CIRCUIT 2013-2017
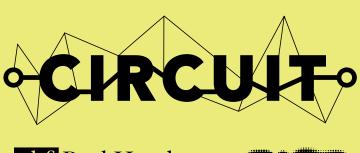
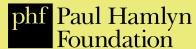# A REVIEW OF THE EVALUATION STRUCTURES AND PRACTICES

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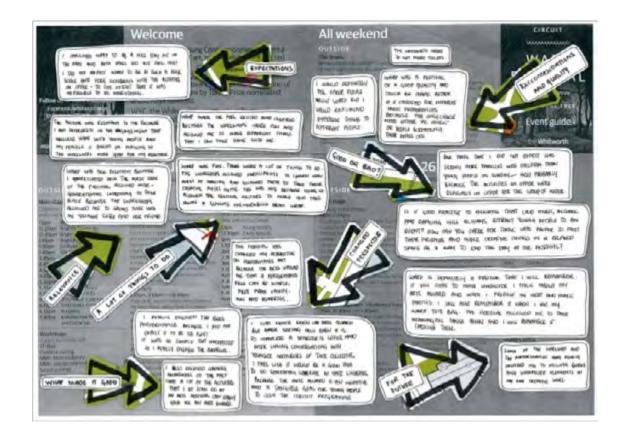
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CIRCUIT

phf Paul Hamlyn Foundation   PLUS TATE

Cover image: A collage with texts responding to the evaluation points that Circulate members had to research for WARP Festival at the Whitworth Art Gallery. Photo © Sufea Mohamad Noor

https://circuit.tate.org.uk/2016/08/collage-evaluation-for-warp-festival/

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Circuit was a four-year national programme (2013-2017) in which ten galleries worked in partnership with youth organisations, aiming to create opportunities for a more diverse range of young people to engage with art in galleries and to steer their own learning. As the programme drew to a close in April 2017, this review was commissioned to explore the evaluation processes and structures of *Circuit* and highlight the learning that emerged about evaluation. This report identifies the key components of the *Circuit* evaluation, considers what worked well and what was challenging, and incorporates reflections from those involved.

Circuit was supported by a national staff team at Tate and a range of consultants including the *Circuit* Evaluator and *Circuit* Critical Friend. Both provided support for gallery staff with the former focussing on gathering and analysing quantitative surveys from audiences and young people; and the latter fostering reflective practice, gathering qualitative evidence and facilitating the young evaluators. All gallery staff cited access to specialist support and expertise as central to the success of *Circuit*.

The *Circuit* evaluation was defined by the ambitions and ethics of the programme around cultural justice and youth voice and therefore adopted a democratic approach to self-evaluation by young people and galleries. The embedded approach was comprehensive and complex and was outlined in an evaluation framework, structured around the programme's four core aims. This framework was generally thought to be overly long and complicated although it did provide a useful structure for reflection and reporting. Twice a year, partner galleries completed Learning Reports to bring together their evaluation evidence and findings, and identify next steps. It took the majority of galleries some time to understand and embrace the action research approach of *Circuit* and the Learning Reports initially tended towards documentation rather than evaluation. It was not until the second half of the programme that these became reflective, analytical documents, exploring challenges alongside achievements and proposing evidence-based adjustments to the programme.

It was generally acknowledged that the programme leaders over-estimated existing levels of confidence and skills in evaluation in the partner galleries and early continuing professional development would have been beneficial. This would also have served a team-building function and hopefully built trust thus creating an environment in which open and honest conversations could flourish.

Young people had a central role in the evaluation, designing data collection tools and reflecting on the value of *Circuit* for themselves and other young people. A national group of young evaluators (called Circulate) was formed and supported by the *Circuit* Critical Friend. Evidence showed that young people in Circulate derived personal and professional benefits additional to those accrued from membership of the core groups alone.

The principal challenges concerned the collection of quantitative audience profile data at *Circuit* events. At the mid-point of the programme, steps were taken to address this issue with the employment of paid, independent data collectors (previously, staff and young people at galleries had been responsible for administering surveys) and the agreement of clear diversity targets for each gallery.

This review does not outline all the evaluation findings (these can be found in other reports, documents and blogs on the *Circuit* website) but does note a small selection of significant learning that emerged through the evaluation including:

• Young people are not a homogeneous group which has implications for representation, youth voice(s) and peer-led work (whose peers?).

• Increasing diversity can be challenging and requires galleries to set targets, to track audiences, to listen and to adopt inclusive practices throughout the gallery.

• How best to support vulnerable young people to engage with activities at galleries and the need for this support to be ongoing.

The review also identified learning about evaluation including the benefits of:

- An action research cycle.

- Dedicated people and time for reflection and evaluation.

- Making evaluation visible to encourage shared and iterative reflection.

- Embedding evaluation as part of an event.

- Employing multiple methods of data collection at a single event to give a holistic view.

- Adopting a collaborative approach (with colleagues and young people) to analysing and reflecting on evidence.

There was clear evidence that the practices and evaluation of *Circuit* are likely to lead to lasting change in how partner galleries work with young people and the youth sector, and also how they view and undertake evaluation. Gallery staff and members of Circulate developed as reflective practitioners and embedded an action research approach of making evidence-based judgements and affecting change.

INTRODUCTION

CIRCUIT

Circuit was a four-year national programme (2013-2017) that connected 15-25 year olds to the arts in galleries and museums working in partnership with the youth and cultural sectors. Led by Tate and funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation, it provided opportunities for young people to steer their own learning and create cultural activity across arts disciplines.

The programme involved 10 galleries including the four Tate sites: Tate Modern and Tate Britain in London, Tate Liverpool and Tate St Ives; and partners from the Plus Tate network[1]: firstsite, Colchester; MOSTYN, Llandudno; Nottingham Contemporary; The Whitworth, Manchester; and Wysing Arts Centre and Kettle's Yard in Cambridgeshire.

Circuit built on Tate's long-term work with young people and was also informed by the Plus Tate Learning Programme[2] (2011-12) that enabled 11- 26 year olds to develop and lead learning activities at 20 Plus Tate partner galleries. The emphasis on young people-led evaluation was a core tenet of the Plus Tate Learning Programme[3] and this was extended to *Circuit*. (See appendix 1 for the Key Principles of Self Evaluation developed through the Plus Tate Learning Programme).

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[1]   The Plus Tate network comprises 35 cultural institutions and aims to support the development of the visual arts across the UK, by fostering a climate where exchange and partnership can flourish.

[2]   Funded by J.P. Morgan

[3]   The report can be found online:
http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/29111

Circuit was designed with and for young people at each gallery, through four main delivery strands:

- Festival – a large scale event to attract a wide and diverse new audience.

- Partnerships – with colleagues in the youth sector to support those with least access to the arts.

- Peer-led – artistic programme delivered by and for young people.

- Digital – creating new work and sharing learning.

Each gallery established a core group of young people[4] to programme *Circuit* and a small number of youth sector partnerships.

Circuit's four core aims were:

- To make a positive difference with and for young people.

- To improve access and opportunities for 'harder to reach' young people through extending and developing sustainable networks between the arts and youth sector.

- To develop and change practice within and across cultural organisations.

- To change attitudes and behaviours towards and about young people.

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[4]   The majority of galleries had a pre-existing young people's group but some recruited a group specifically for *Circuit*.

THIS REVIEW

As the programme drew to a close in spring 2017, the *Circuit* Board, programme staff and young people reflected on the achievements, lessons and challenges of *Circuit*. Evaluation was embedded throughout *Circuit* and was therefore also subject to review. Towards the end of the second year of *Circuit*, a new post of *Circuit* Data Analyst was created to analyse and summarise the learning from the wide range of evaluation documents produced. In April 2017, the *Circuit* Data Analyst was invited to undertake this current review which had the following aims:

- To identify the structures, processes, roles and responsibilities introduced for the evaluation of *Circuit*.

