



EVALUATION REPORT

2016

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LOOK
&
LEARN

1. Executive Summary

Look and Learn is a professional development programme co-designed and delivered by **Look Again Visual Art and Design Festival** and **Creative Learning Aberdeen City Council (ACC)**. It is a new approach to professional development for emerging visual art and design talent in Aberdeen City and Shire and was supported by **Robert Gordon University (RGU)** and **Youth Arts Collective North East (YACNE)**, as part of **Creative Scotland's 'Time to Shine'** initiative.

The intended outcomes were increased skills, knowledge and confidence, and there was an aspiration from the outset that the selected young creatives would continue to practice as a collective in Aberdeen, addressing recognised issues of creative talent retention in the region.

A Lead Artist, Jason Nelson, was selected through a competitive process to deliver a programme of mentored micro-residencies for 6 creatives aged 20-25, during September 2016. These 'Associate Artists' took part in sessions to develop practical making and participatory arts skills, attended talks by an established artist and a gallerist, and were given mentoring training.

A further group of 7 'Aspiring Artists', aged 15-17, were selected to attend two training sessions devised and delivered by the Associate Artists. In addition further groups of 20 pupils from Fraserburgh and Peterhead Academies, aged 14-16, attended workshops also designed and delivered by the Associate artists.

The programme concluded with an exhibition event, presenting the work developed during the residencies and schools workshops.

Since completing the programme, the 6 'Associate Artists' have gone on to form an arts collective, 'STACK', and have secured work from Creative Learning, delivering sessions for schools and for the ACC Inspiration Point project. They also successfully tendered for a commission as part of Aberdeen's Spectra festival in February 2017 and during 2018 will be taking part in a festival in Manchester. A second collective of 6 fine artists formed in March 2017, catalysed by the experience of one of the Associate Artists, who is a founding member. They have successfully secured funds from Aberdeen City Council to set up an artist-run space in Aberdeen. This means that 2 creative collectives have emerged and become sustained as a result of this project.

Project evaluation shows that the planned outcomes of increased skills knowledge and confidence were successfully achieved and the response to the programme from all participants has been overwhelmingly positive. The existence of two new arts collectives as a tangible legacy in the city demonstrates the effectiveness of this practical CPD model which has clear potential for application across other creative disciplines.

2. Context

The project is a response to research undertaken after the Aberdeen City of Culture bid 2017, in particular RGU's 'Creating A New North' report. Recommendations from this and other reports by EKOS, BOP and RGU highlight a challenges for the region:

- How to attract and retain talent.
- How to change perceptions of the city.
- How to create places and spaces that are vibrant, attractive, meaningful.
- How to better value the distinctive culture and heritage of the region.

The project sits within this strategic framework and aims to contribute to building a vibrant creative economy in the region, by investing in:

- Improved leadership and vision.
- Better quality artistic content and production support.
- Effective partnerships.
- Better opportunities for creatives.

Look and Learn also seeks to fulfill Creative Scotland's 'Ambitions', in particular Ambition 4:

'Ideas are brought to life by a diverse, skilled and connected leadership and workforce'. This aims to:

- Work with organisations to develop shared leadership across sectors that is knowledgeable, confident and ambitious.
- Strengthen the talent and skills needed to develop sustainable careers through sectoral partnerships including with higher education.

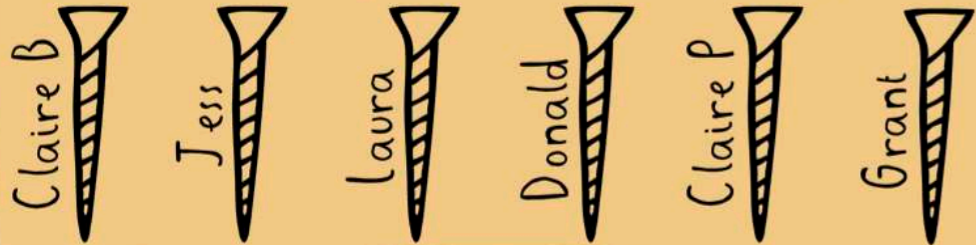
Success factors for this ambition, include:

- strong partnerships in place between public agencies, education, artists, creative people and organisations to develop talent and skills.
- Diverse talent across the arts, screen and creative industries are identified and nurtured. People have increased skills through learning, sharing knowledge and easy access to information and networks.
- Confident, well informed, diverse leadership ensures joined up thinking and maximises public resources.



