# Associate Bridge organisations: Strategic voices in London’s cultural offer for young people

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### Preface by Steve Moffitt, CEO, A New Direction

The intention of this document is to capture the value and learning of four organisations (Apples and Snakes, Lyric Hammersmith, Sadler’s Wells and Roundhouse) tasked by Arts Council England to develop a new strategic role in the arts and cultural education ecology across London. As part of new Lottery investment in Children and Young People all four organisations were selected to:

“Help ensure that every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts and provide an environment in which cultural education can flourish both in and out of school.”

The paper shares the narrative of the Associate Bridge programme in London between 2012 and 2015 and demonstrates how organisations taking a strategic lead were able to test models that could benefit the practices of cultural providers, arts organisations, schools’ cultural education and youth centres. All four organisations worked to produce greater and more relevant cultural education and arts opportunities for children and young people.

Through this process the Associate Bridge organisations shared their strategic work and a number of benefits for their own organisation, including: greater community connections in their local area; more opportunities for their organisations to develop new and better structured partnerships; programming for young people based on needs; and new knowledge of other arts specialisms and other sectors.

All four organisations were presented this challenge by ACE however, it is not beyond other arts organisations to rise to the challenge and address needs for the wider benefits of young people and the sector. The lessons learnt regarding co-commissioning principles, partnership, evaluation and engagement potentially place other organisations in good stead with a set of models for others to take forward in their own area. There is real potential to create tangible change if more arts organisations could step up to the challenge.

How might you take forward the learning from the Associate Bridge programme models to increase the quality of offer for children and young people in your area? What outcomes would you like to achieve? How would this benefit your organisation and how could you go about achieving them? Some points for consideration are:

* What areas of expertise do you hold?
* What would you do to strengthen the arts offer in your local area, the arts workforce and /or your specialism?
* Could you look beyond your art form specialism to benefit the wider sector?
* What need is there and what partnerships need to be formed to address any gaps in provision? Are there new ways of joining up practices that you can identify?
* What would you stand to gain? And what are the risks?
* What would sustainability look like and how would you plan for it?
* How would you evaluate and share learning and to whom?
* What creative ways could your new strategic remit be resourced?

## Introduction

This paper introduces the work of London’s Bridge activity from April 2012 to March 2015 with particular focus on the work of the Associate Bridge organisations; four National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), with children and young people at the heart of what they do, tasked with a strategic remit for connecting London’s children, young people, schools and families with arts and culture across the city. These organisations are: Apples and Snakes, the leading organisation in London and across the UK for performance poetry and spoken word, with education and participatory programmes a core focus of its work; Lyric Hammersmith, a west London based theatre producing and presenting a dynamic range of works, with a new building expansion in 2015 to truly integrate young people and local communities into its programmes; the Roundhouse, a renowned live performance venue in Camden with programmes for young people at its heart, offering a high level of support in music, performing arts and media; and Sadler’s Wells Theatre, an internationally recognised contemporary dance theatre based in Islington with learning programmes and opportunities for young people at its core. The grant awards to resource the Associate Bridge work varied in scale: Apples and Snakes received £55,000 per year; Lyric Hammersmith received £160,000 per year; Roundhouse received £160,000 per year and Sadler’s Wells received £75,000 per year.

The achievements and challenges for the four organisations, predominantly delivery/producing organisations and venues undertaking a new strategic role, are explored in this paper. Conclusions are drawn from a review of programme literature, monitoring documents, individual programme evaluation and a set of interviews with Associate Bridge lead staff at each organisation, lead staff at A New Direction (AND), London’s main Bridge organisation[[1]](#footnote-1), and Arts Council England’s (ACE) Cross Cutting Lead for Children and Young People in the London office. As such the paper is not an evaluation of the programme, there is not enough evidence to review at this time. Conclusions are largely based on the perceptions of those interviewed and it is acknowledged that this does not guarantee objectivity. However key learning points from the point of view of the interviewees is valuable to those developing work by, with and for young people. Where possible evaluation documentation has been drawn upon to back up personal assessments of learning and impact.

Case studies present the different working models developed and trialled by each Associate Bridge organisation with themed learning points in each case. The organisations share their perspectives on partnership practices, commissioning models, evaluation and engagement in the achievement of greater connections and opportunities for young people and the arts. A set of guiding principles and points for consideration for the sector are articulated, emerging from their learning. The paper concludes by considering the value and challenges for arts organisations with expertise in delivery taking on the responsibility of a strategic lead.

The following sub-sections provide background information highlighting the political context the Bridge and Associate Bridge roles operated within and describe these roles in greater depth.

### 1.1 The Strategic Role and its Political Context

After the general elections in 2010 there was a change in government from Labour to a Coalition Government. This party was to instigate great change. The Bridge and Associate Bridge roles emerged during enormous reform in government funding and policy across the arts, local government and education services and organisations.

Fears were rife amongst the arts sector that pathways for young people to experience and develop creative talent would lessen as the arts were being side-lined in schools in favour of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths subjects (STEM) and local authorities and public funding for the arts were shrinking. Many programmes and bodies were affected by reform. The Find Your Talent and Creative Partnerships programmes came to a close in 2010 and 2011 respectively, due to funding cuts to DCMS and ACE. Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) was closed down in 2011. ACE had received a reduction of 50% to its operating costs during the Corporate Spending Review of 2010 and in 2011 had announced a restructure of 880 Regularly Funded Organisations to 695 National Portfolio Organisations, 10 bridge organisations and 4 Associate Bridge organisations. The cuts led to departmental restructures in ACE and subsequently a reduction in capacity for intelligence gathering and strategic support. There may have been an ambition that the new strategic network of Bridge organisations could share in the responsibility of strategic development activity now that ACE’s capacity was lessened.

However, there were some signs of positive change in education during all this reform as Daren Henley’s reviews of music education (2011) and Cultural Education (2012) kick-started new investment and national planning from the government and attempted to raise the profile of these subjects in schools. Also The Mayor of London announced a new secondary London Curriculum in 2012 following an education inquiry. This promised to incorporate London’s arts offer into the curriculum strands to encourage new partnerships between schools and arts/cultural providers.

From 2012 to 2015 the Bridge organisations[[2]](#footnote-2) formed a network of 10 organisations across the UK and four Associate Bridge organisations in London. Each Bridge holds a strategic role to connect, or ‘bridge’, children and young people with a high quality arts and cultural offer in their region. They do this through conducting research and establishing intelligence on cultural engagement, behaviours and attitudes, creating networks between arts organisations and education settings, trialling models for partnerships and commissioning and increasing the quality of what is on offer for young people. They advocate Artsmark[[3]](#footnote-3) and Arts Award[[4]](#footnote-4) schemes and garner new investment through partnership to sustain programmes of activity and strategic planning. The Bridge role was intended to build upon the legacy of the UK wide Creative Partnerships programme (2002-2011) and Find Your Talent programme (2008-2010). Each Bridge and Associate Bridge organisation is also an NPO, with a remit of delivering work towards the achievement of ACE’s Strategic Goal 5: Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts, museums and libraries.

### 1.2 Associate Bridge organisations

To date, ACE has not deployed the model of Associate Bridge organisations to support the Bridge strategy work in any other area of UK. London’s network of Associate Bridges was unique nationally, playing to the great scale of arts and culture on offer, the complex geography and the sheer number of people across the capital.

The strategic nature of the Associate Bridge role was new territory for these arts organisations. According to ACE, they were selected in recognition of their excellent work with and opportunities by, with and for children and young people. They were seen to possess the potential to work outside of their delivery programmes and venue based operations, to take a strategic lead. Their brief was to co-develop with AND a cross-artform strategic plan for children and young people to access quality arts and culture.

