Among Ideal Friends

A family theatre touring consortium developed by The Spark Arts for Children in partnership with Libraries in the East Midlands

Evaluation report

Prepared by Richard Fletcher

the**spark**

arts for children

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in the East Midlands

Project summary, conclusions
and recommendations

Report 1/3: AIF17-1

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Abbreviations used:

AIF   - Among Ideal Friends
BBB   - *A Boy and a Bear in a Boat,* Season 1, S1,
First   - *The First*, Season 2, S2,
BSLB   - *Big Sister, Little Brother,* Season 3, S3
WTRR - *Where the River Runs,* Season 4, S4,
SSWC - *Sylvia South and the Word Catcher,* Season 5, S5

ACE   - Arts Council England
CILIP   - Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
CIPFA - The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
CYP   - Children and Young People
DCMS - Department for Culture, Media and Sport
        (changed in July 2017 to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport)
DFE   - Department for Education
EEF   - Education Endowment Foundation
IMD   - Indices of Multiple Deprivation
LA   - Local Authority
LSOA   - Lower Super Output Area
NFER   - National Foundation for Educational Research
NGSL   - New General Service List
NPO   - National Portfolio Organisation
NS-SEC - National Statistics Socio Economic Classification
SCL   - Society of Chief Librarians
TRA   - The Reading Agency

Contents

When you're young, you read books –
and imagine the stories they hold, are
possible! You see the heroes in them
(girls and boys doing brave,
wonderful things in strange, magical
worlds) and you picture yourself
among them. You read about those
adventures... and you wait for your
own to begin. And then...

Excerpt from *Sylvia South and The Word Catcher*

Foreword

A library is the perfect representation of a healthy community. It endorses membership, but in a manner which is inclusive, not exclusive. It champions ideas, both those cultivated locally and others imported from places far and wide. It celebrates not what is owned, but rather what is shared – yes, a library may possess finite resources, but it works to an infinite model, disseminating ideas and materials as broadly and democratically as is possible. And it utilises what (in my very biased opinion) is that most egalitarian of tools – the word.

Because the letters of an alphabet, the contents of a dictionary, the sounds of a language… are themselves a library. They may be visited by all, they may be owned by none, they may become the catalyst for great thoughts, the building blocks of a grand idea slowly forming in one's own mind. Both sit at the heart of empowered populations, and both are notable absences in struggling ones.

To have access to the stories of many, is to have permission to imagine your own. To read of characters (real or fictitious, it doesn't matter) who live out myriad lives, who strive towards their own innumerable destinies, is to see life as a patchwork, and so begin plotting one's own path through it. That these characters succeed is of course no certainty. But that they aspire is a wonder, and a noble lesson to impart. The labyrinthine bookshelves of a library teach us this.

The Spark Arts' model of adding theatre to this invitational vocabulary in the East Midlands harnesses all these same tools and methodologies, but changes the medium. Where a library dweller may have turned a page or put on headphones or balanced numbered blocks or conversed in whispered delight with another (the co-author of a story being invented in this moment, this conversation), Adel and her team instead provide the audience with a set, and a score, and a performer and a scripted tale.

The intimate pact has not changed – just as a novel's enjoyment is half the work of the author writing, and half the reader conjuring their own pictures and emotional context, theatre brings only some of the ingredients and asks those watching to invent the rest. So of course a backdrop is only the suggestion of a landscape, of course it is only two actors playing six, of course we are not carried through a week of adventuring in this 50 minutes… But if the offer is made, and the offer is accepted, then a complicit game of make-believe may see these realities blur a little.

And like any great library offering, the feeling induced, the world conjured, the fantasy embarked upon is a wholly private one, silently playing out in the head of each person in attendance.

And this silence, I believe, is the true wondrous magic of a library. It is a quiet place not because so little is happening within its walls – but rather, because so much is.

Finegan Kruckemeyer
Playwright,
Author of *Sylvia South and the Word Catcher*

Executive Summary

Introduction

In the early part of 2016 The Spark Arts for Children in partnership with libraries across the East Midlands established a new touring theatre consortium specifically for the presentation of performance work in libraries. The new consortium, Among Ideal Friends, aimed to deliver and transport high quality book / story based performances and workshop activity for children 5-11 years, their families and schools.

Over an 18 month programme The Spark toured five seasons of theatre performances and workshops to libraries in Leicester, Leicestershire, Rutland, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. The tours gave families and schools new opportunities to take part in arts and culture experiencing high quality theatre at venues on their doorstep. Each season involved one play with an associated programme of audience development workshops, bespoke marketing and audience development plans developed in consultation with each partner authority.

Through a partnership approach Among Ideal Friends successfully:

- developed the first pan-regional consortium of touring performance work specifically for library spaces

- delivered a shared programme of high quality produced, presented and participatory performance activity which would not be affordable or achievable working alone

- built new and increased audiences for truly great book/story based work for children, schools and families within the community

- increased the skills and capacity of staff through training to ensure libraries have effective leadership and delivery skills to enable long term success and continued engagement in arts and cultural activity

- maximised the role of the library as a focal point for extended cultural activity.

The desire to inspire and empower people to lead active lives enriched by cultural activity was and remains behind the vision for the project. Libraries want to extend the scope of their programming to encourage active engagement and showcase literature as a satisfying shared experience. The Spark want to find innovative models of practice to ensure that every child thrives through a rich and adventurous cultural entitlement. Through Among Ideal Friends we made art and culture more widely available across a region especially in places of limited engagement.

Adel Al-Al Salloum
Director, The Spark Arts for Children

Box office

Among Ideal Friends (AIF) toured five seasons of live theatre between July 2016 and August 2017 reaching a total audience of 7,961 (2,134 adults and 5,827 children) or 78% capacity of the 10,220 tickets available.

There was a total of 151 shows, in 54 different venues, mostly libraries and a few community venues. Season two focused specifically on school groups, with 27 groups attending. A further 12 school groups attended season three.

37 shows, roughly 1 in 4, sold out or sold over their initial capacity. 31 venues, nearly half, were able to achieve consistent capacities of 80% or more, relative to the total number of shows they received.

Venues that received more seasons, were likely to see an increase in box office. 55% of venues receiving 2 or more seasons, 61% of venues receiving 3 or more seasons and 70% of venues receiving 4 or more seasons saw either a stable or increasing box office. Five venues saw increases of 25% or more over their involvement in the project.

Total Audience Reach **7,961**

151 shows in
54 different venues

1 in 5 adults had never seen a theatre performance with their child before

38% of audience classified as low engagement groups.

Almost double national levels for children & family arts

The Audience

1,364 audience surveys were completed from Season 1 to Season 5 (64% of the adult audience).

Using the Net Promoter Score methodology, (see page 39) Among Ideal Friends shows (+82%) compare favourably to average scores for children and family arts events across the country (+76%, Audience Agency)

38% of the audience were classified as low engagement groups according to Audience Finder segmentation. This is similar to the background level of the East Midlands (37%) and nearly double that of national levels for children and family arts (21%). This is exactly the same proportion as found in the Audience Agency's 2017 national estimate for libraries (38%) from 1.4m users at 14 library authorities.

The typical (median) adult attended with 2 children. 50% of the children were aged between 4 and 6. 75% were aged between 4 and 8.

Nearly 1 in 5 (18%) adults had never seen a theatre performance with their child before. A further 1 in 10 (10%) had done so, but not within the last 12 months. The numbers of those who had never seen a theatre performance with their child was higher in the cities (Leicester 31%, Nottingham 23%) than the counties (Leicestershire 12%, Nottinghamshire 13% and Rutland 9%). When asked where they had last attended a theatre performance with their child, 9% stated that this was at a library.

In Season 1, 23% of the audience claimed to have seen theatre in a library before, rising to 38% by Season 5. This difference was more noticeable in regions that were comparatively new to working with The Spark (Leicestershire +16%, Rutland +17%, Nottingham +19%). Nottinghamshire, which had worked with The Spark before still saw an increase of 17%, although in Leicester, where The Spark has worked with libraries for the longest, this was still an increase of 3%.

In terms of repeat attendance, across Season 3 to 5, 36% of the audience claimed to have seen at least one other previous season. From Season 3 to 5, the proportion of audience who had seen 2 or more previous shows increased from 2% to 8%. (From 1 in 50 to roughly 1 in 12).

In Season 1, 15% of the audience had not heard about the show before the day of performance; presumably finding out by chance or attending as a last minute decision. By the time of Season 4 & 5 only 6% found out about the show 'on the day'.

The majority of open comments given (58%) referenced the quality of the work in some way. Other themes that emerged were that they noticed how much it held their children's focus (8%), that they would like to see more of the same (8%) that they thought the experience had some kind of educational benefit (8%) that they found some added benefit with the show taking place in a library (7%) and that they felt the ticket was good value (4%).

Audiences travelled an average of 1.5-2.0 miles in cities and 2.5-3.5 miles in counties. We examined whether audiences travelled to their nearest library or not, and found that an average of 40% travelled to a library that was not their closest library.

Interviews were carried out with 9 audience members across the regions in season 4. Amongst other things, interviewees reflected the everyday, low-risk, intimate nature of the spaces themselves as something that many more conventional arts venues would probably envy. They were typically positive about encouraging their children to read for pleasure and often stated they felt they got more out of libraries than their peers.

Schools

Regarding the school programme (Season 2), 15 out of 26 schools (58%) stated they had not been to a library before as a class or school for an activity, and 23 of the 26 (88%) stated the experience had encouraged them to do so again in the future.

For season 2, 13 of 14 schools (92%) stated they were developing class based activites linked to the show. For season 3, although no additional resources were available, 5 of 12 (41%) stated they attached some kind of class based activity to the show. Season 2 was predominantly seen by Year 5 & 6 students (95%) whereas season 3 was more varied.

Key stage 2 scores were examined for 23 of the schools and showed a variety of high and low scores according to this one measure. From this we could broadly infer that neither high or low performing schools were any more or less likely to value the experience, or to be able to practically manage this kind of visit, or to be able to afford the relatively low fee.

Libraries are an essential part of communities. They give us spaces to learn, explore and be creative, which is why we're pleased to be investing in The Spark Arts latest library tour. It will be a brilliant way for more families in the East Midlands to enjoy great theatre locally.

Peter Knott
Area Director, Arts Council England

Libraries

For libraries participating in AIF, an average of 29% of their active borrowers (having borrowed an item at least once in the last 12 months) were children under 12. This ranged from 46% in Leicester, 28% in Leicestershire, 34% in Nottingham, 30% in Nottinghamshire and 21% in Rutland. Across all regions, there were a total of 68,712 members aged under 12 who were active borrowers.

The survey established that 7% of adults and 11% of children attending performances did not have a library card. Relative to the box office, this would be 149 adults and 641 children. Across the 151 shows, we could estimate that roughly 1 adult and 4 children at each show did not have library cards.

The average library in our sample signed up 42 new children's members per month. Therefore, if libraries were able to sign up every child attending performances that did not have a library card (641) this would be equivalent to one library's expected level of new sign ups over 15 months.

Four interviews and two group interviews were carried out with library staff between season 2 and 3. Most had been through significant restructuring in the recent past. They saw arts events as a growing priority and were optimistic about their role in continuing to attract and maintaining a family user base. A range of practical considerations and best practices were discussed for marketing to the general public and to schools; all agreed it was useful to be able to share these across the consortium.

At the end of the project, library staff and project leads were surveyed. 78% had helped arrange some kind of additional pre or post show activity related to the shows. The average library would put on 4.6 arts events in a year with 1.8 performing arts events in a year. Half expected to do more events in the future

Across the 151 shows we estimate

1 adult and 4 children at each show **did not** have library cards

AIF reached the total equivalent of 4 libraries entire junior memberships

(either arts or performing arts), half felt they would continue to do the same number and none expected to do less. The range of programming across the shows was discussed as a positive, from the schools focus, to a Christmas-period show, more comedic and more dramatic performances. Library staff and audiences appreciated the challenge and variety in this range.

Library databases were consulted to see if there was an increase in new members under 12 being created on the day of the show or in the months preceding and following the show. The data available covered 48 shows across 18 venues. 25 of the shows (52%) saw average or above average levels of sign ups on the day of the show. Season 1 and Season 5 were typically better than average on this measure, roughly coinciding with other events like the Summer Reading Challenge. Overall, the period running up to a show was more likely to see above average levels of sign-ups than the period after. (the full analysis will be included in report: AIF17-3).

Conclusions

From libraries perspective, projects like Among Ideal Friends can help deliver against two related yet distinct agendas. The increasing expectation that cultural programming is part of what a contemporary *"comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons"* (Public Libraries Act) should offer, whilst also helping encourage general, ongoing use of the library. Projects like AIF provide professional and peer guidance through consortium working, providing various hooks on which libraries can tie other activities and ambitions and at a relatively affordable level of subsidy.

From an arts organisations perspective, libraries are valuable frontline cultural infrastructure that they should consider as generally well connected to their respective communities, especially young audiences. Libraries are increasingly capable, practical and intimate venues with effective promotional reach. The comparison to working within schools is often drawn, but amongst their other qualities, libraries are importantly distinct in aiming to be places that children do not view as extensions of 'work'; to engage in activities that are not extensions of 'studying'. While new work might often be expected to incorporate books, language, storytelling or libraries as central themes, the shows in AIF were stylistically varied, despite small casts and technical limitations.

From an educational perspective, the arts in general are thought to have a range of cognitive, non-cognitive and intrinsic values though these arguments are extremely wide ranging and often in need of more substantial evidence. However, the quality of the 'home learning environment' and the importance of reading for pleasure are both well established, in early development. It is known that libraries in particular can play a role within this. The literacy development benefits of AIF are not directly quantified here though artists, library staff, adult audiences and schools all related various mechanisms or wider effects that the experience would be likely to utilise or generate with the young audience.

"…children who did not grow up in a literacy-rich environment need a significant event (e.g. a book-gifting event, an interesting book, an interesting conversation or a stimulating trip to the library) to kick-start this model by influencing reading enjoyment and attitudes towards reading."

Clark & De Zoysa, 2011
Literature review - see page 101

1. Project background

1.1 Background

The Spark Arts For Children is a registered charity which offers children the opportunity to discover and enjoy the arts as audiences, as learners and as creators of their own art. Founded in 2003, The Spark Festival is a two-week summer festival of the performing and visual arts for children in Leicester and Leicestershire.

Among Ideal Friends was built on a track record of previous work in library settings. The larger context of the project is one in which The Spark has consistently expanded the audience for such work and the capacity for libraries to effectively deliver such work over the long term sustainably.

To say that these libraries had never programmed or commissioned arts events, particularly for children, prior to this project is generally untrue. For one thing since 2008, The Spark had been programming events in Leicester libraries mainly during their annual festival and then as more in-depth projects and tours in their own right. However, all partners recognised the value in a consortium approach and that each region would be able to adapt their approach to their needs and the previous experiences of their audiences.

At the heart of our communities libraries provide a safe and familiar space to engage in new experiences. Live theatre transform these familiar spaces – not because of extensive sets and special effects but because children (and adults) are swept away by the power of the performances.

The opportunities to watch and be part of a live show in an everyday space opens up the experience to many new children, families and schools in a way that not only broadens their cultural participation but also their creative curiosity.

Councillor Sarah Russell
Leicester Assistant City Mayor -
Children, Young People & Schools

Tree Child, 2013

The Spark has worked in partnership with Leicester Library Service since 2008 programming high quality performances across The Spark Festival (annually in May). In 2013 The Spark received Strategic Touring Funds to develop a new show, *Tree Child*, to tour across 16 library spaces in Leicester as part of the Summer Reading Challenge.

Drawing upon its relationships with schools in the city The Spark invited schools to participate in a project, run in partnership with Leicester Library Service, which aimed to improve children's participation in and use of their local library. In the first phase of the project a creative team of three worked with children in a workshop setting that incorporated games and drama exercises designed to stimulate their creative thinking and through this to draw on their experience for the new piece of theatre to be toured to local libraries.

Working in collaboration with young people from Spinney Hill and Hazel Primary Schools, a creative team of three devised a new piece of theatre that was professionally produced and toured to city libraries during July 2013 (over the period 15th July - 2nd August). 886 adults and children attended the 19 shows (80% capacity), an average of 47 per show – most of whom were new audiences for Spark. The library staff indicated that the show worked well in their venues, as did the creative team and there was some evidence that enrolments and visits to the library by children improved following the tour.

Imaginative Spaces / Neighbourhoods, 2014-18

Imaginative Spaces began in 2014, developing into Imaginative Neighbourhoods from 2016.

An artist in residence project supporting storytelling as a medium to promote reading for pleasure and language development. Artists' worked with library staff, schools, families and community groups to develop a programme of work that showed creative and innovative ways to use library spaces, books and other resources.

During Imaginative Spaces artists worked with neighbourhood staff, schools, family and community groups to re-imagine these spaces as cultural hubs at the heart of the community. Cultivating a renewed sense of ownership of local libraries, and encouraging families and children to become actively involved in arts and culture at the heart of their community.

This project was delivered in partnership with Leicester Library Service, supported using public funding by Arts Council England, and formed part of a broader strategy that looked to develop libraries as a beacon of excellence.

The impact and engagement of these schemes have been vast, with Imaginative Neighbourhoods seeing over 11,000 participants across 324 sessions, involving 23 artists and an achievement of 70 arts Awards, in its first year alone.

Pop Up Theatre, 2014

In 2014 Nottinghamshire County Council Library Service in partnership with The Spark developed the Pop Up Theatre Programme, an 18 month performance programme that commissioned its first touring show, *A Boy and A Bear in A Boat*. The second phase of Pop Up Theatre was a programme of family performances in 5 strategic libraries with family audience development workshops delivered in a further twelve. This project provided high quality, fun, imaginative and accessible live theatre in libraries for children aged 5 - 9 and their families.

This extensive strategic programme saw some 41 performances and 48 workshops reaching around 5000 people and enabled Nottinghamshire libraries to develop and grow their audience.

This project gave the opportunity to embed children's literature into the programming and the opportunity to commission a new piece to fill a gap in the market for exceptionally high quality children's plays suitable for library venues.

Among Ideal Friends, 2016

The Spark Arts for Children in partnership with Libraries across the East Midlands established a new touring theatre consortium specifically for the presentation of performance work in libraries. The new consortium Among Ideal Friends delivered and transported high quality book / story based performances and workshop activity for children 5-11 years, their families and schools.

Over an 18 month programme of work The Spark toured 5 seasons of theatre performances and workshops to libraries in Leicester City, Leicestershire County in partnership with Rutland, Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County. The tours gave families and schools new opportunities to take part in arts and culture at venues on their doorstep.

The programme hosted 151 performances in 54 libraries reaching a total audience of 7961 across the region.

From programming to commissioning

The AIF work was delivered across 5 seasons, with each season providing one show with an associated programme of audience development workshops and bespoke marketing and audience development plans, developed in consultation with each partner.

Seasons 1 & 2 restaged two of The Spark's most successful previous productions, *A Boy and a Bear in a Boat* commissioned by Nottinghamshire County Council Pop Up Theatre and *The First*, originally produced during year one of Imaginative Spaces. Seasons 3 & 4 were programmed in consultation with consortium members and Season 5 was an entirely new show commissioned by consortium members.

Previously, both the *Tree Child* and Pop Up Theatre tours showed that these types of shows could achieve 80-90% of capacity in library spaces, which varied from 40-100 seats. Many would also be likely to sell out entirely. With a similar quality of product, it was felt likely that libraries would be able to achieve similar levels of capacity over the seasons. There might be an increase over time, depending on the starting points of respective venues.

In Leicester, where The Spark had operated for the longest, they have gradually been able to build up both the libraries and the public's acceptance of paying for arts events in libraries. No comprehensive records have been pulled together, though libraries involved over the long term typically report moving from £1.00 / £1.50 up to £3.00 / £4.00 over several years. Attendance at these events often increased over time, or tickets generally sold faster than before.

AIF shows were priced, to libraries at £300, meaning that a 100 capacity venue charging £3 per seat would, in theory, be able to recoup the whole cost from the audience. Even at this level, the work remained subsidised by The Spark and Arts Council England, not to mention support-in-kind. Library authorities viewed this as a reasonable expense, for the potential benefits on offer. Though it is likely that only the minority of venues were able to fully recoup direct costs; limited by their capacities if nothing else, even a partial contribution from the audience was a step forward for many. The costs of the project overall were also shared across the five seasons and the authorities involved, therefore print costs, transportation and marketing could all be co-ordinated, allowing for further savings.
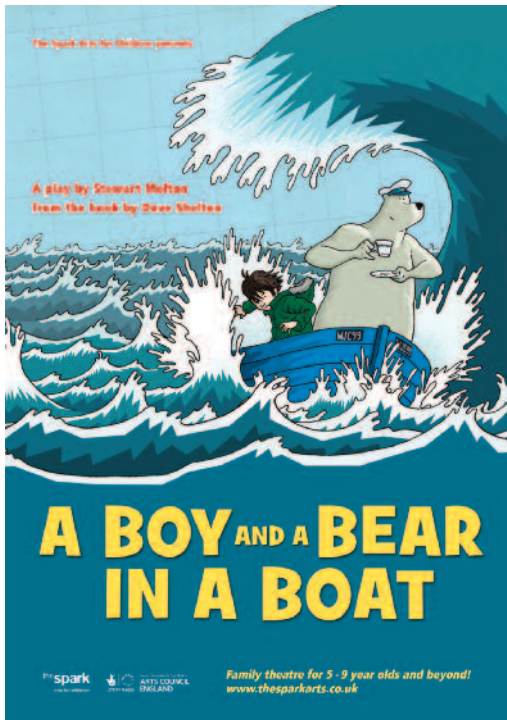
1.2 The Shows

A Boy and a Bear in a Boat

A new play by Stewart Melton from the book by Dave Shelton

Welcome aboard! Join our heroes all at sea with just a suitcase, a ukulele and a teapot to help them. Dark clouds are looming, the ocean is full of dangers, there's only one sandwich left and it's nearly teatime. When all seems lost, can their friendship survive? And where exactly are they heading? Will they ever get there?

Adapted from the award-winning novel by Dave Shelton and featuring live music and movement, *A Boy and a Bear in a Boat* is a funny, thoughtful and thrilling adventure.

"A beautiful, funny, moving piece of theatre; a treat for children and adults alike" Primary Times, Edinburgh.

"Incredible, amazing, brilliant!" Bailey aged 8

Comments from audience survey:

"Grandchildren enjoyed it especially the 7 year old, I enjoyed it too! It was well done."

"Lovely production - the children really enjoyed it. Good length for young children, thank you."

"Simply wonderful, many thanks. My child is an avid reader and this is such a beautiful way of bringing stories to life."

AIF Tour Dates:
21st July - 6th August 2016
20 shows
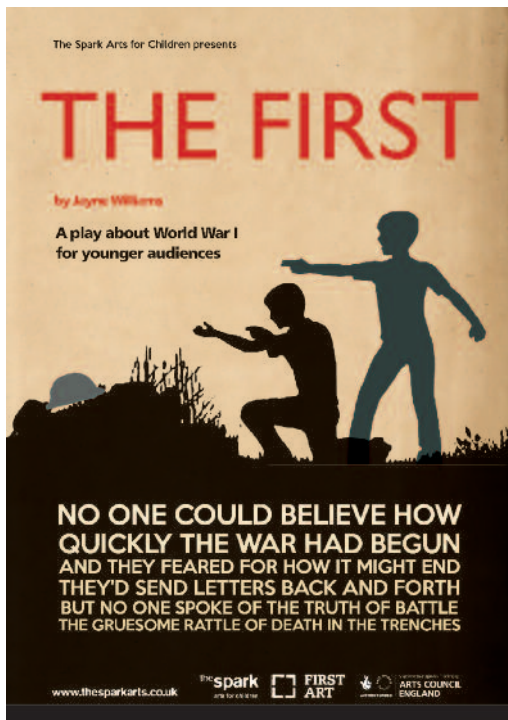
The First

The First is a play based on the global events of WWI, told from the perspective of two boys from a small town in the East Midlands. Written by Jayne Williams and produced by The Spark Arts for Children, *The First* serves as a dramatic work of fiction based on historic fact; a hook to reel in the interest and intrigue of learners aged 9+, to ignite inquisitive minds to explore their own local stories that link to the global history of WWI.

Written as a dynamic epic poem to reflect the real life encounters from the trenches, the story follows two best friends - Frederick and Jack, as they grow together, play together and enter the Great War together. *The First* is a play of choices and the audience is invited to decide the fate of Jack at the end of the play.

Comments from teachers' survey:

"Children were captivated by the performance. They loved being immersed in the action. "

"The children were all talking about it on the bus on the way to another visit the next day."

"The children were mesmerised by the play. They can be a loud year group but all were attentive and concentrating. Some were even moved to tears."

AIF Tour Dates:
31st October - 16th November 2016
25 shows

Big Sister, Little Brother

By Mike Kenny

Rita and Archie, two poor tailors, share their story about the time they met a big-headed Emperor, a foolish minister and an exquisite Empress and how they persuaded them they could weave magical garments. When everything goes horribly wrong, they start to blame each other.

This funny, fast-paced story of two squabbling siblings retells the classic Emperor's New Clothes with a brilliant twist.

Comments from audience survey:

"Really good, excellent show, especially encourages imagination 'funny' thank you"

"We really enjoyed having been able to access theatre in the library at amazing value. Thank you"

"Please put on more events like this at the library"

AIF Tour Dates:
29th November - 17th December 2016
34 Shows
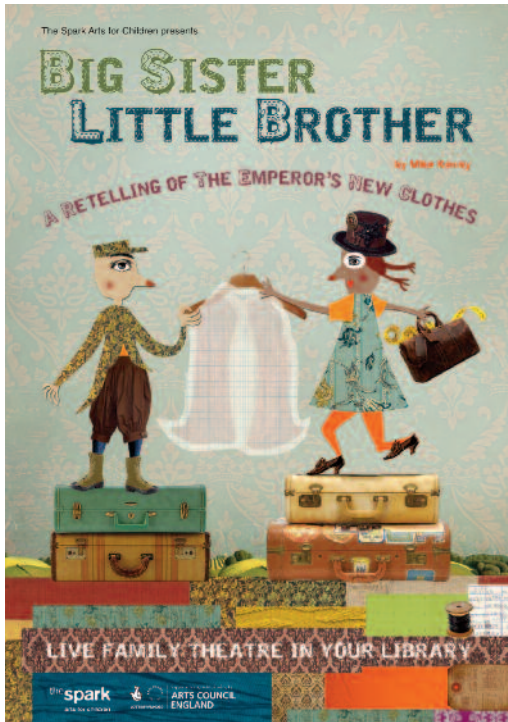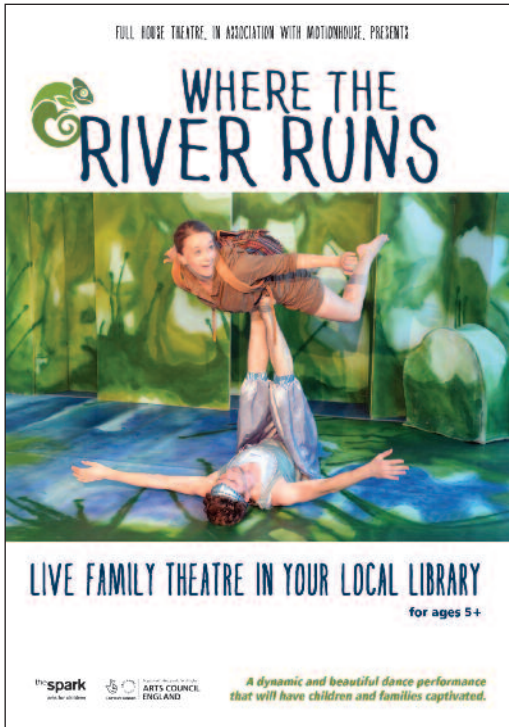
Where the River Runs

Full House Theatre

Made with young audiences in mind, high quality dance performance *Where The River Runs* tells the simple story of a stranger trying to cross a river, and what happens when the water comes to life and starts a wild and wonderful journey.

With stunning movement and spectacular lifts, this dynamic and beautiful story, set in the rain forest, will have children and families captivated and enthralled.

Comments from audience survey:

"Really amazing show, very interactive. A different approach. Thanks."

"Great value for money! Excellent performance - we'll be back again!"

"Show was fabulous. It made it extra special meeting the dancers and clarifying story with questions. Loved it. More please!"

AIF Tour Dates:
3rd April – 19th April 2017
24 Shows
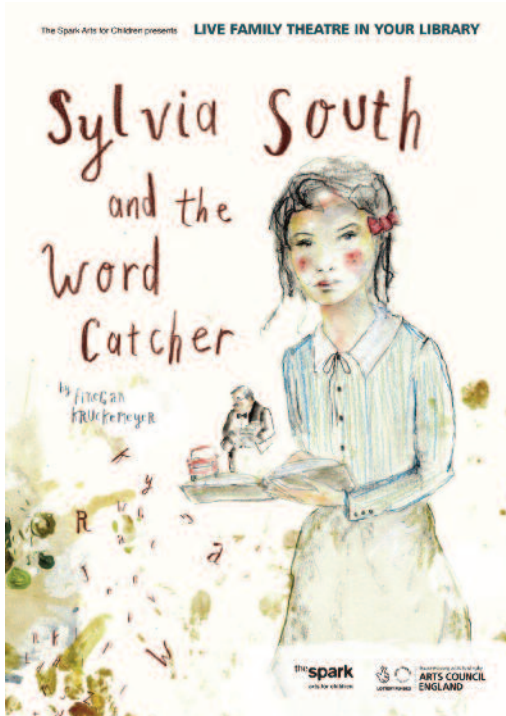
Sylvia South
and the Word Catcher

by Finegan Kruckemeyer

There are stories you find when you open a book. And there are others...that wait to find you.

Sylvia South is settling in for a quiet day at her local library, when she looks up from the pages to see something outrageous. Knowing she'd best be off before something more terrible happens...something more terrible happens.

And suddenly Sylvia South is off on an adventure, navigating streets on a borrowed bicycle to chase a strange little man with an armful of other people's books! It would be an exciting story to read - if only she wasn't inside it.

Sylvia South is a story full of imagination, surprise, adventure and curiosity.

Comments from audience survey:

"Fabulous story! We love stories about books and reading"

"Really enjoyed it thank you! I rarely get to see performances with my youngest on our own and he was captivated."

"Brilliant play, we have never watched one at a library but we definitely will again. Very good and very child friendly. Brilliant, thank you."

AIF Tour Dates:
17th July - 13th August 2017
48 Shows

Performance Schedule		A Boy and a Bear in a Boat (S1)	The First (S2)x	Big Sister Little Brother (S3)	Where the River Runs (S4)	Sylvia South and the Word Catcher (S5)
May 2016	Planning					
June	Programming S2 & S3, Training session 1					
July		20 shows				
August	Training session 2					
September						
October	Programming S4, Commissioning S5					
November			25 shows			
December				34 shows		
January 2017	Interim report					
February	Finalise S5 commission					
March	Training session 3					
April					24 shows	
May	Preproduction S5					
June						
July						48 shows
August						
September	Debrief and Training session 4					

1.3 Research methods

As initial investigations and, in particular, the literature review developed, it became clear that there has been no shortage of commentary, policy, debate and development across the intersecting areas of education, libraries and the arts in recent years and months. Arts Council England has, in its new role as the development agency for libraries, commissioned a range of research and consultation to 'get to grips' with libraries in changing times but also to celebrate cases of best practice and show what can be possible.

