urgent case for a new kind of partnership working*'.³

Present - The funding crisis

In 2024 *The State of the Arts* report was published, highlighting with worrying mathematical certainty, the desperate decline in arts funding that the UK has seen over the last decade;

There have been dramatic falls in arts funding since 2010... Between 2009-10 and 2022-23, per person in real terms:

- *Local government revenue funding of culture and related services decreased by 29% in Scotland, 40% in Wales and 48% in England...*
- *The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)'s core funding of cultural organisations decreased by 18% ...*
- *The Arts Councils' core Government funding decreased by 18% in England, 22% in Scotland, 25% in Wales and 66% in Northern Ireland.*⁴

The Arts Newspaper article '*Museums in the firing line as UK council funding crisis bites*' further elucidates the challenges facing local government, and the impacts which will be felt at the level of local arts provision;

*'Central government funding for local authorities in England reduced by 40% in real terms between 2009-10... Some councils are cutting civic museums funding entirely: Suffolk County Council is stopping all core funding for nine arts and heritage organisations after 2024-25.'*⁵

Across the UK other notable examples of cuts have included Birmingham City Council cutting nearly 100% of its arts and culture funding. Nottingham announced cuts that have resulted in a loss of over 500 jobs, and several significant arts institutions (Nottingham Playhouse, Nottingham Contemporary, New Art Exchange) have lost all of their government funding.

³www.cloreleadership.org/provocation_paper/where-to-next-the-urgent-case-for-a-new-kind-of-partnership-working/

⁴ Campaign for the Arts & University of Warwick, *The State of the Arts*, Campaign for the Arts & Centre for Cultural and Media Policy Studies, University of Warwick, July 2024

⁵ www.theartnewspaper.com/2024/03/05/museums-in-the-firing-line-as-council-funding-crisis-bites

As reported in What's On Stage, *'Local funding isn't some small sum either – authorities are spending around £1.6bn a year on arts, culture and libraries often it's the subsidised ticketing, community events and other outreach initiatives that take the brunt of the hit....the loss of free parking, subsidised transport or other schemes ...will all add extra barriers to potential audiences and aspiring creatives'* ⁶

This article highlights how these cuts are likely to disproportionately affect under-served and historically excluded audiences, and finding ways to off-set the negative impacts of this reduction in funding is now an urgent concern.

Future - Equity and Collaboration

Despite the recent attacks on the progress of Diversity, Inclusion and Equality/Equity being carried out in the US by the Trump administration,⁷ progress made in the UK, Europe and the US since the 1990's on providing more equitable access to the arts cannot be denied.⁸

Nor can the need to go further, and do more to ensure that our cultural institutions include everyone. Nina Simon's powerful example of transformation at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History (MAH) demonstrates both the moral and economic case for this work, with the move towards an institution that is *'of, by and for all'* leading to increased attendance by 9x, membership by 3x, and budget by 4x.⁹

If we accept that the funding landscape for culture in the UK is likely to continue to be challenging for the next decade or so, and that at the same time we must welcome and include more people, then we must be smarter with our planning and programming. We cannot afford to think in isolation about just our ladder out to our selected communities.

I will return to thoughts of the future in the final section of this report, the recommendations section.

⁶www.whatsonstage.com/news/cuts-to-local-arts-funding-will-decimate-our-cultural-community-now-and-for-generations-to-come_1560783/

⁷<https://hyperallergic.com/987131/museums-scramble-to-grasp-impact-of-trump-dei-mandate/>

⁸ The proportion of BME adults visiting museums or galleries rose from 35% in 2005/06 to 45% in 2012/13, and BME visits to heritage sites grew from 51% to 57% in the same period

www.gov.uk/government/news/cultural-engagement-in-england-on-the-increase

2017 ACE Take a Part Survey revealed the engagement gap for Disabled adults had halved since 2006 www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/disabled-people-more-engaged-arts-ever-figures-reveal

⁹ <https://www.ofbyforall.org/our-story>

Methodology

My research was conducted by looking for evidence to support or disprove the following propositions at the level of cultural programming provision;

1. Other countries have found solutions to funding crises through matrixed, intra-industry partnership working.
2. The UK is not currently doing substantial intra-industry partnership working at the level of cultural programming for specific audiences across institutions.
3. Current cultural partnership practice rarely starts with a shared audience ambition across multiple institutions.
4. Current cultural partnership practice generally focuses on protecting a cultural asset, promoting a specific art form, or continuous professional development training, not shared programming.
5. Lack of collaboration amongst cultural institutions at the level of cultural programming has led to in-equitable provision across audiences.
6. Large cultural organisations should not only collaborate to protect cultural assets and advocate for funding but also act as cultural programming harbours.
7. That intra-industry collaboration could be part of the solution to the UK culture funding crisis.

My evidence gathering consisted of a literature review to see what others have said about these questions, followed by primary data in various forms: interviews with industry colleagues from the UK and EU, compilation of current data on programming provision across two UK cities (Nottingham and Manchester), and attendance at conferences and networking events to make further connections.

Please note the following key terms and definitions used in this research:

Intra-Industry partnership - refers to partnerships between institutions within the culture sector. This includes collaborations between two museums, a museum and a library, or multiple music venues working together.

Cultural programming - refers here to targeted provision of activity by a cultural institution, for example; youth programmes, late night opening, creative workshops, community outreach. This definition deliberately excludes general, always-available offerings such as exhibitions.

Cultural assets - refers here to tangible assets including art collections, institutions themselves (galleries, libraries, museums etc), and sites of historic interest.

Literature review

I began by seeking evidence to support or disprove my research propositions by looking for current trends in partnership practice across the culture sector in the UK, then I moved on to exploring practice across Europe, and into the US.

Much has already been written about partnership working in the arts (including a particularly thorough review of partnership practice in the arts sector by published by King's College London entitled '*The Art of Partnership*')¹⁰ but for the purposes of this research I will be looking for partnerships that suggest intra-industry collaboration at the level of programming provision.

Reviewing literature focussed on the standard (ladder) model of partnership shows some innovative practice, and can result in impressive outcomes for participants. However, the nature of these partnerships can lead to both gaps in sustained impact (short term funding at the mercy of industry trends), and a curtailed impact on increase in cultural capital for participants.¹¹

In looking for partnership working that helps to encourage cultural omnivorism (and its associated personal and societal benefits)¹² intra-institutional partnerships stand out as an under-studied area. I was particularly keen to seek examples of partnership working which demonstrated cost saving or revenue generation - in order that they might fulfill research proposition 7 of offsetting the culture funding crisis.

Partnership working between cultural institutions that focuses on the sharing of assets and academic research (exhibition loans and research partnerships) is outside the scope of this project, as it does not tend to start from the needs of a specific audience, and cultural programming provision (as defined above).

Existing partnership models

Place Based Partnerships - Cultural Compacts, Creative Clusters, and Creative People and Places

Whilst there are UK based examples of new models of cultural institutions collaborations including the Creative Clusters,¹³ and Cultural Compacts,¹⁴ and these partnerships do

¹⁰ <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/resources/reports/full-report.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/what-is-cultural-capital/>

¹²

<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0134.xml>

¹³ https://pec.ac.uk/blog_entries/creative-clusters-case-studies/

¹⁴ <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/review-cultural-compacts-initiative>

deliver impressive results in terms of inter-sector collaboration (often with the tech and health industries),¹⁵ urban renewal and economic growth, and do often drive forwards the creation of a healthy creative ecosystem (through skills and leadership development programmes, grants and infrastructure support), the 2020 review of the Cultural compacts revealed that...