Together, the four organisations created a group of NPOs with a range of different experiences and strengths, not least expertise in delivery. Because they were working ‘at the coalface’ it was hoped they would be able to empathise with other NPOs who were also navigating swiftly changing policies and agendas and could provide leverage across the sector for a new cultural offering for young Londoners. Collectively they had knowledge of a range of artistic practices and together they could work across London to understand new and existing arts opportunities for young people and education settings.

The strategic work of the Associate Bridge organisations was guided by a number of targets set for all Bridges across the 3 years.

* 30% increase year on year of uptake in Artsmark in schools
* 50% increase in uptake of Arts Award
* Annual strategic plan and programme of activity
* Establish meaningful and effective networks across the arts/cultural and education sectors
* To conduct research and audits to create intelligence on existing provision
* To garner partnership investment where possible.

In a practical sense it took time for the Associate Bridge organisations to understand their new role and programmes of activity emerged through discussions as a group. The first year was largely spent navigating the expectations of the role, putting reporting processes in place and understanding opportunities for partnership work. They underwent training in Arts Award and Artsmark, they identified areas for support and gaps in knowledge and agreed a strategic programme of work that played to the strengths of the different organisations.

### 1.3 Summary of outcomes and learning

In taking on the role the Associate Bridge organisations faced a considerable new challenge, as was articulated in interviews with the programme managers in each organisation. Initially there was a lack of clarity of the role and selection process, which made it difficult and time consuming to navigate expectations and advocate for their work amongst peers. Funding allocations were unequal, demanding different approaches to staffing and programme delivery. They had their own organisation’s interests to balance with the expectation to look beyond their own practices, beyond their own artform, beyond their own strategic priorities and indeed their own target groups. This involved stepping back to take a new position and gain a broader perspective across a geographic area and a broader area of the sector, as well as continuing the production and presentation of work to the level of quality that they have achieved prior to this move. A strategic role requires broader reflection, the capacity to conduct meaningful research and identify sector wide challenge, to facilitate effective connections within and across sectors and lead partners through a process of developing ways to work together. A strategic role requires that you continually adapt and morph to address a wider range of needs, beyond those of your own. These organisations had to navigate new terrain, new sector specialism, new staffing implications, and in some cases tensions across their peers.

Together the Associate Bridge organisations met the challenge of the strategic role in the following ways:

* They learnt to utilise and build upon their strengths - including expertise in project delivery, artform specialism, staffing capacity, networks and contacts.
* They identified a wider need beyond their own aims and mission.
* They learnt to extend their work beyond their own brand, venue, artform by addressing need and challenges affecting a larger geographic area and the broader sector.
* They explored, tested and piloted programme level methods of partnership working.
* They looked at how to staff new strategic roles, drawing on organisational capacity and delivery expertise where funds were not as large. New staff members with a strategic remit allowed the organisation to balance delivery with strategy.
* They had to learn to look beyond expectations for excellence in outputs and outcomes, instead looking at excellence and innovation in strategic partnership working.
* They developed strategic work for their local area whilst considering how these models might be replicated in other areas/contexts.

They each developed and implemented localised strategies, forming a programme of work that included in-depth research and network building. Importantly, they also focussed their efforts in discrete projects through which they could test out new operational and programme level models for commissioning and connecting young people with arts and culture. These models, described in brief below, achieved a range of outcomes and provide valuable learning for the wider sector.

**Strategic work across the arts and libraries:** Developed by Apples and Snakes, this model reached and engaged a new part of the broader cultural sector to develop spoken word and cross artform engagement activity in libraries underpinned by the Arts Award.

**Strategic hub model:** Developed by the Lyric theatre, this model enabled and galvanised partnerships; bringing organisations ‘into the fold’ to co-develop large scale theatre apprenticeships and a capital development project that will position them as a literal hub for culture in West London.

**Co-commissioning partnerships model:** Developed by the Roundhouse, this model engaged organisations within the arts sector, schools, youth services and local authorities in replicable co-commissioning programmes.

**Dance development model:** Developed by Sadler’s Wells, this modelsought to raise and measure the quality of arts offer and increase the ways children and young people can experience dance in schools.

**Digital communications and connectivity model:** Developed by Sadler’s Wells, this model explored the ways in which an online portal could create opportunities for greater connections and communications between schools and arts organisations.

Four main learning themes from this work are drawn from interviews with programme staff in each organisation. These are detailed in full in section 3 including a set of co-commissioning principles and learning points on partnership working, engagement and evaluation.

The value of this work for the individual organisations was explored throughout the interviews. In addition the Associate Bridge organisations were able to anticipate a number of outcomes which could be felt across their organisation as a result of their work, including:

* Greater connections within their geographic area and stronger local links with schools, other arts and cultural providers, networks and local authorities
* Greater understanding of the mechanism of partnerships.
* More opportunities and increased scale of opportunities for their organisation through partnerships - sharing resources and expertise.
* More opportunities for their organisation to expand work by/with/for young people, e.g. through Arts Award which can add an additional layer to existing programmes of work.
* Playing a part in strengthening the sector.
* Greater understanding of how local authorities work.
* New knowledge of the needs of young people.
* New knowledge of and connections with other arts specialisms.

The values of this work for the sector, local area and partners are detailed in full in section 4.

In the following section case studies present information on the work of the Associate Bridge organisations and their impact in greater depth.

## Programme level models and Impacts

This set of case studies provides a description of each Associate Bridge organisation’s programmes and presents the key emerging models they tested along with some of the main outcomes and learning points. All organisations developed a range of activity in meeting the goals of the strategic role, however the strongest models are identified in each case in depth here.

These case studies are informed by interviews with Associate Bridge organisation staff, ACE and AND and a review of monitoring information and evaluation where available. Some immediate and short term impacts are explored although some are difficult to measure and therefore progress is reflected on using the Associate Bridge managers’ own assessments. The longer term impact for young people and the arts and education sectors in London are yet to be felt from their work.

Themed learning points relating to co-commissioning, partnerships, engagement and evaluation, identified across each of the organisations’ programmes, are summarised at the end of each case study.

### Apples and Snakes

#### ***Model***: Strategic work across the arts and libraries

Apples and Snakes’ approach to the Associate Bridge role was to connect disparate parts of the arts and cultural sector where previously little strategic work had taken place. The main overarching drivers for the organisation’s programme of work emerged after discovering that 1% of Arts Awards were being achieved through literature, and identifying that there was a need to support libraries as cultural hubs now that libraries had come under the auspices of ACE since the closure of the MLA. Through understanding this context the organisation was able to draw on the strength of its artform expertise and its experience of working across large geographic areas to establish a niche: **a model for strategic work across the arts and libraries.**

Within this context opportunities opened up for cross artform partnerships including poetry, visual arts, dance, sound/music, performance, and literature with library services. This role involved establishing new connections with arts organisations, artists and performing poets, and adding value where work was already taking place. Arts Award created the foundation for strategic work which was supported by a programme of project delivery and library grants. The organisation focussed its work in South East London predominantly, before stretching out to West and North London in the final year.

Apples and Snakes were awarded £55,000.00 per year to undertake the Associate Bridge remit. They used money from these funds to cross subsidise existing posts in the first year and then fund a new programme manager in post part-time during years two and three.

