School of Arts, Social Sciences and Management

QMU Working Paper Series – 2020/3

A holistic approach for quality in participatory arts: Impacts on practice experienced by children

What's in this paper

1 | Introduction

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Is This The Best It Can Be?

Is This The Best It Can Be? is a toolkit intended for use by anyone delivering arts and creative learning through collaborative or participatory projects and programmes.

The ideas and approaches build from a research report into quality by Rachel Blanche commissioned by Creative Scotland to inform understanding about quality.[1] Creative Scotland subsequently developed the toolkit in consultation with the sector in Scotland with pilot partnerships of artists, partners and participants using the tools and sharing learning.

The toolkit provides a set of resources to assist in project development, delivery and evaluation centred around a clear vision of what is important in a project or programme of work and what qu(n)108BBme hh47.9 (t)8 08B.2 0.109 Tw I9 (I)-k (t7.9 d[(o)-9 (t)8 1 g12 Tw (u)-8)-7.5 d t

Artworks Cymru Quality Principles and toolkit

The Quality Principles are an online resource created in 2016 by Artworks Cymru on behalf of Arts Council of Wales to provide a framework for discussing and articulating quality in participatory arts contexts. The framework and toolkit was informed by Rachel Blanche's research for Creative Scotland, and was created with the support of a steering committee representing the sector in Wales and a series of practitioner focus groups.[4]

It is designed for use by artists and arts organisations with other main stakeholders including partners to ensure that participants 'get the best experiences possible'.

The toolkits in Scotland and Wales share the same roots in the same holistic quality model emerging from research undertaken by this author, outlined in her research report *Developing a Foundation for Quality Guidance.*[7] The research took in more than 100 sources on quality including earlier frameworks for the arts and education, as well as evidence from the sector generated by the UK Artworks Initiative[8] bringing unprecedented insights into artists' experiences with quality.

Features of the core approach fostered by both countries' frameworks are:

• Understanding of core **conditions* needed** to enable quality, recognising **shared responsibility** by partners beyond the artist in enabling these conditions

(*for details of what artists report these tils
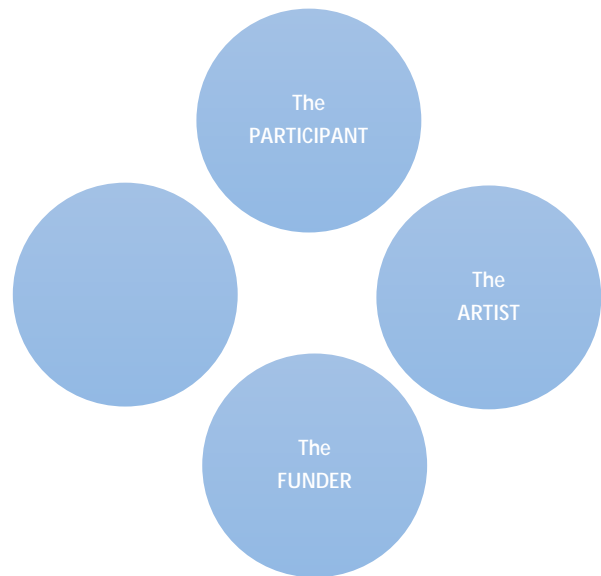
The toolkits facilitate dialogue between key partners to clarify roles for enabling core quality conditions. Establishing shared vision and mutual intention is central to that process.

Who influences what happens 'in the room' on the day with participants? The quality model incorporates evidence showing how quality is affected by decisions made by stakeholders outside or far from the room.[9] Participatory arts often involve multiple decisionmakers controlling the setting, recruiting participants, setting objectives and determining budgets. Dialogue between such partners is vital and quality planning should include those with influence over key conditions.

Find out more about this holistic quality model and the insights that shaped it in the report *Developing a Foundation for Quality* via the Quality Webpages of Creative Scotland and Artworks Cymru.

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[9] Seidel, S., Tishman, S., Winner, E., Hetland, L. and Palmer, P. (2010) *The Qualities of Quality: Understanding Excellence in Arts Education.* Massachusetts: Harvard Graduate School of Education.

2	Whose experiences are being reported here?

Online surveys and filmed case study interviews were conducted during 2020 in three countries where the holistic quality approach has been applied.