In general, the level of detail in existing case studies, final reports and documentation does not yet seem to have caught up to the rapidly changing and expanding definition of what we expect libraries to 'do'. Some of these resources do exist but could be obscured both by the inherently small sizes and local nature of the projects and therefore by their relatively low profile. This unassuming nature, in common with discussions about 'everyday culture or creativity' is arguably a key motivator, part of this project's success and of others like it.

Outside of the extraordinary direct experience of the performances, it is easy to see how the cumulative value of the work can be missed or forgotten about, once the bookshelves are returned to their usual places and the performers moved on to the next venue. If there was an overarching objective of the research, it was to be able to be able to deliver a detailed case study of a relatively novel project.

Further detail on methodology is included in the relevant sections of this report. Survey questions, Interview scrips and further resources can be found in the third report: Technical appendices, data and further resources: AIF17-3. This section gives an overview of how the research element of the project was planned and delivered.

Primary data

Audience	Surveys from S1, S3, 4, 5	Short interviews during S4	Children's feedback forms	
Schools	Group leader feedback form S2	Interviews		
Libraries	Interviews between S2-S3	End of project survey	Library card data	

Secondary data

Audience	Segmentation methods			
Schools	Key Stage 2 scores			Literature review
Libraries / regions	Geographic mapping, National Literacy Vulnerability Scores, ACE Cultural education data, Box office data, Socio-economic data			

Audience surveys constituted the major thrust of the collection of primary data. This was relatively familiar to all partners, audience members and a range of topics could be extrapolated from this. Two particular challenges were encountered. First that the survey data would ideally be disaggregated down to the level of individual venues, secondly that it was likely that the questions would need to change between seasons. It would have been possible to maintain the same questions throughout and to 'lump' all responses together, but this approach has been more responsive and allows for regional and in some cases, venue-level insights. Free text or open questions were used frequently to accommodate a range of responses, although this meant some further time dedicated to postcoding after collection.

Focus groups for the audience were considered, though interviews were felt to be most appropriate within the restrictions of the budget. Interviews would be able to cover a greater range of locations and focused on the more direct experiences and relationships individuals had with their respective libraries. A focus group might be more useful for testing new ideas or allowing individuals to reflect on their thoughts in the context of their peers. Ultimately the project did not seem to need this level of input but it might be of interest in future. The scheduling of the interviews was always planned to be in the later stages of the project, as other themes and topics would have emerged by then.

Interviews with library staff from each region were carried out and included one artist in residence. These were typically in depth, from 45 minutes long to just over an hour. These were predominately carried out over the phone and recorded, though in one case the researcher was invited to carry out this discussion at a meeting at which library staff from across the region attended. These interviews were carried out between season 2 and 3, therefore interviewees particularly reflected on the differences between public shows and school group shows.

School group feedback forms were loosely based on previous approaches with schools *(Tree Child)* and the 'Collective Outcomes Tool' developed by The Mighty Creatives and Shared Intelligence. These were successfully completed by all school leaders in season 3 and around half of those in season 2. It was not possible to reach school leaders for further interview, several were reached out to without success, though some of these commented that they felt they had already had sufficient opportunity to give their views through the feedback forms. One interview was carried out, which remained of some use, though should not be taken to be representative.

Children's feedback forms are something that The Spark has used at similar events, these typically collect the age of the child, a simple 1-5 enjoyment rating and any further comments. Overall this data was principally used for collecting quotes and general feedback, it was not analysed in detail. Children's ages were collected via the AIF adult questionnaire.

The researcher was in regular contact with The Spark throughout and had worked with the team for a number of years previously. The researcher met with library partners at one of the training days, then subsequently at a number of library visits, both to watch the shows, to interview them individually and for visits to interview audience members.

The Spark Arts for Children presents

THE FIRST

by Jayne Williams

**A play about World War I
for younger audiences**

NO ONE COULD BELIEVE HOW QUICKLY THE WAR HAD BEGUN
AND THEY FEARED FOR HOW IT MIGHT END
THEY'D SEND LETTERS BACK AND FORTH
BUT NO-ONE SPOKE OF THE TRUTH OF BATTLE
THE GRUESOME RATTLE OF DEATH IN THE TRENCHES

2. The regions and libraries

ACE cultural education data

The following information is taken from the Arts Council England Cultural Education Data Portal and helpfully summarises a range of information that is useful to those interested in the cultural landscape for children and young people (CYP). The individual findings themselves are from various sources, such as the 2011 National census, 2013/14 Arts Council awards or Local Authority reporting.

	Leicester	Leicestershire	Nottingham	Nottinghamshire	Rutland	East Midlands	England
Number of Children & Young People (CYP)	92,783	153,789	81,140	181,088	8,625	1.0m	
Multiple Index of Deprivation Ranking (of 353)	14	NA	10	NA	299		
% of children in poverty	29%	12%	34%	12%	9%	19%	20%
National Portfolio Organisations	9	1	8	0	0		
Local Authority (LA) investment in Arts and Culture	£9.7m	£9.6m	£9.1m	£14.6m	£853k		
LA investment per CYP	£104	£62	£112	£80	£98		
Grants for the arts for Children & Young People	14 £213,103	4 £59,850	22 £368,655	3 £32,659	0		
Education establishments	134	316	115	365	28		
% of schools with Artsmark awards	11	12	23	11	21	14	15
CYP with Arts Award	493	505	477	389	70	3,663	61,578
GCSE entries in arts subjects	5%	7%	7%	7%	8%	7%	7%

Note that data for district councils is also available from this source (eg: Oadby & WIgston, Mansfield etc) however it is not available at the county council level.

National Portfolio Organisations are clearly clustered within cities. The factors which cause this clustering likely also explain why they proportionately attract greater amounts of Grants for the Arts.

City authorities also invest more in arts and culture (not specifically for CYP), per head (CYP). Between the county regions, Nottinghamshire seems to invest slightly more than Leicestershire, even accounting for the slightly higher base population. (Roughly 20% proportionately)

Nottingham city appears to have a very high proportion of Artsmark schools, with essentially more than double the number of other areas, however it does not appear to be directly linked to the number of children with Arts Awards. It could be related to greater levels of GCSE's arts entries where Nottingham reaches a similar level to the counties, whereas Leicester is slightly lower.

Looking to the indices of multiple deprivation and child poverty statistics, we can see that Nottingham city is the highest in each measure, however again it is interesting to consider that the % of schools with Artsmark awards could be related to higher uptake of arts subjects. Comparing Leicester and Nottingham cities, this is also in the context that Leicester city has more CYP overall and more educational establishments.

In the latest Taking Part 2015/16 headlines, the following figures were produced for the country as a whole:

	Least deprived decile	Most deprived decile
Engaged in the arts in the last 12 months	82%	68%
Visited a library in the last 12 months	31%	37%

Libraries, arts and deprivation

The economic, social and cultural barriers for cultural engagement are of shared interest to those working in libraries and the arts. There are a number of methods that can be used to determine relative prosperity, from NS-SEC (National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification) based on type of employment, to ACORN, a consumer classification method and IMD (Indices of Multiple Deprivation).

The Taking Part survey headlines commonly use IMD when referring to the most or least deprived areas, referring to the most and least deprived deciles (top and bottom 10%) The IMD are a composite of various measures of deprivation (economic, education, health). Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are ranked from most to least deprived, and from these percentiles (100ths) or deciles (10ths) can be derived. It is a relative measure, not an absolute one. The full process of calculating IMD is best described elsewhere, but it is worth noting that it puts a significant weight on economic factors, where for the purposes of arts projects we might be interested in other aspects, or particularly with regards to children.

There is clear reason to be interested in deprivation. While arts engagement drops as deprivation increases, the reverse is true for library usage, although the difference is greater for the arts than it is for library use. Admittedly this is from comparing the extreme ends of both scales, where the middle ranks likely show less variation.

IMD data was mapped across LSOAs to examine the relative locations of libraries. Note this does not cover all libraries in each area, only those that AIF shows visited. Also note the IMD deciles used are based on national level data. It would also be possible to rank LSOAs within each region (The most/least deprived within Leicester for example) or across the four regions as a whole, though it is expected this might produce a broadly similar result.

Overall it can be seen that many of the libraries receiving AIF shows were in or near areas of high deprivation. While this is broadly true for cities more than counties, there are exceptions. Maps can be seen in in AIF17-3.

Library size and children's membership

Library size is determined here by the number of active borrowers, those who had borrowed an item within the last 12 months. From this, the number of children who are members was also determined and expressed as a percentage of the total size of the library. If nothing else, this shows that under 12's make up a considerable proportion of libraries overall membership: a median of 30%. (Mean average of 29%), though this varies across the regions. This only includes libraries in each region that received at least one show.

Total size of library and proportion of under 12's

■ Total ■ Under 12s

■ Total.   Under 12s
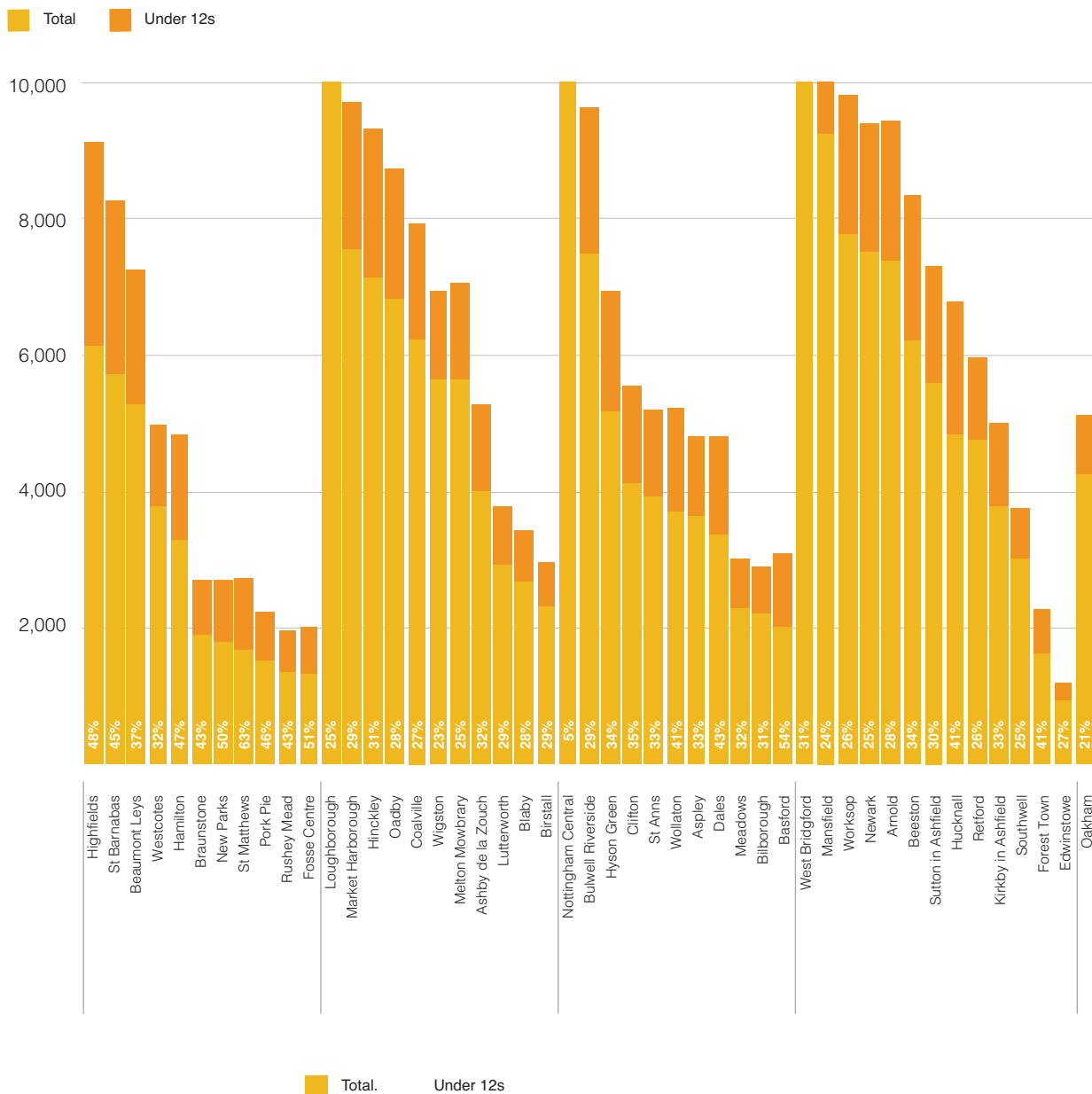
ACE cultural education data

National Literacy Vulnerability Scores

The following is taken from the National Literacy Trust's analysis, carried out by Experian. This used Experian's Mosaic segmentation and data from the 2011 National Census:

"Launched in February 2017, each constituency's literacy score is built on Experian's data expertise and our understanding of the socioeconomic factors most closely associated with low literacy, including levels of education, income and unemployment."

Only those constituencies in the East Midlands, in the regions where AIF was active are included below. In common with the rest of England, cities have increased literacy vulnerability than counties, though Experian also found that: "low literacy levels aren't restricted to regions with low income, employment and social deprivation"

6 of the 18 constituencies were in the highest quartile (top 25%) of areas with the highest Literacy Vulnerability Scores.

|	Constituency Rank (1: Greatest need, of 533)	Percentile	Literacy Vulnerability Score
Nottingham North	8	2	102
Nottingham East	15	3	133
Leicester West	23	4	163
Leicester South	85	16	393
Leicester East	105	20	457
Nottingham South	116	22	497

3. Box Office

Box office

In general, we should assume that the nature of selling to the general public and to school groups varies to a degree, although feedback from libraries suggests that many of the skills and resources developed through the project were of similar value when selling to schools or the general public. Furthermore, while it might require more effort to reach a single school, many commented that being able to sell 60 or 90 tickets in one booking made up for the greater initial time invested.

Unless otherwise stated, season 2 is excluded from findings in this section. This season was entirely focused on school groups, in bulk blocks of either 60 or 90, due to the requirements of the show, these limits were comparatively strict. Season 3 had a mix of school and public shows, however the school shows in season 3 had no similar restriction on capacity, so greater variation was seen. [1]
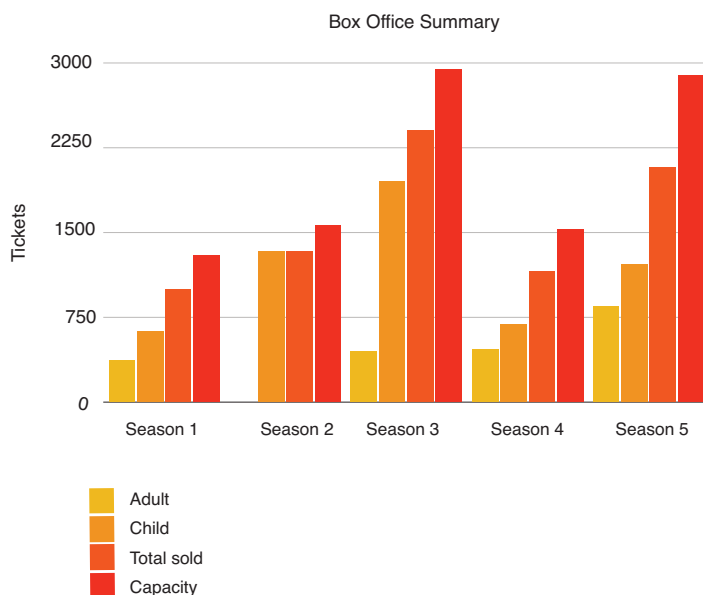
Total attendance

Among Ideal Friends, season 1 to season 5 reached an audience of 7961, or 78% of the total maximum: 10,220. Individually, the seasons sold 77% (S1) 85% (S2), 82% (S3), 75% (S4) and 72% (S5) of capacity.

This was 5,827 children and 2,134 adults at 54 different libraries and community venues, for a total of 151 shows. Roughly 1 in every 4 shows (37) sold out or over the initial capacity estimated (100% capacity or more).

Number of shows / Average attendance
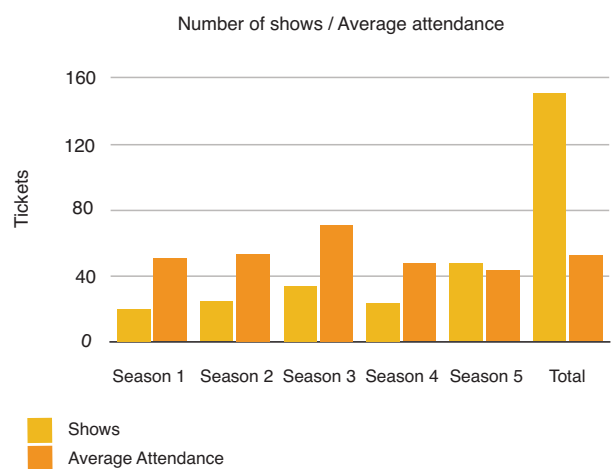
Season 5 reached a much larger range of venues, many of which were relatively small and had not been involved in previous seasons. Average attendance in S5 was 10 below the average across all seasons though nearly double the numbers of shows were produced.

Libraries can overlap in terms of catchment, particularly in urban areas. We might be concerned that shows would cannibalise each other in terms of geographic or scheduling proximity. However it seems there is both sufficient appetite and flexibility on the part of the audience to find a time and venue that suits them.

Box Office Summary

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[1] Season 3 also included a number of shows related to the Imaginative Neighbourhoods project in Leicester. As such, this region had an additional 10 shows in Season 3 compared to other regions. Results here have been included in our box office and audience survey analysis as an extension of the project; different funding, same shows, similar objectives.

With the Christmas holidays near to season 3, feedback from schools, libraries and parents suggested that this was usually a popular time for special events like theatre visits. Survey results indicated that, in relation to their last theatre-going experience with children, many responses were pantomimes or other Christmas shows (14%). We might summarise this situation as high risk – high reward; increased competition from alternatives but a larger potential market.

The chart below indicates that the majority of venues received only one (20) or two (12) shows compared to three or more (20). Five would be the usual maximum expected, though there were a number of repeat performances in a few venues.

Average attendance

31 of the 54 venues achieved 80% capacity or more, across all the shows they received.

The chart below combines all box office records across all venues and all seasons. The data is sorted by the average sales percentage of capacity, compared to the total attendance and the number of shows it received (blue)

It can be seen that the relative performance of each venue does not appear to be directly linked to the number of shows received or the total attendance achieved across all seasons. In general this means that neither larger nor smaller venues seemed to be more or less likely to sell out; neither were venues that only received a few shows compared to those that received many shows[2].

The venues are not individually labelled, this information is shown in AIF17-3

Number of shows received

5,827 children
2,134 adults

54 different libraries and community venues

151 shows
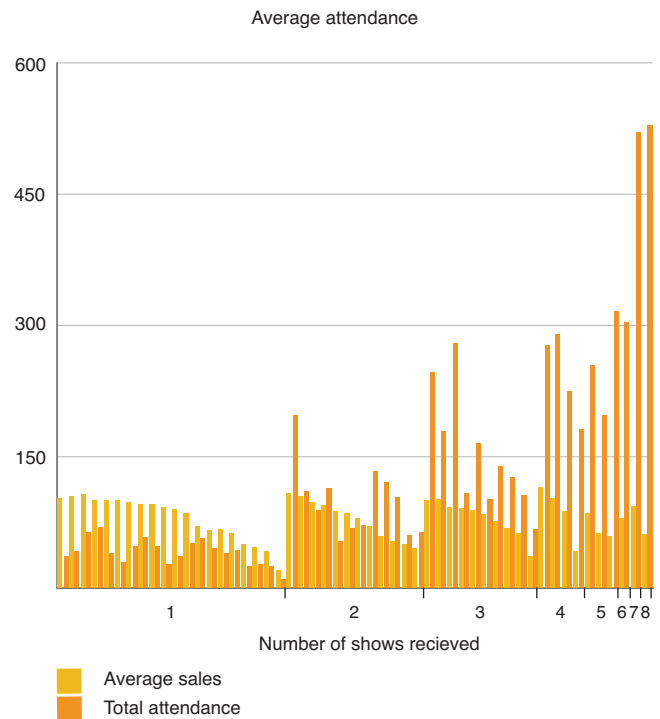**1 in every 4** shows **sold out**
(100% capacity or more).

Average attendance

Number of shows recieved

■ Average sales
■ Total attendance

[2] Briefly: the top 1-26 venues listed had an average of 2.3 shows, venues 26-52 had an average of 2.5 shows.

Attendance over time

Venues that received more seasons, were likely to see an increase in box office over this time. 55% of those receiving 2 or more seasons, 61% of those receiving 3 or more seasons and 70% of those receiving 4 or more seasons saw either a stable or increasing box office.

Capacity percentages were collated to eliminate differences between seasons. A venue that received a show in season 1 and 3 was equivalent to a venue that received shows in season 4 and 5. Therefore a venue could have a first, second, third and fourth season at most, and the first season in one venue could be different to the first season in another venue. Venues that only had one season are excluded.

We looked at the difference in capacity percentage between first, second, third and fourth seasons and took the average from this. For example:

	Season 1-2	Season 2-3	Season 3-4	Average
Example venue A had all shows	+2%	-10%	+4%	+5%
Example venue B had only 2 shows	+3%	N/A	N/A	+3%

It was decided that +5% or above showed an increase, that anything between +5% and -5% was stable and that -5% or below showed a decrease. The average capacity of a venue was around 60, so a 5% difference would, for most venues in reality be the equivalent of 2-4 people.

Overall, the highest individual increase was +36%, the largest decrease was -93%. Those seeing the largest decreases often started from a relatively high point and possibly had long gaps between seasons. Those seeing the largest increases tended to start from a relatively low point and had a more consistent

programme. Outliers might account for further variability but there is a sufficiently large range of venues and seasons involved to make some wider trends apparent.

31 venues received 2 or more seasons, 18 venues received 3 or more seasons and 10 venues received 4 seasons.

	2 or more seasons	3 or more seasons	4 seaons
Increase +5% or above	11	6	3
Stable +5% to -5%	6	5	4
Decrease -5% or below	14	7	3

It is worth bearing in mind that the seasons were not universally interchangeable and if nothing else came at very different times of the year. Season 3 was the highest selling overall, while season 5 reached a large number of new venues. Therefore the mix of seasons each venue had is likely to have had an effect. Nevertheless, we would presumably hope to see an increase if libraries had improved their marketing reach and if audiences were enjoying the shows on offer.

Assuming that a stable box office can be interpreted as a generally positive thing, especially in the context of a relatively experimental project, the same information can be interpreted as:

	2 or more seasons	3 or more seasons	4 seaons
Venues that showed either a positive or stable box office over:	55%	61%	70%

Those that had more shows were more likely to sell well, though this alone is not enough to imply causation, only correlation: the venues that sold one show well were presumably more likely to continue to have more shows programmed in.

The following graph explores the relationship between a venue's average change in attendance versus their single best selling show.

There appears to be no relationship between a venue's best show and their average performance over several shows. Venues that increased their sales over time were equally likely to sell out at least one show as venues that did not.

Essentially this means all the venues involved had relatively equal potential of selling at least a single show very well. 19 of the 31 venues here had at least one show where they sold 90% or more of the capacity.

Average change in Attendance and venues best show (venues with 2 or more shows)

◇ Average change   ▫ Best show
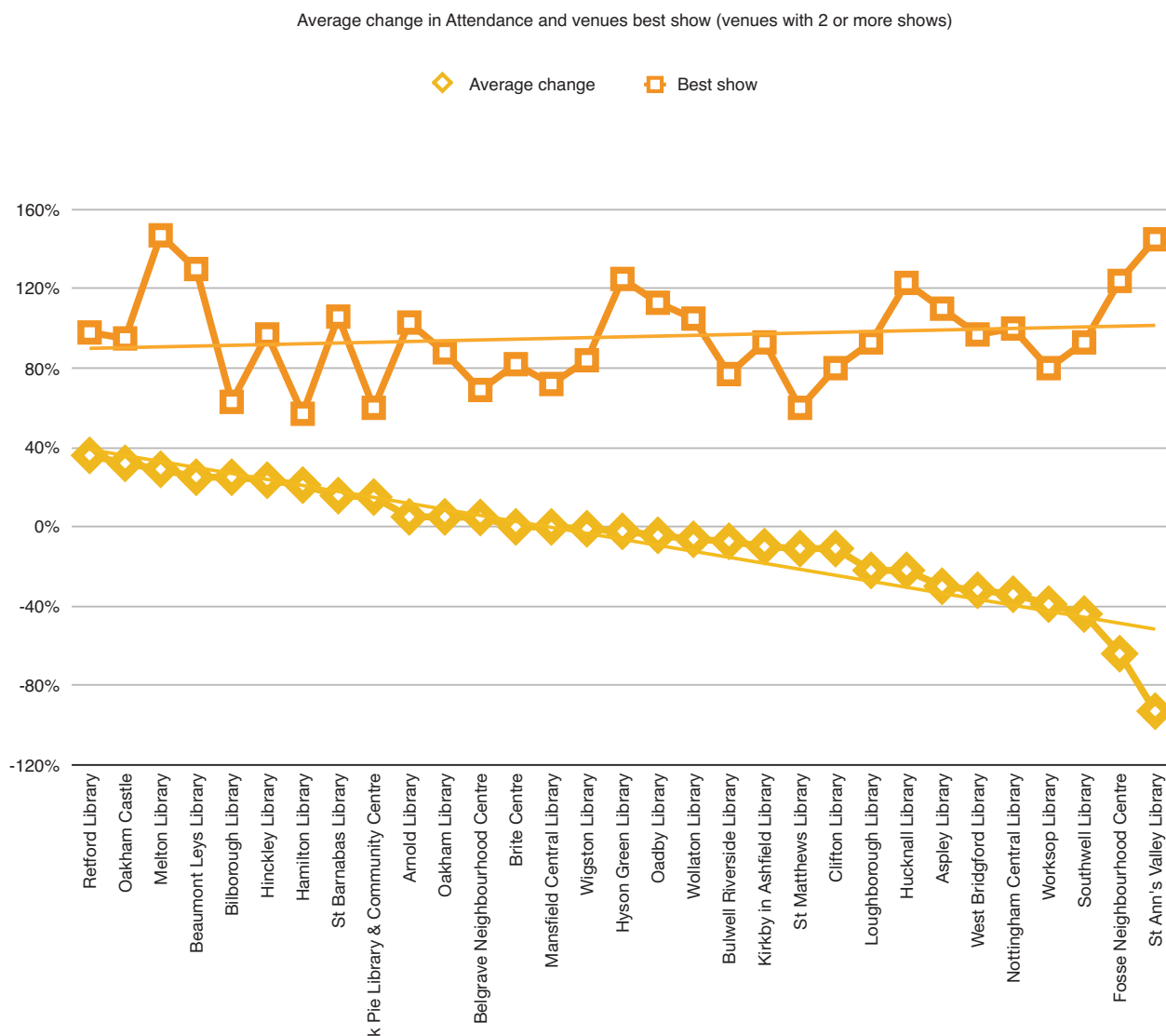
4. Audience Survey

Audience survey

A single sided A4 questionnaire was available at public shows for adults to complete. Season 2 was entirely school shows, so no adult questionnaires were completed.

Region	Responses
Leicester	311
Leicestershire	311
Nottingham	298
Nottinghamshire	386
Rutland	58
Total	1364

	Responses	Shows
Season 1	205	20
Season 3	200	34
Season 4	359	24
Season 5	600	48
Total	1364	126

The average number of responses collected at any show in any season was 14. Clearly, 14 responses, or even 40 responses may not feel like a great deal but it is testament to the buy-in of all the involved parties that this data collection continued and that the results as a whole, and at a regional level were as robust as they were. Of a total of 2,134 adult audience members recorded, 1,364 responses equates to a sample of 64% of the audience.

It is likely that some are responses from the same individual at different seasons, though this is not in itself thought to cause an issue and would simply reinforce these individuals' characteristics and opinions in the overall sample. We estimate elsewhere that around a third of the audience had seen one or multiple previous seasons.

It is also possible to track by individual venue, though only 5 of the venues collected a total of 50 or more responses, and nearly all of these received all 4 seasons. There may be a general trend towards increasing responses in future seasons, presumably as libraries, performers and the audience themselves became more familiar with the process, not forgetting that there were often more shows and a larger audience too.

The questions chosen were subject to ongoing discussion between the researcher, The Spark and in later seasons, the libraries. Summaries of headline data were shared between the seasons, where relevant this included individual breakdowns according to each region. Whilst it introduced some complications, the benefits from being able to alter or rotate some questions between seasons were clear.
See AIF17-3 for the full data, template questionnaires and on the question alterations from season to season.

2,134 adult audience members
1,364 responses
64% of the audience

Net Promoter Score

Using the Net Promoter Score (NPS) methodology, AIF compares very well to to regional and national data from Audience Finder; across all responses for all artforms in the East Midlands, (70) and all responses for 'Children & Family' artforms across the whole nation (76) Put another way, we can state that only 16% of respondents gave a rating of 8 or lower and only 1.6% gave a 6 or lower.

The NPS uses a 0-10 scale where individuals are asked how likely they would be to recommend the experience/service/product to a friend, family member or colleague. We then count 9-10 scores, ignore 7-8 and subtract 0-6 to create a score somewhere between +100% and -100%.

This is a reasonably well used proxy for customer loyalty though it's usage in arts and cultural contexts is relatively new and the typical scores given to arts events often seem to greatly outstrip those given to other industries greatly. For example, +40% would be considered very positive for an airline whereas just +10% for an internet service provider is also positive.

Overall, it is only valuable when comparing amongst sector peers but we can see a strong response and a desire to access more of the same. The underlying theory behind NPS is that customer recommendations are closely linked to actual industry growth and here we may need to tread more cautiously in regards to arts and culture experiences; which are not products, which cannot be easily duplicated (arguably not at all) and the overall supply of which cannot be altered or distributed en masse as easily as other products and services.