Leveraging additional resources... not yet happened... the Compacts took quite a narrow view of the opportunities and resources they could leverage, seeing these mainly as financial (grants / public funding) or simply the opportunities presented by working collaboratively with others. In many cases the expertise of Compacts' members didn't best position them to think more creatively around the potential leverage opportunities such as releasing the value of local assets or considering the implementation of financial / investment strategies locally.¹⁶

There is also minimal evidence of this collaboration happening at the level of audience led programming in these partnerships. Programming partnerships within these clusters tend to coalesce around a festival type opportunity, where lots of venues will programme their own activities to a shared theme. Rather than working together to provide comprehensive programming for a selected audience, or even a divide and conquer model in which institutions make a conscious and collaborative choice to specialise in provision for particular audiences - a gallery working hard on its youth outreach whilst its neighbouring museum focuses on a healthy aging programme for example.

Often these arts and culture partnerships focus on innovation around content (working across artistic genres for example), but there is much less evidence on partnering to reduce operating costs, or to combine audience outreach efforts. Taken as a whole, this evidence largely supports research propositions 2 and 3.

Sector support based partnerships - Family Arts Campaign, Kids in Museums, House, Creative Kernow, Bath Museums Together

There are a number of interesting industry support organisations that provide a model of partnership working focussed around developing and supporting a specific area of audience practice (Family Arts¹⁷, Kids in Museums¹⁸), a particular art form or sub-set of the industry (House¹⁹, GEM²⁰), or all cultural practice in a geographic area (Creative Kernow²¹). These partnerships often focus on skills development, sharing of best practice, and marketing and lobbying activity. They may also provide another example of the ladder

¹⁵ https://pec.ac.uk/blog_entries/creative-clusters-case-studies/

¹⁶ <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/review-cultural-compacts-initiative>

¹⁷ <https://www.familyarts.co.uk/>

¹⁸ <https://kidsinmuseums.org.uk/>

¹⁹ <https://housetheatre.org.uk/events-and-support>

²⁰ <https://gem.org.uk/>

²¹ https://www.creativekernow.org.uk/our_programmes/

analogy, in this case with each cultural institution connecting to the sector support organisation directly, rather than creating a truly interwoven network of connections.

House is an interesting example of a partnership which does extend to programming, by actively supporting the touring of high-quality contemporary theatre to our network across South East England, whilst supporting audience development and marketing campaigns. However, it does this from the perspective of the content - not the starting point of what an audience needs in a particular place.

Kids in Museums demonstrates some of the network thinking I'm looking for by providing a directory of museum based youth groups across the UK. This is similar to the earlier example of MAGIC D/deaf we explored.

The Bath Museums Together²² partnership focussed on making the museum sector in this heritage rich city more comprehensible for visitors through an interesting goal of 'working collaboratively for mutual success in increasing audiences and associated financial benefit.'²³ This partnership has had impressive success, demonstrating an increased number of museums visited per trip by 63%. Largely however, this partnership focussed on shared marketing and audience development, rather than collaborative programming approaches.

These examples provide limited exceptions to research proposition 3 - if we consider culture industry workers as an audience in themselves. The examples also add strength to the research proposition that intra-industry collaboration could be part of the solution to the UK culture funding crisis (research proposition 7).

European examples

The most relevant European partnership examples either focused on collaborative Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training of culture industry workers, or festival style joint programming.

Festival models

The Art Explorer festival programme consisted of a museum boat and a traveling festival that worked with partners in 15 cities bordering the Mediterranean Sea;

*The Art Explora Festival is a project for exchange, dialogue and cultural cooperation on a Mediterranean scale. As part of its mission to support contemporary creation, the festival will develop a programme of cross-regional residencies.'*²⁴

Whilst this does demonstrate a level of partnership working between the main organisers and each city, it is harder to argue that each individual city offer was truly connected, thus

²²<https://museumsandheritage.com/advisor/posts/bath-museums-working-together-making-a-more-coherent-museum-sector-for-visitors/>

²³<https://museumsandheritage.com/advisor/posts/bath-museums-working-together-making-a-more-coherent-museum-sector-for-visitors/>

²⁴[Visit the boat | Festival Art Explora](#)

supporting research propositions 3 and 4, whilst disappointingly not showcasing that our colleagues in Europe have solved things for us (research proposition 1).

EU funded innovation partnerships

Creative Lenses²⁵ catalyst experiments was a four-year (2015-2019) project funded by the Creative Europe EU fund that sought to make cultural organisations more resilient and sustainable by improving their business models and developing their long-term strategic and innovation capacities. It gathered together researchers from the University of the Arts London, mentors in business innovation, and cultural organisation workers from seven European countries.

These projects address elements of my research propositions 1 and 7, but seek to address the funding crisis, and lack of equity in cultural provision, by utilising the creativity of the sector to re-design our business models through inter-sector (rather than intra-sector) partnerships.

Professional development partnerships

European Heritage Hub²⁶ and The Global Cultural Relations Programme²⁷ both focus on CPD and networking to foster good practice across the culture sector and establish an environment of collaboration.

'The Global Cultural Relations Programme (GCRP)... is a unique opportunity that brings together practitioners from around the world to create meaningful connections and discuss cross-cultural collaborations.'

The development of good practice and collaboration here is one step removed, focussing on the laudable aim of upskilling culture sector workers - rather than encouraging direct collaboration. This reflects my earlier observations of the House network and Kids in Museums examples, and continues to support the validity of research proposition 4.

Further afield

A stark article written by the codirectors of the Culture & Arts Policy Institute, New York, describes many worrying parallels in the diminishment of arts funding in the US and New York specifically.

'culture is in crisis. This dire context requires a systemic overhaul of the governance model that structures our sector...it should focus on how the parts must work together to transform the whole. ...the sector continues to face an accelerated rate of disinvestment in a context marked

²⁵ <https://creativelenses.eu/catalysts/>

²⁶ <https://www.europeanheritagehub.eu/>

²⁷ [Apply for the Global Cultural Relations Programme 2024 | Cultural Relations Platform](#)

by economic downturns and a governance model that limits civic engagement and hampers collaboration.²⁸

Thriving through Thick and Thin: Partnerships for Our Cultural Life published by A New Approach (ANA) (Australia's national think tank focused on arts and culture) suggests our colleagues there are facing similar challenges, and looking to partnership working as part of the solution;

*'It's tough out there. It is for everyone. Cultural and creative industries are finding it as hard as anything experienced before...new ways of operating and collaborating are needed to remain sustainable...Understanding and unlocking the value of effective collaboration is key to Australia securing its place as a cultural powerhouse.'*²⁹

In both New York and Australia the right kind of partnership working is being called upon to provide solutions to the sector funding crisis. This adds weight to the veracity of both research propositions 6 and 7.

Interviews

After exploring the literature on a range of partnership models I began to build my own lattice of connections - following threads I'd uncovered in the earlier research and trying to interweave them into a critical mass of insight, with which to test my research propositions.

Each conversation began with testing some of my assumptions through the same set of basic questions; is the ladder/lattice model real? Is the partnership problem for programming real? Are we missing something by not working together for audiences?

And, most critically, is anyone doing it better?³⁰

Look to the Regions

One of my early conversations was with Tony Butler (OBE), Executive Director of Derby Museums. Tony rightly pointed out that my perspective might be suffering from a London and/or big institution bias - noting that in regions, and in smaller organisations partnership working is both more possible and more equitable. We discussed some of the challenges of working with bigger organisations who can approach things from a one up position in which they assume they are the holder of knowledge and arbiter of how best to do things.



²⁸ [Culture in Crisis: A Renewed Call for Systemic Change in New York's Arts and Culture Sector](#)

²⁹ [Thriving-through-Thick-and-Thin ANA-Insight-Report.pdf](#)

³⁰ For a full list of who I spoke with please see Appendix 1

Tony's challenge and recommendation to look more closely at some of the Creative People and Places³¹ work outside of London, pushed my focus towards other UK cities - leading to the data collection focus on Nottingham, and subsequent connections with colleagues in the regions.