#### Programme

Apples and Snakes’ programme of work focused on ways to strategically encourage young people to use their local libraries and to develop libraries as cultural venues. It facilitated and strengthened networks between artists and arts organisations, in a range of specialisms, and schools and libraries where partnerships could be formed and learning could be shared. Apples and Snakes delivered bespoke Arts Award training and events for library staff, literature organisations, artists and spoken word performers, to encourage uptake of the Arts Award programme in libraries and across the wider literature sector.

Apples and Snakes was awarded proportionately lower funds within the group of Associate Bridge organisations, and over time realised that for effective strategic work it was best to utilise its expertise and existing resources in project delivery to maximise the impact of its work. One main part of the programme involved the strategic planning and delivery of a large scale programme of activities called SPINE from 2012 to 2015. Within SPINE, spoken word artists and library staff were trained in Discover/Explore and Bronze/Silver Arts Awards, training was developed for ‘young producers’ in event delivery and events and workshops were programmed across the life of the project. Libraries were also able to apply for strategic library grants from 2013 to 2015 which enabled them to develop their own SPINE programmes. In grant round 1 libraries partnered with artists/arts organisations and schools and delivered Arts Award and in round 2 they co-created events in partnership as part of the pan-London SPINE library festival, a culmination of the programme’s work taking place in March 2015.

Additionally Apples and Snakes worked closely on specific pilot partnership projects with a small number of local authorities’ library services. This included London library based events as part of the large national project Architects of our Republic in 2013/14 and a Grant for the Arts funded project led by Croydon Library service Croydon Wordfest in 2014; an engagement programme of workshops, mini gigs, carnival and final festival that was underpinned and supported by the Arts Award.

#### Impact

Within its work with the library sector, Apples and Snakes’ strategic role focused on the development of long term skills, raising awareness about partnership working, developing meaningful relationships with schools, effective programming, marketing, commissioning artists and animating libraries and public spaces. The organisation observed that there was a demand for this work amongst library services who were keen to work with artists and arts organisations and embrace the Arts Award; in feedback, the librarians remarked that the experience was very valuable in terms of learning how to work creatively with young people in a library setting and how to deliver events with and for young people.

The work has been wide reaching: 13 different local authorities have partnered with Apples and Snakes and/or connected with their programme of activities: Lewisham, Bexley, Southwark, Bromley, Sutton, Greenwich, Croydon, Harrow, Hounslow, Ealing, Waltham Forest, Lambeth and Brent. By the end of the Associate Bridge programme Apples and Snakes estimates 3000 children and young people aged 0-19 will have engaged with library activity across London. The SPINE Festival in March 2015 comprised 103 events in almost 33 libraries across 11 London boroughs. Just under 3000 people of all ages participated in the SPINE Festival, including children, young people, teachers, parents and carers, the vast majority of which were under 18 years. Through SPINE, new and greater interactions with libraries were achieved, with 13% of participants not having attended the library previously and almost half visiting a library less than once a month.

In addition Apples and Snakes have trained around 40 library staff in Arts Award. 10 young people in Croydon have been skilled up as Young Producers and achieved their Arts Award, including the first ever Gold Arts Award in a library based project in the country.

According to the Associate Bridge programme manager, the programme of work provided ‘invaluable learning’ for the organisation. Prior to this role, library work has tended to be on a project by project basis rather than a sustained, three-year programme of strategic level work. This enabled Apples and Snakes’ staff to train and build their own awareness of Arts Award and develop stronger links with schools, local authorities and young people. The organisation has also incorporated Arts Award into many aspects of its own existing programmes. The strategic role enabled it to work in a more connected way across the literature sector and play a part in strengthening the sector. Through training spoken word artists as Arts Award Advisors, Apples and Snakes was able to expand their professional development, adding depth to the organisation’s role in infrastructure development. The artists become more marketable as freelancers and the organisation can include Arts Award as an extra layer to future projects.

Key effective partnerships within its strategy included Islington’s Arts Education Strategic Advisory Group, Trinity College and the Lewisham Education Arts Network (LEAN) where Apples and Snakes were able to develop a broader advocacy role and develop new networking opportunities for schools, arts and cultural organisations and libraries. The partnership with Croydon council is also very strong, demonstrating for Apples and Snakes the value of working with multiple departments within a local authority in achieving a greater impact and a more joined up approach (for example library services, youth services and arts services). This will arm the organisation with greater understanding of the different ways of collaborating with local authorities in the future.

A number of opportunities have evolved from the Associate Bridge role which will sustain the work with libraries and the arts sector. Apples and Snakes has been successful in a bid to the European Cultural Foundation for a Library Takeover project this year, working with Croydon and Waltham Forest library services and arts organisations to facilitate new partnerships between a cross section of the arts and cultural sector. The organisation has also been awarded three years of ACE funding to realise a new strategic role with a libraries focus, creating a new strand of work within the organisation’s portfolio and expanding on its Associate Bridge role.

#### Key learning points

* Co-commissioning – Apples and Snakes found that by identifying a need or gap, those in receipt of strategic library grants could join with the arts to co-develop work addressing this need, leading to a more relevant offer for partners and young people.
* Partnerships – partnering with a new area of the cultural sector can extend the reach of each partner’s work with young people.
* Engagement – factoring in a reason for young people to engage in programmes (e.g. Arts Award) can lead to greater participation. Possibilities for engagement are greater in public spaces/non-traditional arts contexts.

### The Lyric Hammersmith

#### Model: Strategic Hub

The Lyric’s approach to the Associate Bridge role was to establish very strong and active local networks across the arts and cultural sector. Its role is best described as a **strategic hub**, enabling and galvanising a host of cultural engagement experiences for children and young people. Lyric’s hub model worked to bring arts and cultural organisations ‘into the fold’, both figuratively and literally, with two main strands of work: the initiation and management of a youth skills development and apprenticeships programme across a consortium of London’s Theatres; and the development of a new local facility for young people and local arts and youth organisations in West London – a literal hub. Conversations about a new building extension has been in place for many years, but the capacity for joined up working amongst local partners was made possible and shaped through Associate Bridge role.

Lyric Hammersmith were awarded £160,000.00 per year to undertake the Associate Bridge remit. It invested money from these funds to expand the roles of existing posts within the organisation, deploying staff time to lead on different aspects of its programme.

#### Programme

The Lyric’s Associate Bridge programme of activity was focussed around empowering new and existing networks of arts organisations, arts education departments and the youth sector to connect together, and to facilitate opportunities for them to work in partnership. The networks fell into two categories: the first engaged arts and cultural organisations and local authorities in West London, the second engaged education and youth departments within the London Theatre Consortium. Lyric became a conduit for conversations amongst partners and created a strategic approach to raising new funds to support new work amongst the networks. Together these organisations piloted joint working commissioned and/or supported by Lyric in its strategic hub role. This included developing and supporting the delivery of a large-scale programme of Creative Apprenticeships in London theatres and arts organisations, Lyric’s first main strand of work within its hub role. Here Lyric took the strategic lead, undertaking significant fundraising to resource the programme and designing the curriculum with Lewisham and Southwark College to enable young people to gain up to 3 levels of qualifications in Community Arts, Venue Operations and Technical Theatre in 14 theatres and one circus.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The second strand saw Lyric co-develop a major new building expansion within its own theatre to create a literal ‘hub’ for arts activity, first opening in Spring 2015. This new capital project will facilitate the work of approximately 10 organisations from the network of West London arts and cultural organisations, representing a range of artforms and including community organisations and disability groups, to create joined-up learning and engagement experiences for young people. Together they shaped a combined approach to enhancing the quality of work by, with and for young people which would be delivered by the network of partners working together and independently under one roof. The new facility will include recording studios, rehearsal studio, dance studio, editing suite and a small cinema, predicated on expanding each organisation’s work with young people.

