

# New approaches and best practice in commissioning; how do we ensure it is fair and excellent?

## Creative Case NORTH Seeing Event – NEWCASTLE

### Session 1- Question 3

#### **Present:**

Elaine Price  
Laurence Sillars  
Tim Rubidge  
Kale Brindley  
Holli Keeble  
Cinzia Hardy  
Nick Malyan  
Kylie Lloyd  
Caroline Pearce  
Vici Wreford-Sinnott

#### **What has brought you to the conversation?**

- The commissioning of new work is a very exciting time – the bringing into the world new work. Are there previous practices that can be refined while looking to stimulate the emergence of new working relationships?
- Best practice - we tend to commission artists
  - we know
  - are resident in NE / relating to costs!
  - challenge of travel to and within Northumberland - need to drive
- Interested in different / collaborative / new commissioning models – particularly with regards developing new/ the 'right' partnerships
- 'Excellence' always intrigues me + wonder what we around the table all mean by it.
- My current role has increased responsibilities with commissioning artists and projects, and I want to learn from others with more experience about best practice in terms of ensuring accessibility and diverse representation.
- How can we (R. Arts) commission more diverse performing arts for new rural touring scheme 'on tour'?
- Interested in the creative case for equality
- Currently as an artist of previously as director of a development agency promoting disability equality in its widest context to the cultural venues and institutions of the region, who decides what is fair and who decides what is excellent
- Building equality and diversity into our work as crosscutting issue...
  - Improving representation in our work
  - Considering background

<p><b>Situations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commissioning work be final outcome?</li> <li>• What is the openness around the process</li> <li>• Around - R&amp;D</li> <li>• Research</li> <li>• Young artists responsive to the needs of orgs - How?</li> <li>• Talent spot</li> <li>• How do you decide what the commission is</li> <li>• How do you become responsible for becoming the catalyst of change – especially for buildings</li> <li>• New commissions – conversations with audiences</li> <li>• What are the gaps in the cultural landscape</li> <li>• Tend to commission artist you know</li> </ul>	<p><b>Possible Solutions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not about resources but attitude</li> <li>• Broaden networks</li> <li>• Open new networks</li> <li>• Invite artists in</li> <li>• Is there an information gap</li> <li>• Open submissions</li> <li>• Targeting at young people / older people / Disabled people / etc.</li> <li>• How do venues bridge this</li> <li>• Who are the taste setters</li> <li>• What is happening on the fringes/ in the community</li> <li>• Critical friends from diverse backgrounds</li> <li>• Shouldn't be a static process</li> <li>• Work place culture</li> <li>• Proceduralising</li> <li>• Don't be bound by a building</li> <li>• Capitalise on existing networks</li> <li>• Fluidity → a currency</li> <li>• Identify mischief makers</li> <li>• With unlikely outcomes</li> <li>• If you don't have cash can give resources in other ways</li> <li>• Producing conditions that something might happen – who do we invite?</li> <li>• How responsive are you to what does sell</li> <li>• Building new relationships with audiences who might not otherwise come to see it. – engagement</li> <li>• A refreshed approach</li> <li>• Increase education side of work with venues</li> <li>• What would you like to retire? – Retire practices and procedures that don't work!</li> </ul>
<p><b>Concerns</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where there is risk there is failure</li> <li>• Should build in room to fail</li> <li>• Diverse work/ companies/ artists are not coming forward</li> <li>• How accessible is the process</li> <li>• Having the luxury of time to create that space to develop the work – leap of faith!</li> <li>• New commissions → relevant to audiences</li> <li>• How accessible is the work/space/venue and the commission</li> <li>• Time over use of excellence and promoting it, rather than exploring how we do things differently → innovations.</li> <li>• Organisational challenge</li> <li>• A refreshed approach</li> </ul>	<p><b>Data/Facts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who or what is the audience?</li> <li>• Does the commissioner already have an audience in mind?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Closing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building equality and diversity into work as a cross cutting issue.</li> <li>• New approaches and best practice in commissioning</li> <li>• Heads – funders / commissions</li> <li>• Fair and excellence – important value</li> <li>• Tend to commission artists we know</li> <li>• Challenge of geographical space</li> </ul>	

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## Session 2- Question 3

### **Present:**

Ali McCaw  
Cat Jarman  
Emma Dean  
Fiona Melvin  
Jackie Malcolm  
Frances Castle  
Steven Gaythorpe  
Leila d'Aronville

### **What has brought you to the conversation?**

- What is fair and excellent & how do you achieve that?
- What are the possibilities of commissioning new work
  - Collaboration / partnerships in context of Creative Ccase
  - Where things collide & work .
- Who the commissioners are
- Possibility of co-commissioning
  - Artists, orgs, venues, communities, participants
- How do we have the partnerships / networks to exploit those opportunities?
  - Where are they?
- What effect the budget line has on excellence.

