

Paul Hamlyn  
Foundation

**Art  
Works** | Developing  
Practice in  
Participatory  
Settings

**ArtWorks: Quality – because we  
all want to do better**

Working Paper 8

Mary Schwarz  
January 2014



## **ArtWorks: Quality – because we all want to do better (Working paper 8)**

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### **Preface**

ArtWorks: Developing Practice in Participatory Settings is a Special Initiative of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation established in 2011 and continuing to the end of 2014. It is a workforce development scheme that seeks to meet the needs of artists at different stages in their careers – from the aspiring young artist embarking on training, to experienced practitioners who wish to progress their output. It is seeking to build on good practice to enhance the existing development infrastructure.

The overall aim of ArtWorks is:

To support the initial training and continuous professional development of artists working in participatory settings. This will enhance the quality of people's engagement in arts-led activity and the arts, and create a more professional and confident sector whose work is valued and seen as important.

### Key Objectives

- To support partnership working and pathfinder projects to develop, pilot and embed training and continuous professional development opportunities for artists working in participatory settings at all stages in their careers and develop the support infrastructure;
- To develop a better understanding of what constitutes quality in the work through sharing good practice across art forms and demonstrating positive outcomes for participants engaged in arts-led activity and the arts;
- To gather, document and disseminate compelling evidence of positive impact as part of a wider strategy to achieve significant shifts, nationwide, through the

facilitation of shared thinking across agencies and settings about workforce development issues for artists working in participatory settings.

Within the programmes of work undertaken by the five pathfinder partnerships, a large body of learning has accrued over the first 18 months of activity and we have commissioned six Working Papers in addition to this one that seek to crystallise this learning in the following clusters:

- Arts Practice in Participatory Settings
- Artists – Testing professional development activity
- Artists Consultations
- Training and Development Providers and Opportunities
- Research with Participants
- Qualifications, Codes of Practice and Standards

This learning has been gained and reported in different ways that can be defined as follows:

- Those that have involved the pathfinders partnerships reflecting upon what they know
- Those that have combined models (like peer mentoring, Action Learning sets) which are meant to have an outcome in their own right, and tweaked the design and used the output from those models to elucidate research questions
- Those that have undertaken (with a range of approaches) straightforward research, expressed as such to those subjects who are contributing to it, framed formally by research questions, with data collection, analysis and synthesis in a typical format.

The ArtWorks website contains links to all of the material published to date.

The purpose of this suite of Working Papers is to assimilate and summarise this learning and extrapolate key messages so that the learning can inform not only the ArtWorks programme, but also the wider community of practice with an interest in this work. The papers were all commissioned at the mid-point in the ArtWorks programme and therefore provide a snapshot of the work and the learning at that stage.

Further reports supplement these papers and elucidate our work in different ways. These include the *ArtWorks Interim Evaluation Report* (dha & the Institute for Cultural Practices, University of Manchester, 2012a) and the first Working Paper that provided an overview, *ArtWorks: learning from the research* (Kay, 2012).

This Working Paper is the eighth in the series. It focuses on ArtWorks research and activity taking place across the programme that contributes to the quality debate and also references relevant documentation from outside the programme, within the arts and other sectors.

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## **1 Introduction**

There is a range of ArtWorks research and activity that contributes to the exploration of quality in arts practice in participatory settings. Some of this focuses solely on the topic and some has a wider brief but nevertheless contributes to debate and action in this arena. The context for this Working Paper is drawn from the findings of the *ArtWorks Evaluation Interim Report*:

'Quality' has been a significant area of enquiry for a number of the Pathfinders, and is picked up as a key theme across a range of activities... One of the most complex issues in the Pathfinders' enquiries into quality is the question of whether there needs to be a coherent 'answer' to this problem. In some cases, it is not always clear how direct inquiries into 'quality' will relate to the development and design of support solutions further down the line. In addition, there is a significant (though not coherent) body of literature available which already investigates ideas of 'quality' from a range of viewpoints (dha & the Institute for Cultural Practices, University of Manchester, 2012a: 38).

Given this context, the Report goes on to recommend:

It will be important for the Pathfinders not to enquire about 'quality' only for the sake of producing, for example, a finite definition (ibid: 38).

Rather, it suggests enquiry should focus on understanding quality better in order to identify what might improve the participant experience; take into account resources already available; and add to what we know about quality through the examination of tangible and less tangible contributory factors (ibid: 38-39).

Pathfinders are already now undertaking further enquiry and action in relation to quality and such 'work in progress' is referenced in this Working Paper, which serves to:

- Build a clear collective understanding of quality and quality frameworks including reference to organisational and project management; participants' experience; artists', project managers/producers' and commissioners' practice; and training and continuous professional development (CPD)
- Collate and distil relevant material from the ArtWorks programme and beyond

- Offer considerations and recommendations about how the programme can make meaningful use of such material as it moves forward

The relevant documentation can be grouped into three areas:

- Research and reports covering the perceptions and understandings of quality by different stakeholders including artists, academics, commissioners and participants (e.g. ArtWorks London, 2013; ArtWorks North East, 2012; Consilium, 2012b; Deane, 2013a; Lowe, 2011; Mitchell, 2012; Salamon, 2013a; Sellers, 2012)
- Specific approaches to quality assurance and improvement in terms of codes of practice, standards and frameworks (e.g. ArtWorks Navigator, 2013; ArtWorks Scotland, 2013; Consilium 2012; Deane, 2013b; Siedel, 2009)
- Other relevant literature from the wider arts sector and beyond (e.g. Arts Council England, 2006; Bamford, 2010; Cape UK, 2011; C-PAL; Lord et al., 2012)

A first draft of the Working Paper was presented at a national Pathfinder meeting with ensuing discussions informing this final version and its contribution to the ‘development and design of support solutions’ (ibid: 38).

## 2 Context

ArtWorks is a workforce development scheme established after initial research by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation into the ‘arts in participatory settings’ that examined the characteristics of, and challenges faced by, the sector (Burns, 2010). This research evidenced that work growing out of community arts practice in the 60s and now more commonly described as *participatory* has evolved over time and has had a:

...profound effect on the arts establishment through the development of infrastructure and the growing professionalism of the field...forty years on artists across all art forms are now engaging in a diverse range of practices

and we can see an emerging body of practice in individual art forms that has now created a burgeoning sector of work for artists who wish to engage with people (ibid: 7).