1 LEAD ARTIST

6 EMERGING ARTISTS



a lot of
BRAIN TIME



visits, workshops and presentations with:

CAROL . JUDITH . JOHN

↓ . ↓ . ↓
Active . CGP . Funding,
Listening . Project Spaces . Collectives

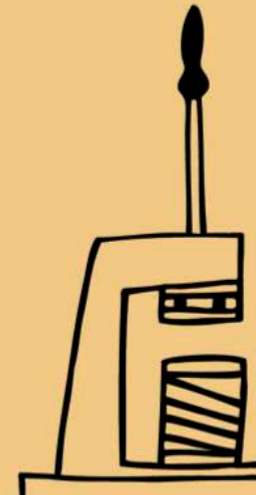
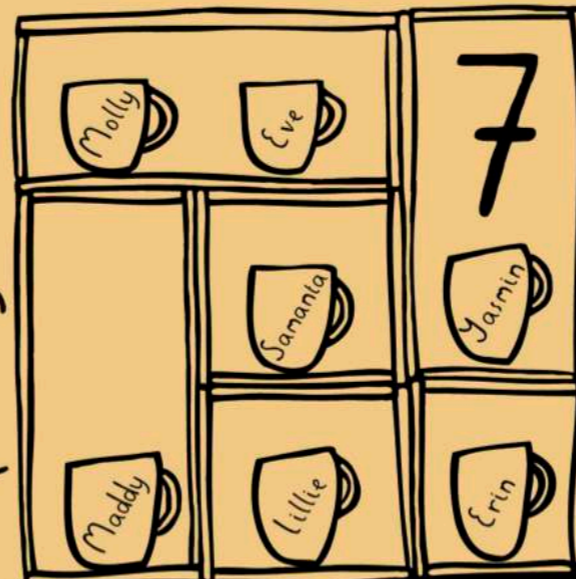


ABERDEEN CITY
ARCHIVE

STACK

- 1 month
- 1 project space
- 250m of timber
- 12 sheets of ply wood
- 500 screws

Aspiring Artists



40 Young
People



3 PARTNERS



creative
learning

LOOKAGMOOT
VISUAL ART & DESIGN FESTIVAL

Youth
Arts
COLLECTIVE
NORTH-EAST

KNOWLEDGE

SKILLS

CONFIDENCE

3. The Partners

The Look & Learn programme draws on best practice from two key partners working across the city of Aberdeen:

Look Again Visual Art & Design Festival presents high quality contemporary art and design practice across Aberdeen and the region, encouraging the public to 'become a tourist in your own city'.

An initiative of Robert Gordon University (RGU), including Gray's School of Art, it has secured Creative Scotland funds, works with a wide range of organisations and resources in the Northeast and is a key part of Aberdeen Festivals.

Look Again's purpose is to develop the visual art and design sector through strategic partnerships and programming, culminating in the festival.

Evaluations from the festival have highlighted skills and capacity gaps in the North East, affecting confidence, professionalism and talent retention in the area. Look Again is responding to these needs through partnership working and building skills development and career pathways into the festival programme at every opportunity.

Creative Learning, Aberdeen City Council

Creative Learning has a mission to improve outcomes for individuals and communities through access to the arts, creativity and culture. It supports the City's drive to become a destination and testing ground for artists, creative enterprises and new ideas. Our role is to help make Aberdeen a place where exciting cultural experiences are around each and every corner and where there are no creative boundaries; a place where all the city is a stage.

Creative Learning's career development work supports artists to derive a living from their work and ensures that a creative life is viable and sustainable in Aberdeen. Through its bespoke professional development programmes and mentoring creatives are more confident to pursue opportunities, aware of progression routes in the arts and contribute to culture and prosperity of the city.