Net Promoter Score

	All AIF	S1 AIF	S3 AIF	S4 AIF	S5 AIF	All EM AF	All C&F AF
Score	82	82	90	78	83	70	76
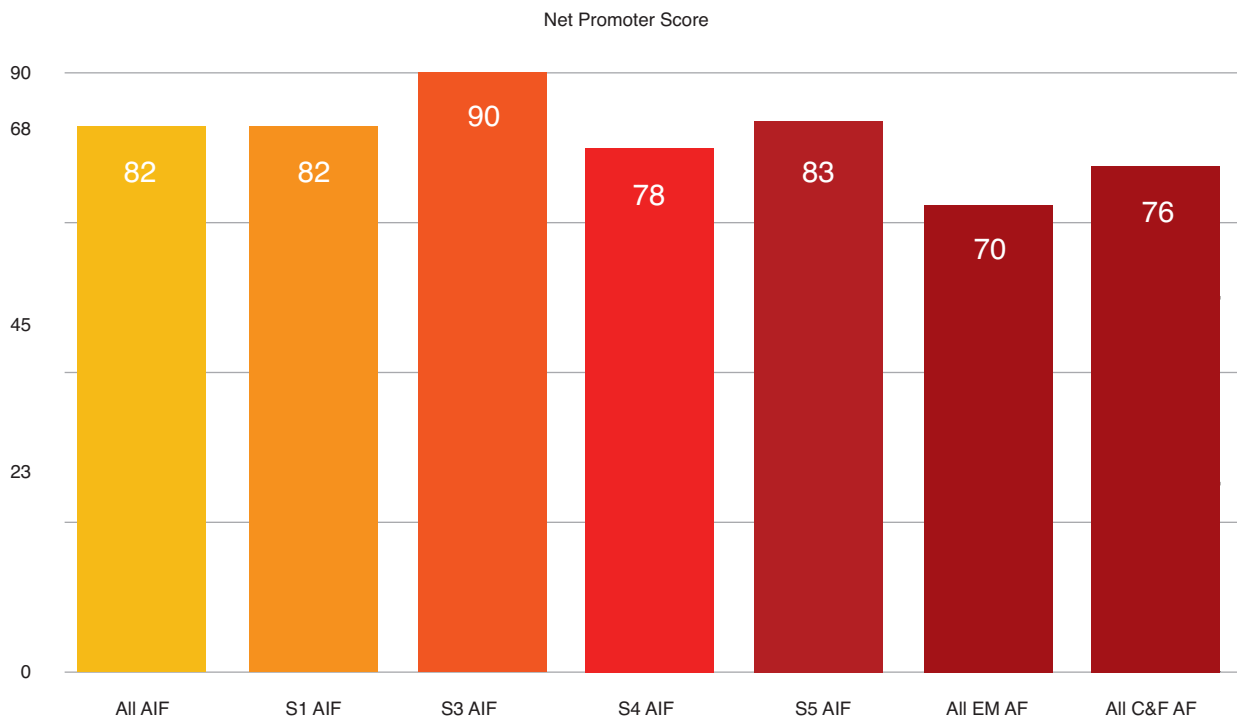
Return visits

The question 'Have you seen any AIF show before?' was asked in season 3-5, adding previous seasons as options as necessary. Clearly someone in season 5 will have had more of an opportunity to see a previous show than someone in season 3; but to suggest that around a third of the audience were return visits, gives a further indication of the value placed on the shows. It may be worth adding that although central box office records were collated, the exact mechanisms of booking and paying for tickets varied across the regions. Therefore there is no central box office record whereby repeat purchases could be tracked.

It is also worth noting that the times of year involved in between the seasons will have an impact, in general, season 2 & 3 were relatively close together, whereas season 5 came after a relatively long break.

In Season 1 and 5 this question was included, and it can be seen that by the end of the project, the numbers of individuals who had seen theatre in a library before had increased by 15%. AIF shows may not have been the only theatre programming libraries were doing during this period, but were likely to be a considerable part of this.

Have you seen any AIF show before?

Yes - 36%   No - 64%
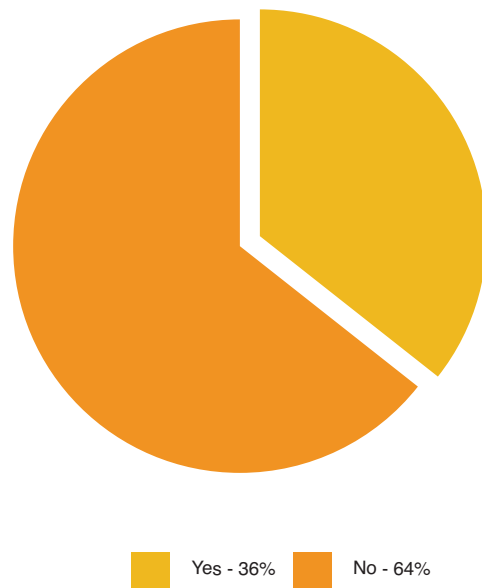
Have you seen theatre in a library before?

Season 1   Season 5

Yes - 23%   Yes - 38%

No - 77%   No - 62%
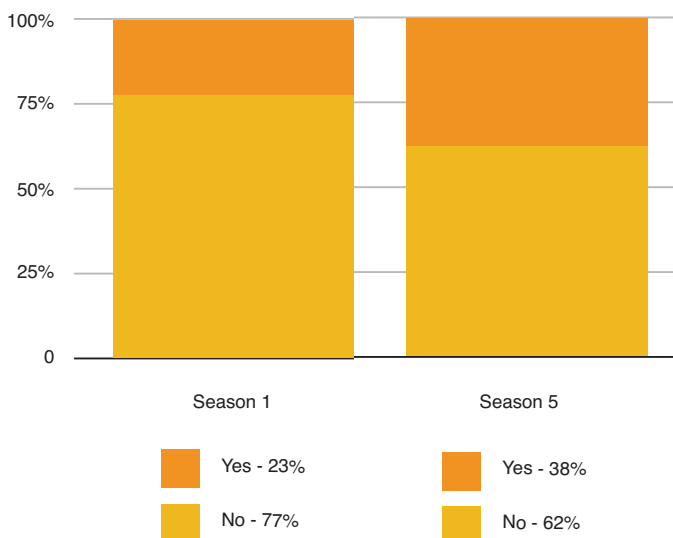
Library cards
and regular attendance

94 of 1,351 responses indicated that the adult filling in the questionnaire did not have a library card. Many of the regions involved had a pricing structure for the shows which encouraged individuals to sign up for a (free) library card. Across the regions, this proportion did not vary greatly, from 6-9%. The Libraries Taskforce states that in 2016, nearly 60% of the population held a library card, though it is uncertain how many of these would be considered 'active borrowers' or otherwise regular library users. From season 3-5, adults were asked to not only indicate the ages of the individual children but also whether they had a library card. This approach recorded a total of 1,948 children, of whom 1,742 were also identified as having a library card.

Taking Part data shows that around 34% of adults had used a public library service[3] in the last 12 months and that this level is significantly higher among individuals with children. Clearly only a small number of the AIF audience would be likely to be entering a library they had potentially never set foot in before, 96% of the audience had been to a library in the last 12 months.

There is no universal definition or agreement over what makes for a regular library user, or indeed what kinds of services and activities within a library might count towards this. Many library staff related in interviews that their usual issuing period (often around 3 weeks) for books was used as 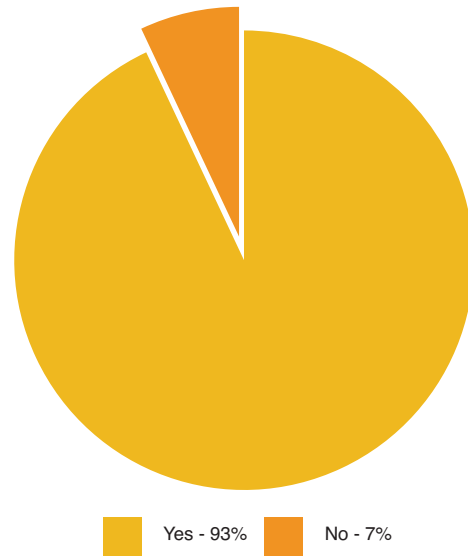shorthand for regular usage. A combined 16% of the adult audience had been, at best, once in the last 3 months and would probably not be considered frequent or keen library users. This theme also emerged in relation to the issuing of new library cards, in which library staff commented that it was equally beneficial to encourage people to visit the library more regularly, as it was to expand the sheer volume of library cards being issued.

Do you have a library card?

Yes - 93% No - 7%

Do the children with you have library cards?

Yes - 89% No - 11%
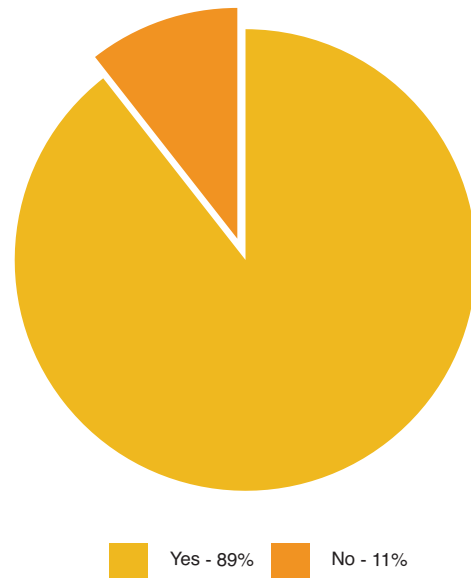
When was the last time you visited a library?

	1 year or more	Last 6 months	Last 3 months	Last month	Last week
	4%	4%	8%	21%	63%
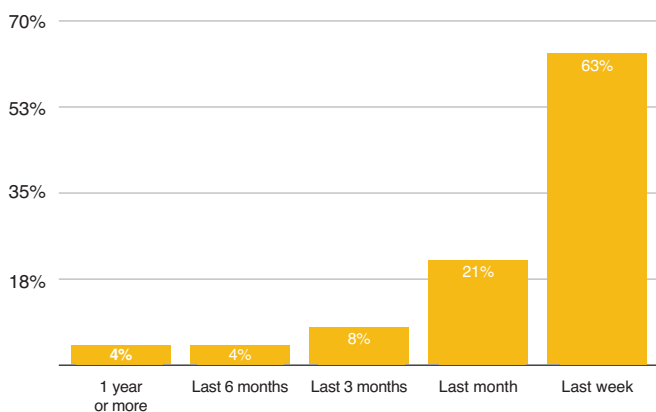
[3] '...In their own time or for voluntary work'.

Theatre attendance

This question was phrased in two different ways in season 1 & 3 and in season 4 & 5.

In season 1 & 3, the same scales were used to compare results to the library attendance question. We can easily see the extent to which attendance at the two types of venue differ among the audience.

Taking Part data indicates that 30% of adults have been to the theatre at least once in the last 12 months. Also, for nearly half of these (12% total) they had attended no more than once in the last 12 months. Based on this measure, the AIF audience would seem to be relatively keen theatre attenders, with 75% having been to the theatre in the last 12 months, compared to 30% of the background population.

Taking Part also indicates that 34% of adults had used a public library in the last 12 months whereas for the AIF audience this was 96%. Only 4.4% of the population claim to have been to the library 'at least once a week' whereas this is potentially as high as 63% for the AIF audience.

The approach of this survey and the Taking Part survey are not strictly compatible, there may be flaws but there is some insight to be had in the discussion. It was difficult to decide on the exact phrasing to be used: "Been to a theatre", "Attended a theatre performance", "Seen a piece of theatre." These could all be interpreted in various ways, whereas in the more comprehensive Taking Part survey, it might be more likely for individuals to select other options or to discuss with an interviewer what a specific experience of theirs might be classified as.

When was the last time you visited a theatre (or theatre performance) (S1&3)

When was the last time you went to the theatre with your child? (S4 & 5)
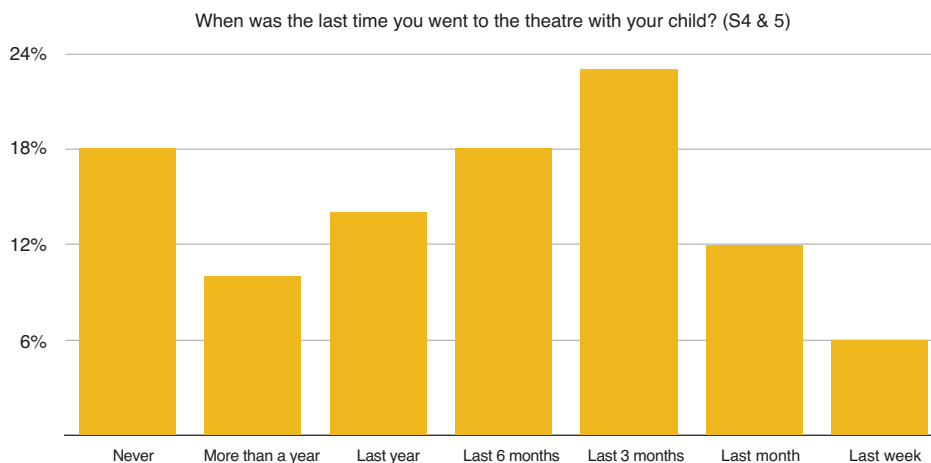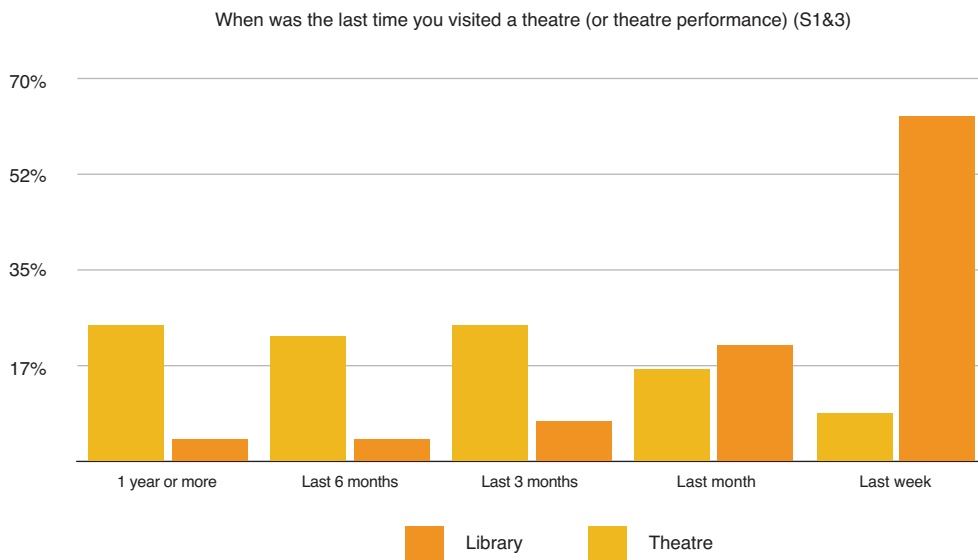
More questions related to theatre were also included in season 4 & 5 and the above 'theatre attendance' question was altered. Based on this phrasing and the Taking Part definition, we would say that 28% of attendees were not regular theatre attenders (within the last 12 months). Those who have been at least once in the past 12 months (62%) compares to 30% of the background population. Again, this is not directly comparable, and for the purposes of AIF it was also important to specify that we wanted to know that they had attended with their child rather than attendance in general.

Looking at the graph below, we can see previous attendance at AIF events, with 9.3% of the audience's last experience of theatre also in a library. A range of smaller regional/town theatres were grouped together

in one category, but this is also a relatively frequent category (5.8%). Referring back to the earlier section, 62% of the audience could be considered regular theatre attenders, while only 42% of the audience gave a response in this section (only a small number of responses said they could not remember).

A substantial range of shows were included, relying on the best knowledge of the researcher, many of the shows still remain categorised as 'Other'. Of those that were relatively easy to code, Pantomimes or other Christmas shows were at the top of the list (14%) although in some cases it was difficult to distinguish these from musicals (7%). A range of different shows were grouped together under 'Roald Dahl related' shows (5%) and TV show related (3%).

Theatre: Where did you go? (S4&5)

Theatre: What did you see? (S4&5)
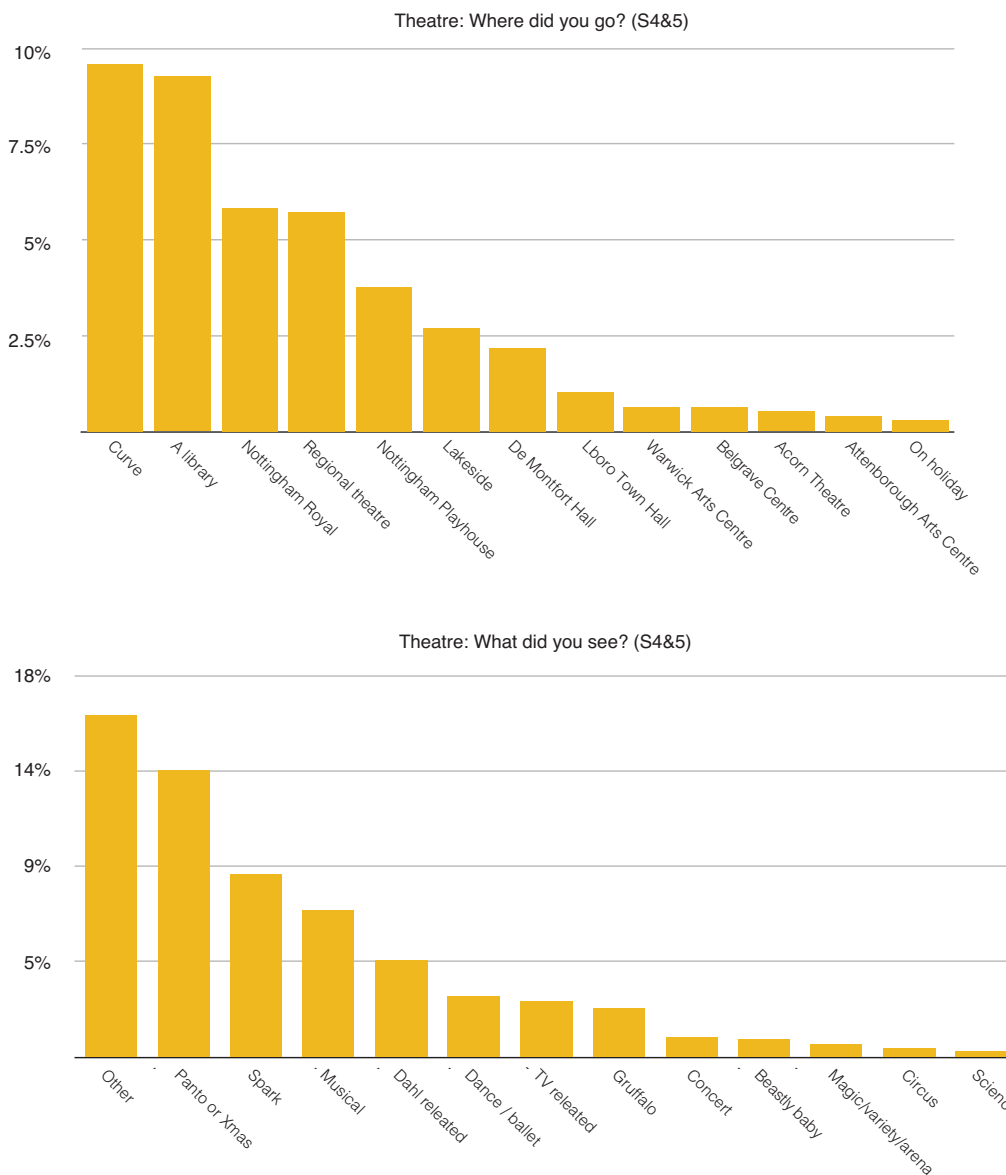
Ages of the children

The ages of children who attended stayed relatively similar across seasons. The median age for all seasons was 6. Around 50% were aged 4-6 and around 75% were aged 4-8. The key age range is clearly within Key Stage 1 (5-7) though there is spill over above and below this. Certainly by the upper end of Key Stage 2 (7-11), the appeal starts to drop off.

Adults were also asked (in S3-5) to identify which child in their group they felt the performance was most suitable for[4] as we suspected that while people attended with several children, their respective ages meant that this might be more a matter of convenience than choice. The table below shows this variation:

<div align="center">

Age most suitable

	(Mean)	(Median)
Season 3	5.12	6
Season 4	6.13	7
Season 5	6.88	7

</div>

Audience interviews further indicated it is generally difficult to gauge the appropriate age range for these sorts of activities and for the most part, both slightly younger and older (and adult) audiences were able to enjoy the work on different levels.

Ages of children

Season 1   Season 3   Season 4   Season 5

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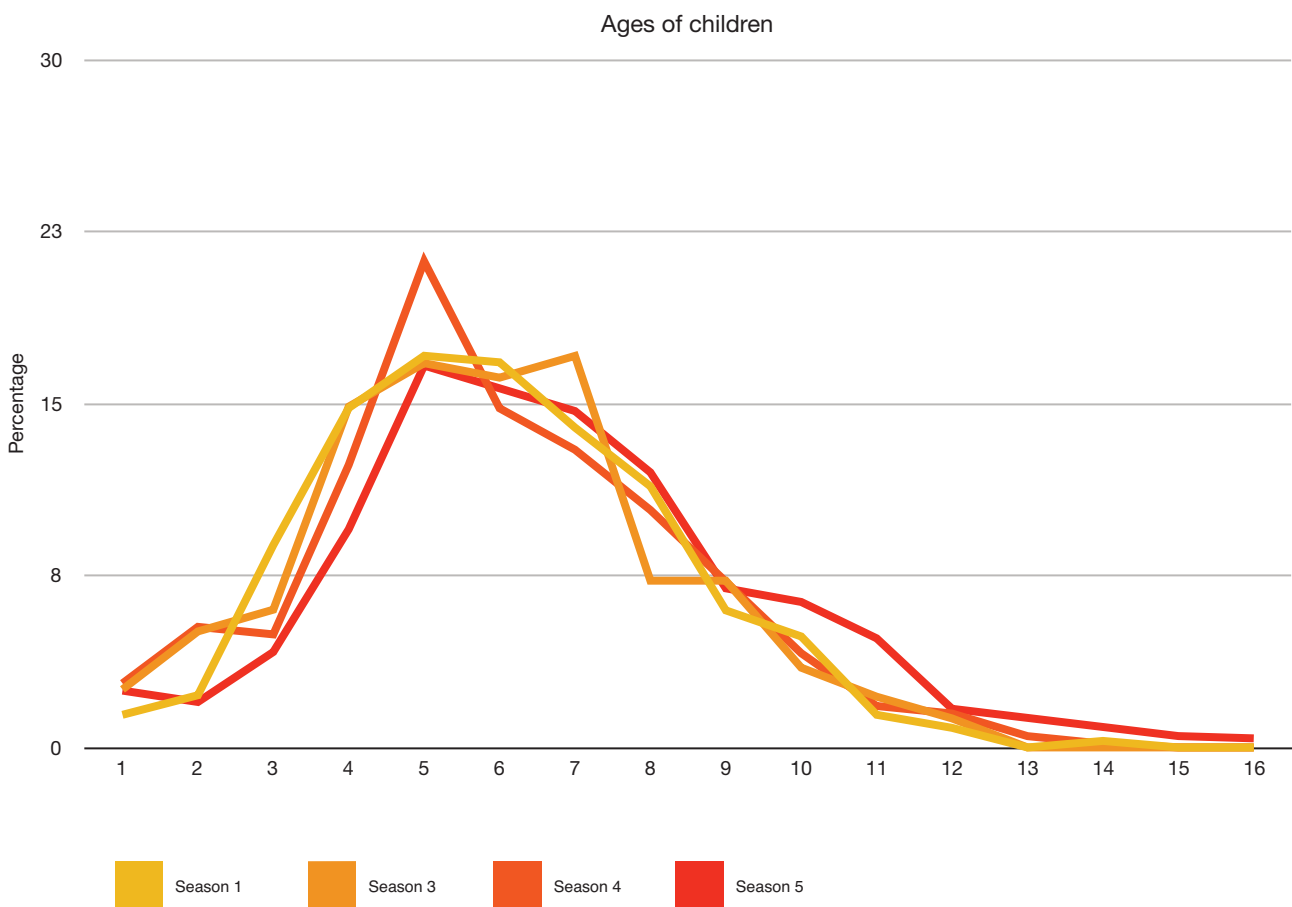
[4] Some responses indicated that they felt all children enjoyed it equally. While this is positive feedback, these responses have been excluded from further analysis or perhaps could have been noted as 'No preference'.

Comments and benefits

This question asked respondents to select up to 3 of the available 5 options to: "What benefits do you think events like this provide for your child?" This restriction was introduced as it was felt likely that individuals would simply tick every option; around 16% chose more than 3 options, with a similar amount choosing less than 3, including blank/missing responses.

The final results were weighted according to how many responses were selected. If an individual chose 5 options, these were given 0.2 points each, whereas 3 options were weighted at 0.3, only 1 choice weighted at 1 and so on. The chart above shows the percentage of total 'points' awarded so balances responses regardless of the number of options chosen.

Benefits of attending (S5)

- 🟨 Interest in the performing arts
- 🟧 Enjoyment of reading
- 🟧 Doing something different
- 🟥 More likely to use the library
- 🟥 Academic benefits

Overall, the five options given seem to break down into three roughly equal groups; performing arts and reading, novelty and library use, and academic benefits. More broadly we could also describe these options as cultural/emotional (interest and enjoyment), practical/tangible (doing and visiting) and knowledge (academic).

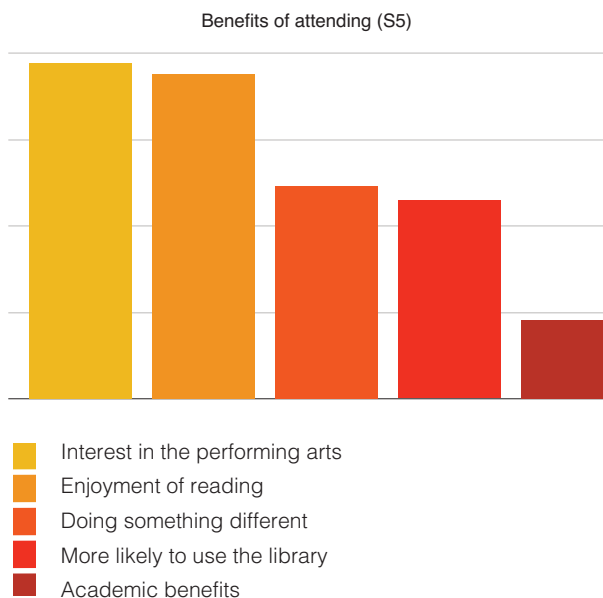The project has many potential benefits but it is notable that among the adult audience, interest in the core cultural experience of performing arts comes out ahead, albeit very similar to reading enjoyment, which is a further cultural experience. Nevertheless, libraries and arts organisations could both benefit from continuing to examine and consider the sentiments of their adult audience. At the same time we could consider the influence of the adults own cultural background, evidently they value the performing arts and reading, so are likely to have experienced this themselves and to pass this on to their children.

Audiences were also given the opportunity to provide open comments in Season 1,3 and 4[5]. 231 comments were postcoded, with the majority (134 – 58% of all comments or 17% of all responses) of these relating in some way to the overall quality of the event. Note that a single comment could be coded as two or more themes if appropriate.

A non-representative sample is given below:

"Thank-you for all these events, we love visiting the library and all the creative activities offered".

"Absolutely enthralling performance, treating children as capable of understanding complex emotions, and fantastic for adults too."

"Excellent performance - thank you!"

Of the other comments, no single theme made up a large percentage of the total audience, but for those who wished to give more detailed feedback the following emerged. Again, some randomly chosen examples in order of diminishing volume are below:

Focus: Super performance! Kids loved it, giggled and sat still throughout.

Educational: Amazing, local schools would really benefit from the performance.

More: Brilliant! Fantastic and would come to any other performances at local libraries.

Libraries: Very interesting to have in library.

Value: Enjoyed performance, good value for money.

Complaint: Better seating would be good (killed my back on the benches).

First time: Very good and first time that my son has seen such a performance in our local library.

More promotion: Don't know what Spark is.

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[5] In Season 5, the questionnaire had instructions to use the blank side of the form for comments, rather than in a designated text box, however this collected relatively few responses by comparison.

Demographics

This section covers demographic data for the project as a whole, though this is broken down by regions in AIF17-3

Note that for each of these questions, although each individual in a group could potentially respond independently, it may be likely that only one adult in each group did. Despite the high response rate overall (around 60% of all adults attending completed a questionnaire) we should be careful with any assumptions we make regarding the demographics of others in these groups. Additionally, we should remember that adults only made up around a third of the total audience size.

Gender

The majority, 84%, of adult audience members were female. We can also note that Taking Part data shows that women were more likely to have visited a library in the last 12 months than men (38% to 29%).
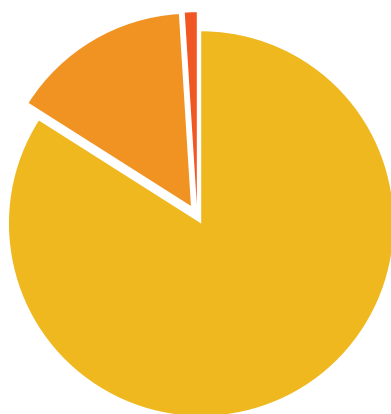
Age

The four peak groups (from 30 to 49) make up the majority of the adult audience, around 75% or more. The dominant age category from Audience Finder, at a national level for children and family events is 35-44 (though a percentage is not given).

While this age group will probably continue to be key for the immediate future, it does prompt consideration of reaching other age groups in creative ways, although these might not be as typical audience members. For instance, students undertaking Arts Award activity, elderly individuals volunteering at a library or perhaps elder siblings bringing younger brothers and sisters; although all of these individuals might consider themselves atypical and therefore might not be as likely to complete a survey. Additionally, the effects of the 'mini baby boom' of 2011-12[6] might have lead to a particular short term increase in adults in this general age group, children born in this year would now be in the typical age range for AIF shows.

Female

Male

Prefer not to say
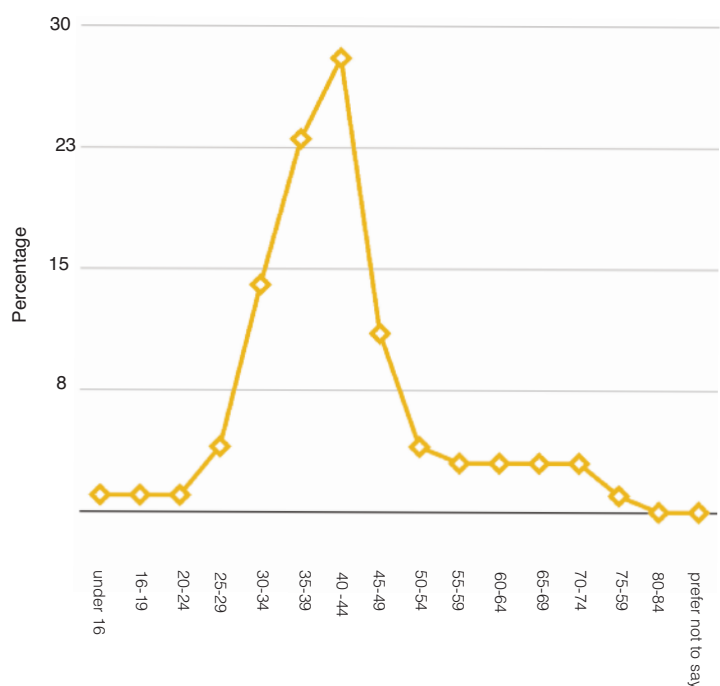
[6]   Office for National Statistics reported that 2011-12 had the highest rate of births in the UK since 1972.

Ethnicity

The above chart is sorted by total from largest to smallest. This data particularly varied across regions and individual venues. See AIF17-3 for further detail.

