

LARC NORTH LIVERPOOL EVALUATION SUPPORT PROGRAMME 2009–11

Final report

François Matarasso

May 2010

89 Julian Road, West Bridgford, Nottingham NG2 5AL

T 0115 982 6330

M 07525 370038

E matarasso@mac.com

W <http://web.me.com/matarasso>

Contents

	Executive summary	1
1	Programme concept and planning	2
1.1	Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium	2
1.2	The LARC Thrive programme	2
1.3	LARC's North Liverpool Programme	3
1.4	The North Liverpool evaluation programme	4
1.5	'Telling Stories: The arts and wellbeing in North Liverpool'	7
2	The Core Group	9
2.1	Introduction	9
2.2	The Bluecoat	9
2.3	Collective Encounters	9
2.4	The Comedy Trust	10
2.5	FACT	10
2.6	Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse	11
2.7	Liverpool Film Academy	11
2.8	Merseyside Dance Initiative	12
2.9	Rotunda Community College	12
2.10	Tate Liverpool	12
3	Training and support programme	13
3.1	Introduction	13
3.2	Seminars	13
3.3	Core group training programme	16
3.4	Evaluation materials	21
4	Outcomes and analysis	23
4.1	Introduction	23
4.2	Objective 1: Evaluation materials	23
4.3	Objective 2: Evaluation training programme	24
4.4	Objective 3: Guidance and support	24
4.5	Objective 4: Evaluation reports	25
4.6	Objective 5: A toolkit and project report	26
4.7	Analysis of the progress made	26
4.8	Learning from the programme	28
4.9	Recommendations	31

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*'Before, I thought that the evaluation process was for everyone else, but now I see it's for me too.'*¹

Between April 2009 and April 2011 Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium (LARC) managed a professional development programme in evaluating arts projects for its members and other organisations working in the arts in North Liverpool. A team led by François Matarasso delivered a programme of public seminars, core group training workshops, and one to one guidance; they also created an online evaluation resource. Nine organisations, ranging from small community groups to major cultural institutions, took part in the core programme, with representatives of about 20 others taking part in some of the activities, including the public seminars.

The programme hoped to produce a body of new evidence about the impact of the arts on regeneration in North Liverpool but in practice this was over-ambitious. Among the reasons for this are the limited time and resources that arts workers concerned with project delivery were able to give to evaluation; the sometimes weak links between project planning, evaluation and delivery; and the complex and sometimes inconsistent expectations about evaluation held both by arts organisations and, more importantly, by the funding bodies who require it.

But if the programme did not achieve a breakthrough in the evidence base of arts organisations working in North Liverpool, it nonetheless delivered high quality training and professional development to arts and community workers working in some of the most demanding parts in the city. Its impact on the skills and knowledge of those who took part was substantial and, in some cases, transformative. It equipped them with a much stronger basis for undertaking evaluation work in future and helped organisations to put in place new evaluation policies, protocols and methods.

It also helped them produce evaluation reports of a higher standard and led to the creation of an online evaluation resource that will continue to develop under LARC's future management. Finally, it has led to some important learning for LARC members about how evaluation might be approached in future.

1 PROGRAMME CONCEPT AND PLANNING

1.1 Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium

Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium (LARC) is a partnership between the Bluecoat, FACT, Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Tate Liverpool and the Unity Theatre. (National Museums Liverpool was a member of the consortium but left in 2010; NML had little engagement with the North Liverpool Evaluation Programme, which was not affected by this change.)

LARC aims to strengthen the place of the arts in regeneration by coordinating the efforts of partners and other cultural organisations and building partnerships with local authorities, health care providers, schools and colleges, registered social landlords and others.

1.2 The LARC Thrive programme

LARC has secured substantial funding for its work, including £1.34 million through Arts Council England's Thrive programme. This was launched in 2006 as a way to encourage partnership, innovation and value for money in the arts sector in a similar initiative to the Treasury's 'Invest to Save' budget. The Arts Council described Thrive as 'a systematic approach to developing organisational performance in order to build capacity to respond to and influence a rapidly changing environment'.² Five aims were proposed:

1. 'To support the development of arts organisations which are flexible, adaptable and fit for purpose.
2. To provide arts organisations with a unique opportunity to develop and change.
3. To improve decision making and leadership within the sector.
4. To enable the arts infrastructure to continuously improve.
5. To strengthen the arts sector.'

The Arts Council made 22 Thrive awards, to a total of £14.2 million. LARC was the largest single grant, receiving £1.34 million to 'test out a new model for embedding the arts and cultural sectors in the processes of social and economic renewal'.³ This aim was to be achieved through three objectives:

- i) 'To develop the role of the cultural sector in civic leadership;

- ii) To create a more audience and people friendly city centre; and
- iii) To research and develop new models of delivery in arts-led regeneration, with a focus on North Liverpool’.

1.3 LARC’s North Liverpool Programme

While much of LARC’s work aims to strengthen cultural leadership and the city centre’s attractiveness (in the context of Liverpool’s role as European Capital of Culture in 2008) the consortium also recognised the need to connect these high profile activities with the city’s regeneration and arts engagement in communities. The third objective therefore aimed to identify new approaches to arts-led regeneration, with a particular commitment to supporting small and community based organisations that were not members of the consortium itself.

LARC focused this part of its Thrive work on the North Liverpool wards of Anfield, County, Everton and Kirkdale. These are close to the city centre but experience some of Britain’s highest deprivation while the level of existing arts outreach work here was low in comparison with some other areas in the city.

LARC’s business plan set out objectives through which the Thrive programme aimed to bring about a change in the effectiveness of the arts in responding to the challenges faced by North Liverpool. The most important of these were the development of:

- **‘A coordinated planning approach**, establishing a new model for cultural organisations to work together in contributing to regeneration of a specific geographic area.
- **Regular dialogue with key agencies** operating in North Liverpool to ensure a clear understanding of their priorities and how the cultural sector can address these
- **A research programme** to draw together key findings from existing social and economic research, and to map current cultural activity in North Liverpool.
- **The delivery of a series of capacity building initiatives** with cultural and community practitioners working in the area, and the creation of a skills development programme for local people, through cultural activity.
- **A shared evaluation programme**, aiming to provide useful evidence on the social impact of cultural engagement, and also to develop evaluation skills within the cultural sector’.

LARC’s work in North Liverpool involved a range of initiatives undertaken collectively and by its members individually. Among the latter, notable examples include the Liverpool Philharmonic’s ‘In Harmony’ schools music programme and the Everyman

& Playhouse's community theatre programme, while the former include networking opportunities and a fundraising capacity building programme for small organisations. It also included the evaluation support programme mentioned in the final point above and which is reported on here.

It is important to note at this point that, while the North Liverpool work of individual organisations focused on delivery of cultural programmes with wider social goals, LARC's support had to focus on the organisational development and capacity building goals of the ACE Thrive programme, from which the funding was derived.