The European Angle

To gather further perspective on the European angle, and to test research proposition 1, I began by meeting with two colleagues, Ian Thomas Head of Evidence - British Council,³² and Catherine Leonard Secretary General - International National Trusts Organisation (INTO).³³

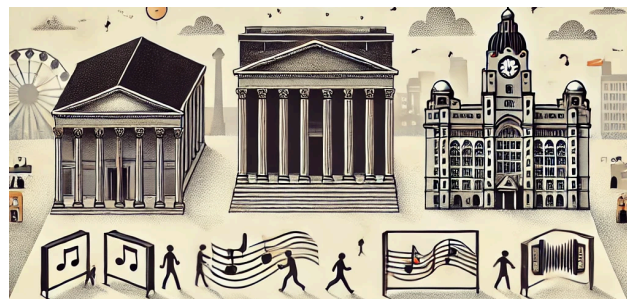
My chat with Ian centred on the partnership practice found in the European Capitals of Culture model³⁴ (replicated in the UK with our Cities of Culture investment programme), and the significant impacts of Eurovision across cultural institutions and the creative economy in its host cities.³⁵

Cities which become winners of the UK cities of culture programme often cite partnership working as a major factor in their economic and regenerative impact. The economic impact of hosting Eurovision is similarly well recorded and touted as a key success measure. There is no doubt that partnership working at a senior executive and funding agreement level is key to this, however the evidence for this partnership practice filtering down to the level of public programming is less clear. This supports research propositions 2, 3 and 4.

An example of where this kind of shared programming does seem to have taken place in response to a cultural moment is in Liverpool's recent hosting of the cultural phenomenon which was Taylor Swift's Era's Tour.

A number of the city's cultural organisations came together to support the creation of the Taylor Town Trail,³⁶ led by two key partners - Culture Liverpool and Make CIC. As reported;

*The Taylor Town Trail was a masterclass in city-wide collaboration...(it) encouraged fans to explore the city, discover hidden gems, and support local businesses along the way.*³⁷



After learning more about the INTO partnership model, Catherine Leonard and I spent time considering which European

³¹ <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/creative-people-and-places-0>

³² <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/about>

³³ <https://www.into.org/who-we-are/>

³⁴ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/european-capitals-of-culture>

³⁵ <https://eurovision.tv/story/liverpool-2023-economic-impact>

³⁶ <https://cultureliverpool.co.uk/liverpool-wins-big-with-the-taylor-town-trail/>

³⁷ <https://cultureliverpool.co.uk/liverpool-wins-big-with-the-taylor-town-trail/>

colleagues might have experienced similar cultural funding crises over the last few decades, and who might therefore be able to suggest how their countries had overcome these - ideally leading towards inspiring partnership practice as part of the solution. From our conversation I zeroed in on Portugal as an interesting comparator, and would follow this thread by connecting with Catarina Valença Gonçalves, Director of Spira,³⁸ and Louisa Hrabowy, UK Lead, Access to Culture, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (the Foundation is based in Portugal).³⁹

To quote Catarina... *'If I understood right the aim of your research, it would be about how different institutions could work together to conquer audiences that have been historically excluded from heritage ...It's funny that you get to a "Let's connect" claim:⁴⁰ we got to a "Get closer".... we do work for everybody, with everybody and with all kinds of heritage.'*

My conversation with Catarina revealed that her organisation was somewhat unique in Portugal, being focussed on working within and partnering with the culture sector. Catarina described how the challenges of the cultural funding landscape in Portugal, and the context of being a young democracy, has generally led to more of a sense of competition than collaboration.

Whilst Spira's work suggests a hopeful future for a more connected sector, I was not able to find significant evidence to support my first research proposition here.

Louisa pointed me towards some of the most impactful current partnership practice that demonstrates the civic role of culture,⁴¹ particularly highlighting the work of David Judd and the Citizens in Power Foundation on Citizen Assemblies and democratic cultural decision making;

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation is excited to see how the Citizens in Power network is building the momentum and pushing the boundaries for citizen engagement in culture...and ultimately improving the chances of more impactful and relevant cultural programmes. '⁴²

The Citizen Assemblies work creates an intriguing possibility to expand my 7th research proposition, towards a recommendation that Intra-industry collaboration, that centres citizen led decision making, might be the way forwards.

Back to the Regions - Finding big ideas

As I began to follow up on Tony's recommendation to look to the regions, I met with Saad Eddine Said, who is both co-director of the aforementioned Citizens in Power Foundation


³⁸ <https://www.spira.pt/>

³⁹ <https://gulbenkian.pt/uk-branch/>

⁴⁰ A reference to my Clore Leadership provocation piece https://www.cloreleadership.org/provocation_paper/where-to-next-the-urgent-case-for-a-new-kind-of-partnership-working/

⁴¹ <https://gulbenkian.pt/uk-branch/our-work/other-initiatives/the-civic-role-of-arts-organisations/>

⁴² <https://www.citizensinpower.com/about>



and CEO of Nottingham New Art Exchange (NNAE).⁴³ Saad's apposite reflections on the culture funding crisis included his hard earned experience of having come from a role in a Creative People and Places partnership that had to close due to lack of funding (Home in Slough).⁴⁴ This experience influences his work at the NNAE where they have taken the decision not to rely on local government funding, meaning they had only lost in the region of £10k from this source in recent times.

However, Saad noted that the wide ranging local government cuts still do impact regional arts organisations; an assumption has evolved that the culture sector can pick up the burden of some elements of social care - like youth programmes and wellbeing provision. This is a tricky line to tread, and a good reminder that community arts programmes cannot and should not become a substitute or sticking plaster for statutory services.

As our conversation developed Saad described the Transform partnership, which involved 14 cultural organisations across Nottingham coming together to create *Transform, a City Takeover* in 2024.

*This festival represents a collaborative and transformative endeavour for all participating organisations ... Our collective vision is to celebrate and amplify the leadership, creativity, and stewardship of the Global Ethnic Majority in our city.'*⁴⁵

The highlight of our conversation for me was analysing the success factors of this partnership. What had made this impressive collaboration possible?

Saad described three key factors: joint buy-in - at the financial as well as conceptual level - from all the organisations, a shared audience-led mission, and a shared crisis point or catalyst for action. We further developed the lattice analogy too, with Saad noticing the collaboration needs to be built into the cake - not just the cherry on top.

Another regional leader who echoed many of Saad's observations was Victoria Clifton, Head of Learning at Bradford Museum and Galleries. Vicky too seemed to have been able to galvanise cultural organisations across her city (Bradford) to act together through her work with the Heritage Hub. Here they have agreed a shared ambition to provide every primary school aged child in Bradford with access to heritage in 2025. What I most admired about this project was the pragmatic approach Vicky described, whereby organisations were going to share data on which schools they were working with in order to avoid excessive overlap and ensure no child was left behind.

Vicky was able to describe key factors of this project's success; the need for a charismatic and tenacious leader (Vicky herself - although she was too modest to put it quite like this), a big - and simple - idea which was audience led, and the tenacity to see it through.

⁴³ <https://www.nae.org.uk/about-us/>

⁴⁴ <https://sloughcvs.org/home-slough-closure/>

⁴⁵ [Transform 2024 | New Art Exchange | Nottingham](#)

Speaking to Suzannah Bedford from City Arts Nottingham was both an excellent reminder that some of my observations on community practice (the ladder model, and how some community organisations may be over served whilst others never get the opportunity to connect) were well founded, and a fascinating look at how important the 'in-between' organisations are to the kind of partnership programming I'm interested in. This provided an interesting way of thinking about solutions to research propositions 2, 5 and 7.

City Arts works with communities and cultural institutions, often having longer term and deeper relationships with marginalised communities and artists than a large institution can. As they describe it;

*'We have established deep and impactful relationships with a broad range of communities. Some are communities of interest and some are place-based...Our partnerships bring new and innovative opportunities for artists and communities to come together.'*⁴⁶

My conversation with Tim Jones was wide ranging and covered topics from the critique of the 'non-profit industrial complex'⁴⁷ to how frequently our sector acts as if we are competing with each other - despite evidence to the contrary. This reflected the breadth of Tim's experience in cultural place making and the arts sector more widely.