- To gather and analyse the views of a small but representative sample of stakeholders on the effectiveness of the various evaluation processes.

- To highlight how, when and what key learning emerged through the evaluation.

- To enable Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF), Tate and partner galleries to understand better the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation and thereby, the implications for future work.

The review took place over the summer of 2017 and involved interviews with members of the National *Circuit* Team at Tate (the Head of Learning Practice and Research, the *Circuit* National Lead and the *Circuit* National Programme Manager); with seven members of staff from five partner galleries (including senior learning staff and staff who were recruited as *Circuit* coordinators for the duration of the programme); and two consultants, the *Circuit* Evaluator and the *Circuit* Critical Friend. The review also drew on learning identified during the programme and previously reported by the *Circuit* Data Analyst.

Job titles vary across the partner galleries but for the purposes of this report, the terms, 'Head of Learning'[5] and '*Circuit* Coordinator' are used as generic terms to distinguish between core gallery staff (who mostly wrote the application to take part in *Circuit* and had responsibility for overseeing the programme and managing the *Circuit* Coordinator as part of their wider Learning remit at the gallery) and programme-specific staff.

This report identifies the key components of the *Circuit* evaluation, considers what worked well and what was challenging, and incorporates reflections from those involved. It does not outline the evaluation findings (for those, visit the *Circuit* website[6]) but does make suggestions that others thinking about the evaluation of large-scale youth arts programmes may find useful.

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[5]   Within museums and galleries, the Learning team is typically responsible for developing strategies and programmes to engage a wide range of visitors in learning with, through and from the exhibitions and collection displays. This could include schools and teachers, families or community groups engaging in workshops, talks or long-term projects.

[6]   https://circuit.tate.org.uk/

COMPONENTS OF THE *CIRCUIT* EVALUATION

COMPONENTS OF THE
CIRCUIT EVALUATION

Evaluation and research were embedded in *Circuit* throughout which resulted in a comprehensive but complex approach in which the divisions between programme (planning, delivery and management) and evaluation were blurred. This is in many ways a credit to the successful integration of evaluation and reflection but did create challenges, not least for determining the scope of this review. Details of the key people, structures and processes of the *Circuit* evaluation that have been identified and considered during this review are summarised below.

An evaluation framework was produced in consultation with partner galleries that mapped out the programme's aims, objectives, indicators of success, evidence to be gathered and evaluation roles. Each six months, staff at partner galleries wrote a Learning Report to bring together their evaluation findings and reflect on what was going well and what, less well. Galleries also completed Event Records (with monitoring data) and Activity Reports. The latter was designed to provide brief information on the programme to keep the National Team informed and to allow the monthly catch-up phone call, between galleries and the National Team, to focus on issues, problem-solving and reflection rather than a programme update. In addition to these monthly updates, the National Team met annually with Directors and *Circuit* teams at each gallery to review progress and discuss future developments.

As with all aspects of the programme, it was intended that young people would have a central role in evaluation, developing their own evaluation tools for *Circuit* events and reflecting on the value of the programme for themselves and their peers. In the autumn of 2013, young people from all the gallery core groups were invited to be part of a national group of young evaluators (which members decided to name, Circulate). A brief set out the potential roles of the group:

- Interviewing, to get feedback from different people, about *Circuit*.

- Filming and photographing to document and record, not just the events, but also the processes of *Circuit*.

- Analysing data and making sense of evidence.

- Reporting on findings.

- Identifying key questions that need to be asked or considered about *Circuit*.

- Informing the evaluation process itself, devising new creative ways of gathering qualitative evidence and quantitative data about *Circuit*.

- Keeping written records of what happens in a research journal.

- Writing about what happens for publication.

- Sharing knowledge and experiences (including knowledge about evaluation) with peers nationally.

The *Circuit* evaluation was supported through two freelance roles: the *Circuit* Evaluator and the *Circuit* Critical Friend. The respective roles of these two consultants was clarified in the first Sharing Session in May 2013 with a 'map' circulated in July 2013. Both were tasked with capturing learning to support ongoing change and improvement in the galleries, and also to provide professional development and support to improve practice. The Evaluator had a clear focus on documenting and measuring impact and change (for accountability), primarily through the use of quantitative audience surveys but also through surveys with core groups of young people and interviews with gallery directors. By contrast, the Critical Friend's role was designed to be responsive to participants' priorities and needs in relation to evaluation; and focused on reflection and the gathering of qualitative evidence with a particular focus on supporting young people's reflections.

Other *Circuit* staff and consultants involved in the evaluation are outlined below together with their role in relation to evaluation:

- Head of Learning Practice and Research, Tate – overview of *Circuit* evaluation.

- *Circuit* National Lead and Convenor: Young People's Programmes, Tate London – overview of *Circuit* programme that included distilling and responding to key learning; and accountability to the *Circuit* Board.

- *Circuit* National Programme Manager, based at Tate London – supported evaluation in galleries including advice on report writing, Circulate and sharing formative learning.

- *Circuit* Digital Producer – produced films and digital content that captured programme learning, and managed the *Circuit* website that hosts evaluation findings.

- Heads of Learning and *Circuit* Coordinators – undertook and supported young people to undertake: evaluation planning, data collection, analysis and reporting at galleries.

- Young people in gallery core groups – reflected on their own and others' experiences of *Circuit* including evaluation of peer-led events and festivals.

- Marketing and Audience Development Consultant – emphasised how evaluation data informs marketing and the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of marketing methods.

- PhD student – attached to programme, undertook research on partnerships with the youth sector.

- Independent, longitudinal study of the impact of *Circuit* on a sample of young people from core groups - 2015-2017.

- Gallery Critical Friends – appointed at three partner galleries.

- *Circuit* Data Analyst – appointed in March 2015 – analysed and summarised learning from *Circuit*.

The governance of *Circuit* operated through a number of national groups, each of which had a role in relation to evaluation.

- Circuit *Board* – provided support and challenge; received and responded to evaluation findings.

- *National Evaluation Group* – brought together the National Team and consultants to review progress and determine action - also attended by the Director, Evidence and Learning from Paul Hamlyn Foundation for the first two years of the programme.

- *Steering Group* – for Heads of Learning, also attended by members of the National Team, Senior Learning staff from Tate, the *Circuit* Evaluator and the Director, Grants and Programmes from Paul Hamlyn Foundation - evaluation on the agenda.

- *Working Group* – for *Circuit* Coordinators, also attended by *Circuit* Programme National Manager and *Circuit* Critical Friend - evaluation on the agenda.

- *Sharing Sessions* – held twice a year for the National Team, gallery and partner staff, and young people from galleries to come together.

STARTING OUT

THE APPROACH TO EVALUATING *CIRCUIT*

'Exhausting, amazing and painful!'
(*Circuit* Coordinator)

Circuit was introduced into a sector where evaluation practice was extremely variable. As one Head of Learning commented, 'Museums do a lot of so-called evaluation but not much reflection' and another explained how, prior to *Circuit*, the gallery had '...paid lip-service [with a] standard form used generically'. Whilst practice has changed significantly in the partner galleries (see section 7 below), the experience of one *Circuit* Coordinator, who had moved to a new gallery at the end of *Circuit*, revealed a continuing mixed picture, 'They think it's a necessary evil at [this museum].'

The evaluation of *Circuit* was defined by the ambitions and ethics of the programme around cultural justice and youth voice and therefore adopted a democratic approach of self-evaluation by galleries and young people. Asked to describe the approach adopted for the evaluation of *Circuit*, responses from gallery staff suggested broad understanding and endorsement but most revealed that this knowledge had been acquired in the later years of the programme.