	White British	66
	Indian	12
	Other White	5
	Other	2
	African	2
	Pakistan	2
	Other Asian	2
	Chinese	1
	White Irish	1
	Caribbean	1
	White & Black Caribbean	1
	Other Mixed	1
	White & Asian	1
	Bangladeshi	1
	Arab	0
	White and Black African	0
	Other Black	0
	Prefer not to say	1
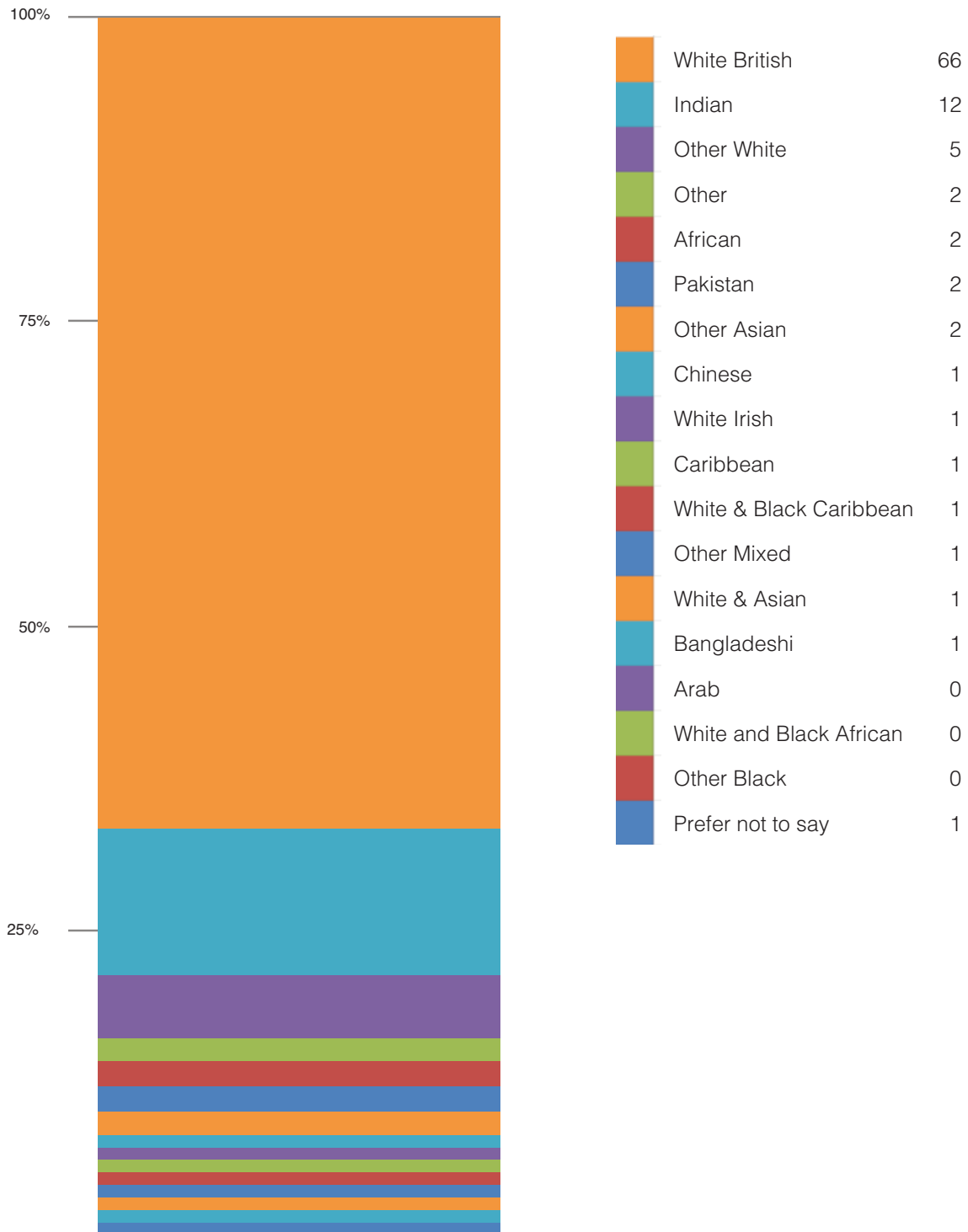
Disability

This question was phrased: "Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last at least 12 months?"

This information may be relevant for libraries when considering guidelines such as 'Six Steps' from the Society of Chief Librarians or the Family Arts Standards, as far as they relate to accessibility for both adults and children.

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last at least 12 months?
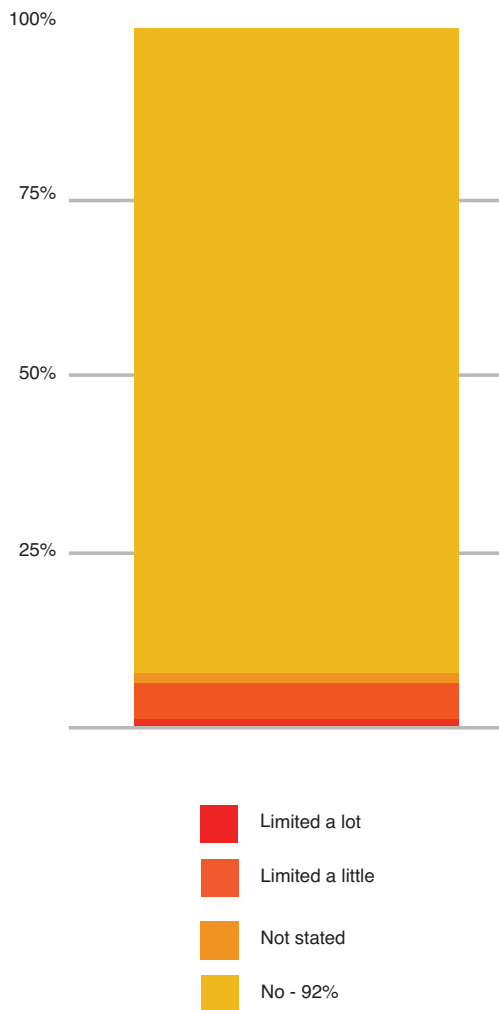
Do any of the children with you have a disability?

- Limited a lot
- Limited a little
- Not stated
- No - 92%

- No - 95%
- Yes - 5%
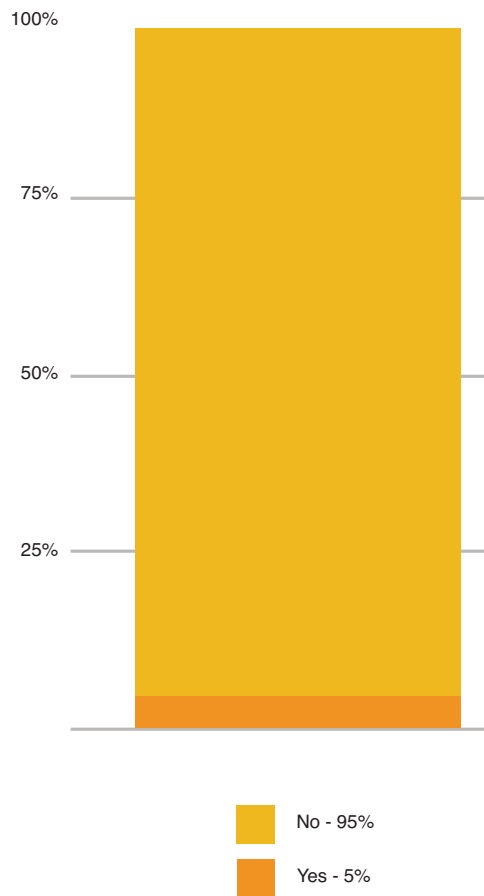
Marketing methods

In season 1, this question was phrased: "How did you find out about the event today?" whereas in seasons 3 & 4 it was phrased "How do you generally find out about events at the library?" We can loosely assume that responses in season 1 were more concrete; what people actually used in relation to this one event, whereas seasons 3 & 4 the ambition was to find out what they might expect to use going forward for similar events. This was an open-text question, responses were postcoded after collection to create the categories shown.

There are four clear priorities at the top of the scale; print materials (leaflets, flyers, posters, displays) word of mouth and a website/online. Word of mouth might, itself, come from various sources (library staff, friends, in person or over social media).

Many of the results are similar between the two, however there are a few interesting differences. Two categories, librarian/staff and local press, were mentioned more frequently in season 1 than seasons

3 & 4. This could suggest that these methods are important or at least memorable, even though many individuals might not think or claim to use them in advance, as seen by their lower ranks in season 3 & 4. On the other hand, where season 3 & 4 mentions are higher than season 1 mentions could indicate methods that audiences are expecting they will use in the future; through preschool/schools or Children's Centres or through social media.

What methods would you like the library to use?

In season 3, an additional open-text question was used, although only 47% of the audience gave a response, with a further 6.5% suggesting that there was 'nothing/not much' more they could think of that the library did not already use. Of the remaining, emails were noted though it might be difficult to differentiate this from other mailing lists; from an individual library, from the regions library service, from arts organisations or from a general 'whats-on' council newsletter.

Awareness

Season 1 Seasons 3 & 4
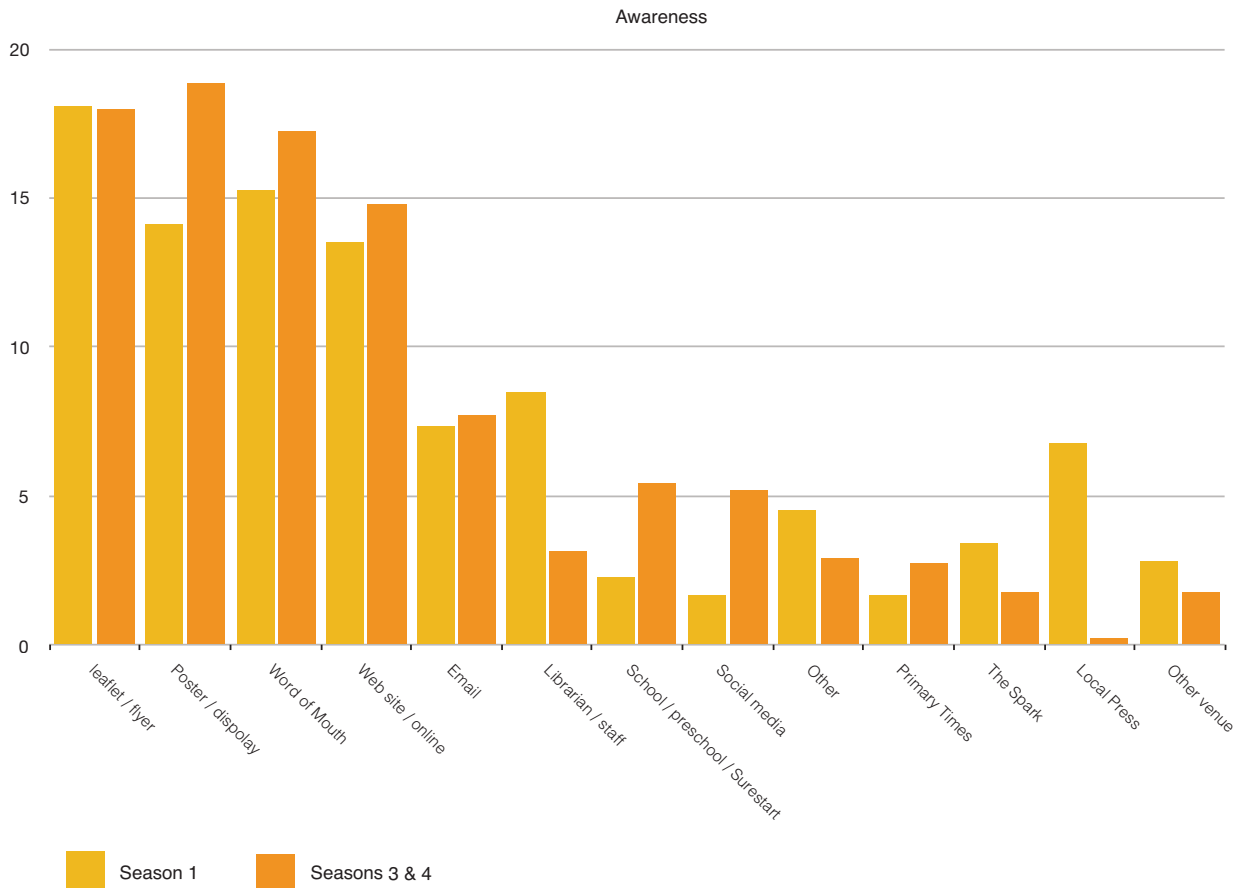
4.1 Mapping

Distances travelled

All audience surveys were geocoded through the UK Data Service. Of the 1,364 surveys completed, 1,196 had a useable postcode, and a further 12 outliers were removed manually. Individual libraries are detailed for both sections here in AIF17-3

These were matched to their respective venues and the straight line distance between individuals was calculated. The table below shows a breakdown by venue, however venues with less than 10 postcodes were excluded. The average distance travelled was 2.3 miles, lowest in Nottingham with 1.5 miles and highest in Rutland with 3.5 miles, though individual venues varied within this.

The difference between city and county venues is fairly clear, though perhaps not as much as might be guessed. It is interesting to compare those venues that appear at the top and bottom of each region's scale; those where people travelled the furthest and least.

Relatively large venues with large catchment areas might attract people from further distances; such as Nottingham Central or Mansfield Central Library – however, market towns with reasonably large libraries such as Market Harborough and Sutton-in-Ashfield

both appear to attract comparatively local audiences. Similar things can be said of 'neighbourhood' libraries or facilities like Brite in Leicester or Dales in Nottingham.

Various other insights may be available to individuals who know the characteristics of the libraries better. For instance, the Pork Pie Library and Community Centre in Leicester – which while relatively large, in a relatively low density area may have struggled to fill, what is effectively a decent sized studio theatre attached to a library. (36% average capacity) In this case, the distance travelled could be viewed as a barrier, whereas for other venues, a long distance travelled could be viewed as related to the 'pull' factor or attraction of the overall offer.

This of course doesn't take into account transport choices and quality of public transport links. Estimating that the average person could walk around 0.5 miles in 10 minutes, not accounting for travelling with children and that these straight-line distances are going to underestimate the actual by-road distance travelled, we can see that some individuals may be just within walking distance of their libraries, though it is likely they used public transport or a car for at least part of the journey.

Average distance travelled (miles)
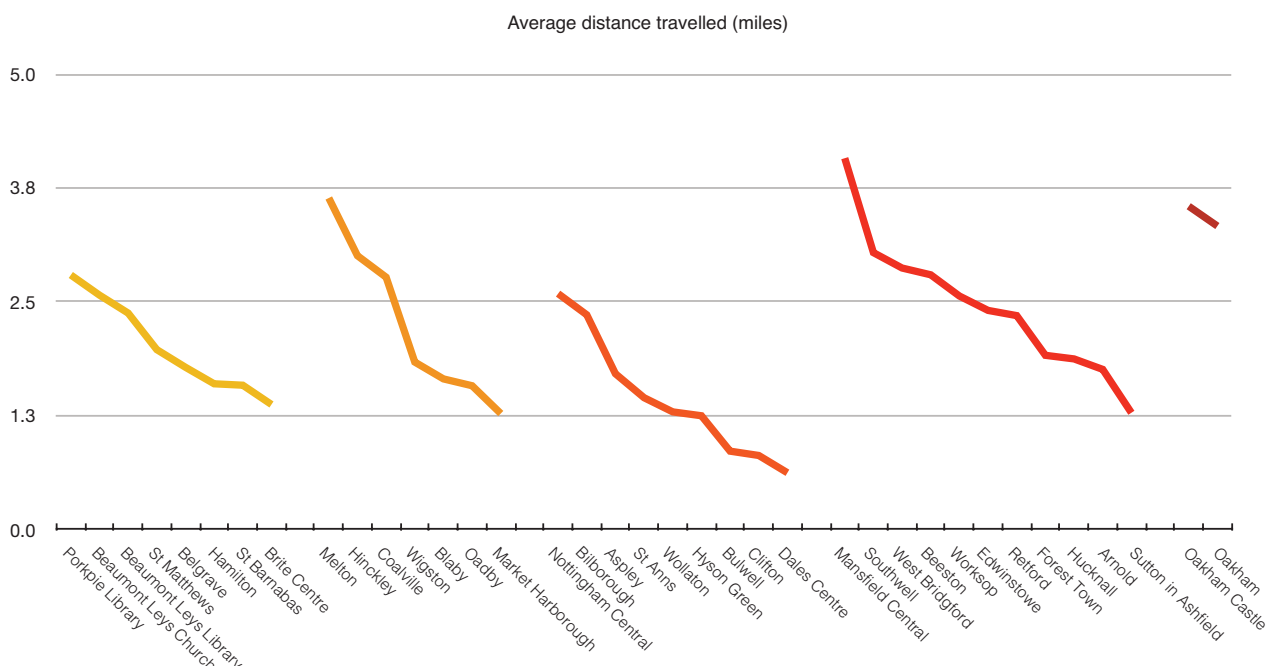
Nearest library

A Voronoi diagram was produced based on the locations of libraries. This type of diagram can be used to establish which point any other point is nearest to, rather than just looking at the distance between two points. The image below shows three selected libraries, their respective Voronoi shapes and the points from which audiences travelled.

This method can provide an estimate as to whether people travelled to their nearest library and how many travelled further, though a number of caveats remain. On an individual venue basis, we are using a relatively small amount of data (though venues with 10 or fewer postcodes have been ignored). Only libraries that had

AIF shows are included, although this is equally a distinction we might choose to make anyway. Venues that had only one season are given equivalent weight, in terms of generating the Voronoi diagram to those that had several. It would be feasible to do so for every season individually, though in addition to being more complex, this would probably reduce the number of postcodes to a very low level. In cases where venues were located very close to each other, these areas were joined together (Beaumont Leys Library and Beaumont Leys Church, Oakham Library and Oakham Castle).
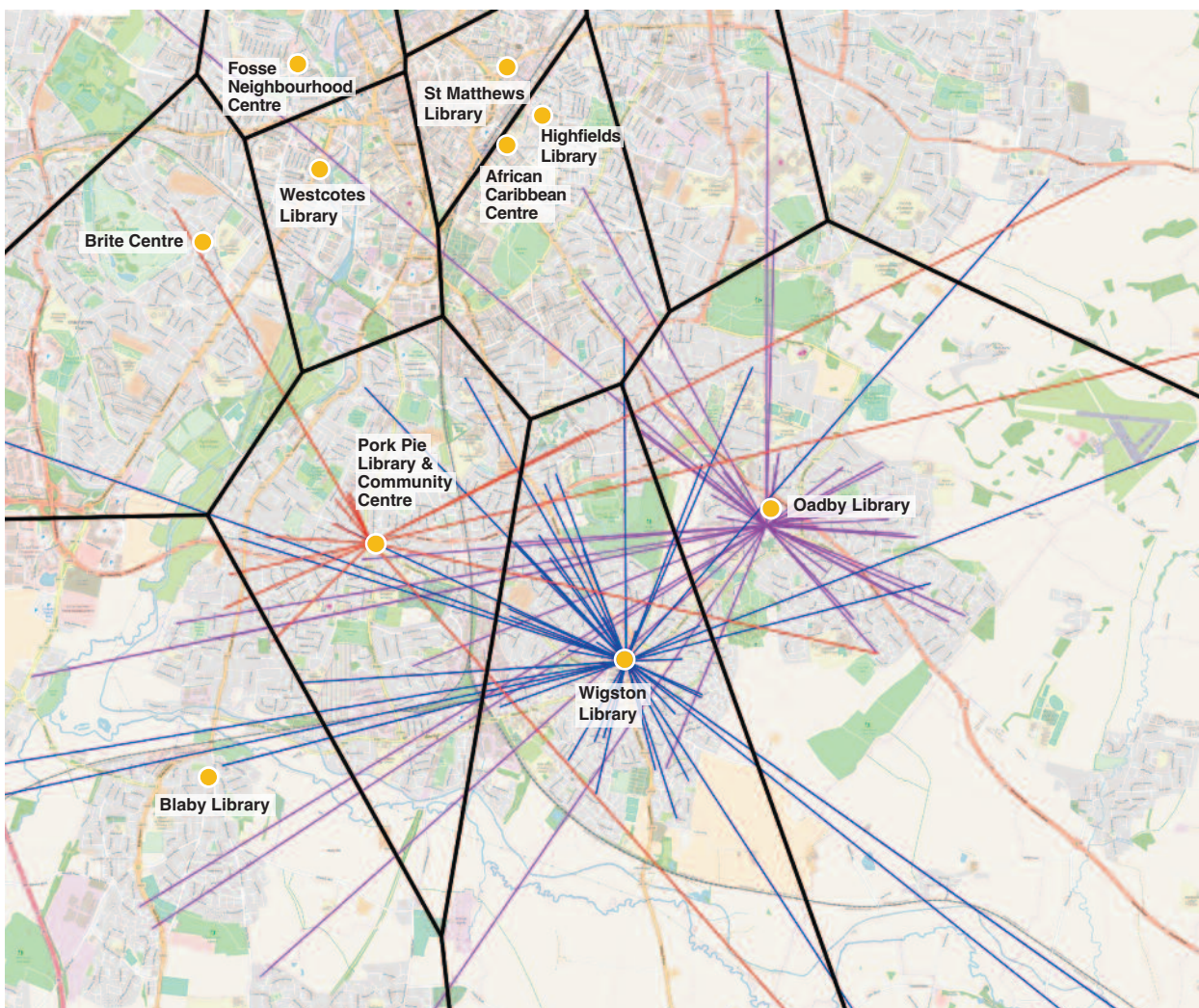
The average % of audience who travelled to their nearest library in Voronoi is 60% across the sample, with cities typically being lower (43-53%) and higher in the counties (66-86%) Venues with higher "% of V" in terms of cities are placed in relatively high density, inner city wards, however the same also applies to counties where a greater area is covered but there are comparatively fewer venues to choose from. Some key outliers are seen in Beaumont Leys Church, Nottingham Central and Mansfield (5-9%).

For each region then, those venues above the average are likely to have a more local audience than their peers whereas those below are likely to have audiences from other 'catchment areas'. Neither is suggested to be more or less desirable an objective than the other, just that the relative mechanisms and barriers are likely to be different from venue to venue. Those that draw the majority of their audiences only from a local area may be able to grow through consolidation whereas those that draw audiences from further afield may be able to grow through broadening their offer.

Beyond the scope of this investigation is a wider understanding of the geographic placement of libraries themselves, although it is probably fair to say at this stage that they are considerably different to conventional performing arts venues. Other research has shown that libraries generally benefit from both being located near a range of other 'everyday' spaces (shops, schools, transport links) and through developing their own offer (services, events, groups). A number of audience interviews showed that people had come further to a library that wasn't their usual library, for reasons of scheduling or general availability.

This is useful to consider in terms of reach and marketing; what sort of crossover is possible without cannibalising the sales of the same area, although box office data equally suggests there is room for growth, probably in some areas more than others. Overall, this helps complement our view of exact distances travelled to a more relative understanding of what counts as 'local' in different areas.

% travelled to nearest library	
Leicester	43
Leicestershire	73
Nottingham	53
Nottinghamshire	66
Rutland	86
Total average	60

% of audience who travelled to their nearest library
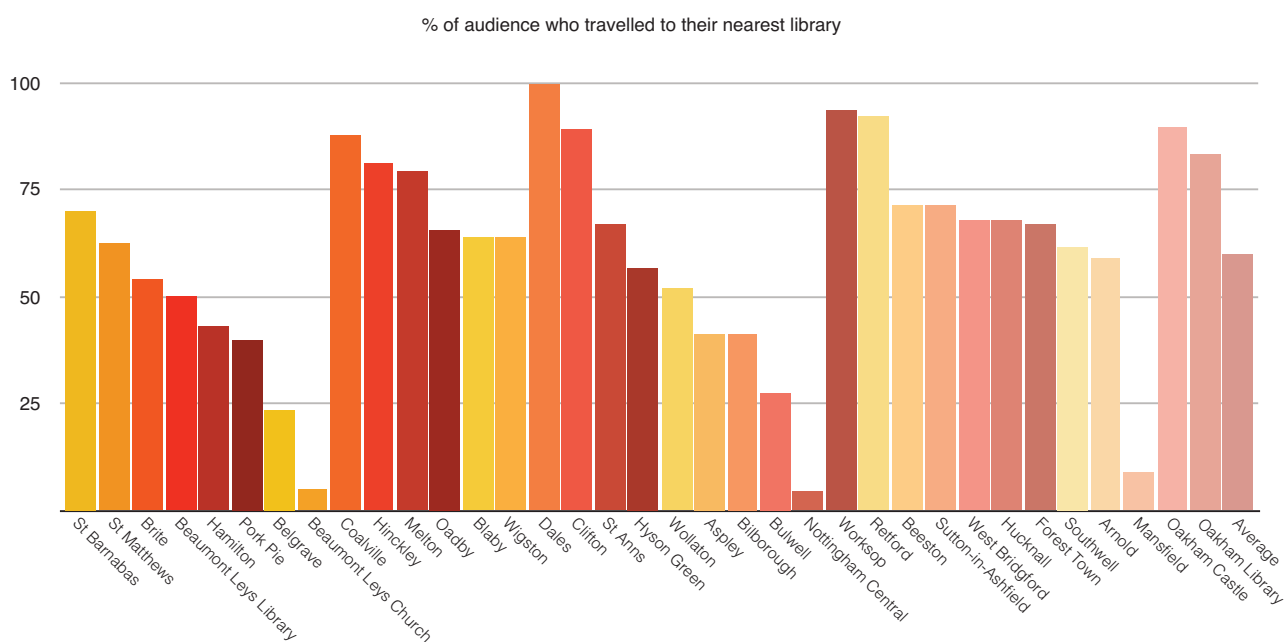
4.2 Audience agency segmentation

Postcodes collected from audience surveys were also analysed by The Audience Agency, according to their segmentation and profiling tool; Audience Spectrum:

"Audience Spectrum is a powerful arts, culture and heritage-specific geodemographic profiling tool developed by The Audience Agency. Audience Spectrum describes the British population in terms of their attendance, participation and engagement in the arts, culture and heritage, as well as behaviours, attitudes and preferences at arts, museums and heritage organisations."

"The British adult population is broken into 10 categories based on their attendance at, and participation and engagement with, the arts, culture and heritage. More widely, these segments can be grouped into 3 categories – high engagement, medium engagement and lower engagement."

National-level data for 'Children & Family' from Audience Finder (AF C&F) is included, as is background information for the East Midlands region

as a whole (EM) and) Individual reports were produced for each region aside from this. For individual regions and detail across the 10 categories, see AIF17-3

Comparing AIF to the East Midlands, there were both more high engaged (16-13%) and slightly more low engaged (38-37%). This is a potentially interesting split, though we should bear in mind the relative differences are still quite small and we could equally argue that AIF matches the background of the East Midlands quite well.

For a larger difference, we can compare AIF to the national picture (AF C&F), where there is more high (25-16%) and medium engagement (55-45%). Audience Finder also gave (at the time of writing) an average ticket yield for children & family events at around £13.00, considerably higher than the ticket price of AIF.

Audience Spectrum - Engagement

| | Low engagement | Medium engagement | Hign engagement |
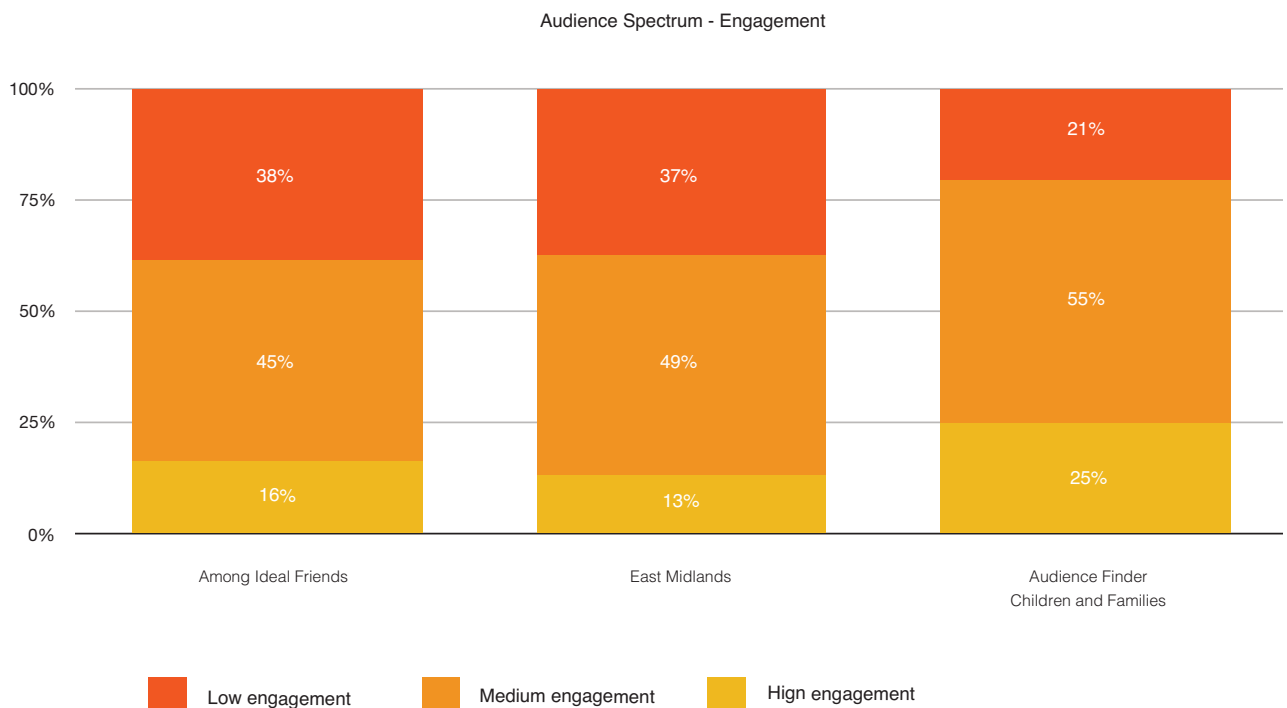
4.3 Audience interviews

During Season 4 *(Where the River Runs)* nine audience intercept interviews were carried out at a range of venues and across the regions of the project. During the pre and post show announcements, the audience was made aware of the option to participate in a short interview and to receive a £5 book token. Overall, this was sufficient motivation and for practical reasons, with only one researcher, it was generally only possible to interview two at each location, without having to ask people to wait for too long or to come back at a later time.

All were library members. Most had more than one child with them, with the eldest 9-10, and the youngest 3-4, most around 6-7. All had lived in their current home for at least 4-5 years, most 8 or more, some in the same general area their whole lives. The interview script, more information on the coding structure used and quotes can be found in AIF17-3

General response to the show

Interviewees were split on whether they had booked in advance or knew much about the show prior to attending. In some cases they related that they knew they were taking a bit of a chance, an impulse purchase or were even slightly apprehensive about what to expect.

Interviewees were universally and pleasantly surprised by the experience even where the majority had previously seen another AIF show in the same venue. Overall, the show in question was the most dance-based of all the AIF shows and this was referenced, compared to a more dialogue/plot driven piece of performance. It was also compared positively to other art forms, such as cinema. The expressiveness of the piece was reflected on by many as a positive and as something novel for their children to experience.

The length of the piece was around 50 minutes including pre and post-performance activities. As much as adults enjoyed the show themselves, it is clear that they also paid close attention to the response of their children who were fully engaged. This was noted as particularly surprising in cases where the children had not seen anything like the show before, or where they thought their children generally had short attention spans. Some noted that they would like to follow on the activity with other books or activities and this theme emerges again under other topics.

Many interviewees commented on the convenience, accessibility and relaxed atmosphere from using an everyday space like a library. The atmosphere was considerably different to that of seeing the same show in a conventional theatre. One person noted that, compared to other areas in which they had lived, it was relatively hard to come by these kinds of activities.

Relationship with the library

Most interviewees were using their usual, local library, though some had travelled further for reasons of scheduling or availability. While all would broadly describe themselves as regular library users, it is useful to note that this varied from weekly to monthly visits. The reasons for visiting regularly varied from the sheer volume of books children got through, to using books for school projects, to primarily using it for events, to socialization and computer facilities. Some interviewees noted that they would like to visit more often for events or just in general.