As well as helpfully confirming some of the basis of my research propositions, particularly propositions 2, 6 and 7, Tim was able to point to interesting examples of where more intra-sector partnership working is happening. We shared a belief, that generally, cultural learning teams seem to operate in a more collegiate manner, and that restricted geographies can help push institutions to collaborate - such as the Culture Mile, which calls out shared programming as a major ambition;

*'Over the next decade and beyond, the five partners, led by the City of London Corporation, will transform the area, improving their offer to audiences with imaginative collaborations, outdoor programming and events seven days a week.'*⁴⁸

The Money - How can funders enable intra-industry partnership practice?

In my conversation with Louisa Hrabowy I'd mentioned my perception that funding for the arts can seem to follow trends, preferring to work with one audience for a few years before moving on to another, and asked, How does the funding sector talk to itself? Are funders aware of this pattern and the impacts it may have? If so, what are you doing about it?

⁴⁶ <https://city-arts.org.uk/about-us/our-strategy/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.dukeupress.edu/the-revolution-will-not-be-funded>

⁴⁸

<https://news.cityoflondon.gov.uk/culture-mile--a-major-destination-for-culture-and-creativity-in-the-heart-of-the-square-mile/>

Louisa allayed some of my concerns by describing connection and networking sessions which do take place between leaders at these organisations, and other ways in which they collaborate. We didn't quite find an answer though as to how funders can influence cultural institutions to collaborate more, and more impactfully at the level of programming.

My connection with Vicky led me to another funder, the Heritage Fund, and Sarah Ledjmi, Heritage Fund Engagement Manager, North. Sarah was able to illustrate for me the process and structures by which their funding is deployed. As a simplified description of the process - they judge each application on its own merits (as they should), against a set of criteria which will vary over time depending on organisational priorities (for example access, inclusion, participation). They do not currently assess based on a matrix of audience vs geographical location - so they would not be able to prioritise a youth engagement project in an area with fewer funded youth projects, versus an elders project that is offered to a well served audience. This of course leaves room for the kinds of challenges I posited in my introduction, where one audience is overserved and another left behind.

Heather Sturdy, Head of National Partnerships - Tate, and I also talked about funding models. Heather explained that many of the arts organisations in the Plus Tate network⁴⁹ were part of the Millennium Commission's and follow a similar tripartite funding structure of Arts Council, local government, and earned income funding. Local government arts funding has often been a more flexible funding resource, and more likely to cover core staff costs than other grants. This may mean that the funder-led programming problem is particularly widespread, and may become increasingly acute as budgets shrink and the local government funding pot gets smaller overall.

Across the pond

Having struggled to find the depth of practice I was looking for at a programming level across Europe I shifted my focus across the pond and connected with colleagues at the National Association of State Arts Agencies (NASAA)⁵⁰.

I was drawn to their work from their policy publications grouped under the title *'Why cross-sector collaborations now'*⁵¹ and their ethos around *'working partnerships to leverage the unique value of arts and creativity across sectors in solving community challenges'*. Within their gathered examples a strong focus on starting with audience need and community empowerment was apparent and inspiring (relevant to my third research proposition).

The published strategy sampler on *'Cross-Sector Strategies for Health and Community Well-Being'*⁵² makes a compelling case for the impact of arts on health, and the benefits that


⁴⁹ <https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/national-international-local/plus-tate>

⁵⁰ <https://nasaa-arts.org/>

⁵¹ [Cross-Sector Collaborations - NASAA](#)

⁵²

<https://nasaa-arts.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Cross-Sector-Strategies-for-Health-and-Community-Well-Being.pdf>



cross sector collaboration can bring to this practice. The publication also highlights the beneficial connecting role state arts agencies can play in this work. The role of the state arts agencies of course has parallels to our own local council arts managements teams, and perhaps points to a significant part these teams could play in further supporting intra-industry collaboration.

The majority of the examples however did not demonstrate partnership collaboration between cultural institutions, or shared programming planning.

The data

A chat with Jack Gamble, co-author of the State of the Arts report⁵³ which highlighted the depths of the funding crisis, revealed just how tricky it was going to be to get the data I needed to justify my observation that our industries lack of connectedness was leading to over-programming for some audiences whilst under-programming for others. Our conversation confirmed that as far as he was aware, and for the purposes of their report, there was no central repository that could tell you hours of arts provision for audience X in city Y across all art forms. The State of the Arts report had used robust data from Data Thistle, and other sources, which focus on analysis information available from ticketing platforms like Eventbrite. The challenge with this is that much arts programming is either unticketed, free, or ticketed directly from each organisation's own systems - meaning this data is simply not captured.

The Arts Council's own data tools are both valuable, and lacking in audience specific data at the level of cultural programming provision. Their Culture and Place Data Explorer tool can, for example, provide valuable insight into arts council funding by year, per capita, and by category - but the categories listed are based around art form, not audience beneficiaries.⁵⁴

In my earlier European explorations I did come across a promising way forwards for the data challenge. Artsmetric describes itself as a digital platform for European cultural and creative spaces to compare data, share practices and learn from each other⁵⁵. Some version of this which combines existing UK arts data sources, with institutional insight could form part of the route forwards and go a long way to answering the challenges of research propositions 3, 5 and 7.

⁵³ <https://www.campaignforthearts.org/reports/the-state-of-the-arts/>

⁵⁴ <https://culture.localinsight.org/#/map>

⁵⁵ <https://artsmetric.com/how-to/>

Conferences

To further my connections and insight I attended a number of conferences during the research period. I looked for explorations of partnership based practice and interesting models to compare and test against my research propositions.

Museum X Machine X Me -Tate Modern⁵⁶ - 2 October 2024

The *Museum, Machine, Me* conference at Tate Modern explored current practice in the use of technology within the culture sector, with a particular focus on AI's impact and potential. Professor Christopher Smith of the AHRC delivered an opening address underscoring the urgent need for deeper, more strategic partnerships across the sector to navigate the challenges of digital transformation, funding constraints, and audience engagement.

Stephanie Dinkins⁵⁷ presentation began to describe how emerging technologies and social collaboration could be used toward more equitable ecosystems in culture. This emphasis on collaboration—both in Stephanie's work, and in Professor Smith's opening address was striking, and adds weight to my suppositions in research proposition 7.

CIMIX 2025 - Hands on Edition -Vienna - 15 & 16 January 2025

At the *CIMIX 2025* conference, discussions centred on the evolving landscape of cultural and creative industries within the context of Europe's *Triple Transition*—green, digital, and social. In his opening keynote, Gerin Trautenberger, Director at EIT-Culture and Creativity, highlighted the increasing interdependence of sectors, noting that 60% of revenue in the cultural and creative industries now comes from cross-sector collaboration. The conference reinforced the idea that, while cultural institutions are adapting to digital and environmental imperatives, they must also embrace new partnership models—both within and beyond the sector—to remain resilient in the face of economic and societal shifts.

Within a fascinating and packed agenda of examples of collaborative and creative partnerships, I was struck by how few intra-industry examples of partnership working were included. The vast majority of examples focused on partnership working either between culture sector organisations (museums, galleries, artists) and creative business, or between one of these two sectors and a very different field of work - including space engineering, climate change, and sports. This unfortunately does not support my hopes expressed in

⁵⁶ <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/museum-machine-me-conference>

⁵⁷ <https://www.stephaniedinkins.com/about.html>

research proposition 1, but instead suggests that the situation in the UK outlined in proposition 2 is in fact shared across the EU.

A chance conversation at the conference did reveal an interesting Intra-sector partnership, the Kulturpass;

"With this ID, socially disadvantaged people receive free entry to numerous cultural institutions. 'Hunger auf Kunst und Kultur'...should be understood as an initiative that focuses on the discourse about the significance and accessibility of culture for all people."⁵⁸

This model of one access pass, removing the barrier of cost for a wide range of audiences to a wide range of cultural institutions across Austria provides a glimpse of the kind of joined up provision we should be aiming towards (and adds support to research proposition 7).