The report goes on to estimate that between '200,000 and 250,000 might be a realistic estimate for the number of artists regularly engaging in work that requires them to facilitate the learning and creativity of others' (ibid: 8).

It concludes that:

...context is creating greater demand for artists to work in participatory settings...and it is arguable that artists are in greater demand than ever before to make interventions in both formal and informal settings... Artists are being asked to work in a hugely diverse range of participatory settings...and are now playing an integral role in the learning experiences of people across the whole age spectrum (ibid: 7).

However, the sector is fragmented and there is a lack of both a robust evidence base and recognised training routes for artists: factors which have contributed to variable experiences for participants.

To support the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's ambition to enhance the quality of people's engagement in arts-led activity and to achieve the outcome 'Artists, employers and participants share a better understanding of what constitutes quality [and value] in the work', it is key to consider the meaning of quality, including defining some key terms, and to harness learning from both within and outside the programme to inform recommendations for the future.

### **3 The meaning of quality**

Discussions at the July 2013 ArtWorks Pathfinder meeting revealed that while all partners are concerned with quality, there are many different interpretations of what quality means, and in particular, what is meant by 'quality frameworks'. There was

agreement that it would not be helpful to seek to establish a fixed quality framework but rather to understand what is already known in order to achieve clarity in this area to inform the final year of the ArtWorks initiative. There was also agreement that this understanding of quality is critical to what ArtWorks aims to achieve in valuing and developing the work.

As a starting point, it is useful to consider the Oxford Dictionary definitions of quality.

Quality:

The standard of something as measured against other things of a similar kind; the degree of excellence of something.

A distinctive attribute or characteristic possessed by someone or something.

Other definitions and descriptions reference quality as meaning something is fit for purpose, meets specifications and stakeholder expectations, achieves the very best results and outcomes – with quality applying to how an organisation is managed and to how services or projects are run, as well as to those who deliver the work.

As noted above, the *ArtWorks Evaluation Interim Report* encourages not focusing on finding a definitive definition of quality but rather on achieving an understanding of quality in order to identify what might improve the participant experience (dha & the Institute for Cultural Practices, University of Manchester, 2012a: 38). In this respect, a quality framework offers a structured way of approaching quality for this defined end. A quality framework supports quality assessment, assurance and improvement.

It is worth briefly explaining these terms, and others associated with quality, in support of developing shared meanings and collectively navigating a sector specific pathway through the 'quality world' (a profession in itself). For simplicity, the term 'delivery' is used below to cover all aspects of arts work in participatory settings i.e. all the artistic, facilitation and management processes involved, as well as the artwork that is produced.



*Quality assessment* is about measuring against a *standard* – a statement of what is seen as effective delivery (by an individual or organisation) – and can include *benchmarking*, comparing activities, results or outcomes against what has already been achieved (by yourself, your organisation or another). *Quality indicators* are agreed-upon measures for processes or outcomes used to determine the level of quality. *Quality control* (QC) is a system of maintaining standards through testing, most often on a sample basis, whether what is delivered meets a defined standard and a *quality mark* gives recognition that a standard has indeed been met.

In terms of people, *codes of practice* (sets of values and behaviours), *competencies* (behaviours and attributes that individuals require to perform effectively) and *National Occupational Standards (NOS)* (baseline competencies for what an individual needs to do, know and understand in order to carry out a particular job role or function) can all contribute to the quality of what is delivered. A *qualification* is an accredited way of proving that someone has met a level of competence or professional standard.

In a *quality assurance* (QA) process, the desired level of quality is maintained through attention to every aspect of delivery and ‘deliverer’: it is a process for checking that standards and quality of provision meet agreed expectations. *Continuous quality improvement* (CQI) is a proactive, cyclical system of planning, doing, reviewing and improving – or enhancing – what is delivered and how it is delivered.

These then are some of the meanings associated with quality which can inform us when looking at the context of learning to date from the ArtWorks programme and beyond and responding to the quality improvement challenge.

#### **4 Learning to date**

The centrally commissioned evaluation work is a critical part of the ArtWorks programme and includes the *ArtWorks Evaluation Literature Review*, which identifies 20 texts in the ‘Quality and Models of Practice’ section of the bibliography. These:

...explore how measures and standards of quality are understood and outline benchmarking processes and competencies aiming to ensure quality standards, derived from work in different countries, cultural settings and art forms (dha & the Institute for Cultural Practices, University of Manchester, 2012b: 12).

The *ArtWorks Evaluation Literature Review* reflects on the discourses around the appropriateness of developing a single framework for a practice that is characterised by its diversity and relates this to quality issues as follows:

Participatory work...engenders divergent expectations of desirable outcomes which are specific to individual project aims and which are therefore difficult to assimilate in a single standard of excellence. The gradation of what constitutes quality within participatory settings is partly explained by the broad spectrum of audiences and art forms...There is no single framework for understanding and introducing measures for quality; and despite the overwhelming aspiration to devise metrics – for performance management, for evaluation, for measurement on ‘social returns on investment’ and for advocacy purposes, there is also a lack of methodology and framework with rigour by which these valuations are conducted (ibid: 7).

The *ArtWorks Evaluation Interim Report* identifies that, along with employers and commissioners, ‘relatively little work [about quality] has been undertaken with participants’ (dha & the Institute for Cultural Practices, University of Manchester, 2012a: 38). In respect of who sets the standards and measures of quality, the *ArtWorks Evaluation Literature Review* refers to participants’ involvement as key:

... there is...an assumption that that for quality outcomes, participation should extend not only to active involvement but also to co-production of definitions and expectations of quality within participatory arts (dha & the Institute for Cultural Practices, University of Manchester, 2012b: 7).

The role of artists is of course also important, with the *ArtWorks Evaluation Literature Review* noting they describe excellence within their work in different ways, not only because of art form and context differences, but also due to:

...inherent confusion about whether excellence and quality relate to the 'inputs' of artistic practice or the outputs of projects and programmes (whether artistic, societal or in terms of personal experience) (ibid: 7).