The surveys were disseminated with the support of respective funders of the participatory arts in those territories (Creative Scotland in Scotland, Arts Council Wales/Artworks Cymru in Wales and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Portugal).

The surveys were designed to capture the variety of ways that practitioners are applying this approach in their work with colleagues, external partners and project participants using the specific tools created in Scotland and Wales.

Detailed questionnaire responses were returned by a total of 42 respondents across Scotland, Wales and Portugal who are working professionally as freelance practitioners or in arts organisations involved with participation and creative learning.

The sample includes: 15 practitioners who responded to the survey about the Scottish *Is This The Best It Can Be?* toolkit, as well as testimony from two artists interviewed for case study films; 18 practitioners who responded from Wales about the *Quality Principles* framework; and 9 organisations in Portugal carrying out participatory arts projects in the current edition (PARTIS III) of the flagship participatory arts programme funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. The respondents in PARTIS have made use of a Portuguese translation of the Scottish toolkit facilitated for them by their funder.

A full list of the 44 individuals and organisations represented in this study can be viewed at the end of this paper.

Wales
18
respondents

Scotland
17
respondents

Portugal
9
respondents

How the artists in this study define their own practice

Practitioners in Scotland and Wales[10]
were asked how they personally
describe the nature of their practice.
Between them the 33 respondents 7ref*BQ00Tw 3.49 0 Td

3 How the tools have been used by Practitioners

Three people *also reported using the toolkit internally for* **something else**

- • helping delivery partners *(school teachers) develop projects;*

- • training emerging practitioners *through higher education teaching and university projects;*

- • explaining 'what we do' *to new staff.*

4	Enhancements reported for Practice

The practitioners in Scotland and Wales who responded to the surveys say that engaging with their respective toolkits has demonstrably changed core elements of their practice.

Specifically, they report changes in the way they:

- reflect internally, reported by three quarters of all

This has become a system of monitoring our core ambitions and expectations, a way to identify key milestones and apply learning as it happens. It is a constant tool that enables us to implement feedback in real time
(Fraser, Sanctuary Queer Arts, Scotland)

The quality   Arts   ity

📌 The process validates time needed by practitioners for considered quality planning:

> Being able to give space and time to these initial discussions and explorations at the start of our work together, and having a frame for that, was invaluable
> (Annabel, Sanctuary Queer Arts, Scotland)

It gives value

Three quarters of toolkit users in all three countries[19] say that the approach has ENCOURAGED REFLECTION in their discussions

What's different for our planning process as a result of using the toolkit is deeper reflection and wider staff involvement in planning
(Donald, Scottish Storytelling Centre)

The toolkit aids the quality of process by encouraging collective reflection and a record of the learning developed (Isabel, arts manager and evaluator, Portugal)

What's different for our planning process as a result of using the toolkit is that I reflect on and understand the quality of my work (anonymous freelance curator, Scotland)

★ The tools are valued as a m

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[19] This statement was ticked by 9 respondents in Scotland, 16 in Wales and 7 in Portugal, representing 76% of all respondents in all three countries (n42).

More than half of respondents in Scotland, Wales and Portugal[20] feel that using the toolkit has helped support CURIOSITY, QUESTIONNING and POSITIVE CRITICISM in their quality process.

It's so easy to slip into doing things the same way as we always / usually do them, particularly when working with regular partners.
[This] keeps us on our toes!
(Kate, Head4Arts, Wales)

56% of respondents in Scotland and Wales *AGREE* [21] that using the toolkit has helped challenge or disrupt our normal thinking or practice

The toolkit helps challenge our normal thinking and practice by offering a different model that enables all voices to be heard (Isabel, arts manager and evaluator, Portugal)

I was able to use the toolkit to question my normal approach to delivery, I've been looking deeper at what quality looks and feels like in my practice... to re-evaluate the properties that I think are present in my work, but perhaps haven't been   thaven' 4]TJ0 Tc Œ0 Tc0.0020 Td( )Tj0.002 T59Td( )Tj0

It's encouraged us to think differently
(Amy, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

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[20] This statement was ticked by 8 respondents in Scotland, 10 in Wales and 6 in Portugal, representing 57% of the whole dataset (n42)
[21] For the 32 respondents for whom this statement was applicable, 18 (56%) agreed and 13 (41%) were not sure yet. One respondent selected 'disagree'.