In other words, any community benefits had to be secured as a result of the improved performance of cultural organisations rather than through direct service provision by LARC. While this was an appropriate approach to strengthening cultural organisations (and especially the smaller, community based groups with little access to funding or professional development), it meant that delivery of LARC's wider objectives was not in its own hands. Distinguishing between the delivery of outputs by LARC and any resulting outcomes by the organisations in which it was investing is therefore very difficult in terms of accounting for the programme's results.

1.4 The North Liverpool evaluation programme

The LARC brief and recruitment

The evaluation support programme was established as a stand-alone project within LARC's work in North Liverpool. A detailed brief for potential contractors was advertised in February 2009, and described the programme as follows:

'The intention is to provide **external evaluation support** to a group of cultural organisations working in and around North Liverpool, producing evaluation reports on projects undertaken in the period April/May 2009 through to June 2010.

Alongside the evaluation studies, the consultants will work with the project advisor, Gerri Moriarty to provide **evaluation skills development support** both to the participating organisations, and to other organisations associated with the Thrive programme in North Liverpool. This could be in the form of **a series of meetings/seminars, or through a one to one approach.**

At the end of the process, it is intended that there should be a set of **documentation demonstrating how the cultural projects have addressed local and national governmental priorities**, e.g. Liverpool First's Sustainable Communities Plan, or national policy directives such as Every Child Matters.

It is also intended that the process should help to **create a system of evaluation** that could eventually be adapted and used by a range of organisations to record and analyse impacts of cultural programming after the completion of the programme in late 2010.

The projects to be evaluated are intended to cover a range of art forms and types of intervention, and to involve some LARC partners and some of the smaller organisations working in North Liverpool'.⁴

The brief set out very detailed plans for what was expected, including a timetable for a series of seminars and proposals for different levels of engagement by the various arts organisations. Various other requirements were specified including that 'the evaluation approach is consistent with the work of Impacts 08, and does not duplicate or repeat any of the work of Impacts 08'.⁵

The evaluation team

The tenders were submitted in March 2009 and a team led by François Matarasso was chosen to deliver the programme following interviews held in April. The other members were Professor Helen Simons, of Southampton University, as academic advisor, and Rebecca Lee, working as project assistant. The team also proposed to invite Eugene van Erven, from the Community Arts Lab and the University of Utrecht in Holland, to visit Liverpool and give an external perspective on the work.⁶

The evaluation plan and revised objectives

Following acceptance of their tender, the team prepared a full evaluation plan, based on the consultancy brief and further discussions with LARC officers. This set the following aim and objectives for the evaluation support programme:

'The aim of the project is to provide evaluation support to a group of arts and community organizations working to support regeneration in North Liverpool, by:

- Producing written evaluation material appropriate to community-based arts activity for use by the participating organisations in Liverpool;
- Providing formal and informal evaluation training for the core group and others;
- Guiding, supporting and reviewing the evaluation of the core projects;
- Analysing and testing evaluation data and writing reports on the results;
- Producing a final evaluation toolkit and project report.

An assessment of the extent to which these objectives were fulfilled is in Part Four, with an analysis of the factors that influenced the programme's development.

Programme stages and timing

In addition to the revised aim and objectives, the evaluation plan set out a timetable divided into four principal stages of work. It proposed 8 seminars and workshops rather than the four originally anticipated in the brief, and re-imagined the evaluation toolkit as an online resource. The planned programme of work was as follows:

1 Preparation *June – October 2009*

The first phase of the programme included introductory meetings with all the organisations who had expressed an interest in taking part and the first public seminar, which took place in July 2009, and was attended by about 45 people. Follow up meetings were also planned with those organisations that were to be part of the core group (see 'Levels of engagement' below).

2 Piloting *October – December 2009*

During the second phase, core group organisations would draft evaluation plans and begin piloting some of the ideas and methods they were being introduced to through the training sessions and one to one support. It was agreed with LARC that an online evaluation resource would be most appropriate because it could be easily updated and would be accessible to all the participants from their computer terminals. Work then began on the creation of a dedicated Wiki site for the project to which the core group had access; adding and editing content was confined to the evaluation team itself at this stage.

3 Evaluating *January – June 2010*

The third stage was intended to see the core group organisations undertaking an evaluation of a project or series of activities, using the methods outlined in the July 2009 workshop and in subsequent one-to-one sessions and core group activities. In the event, it became apparent to the team during stage two that this was the area where many organisations would struggle to achieve what LARC anticipated. The reasons for this, which included capacity, resources, organisational culture and timing, are discussed in more detail in Part Four below.

4 Reporting *July – December 2010*

The final stage of the programme was intended to focus on reviewing and advising on the evaluation reports produced by core group organisations and drawing up an overall programme report (i.e. the present document). Collective Encounters, Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse Theatre, Merseyside Dance Initiative and the Rotunda produced evaluation reports for public sector funders, while internal reporting was completed by other organisations including Bluecoat, Tate and the

Comedy Trust. However, this work is best understood as an evolution of existing practice, albeit in some cases a significant one. It was not such a qualitatively different form of reporting that it could be reasonably expected to transform perceptions of the value of arts practice among public service partners not already supportive of arts practice.

Although the evaluation plan was very precise – perhaps, in hindsight, too much so – it became clear quite early that the timetable was slipping and that even core group organisations were unlikely to meet LARC’s expectations of the programme. The evaluation team reported these concerns to the project steering group in October 2009 and the decision was taken to adopt a more responsive and pragmatic approach that supported individual organisations as and when needed. Parts Two and Three of this report set out what was done to achieve that.

Levels of engagement

The original LARC brief proposed three levels of engagement for organisations and individuals wishing to be involved in the evaluation programme:

- **Core partners** would undertake a supported evaluation that would be featured as a case study in the final report;
- **Associate partners** would not commit to undertaking a supported evaluation, but they would take part in the principal workshops and other activities;
- **Informed partners** would be invited to the main seminars and encouraged to use the evaluation tools provided.

In the event, although there were different degrees of engagement in the programme, in practice reflecting these distinctions, the relationships were not formalised. Some organisations effectively moved between these categories at different points in the process according to the individuals concerned and the fluctuating levels of their need and resources.

1.5 ‘Telling Stories: The arts and wellbeing in North Liverpool’

By the autumn of 2009, it was clear to the evaluation team that LARC’s ambition of helping its members and other organisations produce new evaluation material at a level that would significantly influence the public sector environment in the city was unlikely to be realised. The existing level of expertise in evaluation among the groups involved, the resources and capacity of the organisations most engaged in the pro-

gramme, and the limited engagement among the larger organisations all made this an unrealistic goal for the self-evaluation programme.

However, the team recognised the need to produce a document to highlight the work being done in North Liverpool by LARC and other organisations. Limited resources meant that this could not be a conventional evaluation; such a step would in any case risk undermining the work that some organisations were doing through the evaluation programme. The response was to create a narrative report, which used the framework of the current Liverpool Year of Health and Wellbeing⁷ (a project led by the Primary Care Trust in Partnership with the City Council and other civil society representatives) to tell individual stories of the difference that the arts can make to some people's lives.