The majority of interviewees highlighted the imperative to be able to demonstrate the impact of the programme although the focus was seen to shift from the impact on young people in the first half of the programme towards organisational change in the final two years. Gallery staff were aware of this shift but some found it confusing, as one Head of Learning explained, 'The lead aim kept changing slightly and the evaluation requirements followed on.'

Perhaps not surprisingly (after four and a half years), gallery interviewees couldn't recall specifically when or how they had been introduced to the approach and requirements of the evaluation. Likewise, none recalled having attended the first Sharing Session during which the evaluation framework was developed, referring instead to receiving the framework as a document for comment. By contrast, the National Team, Evaluator and Critical Friend all talked about the session during which gallery representatives were asked about their objectives for the programme and their indicators of success. Comments from *Circuit* staff in galleries implied they were preoccupied with 'getting to grips with the programme' and did not feel they had the capacity to engage fully with the evaluation at the outset. This supports the comment above about gallery staff not fully appreciating the embedded and formative nature of reflection and evaluation, suggesting that initially, the evaluation was seen by galleries as separate from the programme.

CAPACITY AND SKILLS

'I think they over-estimated people's confidence, skills and interest in evaluation all the way through.'

(Head of Learning)

The quote above reflects widely held views from galleries and the National Team. It became apparent that certain assumptions (made by the programme's organisers) around skill levels, reflective practice and knowledge of creative evaluation were not founded in reality. *Circuit* staff praised the support provided by the Evaluator, Critical Friend and Head of Learning Practice and Research but felt the consultants were often deployed to fill a deficit and were unanimous in the belief that early professional development sessions would have been beneficial. Some, early-career staff, required introductory, 'evaluation-basics.' Others had more experience but were keen to develop their practice. One *Circuit* Coordinator, for example, when asked about the approach to evaluation, responded,

'Supposed to be new but new compared to what? What's the knowledge around this [peer-led] way of working and evaluating? We don't want to re-invent the wheel...hence the need for CPD.'

Gallery staff benefitted from being part of a national group but several felt they could have used peer support more effectively. *Circuit* encouraged regional gallery groupings but this did not work as effectively as hoped. The reasons for this were unclear. Informal mentoring of *Circuit* Coordinators by Heads of Learning was appreciated and there was a suggestion from some, that mentoring could have been used more widely across the programme.

It is important to note that interventions were made at various points in the programme to support reflection and develop skills and understanding in evaluation. The third Sharing Session in March 2014 (the end of Year 1), for example, was designed and facilitated by the Critical Friend and focused on data analysis and making sense of qualitative data (with practical activities to analyse evidence that *Circuit* staff had gathered).

Towards the end of Year 2, as people got to grips with the programme, the gaps in reflection and evaluation became evident (and were highlighted in the first report of the *Circuit* Data Analyst in April 2015). The interviews for this review revealed mutual frustration with gallery staff reporting, 'We were told "It's not right" but not given much support to put it right' and the National Team bewildered, that only a minority of galleries seemed able to gather and use evidence systematically to inform programme development.

By the end of *Circuit*, reflective practice had become second nature to virtually all *Circuit* staff and this represented a significant achievement. An initial programme of professional development may well have enabled staff to reach this point at an earlier stage and would also have served a team-building function. This could, perhaps, have overcome an obstacle to effective reflection and evaluation that was identified by gallery staff: having the confidence to be honest. One Head of Learning commented,

'You need to feel trust, to be able to be honest, but there was quite a lot of fear...people were afraid to be honest.'

And a *Circuit* Coordinator elaborated on one of the reasons for this lack of honesty,

'Everyone was saying it's all good...but it's Tate...we can't really say...[because] we're all competing for funding.'

Even when *Circuit* staff gained the confidence to openly share challenges, there were instances were senior leaders in galleries edited negative comments from Learning Reports, which suggests, perhaps, a wider reticence to share learning.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

All the gallery staff interviewed felt they understood their overall role in relation to the evaluation of *Circuit*. The fine details of this role emerged over time as the 'programme morphed'[1] and understanding of reflection and evaluation developed. In addition, some *Circuit* staff felt that tasks were added without warning as the following quote from a Head of Learning illustrates,

'It was frustrating when different things landed in your Inbox…things you weren't expecting…demands on us - such as a consultant wanted something yesterday and yet we hadn't known we needed to collect this.'

A great many documents relating to evaluation were shared in meetings and online and it is inevitable that some went unnoticed. In reality, the scale and complexity of *Circuit*, combined with an ambitious evaluation programme that aimed to change practice, was, perhaps, overwhelming for some gallery staff in the first year.

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[1]   A reference to the shift from a focus on impact on young people to impact on organisations.

EVALUATION STRUCTURES
AND PEOPLE

EVALUATION STRUCTURES AND PEOPLE

As outlined above, there was an array of people, structures and processes associated with the evaluation of *Circuit*. Exploring what had worked well and what less well, it became clear that almost all components had strengths and weaknesses and also that individuals found different people, documents or approaches to be of most use. In the following sections, the effectiveness of the main elements of the evaluation are discussed.

Responses from gallery staff indicated that all felt they had adequate opportunities and channels to share their views on the programme, at the gallery, in national meetings, in catch-up phone calls with the National Team or in the Learning Reports. In general, both consultants and gallery staff believed that the most effective support (that led to effective evaluation and learning) was provided by responding to individual gallery needs.

THE EVALUATION
FRAMEWORK

It was generally agreed that the evaluation framework was a useful reference point but was too long and complicated; it was variously described as 'hefty' and 'intimidating.' The decision to develop the evaluation framework in consultation with the galleries was laudable and was intended to ensure the galleries had ownership of the document. Reflecting on this decision, the National Team thought that 'writing by committee' had been responsible for the unwieldiness of the framework and ironically, as outlined in the previous section, the majority of gallery staff viewed the evaluation framework as 'a given'; imposed rather than collaboratively devised. One *Circuit* Coordinator, for example, commented,

'I was just given the framework...I saw it as a 'To Do' list rather than a suggestion. Ideally, there'd have been a year to figure out the aims and framework, but we did learn a lot through doing...so maybe it just needed to be clearer, on it being action research and experimental.'

All the gallery staff utilised the evaluation framework when they were preparing for and writing their Learning Reports, finding the structure it provided for their reflections of particular use. Some focused primarily on the four aims 'and some of the sub-aims', others draw more widely on the framework, finding it a 'very useful reference point - it had the structure and language to aid our report.'

In terms of its wider use (for example, to inform programme and evaluation planning) one Head of Learning commented, 'I was surprised we didn't refer to it more often (at the Steering Group, for example), it was mostly just when we wrote the Learning Reports.' A member of the National Team expressed concern that the complexity of the document had resulted in it being side-lined but from the interviews, it appeared rather that gallery staff had absorbed the key elements of the framework and this informed their ongoing work. One *Circuit* Coordinator did make a pertinent comment that links to a recurring theme in this review: transparency,

'The Framework made it clear it was not always your responsibility to do everything but you didn't have a sense if other people were doing their bit.'

An additional function of the evaluation framework was to enable Tate and the *Circuit* Board to understand how and to what extent programme aims were being achieved. The framework provided considerable detail on desired outcomes, indicators, outputs and evidence to support such reflections but the length of the framework (an eight-page document with four aims, 13 sub-aims and 22 objectives) made it hard to gain a clear picture of progress. From the end of Year 2, the *Circuit* Data Analyst took on the role of analysing available evidence against the framework and identified achievements, areas were progress was slow and gaps in the evidence.