The process reinforces practitioners' confidence about their own quality:

For three quarters of the users in Scotland, Wales and Portugal,[22] this approach *helps them to recognise where good practice exists* and to celebrate it

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Almost half the respondents[23] *agree* that using

Using the tools has deepened communication about quality between internal and external stakeholders

It encourages and requires open and honest dialogue
1 and takes into account feelings and experiences o   (nd   n   la b Tc 9 (r) ant0 Tw 0uc

The principles definitely helped me to enhance the quality of what our participants experienced. This

It has allowed us, in a timely manner, to correct a proposed activity and replace it with another, having identified the positive and negative aspects of the change made
(Helena, Orquestra de Afectos, Portugal)

Having Quality Principles has had a positive impact on our work to clarify what is intended and, as a consequence, to improve the quality of the work ... as well as to identify, readjust and develop the missions and purposes of the project (Catarina, Filarmónica Enarmonia, Portugal)

[26] This paofcafAntsA3i48 Tmna.p/)T Td0 n P e Tc 4 (nP ⊀ /P Td0 ng)-988 T 44.904 0 Td[(P)-52.1tify0 0 Tw 2.9 0 Td( )% E/Td(n007 Tw 5.04 -0 0 D 18 BD1155 229.68

Several Practitioners have commented on being able to recalibrate their practice and understanding of quality during the Covid-19 crisis

What's incredible about the toolkit in the Covid context
for us is it's allowed us to grab onto something
tangible in the midst of the intangible
(Drew, Sanctuary Queer Arts, Scotland)

These circumstances that we're under at the moment with the coronavirus
Pandemic puts everything under the spotlight a bit more: building relationships
and trust in digital spaces is a lot more difficult than it is in physical spaces. I think
having a toolkit like this and always reminding ourselves of what it is that we're trying to
achieve will allow us to move and adapt and to change as new situations unfold
(Laura, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

Due to Covid 19 all of my projects are on hold ... it

I think that this has helped with funding applications to Arts Council Wales because it provides them with a yardstick evidencing that we know what we should be doing, and we are striving to do it! (Kate, Head4Arts, Wales)

For a third of the practitioners across the surveys in Scotland, Wales and Portugal,[31] having the toolkit MADE THEM FEEL EMPOWERED to address quality with their partners, commissioners or funders.

The tools provide a welcome structure for including quality in commissioning discussions

I normally bring copies of the paperwork to the early meetings I02 Tc 0.000 Td[(th)-7 (e)Tc 0.002 Tw -13.274 -1.rtners

All of the practitioners in all three countries [32] work in some way with external partners. Their main partners are shown opposite.

Other partners specified by respondents include:

- Environmental organisations
- Charitable by

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Enhanced communication between all stakeholders has been a clear benefit for practitioners

The toolkit increased positive communication between staff working on the project, which had a positive impact on the project (Lisa, Aberdeen Performing Arts, Scotland)

The

Almost half of the respondents in all three countries[33] say that using the toolkit has helped get all project partners on the same page with SHARED LANGUAGE AND VISION

The tool allowed us to organize ideas, structure objectives

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| 5 | Challenges and ideas for further development |

Respondents were asked if they experienced any challenges using the toolkits and what else might help to implement the recommended quality approach. Operational feedback

There is appetite for more resources to help users find ways to adapt the tools for engaging participants in an appropriate way

Something to help participants engage with it - that doesn't have so much arts speak!

(Rhian, Operasonic, Wales)

We found the tool [didn't] match up with the reality of delivering our work in informal community settings

(anonymous community arts organisation, Scotland)

The toolkit helped us to pose the questions in a more objective way, both with our partners and with the participants. During the evaluation with the participants there were focus problems which we will have to find a way to overcome and enrich the reflection process

(Marisa, VELEDA Women and Single Parenthood, Portugal)

The Covid crisis creates a need for facilitated sessions for practitioners to reflect on how to adapt practice using the tools

One respondent asked for Covid-specific "training sessions for artists and organisations in the current climate reflecting the learning from the pandemic and adaptations Participatory artists and organisations have implemented to continue their work" (Louise, Literature Wales)

6 Full list of respondents in this study