François Matarasso and Gerri Moriarty undertook the project separately from the evaluation programme itself, although the same organisations were involved. They produced a text based on interviews with people from North Liverpool, which was published as 'Telling Stories' by LARC in December 2010. The document has been well received by the public sector audience for whom it was intended and has gone some way to achieving LARC's objective of raising awareness of the arts in North Liverpool among public sector partners.

2 THE CORE GROUP

2.1 Introduction

The evaluation support programme was conceived from the outset as combining formal training through seminars with tailored support for the organisations involved. This part of the report gives a brief account of the organisations that took the opportunity to join the core group and thus getting support from the evaluation team on live projects they were working on.

2.2 The Bluecoat

The Bluecoat is a contemporary art gallery in Liverpool city centre. Based in the historic buildings of a former school, it also houses creative industries, retail outlets, education spaces and cafés. Recently restored and extended with funding through the National Lottery, the Bluecoat was awarded National Portfolio funding by Arts Council England in March 2011 for the period to 2014-15.

Art Valley is a joint project by Bluecoat and Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse that delivers an extensive arts outreach programme in the Alt Valley area of North Liverpool. It is funded from several sources, including local Community Councils. Annie MacLean was the Art Valley Coordinator until early 2011, when she started a new post at the theatre. Annie was responsible for an ambitious programme of work with many partners and various art forms. The project received advice and guidance on evaluation throughout the course of the programme, and several different ideas were worked on. The development of an evaluation structure based around the five ways to wellbeing (used by Liverpool PCT to structure the 2010 Year of Health and Wellbeing) was a notable outcome, but no single project was evaluated using the participatory methods outlined in the training sessions.

2.3 Collective Encounters

Collective Encounters is a small company working in theatre for social change. Their productions are developed with the groups and communities whose stories they tell and involve non-professional performers with the support of professionals. Recent plays have focused on issues of health, regeneration and community safety, and they have been performed in theatres and community venues in Liverpool and be-

yond. For the first time, Collective Encounters was awarded regular funding by the Arts Council in March 2011.

Collective Encounters engaged seriously with the opportunity that the evaluation support programme offered, undertaking a comprehensive review of the company's approach to evaluation and producing policy papers and practice guidance for internal use with the help of the evaluation team. In addition, they undertook a thorough evaluation of their production about living with Alzheimer's disease, producing a substantial report on the work by the end of 2010.

2.4 The Comedy Trust

The Comedy Trust is a registered charity that runs the Liverpool Comedy Festival and other activities including community outreach through the Stand Out programme, which aims to engage young people in comedy and creativity. The focus of this work is on building confidence, creative potential and wellbeing through structured workshop activities and it is undertaken with a wide range of partners including schools and youth centres across Merseyside.

'We now spend more time talking about how we will evaluate a project. We're making it more fun.'

The Comedy Trust were able to review their approach to evaluation through the programme, developing new approaches that were more suited to the character of the sessions and the ethos of the organisation. They have not only used the new ideas and creative methods but also changed their evaluation practice more profoundly, with a greater emphasis on approaches that suit their young participants.

2.5 FACT

FACT is a leading new media organisation with a cinema and gallery space in the city centre and operating extensive outreach and community programmes throughout Liverpool. A founder member of LARC and a recipient of regular funding from the Arts Council, FACT were accepted to the ACE National Portfolio in March 2011. The focus of the evaluation work was FACT's work with TenantSpin, a community media group which the organisation has been supporting for over a decade. Various ideas were explored in considering the evaluation needs of this work, including the possibility of using film as a medium for evaluation. In the event staff changes and other commitments meant that these were not followed through and, while FACT's work

was featured in the *Telling Stories* publication, no separate evaluation was done by the organisation in the context of this programme.

2.6 Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse

The Everyman & Playhouse is Liverpool's principal repertory theatre, funded by the Arts Council; they work in two buildings and through extensive outreach work. The outreach programme includes community tours, devised productions and non-theatre work, such as the Art Valley project undertaken with Bluecoat.

*'The PCT's first thought, when they heard we were working with Francois, was that we'd be able to deliver a lot of hard data. However, using the other methods has meant that we could create good statistical information that would go with the narrative. We now have so much information that we're preparing a concise version of the report for the PCT.'*⁸

After exploring several possibilities, the main focus of the evaluation was a very large youth programme delivered by the theatre in partnership with the Primary Care Trust and others. This centred on a visit to Liverpool by Afroreggae, a Brazilian music, dance and arts group, who ran workshops leading to performances during August 2010. The project involved up to 1,000 young people, in a very open and informal process, which presented big challenges for evaluation. However, using some imaginative approaches to observation, quantitative data analysis and interviews, a thorough report was produced by the theatre.

2.7 Liverpool Film Academy

Liverpool Film Academy is an educational trust based in Kirkdale, North Liverpool that provides training for young people interested in film, television and new media. Working with schools and other partners, they engage with issues that affect young people, producing educational films through a community process. The organisation used the evaluation team's support to review its approach to evaluation, to improve skills and knowledge and develop new resources including questionnaires appropriate for its users. The Film Academy did not undertake an evaluation project within the framework of the programme.

2.8 Merseyside Dance Initiative

Merseyside Dance Initiative (MDI) is the dance development agency for Liverpool and the wider region, focusing on professional development, community and education work and advocacy for dance. MDI is also a significant dance promoter, often working in partnership with other organisations.

MDI used the programme's support to evaluate 50 Moves, a regular workshop and performance group for older people. The evaluation focused on a project led by Taciturn Dance Company in collaboration with the Growing Older Disgracefully (GODs) dance group that led to a performance at the Liverpool Playhouse on 6 March 2010. The evaluation included physical assessments of memory and flexibility at the start and at the end of the project, observations and interviews and produced a thorough report on the programme's outcomes. The evaluation team supported the process and advised on and edited the final report.

2.9 Rotunda Community College

Rotunda Community College is a well-established community organisation based in North Liverpool, which provides life long learning opportunities for people of all ages. Liverpool Community College, the Adult Learning Service and the Workers' Education Association all support the College, which offers a wide range of courses, not only in the arts. The College drew on the evaluation programme to support evaluation of its work with adults funded through the government's Learning Revolution programme. This was such a positive experience that they have gone on to make wider changes in their evaluation work, including setting up a shared drive on the computer system with evaluation resources that can be adapted to suit different situations and needs.

2.10 Tate Liverpool

Tate Liverpool is one of the two non-metropolitan galleries run by Tate, based in the Albert Dock and providing an international programme of contemporary art from within and beyond the gallery's own collections. Tate Liverpool has an active education and community outreach programme and is involved with schools work in North Liverpool and elsewhere. The gallery drew on the advice and guidance of the team to plan the evaluation of an ambitious programme to use artists to support children's involvement in their decision-making about their school's summer programmes.