GOVERNANCE AND NATIONAL GROUPS

The operation of the *Circuit* Board was outside the remit of this review but the Board's clear focus on *Circuit* as a change programme and thus their constant interest in evaluation findings, was noted in the *Circuit* Data Analyst reports. The funder and wider Board were equally concerned with finding out what didn't work as with what did, and evidence suggests that the Board acted as a critical friend to the programme, playing a key role in holding partners in *Circuit* to account, and championing honest reflection and rigorous evaluation.

The National Evaluation Group was designed as a forum for debate and concerns; discussing findings and appropriate action; identifying the support needed by galleries and how best to provide this. Amongst those interviewees who were involved in this group, opinion was divided about its effectiveness. One individual felt the group became too concerned with sharing perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of each gallery rather than taking the opportunity to debate programme-wide issues and findings. Another individual highlighted how discussion at the Group identified the need for a central analyst role which, she believed, had contributed to the coherence of the *Circuit* evaluation.

Gallery interviewees were unanimous in highlighting the benefits of having a network of peers and both the Steering and Working Group were seen as useful places to meet colleagues. In general, however, together with the Sharing Sessions, gallery staff felt the meetings could have been used more effectively for evaluation; there was a perception that the agenda tended to be dominated by programmatic practicalities. Staff from the National Team and galleries agreed that meetings could have been focused more clearly on problem-solving with systematic sharing and use of evaluation evidence.

There was some criticism about the hierarchy of the two groups, with members of the Working Group, in particular, feeling that they were often required to implement decisions without being party to the rationale behind these. There was a suggestion from one *Circuit* Coordinator that it would have been useful for a representative of Paul Hamlyn Foundation to occasionally attend the Working Group to enable the group 'to understand what the Board needs from us' in relation to evaluation and reporting.

The hierarchy was described as 'unnecessary' and 'unhelpful' and these views may have been exacerbated by some uncertainty amongst members of the Steering Group as to its function. One Head of Learning explained,

'The Steering Group was really interesting. It was the first I'd ever sat on (I'd only just been promoted from a delivery role), therefore, I didn't know what to say. After a year, someone asked something about the programme and [the PHF representative] said, "You're the Steering Group, you decide!" We started to ask big difficult questions after that, like, why are we not able to engage marginalised young people?'

This demonstrates the evolution of the Steering Group, however other comments suggest that the Group did not routinely use evaluation findings to inform these discussions and move practice forward.

SHARING SESSIONS

The opportunity to come together with colleagues and young people from partner galleries, *Circuit* consultants and the National Team was greatly appreciated. Several Sharing Sessions included opportunities for reflection and evaluation. 'Emerging learning' from discussions at an away-day in December 2015, for example, was posted on the website[1] and at this same Session, Circulate shared creative evaluation tools. A half-day session in October 2014 was focused on formative evaluation as the agenda illustrates:

Circuit National Sharing Session

Day One: Tuesday 7th October 2-5pm
Venue: Brighton Dome, Founders Room
Attendees: 4 colleagues from each partner gallery
(incl. Marketing and Learning staff, Youth Sector Partners, Young People and Artists)

14:00 – 14:30   Coffee, Introductions and Warm up

14:30 – 15:40   What's Working & What's not Working

In groups, partners will spend 10 minutes discussing what is working and what is not working within Partnerships, Marketing, Digital, Young People/Peer-Led, Evaluation, Curatorial and National.

15:40 – 16:15   Feedback

16:15 – 16.45   Q and A

16:45 – 17:00   Evening and Day 2 arrangements

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1   https://circuit.tate.org.uk/2016/02/emerging-learning-flipchart-notes/

However, the Head of Learning quoted above (about the Steering Group), went on to suggest, 'We should have been practice sharing about these questions [such as how to engage marginalised young people] but we were meeting about festival marketing instead!' This reflected a widely held view of the Sharing Sessions as a missed opportunity, certainly in relation to reflection and evaluation. Gallery staff said they would have welcomed a sharing of positive and negative experiences of evaluation techniques and felt they 'needed more opportunities to honestly share struggles.' It would appear that whilst opportunities to share experiences were on the agenda, some gallery staff felt inhibited to speak openly and they also felt that too much time was given to outside speakers.

LEARNING REPORTS

'Really hard work and stressful but the process was very thought-provoking and identified our need to hone down our evidence and our learning.'

(Head of Learning)

The quote above reflected a unanimous view that despite challenges, the discipline of preparing for and writing the Learning Reports was valuable for individual, programmatic and potentially, organisational development. The 'enforced reflection' created opportunities to pause and reflect with young people and colleagues and the resulting 'high level thinking and the time to do this were very valuable.' In the majority of galleries, however, it took two to three years for *Circuit* staff to understand the purpose of these reports (and how they differed from the Activity Reports). An analysis of the Year 2 Learning Reports revealed,

'In general, the gallery reports contain too much documentation and too little evaluation...A tendency towards assertions without supporting evidence... During evaluation, it is important to analyse and make sense of evidence, extract learning and use this to inform the next stage of the programme (the Critical Friend has shared an Action Research Cycle that sets out these stages). This cycle is not always evident in the galleries' reports...The majority of galleries have struggled to collect audience profile data [meaning] there is a scarcity of quantitative evidence...on reach and impact.'

(*Circuit* Data Analyst, 2014-15 Report)

Following this mid-point review of progress, the National Programme Manager circulated new guidance for partner galleries, that made a useful distinction between documentation of activity (summarised in an Overview) and evaluation and reflection (Learning Journey). A series of questions were provided as prompts for the Learning Journey that helpfully focused reflection and reporting.

- What strategies and approaches have been successful in realising these aims?

- What things haven't worked?

- What have you changed along the way because it wasn't working?

- Are there other things that need to change?

- Have there been barriers to achieving the aims which seem beyond your control?

- What are the key learning points that will inform what we do next?

For some galleries, this marked a turning point with subsequent reports clearly articulating evidence-based learning and change, both positive and negative. In other cases, this change took longer and for some, did not become evident until the final year. An issue cited by the majority of gallery interviewees concerned the absence of effective feedback on their reports. In a large, complex and layered programme, it can be a challenge to determine who needs to know what, and the National Team were rightly wary of overloading *Circuit* staff (there were, for example, complaints about 'a lot of documents flying about'). However, the majority of interviewees would have welcomed more feedback on their reports including what and how to improve.

THE *CIRCUIT* WEBSITE

The website was seen to present a remarkable record of *Circuit*, providing both an overview and in-depth and diverse perspectives. The site hosts a wide range of content from varied authors and has served as an excellent platform to share raw data (such as films), evaluation findings (for example, on festivals) and reflections on issues pertinent to *Circuit* (such as young people becoming 'institutionalised' at galleries). The public platform also helped to motivate young people to write blogs, including content in all the categories above.

The main issue concerned the difficulty of navigating the website; this is an amazing repository of rich content but some may lay undiscovered by visitors to the site.

THE NATIONAL TEAM
AT TATE

Gallery staff praised the National Team for listening and being supportive and responsive. Individuals felt they could be open and honest, knowing that the National Team welcomed such feedback and would respond appropriately. During interviews, there was a tendency for gallery staff to talk in terms of 'them and us': not understanding what 'they wanted' or needing to 'complete forms for them'. This sense of obligation seemed allied to the fear of honest reflection and may have impeded galleries from taking ownership of *Circuit* in the early stages.

EXTERNAL EXPERTISE AND SUPPORT FOR EVALUATION

'The ability to call on experts when needed was a major plus.'

(*Circuit* Coordinator)

Individual mentions were made about the invaluable support of the Evaluator, Critical Friend, Audience and Marketing Development Consultant and the *Circuit* Digital Producer in relation to evaluation planning and methodology, data gathering and analysis, reflection with young people and professional development for staff and young people.