4. Project Structure

4.1 Lead Artist

The original project structure involved both a lead artist and a lead designer, tasked with:

- Devising and delivering a practically-based mentoring programme in the form of a residency for four Associate Artists aged up to 25 years. The Associate Artists will go on to coach a further ten aspiring young creatives.
- Oversee the development and delivery by the Associate Artists of micro-residencies for aspiring young creatives to create a new body of work, and pass on their skills through workshops with school or youth groups.
- 'Sharing the Learning' - curate a range of outputs from the project to share learning in a creative and informative way.

Following the recruitment process, it was agreed to employ a single lead artist, as the selected individual was able to offer the full range of design, production and teaching skills that were sought.

4.2 Selection Process

The Lead Artist acted as tutor/mentor to a group of 6 'Associate Artists' who were selected through a competitive application process. The profile of the group included recent graduates from visual arts, design and photography courses at HE and FE level with ages ranging from 21 to 25.

The selection process was designed to benefit all applicants, allowing them to reflect on and articulate their practice, why they wanted to take part in the project and what they wanted to get out of it.

It was collective and took place over a half day, structured around a series of presentations by applicants, a mentoring training session and an opportunity to network over lunch.

This process was planned to give all attendees the opportunity to develop new skills and experience by taking part, regardless of whether they were selected for the programme or not.

Feedback on the selection process suggests that it was considered by the participants/applicants as being a positive and worthwhile activity through which something valuable was learned.

4.3 Associate Artists

The 6 'Associate Artists' were offered a residency in a studio supplied by RGU, during which they would work with the lead artist to develop new skills and devise a programme for a further 2 tiers of participants. This included designing a series of participatory workshops for school pupils.

The associate artists were supported to plan and develop the content for these workshops, thereby developing skills to deliver arts in participatory settings, with the aim of building creative skills and confidence within the school groups, as well as opening up aspects of connectivity through access to the art school studios and inspiration from young people at other career stages. As well as 'hands on' creative work, the associate artists received training in mentoring, through a further session with a registered trainer.

Other inputs included talks by artist and curator John Walter and gallerist Judith Carlton. Walter is an established artist based in London, currently working on a large scale Wellcome Trust-funded project entitled CAPSID, and curating the next South Bank National Touring Exhibition entitled 'Shonky: The Aesthetics of Awkwardness' which will tour during 2017-18. London-based gallerist Judith Carlton is director of CPG gallery in Southwark. Both delivered sessions reflecting on personal career development paths, and imparted advice and fresh perspectives through presentations and discussion.

These mentoring training and CPD sessions with industry professionals were cited as highly valuable by participants, building a sense of connectivity beyond the immediate Aberdeen area, and demonstrating that career paths are not always linear.

Payment for participation:

Paying participants was important for the project and its success. Although the selected creatives were all motivated and conscientious, the availability of fees for the Associate Artists created a professional ethos for the project.

The formal contract and payment produced a sense of responsibility and tangible support for those who had to step away from work or take unpaid holidays, and the fact that the programme could invest financially in the young people sent a message that their skills and time were valued.

4.4 Aspiring Artists

The Associate Artists devised a series of activities for a further group of 'Aspiring Artists'. This was aimed at younger people, selected through open application by the Associate Artists, resulting in a group of 7 young people aged between 15 and 17.

The sessions took place over two evenings, with the focus of the first on introducing the space and project, discussions about creative practices and the transition through school, college, university and beyond to self-employment and careers in the arts.

The Associate Artists devised a range of activities, including Pecha Kucha style presentations and a discussion of their practice delivered as a welcome and a set of practical workshops including badge making and 'Five second portraits'.

The second session focused on the creative work of the aspiring artists, exploring their interests and inspirations.