The *ArtWorks Evaluation Literature Review* acknowledges there are

...numerous guides to good practice, which include tools and approaches to measurement...and no shortage...in research-informed resources which are concerned with influencing the quality of the processes for delivering and providing access to participatory arts (ibid: 8).

However, it remains problematic that there is not

...a shared understanding of what quality outcomes might be, and definitions for excellence remain elusive (ibid: 8).

One recommendation from the *Review* is that 'with respect to the concerns over benchmarking and safe-guarding quality of practice' (ibid: 8), the ArtWorks programme needs to bear in mind work already undertaken.

The challenge to create what one might call a 'quality approach to quality' is met by a strong interest within the programme to achieve clarity in this area. This section therefore aims to provide a discrete focus on quality in terms of ArtWorks learning and also to act as a review of relevant work from the wider arts sector and beyond, to support considerations and recommendations for future work in the programme.

ArtWorks Pathfinder research and activity to date has focused on three areas: **investigation of 'quality issues'**; **exploration of 'quality factors'**; and **development of 'quality approaches'** in terms of codes, standards, qualifications and frameworks. These are used as headings under which to present ArtWorks

findings to date, with an indication of work in progress, and to place this learning within a wider context.

## **Quality issues**

By referring to 'issues', we note that Pathfinders have found quality to be subject to ongoing 'live' debate. As well as revealing different understandings, attitudes and views of quality in arts work in participatory settings, research and activity has identified challenges in assessing, assuring and improving quality (whether in project work or training and CPD provision) and in ensuring quality as a topic is covered in training and CPD as a key element of practice.

In Toby Lowe's *Audit of Practice: Arts in Participatory Settings* (2011), commissioned by ArtWorks North East, the analysis of interviews about excellence with arts organisations is subtitled 'Quality is a battlefield', reflecting a comment from one interviewee. Lowe found people responded in 'totally different ways' to the same question: 'Can you give some examples of excellent practice from within your organisation's activities? What is it about those examples that makes them excellent?' (ibid: 39).

Beyond the 'healthy diversity' (ibid: 48) that includes subjective elements to judging quality and excellence, Lowe notes this range of responses significantly revealed a 'lack of a shared sense of excellence – a framework for understanding what goes into making excellent practice' (ibid: 48) and a 'lack of a common framework for beginning to understand how to talk about and reference excellence across people who work in this area' (ibid: 48). As well as this lack being 'an impediment to effective discussion and communication within the sector' (ibid: 48), Lowe highlights another key issue in relation to perception and value:

Beyond the sector, it must harm the perception of the work if we're not able to articulate what separates good practice from that which is less good (ibid: 48-49).

Lowe then proposes the elements of what a common framework might look like and this is examined in **Quality approaches** below, along with further work he has undertaken in developing a quality framework for Helix Arts.

In terms of gaps in training and development opportunities offered by the organisations interviewed, two quality related elements noted by Lowe were: 'mechanisms to help develop greater consistency in the quality and rigour of artists' work in this area' and 'understanding how to measure and monitor outcomes' (ibid: 61).

Findings from the ArtWorks North East Peer Artist Learning project also identify quality as one of the 'contextual/pedagogical knowledge and skills' required 'to operate as an artist in participatory settings'. The summary statement 'Being able to articulate what qualities your work is evoking, and whose standards/values are being applied' is followed by a list of questions, issues, practices and desired understandings ready to inform curriculum content (ArtWorks North East, 2012: 10).

Another ArtWorks North East commissioned report *Academics' perceptions of arts work in participatory settings* (Mitchell et al., 2012) reveals varying time and content attention given to the issue of quality within relevant higher education courses. There was only one interview reference to students using a quality framework offered by a local organisation (ibid: 52) and some lecturers noted the difficulty of assessing the quality of the process in student projects because of time issues (ibid: 60).

Consilium's report for ArtWorks Scotland confirmed 'the need for greater quality and quantity of placement provision...in order to develop the skills, knowledge and qualities required by artists to work to a desired quality in participatory settings' (Consilium, 2012: 46) and suggested the production of guidance and quality standards on placements (ibid: 45) – now being commissioned by ArtWorks Scotland.

There was a range of views on quality from individual lecturers interviewed for the ArtWorks North East work. For instance, one lecturer who respected artists working in participatory settings, nevertheless described the practice as 'not compatible with

producing high quality arts work' (Mitchell, op.cit: 22). This resonates with work undertaken in Scotland which identified the need for

...challenging the perception that work in participatory settings is inferior or a less desirable career path than the production of high-quality art (or indeed that high-quality art cannot be produced in participatory settings) (Consilium, 2012: 44).

In the North East, some lecturers saw the quality of the art work as important (e.g. Mitchell, op. cit: 27) while some saw quality as relating to inclusivity and the work's effect on 'quality of life' for participants (ibid: 31-32), achieved through the 'quality of interaction' (ibid: 39) or 'engagement' (ibid: 51) with the artist. Showing a completely different understanding of participation, another lecturer saw the question of quality answered by bringing in 'high quality' work for people to enjoy (ibid: 41).

In Wales, consultation with artists evidenced an issue that 'Artists find it difficult to communicate what "quality" is' (Sellers, 2012: 2). Most interviewees shared understandings of quality focused on inclusiveness, the participant journey and transformation, with an acknowledgement that this can be 'very difficult to judge' (ibid: 4). While clarity of intention was seen as key to achieving quality (e.g. ibid: 9) and there was a strong sense of the necessity for responsiveness to project context, which can include 'monitoring [the quality of experience] all the time' (ibid: 12), many comments pointed to a degree of scepticism about the use of quality tools such as feedback forms or kite marks (e.g. ibid: 8) to assess or assure quality. One artist noted the following:

Quality in terms of the arts is a difficult **subjective** problem. Erm, I think there's too much, too many attempts to try and quantify and standardise art practice anyway... It's impossible to standardise creativity really. And, for some reason, the powers that be feel that they need to continue to attempt to do it, even though overbearing evidence would suggest it's a *ridiculous* process (ibid: 12).