3 TRAINING AND SUPPORT PROGRAMME

3.1 Introduction

As explained above, the evaluation support programme combined one-to-one support with formal training and access to written material and other resources. This part of the report describes the seminars and workshops and the evaluation support materials that are, in some senses, the programme outputs.

3.2 Seminars

Two principal public seminars were delivered for the North Liverpool evaluation support programme, and a presentation was also made to a meeting of the LARC chief executives and others in the context of a wider review of evaluation programmes.

Seminar 1: Participatory Evaluation

14 July 2009

*'I thought it was a really good thing. Our whole outlook on evaluation was changed in an instant. We went away with loads of new ideas.'*⁹

The first seminar was a well-attended event at the League of Welldoers, the city's oldest independent charity, based in the heart of North Liverpool. The seminar was a full day, from 10am to 4.00pm, and covered the following areas through a mix of workshop activities, presentations and discussions:

- Experiences of evaluation
- The purpose of evaluation
- Participatory evaluation
- Planning and evaluation
- Setting an aim and objectives
- The ethics of evaluation
- Evaluation methods

The objective was to introduce an approach to participatory evaluation that integrated learning and planning in a transparent way based on the values of socially engaged arts practice. The seminar also served to introduce people to the programme, begin building shared expectations and identify people's existing knowledge and experience.

The participants' response to the seminar was generally very positive. ERS undertook an independent evaluation of the seminar for LARC, using a questionnaire; (this was not done for the remaining activities in the programme). They reported that:

'59% of respondents rated improvement in their understanding as a result of the Workshop as '8' or higher, illustrating that the Workshop had, to a large extent, improved the understanding of the purpose and value of evaluation of the majority of respondents.'¹⁰

At the end of the seminar, eight organisations had expressed an interest in becoming a core partner in the programme, a figure that was broadly reflected in what happened over the following months. A further 16 people said that they wished to 'keep closely in touch with the process' and 25 wanted to come 'to another seminar like this one on evaluation and [...] receive any toolkits and reports that may come out of the evaluation programme'. In the event, fewer of these people stayed in touch with the programme, although attendance at the second public seminar, in January 2010, was comparable.

Reflecting on this seminar in February 2011, members of the core group remained very positive about the event that had set the tone for the programme:

*'It did set out the concepts, the conceptual framework. On the day it felt like too much, but now I don't think that.'*¹¹

*'The ethics stood out for me that day. I realised that we should maybe do it in a different way, or approach it from a different angle. It's something we still look at now, when we're evaluating.'*¹²

*'It showed that evaluation is for us [and the importance of] differentiating between marketing, evaluation or advocacy.'*¹³

With hindsight, two lessons can be drawn from this seminar. First, as implied in one of the comments above, it probably sought to do too much in one day: the agenda was very full and the pace set was demanding. Some people were excited by that and became very engaged with the programme, but others may have felt it was asking too much. A lower-key introduction might have been more appropriate.

Secondly, the timing was unfortunate, since it took place just before the summer holidays and this may have contributed to a sense of lost momentum by late September when organisations were once more at full strength and contemplating their autumn programmes. This might have been avoided if it had been possible to contact people straight after the seminar and begin reviewing evaluation needs and looking at projects to include in the programme.

Seminar 2: Evidence for the impact of culture

14 January 2010

The second public seminar was held at Tate Liverpool, on 14 January 2010 and brought together a wide range of cultural actors and public sector representatives from the city. The purpose was to examine some assumptions widely held in the cultural sector about why evaluation is important and how to do it, and to test them against the expressed needs of some of the public sector professionals to whom arts reports are often submitted. A panel of speakers from the Primary Care Trust, Liverpool City Council and Arena Housing was a cornerstone of the event, and many of the participants found this a very illuminating experience:

*'Hearing the voices of people who fund and commission was really helpful – you don't often hear them.'*¹⁴

*'Some of them said, "You're not making the right argument to me". It shows that there is a reframing about our work that we need to do.'*¹⁵

The seminar also considered some of the problems arising from the false ideas that many people had about the expectations of commissioners, including:

- Evaluation processes were often burdensome and damaging to the arts process;
- It tended to focus on the wrong questions – whether there was an 'impact', rather than what kinds of change result from which kinds of interventions and why;
- It produced reports that were often ineffective at engaging partners;
- Because of a focus on accountability and advocacy, evaluation tended to produce limited learning and change within the arts organisations involved.

In response to these challenges, it was proposed that organisations should:

- Develop a formal evaluation policy to guide what, when and why they evaluated;
- Make a clear distinction between monitoring (to meet the requirements of accountability) and evaluation (to learn and improve practice);
- Develop a dialogue with funders to understand better what they want to know
- Focus on workable methods of integrating planning and evaluation; and
- Focus less on *whether* there was an impact and more on *how* it came about.

Once again the seminar produced much positive feedback and raised further interest in the programme. However, some participants found it difficult to build on this enthusiasm once back in the workplace where the demands of service delivery became dominant; the reasons for this are considered in Part Four of the report.

3.3 Core group training programme

The core group organisations received four training workshops between October 2009 and February 2011. Attendance was between 10 and 20 people each session, and participation was lively and interactive with a mix of informal presentations of methods and ideas, practical exercises and sharing experiences.

Core group workshop 1: Evaluation methods

17 November 2009

The first core group workshop was held at the Bluecoat on 17 November 2009 and looked at evaluation methods. The session involved presentations and practical exercises exploring three key evaluation techniques:

1 Interviewing and active listening

Focusing on close attention to what another person said, participants worked in pairs observed by colleagues who then provided their own responses to what they had observed. Attention was paid to language, to non-verbal signals and communication, and to how the interviewer themselves could affect – consciously and unconsciously – the tone and direction of a conversation. In subsequent discussion, the participants felt that this was a particularly valuable exercise, making them much more aware of the richness of a simple conversation and its potential to help them learn about the reception of their work.

*'We're often not listening properly; we're expecting to hear something so we don't listen to what is actually said.'*¹⁶

2 Observing, interpreting and documenting

The second part of the day looked at observation itself, understood as a crucial skill for participatory arts work. Participants looked at workshop photographs and discussed how what was shown might be understood, taking account of potential ambiguities and how untested observation could lead to misleading interpretations. However, a structured observation (e.g. looking at how a group of young people interacted with one another) tested by other methods such as interviews and questionnaires, could be an effective foundation of evaluation.

*'It has changed our working. We have more creative ways of working. We don't use the same boring systems or questions now when we're evaluating with children.'*¹⁷

3 Using questionnaires

The third part of the day considered the value of questionnaires, through close examination of examples both from participants' organisations and provided by the evaluation team. It looked at understandability and the need for piloting, the

risks of excessive length, signalling 'correct' or desired answers and the relationship between closed questions (with a limited choice of tick-box answers) and open questions (with space in which to write freely). The session also explored different ways of administering questionnaires (for instance as a structured interview for people with limited language skills) and timing of their use.