The Critical Friend and Evaluator had different ways of working and thinking about evaluation that were complementary and this complementarity was beneficial to the programme. However, the National Team's attempts to minimise pressure on partner galleries resulted in all communication being directed through the National Programme Manager which sometimes frustrated the consultants' attempts to be responsive to need, and meant that the support offered was not always taken up by galleries.

Without direct communication with the galleries, the consultants often relied on electronic and paper-based communication with gallery staff but this was necessarily generic and became burdensome on occasion as one *Circuit* Coordinator described,

'Felt like lots of frameworks and forms to fill in for marketing and evaluation when what we needed was advice.'

Whilst this was a minority view, as with the National Team, the sense of servicing the consultants occasionally created a 'them and us' atmosphere in the early years.

As noted on page 16, the roles of the Critical Friend and Evaluator were outlined at the first Sharing Session but for a variety of reasons, the Critical Friend's role was gradually diminished until she became, in effect,

the facilitator of Circulate. Working with young people and supporting their reflection and evaluation was a key part of the Critical Friend's role but her brief also included supporting staff to reflect on young people's findings, and, as the title suggests, providing challenge and support, fostering reflection and brokering knowledge. Initially, the Critical Friend fulfilled all these roles, facilitating the first Sharing Sessions, for example, meeting core groups of young people to reflect on their personal ambitions for *Circuit* and providing a wide range of tools for reflection and evaluation.

A lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities combined with differing perceptions of the programme's emerging needs and priorities, resulted in a reduction in the Critical Friend's role. Ironically, the majority of gallery interviewees suggested that the programme would have benefitted from a critical friend and went on to describe an individual who could be challenging, flexible and responsive in exactly the way the *Circuit* Critical Friend had attempted to be at the outset. In a long-term programme, it may be advisable to conduct 1:1s with consultants (as one would with permanent staff) to ensure both sides are happy with the way the work is progressing and discuss any changes in needs and focus.

Depending on gallery priorities, data collected, individual interests and ways of working, galleries' praise for and use of different consultants varied. For some, the Critical Friend's support for the development of creative evaluation tools was invaluable, whilst others appreciated the 'raw and analysed data' provided by the Evaluator and how this could be tracked over time. The PhD student was also regarded as an asset, providing in-depth knowledge, a long-term commitment, cross-referencing between galleries and formative evaluation to shape the partnership programmes.

Three galleries employed their own critical friend. The *Circuit* Coordinator interviewed at one of these galleries described the value of this 'external eye with knowledge of youth sector practices' who provided focused support for staff, young people and artists. This critical friend was contracted to provide 1:1's with staff; training for staff, artists and young people (for example, on approaches to working with young people); attend and provide feedback on Circulate and Sharing Sessions; and evaluate selected *Circuit* events at the gallery.

CIRCULATE

'Great! Really got young people involved and taking ownership. Three young people from our gallery committed throughout...they were reliable and independent.'

(*Circuit* Coordinator)

'Ours were quite committed, therefore they got a lot out of it. But...I'm not sure what [the gallery] got out of it.'

(*Circuit* Coordinator)

Almost all interviewees believed that Circulate was 'powerful and important' for the young people involved. There was repeated and strong evidence that members of the group derived personal and professional benefits additional to those accrued from membership of the core groups alone. Two interviewees also highlighted the value of reports produced by Circulate and the Critical Friend as this was a way of hearing young people's views. In general, however, opinion was divided over the extent to which the programme benefitted from Circulate. Concerns were raised around the membership and positioning of the group:

• Circulate played to the strengths of the more academic young people and was therefore not as inclusive as it might have been.

• Some young people found evaluating a festival a 'big ask' and felt they could not make a long-term commitment to Circulate.

• Circulate was seen as a separate, off-site group, somewhat disconnected from the programme and galleries, with the result that 'the learning didn't really feed back.'

• Some galleries felt the views of young people in their core groups was more reliable and relevant than Circulate.

Concerns around the effectiveness of Circulate had another dimension, namely that young people were set up as change agents but some galleries lacked the capacity or will to change. This resulted in a loss of motivation for young people.

These concerns suggest that the function of Circulate (including the aim of informing change at programme and gallery level) and the group's relationship to galleries was, at times, unclear. Gallery staff who had attended Circulate sessions believed that challenges arose as young people and galleries had varied levels of understanding and skills in relation to evaluation and the programme, meaning it was difficult to meet all the needs.
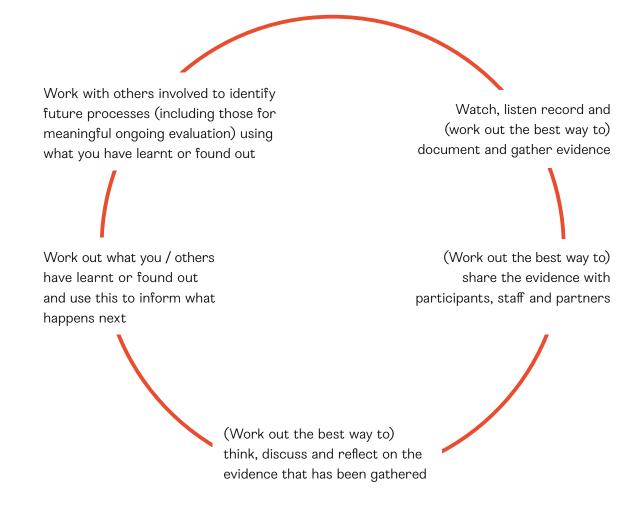
EVALUATION PROCESSES - COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA

KEY LEARNING THAT EMERGED ABOUT REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

At a Sharing Session at the end of Year 2, the Head of Learning Practice and Research from Tate made a seminal presentation that clarified that what was required from galleries was evaluation not advocacy and that evidence needed to be gathered systematically to demonstrate the extent to which *Circuit*'s aims and objectives were being achieved. From this point, key learning emerged including, 'how complicated and demanding good quality evaluation can be and therefore, the skills that are required.'

The majority of gallery staff put various caveats around their response to how successful they had been in collecting and analysing appropriate and useful data, such as 'eventually' and 'could have been better.' Successful strategies and methods are summarised below together with the challenges.

WHAT WORKED WELL

Work with others involved to identify future processes (including those for meaningful ongoing evaluation) using what you have learnt or found out

Watch, listen record and (work out the best way to) document and gather evidence

Work out what you / others have learnt or found out and use this to inform what happens next

(Work out the best way to) share the evidence with participants, staff and partners

(Work out the best way to) think, discuss and reflect on the evidence that has been gathered

The Critical Friend encouraged an approach to reflection and evaluation that was informed by an action research cycle.

PRINCIPLES AND FACTORS FOR SUCCESS IN *CIRCUIT* EVALUATION

- Persistence, routine, repetition; reflection, conversation, collaboration.

- Clear articulation of project objectives that have been discussed and agreed with young people and partners in advance. This is the basis for rigorous evaluation.

- Reinforcing, reminding and repeating consistent messages about evaluation methods, processes and available support.

- Employing a critical friend and independent evaluator where possible and utilising peer exchange and support for mutual benefit.

- Employing data collectors to administer audience surveys.

- Establishing baselines whenever possible.

- Employing artists (including filmmakers) who are familiar with evaluation and familiar with the target young people.

- Committing to long-term projects with the same young people allowing for depth in evaluation and tracking change over time.

- Engaging young people as participant and peer evaluators.

- Dedicated people (including young people) and time for reflection and evaluation.

- Making evaluation visible to encourage shared and iterative reflection.

- Signalling the value of evaluation and encouraging engagement by giving participants something in return for their feedback (a pencil, for example, or origami flower).

- Utilising methods facilitated by people that result in a larger and more thoughtful response.

- Ensuring someone takes responsibility for the meta-analysis of evaluation data gathered and reported in a large-scale partnership project.