This artist went on to say ‘Good practice rises to the top because people who don’t do a good job, don’t get work again’ (ibid: 13), with these comments indicating a reliance on the marketplace rather than a more formal approach to quality. This comment raises two key issues: first, as ArtWorks Navigator explored, that employers do not necessarily have the experience to judge quality and second, that there can be an inappropriate conflation between a ‘standard’ and ‘standardisation’, when the two are different.

When asked about the best way to raise the status of artists working in participatory settings, only one of the 107 respondents to ArtWorks London’s *Pilot Year Artists Follow Up Survey* identified ‘talks and workshops to develop deeper understanding of quality’ (ArtWorks London, 2013: 5). The *Connecting Conversations Evaluation Report* showed that although artists placed great importance on quality:

A big question arose around measuring the quality of participatory work: ‘who decides?’. Participant recognition of their own progress was seen as a key marker in measuring the quality of process... It was argued that it is particularly ‘hard to articulate transformation’ which is [what] often follows much later (ArtWorks London, 2012: 14-15).

Work commissioned by ArtWorks Scotland similarly raised issues about the differentiation of quality in the absence of qualifications as evidence of quality:

The perceived lack of demand for accredited qualifications from both artists and commissioners poses crucial questions as to how settings wishing to engage artists can differentiate quality outside of the rather insular methods of recommendation and word of mouth. The introduction of a quality standard or kite mark was generally supported albeit there was a lack of consensus as to how this could be practically administered in a way that avoids over-burdening the artist or commissioner (Consilium, 2012: 1).

Participants consulted by ArtWorks Cymru showed some concern, like artists, with the idea of kite marking practitioners and ‘most felt that it was better to judge the standard of projects by the reputation of the organisations and “what they’d achieved

in the past” (Sellers, 2012: 8). ArtWorks London’s research enquiry into what participants understand as quality notes that ‘The word “quality” in relation to arts practices is both abstract and subjective’ (ArtWorks London, 2013b: 7) and this led to taking a particular approach to investigation:

When attempting to determine what ‘quality’ or ‘excellence’ means to a group of young people we felt it would be more helpful to pose questions which might encourage discussion of what tangible factors make a project successful (ibid: 7).

The second piece of research identifies another concern:

...that in attempting to determine what constitutes ‘quality’ in the arts that we are suggesting that ‘quality’ can be an absolute measure. This is not the case and as such we feel it is more helpful to look at what effects [sic] the experience of participants and artists from a multitude of perspectives (ArtWorks London, 2013c: 3).

ArtWorks Navigator ran four Artists Labs which raised quality issues and generated proposals for developing quality. The Foundation for Community Dance and NAWÉ investigated the possibility of common training, qualifications and standards pathways for participatory practice and Sound Sense and A+ with engage investigated the gap in knowledge about participatory practice in respect of the ‘demand side’ of employers (with the term in this context including commissioners, hirers and partners) who work with participatory artists.

The Foundation for Community Dance two day discussion Lab raised the issue of perceptions of quality, with participants discussing ‘the hierarchies within the arts that still persistently appear to value “performance” over community practice’ (Leatherdale, 2012: 6) as well as provision of CPD being of poor quality (ibid: 12). In the NAWÉ Lab, comprising two roundtables looking at work with people with dementia, there was ‘widespread agreement that there should be an organization specifically responsible for the arts and dementia, which could [amongst other things]



offer its members tangible benefits such as quality assurance, guidelines on practice...' (Killick, 2012: 5).

The Sound Sense and A+ and engage Labs addressed the question 'How can employers and commissioners of artists ensure they are hiring "quality"?' through expert questioning, discussion groups and surveys.

Participants in the A+ and engage Lab raised the need for a mutual understanding about participatory practice and also the development of relevant quality frameworks:

... a clearer understanding between artists and hirers is vital in avoiding / minimising poor working relationships that could reduce employment prospects for practitioners in the future, as well as ensuring a high-quality experience for participants (Salamon, 2013a: 1).

[they] believed that new ways of evaluating and measuring participatory arts practice and projects – for example, developing appropriate measures of success, definitions of quality and excellence – needed to be found (ibid: 5).

The Sound Sense Lab looked specifically at the issues around 'recruiting quality community musicians' and also 'creating community musicians'. The Lab found 'a spectrum of a definition of "quality" depending on the intent of the work' (Deane, 2013a: 3) and while employers were mostly able to get the quality of practitioner they wanted, despite using various routes they were not always successful. Significantly, it was noted that 'Some improvements could be made, especially for smaller, newer employers' (ibid: 12). Participants also considered community musician training and CPD through the lens of quality improvement for projects, commenting on required core and contextual skills. While some concerns were expressed about the potential exclusivity of mandatory qualifications, there was a greater acknowledgment that qualifications per se could be useful indicators for quality and therefore helpful in terms of recruitment (ibid: 11).

The rich material from across the Labs was seen as helping

...advocate to employers and commissioners to help improve the quality of the work of artists they employ and to gain a clearer sense of whether training, qualifications and standards can be made general or must be created specifically (Johnston, 2013: 2).

A common finding across Labs was

...the need to 'educate' the employer and commissioner – both the experienced (encourage them to be ambitious etc.) and those who are new/ inexperienced/ reluctant (ibid: 2).

Consilium's work for ArtWorks Scotland also evidenced issues to address with respect to commissioners, in part through undertaking 'the feasibility of establishing a kite mark or quality standard for artists working in participatory settings to support commissioners through the procurement process' (Consilium, 2012a: 6), with the production of a 'guidance toolkit specifically to support commissioners' having the potential to improve the quality of engagement in arts-led activity (ibid: 4). There was also a specific issue in relation to arts in education work:

Key issues linked to the quality of work within schools include a lack of understanding from schools of what quality artistic work looks like and where to obtain a valued opinion from in order to inform future commissioning (ibid: 36).

In Consilium's work across the UK for ArtWorks 'centrally', they found:

For commissioners (e.g. NHS, prison service, schools and local authorities), there are issues of quality assurance related to skills, knowledge and experience, and the identification of appropriate interventions by artists (Consilium, 2012b: 12).