Lyric and its partners have had to explore the impact of disparate practices working together under one roof, agreeing a Partnership Mandate for the group which includes agreeing a geographic remit within West London, a joint recruitment strategy, pricing parameters and ensures that the Arts Award will underpin all activity. The Lyric is also undertaking a large scale review of quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods and box office systems in the gathering of data for youth programmes. The West London hub partners will sign up to a new system for evaluating their programmes, and the review and specifications for a new system will be shared amongst theatres/box office system users more widely.

Additionally, within and beyond the strategic hub model, Lyric created other networks and hosted and delivered Artsmark training for schools and Arts Awards training and delivery as part of their Associate Bridge role. Arts Award has also been implemented across their youth programmes.

#### Impact

Taking on the role of a strategic hub, Lyric has been able to play a central role in supporting both the theatre sector and arts organisations based in West London to work together more strategically and effectively.

The work was targeted across 10 West London boroughs: Hammersmith & Fulham; Kensington & Chelsea; Westminster; Wandsworth; Richmond; Hounslow; Ealing; Brent; Harrow and Hillingdon. The range of artforms and other sectors engaged through Lyric’s networks included theatre, music, dance, film, TV, digital media and disability organisations. Key partners crossed artforms and sectors, bridging music, dance, film, theatre and disability. They included a Music Hub, a National Youth Music Organisation and both subsidised and non-subsidised arts practices.

The programme manager reflected on the value of partnerships for the Lyric Theatre. Through acting as a strategic hub to create and facilitate a range of networks, they and its partnering organisations have learnt to put partnership mechanisms in place such as joint recruitment, evaluation and an agreed partnership mandate for working together – to look beyond their own organisation and realise a larger set of achievements. This has enabled them to work together in new ways not previously tried before. One outcome is that they are learning from each other’s expertise and artform specialism. For example, Lyric supported Action on Disability to get their first ACE grant and in return Lyric is receiving valuable knowledge on ways of developing inclusive activities for young people with disabilities. This has directly impacted on Lyric’s own operations, in the development of the new building expansion and the development of its own programmes for children and young people.

Through its new expansion project, Lyric has developed the strategic aim to ensure that every young person in West London has the opportunity for long term progression in the arts, shaped by the networks it created through the Associate Bridge role. The impact will be more visible once the building is fully functioning and activity can begin. However, there is confidence that by working together in partnership, the new hub can improve the creative offer for young West Londoners.

A total of 45 young apprentices have / are completing their qualifications in Community Arts, Venue Operations and Technical Theatre in 14 theatres and one circus company. According to Lyric, 60% of those recruited are from a Black and Minority Ethnic background, challenging the current issue of a narrowed demographic within the workforce of the arts industry.

The Lyric has taken strategic responsibility for raising substantial funds to enable the apprenticeship scheme and other projects, not including the costs of the capital project. The programme manager estimated around £0.5 million has been raised and distributed amongst the sector through its Associate Bridge programme.

#### Key learning points:

* Partnerships – Lyric learnt the value of sharing expertise amongst partners with other arts specialisms and a disability organisation through a structured partnership for the benefit of young people. It reflected on the importance of having a central body facilitating the partnerships, being a conduit for conversations. Strong partnership mechanisms and working structures create clearer objectives and enable effective partnership management.
* Evaluation –methods of quantitative and qualitative evaluation and what information is captured differ across partners, which can prove problematic for data collection and review.
* Engagement –apprenticeships have the potential to create new routes into employment within the sector.

### Roundhouse

#### ***Model: Co-commissioning Partnerships model***

The Roundhouse initially used its Associate Bridge role to be exploratory, trialling new pilot projects and exploring new methods, commissioning evaluation and consultancy along the way to reflect on these models and refine its approaches in a truly action research way. It was able to utilise its existing knowledge of needs and challenges within its local area and sector, and drew upon existing networks and relationships as well as creating new ones.

What emerged from the Roundhouse’s strategic work was a robust **co-commissioning partnerships model.** Commissioned activity was developed in true partnership, ensuring outputs and outcomes met the needs of partners and ultimately the beneficiaries. The aim was to increase the value and quality of commissioned work for children and young people, and to ensure activity was truly appropriate for a range of different settings. This could lead to a distribution of leadership and greater sense of shared ownership amongst partners, which was important in achieving sustainability beyond the life of the Associate Bridge.

The Roundhouse was awarded £160,000.00 per year to undertake the Associate Bridge remit. It used money from these funds to support a new programme manager from year 1 and full time coordinator from year 3. The coordinator post supported the development of Associate Bridge strands into 2014-2015, with a focus on gathering and disseminating learning from the past two years’ work.

#### Programme

The main emphasis of Roundhouse’s strategic programming was to develop capacity and new opportunities amongst a range of partners and participants for the co-design and collaborative delivery of project work.

This was explored in a range of ways: A youth consultation model was developed that facilitated and opened up conversations between young people, cultural partners and potential commissioners, trialled in Enfield for the borough’s music service provision; A model for co-commissioning arts and cultural education activity for schools was trialled across Camden, creating a network introducing schools with arts organisations; A model for skills development amongst youth workers utilising the expertise of the arts sector, trialled in Barnet at a youth centre which developed a radio station operated by its young people; and, in partnership with Sadler’s Wells, a model for a shared Arts Award offer across arts organisations to create a connected offer of support for young people completing their Arts Award, trialled across Islington and Camden. Two notable examples of work to present in greater depth here are the Camden Cultural Commissioning project for schools and the Shared Arts Award Offer for young people.

The innovative Camden Cultural Commissioning project[[6]](#footnote-6) explored the Roundhouse’s model for co-commissioning partnerships in depth. Schools and education settings were supported in partnering with some of Camden’s renowned arts and cultural organisations, including the British Museum, The British Library, The Place and Camden Arts Centre. Schools submitted information online about their arts interests, school improvement priorities and staff professional development priorities. In response, arts and cultural partners developed proposals for potential activity which ignited conversations between partners to co-develop new commissions. A programme of training and support for partners complemented the programme, according to identified CPD needs across the partners. The Roundhouse drove the project, coordinating and facilitating meetings and the programme for submitting information within the partnership, however, the model aimed to be truly self-sufficient with a consortium that steers the development of the partnership work enabling the project to continue beyond the life of the Associate Bridge programme.

The Shared Arts Award Offer explored the Roundhouse’s co-commissioning partnerships model through the co-development of a connected offer for young people by a network of arts organisations in Islington and Camden. The need arose from the difficulty experienced by these organisations of recruiting young people into the award. Roundhouse and Sadler’s Wells invited organisations to create a network undertaking a shared offer for young people. The project enabled Sadler’s Wells and the Roundhouse to work together as Associate Bridge organisations to design the project and created a network of 16 leading organisations delivering a greater Arts Award offer through partnership working, making the award more accessible to young people and easing the administrative workload through sharing the labour. Small clusters of partner organisations were commissioned to co-develop projects for a targeted group of young people which would be underpinned by the Arts Award. The Arts Award garnered greater promotion through the partnership than a single organisation could have achieved. A programme of training and CPD sessions supported the partner organisations.

In addition to the programme of activity detailed above, Roundhouse hosted Arts Award training and advocated Artsmark as part of its Associate Bridge role. It also operated a Teachers Network which met at the Roundhouse for shared discussion about key education issues and ways in which the arts can support schools.