EFFECTIVE METHODS IN
CIRCUIT EVALUATION

- Undertaking 1:1s with young people and talking in general about what is going well and what, less well.

- Using multiple methods at the same event (for example, vox pop, feedback wall, survey, creative techniques etc.).

- Gathering audience profile data, tracked over time, revealing change, challenges and insight for galleries.

- Embedding creative evaluation as part of an event.

- Using film: especially useful for working with vulnerable young people who may not be able to articulate their learning.

- Journals and blogs produced by young people providing useful reflection for the gallery.

EMBEDDING EVALUATION

Wherever possible, evaluation was embedded in *Circuit* events. During interview, the Critical Friend explained how this approach supported *Circuit*'s inclusive aims.

'The opportunity to reflect is a privileged one as it is only available to the people who have time and space (the luxury of time to unpick something). Therefore, the opportunity to reflect needs to be embedded in the process... to enable everyone to have the opportunity to reflect meaningfully for themselves.'

The following example, recounted by a *Circuit* Coordinator, illustrates embedded evaluation and demonstrates how young people 'became autonomous learners and understood their power to help others reflect.' It also illustrates the ongoing challenge of institutional change.

One member of Circulate developed the idea of an Evaluation Lounge for a gallery event in 2015. He created an intimate space with a leather sofa, standard lamp, tea and cake; he dressed in character and claimed to have no knowledge of the event and asked people to explain it to him. Some of the conversations were recorded and provided valuable evidence for informal evaluation and reflection. The concept was repeated for the gallery's *Circuit* festival but the Exhibition staff felt the space was too shabby ('it looked like a student house') and made changes in line with the gallery aesthetic.
The new-look space did not draw people in, however, and after the first day, the sofa and standard lamp were re-introduced. 'Lesson? Let's listen to what young people want and it will work!'

REFLECTION, ANALYSIS
AND REPORTING

The Critical Friend facilitated 'sense-making' sessions with Circulate and core groups to review, analyse and interpret evidence. In a similar vein, staff in three of the galleries described how they had developed a collaborative process to analysing the available evidence in preparation for writing their Learning Reports and then sharing the responsibility for writing different sections of the report.

The National Team actively supported creative methods of reflection and evaluation amongst gallery staff and three *Circuit* Coordinators received commissions to undertake research as an extension of practice developed in *Circuit*. These commissions explored mind-mapping, sketching, language and future museums.

CHALLENGES

The principal challenges cited by gallery staff related to the collection of quantitative, audience data. To aid sustainability, the aim was for galleries to conduct the audience surveys. The Evaluator provided training for gallery staff and young people but voiced a concern that data could be compromised if specialist researchers were not employed. Initially, perceptions of the questionnaire amongst gallery staff and young people were often negative ('Quite extensive, boring form') and it was widely accepted that administering or completing the forms 'was the last thing young people wanted to do!' One *Circuit* Coordinator outlined the challenge,

'Quantitative...we struggled and our young people didn't think much of the surveys...boring, intrusive...a number of our young people were dyslexic, therefore not user-friendly...and difficult to introduce at events without taking over.'

Even when data was gathered, there was dissatisfaction about what it revealed (or failed to reveal). One Head of Learning, for example, described the approach to evaluating the gallery's *Circuit* festival,

'We used mixed methods but you had to be there to understand how different it was for the gallery and how diverse the audience was...3000 young people but we didn't sample enough.'

This quote emphasises the importance of not relying on a single source of evidence and having the confidence to, for example, place the testimony of gallery staff about the difference and diversity achieved alongside audience data and provide an explanation, if necessary, of why these presented a different picture. There is sometimes a tendency to create a false hierarchy between quantitative and qualitative evidence which is unhelpful; each has its role and a holistic approach is generally required to understand the what, the how and the why in evaluation.

By the end of year 2, the majority of galleries had insufficient audience data to act as a reliable baseline or to draw findings about reach. At this point, the National Team asked all galleries to set diversity targets for their *Circuit* programmes and to employ paid, independent, data collectors. These initiatives improved the collection of audience data and thus, improved evidence of audience reach and how this changed over time. Gathering demographic data for partnership young people, however, remained a challenge for the majority of galleries throughout *Circuit* as did the evaluation of outcomes for partnership staff and the impact on partnership organisations. (Although this area was the focus of research by the PhD student attached to *Circuit* and the findings were widely shared and found to be of great value to galleries). Youth sector partners may have been able to provide relevant demographic data for participating young people but as one Head of Learning reported, this was not pursued 'as project delivery was the priority.'

Gathering qualitative evidence was seen as less problematic although a number of interviewees suggested they would have benefitted from more input to avoid 'reinventing the wheel.' There was also a tendency, particularly in the first half of *Circuit*, to focus on data collection at the expense of analysis and interpretation (see comments above about Learning Reports). A general finding in *Circuit* was that for both qualitative and quantitative evaluation, who asks the questions, when and how, affected responses and the response rate.

YOUNG EVALUATORS

The pros and cons of Circulate as a group have been discussed above. *Circuit* aimed for young people's agency to be central to the programme (aim 1:2) with an associated objective for young people to be supported to develop skills in ongoing reflective practice and evaluation. These ambitions extended to all young people in the core groups and during the first two years of the programme, the Critical Friend facilitated sessions with core groups to map individuals' journeys to and through *Circuit,* identify their personal objectives for *Circuit* and reflect on their learning. Whilst the Critical Friend's contact with core groups reduced, her work, together with input from *Circuit* teams, established a culture of reflective practice amongst core young people. The final *Circuit* Data Analyst report, for example, noted,

'There is evidence of clear progression in core groups' knowledge and understanding with evaluation questions and roles now identified early in the planning process and creative evaluation techniques embedded in events. The Festival Lab facilitator at Tate St lves, for example, commented 'I was impressed with how the [young people] embraced the importance of documenting and reflecting back from session to session, building on the successes and failures.'

Whilst fostering reflective practice was a significant achievement of *Circuit*, opinion was divided on the efficacy of young evaluators as the following two quotes illustrate:

'I have also learnt that peer-led evaluation is much less imposing when trying to get a subject to complete the technique. We have had higher success rates of gaining data when we have our core group involved. It is much more welcoming to have peers collecting the stuff that matters, than other more traditional ways of asking for feedback.'

(Member of Circulate)

'Relying on young people to evaluate was hit and miss.'

(*Circuit* Coordinator)

Young people were encouraged to devise creative evaluation techniques and there was a general consensus that the evidence gathered was valuable for staff and core groups at galleries. However, not all creative methods generated evidence that could be used to establish outcomes or improve the programme. In addition, some gallery staff were concerned that once data had been gathered, young people showed little interest in analysing and interpreting the data. During the interviews, it became clear that there had been some confusion about young people's role in evaluation. As a member of the National Team explained, 'I didn't expect young people to get in deep; it was more about young people's voice.' This was perhaps not initially clear to all *Circuit* staff in galleries and it took some time for people to understand that young people's evaluation was one (albeit major) strand of a wider evaluation programme.[1]

At the *Circuit* conference, Test, Risk, Change, in 2017, Circulate presented evidence and creative evaluation tools that members had developed during the programme in an 'Evaluation Lounge'.