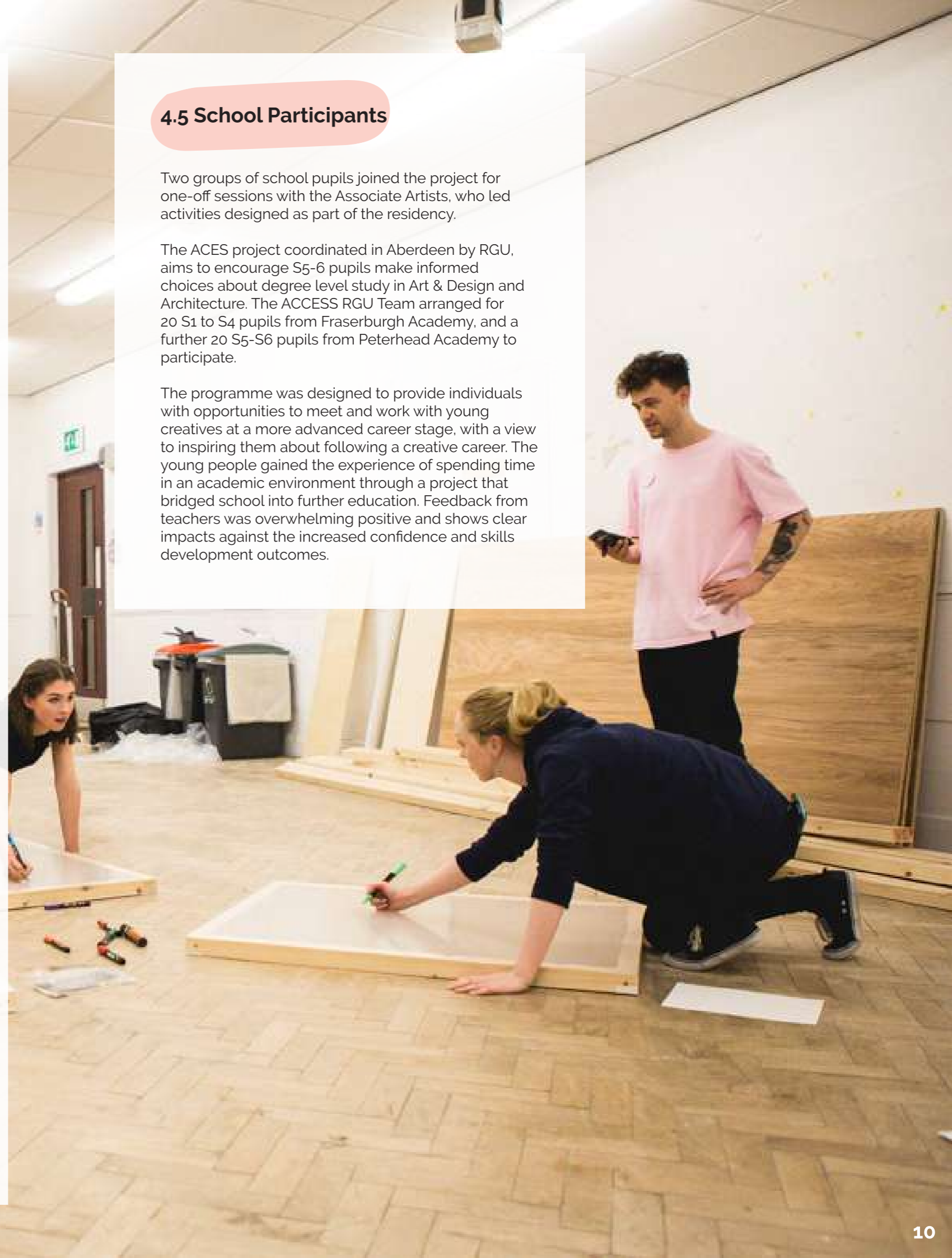
The group was invited back for a sharing event a month later including printmaking workshops. The sessions saw individuals in the group and the studio environment transform in creative confidence.

4.5 School Participants

Two groups of school pupils joined the project for one-off sessions with the Associate Artists, who led activities designed as part of the residency.

The ACES project coordinated in Aberdeen by RGU, aims to encourage S5-6 pupils make informed choices about degree level study in Art & Design and Architecture. The ACCESS RGU Team arranged for 20 S1 to S4 pupils from Fraserburgh Academy, and a further 20 S5-S6 pupils from Peterhead Academy to participate.

The programme was designed to provide individuals with opportunities to meet and work with young creatives at a more advanced career stage, with a view to inspiring them about following a creative career. The young people gained the experience of spending time in an academic environment through a project that bridged school into further education. Feedback from teachers was overwhelming positive and shows clear impacts against the increased confidence and skills development outcomes.