To summarise, ArtWorks research and activity to date has identified the following key issues in relation to quality:

- A lack of clarity in the articulation of what we mean by ‘quality’ and differences in understanding what quality is
- This lack of clarity contributing to negative perceptions of the sector in terms of artistic quality
- A mix of interest and unease about formal approaches to quality assurance and improvement
- The critical importance of a shared understanding of quality between artists and commissioners in order to address these points

These issues resonate with other research findings and debate. For instance, the Arts Council England commissioned review from 509 Arts *Adult participatory arts: Thinking it through* tackles the ‘artistic merit’ question and attributes it to ‘the tension between the notion of artistic excellence as classic and timeless and the more contemporary view that art has a social purpose and its values are relative’ (509 Arts, 2010: 18). If ‘social purpose’ is seen as a sole instrumental (rather than integrated) driver of work, this raises questions such as that identified by The Connected Communities Participatory Arts and Well-being project:

How can the quality of arts and the integrity of artistic practice and process be sustained within a framework that tends to perceive the arts as utilitarian?  
(Billington et al.: 6)

In the blog *Engaging Matters* (2011), Doug Borwick and respondents address key questions under the ‘Quality and Community’ heading including ‘Who decides what quality is?’ and ‘What do we mean by quality?’ in the context that ‘spectator art’ is often privileged over ‘participatory art’. One contributor references Liz Lerman’s three standards of quality: that people are 100% committed to what they’re doing; they know why they’re doing what they’re doing; and something is revealed (see also Stickeler, 2008: 9). With a focus on the integrity of involvement, intent and

expression, these quality standards can be applied to any arts practice – and met or not met. As Lerman says:

Dancers might be able to get their legs up high but they don't have a clue why they're doing what they're doing. Whereas I can bring in a bunch of sixth graders who are just learning and they'll know exactly why they're doing what they're doing and they will be 100% committed and the room will be totally transformed by their presence (ibid: 9).

Debates on artistic quality are not restricted to work in participatory settings and in the context of an increasing interest in exploring the 'dimensions and determinants of quality' (Jackson, 2012) in terms of the audience experience (see also Brown and Novack, 2007), ArtWorks is making an important contribution to looking at quality in terms of the participant experience.

François Matarasso's recent paper (2013) notes that:

Assessments of quality cannot be made independently of specific criteria, which may relate to concepts such as usefulness, effectiveness or, in the case of art, aesthetics...[an arts programme] cannot be judged good (or bad), unless the concept of 'good' is defined. Good for what? Good for whom? Good in comparison with what? (ibid: 4).

In addition, Matarasso identifies a particular problem in assessing the quality of participatory arts because its process involves 'multiple actors' (ibid: 5) i.e. a wider range of people. This leads him to a consideration of quality in terms of the five phases of the participatory arts process: 'conception, contracting, working, creation and completion' (ibid: 5) – a useful construct we re-visit in **Quality Factors** below.

Matarasso's highlighting of the 'multiple players and processes' resonates with two interesting earlier studies focused on arts education. The American study *The Qualities of Quality Understanding Excellence in Arts Education* by Steve Seidel and colleagues focuses on 'the character of excellence itself' and asks how to conceive of and define high quality arts learning and teaching; what markers of excellence to

look for; and also explores how programme decision making affects the pursuit and achievement of quality (Seidel et al., 2009: III). This usefully prompts us to consider the wider context of 'work beyond the workshop' that has a significant impact on quality, but does not always figure within quality assessment, assurance and improvement.

Anne Bamford advocates that 'the achievement of quality must be planned'. Looking at the issues of global and local quality in arts education, she argues that arts experiences need to be 'fit for purpose' and 'right first time' – in that provision must be relevant for the intended purpose and participants, based on principles and attributes associated with quality arts engagement (Bamford, 2010: 47). In addition, 'any approach to quality assurance should take into full account the perspective of the cultural constructors and players' (ibid: 50) – that is, all those involved. Bamford states:

High quality does not apply only to more traditional genres of arts practice or to those that are the most expensive...you can have good and bad opera programmes in schools as you can good or bad rap projects...quality operates separately to price...expensive projects can fail to be either fit for purpose or right first time (ibid: 52).

Taking Bamford's call **to plan the achievement of quality**, a next step is to look at quality factors – those elements that make for successful arts work in participatory settings.

### **Quality factors**

The *ArtWorks Evaluation Interim Report* usefully reminds us that a range of factors 'contribute to, or impact upon, 'quality'...[including] the skills and experience of artists, the circumstances in which commissioners commission, how activity is scheduled, etc' (dha & the Institute for Cultural Practices, University of Manchester, 2012a: 39). ArtWorks Pathfinders' consultations and other work have resulted in generating useful material from a variety of perspectives.

ArtWorks Scotland has developed an infographic of quality factors, arrived at through research undertaken with a small group of artists who formed part of Artworks Scotland funded Peer to Peer Networks (Dean, 2012). These factors, which artists felt were important to supporting high quality work, were tested with artists in 2012 and as part of a second phase of research in 2013, with partners – employers, commissioners and project hosts (Dean, 2013). Artists and partners were both asked to respond to the factors in terms of their importance and how often they happened, in projects in which they were involved. The 15 factors – displayed in an infographic – are:

- artists being involved in research, planning and development with all partners/ participants
- artists being involved in evaluation and documentation with all partners/ participants
- artists having time to time to think and reflect as part of a project
- artists having professional development opportunities as part of a project
- a brief that allows creative input from the artist
- there is a creative approach to evaluation
- artists feel professional valued within the project
- having 'buy in' and trust between all artists/ partners/ participants
- there is time to build relations between artists/ partners/ participants
- numbers of participants are realistic in terms of time, budget and aims
- realistic expectations of what can be achieved in the time and resource
- adequate resources – financial and other – to support planning, delivery and evaluation
- understanding between all artists and partners of what each can offer one another
- a contract that makes clear everyone's roles, tasks and expectations
- having a dedicated project manager (ArtWorks Scotland, 2013)

These factors are wide ranging and most were agreed between artists and partners. Reflection time and the importance of trust and buy in between all partners were seen as highly important and when in place, enabling of other factors. There were

interesting differences of perspective, in particular in relation to how often certain quality factors are present and this is already prompting thoughts about how these factors can be used in practice, as noted below in **Quality Approaches**.