*'We scrapped our questionnaires for kids. Now we're using Post It notes on the wall at the end of sessions and we've had comments we've never had before. We also use interviews too, where people can talk openly.'*¹⁸

This workshop, like all those in the programme, was followed by time for one-to-one discussions with core group members about their evaluation projects. In these they could ask further questions about content, get advice about their evaluation work and discuss how to use some of the ideas and techniques presented.

The workshop was very well received and influenced the evaluation practice of the core group members. In the final core group meeting, 16 months later, participants reflected on some of the key learning outcomes of the workshop:

*'We've moved away too [from what we were doing] and evaluations are more like focus groups. I listen and record like that. You get more interesting information.'*¹⁹

*'We had a really nice tea party for our elders project evaluation. People chatted in a very different way. We did get a lot of responses outside of the norm.'*²⁰

Participants noted the danger of creating a cosy atmosphere in such discussions but thought they could avoid it by retaining a critical distance and focusing on how feedback sessions could improve practice.

The group discussed the difficulty of staying focused on real knowledge about the value of the arts when limited time and funders' expectations could lead to simplistic reporting. On the other hand, the dangerous allure of perfection, which could mean knowledge was lost in a mass of inassimilable information, was also acknowledged: an evaluation should be appropriate to the needs of the project and no more.

Core group workshop 2: Creative approaches to evaluation 22 March 2010

The second core group workshop took place on 22 March 2010 in a room at the Metropolitan Cathedral on Mount Pleasant. It covered two contrasting issues: logical frameworks and creative evaluation methods.

The work on logical frameworks introduced people to a structure widely used by international aid and development agencies to monitor their programmes. It was

drawn on because it complemented the planning and evaluation cycle outlined at the first seminar, nine months earlier, but which the core group members had not yet used. The evaluation team were concerned that as a result there was limited connection between project planning and the design of evaluation, a weakness both in terms of evaluation and of developmental practice; (this question is discussed further in Part Four).

The rest of the workshop explored how creative methods could be used to learn about people's responses to situations and experiences. Images, writing, physical action and similar techniques were introduced through practical exercises. Although the workshop was the least well attended, with only 10 participants, those who came enjoyed learning about ideas that connected directly with their artistic practice and made efforts to explore them in their subsequent evaluation work:

*'For one of our projects, we asked young people to draw a picture in session one [...]; they drew a picture again at the end and were invited to compare them. It was really good for them as well as us. We did learn a lot from their starting point pictures – we got to know them.'*²¹

During this workshop, participants also learnt a way of testing how much any one individual's views reflected those of the group as a whole, with each person's responses to a question being considered by everyone. Since the evaluation programme had reached a mid-way point, the opportunity was taken to do the exercise focusing on the programme itself. To the question 'What has been the best aspect of the programme so far?', the individual responses that most reflected the views of the group were (in priority order):

'I have found it most valuable to have been given the space/time/input of experience to evaluate the evaluation methods and question and forced/given to think "why" not just do things the way I always have done.'

'Having focused time to really think about and discuss evaluation with other interested people.'

'Learning to focus/be selective, to have an overall framework and not [to] evaluate everything.'

'The knowledge of different methods, terms and understanding of evaluation and monitoring – beneficial to me as I'm new(ish) to my role.'

'Understanding the difference between evaluation and reporting.'

The exercise was also used to test how people felt the programme might be improved or how they could get more out of it. The responses suggested that the main problem people were experiencing was in taking the knowledge and ideas that they were getting from the workshops and seminars and applying them consistently in their everyday practice. Several people felt that it was difficult *'to pass the learning on to the rest of your organisation'*, while others wanted to see *'a more consolidated approach to evaluation in our organisation as a whole and across LARC'*.

No suggestions were made about how the programme itself could meet their needs more effectively, but the context in which they were trying to apply its learning remained a challenge in subsequent months.

Core group workshop 3: Analysis, reporting & advocacy 3 December 2010

The focus of the programme in the period after the March workshop was on supporting core group members with their evaluation work and so the next workshop, on analysing and reporting data, was planned for the autumn, once again at the Bluecoat. It dealt with the interpretation and presentation of both quantitative and qualitative data, and how evaluation results can be presented to different audiences.

Quantitative data

The first session looked at how to analyse, understand and present quantitative data obtained through attendance records, questionnaire results, surveys and similar tools. The group considered how different types of chart, graph and table could help or hinder understanding by looking at published examples. They also discussed how the interpretations different people made could reflect their own starting assumptions and expectations. For example, the concept of a 'disappointing' result may say more about the expectations of the person reporting it than about the data itself, which simply reports what has occurred.

Qualitative data

The second session dealt with the interpretation of qualitative data gathered through interviews, creative tools and other non-standardised methods. It made a distinction between analysis, which looks for explanations arising from patterns in data, and interpretation, which is more intuitive, allowing for insights through metaphor and lateral thinking, and is more able to accommodate ambiguity and different understandings. Participants looked at an interview transcript and discussed how they would analyse and interpret the recorded text. They also looked at a series of statements made by audience members at an art event and discussed the possible meanings of the differing experiences that people reported.

Reporting

The final session considered the uses of reports, taking into account different audiences and ways of communicating results. People discussed whether a written report was always the best way to report given the purpose and audience in question. Formal reports were appropriate ways of accounting to a funder and providing a record of the work. But in other circumstances a narrative depicted by photographs or a film, or simply a meeting or conversation would be more effective ways of getting people to think about the outcomes of a project. One way round the problem of reporting differently to different audiences was to create a central report 'resource' from which different elements could then be extracted to create smaller versions specific to the needs of different audiences.

The core group members responded positively to the ideas and methods in this workshop, which coincided for several of them with a point in their own evaluations where the content was directly relevant to their work.

Core group workshop 4: Reflection and consolidating learning

The final core group workshop was held at the Bluecoat on 21 February 2011. A full day session, it was an opportunity to reflect on what had been learned and to look at how to build on the experiences. Participants discussed each aspect of the training programme in turn, sharing experiences and describing their organisation's evaluation work through the programme.

The core group as a whole valued the opportunity of working on evaluation with peers that the LARC programme had enabled; one person reflected a general view when she said that she specially valued:

*'The chance to get together with others and learn about what they are doing and why, feeling like we can trust our own knowledge yet in the same instance learning some new ways of thinking that may (or may not) totally change our thinking and practice.'*²²

In keeping with other seminars some evaluation methods were used as exercises in this process. For example, people were asked to speak about their experiences in pairs, at the end of which one person would report back on what they had just been told, with the person whose views were being reported commenting on the interpretation of what they had said at the end. From these discussions, it was clear that the members of the core group had gained a good deal of confidence about evaluation as a result of their involvement.