[1]   https://circuit.tate.org.uk/2017/03/circulate-lounge-at-spark-change/

LEARNING AND CHANGE

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KEY LEARNING THAT EMERGED THROUGH REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

Learning was identified and shared at a programme and gallery level throughout the duration of *Circuit* but 'was better from Year 3; more purposeful.' At the end of Year 3, for example, the *Circuit* Data Analyst produced a report that identified emerging learning from the programme. During interviews, *Circuit* staff highlighted key learning; some related to an individual gallery context but other learning was generic and is summarised below (with the year the learning emerged indicated):

Young people are not a homogeneous group and 'youth voice' is made up of diverse 'youth voices' and the silent 'voice' also needs to be heard. (Articulated clearly by Circulate member Steven Hyland in a paper for a BERA conference, The Trouble with Youth Voice[1]). This informed thinking about representation and the validity or otherwise of, for example, inviting a single young person onto a gallery board. This learning also had implications for the concept of 'peer-led' (whose peers?) and marketing. (Year 2)

Young people's motivations for engaging with galleries range across personal, social and vocational, and vary with age and background. It is important for galleries to understand these motivations and offer a wide range of opportunities to accommodate these interests. (Year 3)

Galleries need to utilise evaluation to inform marketing: quantitative data to understand who is, and who is not, being reached; focus groups to understand the interests of target audiences; and audience surveys to find out how people hear about events. Knowledge gained from young people in the core groups and through evaluation, gave Marketing staff the confidence to try out new ideas and ways of working. (Year 2/3)

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[1]   https://circuit.tate.org.uk/2015/04/presenting-the-trouble-with-youth-voice/

Increasing diversity is challenging; to measure change, targets and audience data are needed. A realisation at the end of Year 2 that insufficient data had been gathered (and anecdotally, that insufficient progress had been made to engage more diverse audiences) led to fruitful discussion and action. (End of Year 2)

In pursuance of diversity, galleries need to develop inclusive practices. Galleries identified diversity targets but only when young people from underrepresented groups found 'people like me' in the core groups, did they feel truly welcomed. Galleries also recognised that to maintain such engagement, this diversity needs to extend to the staff, the artwork and the language of the gallery. (Year 4)

It is beneficial to consider and articulate the values that underpin work with young people. At one gallery, for example, the values were identified as: honesty, generosity, responsiveness and flexibility. (Year 3)

To maximise levels of engagement and benefits for young people, it is important for galleries to provide informal, communal space for young people and activities that are culturally, politically and socially relevant. (Year 3)

It is important to work with youth partners and young people to develop understanding of how best to support vulnerable young people's engagement with activities at galleries. Galleries discovered that the level, type and duration of support required often differed from that originally envisaged. (YeaWr 3)

It may be necessary to reduce the pace and quantity of programme to allow for reflection and formative evaluation to inform the next iteration of programme. (Year 3)

Change is a slow, sometimes contested process that needs active support from senior management. As one Head of Learning concluded, '*Circuit* made me realise that change needs to be planned for and implemented as a step change.' (Year 4)

In the final year of the programme, using all the emerging findings from *Circuit* to date, the National Team (in consultation with the *Circuit* Board, consultants and galleries) identified themes that distilled *Circuit* learning into five areas. The aim was for these five themes to help galleries focus and to build on reflection so far, by serving as a structure around which to base reporting in the last year of the programme. They also provided a frame when the National Team came to develop key messages from the programme for external dissemination, that could be of interest and feel new to the sector. The *Circuit* conference (Test, Risk, Change) shared, explored and added further to this learning.

The five learning themes are:

• Clash of cultures: youth and cultural sector ecology
There are social, professional and political barriers between the sectors. When working together, it is important to address tensions and challenges surrounding class, skills, expectations and assumptions.

• Cultural sector, diversity and change
Cultural organisations need to identify the motivations that are required in order to make changes to organisational models, that will in turn enable greater diversity in programming. This can be done through unpicking the challenges that galleries face and understanding these challenges within their own unique context.

• Young people's cultural production
When young people produce cultural activity in galleries it can have significant value and impact that positively disrupts institutional hierarchies.

• Relevance and reconnection to lived experiences
Linking arts programmes to people's wider experiences can demystify galleries and create more relevant connections for people. Creating social, multi-disciplinary and thematic programmes can support this.

• Insight and action
By recognising the value of embedding reflection, research and evaluation, galleries can gather and respond to deeper insights, enabling them to develop and improve their working practices.

IMPLEMENTING FINDINGS
AND AFFECTING CHANGE

By the end of *Circuit* there was evidence from all galleries that evaluation had informed the way the programme developed at that institution. The long-term nature of *Circuit* enabled galleries to work through the action research cycle and refine models of practice. Involving young people in evaluation provided galleries with the opportunity to hear and respond to a wider range of voices to inform change and the majority capitalised on this opportunity. In general, the gallery staff interviewed believed that learning was implemented within galleries with fewer examples of this informing practice in other partner galleries. The one exception was festivals, where learning accrued from the first festivals in London (Year 1) and Liverpool (Year 2), was widely shared (in person and online) and informed galleries' thinking. Having young people from Circulate involved in the festival evaluation helped to disseminate learning to core groups and gallery staff. *Circulate's Findings from Blueprint: Top Tips for Peer-led Festivals*[1], for example, provided clear advice, derived from an analysis of a wide range of evidence, that was applicable to all gallery settings. Beyond these first festivals, however, gallery staff reported finding Circulate's evaluation less useful: in part because generic findings had already been outlined from Blueprint but also because galleries were becoming more in-tune with the particularities of their own local circumstances and thought findings from other areas less relevant.

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[1] https://circuit.tate.org.uk/2015/01/circulates-findings-from-blueprint-top-tips-for-peer-led-festivals/

The changes made through *Circuit* were extensive but there were still instances where learning remained within the immediate *Circuit* team, with senior Learning staff having differing views of partnership work, for instance, and overriding recommendations made by *Circuit* Coordinators. In some galleries where these strict hierarchies of decision making perpetuated (senior leaders at gallery » Head of Department » *Circuit* staff » young people) the impact of *Circuit* was often reduced. One Head of Learning, for example, recounted attempts to share *Circuit* learning with Exhibitions, Programming and Marketing but found 'teams are very precious about what they do.' A *Circuit* Coordinator in another gallery shared similar issues and provided the following illustration,

'We learnt what gets young people through the door and shared this...but still, the language in leaflets is aimed at people who are already engaged.'

These issues were not universal and some galleries made structural changes to facilitate wider learning from *Circuit*. At one small gallery, for example, Education Programmes now sits in Curatorial where previously it was part of Operations; in a second gallery, a member of the *Circuit* core group is now a board member.

LASTING CHANGE

CHANGES IN EVALUATION PRACTICES IN PARTNER GALLERIES

All the gallery interviewees believed that some of the changes in evaluation practice implemented through *Circuit* would be sustained across the Learning team. At one gallery, for example, the Learning Department was committed to continuing to collect audience profile data and had produced a simplified 10-question form; in another gallery, the practice of determining baselines (both qualitative and quantitative) and setting targets was firmly established and participant feedback is more visible with quotes appearing on marketing; a third gallery now routinely embeds creative evaluation methods in projects and includes a team reflection session at the end of each project to ensure the learning and reporting is based on diverse views and evidence. Importantly, *Circuit* introduced an approach of using evaluation to make evidence-based change rather than acting on a programmer's hunch.

As with other areas of learning identified through *Circuit* (see page 56 above), in some galleries, there were barriers to wider institutional change in evaluation. At one gallery, however, where funding issues have necessitated more cross-departmental working, the *Circuit* Coordinator reported, 'What are we trying to get out if it? What are we hoping to learn? I take this into all meetings now, across the gallery.'

PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

All the gallery staff felt they had benefitted professionally from working on the *Circuit* evaluation. The Head of Learning at one gallery, for example, noted that she was one of three colleagues who had been promoted during *Circuit* and she attributed this career progression in part to 'the skills you learn through working on a rigorous programme.' She was also about to take a sabbatical to study for an MA and believed that *Circuit* had helped to highlight the value of research.