ArtWorks Cymru and ArtWorks London's research with participants revealed their views on quality factors. ArtWorks Cymru research found that 'trust' was a key factor in developing a safe environment and that participants expected to work with professional artists experienced in participatory settings (Sellers, 2012: 8). ArtWorks London found core areas that 'constitute quality for participants' included collaborative working practices; development of process based skills and achievement of an outcome; having ownership over content and material; and working with skilled, non-directorial, artists (ArtWorks London, 2013b: 19).

ArtWorks Cymru and ArtWorks London are currently working together to undertake further research to develop a richer understanding of the participant experience in participatory arts projects. The research questionnaire contains specific questions about what aspects of a project enhanced and reduced the quality of participants' experience. It also asks respondents to rate to what degree particular quality related factors were experienced. These factors are drawn from the ArtWorks Scotland research as noted above, translated to a participant's experience.

With funding from the ArtWorks Changing the Conversation development fund, Trinity Laban is consulting on quality factors with artists and people from another key constituency – project managers and producers. Findings to date have emphasised the importance of everyone in a project agreeing at the start 'what quality looks like', recognising this may vary according to context. Other key factors are achieving clarity about the dual responsibility and complementary roles between artists and project managers/producers in supporting quality and ensuring that regular reflection time is built into projects.

When we consider wider literature on quality factors, we can usefully draw on material related to specific art forms and also particular working contexts or participant groups (e.g. health, children and young people). Sometimes these factors are called 'principles' or 'characteristics' and can apply to the practitioner, the

process and the participant experience. The following examples have been selected and summarised as of particular interest and relevance.

Within dance, the Foundation for Community Dance has developed, through discussion and consultation with practitioners, 'benchmarks for quality'. While 'benchmarks' are more usually associated with active quality comparisons, in this instance these are explained as what practitioners 'actually say they are doing, rather than a blueprint for excellence in community dance' (2002: 20) in relation to quality criteria. They cover the areas of purpose; planning and communication; practice and process; engagement; and outcomes – and again the importance of context and clarity of agenda is emphasised. Youth Dance England identifies high quality dance experience as: inclusive, coherent, purposeful and progressive – and lists 10 outcomes arising from that experience (2010: 18).

Mike White's 2010 paper *Developing guidelines for good practice in participatory arts-in-health-care contexts* charts research and consultation leading to what is described as a 'statement' of professional practice and personal conduct which draws on health related and arts based codes of practice, including that for visual artists: contribute confidently; prepare thoroughly; collaborate creatively; aim high. The statement comprises the following five key factors for practitioners in the participatory arts in health field:

- 1 Putting participants first
- 2 A responsive approach
- 3 Upholding values
- 4 Feedback and evaluation
- 5 Good management and governance (White, 2010: 147-8)

These are in effect 'quality principles', supported by 'keynote points' which express 'the essence of good practice', within the context that 'guidelines...need to meet the practitioners' aspirations to do their best and not just be there to regularize their work' (ibid: 148).



Turning to artists who work with children and young people, Chambers and Petrie have developed 'principles and values' for 'artist pedagogues' working with looked after children (but applicable more broadly). These are to aspire to provide the best; ensure safe boundaries; work with their head, hands and heart; aim high; work in partnership; keep children and workers safe; and reflect on their practice ([http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/561457/abbreviated\\_learning\\_framework\\_for\\_artist\\_pedagogues.pdf](http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/561457/abbreviated_learning_framework_for_artist_pedagogues.pdf)).

More widely, Arts Council England's *Providing the best: Guidance for artists and arts organisations on assessing the quality of activities provided for children and young people* 'defines the characteristics of high quality activities' covering the practitioner, the process and the participant experience, described as:

- ideas that excite, inspire, challenge or affect young people
- an effective partnership between artist/arts organisation, host and children and young people
- promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion
- the work of professional artists
- artists who can communicate their art, knowledge or skills in an appropriate way for children and young people
- opportunities for children and young people to create their own art
- a supportive framework to develop and foster progression (Arts Council England, 2006: 6)

Understanding and articulating the quality of the work that organisations delivering work by, with and for children and young people is core to Arts Council England's remit and it has now developed seven core principles for organisations to embed into their work:

1. striving for excellence
2. being authentic
3. being exciting, inspiring and engaging
4. ensuring a positive, child-centred experience

5. actively involving children and young people
6. providing a sense of personal progression
7. developing a sense of ownership and belonging

[\(http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/our-priorities-2011-15/children-and-young-people/quality/\)](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/our-priorities-2011-15/children-and-young-people/quality/)

Specifically within the field of arts education, two international examples of quality factors are interesting to note. In Canada, research and evaluation work by ArtsSmarts (Hume, 2010) identified four factors – with accompanying specific qualities – in students' experience of learning that would lead to higher levels of engagement. These were content (personal and cultural relevance; importance student ownership or choice); context (collaborative; supportive; positive; challenge; risk-taking); process (integrated; hands-on); and product (authentic; experienced by others).

In the US, Seidel et al. (2009) researched 'markers of excellence' in arts learning and teaching activities, examining the arts education experience through four different but overlapping lenses. These were learning (what students are actually doing), pedagogy (how teachers conceive of and practice their craft), community dynamics (social relationships in the classroom) and environment (physical space and resources) (ibid: IV).

Quality markers in learning included engagement; purposeful experiences creating or engaging with works of art; emotional openness and honesty; experimentation; and ownership (ibid: 30). Authenticity; modelling artistic processes; participating in learning; making learning relevant; intentionality and flexibility were pedagogical markers (ibid: 34). In terms of community dynamics, respect and trust; open communication; and collaboration were key quality elements (ibid: 38); and sufficient time, centrality and appropriate functional and aesthetic resources were quality markers in terms of the environment (ibid: 42).

The research also evidenced that 'foundational decisions matter...decisions and decision makers at all levels affect quality...reflection and dialogue is important at all

levels...misalignment of ideas among decision-makers about what constitutes quality often complicates...pursuit of quality' (ibid: IV-V).

The five phases of the participatory arts process identified by Matarasso (2013) in effect act as quality factors. In terms of 'conception', there is 'no way of testing the quality...of any proposed activities nor, in the longer term, of improving practice within an organisation', without a consideration and articulation of expected change to be achieved (ibid: 7-8). With regards to 'contracting':

Unless the people who are supposed to benefit from an activity can participate in defining the criteria of its success, then control remains firmly with the professional organisations and any claim of empowerment must be open to question (ibid: 8).