<p><b>Situations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is nice to the unionised</li> <li>• Writer fee - C £8000 to write a play (60 minute play)</li> <li>• Where is the scope for doing something in a different way</li> <li>• There is expertise</li> <li>• Commissioning with community groups – accessibility</li> <li>• Health commissioning, schools, SEN, non arts commissioning</li> <li>• Social return on investment</li> <li>• We work with artists with similar world view</li> <li>• Communities we work with are they the same individuals and families that participate.</li> <li>• Nurturing new talent from diverse communities</li> <li>• Artists are commissioners tomorrow.</li> <li>• Share the risks</li> <li>• What are we commissioning → need action research</li> <li>• Across art form and different spaces – going for additional funding / resources / commissioning</li> <li>• Do the “pure artists” exist only unfunded!?</li> <li>• When answering commission briefs artist have to bend and answer the brief.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Possible Solutions/Options</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there an opportunity for writers to speak with commissioners to enable appropriate resources? (co-design of brief)</li> <li>• What is excellence – can this be measured by audiences VS quality.</li> <li>• Not necessarily about track record as ACE &amp; orgs they fund have an obligation to nurture new artists and innovation → taking risk</li> <li>• Commissioning within participatory settings builds audiences for tomorrow.</li> <li>• Completely open with criteria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide access and advise, so funding applications are accessible to more artists</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Opportunities for more conversations to happen - critical friends</li> <li>• Capacity building in artists</li> <li>• CPD</li> <li>• Changing commissioners</li> <li>• Criteria need to be more open</li> <li>• Artists becoming more proactive – become the commissioners.</li> <li>• Commissioners want to take more risks.</li> <li>• Risks – making mistakes is okay!</li> </ul>
<p><b>Concerns</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding applications – language</li> <li>• What is excellence?</li> <li>• How do we decide what will be funded?</li> <li>• Is excellence judged by how many people see it or is it about quality</li> <li>• Patchy information re strategic commissioning</li> <li>• How our application structured may be prohibitive to diversity and equality</li> <li>• Capacity of orgs → how is that built in - needs to be resourced.</li> <li>• Even if there are open calls the perception is that certain orgs tend to shortlist the same artists.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Data/Facts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In terms of strategic commissioning short time frames to submit bids.</li> <li>• Sharing information</li> <li>• Being less territorial</li> <li>• Creating opportunities to faster collaboration</li> <li>• Are we producing something that the sector really wants?</li> <li>• Word count in G4A makes it difficult to explain how you will reach your audience.</li> </ul>

# Creative Case NORTH Seeing Event – Salford

## Session 1- Question 2

<p><b>Present:</b>  Sarah Fisher  Karen Gallagher  Philip A Watson  Pete Tauscher</p>	
<p><b>What has brought you to the conversation?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MONO – live art</li> <li>• How do we get to a point of having diverse artists in order to develop...?</li> <li>• Breaking glass ceiling – commissioning lesser known artists.</li> <li>• Where do we find diverse artists?</li> <li>• Access</li> <li>• Communicate + network</li> <li>• Picking brains</li> <li>• Across different art forms</li> <li>• Specific advice for Hull</li> <li>• Are there new approaches in commissioning?</li> <li>• Fair / excellence</li> <li>• Conditions</li> <li>• How to start conversations?</li> <li>• Make approaches</li> <li>• Injection of inspiration</li> <li>• Look outwardly but value local</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Situations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not having access / knowledge of diverse artists</li> <li>• Funders who won't take risks - bad decisions</li> <li>• Career paths – lack of progression/development routes</li> <li>• Utopian ideal – mismatch reality</li> </ul>	<p><b>Possible Solutions/Options</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating right condition of engagement</li> <li>• Influence</li> <li>• Lobbying education</li> <li>• Improving communication – with other arts organisations</li> <li>• Talk to each other - more regular commitment</li> </ul>
<p><b>Concerns</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chicken + egg</li> <li>• Risk / excellence – are these two terms compatible?</li> <li>• Safe good vs. wonderful unknown</li> <li>• 'Fair' is a redundant criteria</li> <li>• Not visible – investment is needed to make diverse arts more visible</li> </ul>	<p><b>Data/Facts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find out who is out there</li> <li>• See more work</li> </ul>

# Creative Case NORTH Seeing Event – Salford

## Session 2- Question 2

<p><b>Present:</b>  Adam Quayle  Hannah Tyrrell – Pinder  Janneke Geene  Howard Rifkin</p>	
<p><b>What has brought you to the conversation?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barriers to progression</li> <li>• Pathways – training ...</li> <li>• Who is judging? Judgement Criteria</li> <li>• Learning about commissioning – new</li> <li>• Best practice</li> <li>• Outcome vs access</li> <li>• Work out purpose of commission – clarity</li> <li>• Curious about ‘fair’ + ‘excellent’ – presupposed dichotomy?</li> <li>• Bad commissioning by people who don’t know about art.</li> <li>• New approaches, break cycles – take chance / risks.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Situations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Visual arts can be a closed shop</li> <li>• Little public art by Asian artists</li> <li>• Criteria for commissions often limits possibility of working with diverse artists/art forms</li> <li>• Peer led programming (not audience led) is a problem.</li> <li>• Good relationships – does it get insidious.</li> <li>• Emphasis on ‘New’ ‘Young’ ‘Emerging’</li> <li>• Lack of commissioning opportunities for mid career artists.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Possible Solutions/Options</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take risks – commission unknown artists</li> <li>• Build trust</li> <li>• Subject matter</li> <li>• Follow example of Scratch nights to create more opportunity and lessen risk</li> <li>• Strategy – ‘art of saying no’</li> <li>• Prioritising areas to address with targeted commission – you can’t do everything all at once.</li> <li>• Listening – to artists and audiences</li> <li>• Encourage risk, must be part of the solution</li> <li>• Keep challenging yourself about what and why you’re commissioning</li> <li>• Support artists’ development more longer term. Establish a commitment to working with an artist for ‘X’ number of years rather than jumping from one ‘emerging’ artist to the next.</li> <li>• Make risk a purpose/criteria in commission</li> </ul>
<p><b>Concerns</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tokenism in targeting</li> <li>• Can’t include everybody.</li> <li>• Is open ended process best way to commission?</li> <li>• How to begin relationship</li> <li>• Commissioning is subject to timing, ‘fashion’ and trends</li> </ul>	<p><b>Data/Facts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not many black led theatre groups in North</li> </ul>