The approaches introduced in the *Circuit* evaluation were new for the majority of staff in galleries meaning that even the more experienced staff developed their practice. As one Head of Learning said, '*Circuit* has changed how I think about and use evaluation: I'm more creative and more rigorous.' Many of the *Circuit* Coordinators were early-career and they found the rigour of the evaluation extremely challenging. In terms of professional development, however, the benefits were great and the consultants commented that these individuals were often more receptive to new ideas. For one Coordinator, *Circuit* was her first gallery job and after initial struggles, she relished the reflection and evaluation,

'The whole experience was brilliant! I just thought that was the way things are done [in evaluation]...so at [my new gallery] it's really shocking...that nothing is in place.'

The regional and national networks established through *Circuit* continue to provide support for individuals with gallery staff in Colchester and Cambridgeshire, for example, maintaining contact.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation and reflection were embedded in *Circuit* from the outset. In line with the overall programme's ambitions of social justice and youth voice, self-evaluation by young people and gallery staff was central, with specialist support provided by consultants. There was a clear focus on evaluation as a tool for learning and improvement rather than advocacy and this demanded a systematic approach to gathering and reflecting on evidence that was new for many gallery staff. This review identified particular challenges in relation to audience surveys, for example, and it was not until the later years that galleries' Learning Reports became useful analytical documents. However, this review also confirmed how influential *Circuit* has been in changing and improving evaluation practices of Learning teams in partner galleries and in developing the skills of individual young people and gallery staff in reflection and evaluation.

By the end of the programme, those working on *Circuit* had embedded an action research approach of doing, reviewing, learning and applying that learning; appreciating the importance of finding the tools and the time for reflection and the value of listening to young people. This review identified how evaluation was used locally to inform gallery projects but also how programme-wide learning informed galleries' approach to working with young people and the youth sector.

This review also revealed learning that emerged about reflection and evaluation and this informs the suggestions below.

Drawing on what worked well and what might be approached differently, the following suggestions on evaluation emerge for funders and programme leaders of youth arts partnership projects:

Affecting Change

For a change programme, be open and clear from the outset about the nature of the desired change and ensure senior leaders sign up to this concept and are willing to listen and take action in response to evaluation findings. Engage all stakeholders in discussions about the details of what you are trying to achieve and change. Use this to structure the programme and inform how and what you evaluate. Establish baselines wherever possible.

Clarity, simplicity and transparency

Keep it simple and manageable with a small number of consistent messages reiterated throughout. Ensure stakeholders understand why they are being asked to work in particular ways, gather particular evidence and how this will be used by others to bring about change.

Repeat and review aims, objectives and requirements of the evaluation - in person, not on paper. Ensure effective communication and feedback loops share findings across and between the varied layers of people working on a programme.

Team building and honest conversations

Invest time and resources in an induction programme (of two to three months) to ensure shared understanding of the programme's aims and objectives, and the evaluation rationale and requirements; to have fun together, bond as a team, take away the fear and thus create an atmosphere in which people can have open and honest conversations about what is and isn't working.

Capacity and skills

Spend time getting to know the context, the organisations' histories and expertise with evaluation; work out how to get people on board with evaluation. Build in Continuing Professional Development sessions, evaluation surgeries, mentoring and 'buddy' schemes for gallery and programme staff to share knowledge of existing good practice in evaluation, the requirements of the programme evaluation and to facilitate skill sharing.

Practice sharing and reflection

Create and structure opportunities to share evaluation approaches, tools and findings between partners. Share what doesn't work as well as what does work.

Roles and responsibilities

Provide a clear outline of the roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the evaluation and how these roles combine to provide a holistic approach. Find a balance between delivery and evaluation. With limited capacity, there is a tendency for delivery to become the priority.

Data collection

Employ mixed methods of data collection (qualitative and quantitative) that provide evidence of outcomes and also illuminate the factors that supported or prevented change. Gather feedback from all stakeholders to triangulate and thus increase the validity of findings.

Young evaluators

To maximise learning outcomes for young people, support and engage them in reflection on, and evaluation of, their own experiences and those of their peers. This develops young people's critical thinking skills as well as their agency and project management skills.

Specialist skills and support

Don't underestimate the specialist skills needed for evaluation. If programme aims include the diversification of audiences, for example, ideally find budget to employ professional researchers to collect, analyse and interpret data. Provide support and challenge through the work of a critical friend. If the programme is national, consider appointing a small team of regionally based critical friends to facilitate face-to-face meetings at each gallery. In a long-term project, ensure measures are in place to manage, support and debrief consultants

Drawing on what worked well and what might be approached differently, the following additional suggestions on evaluation emerge for staff within galleries and museums working on youth arts partnership projects:

Approach

- Be open, honest and collaborative.

- Listen to young people.

- Regard evaluation as an aspect of project delivery not as an add-on.

- Reflect, learn, change - repeat.

Affecting change

Discuss with stakeholders and articulate clearly what you are trying to achieve and change. Even if not requested, disseminate and champion evaluation findings internally at the gallery to support institutional change. Ensure evaluation is used to inform marketing and inclusive practices to engage diverse audiences.

Team building and honest conversations

Schedule regular (every two to three months) reflection sessions with stakeholders (young people and youth sector partners) and encourage honest conversations about what is and isn't working and work together to find solutions.

Practice sharing and reflection

Make time for reflection and 'give permission' for others to make time for reflection. Draw on the knowledge of your peers. Ask for help from colleagues in your own or other galleries and share expertise and learning.

Data collection

Embed evaluation activities within events. Work with youth sector and other partners to gather demographic data from partnership young people.

Specialist skills and support

Find budget where possible and make use of evaluators and critical friends who can bring an outside eye, provide support and challenge existing practices.

APPENDIX 1

PLUS TATE LEARNING PROGRAMME
SUPPORTED BY J.P. MORGAN

ENCOURAGING SELF EVALUATION - KEY PRINCIPLES

This project doesn't provide a fixed and final evaluation model that organisations can implement and there is clearly more work to be undertaken in this field. However, the Plus Tate organisations and the young participants have identified a set of principles for a young-people-led evaluation framework that can be used across the sector:

Time

It can take a while for young people to engage with this reflective practice as evaluation; to see its relevance and take ownership of it. Taking time, particularly at the start of a project, to allow for this engagement and allocating specific responsibilities ensures that the evaluation process is a positive, productive and authentic experience for all.

Trust

Genuinely enabling young people to take the lead in evaluating a programme requires trust to be established between the participants, the gallery staff directly involved in the programme and the organisation more widely. Without this trust an honest appraisal of a project cannot take place.

Flexibility

A 'one size fits all' model is unrealistic. Evaluation led by young people relies on understanding the needs, interests, ambitions and capabilities of the individuals and organisations involved. Ideally on-going evaluation is set in motion and overseen by the young people themselves, who identify the expected outcomes from the outset.

Rethink language

Given the potentially negative associations the term 'evaluation' can have for young people and others, it can be more useful to frame this activity as reflective practice (with its focus on critical, creative and thinking skills), whilst not forgetting that the overall process of assessing a project can also involve monitoring (i.e. on-going data collection and examination) and evaluation by participants and others.

Co-construct knowledge

While enabling young people to take the lead, gallery professionals must not put aside responsibility for guiding, supporting and challenging young people, when appropriate. The best practice involves professional development, skills sharing, recognising expertise and dialogue between gallery professionals and young people. This allows for deep levels of reflection that change underlying patterns and bring about new learning processes. Evaluation becomes less to do with assessing content – what we did – and more on how we learn to learn and adjust actions accordingly.

Creativity and connectivity

Using creative, enjoyable and relevant methods that enable critical reflection and analysis by all participants from the start provides more effective insights into young people's experiences than 'bolt-on' data collection done at the end of a project. Young-people-led evaluation works best as part of an integrated approach to project development and reflective practice, complementing other quantitative and qualitative project evaluation.