#### Impact

The programme of co-commissioning work has been a catalyst for a significant range of partnerships across a diverse range of artform specialisms and sectors. Almost 40 organisations created new links with schools and young people, gaining invaluable insight into the needs and contexts with which new commissions can be developed through the co-commissioning partnerships model. The artforms they represented included dance, music, visual arts, museum heritage, libraries, media, theatre and literature. Around 60 teachers and 600 primary and secondary aged young people engaged in relevant and tailored cultural education opportunities through the Camden Cultural Commissioning Model. 16 leading organisations in Islington and Camden were able to promote their work to new young audiences through the Shared Arts Award Offer. 25 young people accessed information and support about bronze, silver and gold Arts Award and were signposted to organisations across the partnership. Around 60 teachers attend the Teacher Network which included more than one teacher from each school, demonstrating increased interest in arts in those schools. This is significant especially at a time when the arts subjects are under threat in education reform.

Key partners include Camden and Barnet local authorities. Camden departments were instrumental in marketing and positioning the cultural commissioning model, and the programme garnered interest within the Council’s Corporate Strategy team who was keen to explore how the learning from co-designing services could inform council initiatives. Roundhouse’s partnership with Barnet youth services, mentioned briefly above, enabled training for youth workers by Roundhouse and the council’s investment in the radio programme in the longer term. Roundhouse reflected on the value of youth services engaging in partnerships with arts organisations to share learning about pastoral care and creative practice, observing that the knowledge transference made possible through cross-sector partnerships has the ability to support skills development amongst partners. A fully funded radio station for Barnet is now operated by 11 trained young people and has attracted new youth engagement with the youth centre.

The Roundhouse developed replicable structures for partnership working to enable the co-commissioning of rich and engaging opportunities for young people based on needs within the sector, needs within the local area and needs of young people. The organisation undertook and commissioned a significant degree of evaluation within its Associate Bridge programme of work. Researchers Tom Fleming and Catherine Bunting undertook a considerable review of the Barnet radio project, Shared Arts Award Offer and the Camden Cultural Commissioning model, including interviewing partners and conducting focus groups with participants. The report reflects on the Roundhouse’s approach to the Associate Bridge role and the nature of new working partnerships, which often demonstrated more innovation in their processes than their early commissioning outputs. It also alluded to the potential for Roundhouse’s strategic approach leading to stronger distributed ownership between partnerships and across sectors.[[7]](#footnote-7) Indeed the strength of its co-commissioning partnerships model is in its very nature of sustainable activity through being delivered and managed between partnering schools, organisations and local authorities.

#### Key learning points:

* Co-commissioning –principles of needs-led co-commissioning amongst partnerships can lead to greater relevance of programmes for young people and greater sustainability of the work
* Partnerships – knowledge transfer and skills development can happen within partnerships. Greater reach of work is possible through structured partnerships. Innovative partnerships are more valuable than their outputs in the early stages. A central management role within a partnership or network can lead to stronger working partnerships.
* Evaluation – the importance of external evaluation and a process of reflection and sharing in the development of strategic programmes

### Sadler’s Wells Theatre

#### Models: Dance Development and model for Digital Communications and Connectivity

In its Associate Bridge role Sadler’s Wells played largely to its strengths of artform expertise and its strong standing in the local area. This new strategic role provided the opportunity to invest in existing partnerships as well as open up new opportunities for new connections and networks. The main drivers for its programme emerged from undertaking a local mapping of Arts Award offer across Camden and Islington with the Roundhouse, horizon scanning the local cultural education offer for schools in Islington, and identifying a gap in support for dance in Artsmark applications.

Amongst a range of activity, the organisation tested different forms of **dance development** to raise the quality of a dance offer for children and young people, seeking to understand the impacts of this work both on young people and on schools’ artsmark applications. It also developed a replicable **model for digital communications and connectivity** across Islington’s arts organisations and schools.

Sadler’s Wells was awarded £75,000.00 per year to undertake the Associate Bridge remit. It invested money from these funds to create a role within the Creative Learning team to support the Co-Director of Creative Learning in the management and coordination of the programme.

#### Programme

The Associate Bridge role saw Sadler’s Wells undertaking research projects and testing out interventions that led to two main strands of work drawing upon its knowledge of the needs of the dance sector and the issue of connecting schools with the broad arts activity available within their immediate locality. The programme that emerged focussed largely on dance development work for schools, young people and the dance sector, and the creation of an online network or E-Portal that could connect schools with local artists and arts organisations across all art forms.

Dance development
Sadler’s Wells used its Associate Bridge role to support the development of dance in schools by exploring curricular and extra-curricular needs and gaps. The organisation learnt that schools were struggling to fulfil their Artsmark quota for dance and identified the need for sector-wide support that would help schools as well as position and create demand for the work of dance practitioners. An online interactive toolkit was developed to support primary and secondary schools to audit their current dance offer and develop their dance provision. This resource includes films, case studies and interactive guides, which has been shared with the Artsmark Network of over 3000 schools across the country.

The organisation also designed and developed a research project to measure the impact of dance in education. Working with Wayne McGregor|Random Dance in five East London primary schools the project responded to the need for strengthened evidence base for the education outcomes and wider benefits of dance interventions. A research team from Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy developed a theory of change and methodology to evaluate the impact of dance on resilience in year 5 pupils. The ambition is to create a replicable evaluation framework for assessing the impact of dance in primary schools using Project Oracle’s Standards Framework.

Sadler’s Wells has also worked with PAN-London dance, a consortium of dance organisations, to create a children and young people strategy and subgroup who secured a dance module for the GLA’s London Curriculum which will join the suite of arts and humanities resources in July 2015. Sadler’s Wells and GLA played a key role in brokering this strategic opportunity for the consortium. It will be a chance to raise the profile of dance organisations across schools in London and directly addresses a gap in provision to support non-specialist teachers who are teaching dance as part of Key Stage 3 Physical Education.

Digital communications and connectivity
The development of the Islington Education Portal[[8]](#footnote-8) responded to the need for schools to be able to understand, navigate and connect with a range of arts on offer for children and young people. Sadler’s Wells is a founding member of Islington’s Arts and Education Strategic Advisory Group (AESAG) which formed the working group for the online portal. Schools and youth organisations had previously reported to have found the wealth of the arts and cultural education offer in the borough bewildering, with around 30 NPOs based there. The portal acts to enable arts and cultural organisations and practitioners to publicise their education offer to schools and youth services, facilitating clear communications and new connections for education settings. In its Associate Bridge function Sadler’s Wells contributed resources for the initial development of the portal and commissioned work on the sustainability of it going forward.

In addition to the two main models detailed in this section, Sadler’s Wells developed other discrete projects that enabled partnership working across broader areas of the arts sector. This included a programme that explored how arts organisations can support schools and understand barriers to engagement with cultural education, with a view to increasing Artsmark applications. Also included is the Shared Arts Award offer[[9]](#footnote-9), developed in partnership with the Roundhouse. Additionally Sadler’s Wells supported small commissions from a cross-section of arts organisations to pilot a peer-led model of Arts Award delivery which focusses on developing leadership in groups of young people.

#### Impact

Sadler’s Wells’ Associate Bridge programme strands focussed both on local strategy that saw projects taking place across Hackney, Enfield, Haringey Newham, Islington and Camden, and sector-wide strategy that saw high quality dance being developed across the London schools within the London Curriculum and across the Artsmark Network. Outcomes have yet to be measured or felt however, the programme manager felt that these pieces of work had the potential to increase Artsmark applications, strengthen dance provision and create demand for new partnerships between the dance and education sectors. The Artsmark dance toolkit for schools has been viewed by over 3900 schools/users between April 2014 and March 2015. The organisation also succeeded in developing significant partnership support in its strategic programmes, reporting 58% partnership investment garnered in the first two years of its Associate Bridge role.