'This project has transformed [my] thinking about evaluation – taken it out of the box. [I] now know you just need simple things, and that working creatively is effective.'

Several people spoke about no longer feeling that they should (or could) 'prove' the worth of their programmes but that developing an understanding dialogue with partners was more realistic and useful. Using good evaluation methods, based on sound understanding of concepts and principles, was the best way of doing that, but in the end, the most important thing was to be able to guide the practice of their organisations through better evaluation.

*'[I have] learnt more about having the courage to find out what goes wrong. Having the ability to say what goes wrong is the best way to learn and make those changes in the future.'*²³

3.4 Evaluation materials

The LARC Wiki

At an early stage in the process, the evaluation team proposed that, rather than producing a simple folder of evaluation handouts and resources, it would be more useful to build a website for this material. The advantages to this approach include:

- Making the resources more easily accessible and available;
- Ensuring they can be updated, so everyone is working from the latest version;
- Ease of expansion, even after the life of the project;
- The site can eventually include evaluation reports and other material.

It was also noted that paper materials are expensive to produce, resource-hungry and tend to be left on shelves; it was felt that a web resource was more likely to be used if it could be accessed directly from people's own workstations.

It was decided to use a Wiki structure rather than any other form of website because an interactive tool offered the greatest future potential for both the programme and its resources. LARC and the core group members could eventually add their own material to the site, thus taking ownership of the process and enriching the knowledge held. Given the visual and conceptual familiarity of Wikipedia, it was decided to adopt the same design. With the agreement of LARC and the steering group, Eco Consulting was sub-contracted to design, host and manage the Wiki, which has been online since January 2010 at <http://larcwiki.ecoconsulting.co.uk/>.

By April 2011, web pages on the following subjects had been created:

- Aim and objectives
- Analysing and interpreting data
- Analysing data
- Assessing artistic quality
- Collecting data
- Core Group Workshops
- Creative methods
- Downloadable resources
- Ethical issues
- Evaluation
- Evaluation methods
- External evaluation
- Guidance
- Informal means of gaining feedback
- Informal methods
- Interactive methods
- Internal evaluation
- Judgements
- Monitoring
- Participatory evaluation
- Performance indicators
- Planning and Evaluation Cycle
- Principles of project evaluation
- Questionnaires
- Reasons for evaluation
- Reporting
- Stakeholders
- Strategies for Making Sense
- Using documents
- Word-based and documentary methods

In addition to this content, a number of other pages about LARC, the evaluation programme and the core partners were also added to the site, as well as some images and a range of downloadable documents, including the worksheets and notes prepared for the different workshops.

The LARC Wiki was demonstrated at the core group seminars in March 2010 and February 2011, but take up has been low. It is not clear why, though it is probably related to the difficulties participants had in making time for evaluation (discussed in Part Four) rather than the online format itself. The rationale for this approach still seems sound. Since one advantage of online resources is that they can continue to be available and to grow and adapt over time, it is to be hoped that this work will develop in future.

Workshop notes

Notes and handouts were produced for all the workshops, during the course of the programme. These included copies of the presentations, information sheets on particular topics and notes of workshop discussions circulated after the sessions. These handouts and other notes have been included in the material on the LARC Wiki.

4 OUTCOMES AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This part of the report provides our assessment of the extent to which the programme's intended outcomes have been achieved, followed by an analysis of the reasons for the nature and extent of the progress reported. The assessment refers to the revised objectives agreed with LARC in July 2009 and set out in the evaluation plan. The following sections consider each of the five objectives in turn.

4.2 Objective 1: Evaluation materials

Producing written evaluation material appropriate to community-based arts activity for use by the participating organisations in Liverpool

At the outset, the programme was expected to produce a toolkit for evaluation, but neither form nor content was specified. Early work was initially produced in the form of handouts for the seminars and workshops, which provided a detailed reference to the material covered in the sessions.

*'You need loads of ways of being able to evaluate; need a bank of resources and evaluation tools so you can do a good evaluation.'*²⁴

Subsequently, and with the agreement of LARC and the programme steering group, this was developed in the form of the Wiki site, and that has been operational since early in 2010. The Wiki fulfils the function of an evaluation toolkit, and it provides extensive material that arts organisations work in Liverpool can access and download.

*'It's good to have a bank of resources. If you've got those templates, you can use and re-use them – it makes life easier.'*²⁵

At the same time, the use of this resource by the organisations involved in the programme has been limited, though this is probably not related to the online format. The participants have the necessary skills, knowledge and resources to use the Wiki and were generally enthusiastic about this approach to providing information. The simplest explanation for the low take up of the online toolkit is that, as with other aspects of the programme, and for different reasons according to whether they were large or small organisations, participants struggled to maintain a focus on evaluation under the pressure of everyday project delivery.

4.3 Objective 2: Evaluation training programme

Providing formal and informal evaluation training for the core group and others

The evaluation programme was delivered according to the plan with four core group workshops and two public seminars being provided during the period, as well as a presentation to LARC chief executives and other staff. There were 40 to 50 participants in each of the public seminars, while the core group workshops averaged a dozen attenders. The programme was well received by participants, as evidenced both by the external evaluation by ERS and the internal processes used by the team.

*'The programme [...] has radically changed the way I think about and understand evaluation.'*²⁶

The content of the training programme was partly theoretical and, despite the team's focus on the practical aspects of these abstract ideas, on some occasions and for some participants this was less helpful. On the other hand, others had considerable knowledge of evaluation practice and were keen to go deeper. On balance, a more modular approach might have been helpful, so that people could take their interest to the level that suited them best, though this was achieved in other ways through one-to-one support.

4.4 Objective 3: Guidance and support

Guiding, supporting and reviewing the evaluation of the core projects

One-to-one support was provided to at least 10 organisations during the period of the programme; (in addition to the nine listed in Part Two above, advice was also provided to organisations such as the Reader Organisation that did not become part of the core group).

Support was given in face-to-face meetings and visits, telephone calls and by email. Existing methods and tools for evaluation, such as questionnaires, were reviewed and revised. All the core group members were encouraged to develop short evaluation plans for their projects and a template provided for this, but only one or two managed to write an outline of what they intended to do. But a good deal of time was also spent simply talking through projects, helping people to see how their work could be planned and structured so that it would be easier to evaluate.

With one or two exceptions, it was the smaller, community-based cultural organisations that benefited most from this support, with the effects being most evident for Collective Encounters, The Rotunda Community College and The Comedy Trust. While some of the larger organisations, such as the Everyman & Playhouse and

Tate, were strong members of the core group who produced good evaluation work, the impact on them was necessarily less. The small groups had most to learn, most to gain and were most able to change their practice or even policy. The larger organisations that did take part in the programme did so through their community and outreach work; consequently, and despite its value to that strand of work, the programme had little if any impact on the institution as a whole.