Some would deliberately plan to make a specific trip to the library although others would drop in as part of other trips or when a school project would require it. Most interviewees lived within a 15-20 minute walk or shorter drive, bus or tram journey.

Interviewees were broadly aware of the utility of the performance as a jumping off point for other activities and studies. Many asked about a companion book related to the story or related to the setting. One commented that with other performances they had read a book in advance, which then added a new dimension to the performance. Another commented that the experience would help create interest in performing, not just the themes or topics of the story. A few noted that in regards to increasing reading specifically, some follow up activity would probably be necessary.

There is an interesting contradiction of sorts between the opinions that children are generally excited by books and libraries by default, but that having performances creates additional excitement. Under other topics it was noted that the storytelling and performative aspect of reading to children was an area where adults could benefit in terms of developing their own confidence in performing (to any modest degree) to their children. Certainly in one case it was stated that enthusiasm for reading is very rewarding for both adults and children, and comes about in unexpected ways. Interviewees were broadly aware of other reading initiatives, with the most common being the Summer Reading Challenge. One interviewee stated they also volunteered with their school related to reading assistance.

Interviewees had a range of feedback to provide about the more concrete resources of the library. Most, but not all, interviewees were at their local or most regular library or commented that their library had recently undergone (positive) change. Even in relatively established libraries, there was still comment that the overall feel of the place had changed positively. Many interviewees commented, some with greater concern than others, that they were in some way worried about the future of their library. In one case, they noted that without resources or added-value activity going on inside, the building itself would be of limited use. Particularly in the context of special events like AIF, interviewees were positive about their views of libraries as offering more than 'just books'. These sentiments were often expressed in the context of wanting to persuade others to find out what is on offer.

Accessibility was brought up from a range of perspectives, taking in affordability and location and broadly the 'everyday' and intimate nature of the space. The difference between public and school libraries was referred to, particularly with regards to it being a place with more than 'just books'. The library staff were acknowledged as being particularly important in one case; a participant also stated that the staff had helped advise whether the performance would be age-appropriate for their child.

Other events, arts and culture

Most, but not all of the interviewees were either aware of other AIF shows and in the case of those in Leicester/Leicestershire were more likely to have also heard of The Spark. Post-event activities and materials were referenced as useful, even simple things like tickets, flyers or posters were kept as mementos.

The positives of attending museums and galleries were referenced by some of the interviewees; a combination of affordability, distance and a generally relaxed atmosphere. The library environment was described as more personal or intimate having a relaxed atmosphere. Overall, interviewees appreciated variety and did not seem to specifically pursue any type of performance over another. Put another way, we could argue they saw the value in presenting their child with a range of cultural experiences.

The affordability of the show compared to other shows was mentioned universally as a positive; even among those who were otherwise regular attenders at other shows and more mainstream venues. One referenced the relative value for money and perhaps feeling less attached to bigger shows in less familiar venues. Many stated they would like to be able to afford to go more often and to go as a whole family, rather than only with a main carer and children. One interviewee discussed their struggle in determining what would be appropriate for their child.

Interviewees referenced the typical range of marketing methods they were likely to use to find out about AIF and similar events. The value of physical media was referenced to those who didn't have internet access or felt that emails are relatively easy to ignore. Having a flyer or leaflet was useful to some to have something to take away, think about and discuss before making a decision to go.

Values, benefits and barriers

All interviewees stated they were keen readers and that they were trying to stimulate (or sustain) this interest in their children. Overall, they felt that they were the main drivers of this, although schools and libraries were also referenced.

The performance of storytelling was referenced by one interviewee as crucial to this development, particularly for younger children who were not yet independent readers. While enjoyment and escapism were familiar sentiments expressed here, there were nevertheless other considerations; with some relation to learning difficulties, academic achievement and when reflecting on their own educational experience. The further benefits of reading were described as multiple, but very broad and difficult to pin down.

Personal enjoyment was a common theme, but also as a necessary stepping stone for other benefits or socialization and happy memories. Academic benefits were a further theme as were considerations of social and moral development. Interviewees noted the multi-purpose nature of the library space and some of the challenges of sharing this space or in one case, where the show had been programmed while the rest of the library was closed. Public transport was referenced as useful in regards of cost and convenience when travelling with children.

Overall, interviewees stated a variety of ways of finding out about the shows, but despite the positive experience were relatively unsure about what comes next or where to look for more opportunities like this. Others commented on the general size of the audience and that they might be interested in travelling further to similar events.

Interviews summary

From the outset, it was fairly apparent that this approach would attract individuals who were likely to be relatively frequent library users and potentially also keen advocates for the arts. We did not interview anyone who did not have a library card and though memory is fallible, it seemed that most had been to another AIF show previously. Unlike the quantitative survey, the purpose of this section is to illustrate how a small segment responded to the experience in their own terms.

It is reassuring to find such a similarity of experience across the different libraries and regions covered, urban and rural, relatively deprived and relatively well-off, relatively new to the area and relatively familiar, a range of ethnic backgrounds and some variety in the ages of children being accompanied. Of the nine adults, only one was male but this is roughly in line with the quantitative data. One was a grandparent rather than parent to their child.

Combined with the survey data looking at marketing methods, it is clear that a relatively direct approach (word of mouth, staff, leaflets and posters) is a common theme but at the same time, most interviewees could suggest alternatives or ways of spreading the word further. There is a suggestion that most users see their local library as the main point of access however it was also clear that for special events like this, audiences would be prepared to shift venues or travel further if this fit their particular schedule. This is mostly reinforced by the mapping aspect of the audience survey data and is a positive reflection of the 'pull' such events can have.

The everyday, low-risk nature of the spaces is something that many more conventional arts venues would probably envy. This goes beyond the considerable value given to, location, relaxed atmosphere, variety of facilities, low cost, and begins to hint at the importance of a sense of place alongside these more practical (yet undoubtedly still critical) considerations. This simply would not be the same show or experience if it took place in bigger, louder, flashier, more distant, more expensive and less familiar spaces. "Site-specific performance" is probably not a concept in the vocabulary of the children in the

audience, but it is easy to wonder how they might reflect back on this in future years, perhaps after a visit to a conventional theatre.

That season 4 was when interviewing took place was a somewhat unplanned but potentially happy accident, given that this show was the 'odd one out', dance-based with comparatively little dialogue. This may have resulted in a greater reflection on the more abstract value of performance specifically, rather than potentially focusing on particular elements of dialogue, character or plot.

The generally positive direct experience was deepened through reflections on personal benefits (attention, encouragement to read, performance) and situated within an environment most commented was changing positively (variety of activities and resources, staff welcome and advice). It is clear that the interviewees valued their libraries outside of the shows as places that have quite varied 'offers' and generally felt that they seemed to be getting more out of such places than some of their peers. There is some apprehension around cuts to services, perhaps this has heightened these users perception of what is on offer and that it should be taken advantage of. It is not too unusual for individuals, especially when being put on the spot in an interview, to wonder whether their experience reflects that of their peers; however in the wider context of change for libraries, maybe we could stand to underline the theme of 'pleasant surprise' much more heavily.

School audience enjoying Big Sister Little Brother

5. Schools Programme

Schools programme

Season 2, *The First,* was entirely focused on school groups visiting libraries. Unlike other shows, this was programmed within school term time, and the content of the show, *The First*, had a particular tie in with school activity that addressed the centenary of World War I.

Season 3, *Big Sister Little Brother,* included a smaller number of schools only shows and overall there was less of a focus on groups incorporating pre or post show activity.

	The First	BSLB	Total
Total feedback forms	14	12	26
Total school groups attending	27	12	39

	The First	BSLB
Have you attended the library as a class or school for activity in the past? Yes	7	8
Has this encouraged you as a school group to visit the library again in the future? Yes	13	10

Some additional comments from the group leaders are given below:

"Children were all thoroughly engaged, children with specific learning needs really focused, Fantastic for visually impaired child who laughed throughout."

"Children were captivated by the performance. They loved being immersed in the action."

"Excellent behaviour - children engaged in the play, Children joining in with actions, Children noticed the music played a part."

"It was brilliant - it was so good the way they did all of that with just 2 people."

"It was a really emotional story - the children were all talking about it on the bus on the way to another visit the next day (the Zoo so unrelated)"

Year Groups attending

The First Big Sister Little Brother
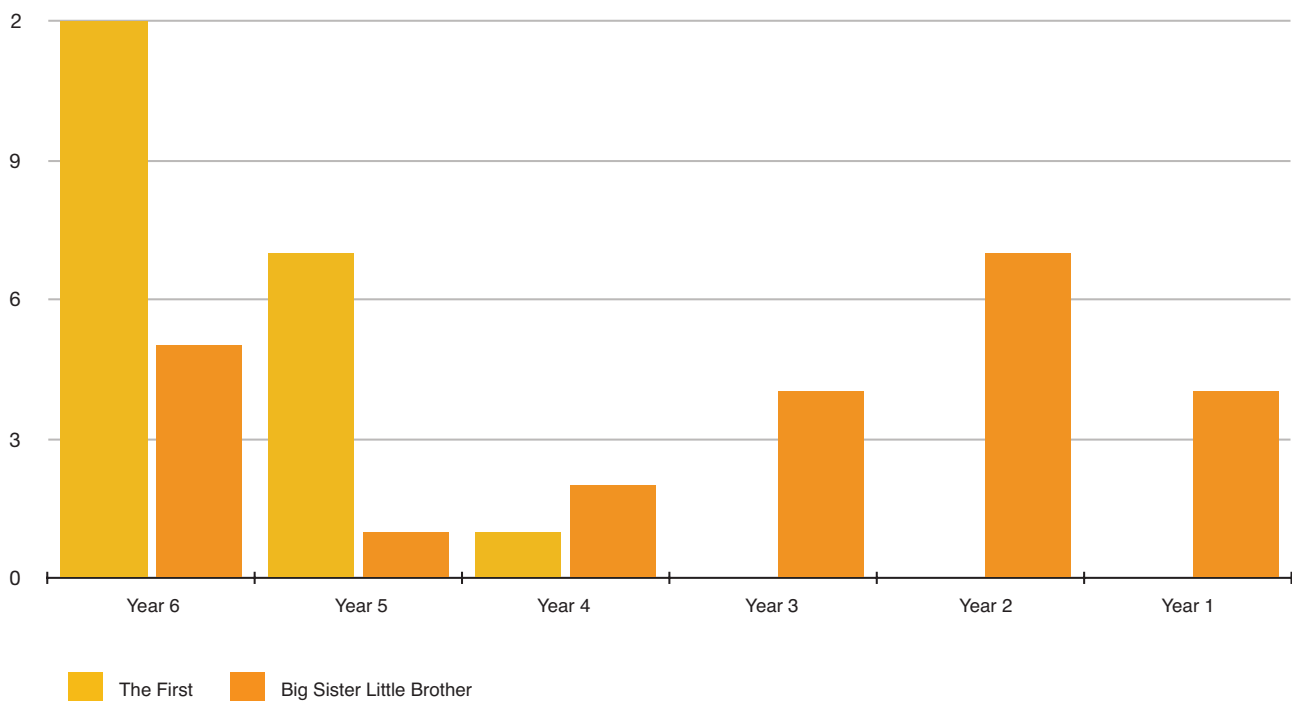
Class based activities

Note there was no activity pack associated with *Big Sister Little Brother* (BSLB).

	The First	BSLB
Total feedback forms	**14**	**12**
Are you developing any class based activities linked to the event? : "Yes"	13 93%	5 42%
Are you aware of the activity pack?	12 85%	n/a
Are you using the activity pack?	11 79%	n/a

Total school groups attending 27

For the most part, class based activities focused on reading and writing. Some examples given on the forms are selected below:

"Literacy based writing, letters from the frontline, debate about war"

"Children wrote a review on the play"

"A diary entry from a soldier in World War One"

"Sewn poppies, Blackout poetry, Performing Poetry"

"Use of the story to start the WW2 topic that we will be doing next half term. Looking at WW1 and how it then moved on to a second war. Human stories are also similar in both wars."

What artforms will be used in this work?

Sylvia South and the Word Catcher at Fosse Library, Leicester
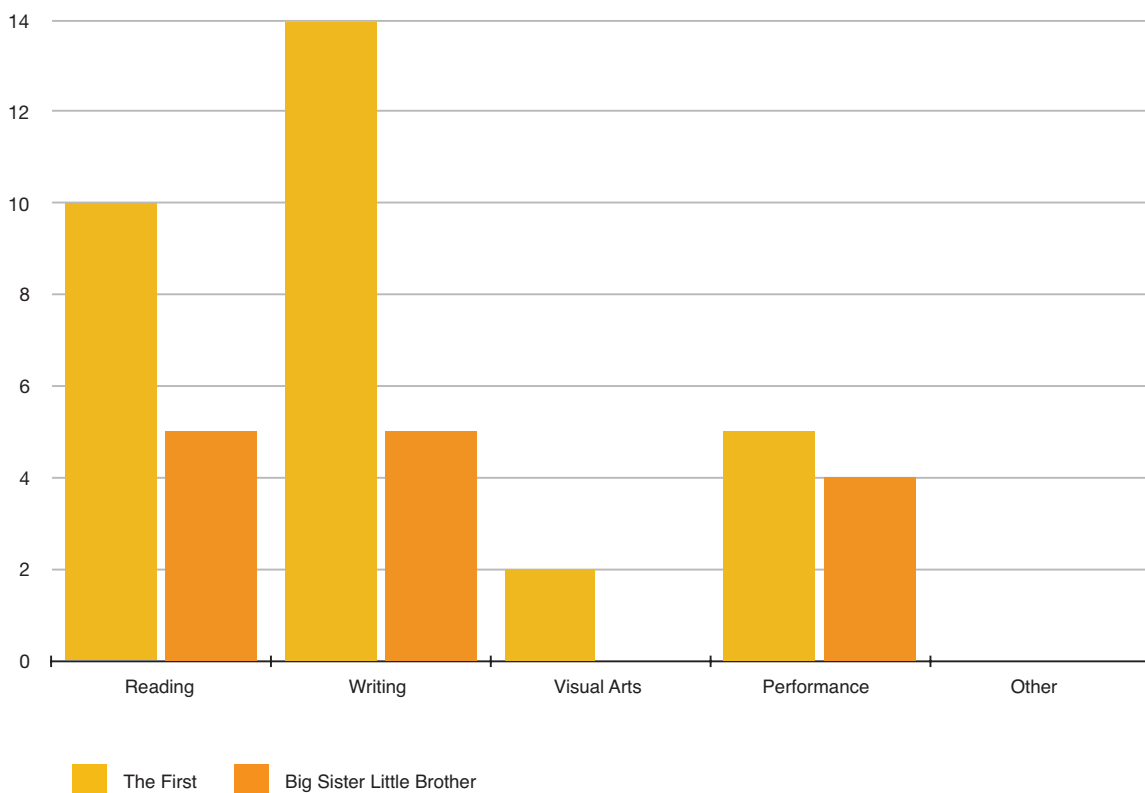
6. Library Staff

6.1 Interviews

The project leads in each region had a track record of managing arts and culture performances and events outside of work with The Spark including; Bookstart, Summer Reading Challenge, Arts Award, Big Lottery projects, Letterbox Club and Heritage Lottery Funding.

Compared to the audience interviews, there is no summary, as the salient points are summarised in each section. Quotes are used directly where necessary. Each interview lasted 40-70 minutes.

Date	Venue	Region
9/11/16	Phone	Leicester
23/11/16	Group (7)	Leicestershire
28/11/16	Phone	Nottinghamshire
28/11/16	Phone	Nottinghamshire
7/12/16	Group (2)	Nottingham
5/1/17	Phone	Leicester

For reference the dates of the three seasons at this stage of the project were:

S1: 21st July – 6th August
S2: 31st October – 16th November
S3: 29th November – 17th December

The interview script can be seen in AIF17-3

Organisational structures

Of the authorities involved, one (Inspire) was a community benefit society having been launched by Nottinghamshire County Council to deliver cultural, learning and library services. The other four (Leicester City, Leicestershire County in partnership with Rutland and Nottingham City) were under local authority control. It was noted that for Inspire, the public libraries element of their service still remained one of the largest elements of their overall remit. At least at the level of this project and the topics covered in this interview, there did not seem to be any particular issues raised related to this difference in the structure of the authorities, although Inspire had previously worked with The Spark before, unlike three of the others (Leicestershire, Rutland and Nottingham).

The two city authorities noted that many of their users were generally of a younger and transient demographic: *"Young families with young children and lots of new arrivals"*. In both cases, interviewees mentioned a range of wider health, social or educational programmes, typically related to young families and young children that operated city-wide that their work contributed to[7]. Overall, the levels of transience in these areas meant that it was difficult to ensure that all children of a certain age or at a year of school had been targeted by a given initiative: *"If a child is born here, they should have a library card through Bookstart. We looked at 5 to 7 year olds, and about a third of them don't have them, so presumably they've [recently] moved into the area."* Finally, the two city authorities referred to the different role that their central libraries played, compared to neighbourhood libraries. In terms of general size, we should also note that the county authorities have some town centre libraries which might have a similar role. In the case of Nottingham, there had been recent headlines around the central library being redeveloped and moved, which although some of the reporting in the news had apparently been incorrect, this stimulated a degree of positive backlash and support for the library service in general. It was also discussed that for other school activities, that would require a city visit to heritage sites, museums or galleries, that the central library might also act as a good 'stop' on this tour.

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[7] This is not an exhaustive list but: in Leicester, 'Whatever it takes'; in Nottingham 'Small Steps, Big Change' and 'Opportunity Notts'.

All authorities were, unsurprisingly, aware of the challenges facing library services and most had been through restructuring recently, the specific details of which are too many to relate according to each authority. All were aware they were living in changing times and were, in various ways, responding to this as best they were able. Being able to show they were offering something new and outside of their everyday remit such as a performance was a positive.

Arts and enjoyment context

Most interviewees were happy to relate that most young children find libraries naturally exciting places. It was not explicitly stated but of course, official usage statistics and the Taking Part survey show clearly that adults with children are typically more likely to use the library; therefore it is difficult to say if or how libraries consider themselves to particularly good at attracting this demographic, or whether their core offer naturally skews more towards this. Certainly, in one discussion with a city library, and from looking at library card data, it was shown that central libraries may have a proportionately smaller number of child members than neighbourhood libraries.

One interviewee related that children appreciated the seemingly 'unlimited' content their libraries offered and especially for those with limited means, the luxury of being able to read anything, as much as they could possibly manage, was a key motivation. Even those who able to afford 'some' books could surely not provide an entire library. In one case, it was noted that perhaps around the age of 9, this excitement was changing and that children might feel they are getting: *"too cool for the library."*, but that increasingly offering a variety of events and being seen as a lively, changing place might indirectly help challenge these perceptions, providing opportunity to tie in Arts Awards or volunteering activity. The pre and post show activities, where they had taken place, were cited as good examples for libraries to adapt activities according to their own resources and skills: *"It has room for experimentation."*

Many individuals related that they saw projects like AIF to change perceptions of other stakeholders, particularly schools. *"Learning doesn't only take place in the school, reading for pleasure and trying to engage those who can read, but don't."* In one case, this was described as

moving perceptions away from just education, to emphasise *"reading for fun rather than work… expanding their tastes to new authors, more than just what the school is recommending, or what their parents are recommending."* In one case, the discussion around schools reflected on a nearby university which trained teachers, where it was relatively unknown what sort of literacy education future teachers would be required to undertake and whether teachers might simply refer to their own preferred reading as children and not know about newer authors.

All were keen to encourage schools to visit more frequently: *"Once a half term we would consider to be very engaged, once a term was more typical."* There was a degree of tension between whether libraries should take their efforts and activities into schools or whether they should aim to use these as a way of *"building the habit of going to the library."* Despite this, it was acknowledged that the demands of safeguarding and often needing extra staff or volunteers could easily put off schools from doing many visits out of the classroom.

It was acknowledged that many library staff generally want to do more of 'this sort of thing' but don't have the resources to do so on a regular basis. The lack of skills was more around commissioning new work, many were grateful for external expertise and noted that they likely would struggle to find the time or make the judgement necessary to find excellent children's theatre, potentially getting a worse product at greater expense. Interviewees were not asked to relay a full audit of the events and children-focused work they delivered but it was broadly felt that shows like AIF were seen as quite a rare occurrence, even among those libraries that received multiple seasons and programmed other special events. In the case of libraries with artists-in-residence, it was further related that these individuals were aware of very little other similar activity in the area, based in either schools or libraries, being sustained over the relatively long term.

Libraries as performing arts venues

For the most part, libraries accommodated the performances with relatively minor adjustments and that this fit within wider changes to their buildings and facilities: *"We have movable shelving, chairs that are easy to stack, aside from [these shows], we want to make use of the spaces as well."* Despite this, it could still be a challenge to ensure that basic facilities, like the right amount of seating was available in each venue, and that these requirements matched up with any additional equipment or seating that was being brought by the touring company. Meeting the exact scheduling needs of multiple stakeholders was an ongoing challenge: *"The school wants the times to be this, the library needs the times to be that, the touring company needs to arrive by then; we all manage to compromise."*

In some cases it was easier to accommodate shows during times when the libraries would not usually be open, or to extend opening times slightly to host two school groups on one day. Both Leicester and Nottingham mentioned co-locating library services within other buildings (multi-use centres) and that these had reached different users. However, due to sharing the space with other services, it was sometimes difficult to guarantee a suitably isolated and uninterrupted performance, though only one concrete example was given of an interrupted performance.

Other facilities and services nearby were also mentioned as having a potential impact, for example a library situated near a swimming pool found that there were two groups of pupils from one school who would alternately use the library whilst the other group used the pool. In Leicester's case, a library and neighbourhood centre based relatively near each other shared many users and co-ordinated various activities, despite the library being too small to host the performances itself.

Some shows were deliberately programmed into areas of relatively high deprivation. One interviewee noted that they would always like to programme shows at a wider range of libraries, but often focused on the larger libraries for reasons of cost and capacity. While the phrase, "touring circuit" was not directly used, it became clear that the services were confident in discussing the practical, social and cultural factors influencing their programming decisions across a range of diverse venues.

Schools: existing activities and changes

Libraries had varying degrees of previous activities with schools, most commonly this seemed to be an authors' event or a visit to a school for assemblies. Overall restrictions on resources meant that libraries were generally becoming more deliberate in targeting certain schools.

Many noted that charging a fee for events hosted at the library (also for public events) was a new approach for them: *"We have discussed it for years. It has given us the impetus to do it and it hasn't been a problem. Schools have even asked us about paying for author events before."* All reflected that the amount charged for schools (in the region of £2 per student) was, in their view, highly affordable compared to other school visits or events. Some outliers for this were identified, both for public events (particularly for larger family groups) and for some schools (where they were reliant on parents contributing towards costs).

Nottingham noted that the charges would bring them in line with equivalent offers being made by the museum service, with paid visits to heritage sites like the castle. Nottinghamshire stated that they had charged for some relatively large headline events during a poetry festival before, but it was newer to charge for 'one-offs', though they were having success with this. In many respects, the most beneficial side-effect of charging a fee was that it increased the level of commitment, where otherwise it was a sad possibility that cancellations would happen. The level of commitment may also have increased the amount of 'value' school staff wanted to get out of the experience, potentially making the take up of pre or post show activities greater.

In terms of changing their approach to programming events, all services noted that the experience had given them ideas and motivation to seek out similar opportunities: *"What we want is more. It's hugely valuable. It is popular with our audiences, the next set of shows in December are more or less sold out…We are programming in two or three shows outside of the project on this basis."* In one case, this meant targeting schools with different types of events, not only author events. All libraries were new to working in a consortium and found this aspect valuable, in terms of the central support available through The Spark and in terms of continuing networking and sharing ideas among their peers.

Schools: what worked

Different approaches for communicating effectively with schools were discussed. Leicestershire noted that they might change their approach, rather than having individual libraries reaching out to schools, it might be more efficient to have one person designated as the schools contact (on the libraries side) who managed this process, chasing up and booking for the whole service. Finding 'the right' person to speak to at a school was universally acknowledged as a challenge, in some cases an individual teacher or the head teacher was involved, in other cases there was a literacy co-ordinator or arts lead for the school: *"It's a bit like the doctors, you know, to get past the person at the front desk."* A general point was raised that it was important not to assume that the schools that were geographically closest would necessarily be the easiest ones to engage[8]. Most discussed, in one way or the other that they felt the offer for schools was valuable for a variety or reasons: *"I've been able to engage with schools who weren't engaging before, because I have been able to offer something different and exciting."*

The quality of the work was central: *"We have had theatre in libraries before, but very erratically, not programmed in seasons. One of the things for me, reputation wise, this has done us a great favour because of the standard of the productions. This is an example of that; they're going back [to the schools] and saying this is fantastic, if we get the chance we should come again."* And: *"I hope it gives them [the school] the idea that the library is somewhere where you can get high quality cultural events"*

Pre and post show activities, both at the libraries and back at the schools took a wide variety of approaches, most being reflected on positively. Displays of some description at the library, often incorporating work created by the children were noted by several libraries as being effective ways of bringing groups back and also for children to bring their parents and families to the library to see their work. *"Would you like to finish this [activity] at school? When they did, they came back to the library to display it, really effective."*

In one case in Leicester, an artist-in-residence was able to provide a considerable degree of support to the surrounding activities over the course of a number of days (3 sessions before and 3 sessions afterwards) and commented: *"Almost like a young person's takeover in the library. Around Remembrance Day there were banners and displays that were in anyway … other users of the library noticed and felt part of it a little bit too, there were positive reactions that this helped the place have a feeling of community."* Where schools wanted, or were able to, buy in at a higher level, the benefits were similarly extended: *"Schools, if it's all done for them, versus if they have some input, they feel more like it's theirs, the same as workshops, if it's something that's being done to you versus if you bring some of your own input and energy to it."*

"...they're going back and saying this is fantastic, if we get the chance we should come again."

"I hope it gives them the idea that the library is somewhere where you can get high quality cultural events"

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[8] There was a small 'access' fund as part of the overall project, that libraries could use in cases where travel costs were a significant barrier for schools and other groups.

Teachers in some cases seemed to have similar reactions to parents, frequently commenting on the performers' ability to hold attention during the show or during post show activities. A librarian, quoting a teacher: *"I can't believe they're writing this much, I can't believe they are this focused!"* In one case, it was noted that different approaches were generally seen to be beneficial for those pupils who might otherwise have limited interest or ability in literacy activities. Overall, many commented that the experience was valuable for teachers own skills in capturing the attention of their pupils and making literacy activities fun; maybe more so for those involved in the workshops than only the show: *"Teachers in the workshop programme were saying they got loads of new ideas"*

The performers themselves often had short post show meet and greets or quick Q&A's with the children. The questions being asked by the children help show the degree of engagement, again, as related by librarians: *"What is that instrument? How did you cry? How do you do different people [roles] all at once… there were questions about the war, friendship, it would be interesting to hear more about what came up afterwards back at school."* Those librarians who had seen the performance with different age groups and from different schools noted that there was some variety in the level of engagement, between those who came in already 'warmed up' to the idea through pre-show activity versus those who did not.

> *"I can't believe they're writing this much, I can't believe they are this focused!"*
>
> Librarian quoting teacher

Schools: challenges

Both libraries and schools seemed to be in positions of relatively high structural change and individual employee turnover, which naturally made it: *"difficult to build relationships, and keep track."* Getting a foot in the door continued to be a key challenge, with few central contacts or channels for disseminating a message widely across schools effectively: *"There was a schools newsletter, or something like that, which was supposed to get to all teachers in the area, but when you speak to them, it's one of those things that people don't really seem to use that much."* The increasing number of academies in some areas further meant that central contacts or resources were difficult to find. Some regions noted they also successfully reached out to networks for home educated children and children in care.

Many of course sympathised with the pressures facing schools: *"We do a lot of work with schools; in general they are busier than ever, it was harder than we thought to engage them...Parents can take up a lot of teachers' time."* Scheduling and safeguarding issues were all barriers, though usually not insurmountable, and certainly diminished after having had a quality experience: *"Schools can be very picky, so you have to make a strong case."* The role of libraries in reaching out to schools was discussed: *"When we had more staff, a librarian would be there to introduce the library service [to schools], we do still try, but after that introduction, they are somewhat looking after themselves."*

While it is easy to focus solely on the activity related to AIF, the relationship-building and partnership working between libraries, schools and the wider community was acknowledged to be a long term investment. "I've seen adverts for similar artist-in-residence roles, only for 6 months, where in my experience, even 1 year can feel short."

Cultural Education

Libraries were broadly aware of the term, "cultural education", and the relevant Cultural Education Partnership (and Bridge Organisation) that was established in their area. Arts Award and Artsmark were often topics that emerged, related to cultural education, with the qualifications being seen to be valuable among teachers and parents: *"We started offering entry level, now parents want them to do the next level."* The concept was known and useful, but still fairly new and open to debate: *"We don't necessarily discuss "cultural education", seems like a very specific terminology, with schools, but that is a general theme that they respond to."*

Overall, it was an area in which they felt libraries could probably stand to play a bigger role and were generally keen to push themselves forward into relevant discussions and meetings where possible. In the case of Nottingham, the UNESCO City of Literature award was noted, and the libraries were, at the time, investigating what their role in this might be.

Evaluation

How do libraries judge what works and are they obliged to collect data for other initiatives? All services commented that the audience survey being carried out for AIF was comparatively more detailed than their usual approaches, though they equally understood that the investigation was being carried out across a very wide range of venues and audiences.

The Summer Reading Challenge was referred to here as a familiar model for national engagement and benchmarking, as libraries were able to participate while a separate entity could help take care of the delivery and analysis of the findings: *"…external agencies can get the research, where as local authorities can't necessarily."* In one case, the interviewee referred to other research having informed their approach and positive view of activities like AIF: *"We know that having universal library cards, automatic enrolment, does something but without more engagement, involving the rest of family, the impact is low."*

Headline figures and immediate response were noted to be relatively easy to capture, but follow ups and the longer term impact were usually unknown; whether with the general public or with schools specifically: *"What do schools get out of libraries? Literacy must be improving if they are coming regularly, we try to find out if there is any way schools can tell us if this [literacy] improves… but with reading ability, there's all sorts of factors come into play…our one bit could be crucial, but it's not the only bit, are there books in the home?"* With regards to schools specifically, some wondered exactly how the experience might be referred back to parents or governors through anecdote or in final reports. Interviewees also wondered how much attention schools paid to each other, in terms of hearing about new approaches or priorities, and what the 'tipping point' might be that influenced their decisions to participate (or not).

6.2 End of project survey

A final online survey was sent after the final partners meeting to collect reflections and observations on the project as a whole. This was available for completion by both project leads and those who were involved, but had less overall input or responsibility. Project leads were asked an additional subset of more detailed questions. 23 responses were collected.

Both Leicester and Nottinghamshire had, as regions, worked with The Spark before, though not every library or member of library staff would have been involved. Overall, 13 had not worked with The Spark prior to AIF and 10 had.

Season differences

Most had seen several of the shows, with the most recent season (5) being the most familiar at the time of the survey.

Season	Have received this show
Season 1	59%
Season 2	50%
Season 3	68%
Season 4	77%
Season 5	100%

Many of the questions allowed respondents to reply in their own terms, key points are summarised below:
Did you feel any of the shows had more or less of a beneficial impact than the others? If so, why?