For some time arts practitioners in education settings have observed the potential role of arts subjects in the development of ‘soft skills’ in young people, but little rigorous research has been undertaken to date. The dance intervention research with Wayne McGregor|Random Dance aimed to fill the gap of what we know and what we can prove of the impact of dance on the education of primary school children. 143 Year 5 pupils participated in the programme, almost 50% of which had no previous experience of dance. The research found that confidence was raised, team working skills were improved, they developed the increased ability to evaluate their performance and partaking in dance increased their resilience to overcome challenges and achieve. It was felt by teachers that these impacts could be seen at play in other areas of these children’s school life. In addition, they increased their physical coordination and gained new perception about dance, developing a keenness to learn more about this artform.

The organisation’s involvement with the Roundhouse in developing the Shared Arts Award offer enabled a number of needs-led partnerships and commissions and 16 leading arts organisations across Islington and Camden were able to promote their work to new young audiences.

The programme manager felt the achievements of the organisation are due to its collaborative, resourceful approach to identifying issues/ needs and enabling dance, wider arts organisations and education settings to come together in new ways. The Islington education portal for example is expected to have a significant impact on how schools and cultural organisations communicate and work together going forward. This is intended to be a replicable model, piloted in a borough with a dense number of arts organisations which has proved difficult to navigate for schools. The programme manager also felt the portal also has the potential to support arts and cultural providers who find they are frequently working with keen schools and not able to access schools that are much less engaged in partnership work - should they choose to join the online portal of course. If a clear and coherent method for successfully connecting and communicating between schools and artists/arts organisations can work in Islington, with around 30 NPOs, there is a good chance that the portal approach will work in other boroughs too.

#### Key learning points:

* Partnerships – a central role is crucial to manage partnerships and broker opportunities, acting as an enabler and facilitator. Needs-led commissioning partnerships can lead to greater benefits, shared investment and greater ownership.
* Engagement – could an online portal connecting arts and education providers help to reach those schools less likely to engage? Outcomes such as soft skills, physical ability and appetite to learn more are possible outcomes of dance interventions in primary schools
* Evaluation – the importance of external evaluation, reflection and dissemination. Can a framework for evaluating dance practices with young people be replicated across the sector?

## Overview of key learning points and the value of the Associate Bridge work

This section details four themed learning points drawn from the Associate Bridge organisations’ working models and programmes of activity: Co-commissioning principles; Partnership working and networks; Engagement and Evaluation. Key points for consideration are brought together from the personal assessment and reflections of the Associate Bridge programme lead staff, and key programme staff at AND and ACE. A review of programme literature, monitoring reports and available evaluation documents has enforced these learning points, which include the Roundhouse’s evaluation report by Tom Fleming and Catherine Bunting.[[10]](#footnote-10) Some key questions emerge for the arts and cultural sector and those dedicated to increasing the quality of its offer for young people, which are presented here.

### Co-commissioning principles

A strong ethic for effective and meaningful commissioning developed collaboratively within partnerships was developed across the Associate Bridge organisations.[[11]](#footnote-11) Examples include the Roundhouse’s Camden Cultural Commissioning Model and Apples and Snakes’ programme of library commission grants for the SPINE project. Key points for consideration are presented below, drawn from the organisations’ personal reflections and evaluation documentation. Clear cross overs are apparent within the learning points for partnerships in the following sub-section.

* **Create a structure for partnerships:** An efficient process of brokerage, a steering group to oversee practice, a robust approach to networking and partnership agreements is effective in centrally managing commissions. This is especially useful for partners outside of the sector for whom this work is not a part of their core practice.
* **Talk:** invest time in making and allowing conversations to happen which can plant seeds for new collaborations.
* **Share:** honour generosity in sharing opportunities, resources and knowledge to increase opportunities for young people.
* **Learn:** engage closely with partners such as schools and youth centres to learn the context in which they operate and gage what is important and valued about this work. Think about what you want to know and what you want others to know about you.
* **Assess needs:** commission ideas that develop from an assessment of need will ensure relevant and appropriate programmes. The needs of all partners and beneficiaries should be understood.
* **Support:** Identify partners’ comfort zones and ways to support each other in the development and delivery of commissions which may be outside of their experience, such as developing clear and concise language across partners from different sectors, understanding training needs and sharing skills. Create a safe environment to challenge expectations, comfort zones, fail and learn.
* **Co-create:** utilise new shared understanding and knowledge to develop needs-led work with shared aims for greater impact and more relevant work with and for young people.
* **Disseminate:** reflect and disseminate evidence and learning to increase the ongoing development of engagement opportunities of young people through meaningful arts and cultural commissioning partnerships.

Amongst the Associate Bridge organisations there was a consensus that co-commissioning - developing project work collaboratively with partners such as schools, Local Authority services, arts organisations and youth centres - can help develop a better, more bespoke offer, new approaches, stronger partnerships, and lead to a stronger educational offer for young people.

### Partnership working and networks

Clear recognition of the collective power of effective partnerships and active networks is broadly recognised and was further developed and cemented across each of the Associate Bridge programmes, and indeed within the network of organisations themselves.[[12]](#footnote-12) Notable programme examples include Roundhouse and Sadler’s Well’s Shared Arts Award Offer, Roundhouse’s Camden Cultural Commissioning Model and Lyric’s strategic hub work. There are clear cross overs within the learning points for co-commissioning in the previous sub-section. Key points for consideration are presented below and in many cases these reinforce what we may already know about partnership working. They are drawn from personal reflections of those interviewed, monitoring reports and evaluation documentation where available:

* **Shared investment across partners leads to greater involvement** and ownership of the programmes, increasing the likelihood for sustainability beyond the life of the strategic funds.
* The **central role of an organisation or group** to be the conduit for conversations and support the ongoing development, meetings and strategy for local and sector specific networks and partnerships is crucial. This role maintains the vision for the network or partners and plays a valuable role in communications especially where partnerships are formed across sectors outside of the arts.
* Partnerships and active networks can become an incredibly useful platform for **skills development, knowledge transfer and sharing expertise** amongst partners. This proved particularly insightful across sectors, where a range of experiences in the arts and youth work could be shared, complementing one another’s practices and increasing opportunities for informal professional development.[[13]](#footnote-13)
* A **partnership agreement, strategy, brief or mandate** is crucial for driving forward the work of partnerships. Co-developed in partnership with the group, this can set the parameters of work and agree shared aims for a joined up creative offer. Clarity of roles and direction is needed across the partnership. Where necessary, legal implications of authorship, ownership and copyright can also be addressed.
* The **reach of work** with and for young people can be expanded and sustained through creating networks and partnerships with a range of specialisms within and beyond the arts sector. Through working together a greater pathway of opportunities can be offered.
* Rather than starting with a set of ideal partners, **identify the need first** and then identify the right partners, adapting programmes along the way. This is time intensive but crucial to the strategic role.
* **Co-commissioning partnerships can be just as valuable as their outcomes**, indeed early commissionswithin a partnership may not lead to ‘innovative work’, rather the partnership itself may be the innovation (Fleming and Bunting 2014)

Partnership working is and will continue to be a vital part of arts practices as the sector experiences broader expectations of outcomes, impact and reach while fewer resources are made available. The Associate Bridge organisations were able to explore partnership working in depth resulting in lessons learnt about the ways in which partnerships can be strengthened, formed, and the value of partnerships.