5. Key Learning: Outcomes & Outputs

The partners, through Look & Learn aimed to deliver against a range of outcomes already in place through the funding programmes as well as outcomes specific to the project itself. Project specific outcomes were chosen for simplicity and to enable qualitative evaluation through personal reflection. Participants were asked to provide evaluation material through interim surveys and a face to face exit interview.

Look and Learn Outcomes were:

- Improved skills for participants
- Increased participant knowledge
- Increased participant confidence

Look and Learn Outputs:

- 1 lead artist residency with the opportunity to build on own practice and mentoring skills
- 6 micro residencies for Associate Artists
- 2 mentoring training sessions per Associate Artist
- 1 talk by an established artist
- 1 talk by gallerist
- 7 micro residencies for Aspiring Artists
- Workshop models developed for aspiring artists and schools groups
- Delivery of 3 workshops for Aspiring Artists
- Delivery of 2 schools workshops for 20 pupils
- Final sharing the learning event and exhibition

Look and Learn Outputs – beyond the project:

- Presentation of Look & Learn project at Artworks networking event in Aberdeen
- Formation of 2 new creative collectives
- STACK collective at Winter Festival- leading on participatory arts project/parade with young people
- STACK collective at SPECTRA – leading on public engagement project
- STACK collective at Inspiration Point- leading on creative careers workshops and creative takeover activities
- STACK collective leading and Jason Nelson at Look Again Festival of Art and Design

The outcomes for Youth Arts Collective North East (YACNE) are as follows, and were evaluated through separate reporting to the funder:-

- Improving the infrastructure for youth arts in Aberdeen and the North East.
- Improving access to and increase participation in youth arts provision in Aberdeen and the North East.
- Increasing opportunities for young people to progress and excel in the arts
- Increasing opportunities to celebrate and share achievements in Youth Arts.

5.1 Lead Artist: Reflection

The project occupied a very interesting space offering a form of structure and support reminiscent of an institution or post graduate study but with a completely different relationship dynamic. This created a stable environment that offered both support and autonomy.

Recommend longer run in time for lead artist with management team prior to project start, allowing more time for the team to; secure and make ready a space, make the budget accessible, organize events, activities, materials, tools, and obtaining any permissions that may be required by third parties.

Running the project over a longer period of time with more funded contact days for participants. Possibly 15-20 contracted days delivered over 2-3 months. This would afford greater flexibility through the project for those participants with other time commitments. It would allow deeper discussion and more practical exploration of the ideas and topics that underpinned the project for example participants getting first-hand experience of the project management, writing proposals and funding applications and handling budgets. It would also facilitate the capacity for responsiveness. Allowing subjects or areas of interest that might be voiced through the project by the participants to be explored and included in the program.

5.2 Partner Reflections

Through the process of developing and delivering Look & Learn mentoring programme together we brought with it a wealth of knowledge, experience and resources. This in result made the project much stronger and allowed for a number of additional opportunities and expertise to become available for the individuals involved. Ongoing mentoring cascaded through the partners, lead artist, emerging artists and aspiring artists. We are always learning, the programme gave a platform for reflection and acknowledgement of how much expertise there is between partners and how far we have come over the last few years.

Confidence

The partnership created a sense of confidence and capacity to deliver on a quality and aspirational programme. Through the success of Look & Learn the partners are confident in the model of working and can evidence the impact on individuals and the overall success.

Skills

Through the partnership individuals and organisations have applied their specialist skills, for example: Creative Learning applying experience and expertise in delivering arts in participatory settings and devising bespoke mentoring/professional development programmes. Look Again creating opportunities for artists to feed into the festival and connecting local artists with national/international artists at the forefront of contemporary practice.

Knowledge

Look & Learn has provided the partners with the knowledge and understanding of shared and best practice going forward. The evaluation collated generates a picture of the improved supportive local landscape for emerging artists and highlights the gaps in provision and areas to further develop.

Statements from the aspiring artists include:

5.3 Associate Artists: Evaluation

The associate artists were invited to do a face to face exit interview, focussing on their reflections on the programme, with a particular emphasis on confidence, skills developed and knowledge acquired.