'Quality of process' enables the identification of 'the characteristics – the objective qualities – that need to be in place to ensure a good participatory arts process' (ibid: 9) and 'quality in creation' represents an 'independent validation of [participants'] effort, learning and creativity' (ibid: 10). How projects end is 'another important aspect of their quality, since it can influence the meaning and therefore the result of everything that has gone before' (ibid: 10). Matarasso concludes his paper by talking about 'criticality and openness' and the 'quality of self-awareness and critical reflection artists bring to their work...[with] the further challenge of ensuring that the critical reflection, and the definition of success, is opened to all participants' (ibid: 12).

Seidel's and Matarasso's work highlights the need to take a holistic view of quality in terms of the whole project process and all those involved, to which we will return in the next section.

In summary, the learning from ArtWorks appears to reflect learning from elsewhere:

- There is a general consensus on the factors that ensure quality experiences

- Attention to all stages of work in participatory settings is critical to achieving a holistic approach to quality
- The achievement of quality depends on planning, shared responsibility between artists and commissioners, and a focus on content, context, process and product that includes participants' perspectives

## **Quality approaches**

Knowing what makes for quality leads us on to the matter of identifying and measuring that quality – and then taking actions, so that quality can be continually improved. If we are committed to learning and development, being able to set indicators, evidence, assess, assure and enhance the quality of work and workers (whether this is in relation to an organisation, a project or the provision of training and CPD) is key.

We also need to recognise that 'different kinds of approaches [are] appropriate for different functions' of quality related work which can include self-improvement (using self-evaluation and reflective practice tools); achieving a quality award or mark (producing specific required evidence); benchmarking (using indicators of success with peer or external assessment); and demonstrating sector value (including project and organisational-level evaluation, covering participation and outcomes) (NFER, 2012: ii-iii).

Work undertaken or commissioned by ArtWorks Pathfinders to date has included consultation about the use of different quality approaches and 'tools' and also active development of a variety of new tools, which has focused mostly on artists, in respect of codes of practice, standards and qualifications.

In terms of surveying the use of formal approaches to quality, Consilium's work for ArtWorks Scotland found that:

Just over one third (34%) of responding artists had used guidance materials or toolkits to support their work in participatory settings. The most frequently specified toolkit or set of guidance materials utilised was the Quality Framework, as cited by 22 responding artists, followed by the Cultural Coordinator Handbook (18) and the Partners toolkit and Creating Safety (both 17). Although based on relatively low numbers, the Quality Framework was found to be most useful with 45% of artists using this support stating that it was either useful or very useful followed by the Partners toolkit (41%) and Creating Safety (35%). In contrast, the Cultural Coordinator Handbook was found to be least useful of the examples provided with 39% of users responding to the artists survey stating it to be either of little or no use followed by Making the Most of Residencies (36%) (Consilium, 2012: 24).

The report also covered the role of qualifications:

... in the context of supporting artists to enhance the quality of people's engagement in arts-led activity within settings, participants suggested that many of the core competencies could be acquired by completing teaching courses. Referenced examples included Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS), Teaching Qualification in Further Education (TQFE) and the Professional Development Award Advanced Diploma: Introduction to Teaching in Further Education. Indeed the required knowledge and understanding referenced in relevant National Occupational Standards (NOS) 11 published by Creative and Cultural Skills can be supported through the completion of teaching qualifications (ibid: 32).

ArtWorks Navigator's consultations evidenced some value being placed on qualifications by employers (especially those who were inexperienced) alongside the awareness these did not always cover 'soft' and personal skills. Artists accepted qualifications could act as a 'short hand', while not wanting them to be a requirement more significant than experience (Salamon, 2013c: 19-21).

In response to the quality issue of ensuring artists have the relevant knowledge, skills, understanding and behaviours for working in participatory settings, ArtWorks

Navigator has also been involved in direct development activity. This has included leading on the further development of the National Occupational Standards (NOS) in community arts, promotion of the Dance Leadership NOS, a review of codes of professional conduct in the arts and beyond (Deane, 2013b) and helping to develop a Level 4 certificate for music leaders (ArtWorks Navigator: 2013: 2).

This work is now being built on with guidance for employers, further qualification developments, a common code of practice for artists and exploration of a 'fellowship' model (drawing on the Arts Development: UK Professional Fellowship Programme) to place value on CPD through the validation of non-accredited learning. ArtWorks Navigator describes these elements as the 'pillars' of a quality framework. Adoption of, and adherence to, a code of practice and use of competencies in role descriptions, appraisals and CPD planning demonstrates a commitment to quality; accredited qualifications evidence specific quality standards are being met; and a validation scheme can provide quality assurance for non-accredited learning.

ArtWorks Navigator is also a member of an ad hoc grouping of organisations working with children and young people (including the NSPCC, National Children's Bureau (NCB) and the Pre-School Learning Alliance) chaired by the sector skills agency Skills for Care and Development. This is picking up on the quality framework that was being developed by the now disbanded quango Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC). In this grouping, artists working in participatory settings are recognised as part of a diverse professional workforce and there is discussion about the exploration of workforce registration.

Specifically within the field of arts work by, with and for children, ArtWorks Navigator partner engage is involved in the 'raising standards' debate and activity being led by Arts Council England, in terms of the testing of quality principles (as noted above) currently taking place.

ArtWorks Cymru is currently working with Arts Council of Wales to review their participation strategy. A meeting of community organisations has included discussions about the quality appraisal process, leading to suggestions that, in order to understand participatory work as fully as possible, assessors will need more

'touch points' and sense of context for projects, including the clear articulation of their intent.

Creative Scotland, with input from ArtWorks Scotland, is currently commissioning work on building a foundation for quality guidance for work in participatory settings. This will draw on the Scottish Arts Council's *Quality Framework guidelines for arts organisations* (2009) (which focuses on artistic leadership creating high quality programmes of work, public engagement and accountability); the ArtWorks Scotland Quality Factors; reports and other documents relating to the development of thinking around quality; commissioned work on quality assurance; learning from across the ArtWorks programme; and a wider range of resources. The intention is to explore the development of a quality framework or guidance for arts work in participatory settings, for continuous improvement in the sector, staff training and to inform funding guidance.