But there was also a more fundamental obstacle to using the approach proposed by the evaluation team. As already described, this was based on integration of project planning and evaluation so that the aim and objectives were clearly articulated from the outset and a theoretical link had been made between the proposed activities and their intended outcomes. In practice, it became apparent that the planning processes being used were not adequate to enable this to happen.

First, where written plans existed – typically as submitted to funding bodies in grant applications – their objectives were often general and aspirational. There was rarely a theory of change showing why a project could reasonably be expected to achieve its anticipated outcomes.

Secondly, where plans existed, they tended not to be a practical guide during delivery, so any link between them and what happened on the ground was a matter for the artists and project workers involved. Since, especially in the larger organisations, those who had written a plan or an application were not always directly involved in delivering the resulting project – especially as more individuals and organisations became involved once a project went ‘live’ – the connection between theory and action could be further weakened. This issue is considered further in section 4.8 below.

4.5 Objective 4: Evaluation reports

Analysing and testing evaluation data and writing reports on the results

This was the area where the programme most evidently failed to achieve its original ambitions. About half the organisations produced evaluation reports on their work and not all of those were intended for external use. Where a funder required a report on a specific programme, there was obviously a strong imperative to produce something that satisfied the grant conditions. Where this was not the case, there was less pressure and other demands tended to take precedence.

The small organisations worked very hard to achieve good outcomes from a highly productive model, but in most cases it left little time for formal reflection and reporting. Where there was no immediate or obvious audience for that reporting, it is

understandable that motivation, which in principle was high, flagged and time was given to more urgent demands such as fundraising. The same situation was broadly true of the community, education and outreach teams of the larger organisations, which were equally productive in terms of the range and scale of their work, but similarly pressured when it came to finding time for reflection and evaluation.

'I think my job needs more time for just thinking. It's a different kind of evaluation; a way of thinking, "this is how I can share it with other people.'²⁷

Since funders do not generally give additional funds to cover the cost of evaluation, though they normally require it, project budgets have to make allowance for it, resulting in often nominal figures – perhaps a thousand pounds or two – that are not sufficient to pay for high quality external evaluation nor very meaningful in terms of internal costs. This reflects part of a wider problem about the expectations of funding bodies and a widespread lack of distinction between monitoring, which should be universal, and evaluation, for which more nuanced approaches are possible.

With hindsight, it seems that LARC's original expectations were too high in this area. The level of existing knowledge of evaluation and the various pressures under which the participating organisations work made it unrealistic to expect that it would be possible to produce an increase in quality of evaluation of the kind hoped for at the outset. After all, the challenges of evaluating the outcomes of the arts with rigour, honesty and imagination have been a matter of debate for over two decades, or, depending on one's perspective, over two millennia.

4.6 Objective 5: A toolkit and project report

Producing a final evaluation toolkit and project report

The development and content of the online toolkit have been sufficiently considered already; and, while this report may not be quite what was originally anticipated, the lessons drawn from the programme's experience are worth considering in future and have been summarised in the form of recommendations.

4.7 Analysis of the progress made

Achievements

It will be evident from this summary that the programme only partly achieved its objectives and this is disappointing, at least in relation to the high ambitions set for the work. However, it did have a substantial effect on the evaluation skills and know-

ledge of those who took part. Indeed, as might be expected with any learning programme, those who put most in got the most from it and it is fair to say that it had a transformational impact for some of these people:

*'It has been a very positive learning curve for me. It has been a real challenge and my skills and understanding have grown a great deal. I've very much appreciated the opportunity and it's been the best CPD I've ever undertaken.'*²⁸

Where they are leaders, or where the organisations are small, the effects on how these people plan, deliver and learn from their work have been substantial:

*'Before, we used a standard evaluation form for every programme but now we recognize that each programme is different as are the needs of the young people and client, this is reflected in the evaluation method we might use.'*²⁹

Several organisations, including Merseyside Dance Initiative, Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse Theatres, The Rotunda and Collective Encounters, produced written evaluation reports that were a real step forward on what they had done in the past, both in terms of rigour and the knowledge produced.

The programme helped a little in creating a network of cultural organisations working in North Liverpool, enabling small and voluntary groups to participate alongside staff from the major institutions. The January 2010 seminar that brought together cultural organisations and representatives of local authorities and public service providers was an important opportunity to strengthen dialogue and understanding between the sectors and was highly valued by those involved.

Weaknesses

However, progress was uneven, with some organisations being more engaged than others and some finding it difficult to implement consistently the ideas and techniques from training sessions. Attendance at seminars and workshops was uneven, which meant that people did not always have a complete understanding of the concepts and approaches being made available. As already noted, there was negligible use of the online resource, the LARC Wiki, which provides the reference materials that supported the workshops themselves.

The second major weakness was the programme's failure to produce the evidence of impact that had been anticipated by LARC. Although this was partly due to the difficulties some organisations had in finding time and resources to use the programme effectively, the principal difficulty lay in the expectation itself. As originally expressed by LARC, the programme was to ['create a body of evidence demonstrat-](#)

ing the impact that can be achieved by engagement in cultural activities'. This was the first objective listed but, since the intention was to develop the evaluation skills of people running projects in North Liverpool so that they could themselves produce more robust and effective evaluation reports, this would have fitted more naturally as the last of the three objectives in the brief. Its placement at the head of the list suggests that this evidence of impact was the commissioners' primary focus and that using capacity building as a method to secure it was the result of applying organisational development funds to that purpose. Although the problem was circumvented by the work that produced *Telling Stories*, that publication itself acknowledged that the evaluation work of the participating organisations was not going to result in a new body of evidence.

The important point here – and one of wider relevance than the present study – is that expectations of what evaluation can do, how and in what ways, are sometimes significantly misplaced in the arts sector, where the combination of limited public investment and high self-belief creates a culture shaped by a desire to prove worth. Such a desire is, of course, perfectly understandable and may be laudable in some respects. It becomes problematic, however, in creating confusion about the purpose and methods of evaluation and the difference between monitoring, evaluation and advocacy. In all this, the learning that might produce better practice, suffers.

4.8 Learning from the programme

Given the uneven progress made, it is necessary to look at what can be learnt from the evaluation programme. Indeed, it has often been said during the seminars that a good evaluation means that even unsuccessful projects can produce value by identifying lessons that can be applied in future. In doing that, it is as important to identify what has worked and why, as to consider the areas that didn't succeed.

Connecting project plans with evaluation

*'It's because there's not enough time, or opportunities to plan. We're not being asked to plan in a way that leads to evaluation.'*³⁰

One unexpected problem arose from the need to establish links between project planning and evaluation. This was central to the concept of participatory evaluation outlined during the first seminar in July 2009 since it is on this basis that a causal connection between the intended action and the observed outcomes can be linked by a theory of change. Each of the core group members was encouraged to begin their evaluation by drafting an evaluation plan using a simple template; although one-

to-one help was also given, only one or two plans were completed. We returned to the issue in March 2010, using a different approach – logical frameworks – in case the obstacle lay in the particular method that had been proposed. However, although core group members expressed interest in the idea, none used logical frameworks to structure their evaluation.