Confidence

All participants but one reported a growth in confidence. The one who felt confidence had reduced contextualised this by saying this was to do with realisation that attaining a degree would be beneficial, something that had been ruled out until this point, and that this was, on reflection, a positive outcome.

Participants reported that their attitude had changed, that they felt calmer, more proactive, and experienced a greater sense of being able to 'just do it'.

Skills

Participants reported gaining a wide range of practical and interpersonal skills including:

- Learning how to work together
- Transferable project management
- Ability to deliver and develop workshops
- Mentoring was amazing – really really interesting stuff and I have been using since and will continue to think about that
- Construction skills
- Ability to work with larger groups
- Greater ability to depend on other people

Knowledge

All participants reported an increase in their knowledge of the creative sector, including a clearer understanding of key contacts and roles locally and further afield, and how to access opportunities.

All but one noted the importance of understanding, from hearing first hand from the professionals brought in to the programme, that a creative career is not a linear one, and that many experiences that may seem irrelevant at the time, can, on reflection, prove to have value.

All participants noted an increase in their knowledge of how to set up/navigate a project and deliver a participatory workshop as a result of the programme.

it was a great experience to be able to learn first-hand what it's like to go through art school and some of the views and opportunities the artists had

the space was awesome, especially since the artists had built the furniture themselves

I went in with low expectations and came out with high hopes. I gained a lot from the experience and I am now more confident in trying to get a creative career

this opportunity has inspired me and made me even more excited about pursuing a career in art

it's made more confident about art school being an option for future plans

take a risk because you don't know what you might get out of it in the end



5.4 Aspiring Artists: Evaluation

The Aspiring Artists were invited to complete a questionnaire based on the same project outcomes. Approximately 50% were completed. Feedback from the questionnaires about the programme is overwhelmingly positive, with participants reporting that they feel '**inspired**', more **confident**, and that it was a '**great experience**'.

This opportunity has inspired me and made me even more excited about pursuing a career in art.

I think it was a great experience to be able to learn first-hand what it's like to go through art school and some of the views and opportunities the artists had.

Yes, I would recommend it because it is a great experience and you can learn a lot if you are consider art school as your future plans.

I've learned that art isn't just one thing, there are more paths to art with things I actually would consider doing as a career.

It has shown me how previous art university students have got through it and what they have done so it's made more confident about art school being an option for future plans.

I feel more confident in collaborating with people I'm not familiar with.

I am more confident after attending the look and learn sessions. Normally when I show my work to people they point out mistakes or find flaw but when I presented my work at look and learn there was no judgement and I was encouraged to keep doing what I want and like to do.

6. Project Legacy

Since the conclusion of the project the 6 Associate Artists have gone on to form a creative collective, STACK. The collective has delivered participatory workshops for Creative Learning, working collaboratively on a Christmas Light parade with schools, and individually on running and documenting other projects, such as 'Inspiration Point'.

STACK successfully secured a competitive bid for a public engagement commission as part of Aberdeen's SPECTRA festival in February 2017. They delivered a public event as part of the Look Again Festival in April 2017, and have been invited to take part in a festival produced by Manchester-based Curated Place in 2018.

A second collective of Fine Art Graduates, 'Tendency Towards', catalysed by the experience of Look and Learn has been successful in securing funds from Aberdeen City Council to set up an artist-run programme of projects.

7. Conclusion

The programme was effective in achieving planned outcomes, with participants reporting significantly increased confidence and improved skills and knowledge as a result of taking part. Provision of opportunities for the participating creatives, beyond the immediate duration of the project, were important, providing continuity and a tangible career development pathway.

The project was complex, with multiple layers of involvement creating a need for clear roles and responsibilities for each partner. Procurement procedures required by RGU and ACC was challenging due to lack of flexibility.

Partner organisations and participants are agreed that there is an appetite for professional development models such as this, that both provide valuable experiential learning opportunities, and connectivity beyond the immediate city surrounds.

In conclusion, this is a highly effective model with excellent potential for more sustained delivery, and that could be modified to focus on specific creative industry needs as required.