### Engagement

Reflections on strategic approaches to engage schools and young people are drawn from the broad range of Associate Bridge programmes of work, including Apples and Snakes’ library work, Roundhouse’s youth consultation work, Lyric’s theatre apprenticeships and Sadler’s Wells’ dance interventions. The direct delivery of engagement programmes was not in the remit of the Associate Bridge programme and therefore this list is formed from observations and the personal assessment of those interviewed, as well as evaluation and monitoring documents where relevant. It does not form a comprehensive list and in many cases reinforces what we already know about engagement practices. Key points for consideration are:

* There is a general consensus that **young people value co-creating their own experiences** rather than passively receiving experiences. This can deepen the relevance, the level of engagement in, and the impact of the work.
* Programmes such as Arts Award, leadership development and apprenticeship schemes make real headway in the **development of new routes into the sector for young people.** Employability and personal progression could be a tangible outcome of these qualifications, shaping the arts workforce to come. Factoring in a reason to take part (skills development, new creative platform, networking) can lead to more meaningful engagement.
* The possibilities for increasing engagement are **greater in public spaces** than in arts centres which often present a barrier for young people. For example, libraries maintain a true cross section of society presenting opportunities for working with those who would not usually engage with the arts.
* The issue of reaching the schools that rarely engage in partnerships and arts and cultural offers is ongoing. Through **digital communications, greater networking opportunities and cross-sector partnerships** the Associate Bridge organisations have tested the way we engage with schools and reach those least engaged.
* Evidence in a sample group has shown increase in **confidence, team working, resilience** to overcome challenges, an appetite to learn more, ability to evaluate performance as well as physical ability can be developed as a result of taking part in dance at primary school age.
* Programmes such as **Artsmark, Arts Award and cultural education interventions** in schools extend and expand the school curriculum, potentially creating a foundation for the engagement with and appreciation of arts in young people going forwards. Arts Award can prepare the ground for new interactions and new opportunities for young people to participate in programmes.

Arts organisations regularly struggle with the issue of **Who are we really trying/able to engage?** A number of the Associate bridge organisations challenged the sector to be rigorous about why, who for and how we are working with/for young people. Those who are least engaged may only have the opportunity to interact once or twice, the impact of which may not be measured. Meanwhile, those already well engaged are more likely to demonstrate progression through a lasting relationship with arts and culture. It is a complex area that has implications on the value of work by, with and for young people.

### Evaluation

The value of evaluation and reflection is already widely accepted across the arts and education sectors. A number of Associate Bridge projects shone light on the importance of evaluation within the context of this strategic work, including Lyric’s work exploring how evaluation can be shaped for cultural providers of activities for young people,[[14]](#footnote-14) Sadler’s Wells’ dance impact work and the Roundhouse’s commitment to evaluation and dissemination. Key points for consideration for self-evaluation and project evaluation are drawn from the personal opinion of those interviewed and a review of available evaluation and monitoring documentation:

* The commissioning of external evaluators provides **objective assessment of activity** **which can reinforce and strengthen the work.** External evaluators have greater ability to stand back from the activity to make space for reflection and recommendations for future programmes of work, feeding into a cycle of reflection and development. However this comes at a cost.
* Through a process of **active testing of models, evaluation and reflection**, strategic organisations can create niche work and use findings to create the scaffold for new broader programmes with wider outcomes.
* Methods for capturing and recording qualitative and quantitative evaluation amongst arts, education and youth sectors **differ vastly in approach and quality.** There is little clarity or consensus about what information can and should be collected in partnership contexts. A joined-up evaluation across project partners would be prudent yet data sharing across organisations presents clear challenges and data protection issues. Can a joined-up approach for the arts and wider sector achieve coherent project evaluation that overcomes these issues to collect useful data and information on young people’s engagement? Who will this benefit and how?
* How do we as a sector evaluate the impact of arts interventions in schools to measure **the outcomes such as confidence, focus, autonomy and other ‘soft’ skills**? Especially since these outcomes may not necessarily be felt immediately but after a sustained period of interaction. Indeed, should we assess the value of our work in this way?

It is often observed that the lens by which we evaluate our practices is too often specified by the aims of funding agreements and leading partners/commissioners. Frequently evaluation falls into the trap of advocacy and communication, not achieving an objective assessment of the challenge, lessons learnt and value for increasing the sustainability of our work. Most of the Associate Bridge organisations built robust evaluation into aspects of their programmes, be it self-evaluation, an assessment of youth and arts sector evaluation methods or the creation of a replicable evaluation process for school programmes. However, a valuable consideration is the resources required to undertake effective evaluation and disseminate the learning.

## Concluding reflections on arts organisations taking the strategic lead

During interviews with programme staff at ACE, the Associate Bridge organisations and AND, the participants were asked to articulate the value of the Associate Bridge programmes of work and any challenges experienced.

A summary of their reflections are presented here, based largely on their own personal assessment as well as evaluation documentation where available. There was a broad consensus that the true impact and value of the Associate Bridge work will not be felt straight away. Change takes time to bed-down and the outcomes may become more visible further down the line.

### 4.1 Meeting the challenge

Four NPOs were selected to take on the challenge to operate strategically as the Associate Bridge organisations in London. Three of these organisations operated from an arts venue and all four were established producing organisations, delivering high quality programmes and events directly for audiences and beneficiaries.

The Associate Bridge role expected that these organisations would look beyond their own artform, target audiences, organisational priorities and programmes, to balance *delivery* with *strategy.* This was no mean feat for those organisations that are very artform specific, who were used to advocating for their own specialisms rather than representing the viewpoint of a range of interests across the arts spectrum. It may have become especially challenging as the benefits of the strategic work would not necessarily benefit the organisations themselves. In a climate where quality and innovation are largely thought of in terms of outputs, outcomes and brand – aspects of delivery – the strategic role demanded these organisations switch their viewpoint of quality. One venue felt unable to utilise their brand, facilities and technical expertise where if they had done so they may have been able to increase the quality of the work for their partners. Instead, as observed by Roundhouse’s evaluators Fleming and Bunting (2014), the new approaches to partnerships that these organisations facilitated were the innovation.

The initial lack of a clear brief and clarity around the selection process and funding decisions caused confusion within the group of organisations as well as within the sector. There was consensus across the Associate Bridge organisations and AND that the role needed to be clearer, for those organisations who were expected to undertake this work and for the network of NPOs around them. This may have better enabled the organisations to lead early on. What happened instead was almost a year of planning while they unpicked and developed their role within the Bridge agenda. Many interviewed felt that after three years the work is only just starting to bed-down. However, it could be argued that expectations of change were unrealistic within a three-year programme.

Individually the organisations successfully developed partnerships across boroughs and sectors with a remit for working together to place children and young people at the centre of their work. However, there were few opportunities within the timescale for the Associate Bridge organisations to work together, to truly model the principles of partnership and co-commissioning that they tested at local level. This led to some frustration, and it seemed the organisations operated together as a group with a similar remit rather than an active network that could develop clear and concise joined up programmes of work.

The Associate Bridge organisations faced these challenges in a range of ways. All drew upon their existing strengths, for some this included delivery expertise and artform specialism, for others this was their existing networks and local standing. They explored subsidising existing posts and creating new specific posts to undertake the strategic remit. This came at a cost and the differing levels of ACE investment were felt to be prohibitive for two of the Associate Bridges. Where in place, the new posts proved successful; they sat at the periphery of the organisations, representing the organisations’ values whilst being free to develop the strategic remit. Apples and Snakes reflected that if the investment is small, greater impact and achievements are made possible if organisations were to draw upon their expertise in delivery to work on the ground.