Why was this a problem, since in workshops and one-to-one sessions participants expressed a good understanding and appreciation of the models outlined? Our tentative conclusion, based on the discussions and observations, is that we overestimated the nature and extent of project planning itself.

In practice, many participatory art projects are supported only by basic planning, not always closely connected with plans outlined in a grant application, and that even this may be sidelined as people focus on delivery, perhaps with limited resources and facing the not always compatible expectations of many stakeholders. In other words, the problem with planning evaluation is a symptom of an underlying problem with project planning, the foundation on which it naturally sits.

If projects do not have clear, albeit simple, plans setting out their aims and objectives and how the proposed activities will enable these to be achieved, and if these plans do not actually guide the delivery of activities, then evaluation may be something of an afterthought, retrofitted as it were onto a project that is not clearly expressed.

*'I'm putting evaluation into the planning. I'm doing it bit by bit. You can't do it all at once.'*³¹

These comments are not intended to be critical: they simply observe the everyday reality that over-worked and under-resourced arts and community workers deal with all the time. The criticism, if such there is, falls properly to an arts funding system which gives a relatively low priority to community and participatory practice whilst simultaneously expecting high returns from it and therefore imposing unrealistic and inappropriate management systems in the hope of demonstrating, by association, the wider value of the arts.

Our experience of working with a wide spectrum of arts organisations in Liverpool on the evaluation of community programmes suggests that there is an urgent need for the arts funding system – and indeed the wider public sector – to rethink the basis of its approach to monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

What worked

Despite the patchy progress reported here, the programme has had its successes and those who stayed the course are very positive about what they have gained, so there are also useful lessons to be drawn out for any future work in this field.

First, there is a strong desire to learn about evaluation among arts practitioners working at a community level. They understand the need to account for their work, especially when the funding comes from non-arts sources like a housing association or a primary care trust. They see good reporting as a necessary and potentially valuable part of the grant-making process. They also mostly see the creative potential of evaluation, recognising that it is a way of introducing rigour into the reflection on practice that is central to any creative work. That rigour is demanding, of course, and different people's appetite for it, and for reflection in general, naturally varies. But most people in this field are keen to learn, recognising that they have few opportunities to build evaluation skills through normal professional development in the arts.

*'I think artists and practitioners are reflexive thinkers; they are constantly reflecting and then doing. It's an internal process they are always doing.'*³²

The prospect of evaluating projects better, more consistently and more usefully is attainable. The skills involved can be integrated into the usual practice of artists and arts workers, though not everyone need take responsibility for everything. It will often be most appropriate for a manager to take on overall responsibility so as to minimise any intrusion into the artistic process.

*'Our senior administrator has evaluation as their responsibility.'*³³

Bringing together a group of like-minded people to build a supportive network was also a good idea and one that was valued by all those involved. Being able to share and contrast experience, to learn from one another and to position oneself among peers was key to the learning. The training sessions were a useful way of focusing attention and enabling people to take time out, but it might be better to run a similar programme over a much shorter time in future.

One-to-one tailored support was also very welcome, but it might have concentrated people's attention if – for instance on the model of business support – organisations knew that they had a fixed number of hours of support. In the end, it was perhaps this human dimension – having someone with whom to discuss the challenges of evaluation – that was most productive for the core group members.

4.9 Recommendations

The end of the evaluation programme is an opportunity to reflect on the experience and make some suggestions that LARC members might wish to consider in relation to future work in evaluation. Given the sharp reductions in public spending, and not least to the Arts Council itself, the kind of resources that were invested in the Thrive programme are unlikely to be made available in the near future. It is therefore all the more important to integrate its learning into the core work of the partners individually and collectively. In doing that, we suggest that LARC consider the following points:

1. Arts organisations would benefit from having an evaluation policy, setting out what they intend to evaluate, for what purpose, how and why; this should be developed with reference to a learning and professional development strategy.
2. They should make a clear distinction between monitoring for the purposes of reporting the input and outputs of resources, which should be consistently applied to all their work, and evaluation for the purposes of learning and developing practice, which should be selectively used.
3. They should use consistent, appropriate and jointly agreed evaluation methods and report the results regularly to senior managers and to their boards in the context of the organisational planning process.
4. They should use evaluation across the range of their operation, not just community work with a declared social purpose, but do so selectively and in line with policy.
5. They should share the results of their learning wherever possible with peers, funding bodies, their audiences and others, in order to help foster a more mature and informed debate about the role and value of the arts.

Finally, it must be recognized – and above all by public and private sector bodies that fund the arts and make evaluation a condition of that funding – that good evaluation requires resources. People who are trained and skilled in arts delivery cannot be expected to become effective evaluators, even of their own work, without support and without clear, logical and consistent explanation of what is expected of them in this field. There remains an essential role for professional external evaluation, though it needs to be used in a targeted way in order to achieve an organisation's evaluation policy, and it needs to be resourced. Without a more profound reassessment of the role of evaluation by public funding bodies, there is little prospect that the challenges faced by organisations in this programme will be overcome.

Notes

- 1 Programme participant, February 2011
- 2 PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2008, *Evaluation of the Grants for the Arts, OD Thrive! Programme- Interim report*, ACE: London p. 2.
- 3 LARC Website <http://www.larc.uk.com/projects/liverpool-thrive> (checked 7.4.11)
- 4 LARC 2009, *Evaluation Development Programme Brief* (emphasis added)
- 5 LARC 2009, *Evaluation Development Programme Brief* (emphasis added)
- 6 Eugene van Erven visited on 9 and 10 December 2009, meeting programme participants from Bluecoat, Everyman & Playhouse, Collective Encounters and the LARC Thrive team, submitting a written report of his impressions to the evaluation team after the visit.
- 7 <http://www.2010healthandwellbeing.org.uk/index.php> (checked 24.5.11)
- 8 Programme participant, February 2011
- 9 Programme participant, February 2011
- 10 ERS 2009 *LARC Evaluation Workshop, Summary of feedback from 33 respondents*
- 11 Programme participant, February 2011
- 12 Programme participant, February 2011
- 13 Programme participant, February 2011
- 14 Programme participant, February 2011
- 15 Programme participant, February 2011
- 16 Programme participant, February 2011
- 17 Programme participant, March 2011
- 18 Programme participant, February 2011
- 19 Programme participant, February 2011
- 20 Programme participant, February 2011
- 21 Programme participant, February 2011
- 22 Programme participant, March 2010
- 23 Programme participant, February 2011
- 24 Programme participant, February 2011
- 25 Programme participant, February 2011
- 26 Programme participant, March 2010
- 27 Programme participant, March 2011
- 28 Programme participant, March 2011
- 29 Programme participant, March 2011
- 30 Programme participant, February 2011
- 31 Programme participant, February 2011
- 32 Programme participant, February 2011
- 33 Programme participant, February 2011