TransCulturalExchange - Boston - 7-10 March 2025

At the *TransCultural Exchange 2025* conference, the focus was on fostering global artistic collaboration, with discussions spanning cultural diplomacy, creative exchange, and the role of artists in addressing contemporary global challenges. A recurring theme was the necessity of moving beyond national and institutional silos to build sustainable, cross-border partnerships that amplify cultural impact.

When asked (by this author) what cultural institutions could do better to support art and artists on the front-line of today's most challenging societal issues (in the context of a panel discussion entitled 'Art on the frontlines: navigating risks and fostering resilience'), Achiro P. Olwoch⁵⁹ answered '*work together*'. Achiro went on to describe how we needed to collaborate within the sector, to form coalitions to lobby for change, to share funding, and to support audiences and artists.

⁵⁸ <https://www.hungeraufkunstundkultur.at/>

⁵⁹ Artistic Director of National Queer Theatre <https://www.achropolwoch.com/>

Data crunching

To combat the lack of data discussed with Jack Gamble, I undertook some direct data gathering to test research proposition 5. I conducted a deep dive into cultural programming provision at four cultural organisations in Nottingham, and a lighter touch look at provision in Manchester and Liverpool to provide comparators.

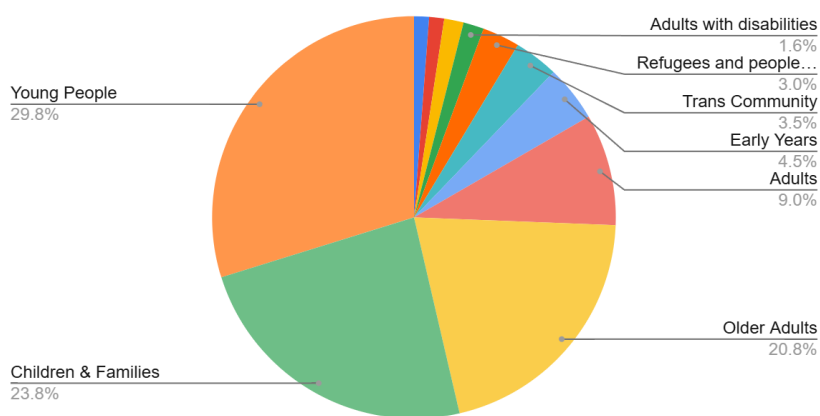
Nottingham

In Nottingham I calculated the provision of over 2,000 hours of dedicated cultural programming provision across four organisations; Lakeside Arts (University of Nottingham), Nottingham New Art Exchange, Nottingham Contemporary, and Nottingham Playhouse. The institutions were selected to provide a broad view of programming provision, agnostic of art form.

The data was gathered through individual institutions websites, and as such is subject to the limits of accuracy and fullness this would suggest. Challenges with the data also occurred around lack of consistency in language used to describe a particular audience (eg. Seniors, Older Adults, 55+ etc all being used to describe the same target audience). For the purposes of the table below I have excluded cultural programming that did not have a clear target audience, and I have avoided categorizing activity labeled as 'community' unless it had a clearer definition (Trans community for example).

Hours of provision was selected as the fairest and easiest to observe comparator for judging level of provision, however other criteria around cost of provision and/or number of participants would likely reveal a different and more nuanced picture.

Total hours annually per identified audience across chosen cultural institutions in Nottingham



The data summary from the four Nottingham Institutions is a fascinating glimpse into the impacts of individual organisations planning without consistent coordination.⁶⁰ At a blunt level this data suggests that research proposition 5 holds true, and that programming provision is not equal across identified audiences. With further time and research

⁶⁰ Full data can be found in Appendix 2

additional conclusions could be drawn by comparing the in-equalities in provision with demographic and socio-economic data about the population of Nottingham.

An interesting initial observation would call out the difference in hours of direct provision for adults with disabilities, versus refugees and people seeking asylum. Given that we know roughly one in five people in the UK lives with a disability,⁶¹ and refugees and people seeking asylum account for 0.6%⁶² of the population, this is worthy of further exploration.

Liverpool and Manchester

My data gathering across institutions in Liverpool and Manchester was more limited, and focussed on comparing across just two target audiences, youth and older adults, at five institutions in Liverpool, and three in Manchester. The same caveats apply around the reliability of the data,.

Total annual hours of provision	Liverpool
325	Youth
150	Older adults

Total annual hours of provision	Manchester
300	Youth
225	Older adults

63

Here, as with the data gathered from Nottingham, this snapshot of provision suggests that research proposition 5 has merit, and that further investigation into why different levels of provision are observed would be valuable.

⁶¹ <https://www.scope.org.uk/media/disability-facts-figures>

⁶² <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/about/facts-about-refugees/>

⁶³ Full data can be found in appendix 2

Emerging themes

From the interviews I conducted, the literature review, conferences and data crunching I undertook, a number of key themes have emerged. The majority of these align with, or support, the 7 research propositions I undertook to explore.

Theme 1: **Intrinsic Value of Partnerships**

Partnership working has become intrinsic to the culture sector, and is seen as a significant part of the solution for issues facing the industry including (but not limited to) funding challenges (proposition 7). Collaboration, co-creation, and partnership have become both buzz words for press releases and funding applications, and key areas for sector workers skills development. Partnership working is also seen as a key driver of innovation and a major route to revenue creation, aligning directly with the recognition that intra-industry collaboration could mitigate the UK's cultural funding crisis (Proposition 7).

Theme 2: **Strength in Cross-sector Partnerships**

We are becoming better at working with partners outside our sector, such as health, technology, and education, and simultaneously better at articulating and advocating for the value our sector brings to these partnerships. However, intra-industry partnerships—especially in programming—remain comparatively underdeveloped, reflecting research proposition 2 (the UK lacks substantial intra-industry partnerships at the programming level).

Theme 3: **Lack of Data = Lack of Coordination**

There is a major gap in our data. We do not track access to culture across audience types, and this leaves open a significant risk of over and under provision. We continue to focus on content types, rather than developing individuals' cultural capital across genres.

Despite the vast, varied, and fantastic arts programming taking place across the UK there seems to be no central repository tracking provision by audience type and location. This makes it difficult to measure gaps in access and ensure equitable distribution of resources. For instance, the small sample data collected from Nottingham cultural institutions demonstrated a clear disparity in programming provision across audiences. This broader data gap hinders coordinated programming and exacerbates inequities in cultural provision (Proposition 5).

Theme 4: **Limited Innovation in Intra-sector Programming Collaboration**

Intra-sector working is much less innovative than our work outside of the sector when it comes to programming provision.

Examples of health and wellbeing partnerships demonstrate how we can collaborate with those outside our sector with a shared audience outcome at the heart of our plans. Why can't we do this as part of our everyday programming planning?

Intra-sector collaborations are often less innovative and seldom start with shared audience ambitions across multiple institutions. This directly confirms propositions 3 and 4—partnerships rarely begin with collective audience goals and are often centered around asset protection, advocacy, or professional development rather than joint audience-focused programming.

Theme 5: **The lattice rarely exists** (when it comes to programming)

Intra-industry partnerships exist, and make significant positive impacts on the cultural ecosystem - particularly through shared advocacy, and can drive regeneration and city wide growth. They are also beginning to be used for wider civic purposes, such as driving awareness of and solutions for climate change.

These intra-industry partnerships can have a positive impact on programming provision from a macro perspective when we consider examples of collaboration on industry wide continuous professional development, and networks designed to build best practice for specific audiences.

However, on closer examination, relatively few of these partnerships take the steps towards a lattice approach at the level of direct programming provision for audiences.

Many cultural institutions engage in what could be described as parallel play, - simultaneously programming for similar audiences, or for a similar theme, without actually collaborating directly.