### 4.2 Rising to the challenge across the sector

Representatives of AND and ACE were in agreement that the arts and cultural sector now has four organisations that have demonstrated leadership with dedicated staff who maintain a broad understanding of wider cultural education issues and can articulate the value of this work.

The Associate Bridge organisations represented a broad range of sector specialisms but not all areas were present at the table. They were tasked to work across artforms. Some successfully extended their work beyond their own specialism, brand and venue, while for others some strands of work focussed in on their own specific areas of the sector where their strategies could help push forward work across the arts and education, providing new opportunities for artists and expanding the offer for young people.

The Associate Bridge programmes promoted and increased greater awareness in schools and arts organisations of the Artsmark and Arts Award programmes, which formed the foundation of work to raise schools’ and youth engagement with the arts. Together they have trained a new workforce of skilled-up artists and creative workers in Arts Award and project delivery by, with and for young people.

Partnerships will continue to be a key facilitator of project work as resources shrink across the sector. The partnerships developed through the Associate Bridge work both increased the capacity of the organisations to work collaboratively and demonstrated the possibilities for more strategic approaches to working with young people. An enormous amount of funding and partnership investment has been injected into the sector through the capacity held by some of the larger Associate Bridge organisations, who utilised their brand, their departments and staff resources to secure funds to support pockets of partnership activity.

### 4.3 Rising to the challenge in the local area

Each organisation had established strong roots within their surrounding geography prior to becoming an Associate Bridge. This stood them in good stead, increasing their traction at local level, opening up partnership and network opportunities for other local organisations within, across and beyond the arts sector, including council partners and education settings. They each spent time researching needs and listening to partners, establishing a leadership role within their locale. Additionally, whilst carefully focussing their work in their local region, they considered how to replicate programmes in other boroughs.

This led to more opportunities for schools to connect with arts and culture on their doorstep, increasing the visibility of the practices of local arts organisations. It led to sharing of local knowledge and greater opportunities to co-develop projects and programmes that are relevant and appropriate to young people in the area. It led to a model for powerful collaboration which could foster the local redistribution of power.

### 4.4 Rising to the challenge through partnership

At a time when schools are struggling to resource the arts in an education landscape that values STEM/other academic subjects, the Associate Bridge organisations provided curriculum resources, auditing support, valuable connections with artists and arts organisations, and an evidence base for the impact of dance in particular on the education of children and young people.

All valued the process of listening and talking to peers and other sectors, identifying wider needs and trialling new programme models and methods of needs-led partnership working. New partnerships and networks have been formed and existing ones strengthened and enlivened by establishing mechanisms for strategic working, needs-led connections and co-commissioning. They had to rethink notions of innovation and excellence, looking to how partnerships function rather than the outputs of the partnership. The Associate Bridge role has emphasised the power of connecting up, the potential reach of partnerships being just as valuable as the projects themselves.

Together the Associate Bridge organisations trained a new wave of Arts Award supporters and provided library staff, youth workers and teachers with training in planning and delivery of arts events, increasing their understanding of how the arts might benefit young people. More people outside of our sector, working with young people are now more aware of and engaged in opportunities for children and young people.

## Recommendations for further research

This report presents information about the programme level models and key learning points developed within the Associate Bridge programme from 2012 to 2015. It draws largely upon anecdotal evidence, self-evaluation, personal assessment and reflection.

Further, more evaluative research would benefit from engaging stakeholders for reflections and feedback. It could also look into the potential levels of change experienced by the organisations following their three-year strategic role. In this paper it was not possible to assess in depth how the strategic role will change the organisations at this stage: whether or how far the investment, new partnerships, new knowledge of needs and new programmes of work with young people have created new opportunities for the organisation; whether or how much the value of the departments in charge of children and young people did or can increase within the organisations. What has been gained and what has been lost? However, time will need to pass before real change can be reflected on.

This paper does not assess the impact of AND’s programmes, which was outside of the scope of this research. However, a great deal of new strategic work and sector wide research has taken place as part of AND’s Bridge role for London. A separate review of the Bridge work from 2012 to 2015 could bring together London-wide priorities and achievements plus advocate the value of this work in context of London issues.

Sarah B Davies

July 2015

## Web references:

**ACE Bridge information:** <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/our-priorities-2011-15/children-and-young-people/bridge-organisations/>

**A New Direction:** <http://www.anewdirection.org.uk/>

**Apples and Snakes:** [http://www.applesandsnakes.org/page/3684/Associate+Bridge](http://www.applesandsnakes.org/page/3684/Associate%2BBridge)

**Lyric Hammersmith:** <http://www.lyric.co.uk/about/young-people/>

**Islington’s E-Portal:** <http://education-portal.creativeislington.com>

**Roundhouse:** <http://www.roundhouse.org.uk/about-us/partnership-work-and-resources-/>

**Sadler’s Wells:** <http://www.sadlerswells.com/learning/Associate-Bridge/>

1. It was outside of the remit of the paper to cover the achievements of AND in depth, although references to their work are present throughout the paper due to their relationship with the Associate Bridge programme. Further information on AND’s Bridge work can be found on their website. [www.anewdirection.org.uk](http://www.anewdirection.org.uk) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The 10 Bridge organisations: Norfolk and Norwich, Royal Opera House, Mighty Creatives, A New Direction, The Sage Gateshead, Curious Minds, Artswork, RIO, Arts Connect, Cape UK (<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/our-priorities-2011-15/children-and-young-people/bridge-organisations/>) . [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Artsmark is ACE’s flagship programme enabling schools to evaluate and celebrate their arts and cultural education provision. <http://www.artsmark.org.uk/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Arts Award provides a range of qualifications for children and young people to develop interest and progression in the arts. <http://www.artsaward.org.uk> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Almeida, BAC, Bush, Donmar, Greenwich, Hampstead, Lyric, Royal Court, Soho, Unicorn, Stratford East, Tricycle, Young Vic and the Gate Theatres and the Albert and Friends Instant Circus [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Read more about the Camden Cultural Commissioning Model in Connected London: A Guide for Area Leaders Striving to Connect Young Londoners To Exciting Cultural Opportunities (downloaded here: <http://www.anewdirection.org.uk/connected-london>) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Fleming, T. & Bunting, C., 2014, ‘Roundhouse Associate Bridge: Progress Paper – Critical Reflections and Learning Points’ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Read more about Islington’s Education Portal in Connected London: A Guide for Area Leaders Striving to Connect Young Londoners To Exciting Cultural Opportunities (downloaded here: <http://www.anewdirection.org.uk/connected-london>) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Greater information about the Shared Arts Award programme is included in the Roundhouse case study as it demonstrated the principles that the Roundhouse were developing for co-commissioning. However Sadler’s Wells’ role in the co-commissioning model is acknowledged as is its role in the outcomes and impact of the programme. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Fleming, T. & Bunting, C., 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. There are some examples of involving young people and community groups in the co-creation of projects, but these principles have mainly been developed for partnership co-commissioning. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Although many mentioned the limitations of the Associate Bridge network, which is explored further in section 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This was identified by most Associate Bridge organisation interviewees and a point mentioned by Fleming and Bunting in their progress report on Roundhouse’s programmes (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The outcomes of Lyric’s research into evaluation and data gathering amongst cultural providers of opportunities for young people was not available at time of writing. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)