All responses were broadly positive about the quality of the shows, though those who had only seen one show noted they had nothing to compare it to. Many noted that the shows were very different in content, theme and in terms of the benefits or barriers they had regarding audiences. While this range was a challenge, most were positive about their ability to incorporate this within their libraries offer and that audiences appreciated such variety. Some quotes are provided below:

Season 1
A Boy and a Bear in a Boat:

"was my personal favourite in terms of the drama and the experience."

"was our first involvement and so could say a bit hit and miss. Saying that we still had a full house and we had the show twice at our library"

Season 2:
The First

"Theme had obvious draw for schools. Moving performances that remembered long after the event"

"was powerful and moving."

"excellent schools engagement"

"Very little of our previous theatre in library work had been with schools. The First was helpful in showing there is an appetite for quality, relevant work that schools can work into their curriculum."

Season 3:
Big Sister Little Brother

"had a fun comedy element between brother and sister which younger children could relate to."

"really good to showcase potential as an arts venue/space."

Season 4:
Where the River Runs

"was artistic with dance and music and a great way to bring art to a younger generation."

"demonstrated potential to draw in dance audiences. Interesting to explore physicality in storytelling. This also has the potential to cross language and age barriers when combined with words and audience activities post-performance."

"was difficult to promote as a Dance production was a new offer in our communities"

Season 5
Sylvia South and the Word Catcher

"Sylvia South brought drama and storytelling in a fun way and also highlighted libraries in a positive image."

"Publicity for Sylvia South poor and not reflective of the show content and a difficult sell to customers"

"Audience numbers affected by performance dates in 1st week of school holidays. The set/props worked well in the wide variety of city venues to create an area where the story took place - a library within the library."

Did you do any pre or post show activity? If yes, what did you feel was most beneficial?

5 respondents either did not do or were not personally involved in pre or post show activities, the remaining 18 all gave some examples. Although most were positive, they also noted it was difficult to quantify exactly how many bookings were as a result of offering these activities. In some cases it was noted that the majority of workshop activity related to school groups, rather than public shows. In one case it was noted that school groups visiting the library, for other reasons, were a useful target for promotion (of public shows).

Several respondents noted a display, sometimes fixed, sometimes movable, which promoted the show in the run up. This acted as a prompt for library visitors and staff to talk to each other about the show in less of a 'hard sell' context. One respondent noted that by virtue of having a new or special display, this also helped: *"move customers away from thinking that everything should be "free" from the library service."*

Activities typically involved art, craft or performance, though some competitions and give-aways were noted. Craft activities were noted as helping give children something to take away after the show. Although not the intended focus of this question, one respondent used the opportunity to mention the staff workshops being run by The Spark, and that these helped their staff talk with more confidence about the shows to library users.

As a result of AIF...

Legend:
- Disagree Strongly
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

X-axis categories:
- Increasing library visits by children
- Increasing engagement with schools
- More confident delivering arts events in libraries
- Reached a different audience
- Number of children with library cards
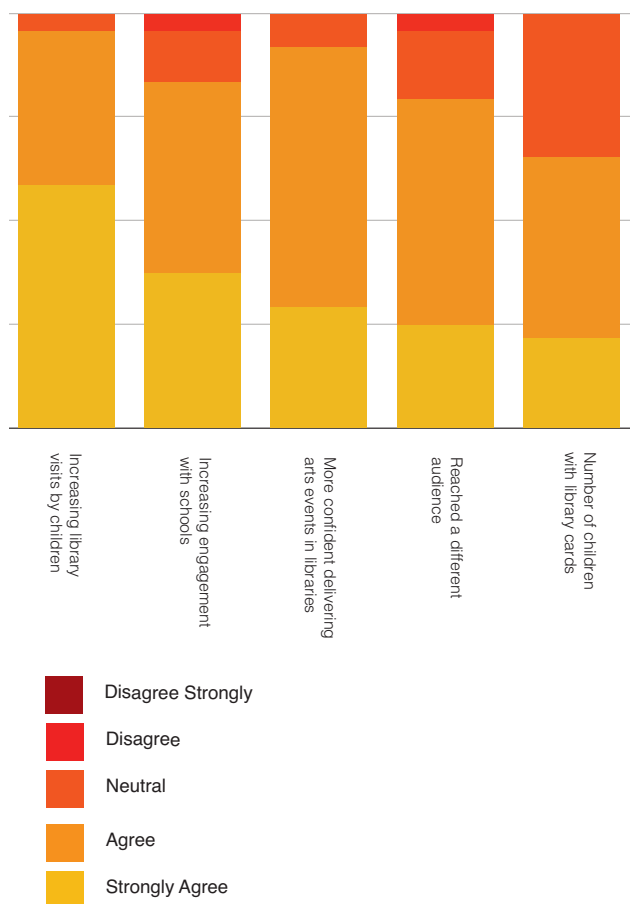
Some benefits of the project were suggested and responses have been ranked above according to those that received the most positive response, though all seem to be broadly positive.

Libraries are clearly happy about the project's scope to increase visits by children in general and for attracting school groups. As individuals, most feel more confident about tackling other arts events in the future. Most feel they reached a different audience through this approach, though from earlier responses, it may be that this was concentrated in some venues more than others. Increasing the number of children with library cards was, while still positive, the least of the categories presented and there may be other mechanisms by which libraries aim to achieve this particular goal.

Respondents were asked if they would like to comment further on the impact they felt AIF made. 10 respondents gave further details, the key themes emerging were:

Children might not have seen theatre before:

"However it does bring theatre to children that perhaps would never see a show otherwise."

"Brings theatre to families who wouldn't normally go, who may not be able to afford theatre prices, or who haven't had the confidence to visit a theatre."

"Continued to reach out to audiences who hadn't ever tried a performance in a library before"

"Many of the children were library visitors already, but would not have been taken to a theatre"

Library image and wider relationships:

"An arts event in libraries / community venues showcases these venues as high quality community assets that are linked to the wider city arts community. The performances and related activities extend our on-going work in developing language, literacy ability and emotional/social well-being through shared affordable experiences."

"I think the shows have made our customers think about us a little differently, they are helping us to tackle our stereotyping."

"Contributes to the new National Cultural Offer in Libraries."

"It also developed the library image and offered a greater opportunity for promotional activity."

Selling shows:

"Because there is always a charge for these events the staff have to work really hard to sell them."

"I have more confidence in organising shows because I know they will be popular, and I know that charging has worked on each occasion."

Project leads also were asked whether the project had any beneficial impact on their staff or volunteers:

Enjoyment and morale:

"General enjoyment and approval of what we are offering"

"General enjoyment, being involved in promotion"

"It has proved effective in increasing morale and confidence"

"definitely raised confidence and also made it more enjoyable"

Changing the offer:

"Offering something different, creating new audiences, using what we have differently"

"A greater application of the importance and impact of creative activity in our libraries/centres"

"It has been a demonstration of what is possible, and best practice in how to run events like this."

Specific skills:

"Staff especially the local managers have developed increasingly effective methods in staging and promoting performances"

"How to promote events, I think some of our marketing methods had got quite staid - it's almost like staff needed permission to think 'outside the box'"

"Marketing skills a lot of experience in ticket selling, crowd management etc."

"Skills in marketing / audience development, confidence and expertise in running and hosting cultural events."

Programme development

Project leads were asked how many arts events (of any type), and how many performing arts events specifically, their library would host in a typical year. The average for arts events was 4.6, for performing arts events the average was 1.8 [9]. These were not specific to children or young people and could include free and paid for events.

Project leads were also asked whether they were expecting to increase the number of arts or performing arts events. In both cases, the 10 respondents were split 50/50 between increasing or staying the same. An option for decreasing was included, though none selected it.

Other comments about the number of events:

7 responses were generally optimistic, though many had not made any concrete plans or noted their reliance on funding. Two responses were relatively detailed (edited slightly for anonymity):

"I would like to do 3 theatre shows a year to keep things consistent. I feel we have started to get a good following and building a reputation. Quality is important - as is capacity to organise, so we need to be realistic. Children's/family shows certainly seem to get good numbers and that is a nice counterpoint to the 'meet the author' events that tend to be frequented by our older customers. It all helps to build positive experiences of the library and good word-of-mouth. We are also starting to get more interest from schools who now seem to be quick to book on to events we offer out - there is a lot of potential that needs some thinking about to keep up with demand and what we could offer them."

"Really difficult question to answer in terms of what arts events are (have included author visits but excluded events that might be developed and hosted by library staff). Over the coming year we have secured funding to further develop our cultural offer - increasing the number of arts and cultural events for children but because of our previous project, it is likely that the [total] number of events will stay roughly the same."

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[9]   In the case of individuals who had responsibility for multiple libraries, some responses referred to many events across the whole region, these were excluded.

Do you feel the overall programme, schedule or pattern of AIF shows in your venue(s) had any impact?

Well-spaced out:

"Overall I think spacing of the events has been very good, distant enough not to be over-whelming on the organising side, but not so much that our event regulars forget about us."

"Two performances very near each other was administratively a headache"

Repetition:

"Ensuring shows, where possible, could be hosted at our biggest libraries and repeating each season meant we could build on the audience. There is an expectation we will host theatre and customers will look for 'what's next'."

"We had two shows of the one event (two days running). Initially tickets were very slow to go and I had been very concerned that we would not be able to sell two shows. In the end, with our marketing efforts, we were sold out. That was a huge surprise but also very confidence boosting."

"Definitely worth having a continuous programme as the audience builds up slowly and starts to ask about the next performance."

Problems:

"need to have more flexibility with timings as so much else happens in the library that a little bit more flexibility helps"

"Some of the shows were in other local venues which meant that we did not get as good a turn out as we might have done. There was also some discrepancy with regard to pricing between local libraries for the events"

Ticket prices

Respondents were asked to describe the pricing model for audience tickets to AIF shows, including library card discounts or other discounts. Additionally they were asked whether the model changes over the course of the project, how they felt audiences responded and would they change anything regards pricing in future.

All venues made some charge, in some cases varying whether adults or children attended for free (though not both). Family tickets offering some discount were introduced by some, though others noted that they were planning to have one flat fee in future for simplicity. For example, one respondent noted they charged £5 for children, with adults coming for free, now they would be planning to charge a £3 flat fee. One respondent stated they found the project useful in being able to experiment with different charges and offers.

It was noted a few venues were able to access additional small scale funding that allowed them to offer the events at a lower price than others in their respective regions. In particularly unengaged locations, this extra support was thought to be critical. However, variance within nearby (or regional) venues also appeared to have been picked up on negatively by a few audience members. Discounts based on library cards were noted by two respondents; one noted it made no difference as the majority of attendees had library cards. Another noted that despite offering the discount (and free library cards) a few still bought at the higher price. As a side note, none of the regions currently offered an automatic enrolment scheme or similar for children, though several were looking to trial this at various levels.

Difficulties were generally overcome:

"We are able to explain that events like family theatre are 'value added' and a nominal charge helps them become more sustainable."

"Comments suggested parents preferred simple pricing - they also were not so keen on children paying more for a ticket than an adult."

"They like what we are charging now and they believe it is fair and performances are of a good quality"

In terms of changes going forward, most reflected that they would struggle to fund this work entirely themselves or otherwise would likely have to increase costs to the audience. The most common solution for increasing revenue was to increase venue capacity, mostly by focusing shows in larger venues, which would have downsides. A minority suggested they might be able to charge more, though most either made no suggestion or thought increases would be difficult. There was some consideration that increasing the cost too much would place it within the general range of a 'normal' theatre performance and would change the nature of the project.

Overall, there was a degree of variety in the pricing models used across regions and within individual venues. The most common 'flat rate' price seemed to be £3. All respondents were more confident in charging for future events, but it seems likely there will continue to be variety in their approaches.

The experience

Respondents/project leads took the opportunity in the final survey to sum up their experiences as being part of AIF:

"It has been a hugely positive project. It helps us demonstrate how libraries are able to attract new audiences, provide space for stories to be brought to life, be creatively involved in developing new work and most importantly give children the opportunity to see engaging and inspiring cultural events."

"It's been incredibly useful to be able to run events in conjunction with East Midlands colleagues, and be able to swop ideas, discuss success & failures, and plan together. I feel we've learned an awful lot, and having that guidance from Spark with their experience has made everything easier, and so much more successful than had we attempted a programme on our own.."

"In the past, we had very few performances aimed at children delivered at the establishment. Many of the local children have never been to a theatre to see a play, so this is an ideal way to introduce them to it at a very affordable price."

"Parents have commented they felt more comfortable taking their children to the library to see a performance rather than going into town to a large theatre."

"I think the show and tell sessions were crucial. Prior to this project my single experience of live theatre was a pantomime as a child. I certainly had no idea what could be achieved in a library space. My attitude towards theatre was a bit academic - one of shows being something we probably 'should' do rather than having a genuine enthusiasm and appreciation for the work. This project has made me completely re-evaluate the value of performance arts, particularly smaller shows. I have personally found my experience in the project very valuable - with a desire to see more performances personally, as well as to schedule them for my library service."

A Paper World created at Loughborough Library. Wrap around workshops run by Linda Harding to promote Sylvia South and the Word Catcher

7. Creative team feedback and script analysis

Creative team feedback

Throughout the project, The Spark worked closely with the artists, performers and writers behind each show. Further written feedback was sought from members of the 'creative team' after the project had ended for posterity. One phone interview was carried out and two email responses given.

A few key points are summarised, next to the relevant heading for the questions / topics.

Your overall experience: what you would change, what worked well, what you would build on?

Some reflected on the sense of enthusiasm and collaboration:

"The professionalism of the project and creative process was something I did already expect prior to starting, but was matched with real enthusiasm for taking high-quality theatre into non-traditional spaces"

The opportunity for writers of new work was noted:

"…as it had clear links to the curriculum, I think, although a new play, was less of an unknown, therefore easier to sell."

Others noted how they personally had a strong sense of providing opportunities for the children involved:

"It is a real privilege to play a part in making stories come to life for young audiences who might not ordinarily have the opportunity to experience live performance which is exactly what I would have cherished, growing up in an area of least arts engagement"

"…to see children/young people access this style of live theatre in their local libraries, that they take ownership of."

Libraries: as performance venues, their ability to promote events like this and the audience as compared to traditional theatre (or theatre for young audiences)

Most had very positive things to say about the intimate and unique nature of performing in libraries

"Performing in the library setting seemed to work well and audiences felt more relaxed and invested in the story and performance."

"That skilful sharing of emotion through character and narrative from another human being just a few feet away with no lighting to help set the atmosphere or stage sets to illustrate the environment, it is a unique experience having the story unfold before your eyes. One that cannot be recreated in the same way in a traditional theatre space."

"The range of venues…we could experience both aspects of traditional and non-traditional theatre spaces…Sharing the same space and light as the audiences felt to me as a performer the more rewarding of the two and the intimacy of the audiences sat around the set connected them more to the piece."

In some cases this linked to wider reflections on the communities for libraries:

"In the one venue, we were sold out, there were some boys peeking through the book shelves, sort of wanting to be part of it. Little things that show we've brought it into their community space. The parents and other users of the libraries get to see it too and there's a generational aspect. It feels like the community has invited us in."

Library staff were integral to the project and took ownership appropriately:

"Library staff did their best to provide a clear and quiet playing space and were wonderful in encouraging school groups to make a return visit and display the

work created in response to the play. They worked with the history groups to make WWI displays and made poppies in workshops to advertise the play."

"Mostly the libraries and their staff were hugely welcoming and excited to be hosting the show, with most having promoted the book and the show weeks before."

Reaching first-time audiences was a universal experience:

"It seemed as well when we went into communities/venues that weren't as theatre literate, it was the first time many of the audience members had seen a piece of live theatre - so that was important."

"For that opportunity to see theatre, not to be available to everyone, it feels quite wrong, almost like it should be a human right as far as I'm concerned. We're invited in, we're showing them what's on offer, in the world, not that it's just for certain people but for everyone."

Some limitations with the venues and environment were noted, though rare:

"A few venues along the way, slightly more difficult for the show to reach it's full potential, whether that be due to practical restrictions of the building/environment or the involvement or lack of involvement of the venue itself."

"In very rare cases, where it was staged in the main area of a busy library on a day when it was open to the public, multiple distractions such as computers, chatter, doors banging, phones ringing and scanners beeping (and drilling on just two occasions) it was a challenge for the actor to maintain full concentration and for the audience to remain within their imaginations, in this world we have created together"

Literacy: what do you think about the level of language used and any potential impact on reading?

The detail and complexity of language used in the scripts was noted:

"It had wonderfully rich language in the script (also the book) that allowed a whole range of conversations and fun to be had from and with the audience regarding words they had never heard before."

"Teachers would comment that the language was lyrical and rich which I hoped would inspire more reading."

In terms of post-show activity and longer term aftereffects, this ranged from vocabulary development to creative writing and expression:

"I really support the idea of using less well known literature and slightly odd language for these projects, as I found the young audiences would be talking and writing down the words or lines after the show and subsequently having an interest in the book itself."

"I think we can say that it inspired an interest in writing too, as children wrote their musings on what happens next."

"When you've got writers attached to the show, that always seems to be really valuable for visits, children asking how they write and so on. Not just spelling and things but starting to develop their own voice and style, not everyone becomes a writer but expressing yourself in writing is valuable for lots of subjects and jobs."

Some commented on the deliberate consideration of creative language and style in the shows:

"The writing style of the show is like an elongated poem with the intention of igniting an interest to explore more poetry after seeing the play."

"Two of the characters in the (new) show are unable to read or write, so there's a huge thought process there, about language as part of their characters and the show."

Your professional development: Did you already do work with libraries prior to this? Are you likely to do more as a result?

For one respondent at an early stage in their career, the opportunity was valuable in its own right but also as an introduction to community settings in general:

"I hadn't performed in a Library setting before AIF and whilst the experience was very rewarding it was a huge learning curve. In the earlier tour I was still training at drama school and most of my training had been focused towards performing in a 'traditional' theatre setting. So it was hugely beneficial to me as a young professional actor to learn new skills and be part of a small touring so early on in my career. I would really like to see this platform used as an opportunity to employ graduate/young actors as the professional experience and development I received from the project so valuable to the rest of my practice."

The relationship with libraries as a creative consideration was discussed by one respondent, in particular by providing a platform for further creative activity:

"The development of the relationships between school and venue was key and made me want to encourage the children to return to that magical space and create their own work, which is why I ended the play with space for the imagination to create the next scene or chapter. To access live performance in your local library is one thing but to be invited to explore more about the theme/subject matter, and display your creative response is the validation that great art is for everyone and we are all capable of creating it."

Reflecting on the issue of quality, some referred to their own development, while others referred to the challenges in engaging with non-traditional venues and the view of the wider industry towards work for children:

"Maybe we're not so great about shouting about what's happening and how great it is, we're often too busy just doing it. From the industry, probably still seen as the poorer cousin to other theatre, but I think we're moving it on, often the communities were working with are some of the best advocates."

"I returned to the project again and since then have remained in touch with people involved in the project creatively and auditioned for further theatre for young people as a result of the show."

"You need an organisation like The Spark with the vast experience, respect and reputation to make this work happen, for these non-traditional venues to trust the quality and for the schools to want to come. You can't do this on your own, that's why it is a massive privilege to be invited to write for The Spark and going forward, it is a massive mark of quality on my CV. "

"Maybe we're not so great about shouting about what's happening and how great it is, we're often too busy just doing it. From the industry, probably still seen as the poorer cousin to other theatre, but I think we're moving it on, often the communities we're working with are some of the best advocates."

Creative team interview

Script analysis

When discussing the literacy-related educational benefits of the shows, the language used in the scripts was a focal point for the creative team, librarians and adult audience members. Overall, many participants reflected that the level of vocabulary used was well-pitched to the ages and abilities of the children in the audience. This trod the line carefully between simplicity and dramatic emphasis, but also introduced complex or unfamiliar words in an engaging context.

Ignoring the performance aspect entirely, we looked at the scripts used and beyond this, looked at the individual words of the script. At two levels of abstraction away from the actual experience of the performance, we are simply looking for complex or unfamiliar words to help illustrate the sentiments of those adults interested in the more literacy-related outcomes of the shows. We are not suggesting that the presence or absence of complex or unfamiliar words in a script is, by itself, sufficient to make any worthwhile comment on the content or quality of the scripts or the performances. However, given that it emerged as a common theme throughout discussions with all stakeholders, a brief and experimental investigation felt necessary and of interest.

What makes for a complex or unfamiliar word? The length, number of syllables, likelihood to be spelled incorrectly, morphology, semantic transparency? Where is the word used, in literature, newspapers, conversation or television? The approach we took was fairly easy to carry out and produced useful, repeatable outputs for each of the scripts analysed in this way, with the exception of Season 4, *Where The River Runs*. Further detail on this process can be found in AIF17-3.

Using a computer-only approach and minimal clearing up didn't result in particularly useful findings, other than to say that all of the scripts seemed to be fairly similar in terms of complexity, from this perspective. Ideally, we would focus only on the spoken dialogue in each script and still needed to exclude:

Stage directions, acknowledgments, biographies, footnotes

Colloquialisms: higgledy-piggledy, tickety-boo, abracadabra

Place or product names: Leicester, Marmite, Cheddar

Supplementary words: dates, days, numbers, hundred, thousands

Technical errors: from pdf/word to .txt conversion

Looking through the texts by hand, with computer assistance, we identified the first 30 words in each script that were not part of the NGSL (New General Service Lists) and therefore could be described as relatively complex, unfamiliar or both. 30 words as a cut-off point was fairly arbitrary but for all of the scripts seemed to cover at least a third of the text and was felt to be sufficiently illustrative for the purposes of this experiment.

The words are arranged alphabetically opposite.

What makes a word complex or unfamiliar still remains entirely up for debate, though the lists above certainly help illustrate the expressive and dramatic focus of the language in a very condensed form.

Some seemingly mundane nouns appear; banana, broccoli, sandwiches, but then in the entire English corpus, these are much less frequently used than fruit, vegetable or food. Very specific nouns will appear (ukulele, bayonet, schooners) but may not be as semantically complex as some others (anomalies, hierarchy, saga). Elaboration and dramatic emphasis are clear: complimentary rather than free, quarrel rather than argument, exquisite rather than nice.

BBB	First	BSLB	SSWC
Amateur	Amongst	Awed	Adventurer
Anchovy	Bayonet	Bowed	Airports
Anemones	Born	Bucketful	Bench
Anomalies	Clamped	Chandeliers	Brave
Asleep	Clasped	Clapped	Drain
Banana	Clue	Cloth	Frigates
Broccoli	Cricket	Courtiers	Glove
Captain	Darns	Crystal	Headlock
Complications	Destined	Echoing	Jigsaw
Complimentary	Dictators	Emperor	Librarian
Custard	Hierarchy	Exquisite	Lookout
Delicious	Insignificance	Flips	Magical
Drowned	Knobbly	Flog	Mask
Earl	Leeches	Fountains	Mild
Ginger	Lethal	Garments	Naughty
Gooseberry	Mindful	Invisible	Punts
Hungry	Mumble	Kingdom	Puzzle
Instinct	Playground	Majesty	Rubbish
Lifetime	Prayer	Mended	Rude
Quirks	Pronouncing	Palace	Sagas
Reassured	Quarrels	Peek	Schooners
Regrettable	Rotten	Privacy	Sidekick
Sailor	Screeches	Sandwiches	Skiffs
Sandwiches	Seep	Skint	Songbooks
Sherbet	Spindly	Specially	Soundly
Shipwrecked	Starving	Spires	Spy
Spy	Suck	Tinkling	Stung
Ukulele	Upright	Triangles	Super
Unforeseeable	Wiggly	Vain	Unluckiest
Wisdom	Willingly	Weavers	Vigilante

The primary means of experiencing the performances remains of course to see and hear it, failing that perhaps to read the script, and failing that perhaps to look at quotes, pictures and secondary analysis like this. It is tempting to then compare these words to other age-related word lists for children, specifically reading or spelling tests such as Burt's Reading Test or Shonell's Spelling test but these have very different origins and motivations.
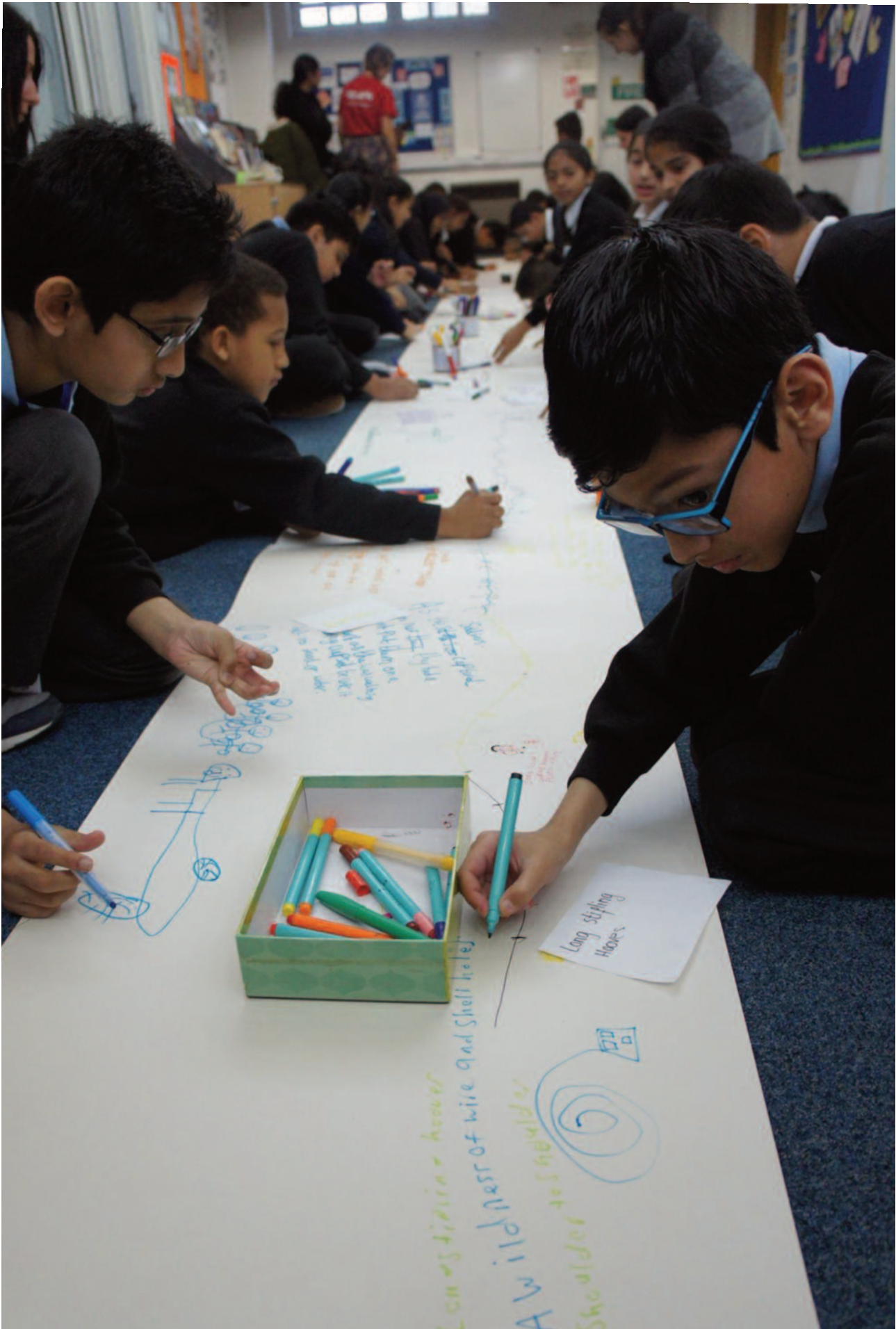
While a very abstracted distillation of the performances and scripts, we hope that this nevertheless helps give a little weight to the shared assumption that the language of the shows as a whole were pitched at or slightly above the vocabulary level of many of the children attending.

Pupils enjoying their local library as an out of school classroom space

8. Conclusions and recommendations

Making full use of libraries

While the general duty of library authorities laid out in the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964 is often quoted in discussion around libraries: "It shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof", the following detail to this section is perhaps forgotten about: "In fulfilling its duty… a library authority shall in particular have regard to the desirability… of encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as to its use".

The distinction, often pointed out by library campaign groups, is that it is not enough to simply have buildings called libraries, authorities also need to promote and encourage their 'full' use. Those looking to reduce spending in the public sector will not only look to 'non-essential' services but within this, would look to activities outside of core spending and infrastructure. Promotional activities and events by libraries might be considered non-essential, but it is suggested that under promotion and an overall poor quality of offer, will link to further declines, and vice versa.

AIF has been warmly received as an opportunity both to promote 'full use' of the library service, particularly for children, and to help develop a wider programme of cultural events that is increasingly recognised as a natural part of a 'comprehensive and efficient library service'. Aside from the total attendance and appreciation of the shows themselves, all partners hoped that by participating, they might also reach a different audience or at least, provide core and developing audiences with a new experience. In terms of the benefits of the project for audiences, all partners agreed that providing a quality and relatively novel experience itself would be valuable, particularly in areas of low arts engagement. Other positive effects could be seen by increased library usage, new relationships with schools and, broadly, increased literacy.

In terms of attendance, the shows demonstrated similar levels of appeal across seasons and regions, with many individual venues being able to sell above 90% capacity of at least one show. Venues that received more shows were typically more likely to show an increasing box office over the course of the project, though many venues only received 1 or 2 shows. Each region, in addition to differing organisational structures, was also observed to have comparatively different background 'cultural infrastructure', in terms of arts funding, schools with Arts Awards, and different socio-economic characteristics. Although not specifically investigated by this research, the libraries themselves also varied greatly in size, location and age. Some library authorities were more familiar with arts programming and charging audiences for events than others and the project has helped all move towards their respective longer term goals. Based on the end of project survey, half of the libraries were looking to programme more arts events in the future, with the remaining half planning to stay at their current level; none were planning a reduction.

Adult audiences were typically clustered around certain age groups (76%, 30-49), as were their children (75%, 4-8), though demographic, socio-economic and arts-based segmentations varied across regions and individual venues. Broadly, this included high numbers of 'low arts engagement' (38%), high deprivation (19% most deprived quintile) and Black and Minority Ethnic groups (44% not White British). Quality ratings and repeat attendances were not interrogated regarding these variables, though the positive overall trends and attendance figures suggest that shows worked well. The audiences were relatively frequent library users (96% in the last 12 months) and perhaps more frequent theatre audiences than we might initially assume (75% in the last 12 months). Still, a reasonable proportion had either not been to the theatre with their child ever before (18%) or had not been in the last year (10%), or that the last time they saw theatre; it was at a library (9%). In interviews, the audience appreciated the value and quality of the offer and often commented that they were surprised their peers (with children) may not have been making as much use of the libraries as they were. As venues, audiences and artists both reflected on the special qualities of libraries; intimate, welcoming and truly local.