Where this does happen tends to be around celebratory or festival event moments, rather than deeply integrated ongoing cooperative efforts that could maximise impacts and share resources.

It was extremely difficult to find examples of either all the local providers of youth arts in a city (a theatre, gallery and museum), coming together and agreeing how best to deploy their shared expertise and resources for maximum audience impact. Or, a range of cultural

venues in a city agreeing to a divided outreach programme - where one would focus on audiences in post codes X and Y, whilst another served P and Q.

Instead, cultural institutions frequently run similar programs simultaneously but independently, missing opportunities for deeper cooperation, resource sharing, and maximized audience impact. This highlights that substantial lattice (cross-sector) programming collaborations remain rare, validating propositions 2 and 4.

We know at some level that the ultimate priority is access to arts provision. We seem to fall back into the trap of privileging our organisations particular type of arts provision. Of assuming that what matters most, is an audience connecting with us.

Theme 6: **Increasing Demand for Equity and Citizen-led Approaches**

The demand for equity and citizen involvement in culture is increasing and evolving. The impressive work at Nottingham New Art Exchange on embedding a permanent Citizen Assembly into the DNA of their organisation paves the way for a new future of community engagement and democratisation of cultural power. We can only hope that the next wave of this work would emulate working with all the cultural organisations across a city to rationalise programming provision across all of the city's audiences.

I can imagine a future in which local government arts structures are formed around embedded citizen assemblies, which help to direct funding and enable equitable programming (a build on proposition 7).


Theme 7: **The Ladder problem - unequal access to arts provision**

My research confirms that some well connected community groups develop strong relationships with multiple arts institutions and regularly access arts provision. Others remain excluded or underserved. This exacerbates existing inequalities reinforcing a hierarchical structure, where smaller organisations and communities remain dependent on individual institutions rather than being a part of a larger, interwoven cultural ecosystem.

Theme 8: **Funding can drive programming**

Industry insiders agree that Arts funding in the UK often follows trends, leading to temporary surges in programming for specific audiences (e.g. youth, people with dementia, specific underrepresented communities) before moving on to the next focus.

This funder led approach can result in cyclical bursts of attention and provision for audiences, rather than sustained, strategic engagement and development of cultural capital and agency (proposition 5). This can be compounded in an environment in which



shrinking local government budgets place greater pressure on cultural institutions to pick up the slack in provision of social services without the necessary structural support or oversight.

Taken as a whole, these themes largely reinforce the validity of research propositions 2-7, whilst adding depth to our understanding of the underlying issues and complexities. Sadly, my exploration of the work of our European colleagues who have been through a similar funding crisis did not yet uncover the idealised matrix of intra-industry collaboration I'd hoped for, and expressed in research proposition 1.

Recommendations

Returning to the initially scoped research propositions provides useful clarity in how to turn this research into recommendations.

The first recommendation addresses propositions 1 to 6, and it is to conduct further research into the existing models of intra-industry partnerships that do exist in the UK and Europe. This research project had a relatively short timeline, and as such it has not been possible to exhaust the potential pool of examples.

The second recommendation is to invest and build on existing data repositories, such as the European Artsmetric⁶⁴ and the Arts Councils Culture and Place Data explorer⁶⁵ by providing data on provision by audience beneficiary as well as art form. This could make a significant difference in addressing the in-equitable provision across audiences highlighted in research proposition 5, and enable the change required to address propositions 3, 6 and 7.

The third recommendation addresses the full range of research propositions to build on the powerful examples of collaboration which have been uncovered, and apply these to cultural programming provision. From the advocacy collaborations which helped secure and additional 270 million in funding for the arts sector this spring,⁶⁶ to the powerful impact of NNAE and Nottingham's mission led partnership to support and empower global ethnic majority talent and leadership,⁶⁷ We know we can do more when we do it together. As both Saad-Eddine Said and Victoria Clifton argued, a shared audience led mission and a charismatic leader can overcome the barriers to intra-industry collaboration at a programming level.

Back to the Future

As promised in the introduction to the paper, I want to return to the future of the sector I hope for.

There are hints and indications that we may be starting to move towards models which demonstrate the application of these three recommendations. In Manchester a recently launched Collaborate fund is offering £300,000 for projects and programmes which demonstrate how the sector working together can aid our ongoing resilience and civic

⁶⁴ <https://artsmetric.com/>

⁶⁵ <https://culture.localinsight.org/#/map>

⁶⁶ <https://www.campaignforthearts.org/news/uk-government-commits-new-funding-for-arts-and-culture/>

⁶⁷ <https://www.nae.org.uk/transform-2024/>



impacts.⁶⁸ The Citizen Assemblies⁶⁹ model presents a fantastic opportunity to scale and apply rigor to the involvement of communities in their own cultural provision.

In my hoped-for future, we would have the data at our digital finger tips to allow each cultural programming manager to make data led decisions, that put audience need and equity first, to support programming provision at their institution.

Working at Museum A I'd know that Gallery B, just down the road, has a fantastic youth programme, working with three local youth centres. And I'd be able to choose whether to connect with those same youth centres to offer more and build on that foundation, in order to respond to an evidenced lack of opportunity for young people in our city, or to instead focus more of my budget and efforts on the Elders in our community.

At Gallery B I'd know, when I was starting up my new community outreach initiative, that Theatre C had great experience in working with Refugees and Asylum seekers, and I could learn from them and build on their connections. I'd also know that if Theatre C was faced with a sudden budget challenge, and had to withdraw their programming for this audience, I'd be ready to step in and offer safe harbour. This would build on the successful models of intra-industry, audience focussed CPD we've already discussed.

As a cultural ecosystem, all three of these institutions would also be more readily able to demonstrate to future and existing funders their city wide civic impact. How the services they offered were matched to the needs of their people, and making a real difference as a whole.

⁶⁸ <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/culture/collaborate-fund/>

⁶⁹ <https://www.citizensinpower.com/>

Conclusion

In beginning this research I set out to test a number of propositions about the nature and effectiveness of intra-industry partnerships in cultural programming, particularly in the context of the local government arts funding crisis. I also wanted to validate my professional experience and observations about gaps in cultural programming provision, and why and how they occur.

Some of my assumptions have now been validated, such as the constraining existence and persistence of hierarchical "ladder" style partnerships, imbalances in cultural programming provision across audiences, and the limited scope of current collaborative intra-industry practice.

However, other suppositions have not been realised. International examples provided inspiration (and repetition) rather than the fully-realised solutions I'd hoped for, and genuine lattice-like collaboration within our industry proved rare.

Through interviews, primary data gathering, and literature analysis, I've uncovered valuable approaches towards impactful collaboration. Some of which could be parts of the building blocks of the new kind of partnership working I am envisioning.

The potential for equitable, audience-led intra-sector partnerships clearly exists, though it remains underutilised. Real-world examples from Nottingham and Bradford demonstrate that purposeful collaboration driven by shared audience objectives and visionary leadership can bridge gaps in cultural provision.

I am also aware of the limited scope of this research. Seven months is only enough time to scratch the surface of the brilliant work that exists in our sector, and I look forward to continuing the discourse outside the confines of this paper.