This research never intended to establish concrete literacy, cognitive or other educational benefits stemming from the work, though there are clear indications in this direction. Shows that targeted school groups were effective, obviously from an arts education perspective (which was often a driving motivation) but particularly where wider curriculum links were more obvious and resource packs were developed. Libraries reported that they were generally able to engage schools through this approach and that having an established, quality product to offer was key to this. Artists, librarians and a brief analysis of the scripts all indicated that the level of language used was appropriately challenging, both in terms of the complexity of individual words but also in terms of narrative, style and expression. In terms of Key Stage 2 scores, school groups that participated included a range of high and low performing schools, perhaps indicating that the resources, willpower and general perceived value of the arts are relatively evenly spread across schools regardless of their overall performance, at least by this one particular measure. Adult audiences reported through the survey that stimulating interest and enjoyment in performance and reading for their children, were more significant motivations for them than academic benefits though in interviews most agreed that the areas were closely interlinked.

Libraries used the shows and support from The Spark to experiment with event pricing and marketing. Relatively direct methods were the most effective (print materials, displays and word of mouth) though websites and emails were close second, with email being the most requested method to use in the future. Audiences typically travelled around 2.5-3.5 miles in counties and 1.5-2.0 miles in cities. Roughly 40% audiences were willing to travel to a library that was not their local one, for a show, indicating some degree of 'pull' appeal. Prior to AIF, Spark had already worked with some authorities to establish a touring circuit of some libraries and it seems to continue to be effective at a further extended level as venues are able to benefit from each other's promotional activity without duplicating efforts or cannibalising sales. Of course, the value for artists, writers and performers is also enhanced, with a greater purchasing power from the consortium.

There is insufficient data to be truly certain if the shows were related to an increased number of new children's library members, though 38% of the shows we examined saw greater than average numbers of sign ups on the day of the show. On a wider timescale, the level of sign ups from 30 days before shows to 5 days before and 5 days after were all above average (71%, 63% and 58% of shows respectively), with this effect tailing off after 30 days. Some seasons showed a greater positive impact than others. However, with further testing, relatively few of these cases were statistically significant, though the indication is that the short term (5 days before and after) might be key. It seems likely that libraries used the show as part of a wider period of increased children's membership.

Reading and children's culture

Debates about the intrinsic and instrumental value of culture find themselves at an interesting nexus around literacy. Being able to read well is perhaps the most fundamental intellectual skillset for accessing the opportunities of the world, therefore it has undeniable instrumental value and yet the strongest readers are predominately those who also derive the most intrinsic, personal and cultural meaning from it, especially from a young age.

We should be wary of describing reading too singularly when compared to other artforms. For instance, it can be claimed that music could have some impact on maths ability and on the surface there are frequencies, timing signatures and other numerical signposts we can easily point to. With non-cognitive abilities, we might also claim that drama increases co-operation or public speaking ability as these are, literally, rehearsed and acted out for us. Reading a bus timetable and a novel might appear on the surface to be relatively similar, but as literacy development theory continues to uncover, there is far more going on beneath the surface than being able to turn a series of shapes into words and sentences. Exactly how performance, theatre and literacy reinforce each other is difficult to establish but certainly at younger ages, these experiences are widely thought to be valuable.
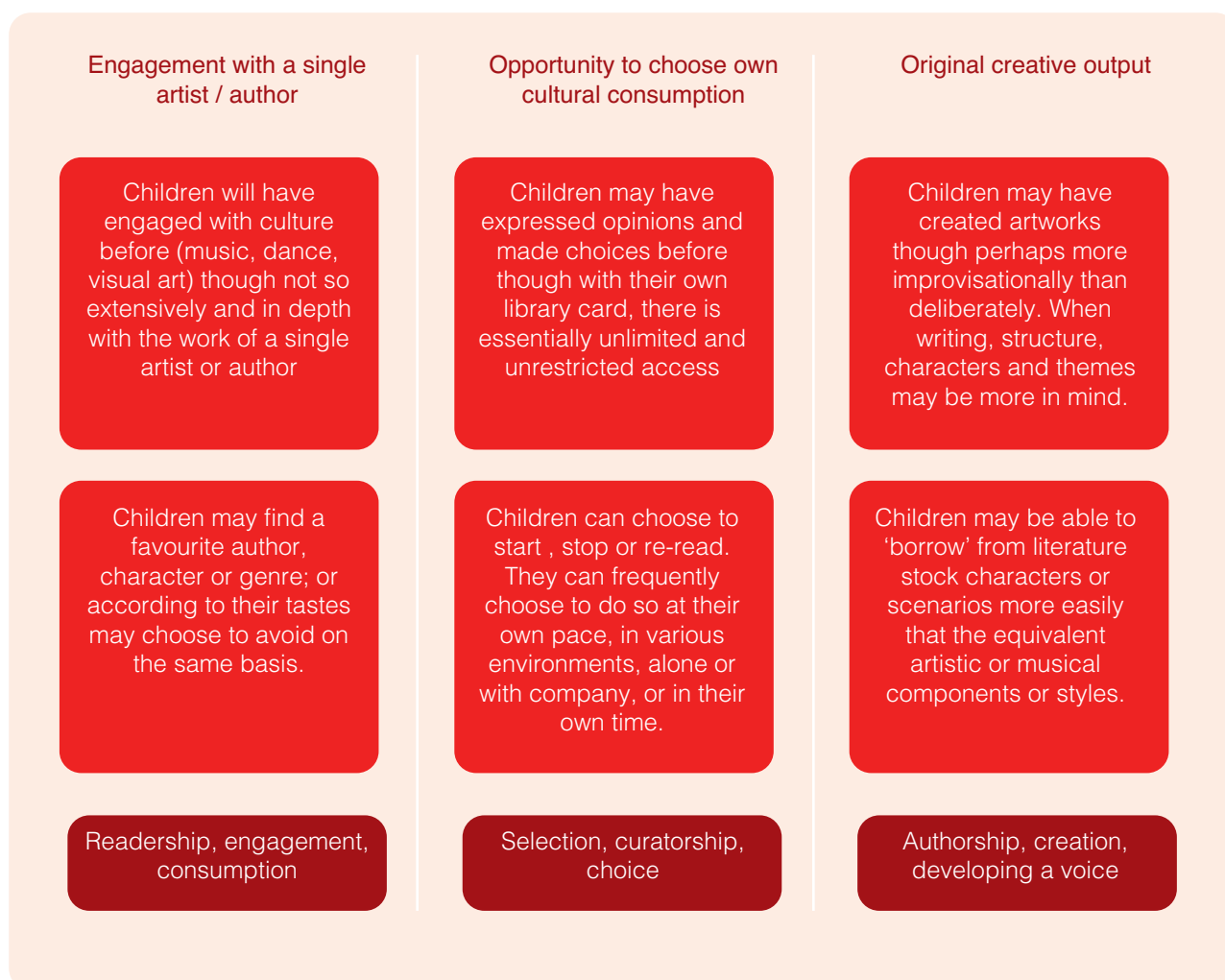
Reading and writing may not strictly be the 'first' significant cultural or arts experience that a child might have, but we could certainly argue this is critical in determining their future arts engagement; in particular the freedom to choose their own reading material or in authoring their own story. Being able to choose a book is a more likely proposition for a child than determining which theatre show or concert they want to attend, much less being able to independently act on that decision. Certainly as far as the Taking Part survey goes, children generally engage in the arts more so than adults and reading and writing activities are at the top of the list in terms of engagement compared to any other artform. If we took reading and writing as a 'first culture' of some description, we could easily view libraries as one of the largest audience development platforms for the wider arts world, an absolutely vital part of the cultural landscape for children.

This is further described in the diagram on page 89.

A university education has long been recognised as one of, if not the, most important factors in engagement with the arts. It seems that reading for pleasure at a young age also increases the likelihood of engaging in the arts at an older age (beyond its impact on the likelihood of obtaining a degree).

The links from reading to the arts are easy to speculate but hard to evidence: valuing reflection and imagination, co-creation between author and reader, exposure to scenarios, environments and viewpoints of others or simply a conscious decision to set aside time from for cultural activity. Certainly the views of partners in projects like Among Ideal Friends suggest that this is ample grounds for collaboration and further investigation of mutual relations between performance and literacy.

Reading and children's culture

Engagement with a single artist / author	Opportunity to choose own cultural consumption	Original creative output
Children will have engaged with culture before (music, dance, visual art) though not so extensively and in depth with the work of a single artist or author	Children may have expressed opinions and made choices before though with their own library card, there is essentially unlimited and unrestricted access	Children may have created artworks though perhaps more improvisationally than deliberately. When writing, structure, characters and themes may be more in mind.
Children may find a favourite author, character or genre; or according to their tastes may choose to avoid on the same basis.	Children can choose to start , stop or re-read. They can frequently choose to do so at their own pace, in various environments, alone or with company, or in their own time.	Children may be able to 'borrow' from literature stock characters or scenarios more easily that the equivalent artistic or musical components or styles.
Readership, engagement, consumption	Selection, curatorship, choice	Authorship, creation, developing a voice

Frontline cultural infrastructure

Among Ideal Friends works with libraries as frontline cultural infrastructure. It is a platform for new art, specific to these places and audiences. It is a way to develop the audiences of the future and to reach out to underserved audiences of the present. It is support to develop the cultural offer of libraries taking them in a new direction. From a cultural ecology perspective, it could not be expected to sustain any of these by itself, but it can strengthen the whole network, through introducing new elements, reinforcing and evolving others. From a cultural democracy perspective, it might be too cliché to suggest that few institutions are loved at a local level more than libraries but at least in the best cases, this sentiment still remains true and is a testament to their potential and the equality of access they have at their core.

Despite close theoretical links, the real world instruments for delivering intrinsic, instrumental, educational and cultural benefits are of comparable complexity, albeit of a very different nature. The idea of quality arts for young audiences has not, in the grand sweep of history, been around for very long and has seen various approaches to defining and delivering this, at least at a national level.

On the educational side of things, we have moved from "Creative Partnerships", "Creativity, Culture and Education", to "Bridge Organisations" in the late 2000s and the emerging theme of cultural education in the last few years. The establishment of a national curriculum, years later to contract around the subjects comprising an EBacc gave and continue to give arts educators' room for concern. Although the EBacc naturally focuses attention on GCSE / Key Stage 4 level, there is every reason to suspect its influence, and of similar reforms, are also felt at younger ages and earlier levels[10]. If the arts are being squeezed out of the classroom, is the wider cultural sector a sufficient, complementary or even preferable alternative? It is easy to view various campaigns and new approaches to arts education as solely a protest against these changes but at the same time a range of out-of-classroom activities are seeing experimentation and success, albeit perhaps more likely to be hidden away on a local or regional scale, not to mention potentially unfairly distributed and generally of a

short term nature. Similarly, national headlines of arts education doom and gloom may not necessarily represent local conditions or there may be pockets of excellence within certain areas, artforms or age groups.

The same fragmented picture can be applied to libraries. Astute readers may have spotted that not all library authorities in the East Midlands participated in the project, for various reasons, though this is not to suggest that those who have participated are necessarily any more fortunate or better performing. Clearly the shows could not tour to libraries that are closed. It is fair to say that libraries across the country are finding themselves in a rapidly shifting field though re-orientation towards community and cultural hubs is a common theme. Both the Society of Chief Librarians and the Libraries Taskforce have spent a considerable amount of effort over recent years, developing policies aimed to establish libraries as a positive 'brand' in the minds of funders and the public, to highlight the varied 'offers' they can make.

Bringing the arts into libraries does not seem like a particularly controversial step but practically, most libraries on their own would not generally be able to afford to commission, promote and subsidise this series of shows, even at total capacity, without raising ticket prices further or finding additional funding. However, it was also not so long ago that many of the libraries involved in this project had never charged for an arts event in their library or seriously considered that they were capable of using their venues to these ends with multiple seasons of events.

There is a mutuality of benefits being shared between the arts world and the library world in terms of audience reach, infrastructure and expertise; much of which chimes with the more academic discussion around cultural ecology, cultural democracy and everyday creativity.

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[10] National Society of Education in Art and Design (NSEAD) Survey Report 2015-16: 89% of primary teachers in state schools reported that time for art and design had decreased in the two terms running up to KS2 tests. 53% of secondary teachers stated that levels of art and design attainment had fallen among Year 7s at entry.

Reflections and provocations

This research has been necessarily broad due to the experimental nature of the project itself and the relatively uncharted overlaps between arts, libraries and education; therefore many areas could stand to be further developed. In the more immediate future, it is likely that the monitoring and evaluative aspect of the research can be cut down and adapted for future reference in management: targets for attendance, ticket prices, basic audience characteristics, likely marketing channels, library card issues and circulations. The use of library cards in particular has led to further research which can be found in AIF17-3. These are likely to be adapted according to the resources and interest of individual libraries (or authorities) though the possibility of some commonalities and future comparisons should be kept in mind. At the very least, there are numerous real world tests involved here that can be kept in mind when devising future investigations.

1. Existing library card data is a good place to start

In terms of the data collected, it is uncertain how specifically applicable arts based segmentation is to libraries and community venues in the long term. It may still be of use to artists that work both here and in traditional venues. Particularly for a project like AIF, with a fairly narrow audience (in terms of age and family lifestage) and a fairly specific geographic catchment it may be more pragmatic to focus on other measures of engagement. Presumably libraries' own databases would be a natural jumping off point. However we also should not hold back from new methods in the assumption that library card data alone will tell us all we want to know.

2. Libraries are based in and beholden to neighborhoods in ways that most arts organisations typically aren't

Arguably libraries do not host (or produce) as wide a range of cultural programming as arts organisations do. Therefore they do not particularly gain from being able to consider how different segments are represented across this range of programming. This might be less true for a group of libraries or library authorities as a whole than for a single library, but then individual libraries within the same authority can be seen to vary greatly. Libraries are still at the early stages of commissioning new work and seem more likely to partner with an arts organisation than to take this journey entirely on their own. Given their relatively narrow geographic catchments, libraries may also find that existing neighbourhood and ward level statistics more reliable at their scales than the equivalent would be for an arts organisation, with a catchment area of a whole city or region.

3. Libraries are universal but not homogeneous

Aside from locations, capacities and broad demographics of the venues involved, it could have been beneficial to collate further information about each venue and their immediate facilities and localities. As universally provided, statutory functions, it is always tempting to view libraries as somehow homogenous. However, bearing in mind their localities, demographics and distances travelled, it is clear that individual venues vary a great deal. Perceived or actual barriers to their use are generally thought to be considerably lower than traditional arts organisations. This is not to suggest barriers are entirely non-existent and could not be usefully investigated in their own right. Of particular value would be more information about lapsed or infrequent users. However most likely that individuals generally drift in and out of library membership at various points in their lives for various wider reasons.

4. Collaboration requires sharing, learning and developing new sector languages

All cultural sector organisations have long struggled to state, or stake out, some kind of equivalence or difference between their respective artforms and activities. 'Engaging in the arts includes activities A and B but not C or D' or 'visiting a heritage site has value X whereas reading a book has value Y'. Really, there may not be much of a struggle here as it seems an extremely unpopular square to try to circle in the first place. Increasing collaboration across the cultural sector in the name of cultural ecology, democracy or education, means that it is likely that individual methods and definitions may be applied outside their original contexts. While 'engaging in the arts' and 'reading for pleasure' are two broad, comprehensible terms, both with relatively high representation in surveys like Taking Part. If we stick with them as top level categories alone, they obscure a wide range of genres and activities that make them up. It may be unlikely to expect either policy or practice to refer to this level of granular detail on a regular basis, but it is also noted that the Taking Part survey (for one, among other sources) has more recently made efforts to produce data that is accessibly presented and at a more local and disaggregated level. Rather than 'engaging in the arts' we can talk specifically about 'attending the theatre', if that is what we are really interested in. This is something libraries have also been adapting to, as usage of all a libraries resources cannot be wholly expressed by figures around library card issues or circulations.

5. Cultural education is a broad church with solid foundations, though it has many corners in need of more light

For one thing, the Taking Part information as it relates to children identifies a few areas in which this project and others like it might make a particular impact. Only 31% of 5-10 year olds have engaged in 'theatre and drama activities' in the past 12 months. Additionally, boys are less likely (27%) to have engaged in theatre and drama than girls (35%) and though high, boys are also less likely to have engaged in reading and writing activities (83% boys, 91% girls). By the ages of 11-15, there has been an increase, with 65% engaging in theatre and drama, though the gender split is still notable (55% boys, 76% girls). An even larger disparity is also seen in dance across the age groups. We did not specifically examine gender among the children in the audience but arguably there is a case that this approach might help engage boys in the arts. As research around arts education has found, it does not help to make overly broad claims, that all artforms have similar educational effects, for all age groups, or that all artforms benefit from being experienced and taught in the same way. The assumption that all children would benefit from a broad cultural education is, more or less, a given, and future investigations might perhaps be more confident to focus more on the specific mechanisms of their interventions, rather than try to cheerlead for the totality of cultural education at every step.

6. New experiences can be new to different audiences in different ways

In terms of new audiences, clearly many audiences will be new to attending a full length theatre performance in a library and possibly very new to attending theatre in general. Interviews highlighted that adults were slightly unsure what to expect; was there a book the show was derived from? Where could they borrow or buy this? If not, were there books related to the general topic or themes of the show that they could borrow? Often the audience took photos of the shows, or of their children's reactions (or a combination of the two) but were unsure whether they were allowed (or encouraged) to do this. They were sometimes surprised that their children wanted to keep relatively mundane items like tickets or posters as mementos. We know that adults are relatively likely to have approached, or be approached by library staff in relation to the show, and in some cases will have asked questions about the suitability of the show in terms of age range. While addressing all of these concerns and questions might seem daunting, we should equally look on it as a clear demonstration of the appetite not only for this type of work but also for the possibilities available in using the show as a platform for further engagement and really maximizing longevity in the minds of the audience.

7. Meeting demand

The challenges of demand are not solely around stimulating interest, marketing and outreach, as at times of high demand, ticket prices and capacities are relatively inelastic. This was particularly noted with regards to season 3, which came very soon after season 2, and was also in the popular Christmas period where there was competition from other similar school-trip activities. Despite this, it was a very well selling season, even adding more shows due to demand. Due to the nature of the product, this is not an issue that can be solved in the performing arts but it can be anticipated. Meeting higher demand is still a challenge, but a positive and infinitely preferable to the challenges presented by lower demand.

8. Pricing should be simple and can, broadly, increase as familiarity grows

It is clearly possible to charge for this type of event, but it is important to communicate that this is not for a previously free event or service. It is added value beyond the usual library offer and ultimately not much more expensive than an equivalent DVD, game rental or similar. The charge is not there to subsidise other, free parts of the library service, it is entirely related to the costs of this one event. It is also difficult to communicate that the audience charge is, itself, not the full cost of the show. Keeping things simple and affordable is preferred on the part of audiences and library staff, though there are nevertheless some cases where further local subsidy was put into place. On the other end of the scale, the question that no one particularly wants to ask, let alone test, is what the upper limit of a ticket price could be? For instance, the average ticket for presumably a more typical arts event reported by Audience Finder was £13.27 at the time of writing, considerably above the £2-4 range typical for AIF, although we should bear in mind this is a fairly ad-hoc comparison. This is not to suggest raising prices for the sake of it, but that a comprehensive look at the affordability of arts events targeting children and young people, in a range of venues and locations might be useful, possibly even incorporating an international dimension.

9. Library cards are a natural starting point If cultural passports will exist at all

A 'cultural passport' is a concept that has emerged in various places yet remains underdeveloped. Perhaps it is a concept that appeals more by its face value than by real application, despite library cards themselves being probably the closest to a universal application of this concept than anything else. Some ideas place it as closer to a loyalty or reward card, some as a kind of certification particularly for young users. For example, the 'Opportunity Notts' scheme in Nottingham incorporates a range of cultural, civic, educational and sports related activities targeted at children. Even limited only to the public sector, there is a huge diversity of activities, price points and artforms that could be covered and it is hard to imagine a way that all users would be sufficiently motivated to use their passport at each. If the principle reason from the organizations point of view is to build up further data. It seems a more narrow application of the concept would be more realistic, and if successful, expansion can be built in later.

10. The importance of learning at leisure

Arts education is a key area in which both arts organisations and libraries generally want to contribute, though in terms of formal education, school visits and Arts Awards are likely to be the major way in which both are able to act directly. Arguably their indirect, non-accredited impact is expected to be at least as substantial, if not more so than the numbers of school visits or Arts Awards achieved in a given year. Reading for pleasure and the Home Learning Environment are both well-established topics around which interventions are welcome. However due consideration should nevertheless be given rather than simply assuming that visiting a library mechanically produces a given quantity of 'literacy impact'. It is therefore considerably harder to pin down any educational impact that happens outside of an accredited scheme, even if we accepted that this runs counter to the idea of, for one thing, 'reading for pleasure'. Both groups should continue to follow developments in this area, especially the work of the Educational Endowment Foundation / Royal Society of the Arts (EEF/RSA). On the topic of Arts Awards specifically, there could be scope for libraries to investigate their capacity to get involved with and deliver these either more frequently or at a higher level, though this varies greatly across regions. It is beyond the capacity of this research to comment on curriculum changes or future economic trends, but there is plenty of other literature that points to the growing importance of creative industries and a STEAM approach.

Recommendations

Develop a sustainable business model

Use simple pricing to build contributions from little or nothing to ensure a quality offer and commitment from all partners and the audience.

Build around the immediate impact

Plan for longevity by taking into account a wide range of past audience journeys and future trajectories across libraries, reading and the performing arts.

Share learning with partners

There are many valid methods and languages for describing engagement. Be specific yet ambitious, acknowledge your unique context and think ahead to the future success of your next project.

Libraries are universal but not homogenous

Arts organisations to better understand and leverage the neighbourhood level nature of libraries. Audiences appreciate a strong and varied artistic programme as much here as they do in traditional venues.

A Boy and a Bear and a Boat sail through Carlton Library

9. Literature review and policy background

Literature review
and policy background

The underlying purpose of the literature review was to identify the most relevant policy and practical issues that the varied stakeholders of projects like AIF would likely be encountering directly or aware of as trends in their respective sectors. These stakeholders could be viewed as libraries, primary schools and artists specialising in work for children and young people. Literature was mostly collected from policy and charities/campaigns, though some purely academic and many academic-led documents are covered.

AIF was working at the intersection of these issues, therefore focusing efforts on a single theme or sub-theme would not reflect the reality of the project.

…the primary purpose of phronetic social science is not to develop theory, but to contribute to society's practical rationality in elucidating where we are, where we want to go, and what is desirable according to diverse sets of values and interests.

Flyvbjerg, 2009

We are not primarily interested in developing theory, but to accommodate a diverse set of values and interests and to provide a sense of where we are and where we want to go.

An overview of the literature review is included in this summary report. It is hoped that individuals across libraries, arts and education find the full literature review with individual document summaries of additional value. This can be found in the second report in this series: Arts, libraries and education: a literature review: AIF17-2 with further detail on individual documents and commentary regarding implications for projects like AIF.

A range of other sources are also referenced below, though not all of these have been reviewed individually, some of which were only published in the months and weeks leading up to the end of the project. Others may be relatively journalistic in nature, therefore not requiring in-depth review for our purposes. It has been immediately apparent that both primary schools and libraries have both undergone great change in the past decade, if not the past five years. Overall, 33 of the 49 sources reviewed here were all published in the last 3 years.

A number of other, more comprehensive literature reviews on more specific topics were covered and readers are recommended to consult these for a more thorough grounding in either the impact of arts education (Education Endowment Foundation, 2015) and reading for pleasure (The Reading Agency/BOP, 2015), (Department for Education, 2012), The history of arts policy and young people is another recent contribution (Doeser, J, 2015).

The table on page 99 summarises the general themes of the documents and their year of publication:

Theme	Count
Libraries	15
Cultural education	8
Literacy	7
Arts for children	4
Education and inequality	4
Cultural policy	3
Out of school education	3
Reading for pleasure	3
Local government	1
School libraries	1
Total	49

Year published	Count
1998	1
2004	2
2009	1
2010	1
2011	2
2012	5
2013	4
2014	7
2015	10
2016	9
2017	7
Total	49

The literature is discussed here under 5 main headings:

- Literacy and reading for pleasure,
- Arts education,
- Arts for children and young people,
- Cultural policy,
- Libraries.

Literacy and reading for pleasure

Literacy and reading enjoyment are arguably the lead themes around which the stakeholders of AIF initially convened. Libraries' central functions and unique offers; artists' use of language and performance; teacher and parental encouragement for personal and academic motivations. All have a shared desire to see children become capable and enthusiastic readers.

Educational policy around primary school age in the UK and internationally typically emphasises reading attainment as a strong link to attainment in other subjects, in study at older ages and improved life and career prospects in general. Overall literacy skills among children in the UK appear to have improved in recent decades but a significant sticking point seems to be the enjoyment of reading:

"A positive trend in literacy skills has not been matched in attitudes, with studies finding that children's enjoyment of reading at age 9 and 11 declined between 1998 and 2003, even as their confidence increased and that the UK is behind other countries in pupils' enjoyment of reading." (Gill, 2014)

The Department for Education (DFE) has itself stated in 'Reading: the next steps':

"This poor performance is the result of a decade of stagnation. In the ten years to 2012, our absolute and relative position in the assessments [PISA][11] did not improve, despite substantial increases on spending on education over the same period." (Department for Education, 2015)

The DFE also refers to OECD indicators of inequality, where it can be seen that England has a wider gap between those with the highest and those with the lowest reading scores, wider than two-thirds of OECD countries. While this particular finding is not suggested to directly link to socio-economic inequality, plenty of other research points in this direction.

Closing the educational gap related to socio-economic difference has been described as one of the central problems in the sociology of education. (Sullivan & Brown, 2013) Reading behaviour, enjoyment and attainment have been at the centre of many investigations in this area. Goodman and Gregg, drawing from the Millennium cohort study, found that the 'early childhood caring environment' accounted for one quarter of the cognitive gap between the poorest and richest children; and within this, differences in the 'home learning environment' had the most impact. (Goodman & Gregg, 2010)

The home learning environment can be described as the various activities that parents or carers do with children outside of an educational setting[12]. There is little attainment data gathered which relates to preschool education, however the Effective Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education Study (EPPSE) followed 3000 children from age 3 to 16, and found that the quality of the home learning environment was more important for intellectual and social development by age 16, than parental occupation, education or income. (Sylva, 2014) Research for Save the Children estimated that as much as 80% of the gap in achievement between disadvantaged pupils (those receiving free-school meals) and their better-off peers could be determined by the time children were age 7, or half way through primary school. (Warren & Paxton, 2013) In a widely cited study, Sullivan and Brown, drawing from the 1970 British Cohort Study tested the relationships of various socio-economic factors to cognitive scores. In their most stringent model, controlling for numerous factors, only two factors emerged as significant in a child's cognitive attainment: whether their parent had a degree (up to 4% increase in scores) and the child's own reading behaviour (up to 14% increase). Reading behaviour was a composite of other factors such as reading books often, going to the library regularly and reading newspapers at age 16. (Sullivan & Brown, 2013)

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[11] The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) provides the source for much international comparison although it equally draws criticism for being another league-table policy instrument.

[12] One definition included: Singing songs, nursery thymes, reading with their child, visiting the library, playing with letters and numbers, painting and drawing, taking children out and about, providing opportunities for them to play with their friends at home. Effective Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education Study (EPPSE)

There is a wealth of evidence linking reading enjoyment to educational and personal benefits, but which interventions work, and why? Clark & De Zoysa's model of enjoyment, behaviour, attitudes and attainment is based on findings from a survey of 17,809 8-16 year olds, and attainment data for 4,503. The model suggests that enjoyment links to attainment both directly and indirectly through behaviour. This gives weight to the assumption that striving for attainment and increasing reading behaviour alone may lead to decreased enjoyment and poorer attitudes towards reading. Conversely, this might also suggest a need to accept lower standards of attainment in the short term to improve attitudes and enjoyment in the long term. Of course the gold standard of intervention that somehow increases all parts of the cycle is still up for debate, but they suggest amongst other conclusions that:

"…children who did not grow up in a literacy-rich environment need a significant event (e.g. a book-gifting event, an interesting book, an interesting conversation or a stimulating trip to the library) to kick-start this model by influencing reading enjoyment and attitudes towards reading."

Clark & De Zoysa, 2011

Roughly 12% of the global population is functionally illiterate (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014) Functional illiteracy is defined as a level of reading and writing skills that mean an individual will struggle with day to day tasks and employment. In most UK policy it has been defined as the equivalent of not being able to meet the approximate requirements of a GCSE grade D-G in English [13]. It was identified in 'A fresh start: Improving literacy and numeracy', also known as the Moser report, that as many as one in five or 20% adults in England were functionally illiterate (Moser, 1999). The Leitch Review of 2006 set a target for this level to reach just 5% by 2020 (Leitch, 2006) Although this was officially disowned in the change to the Coalition Government in 2010, many of the targets are still referred to. Today, the National Literacy Trust still places the level of functional illiteracy among adults at 15%. (National Literacy Trust, 2017) An OECD study published in 2016, based on data from 2012, found that England had the lowest level of literacy skills among 16-19 year olds across the 23 countries examined. (Kuczera et al, 2016) While there is no space here to provide a comprehensive review of international literacy strategies, the picture for the UK seems to be one in which there remains room for improvement and the relative effectiveness of different approaches continues to be debated.

The most recent updates, the Skills for Life surveys of 2003 and 2011 broadly show that progress is being made towards the Leitch target [14], albeit in a changing context where digital skills have risen in importance and considerably wider debates around the value of skills vs qualifications, changing role of higher education and apprenticeships have all been taking place. (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012) Overall, it is well accepted that low levels of literacy cost individuals dearly in terms of their own education, employment opportunities, health, social exclusion and their ability to help their own children learn; even before considering the wider economic, social or cultural impacts.

[13] While we are focusing on literacy, numeracy is noted to be in a similar or worse condition across the adult population. The two together are often referred to as 'basic skills'. Since the early 2000's, the importance of digital basic skills is being furthered in a similar vein.

[14] Additionally, the differing basis on which the Skills for Life surveys, of those who are/were active learners, and earlier targets, which surveyed the wider population, mean it is difficult to draw a true line between the figures in 1999, 2006 and today.

Arts education

Stimulation of enjoyment, creativity, wonder and curiosity are all aspects in which literacy and reading enjoyment debates often show some similarity with wider cultural policy and arts education debates. We can find echoes of contemporary debates in the foreword of 'Developing the Arts in Primary Schools', published around the date of the introduction of the National Curriculum (Sharp, 1990). In the foreword, Prof. Hargreaves states that he hopes the National Curriculum will improve science and technology teaching and pupil achievement, yet many teachers were apprehensive as they lacked HE qualifications in either subject. The same can be quite easily said, argues Hargreaves, regarding the level of confidence and qualifications as they regard the full range of the arts. This was threatened, at the time, by arts not being deemed 'core' subjects and being broken up [15]. At a more fundamental level, Hargreaves also suggested that a balanced arts education is arguably a harder concept to imagine and deliver, than a balanced science education.