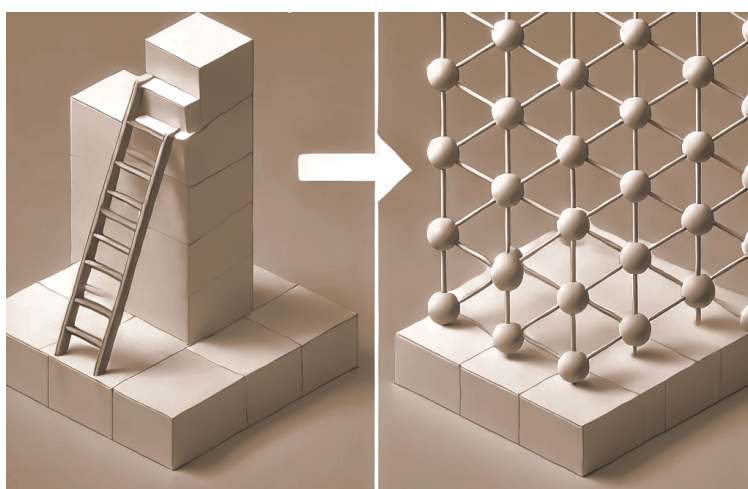
As the King's College London partnership report published back in 2015 stated:

*'the objectives of broad national policy can only be achieved with the coordination of fragmented and dispersed resources. It seems that while there are complexity and scarce resources there will be the need for partnership. Neither of those processes look like slowing down, and partnership will continue to be part of the policy toolkit for the foreseeable future.'*⁷⁰

⁷⁰ <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/resources/reports/full-report.pdf>

Now, ten years after the King's College report, the key recommendation from this research is clear: cultural institutions should adopt audience-centred strategic partnerships across and within the sector, supported by improved data systems and innovative funding practices.

The adoption of this approach is more critical than ever as we navigate ongoing financial constraints and rising demands for equity in arts provision. The ladder must become a lattice, ensuring no audience remains overlooked or underserved, and no resource is wasted.



Appendix 1

Table of interviews

Date	Who I met	Title	Organisation	Key insights	Resulting Connections
22/04/2024	Tony Butler	Executive Director	Museum of Derby	Takeaway: Partnership work is happening, but at a smaller, regional scale. Opinion: Should be asset-based. Recommendation: look at Cultural Compacts.	N/A
30/08/2024	Jack Gamble	Director and CEO	Campaign For the Arts (State of the Arts Report)	Takeaway: the data does not exist regarding types of programme v types of audiences (leading to Nottingham data grab)	CIPFA
02/09/2024	Baroness Genista McIntosh	Member of the House of Lords		Takeaway: Look more closely at local government arts officer roles - can they/do they coordinate?	Colleague in local Government
14/01/2025	Sarah Ledjmi	Heritage Fund Engagement Manager North	National Lottery Heritage Fund	Takeaway: Funders also don't have the data to track funding by audience type . Funders tend to track by Heritage type. Takeaway: funding allocation is individually assessed, so you can't do an allocation by type. Question: how would you start a multi agency approach?	Senior colleague connection, George Stanley Jones.
5/09/2024	Suzannah Bedford	CEO and Creative Director	City Arts	Takeaway: Agreed with my perception of how the sector isn't joined up. Meaning that one community group can benefit loads and another can benefit not at all (Refugee Forum).	East Midlands Participatory Arts Forum
11/09/2024	Saad Eddine Said	CEO and Artistic Director	New Art Exchange Nottingham	Takeaway: we are looking at growth within a sector crisis. Key factors for successful collaboration = clear mission, clear leadership Sharing: experience of when local council went bankrupt (Slough), resulting in Notting Arts not being reliant on local gov arts funding T: Set up cross sector partnership	N/A

				to get more global majority leaders in Nottingham Arts Sector. The reason their collab worked is that agreed a clear mission , everyone put cash into the pot, the cake of collaboration not the cherry.	
20/09/2024	Simon Glynn	Assistant Director (City Public Realm)	City of London	Reflection: his team don't currently work in this way but we should look into it.	N/A
03/10/2024	Catarina Valença Gonçalves	Director/Founder	SPIRA, Portugal	T: Context with Portugal, everyone is in a survival mindset, because their democracy is 50 years old and the arts are under funded. T: Spira is one of the only orgs working in partnership T: Partnership working revolves around career development in heritage sector	Conference, Spain
19/11/2024	Heather Sturdy	Head of National Partnerships	Tate	T: PLUS Tate network, started in Millenium with 3 part funding model (arts council, local auth, revenue) T: The Arts Council is main problem, regarding funder led programming	N/A
21/11/2024	Tim Jones		Independent Arts Consultant	T: Agreed with funding being disconnected Recommendation: look at place based work eg Culture Mile T: Organisations think we are competing, but data shows we are not. T: Learning depts tend to be more partnership based.	Simon Glynn - City of London
26/04/2024	Alice Purkiss	Manager of Oxford/National Trust partnership	National Trust / University of Oxford	Connected me with Dr Pegram Harrison as academic supervisor	Pegram Harrison Catherine Leonard (INTO)
17/04/2024	Sarah Holloway	Manager of Heritage Open Days	Heritage Open Days, National Trust	T: Most partnerships in our sector are a ladder not a lattice T: During Heritage open days we are a collaboration not a competition	Ruth Ann Baxter

13/05/2024	Louisa Hrabowy	Lead UK Arts and Environment	Gulbenkian Foundation	T: Hyperlocal Examples of partnership working that produced a civic led change T: Connection to Cultural Commons, check out Citizen Assemblies T: Confirmed that major Arts Funders do connect	Trevor, Cultural Commons
11/07/2024	Catherine Leonard	CEO International association of National Trust Organisations	INTO	T: It would be interesting to look at countries that have experienced significant political change, for example Czech / Slovakia, because they might have different models of partnership working	Katrina from Spiro, Portugal
02/05/2024	Ian Thomas	Head of Evidence	British Council	T: European Cities of Culture model and the impact of Eurovision	N/A
11/02/2025	Lucy Ribero	Communities at the Royal Horticultural Society	RHS	T: Attempting similar join up with a network of providers working in community horticulture.	N/A
15/10/2024	Vicky Clifton	Learning and Outreach Manager	Bradford Museums and Heritage	T: It needs a big, shared idea and a trusted leader	Sarah Ledjimi, Heritage funder
16/01/2025	Susan Oetgen and Multiple Colleagues		National Association of State Arts Associations	T: Similar challenges in the USA, best practice is happening in some states and some cities where there is a coming together of organisations around a specific civic agenda - such as healthy ageing.	