There has been a substantial amount of recent debate surrounding two potentially opposing issues for arts education, the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) at secondary level and the advancement of the concept of cultural education. The Henley review of 2012, following from a review of music education, expanded to define and encompass all aspects of cultural education at various ages. (Henley, 2012) Amongst other recommendations, this included guidelines for what a suitably broad 'cultural education' would look like for children aged 7, 11, 16 and 18/19. Since then, regional Cultural Education Partnerships have been established and a top level summary of programmes produced (Department for Education & Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2013). Much of the focus so far has been on increased partnership working between cultural and educational institutions, influencing relatively experimental projects such as 'My Primary School is at the Museum' where schools do not just visit institutions, but are based within them for significant periods of time and shape

their curricula through this. (King's College London, 2016) Following a substantial literature review of existing evidence around arts education (Education Endowment Foundation, 2015) the Educational Endowment Foundation and Royal Society of the Arts more recently launched a series of trials, starting in January 2018, to address the need for high-quality research into the impact and relative benefits of different arts education approaches to a range of pupil outcomes at various ages. (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017)

This might seem to suggest that arts education could be increasing in profile. However the EBacc has arguably been more of an immediate concern for many in this area and has been the subject of significant campaigning from both anti (BACC for the future, Cultural Learning Alliance) and pro sides (New Schools Network) of the debate. The EBacc is a measure of the percentage of pupils entering and completing GCSE's in five subject groups (English, Maths, Science, Humanities, Foreign Languages) and completing at least seven GCSE's from this group (with at least two English and two Science subjects). Although it was not, initially, a qualification and was not, initially, compulsory, the trend has been towards this. Current policy (July 2017) aims for 90% of pupils will study EBacc subjects by 2025 with schools EBacc achievement rates being published from 2019. (Long & Bolton, 2017)

The EBacc was announced in 2010 and began to be actively tracked from 2012/13. Both sides of the debate typically present figures from pupil entries or completions of GCSE subjects to argue whether or not it has impacted on arts education. The figures presented naturally contradict one another, with major variations occurring by two key factors. Firstly, the years covered; should measurement start from 2010, when the announcement was made, or from 2012/13 at which point the EBacc began to be measured? Secondly, which subjects count as representing 'arts education'? Anti-Ebacc campaigns seem to include

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[15] Art and music as foundation subjects, whereas dance and drama were not. Drama in particular was initially taken out entirely, but returned and arguably has remained the lesser sibling of English ever since.

design and technology subjects, which collectively have a very large cohort compared to smaller subjects, like music or dance. Pro-Ebacc campaigns, and the Department for Education themselves do not include design and technology [16] and in some cases have also looked at english literature. Headline figures of both sides often do not account for the general fall in secondary school population over this time.

The debate has continued more recently with 'Trends in arts subjects in schools where EBacc entry has increased' (Department for Education, 2017) being published and quickly being responded to by the Cultural Learning Alliance. This time each side reaches different conclusions, partly over whether the key measure is whether pupils take 'at least one' arts GCSE or rather than the total number of arts GCSE's taken from all pupils. Some of those taking one arts GCSE might have previously taken two or more.

The Education Policy Institute recently joined the debate, in research funded by Arts Council England and the City of London Corporation and addresses the two key problems raised by earlier claims. One, it looks at the wider range of years 2007 to 2016 and two, it does not classify design and technology as an arts subject [17]. This broadly concludes that total entries to arts subjects remained stable between 2007-2014, and have fallen since, as have the numbers of pupils studying at least one arts GCSE. (Johnes, 2017) Regional data for the East Midlands shows that:

	Percentage of entries to arts subjects	Percentage of pupils with at least one arts entry
2007	7.8%	55.3%
2016	6.6%	51.3%
Change East Midlands	-1.2%	-4.0%
Change England	-1.1%	-2.1%

We should also note that a subject's inclusion in the EBacc is not necessarily a guarantee of increased pupil uptake. For 80% of pupils who entered only four of the five necessary EBacc subjects, modern languages was recently found to be the area in which they did not take a subject. (Vaughan, 2017)

Despite the difficulty in even reaching shared terms of disagreement, most seem to agree that numbers of art teachers and teaching hours for the arts in schools have fallen and that teaching in both primary and secondary school is frequently reported on in the media as a profession in a recruitment and retention crisis. The OECD 'Education at a glance' report for 2017, led to headlines that pay for teachers in England was down by 12% over 10 years, whereas in other OECD countries, pay has risen in real terms by an average of 6% (at primary school level). (OECD, 2017) The House of Commons select committee on Retention and Recruitment of Teachers discussed targets for Initial Teacher Training. Primary level recruitment targets have been met whereas many secondary subjects have not, especially in Non-Ebacc subjects, where only 75% of positions were filled.[18] (House of Commons Select Committee on Education, 2017) Despite meeting primary targets, some raised concerns that primary schools still struggled to recruit in the numbers and specializations required, though this latter point referred more towards science and maths than arts subjects. The long-term impact of investing high-needs bursaries of up to £30,000 for maths and physics teachers has yet to be seen, with research due to be published in 2018. Two academics from Leeds Trinity's Institute of Childhood and Education have written extensively on teacher recruitment, suggested that a similar level of bursary should be in place for prospective primary teachers. (Doherty & Gerrard, 2015) Socio-economic factors are a related issue, with original research carried out by the BBC's shared data unit finding that teacher vacancies for primary school teachers were more than twice as high for schools in the 20% most deprived areas compared to the 20% least deprived. (BBC, 2017)

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[16] Looking briefly at AQA's Design and Technology for 2017, this potentially includes subjects like: Electronic products, Food technology, Graphic products, Product design, Resistant Materials, Systems and Control technology and Textiles technology.

[17] It also included 'equivalent' qualifications at Level 3, however compared to GCSEs, this was an extremely small proportion.

[18] Disaggregating this further, Design and Technology was significantly behind at 41% whereas some subjects like Drama (95%) and Music (90%) were generally in the upper half of the results.

Finally, in terms of qualifications, Arts Award is an increasingly widely known standard that many working in arts for children and young people are aware of, with Artsmark as a standard for entire schools, whereas Arts Awards relate to different qualification levels for pupils [19]. 184,608 awards have been made since its launch in 2005 with a recent impact study following 68 pupils from 2012 to 2016 (Hollingworth, S et al, 2016) This helped articulate the impact of a relatively unconventional qualification, celebrating the pedagogic foundation of the award and numerous 'soft' benefits for students undertaking significant amounts of self-directed and self-reflective work. It was found that those achieving the highest level of the award (Gold) alongside an established arts or cultural organisation were those who benefited the most in terms of future careers in the arts. The lower levels of awards, such as Bronze, could still have a valuable impact in themselves or encourage progression, though there was some concern as to the diminishing value this might have in larger cohorts. While well known among practitioners, national levels of engagement among schools in the scheme were recently described as 'stagnating', having only increased its reach from 13% to 14% of all eligible schools between 2005 and 2018.

Although we have presented cultural education and the EBacc as opposing, yet related themes, they arguably come from quite different motivations and influences. While Henley's recommendations for a broad education include: "By the age of 16…being given the opportunity to study cultural education subjects to gain qualifications at Level 2 [GCSE]", it is clear that many individual subjects under this same banner have suffered: "archaeology, architecture and the built environment, archives, craft, dance, design, digital arts, drama and theatre, film and cinemas, galleries, heritage, libraries, literature, live performances, museums, music, poetry and the visual arts." It would be hard to argue that despite the EBacc, pupils are not given the opportunity to study any subjects under the above banner, though it is easy to see these have not been prioritised as a whole or that there is considerable disparity between the individual subjects. As Hargreaves stated back in 1990, we are still struggling to define and deliver a well-balanced

arts education. However under the banner of "cultural education" it seems likely that the involvement of arts and culture organisations and out-of-classroom activities will continue to increase.

The teaching profession as a whole has hardly flourished in recent years under ongoing pressure and rapid change. The campaigns for arts education have drawn together a wide range of compelling arguments related to the creative economy, well-being, civic participation and more, however the overriding government argument is one in which the defined core academic subjects ultimately take priority and there is not, at the time, sufficient evidence to argue that arts education improves this core academic performance. The debate then becomes one of academic vs creative vs vocational skills and what will prepare children best for the future, a topic likely to continue to be divisive. In the foreword of the EEF's review of arts Education, Sir Kevan Collins puts it:

"We should continue to investigate links to other outcomes we value, but we shouldn't expect everything to link tightly to academic achievement. Instead, we should teach the arts for their own sake – for the intrinsic value of learning creative skills and the enjoyment they bring." (Education Endowment Foundation, 2015)

Holly Donagh of A New Direction concludes, in a piece tellingly titled, 'Is it time to stop talking about the EBacc?':

"There is little doubt that the arts in school are under threat, but this is not the case in all schools and is not necessarily all about the policy of the EBacc. Perhaps arts education needs its own seismic shift. Is arts learning in school keeping-up with innovation outside of school? Does the sector have a compelling narrative for teachers, students and parents? Is it appropriate to measure a school's 'arts success' on the basis of GCSE entries? Or could we think of other more relevant measures?" (Donagh, 2017)

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[19] Bronze, Silver and Gold are all recognised on the Regulated Qualifications Framework; roughly equivalent to GCSE G-D (Level 1), GCSE C-A*(Level 2) and a B at AS Level (Level 3) respectively. Gold also carries 16 UCAS tariff points. Discover does not appear on either the RQF or UCAS Tariff. Explore is entry level and does appear on the RQF. (Entry level has 3 sub levels and is below Level 1)

Arts for children and young people

Artists specialising in work for children and young people are operating in spaces shaped by these wider debates and have themselves navigated a similarly uncertain and changing funding environment at both local and national levels.

A brief history of work under the banner of Children's Theatre, Theatre In Education (TIE) or Young People's Theatre is related by Johnston and Harman alongside the history of 'Take-Off', England's leading festival and industry showcase of theatre for children and young people. This celebrated its 30th year in 2017, having regularly moved from various authorities, funding sources and business models over this time (Harman & Johnston, 2017). Harman further writes of the contested origins of 'specialist theatre for young people': "The very concept… was challenged by influential figures in the theatre world as encouraging a 'poorer form' of theatre to be produced for children" and suggests that the concept only began to gain real recognition by ACE from the publication of 'A Policy for theatre for young people' in 1986. (Harman, 2012)

Arts Council England's current strategy for 2010-2020, 'Great art and culture for everyone' includes five top-level goals, one of which specifically relates to children and young people (Goal 5). In 2013, following the demise of the Museums, Libraries and Archives council, this goal was slightly revised to state: "Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts, museums and libraries". Harman responded to ACE's supposed prioritization of children and young people at this time stating that much of the work being positioned to meet this priority goal for young people was primarily educational, social or promotional in nature, and that artistically led initiatives made up a very small part of the theatre budget. This led to a scenario in which:

"…most theatre seen by children in the UK has no public money invested in it at all and is utterly untouched by arts councils…after the cuts, Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE) will still get three times more to spend supporting a creative curriculum in schools than the regularly funded organisations (RFOs) which deliver arts experiences to children."

Harman, 2010

CCE was a successor, at the time, to the Creative Partnerships programme (2002-2009), which was managed by ACE with funds from both DCMS and DFE until funding was cut in 2011. The underlying reasons for this specific decision are too complex to cover here, though we can see the considerable difficulties of drawing lines between organisations and governmental departments as to the roles each should play with regards not only to an education (cultural or otherwise) but to a child's entitlement to cultural experiences in life, in general. How much should we encourage teachers to become artists or vice versa? Which approaches create 'quality' experiences or outcomes?

In 2012, ACE commissioned a report with the National Foundation for Educational Research to understand the principles of "quality in arts and culture, by with and for children and young people." (Lord, 2012) This led to a three year pilot of the seven 'quality principles' among 51 lead organisations and over 9,350 children and young people. (Sharp & Lee, 2015) The 'QP's have helped influence other instruments such as the relatively well-known Artsmark and broader evaluative approaches such as the Quality Metrics, albeit the latter not without its own share of controversy among arts professionals. (Hill, 2017)

Individuals, organisations and projects such as the 'QPs' have found that, if nothing else, many arts organisations value the critical attention being given to issues of quality in this area of work; both 'pure artistic quality' and otherwise. Amongst others, the Reading Agency key campaign, the 'Summer Reading Challenge' states that it reflects both Goal 5 and the Quality Principles in recent participation reports. (The Reading Agency, 2015) Work for children and young people can still struggle to throw off assumptions along the lines that these audiences don't need or appreciate high quality art, or that high quality art for children is somehow already a contradiction in terms. This is a sentiment that others are quick to challenge, in a recent essay for ACE, Anne Wood of Ragdoll Productions states:

"It is a sad fact, that the epithet 'children's' seems to diminish the artform. At its best, work for children challenges categorization."

Anne Wood, Ragdoll Productions

Playwright Finegan Kruckemeyer, in responding to a question as to what differentiates writing theatre for adults and children stated:

"…aside from certain thematic and linguistic sensitivities (relating more to how to express things, than whether to), I honestly don't consider the age spectrum too much, but focus on trying to write theatre that is good. The best work I've seen for young people could be accessed by adults as well, simply because it was artistically strong." (Onyett, 2010)

A further emphasis on young audiences can be seen in the establishment of the Family Arts Campaign, funded by ACE in response to audience research suggesting that family audiences offered the greatest opportunity for expanding both new and existing audiences. David Brownlee, the director of the Family Arts Campaign, stated:

"I've never liked the term 'family friendly', particularly in the context of the arts. It sounds compromised: the opposite of high-quality, innovative, challenging art. It seems to be saying 'Don't worry, it may be dull and unexciting but it's safe to take the kids.' Of course this is deeply unfair and many arts organisations have been promoting some great work under the banner of 'family friendly' for decades. But it has also been the banner for tokenistic face-painting and many hours of tedious workshops that have marginal interest for children and absolutely none for accompanying adults.' (Rose et al, 2015)

At the national level, the Taking Part survey contains an element in which children between 5-15 are interviewed (5-10 year olds by proxy with an adult). In 2015/16, 98% of children have engaged in the arts in the last 12 months and 66% have visited a library. Only 31% of 5-10 year olds have engaged in 'theatre and drama activities' specifically. Additionally, boys are less likely (27%) to have engaged in theatre and drama than girls (35%) As a whole this is down from 47% in 2008-9. For 11-15 year olds, 65% have engaged with theatre and drama in the last 12 months, though the gender split is still notable (55% boys, 76% girls) (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2016)

The idea of quality arts for children and young people is a relatively new invention, at least in policy terms and many on the ground might argue its importance is still overlooked. In the 30 or so years since, we have seen piecemeal funding for companies coming from a range of local authorities and governmental departments which arguably remains the case today. For more on the history of arts policy and young people, see the recent 'Step by step' report for Kings College London, which covers the years 1944-2014. (Doeser, 2015) Large scale initiatives like Creative Partnerships have come and gone, arguably leaving the distinction between what artists and schools should each be responsible for still relatively unclear or at least open to change. In more recent years, it seems that ACE have attempted to develop their position whilst also making the most of the increasing focus on cultural education.

Cultural policy

We might consider The Museums Act of 1845 and the related Public Libraries Act of 1850 as some of the most defining acts of cultural policy of the modern era, with their impact and underlying principles maintaining contemporary relevance. When it appears that all information is freely available online, people have speculated on the question: "Would libraries be invented today?" (Cochrane, 2007) , (Altucher & Dubner, 2016), (Masnick, 2010) Arguably the emergence of Museums and Libraries were more informed by Victorian paternalism and the broad social effects of industrial revolution than the equivalent drivers of contemporary cultural policy, but modern debates are no less informed by and beholden to their wider economic and social realities. Work for children and young people also reflects and influences the tensions of wider debates in cultural policy, of public sector cuts, overlapping responsibilities, hierarchies of value and who decides how these are captured.

The most influential recent debate in cultural policy in the UK has arguably been that of defining, capturing and furthering the concept of 'cultural value'. The Arts and Humanities Research Council funded 70 original pieces of research under the Cultural Value Project (2013-2016), leading to the Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value (2013-2015). Cultural value as a concept seeks to recognise and place the experience of culture as a central part of the debate. This diverges from the largely instrumental basis for existing policy, from the reformist acts of the Victorian era, to more recent emphasis on social cohesion, economic impact and various other non-arts justifications for arts funding. This instrumental focus of policy and research has arguably continued to reinforce the view that arts and culture are only viewed and valued as 'means to other ends'. Over the last few decades this is thought to have led to:

"…the paradox of a cultural sector that has experienced a remarkable growth in funding, a more prominent political profile and, indeed, a golden age, yet also appears to be consistently on the defensive, vulnerable, and lacking in confidence when it comes to articulate its own value." (Belfiore, 2012)

Amongst other things, the dominant need to make a case for public funding particularly helps obscure the value of more 'everyday' commercial, amateur and participatory arts. A key theme emerging and since gaining some traction, was that of the 'cultural and creative ecosystems', or 'cultural ecologies' as a way to describe:

"…a dynamic flow and exchange between different parts of the Cultural and Creative Industries which is vital to their future success…"

The Warwick Commission, 2015

A typical use of this metaphor would be to argue that cutting public funding for aspiring performers, larger impacts will be felt downstream among commercial theatre and film companies as available talent dries up. Equally, the working reality of many artists and creatives relies on them regularly jumping between engagements in the private, public and voluntary sectors. While we may see the appeal of the ecological metaphor on a theoretical level, some have criticised its policy implications. It is arguably too easy for many non-profit organisations in arts, culture and heritage to rush under the banner of 'the creative industries', whilst ultimately playing a fairly limited role in exports or innovation for a sector where software companies generate about half of the total GVA (Bennett, 2015) This is not to suggest non-profit cultural organisations have no value, or play no part in the wider cultural ecology, just that we should be clear about the terms used for each and the arguments made for each. Arguably a key practical outcome for taking a cultural ecology approach forward is to focus on local and specific ecologies, around certain areas or art forms, analysing the networks and measuring a wide range of 'vital signs' from attendance figures, to types of venues and so on. (Holden, 2015)

A central argument for change in cultural policy is that to date it has predominately taken a 'deficit approach' to arts and culture, arguably still underpinned by an Arnoldian view of culture as 'the best that has been thought and said' [20]. The report, 'Towards Cultural Democracy', instead places a capabilities approach at the core of their argument, changing the focus to one around individual freedoms rather than institutionally defined deficits. (Wilson et al, 2017) Human functionings (beings and doings) differ from their capabilities (the opportunity to achieve those beings and doings). This re-orientation would require a huge shift across the government and sector as a whole, such that the authors' admit they would not quite know what cultural democracy would look like if it emerged overnight. Some criticised what could be seen as further instrumentalism and the replacement of traditional gate-keepers, however the concept of cultural democracy seems to sit well within an ecological approach and underlines the importance of everyday culture.

Looking to vital signs in local ecologies, the 'Rebalancing our Cultural Capital' (or RoCC) report sparked considerable debate around the extent of bias towards London away from the regions. Figures here show that total arts lottery funding since 1995, has been £65.00 per capita in English regions and £165.00 in London. The East Midlands figure is £34.52, the second lowest of all regions. (Stark et al, 2013) ACE grants to the East Midlands, per capita have stayed relatively similar between 2002/3 (£2.25) and 2012/13 (£2.40), third lowest of the regions. National Portfolio Organisations have fallen from 51 in 2011/12 to 42 2014/15 though their percentage of regular funding has remained the same (3%); the lowest of all regions. (Dempsey, 2016) For context, the East Midlands is the sixth largest region of the nine regions in England, with around 8% of the total population.

As a further backdrop, the budget for DCMS as a whole has been cut by 24% between 2011-12 and 2014-15, despite nearly doubling in 2012 due to the Olympics. (National Audit Office, 2016) The recent Culture White paper has arguably been more notable simply for being the second ever to emerge (since 1965) than for anything it actually contained

(Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2016). Commentators suggested it contained little other than initiatives that had already been announced and problems that were already being addressed. Little detail in regards of cross-department buy in, nowhere near as much of a focus on education as many expected and little relevance to newer understandings of culture and everyday creativity outside of subsidised institutions; even the BBC gets little mention. In regards of core funding, no movement was made and although national arts funding has fared reasonably well in recent years, once local authorities are factored in, the picture is much different.

Despite the national direction of cultural policy seeming to come from DCMS, ACE and the considerable 'weight' of London in general it is fair to say that local authorities themselves have often been the principle funders of much of the cultural sector. Harvey summarises the national picture as £700 million from the Arts Council, £450 million for National Museums and a collective £1.1 billion from local authorities. (Harvey, 2016) At the time of the report, between 2009/10 and 2014/15, and factoring in population growth, local authority spending on arts and culture had reduced by 23% per head. CIPFA data analysed by Coates shows total expenditure on libraries had risen from 2000/01 to 2008/9 and has declined since. (Coates T, 2015) Brownlee, writing in The Stage, challenges the assumption that local authorities are the largest funder of the arts. (Brownlee, 2016) Amongst other things, he points out that that the relevant budget data at a local authority level conflates arts, museums, libraries, open spaces, sport and recreation facilities. At the same time, funding for an arts project could easily be coded under other headings, such as community or youth work, making the true picture even harder to determine. Regardless, the conclusions are similar to Harvey, with a decline of 35% between 2009/10 and 2014/15. In the East Midlands, this figure is even higher at 45% and for shire districts across the country is 47%.

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[20]   Matthew Arnold, poet and cultural critic (1822-1888), in the preface of Culture and Anarchy (1867): "…culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world."

Libraries may have taken the brunt of these cuts, but were and are still the largest proportion of total spending (compared to arts, museums and galleries). By the same measure, it is easy to identify libraries as also the most dependent on local authority funding, being less likely to attract other funding and perhaps dependent on and connected to their local communities in a way that few arts organisations are. Despite these bleak headlines, Harvey notes the rate of reduction is lower than that for spending overall. Suggesting that local authorities might be trying to protect these services, or that these services have done a good job of arguing their value, or that authorities have initially found other areas in which to make larger savings. Cultural policy at a national level, despite academic debate, appears to be relatively stable (or stagnant) and ultimately beholden to other priorities. It seems contradictory to suggest that a more plural, localised and everyday approach to cultural policy is emerging in an environment of austerity, economic and social instrumentalism but clearly there have been a number of attempts to advance alternatives; some far-ranging and some by small increments. In 2020, ACE's 10 year strategy will be due for renewal, and a further 2 years after this there may be another general election, so further change is extremely likely, one way or the other.

Libraries

Looking back nearly a decade to the beginning of the global recession, Rooney-Browne collects a range of other small scale studies and reports, from the UK and US, to illustrate the immediate reaction of libraries in a period of economic recession, where it is broadly shown that libraries were seeing an increase in use. (Rooney-Browne, 2009) One study in Washington across 36 libraries showed attendance up by 7%, checkouts by 11% and computer use up by 14%. The two main reasons for increased use are, unsurprisingly, the consumer value offered in loaning vs buying and utility with regards to education and employment. The author notes that despite showing similar, if not increasing, value during a recession, libraries are likely to be threatened by public sector cuts without ongoing, high profile campaigning.

"Cuts to libraries during a recession are like cuts to hospitals during a plague."

@Crumblehulme, US library professional
A much quoted tweet from 2010.

By most measures, libraries have suffered recently in terms of closures, reduced funds and staffing. This was taken up by the Culture, Media and Sport Committee in 2012-13, with CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) statistics quoted within showing year on year declines in visits (-2%) and loans (-3%) though this was also in the context of reductions in budgets (-6%) and stock acquisition (-14%). (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2012) CILIP further notes the difficulties surrounding debates, which commonly focus on keeping specific buildings open, while neglecting other areas of spending such as staff, stock or mobile libraries. The session was arguably prompted by campaigning and in particular the threat of statutory inquiry into Derbyshire and in reality in the Wirral. The statutory duty for local authorities to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient library service' was the subject of much debate. What does a comprehensive and efficient public library service look like in the 21st century? Overall, the session concludes that the new approaches being outlined by SCL and ACE are broadly appreciated and would help inform national standards and likely any decisions made under the statutory duty in the future.

Following this, the Sieghart Report, or 'Independent Library Report for England' was published in 2014. (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2014) This report was criticised by many for not moving the debate forward enough, or not calling strongly enough for sustained funding, though with hindsight it arguably fills a gap more as a broad consultation and maybe overdue 'state of the sector' than as a revolution in itself. It has proven to be of some influence going forward, particularly in the establishment of the Libraries Taskforce. Around a similar time, between 2013 and 2016, SCL published a trio of national policy papers that summarised the 'universal offers' that a contemporary library service could offer. In 2013, this covered four areas: reading, information, digital and health. In 2015,

learning was added as an offer and a Children's Promise and Six Steps (broadly around accessibility) were added as additional strands. In 2016, a cultural offer was announced and was completed in May 2017. More detail behind each area or offer is given, of course, but even at a surface level is it easy to see the reorientation and changing priorities across the sector as well as the need to make the benefits of libraries clearer to policy makers and users.

The Libraries Taskforce report 'Libraries Deliver' outlined a national strategy for libraries from 2016-2021. (Libraries Taskforce, 2016) This too was criticised for failing to address the main concerns of falling staff numbers, poor quality buildings and book stocks, despite agreement around the wider direction. No doubt pre-empting some of this criticism, the report itself sets out some assumptions which it considers to be non-negotiable for the near future such as *"Library budgets will continue to be constrained"* and *"Competition will come from technology, entertainment and information services"*. The ambition stated here gives a number of objectives against which libraries would seemingly be wise to deliver against where possible. Many of these individual objectives show the general merging of wider cultural policy and cultural education objectives; from libraries being venues for cultural experiences and events, to stronger partnerships with schools, a greater role in place making, developing more resilient and connected communities.

The role of school libraries in particular, was investigated by the All Party Parliamentary Group on School Libraries, producing their final report 'The Beating Heart of the School' in 2014. (Libraries All Party Parliamentary Group, 2014) Critically, this report notes that there are no definitive figures on the number of schools that have a school library or school librarian, and that at the time of writing, OFSTED did not include this in their inspection framework. What survey figures are available show that, in primary schools, there has been a 7% fall over three years of schools with library spaces, that most budgets have been frozen or cut and that 25% of school libraries do not open for the full school day. A range of US studies[21] are referenced that link well-resourced school libraries to student achievement, though it is noted that there are gaps in the equivalent body of UK research.

The current state of library usage is summarised in 'Taking Part: Focus on Libraries' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016) .34% of adults had used a public library (at least once) in the 12 months prior to being interviewed, which was down from 48% in 2005/6. Similar declines in library visits and levels of borrowing are confirmed by data from CIPFA (Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy). Research by the BBC in 2016 through Freedom of Information enquiries showed that over 2010-16 8,000 jobs in libraries had been lost (around a quarter) and 343 libraries closed. (BBC, 2016) The Libraries Taskforce, for one, repeated statistics originally drawn together by academic librarian Ned Potter to put total library visits in context; in 2013-14, 282 million visits were made to libraries, which was estimated to be twice as many as football matches, theatres, accident and emergency visits and the church combined. Although the 282 million visits figure has fallen since then[22], it has still been a point of debate around which declines can be put into context.

Returning to Taking Part data, this also shows that among adults whose library use had increased, encouraging a child to read was the main reason for this increase (20% of those using the library more often) Despite the vast majority being very or fairly satisfied with their experience (94%), the most common reasons given for those who were using libraries less were buying or getting books elsewhere (17%) or reading e-books instead (12%). Libraries usage by children specifically can also be seen in the Taking Part Annual Child report for 2015/16. 66% of children between 5-15 have visited a library in the last 12 months, which was a decrease from 75% in 2008/09, however the equivalent figures for having visited the library in the last week had stayed relatively similar (21.5% in 2015/16 to 20.7% in 2008/09) Over the same time, among 11-15 year olds, annual use was also down (70% from 77%) but weekly use had increased (25% to 31%). (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2016) Two key points are often repeated by library

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[21] These studies do not appear to have been examined individually and we should note the review being referenced is produced by Scholastic, probably the largest publisher of children's books in the world.

[22] Kathy Settle of the Libraries Taskforce more recently quoted 211 million visits for 2015/16.

supporters; that library usage is already very high to begin with, and that relatively small declines are better explained through direct cuts and closures rather than technological irrelevance or public disinterest. Whatever the drivers are, library use is clearly changing, so what will the future hold?

Arts Council England's involvement with libraries has been broadly well received, though campaigners frequently point out the relative value of the new funds available through ACE, such as the £4m Innovation fund in 2016 and £1.6m to NPO library organisations in 2017, are dwarfed by the overall scale of local authority cuts. Nevertheless, ACE has been clear that this activity does not replace core funding, with then director of Libraries, Brian Ashley stating:

"We are very clear that core funding for delivering library services still goes to local government... Our funding is not in any way intended to replace cuts in local authority library services." (Kean, 2017)

ACE had themselves commissioned a three-phase review, 'Envisioning the library of the future' to provide some direction and insight into future challenges over the next 10 years. These trends included population growth, demographic change, increasing poverty, low economic growth, constraints on public spending, changing consumer behaviour, longer working hours, the digital divide and more besides. Overall it argued that despite the challenge, the national picture of decline did not reflect the reality of those who were running 'libraries of the future' in the here and now. (Arts Council England, 2016) ACE also commissioned the Audience Agency to use arts based segmentation on a selection data from library authorities, finding that 38% of library visitors could be classed as 'low engagement' compared to 18% of arts event audiences. (The Audience Agency, 2017)

Tim Coates, former managing director of Waterstones and campaigner for public libraries wrote back in 2005: "Only 20 years ago the library was one of the most vibrant of civic facilities. It survived the arrival of cheap paperbacks, radio, television, VCRs and the first generations of home computers." (Coates, 2005)

At the time, Coates was discussing market research that investigated non-users' opinions of libraries, finding that the managers and policy makers were failing to grasp what the public really wanted from libraries, instead focusing on increasing availability of computers, competition from high-street booksellers and, to a degree, cafes. Ultimately, Coates suggests that diminishing investment in book collections is the principal driver of public disinterest in libraries and also that there is limited accountability or leadership among local or national government for libraries. Both of these issues remain key, 12 years later, in his more recent criticism of the Carnegie Trusts 'Shine a light' report published in 2017. (Coates, 2017) Coates points to surveys that suggest that the quality of book collections remains the principle reason for public library visits, and to international comparisons with Australia and the US where both circulations and visits have seen far less of a decline than the UK, over a 20 year period. Further issues are found with the use of contradictory headline figures, the Carnegie survey suggests that 46% have used libraries in the last 12 months, whereas both Taking Part and CIPFA place this at around 35%.

Are libraries mainly for books or not? Are they in decline or not? The average reader would be forgiven for their confusion and would probably base their views either on nostalgia, the latest headlines in the media or their last visit to a local library. Depending on where they live, this could easily run the gamut of inspiring, multipurpose library of the future to an under-resourced service, possibly hanging on by volunteer support or simply closed. It is clear that initiatives involving children, arts and literacy have continued to find a common ground in libraries and perhaps these key users now will be particularly influential in what comes next.

Acknowledgements

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Biography

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Richard Fletcher graduated from De Montfort University with a BA in Arts Management and later completed a MSc by research in Festival Impacts. He has carried out a number of applied research projects with local arts organisations and festivals. He is interested in applying social science methods to the understanding and documentation of the arts, and the role information management has in organisational cultures. He is an advocate for open-source methods, and is a member of the Alliance for Useful Evidence and the Open Data Institute. He has spoken at a number of national conferences for the British Arts Festivals Association, at a local level he has worked with support networks Creative Leicestershire and Leicester Arts Festivals.

He remembers spending a lot of time in public and school libraries as a child, even more as a student, quite a lot as a penniless graduate and on an ongoing basis as an academic. His principle recommendation to students he is fortunate enough to teach from time to time can often be boiled down to: "Go to the library more."

You can find more of his writing on his website, in Focus on Festivals (Goodfellow, 2015) on websites such as Arts Professional Festival Insights and in the journal of Applied Environmental Education and Communication.

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