Organisation	Event title	Audience	#	Hours	How often?	Annual sessions	Total Hours
Lakeside Arts (Uni Nottingham)	Intaglio Printing Workshop	Adults	2		one off	1	2
Lakeside Arts (Uni Nottingham)	Brush Painting workshop	Adults	2		series of events	7	14
Lakeside Arts (Uni Nottingham)	Writing Apothecary: Writing for wellbeing	Adults	2		series of events	4	8
Lakeside Arts (Uni Nottingham)	Craft Adult workshops (standalone events)	Adults	2		series of events	5	10
Lakeside Arts (Uni Nottingham)	Writing Workshop: over the counter	Adults	2		series of events	4	8
Lakeside Arts (Uni Nottingham)	Dance workshop: exploring tender steps (c	Adults	2		one off	1	2
Lakeside Arts (Uni Nottingham)	Craft childrens workshops : monthly (eg pi	Children & Families	2		monthly	12	24
Lakeside Arts (Uni Nottingham)	October Half Term Family Activities	Children & Families	3		series of events	3	9
Lakeside Arts (Uni Nottingham)	Circus Skills workshop	Children & Families	2		one off	1	2
Lakeside Arts (Uni Nottingham)	Museum Explorers : drop in craft sesalon	Children & Families	3		one off	1	3
Lakeside Arts (Uni Nottingham)	Carnival Craft Summer School	Children & Families	5		week	5	25
Lakeside Arts (Uni Nottingham)	Storytelling workshop	Children & Families	2		series of events	2	4
New Art Exchange Programme	Free Flowing threads: Dance workshops	Adults	1.5		8 weeks	8	12
New Art Exchange Programme	Community Cafe (communal eating event)	All ages	2		1+3 thursdays	24	48
New Art Exchange Programme	Friday Socials	All ages	4		2/3 time a month	30	120
New Art Exchange Programme	Younger YARD: games, story-making, and c	Children & Families	2		weekly	50	100
New Art Exchange Programme	Saturday art club	Children & Families	2		2.5 sessions/month	30	60
New Art Exchange Programme	Reside: Nottingham Trans Hub	Trans community	2		8 weeks	8	16
New Art Exchange Programme	Older YARD: drama and performance	Young People	2		weekly	50	100
Nottingham Contemporary	Free teacher CPD	Adults	2		2 sessions in 2024	2	4
Nottingham Contemporary	Dance and Music one off workshops	Adults	3		2 sessions in 2024	1	3
Nottingham Contemporary	Art of Belonging: Practice sharing and train	Adults	2.5		one off	1	2.5
Nottingham Contemporary	Slow Reading Group (online book club) in 2	Adults with disabilities	1.5		5 sessions (Jan - May)	5	7.5
Nottingham Contemporary	October Half Term Family Activities: Kindec	Children & Families	2		week long	6	12
Nottingham Contemporary	Craft Fair family art activities drop in	Children & Families	4		one off	2	8
Nottingham Contemporary	Summer Family Activities: Cattywampus!	Children & Families	4		6 weeks	18	72
Nottingham Contemporary	May Half Term Family Activities: Here, then	Children & Families	2		week long	6	12
Nottingham Contemporary	Easter Family Activities 2024: Traces in Sp	Children & Families	2		week long	6	12
Nottingham Contemporary	February Half Term Family Activities: Point	Children & Families	2		week long	6	12
Nottingham Contemporary	Early Years Sensory Workshops: We are W	Early Years	3		sessions thrugh year	10	30
Nottingham Contemporary	LGBTQ+ Festive Family Meet Up	LGBTQ+	2		one off	1	2
Nottingham Contemporary	Cool company Dance & Movement worksh	Older Adults	2		5 sessions (May-Jun)	5	10
Nottingham Contemporary	2024 programme of workshops for YP: ma	Young People	19		total hours of 6 events	1	19
Nottingham Playhouse	Making It Up: Core skills (improv comedy w	Adults	2		series of events	10	20
Nottingham Playhouse	Playhouse Performers Ensemble (Commun	Adults	2		term time	39	78
Nottingham Playhouse	Playhouse Choir (Community)	Adults	1.5		term time	39	58.5
Nottingham Playhouse	Space to Create: puppetry	Adults with disabilities	2		series of events	10	20
Nottingham Playhouse	Streetwise Opera: adults w experience of h	Adults with experience of h	2		series of events	10	20
Nottingham Playhouse	Open Stage Young Company is for young p	Autism / Learning Disabil	1.5		series of events	10	15
Nottingham Playhouse	Playhouse Platform (learning disabilities ar	Autism / Learning Disabil	2		term time	39	78
Nottingham Playhouse	Magical Oak: Libraries Tour	Children & Families	1		sessions	12	12
Nottingham Playhouse	Junior Young Company	Children & Families	1.5		series of events	20	30
Nottingham Playhouse	Rainbow Stripes: music session	Early Years	1		series of events	4	4
Nottingham Playhouse	Little People Big Adventures - story telling l	Early Years	1		series of events	11	11
Nottingham Playhouse	Infant Young Company	Early Years	1.5		series of events	20	30
Nottingham Playhouse	Nottingham Queer Arts Collective	LGBTQ+	2		monthly	12	24
Nottingham Playhouse	Encore: Play readers (morning and afterno	Older Adults	1.5		term time	39	58.5
Nottingham Playhouse	Encore: Dance performance	Older Adults	2		term time	39	78
Nottingham Playhouse	Encore: Crafters	Older Adults	2		term time	39	78
Nottingham Playhouse	Encore: Monthly Meets	Older Adults	2		monthly	12	24
Nottingham Playhouse	Sky Mirror Dance: choreographic project	Older Adults	2.5		term time	39	97.5
Nottingham Playhouse	Conversation Cafe: refugees and people se	Refugees and people see	1		weekly	50	50

Appendix 2 UK City Data

Nottingham Data

Nottingham Playhouse	Writers Room: creative writing for fun (com	Trans community	1.5	series of events	10	15
Nottingham Playhouse	Trans voice workshops	Trans community	2	monthly	12	24
Nottingham Playhouse	Trans drama ensemble (community)	Trans community	2	series of events	2	4
Nottingham Playhouse	Senior Young Company	Young People	2	series of events	10	20
Nottingham Playhouse	HomeGrown Performers: nurturing talent	Young People	3	annual, term time	39	117
Nottingham Playhouse	HomeGrown Creatives: nurturing talent	Young People	3	annual, term time	39	117
Nottingham Playhouse	Playhouse Art Club	Young People	2	series of events	10	20
Nottingham Playhouse	Speak Easy: Spoken Word Collective (open	Young People	2	2 / month	24	48
Nottingham Playhouse	National Theatre Young Technicians course	Young People	2	series of events	12	24
Nottingham Playhouse	Homegrown Collective workshops	Young People	2	monthly	12	24
Nottingham Playhouse	Playhouse Youth Art Club	Young People	2	series of events	4	8
Nottingham Playhouse	Rootz: space for YP with experience of livi	Young People who have e	2	series of events	10	20
TOTAL HOURS					2000.5	

Liverpool Data

Institution	Program (Target Group)	Target Audience	Session Hours	Schedule	Estimated Annual Hours
Everyman & Playhouse	Young Everyman Playhouse (YEP)	Youth	~2 hours per session (weekly) Technical strand ~3h	Weekly sessions by strand:- Tue or Wed or Thu evenings (e.g. Thu 5-7pm)	~80-100 hours (40-50 weeks)
Museum of Liverpool	House of Memories – Memory Walks	Older Adults	1 hour per session	Fridays (guided walk each Friday)	~50 hours (1x per week, 50 weeks)
Royal Court Theatre	Variety Lunch Club	Older Adults	~2 hours per session (including lunch)	Weekly on Wednesdays (early afternoon)	~100 hours (50 weeks)
Royal Court Theatre	Royal Court Youth Theatre	Youth	2-3 hours per session (weekly)	Weekly:- Ages 14-16: Thu 5pm-7pm- Ages 6-10: Sat 10am-1pm- Ages 11-13: Sat 2pm-5pm	~100-150 hours (50 weeks)

Tate Liverpool	Tate Collective / Tate Collective Producers	Youth	Varies by event (often 2–4 hour workshops or meetings)	Occasional sessions (often weekends or project-based). For example: a workshop ran 11:30–16:00 one Saturday	~40–60 hours (project-based, ~20 sessions/year)
Walker Art Gallery	“Happy Older People” (HOP) Network (2014–2020)	Older Adults	Varied (project-based events)	Varied events year-round across NML venues	Not currently running
Walker Art Gallery	Youth Engagement Forum	Youth	~2 hours per session (monthly)	Monthly meet-ups (often on weekends). E.g.: one forum meeting ran Sunday 11:00–15:00; regular sessions ~2 hours.	~24 hours (12 sessions/year)

Manchester Data

Institution	Program (Target Group)	Target Audience	Session Hours	Schedule	Estimated Annual Hours
Manchester Museum	Age-Friendly Programme (Talks, Dance, Outreach)	Older Adults	~2 hours per session (monthly)	Varies (monthly sessions, often daytime)	~24–36 hours (12–18 sessions/year)
Manchester Museum	Young Collective	Youth	~2 hours per session (weekly)	Varies (typically evenings, weekly meetings)	~80–100 hours (40–50 weeks)
Royal Exchange Theatre	Elders Company	Older Adults	~2 hours per session (weekly)	Wednesdays (weekly, afternoons)	~80–100 hours (40–50 weeks)

Royal Exchange Theatre	Young Company	Youth	~2 hours per session (weekly)	Tuesdays (weekly, evenings)	~80–100 hours (40–50 weeks)
Whitworth Art Gallery	Age-Friendly Craft Workshops	Older Adults	2 hours per session (weekly)	Fridays (weekly, 2–4pm)	~80–100 hours (40–50 weeks)
Whitworth Art Gallery	Young Contemporaries (WYC)	Youth	2 hours per session (weekly)	Thursdays (weekly, 6–8pm)	~80–100 hours (40–50 weeks)