The ArtWorks Scotland conference 2013 included two breakout sessions on the researched Quality Factors (see above). In terms of building on these to develop an active approach to quality improvement, delegates explored a variety of ways in which they could be used as prompts for discussion and dialogue, providing a 'constellation of questions' within a critical and reflective practice context. There was support for sharing values for quality work at the earliest point in project planning.

Although ArtWorks is not currently engaged in discussions on quality with the other two national funding bodies, it is useful to note that Arts Council England is supporting the piloting of a sector-led (i.e. general arts and cultural sector) quality metrics framework to capture quality and reach of arts and cultural productions. While 'experience' and 'engagement' are included as 'dimensions' in the outline framework, there is no reference to 'participation' and the framework clearly relates to measurement and assessment, not quality improvement.

Overall beyond the ArtWorks programme, there is a vast range of resources available including guidance on quality principles, codes of practice, formal 'awards' (marks and badges), toolkits and frameworks.

For instance, a scoping study into the use of quality frameworks within the voluntary and community sector (VCS) identified the use of over 130 different formal standards. The most widely used is PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations), covering the whole organisation, with Investors in People, which covers human resources, the most well-known (Brodie et al., 2012: 5). While some frameworks are 'generic' to the sector, some are 'generic' per se and some specific to particular services – and organisations such as the Mentoring & Befriending Foundation are developing new national quality standards.

Within the children and young people (CYP) sector, the former Department for Children, Schools and Families developed *Quality Standards for Positive Activities* for commissioners and providers, also designed to empower young people and their parents/carers to demand high quality provision. The standards cover achieving outcomes for young people (activities reflecting needs and interests; young people being aware of activities; achieving positive outcomes through activities) and planning and delivery (collaborative approach; equality; and safety), with each standard having a set of evidence indicators and guidance for implementation.

The National Youth Agency (NYA) has an *Ethical Conduct in Youth Work* statement of values and principles (2004) for youth workers. This requires a commitment to treating young people with respect; promoting their rights to make their own decisions; promoting welfare and safety; contributing to social justice; recognising boundaries between personal and professional life; being accountable to young people; developing and maintaining skills and competencies; and working for employing agencies to uphold the principles. Their *Quality Framework* is a self-assessment tool covering 11 standards within the organisational areas of policy and strategy; people; and partnerships and the *NYA Quality Mark* is a nationally recognised and externally validated process for assessing services with young people, awarded where all standards are assessed as 'established', with 'aspiring' and 'emerging' as the other level descriptors.

In terms of arts work with children and young people, a report by Lord et al. (2012) references 31 quality frameworks – although in fact not all are frameworks per se, as the list includes inspection/assessment schemes; guides and handbooks; research



outputs; and policy/strategy frameworks (NFER, 2012: 42). Likewise, Cape UK (2011) identify eight 'quality assurance models' of potential relevance – again a mix of guidance documents, standards frameworks, codes of practice and formal awards (which are based on adherence to a quality framework). Included in these models is *Eight Best Practice Principles to support effective working in the arts with children and young people*, which can be described as an 'approach', in that the document offers questions for use in thinking how to implement and evidence the practice principles.

In the same manner, Arts Council England's report *Providing the best* not only defines the 'characteristics of high quality experience in the arts' but also offers a 'framework for assessing and assuring this work'(ACE, 2006: 4) through prompt questions and the invitation to use the guidance for a range of purposes, including:

- as a project planning and evaluation tool
- organisational reflection, review and development
- advising and training artists new to work with children and young people
- analysing support, training and development needs
- working with partners to define expectations
- helping to select artists for participatory work
- helping children and young people develop creative and critical skills (ibid: 5)

The self assessment tools from the National Association of Youth Theatres (NAYT) *Excellent Youth Theatre* and *Inclusive Youth Theatre* embrace a commitment to define excellence in relation to context and community and to ensure all members 'are involved in setting these standards and are aware of how they can best achieve them' (NAYT, 2010a: 5). As quality frameworks, these documents provide a detailed set of questions which can be used in a variety of ways to 'provoke discussion and debate, resulting in improving your practice and service to young people' (ibid: 12).

Sing Up is currently working on a Quality Framework based on their *Principles of Good Quality Vocal Leadership* – building on identified quality factors to provide a

way of applying them in practice, emphasising a flexibility in relation to context and need. As they state:

Using our **Quality Framework** will give you a clear process to explore and reflect upon your approaches, skills and knowledge, **identifying your strengths and areas to develop**. Everyone who leads singing and vocal work with children can use our Quality Framework resources as a baseline for good quality vocal leadership. These resources **can be tailored to your own needs** (<http://www.singup.org/teaching-tools-advice/quality-framework/>).

Youth Music has just published a quality framework with a title that indicates support for continuous quality improvement: *Do, Review, Improve...* (2013). The framework comprises 23 criteria considered 'desirable for a high quality music-making session' (although the framework is for 'music education') under the headings 'young people-centred', 'session content', 'environment' and 'music leader practice'. It is accompanied by examples from projects and observation worksheets, with room for notes and graded red to green scales for marking how well a criterion is met. There is no intention for scorings, rankings or comparisons to be undertaken and rather, as a tool for peer assessment and self reflection, the framework can be used to help identify training and development needs.

Another interesting example of a quality approach in relation to individual artist professional practice is *Excellence in Arts Practice: A core competency framework for participatory arts*, produced through member consultation by C-PAL (the Consortium for Participatory Arts Learning). The framework comprises grouped competencies under four headings of personal excellence, thinking, creative practice and relationship building with descriptors of what these 'look like' at three levels of 'doer' or learner; leader; and manager – and comments on 'what we don't want'. C-PAL have a clear quality improvement rationale for the framework and its active use:

A competency framework is a model that broadly defines the blueprint for 'excellent' performance within an organisation or sector... An organisation that neglects to define an expected standard of performance, will be one where judgement of good, bad or excellent will be highly subjective. Without a

common understanding of good, bad and excellent, judgement cannot be fair and development priorities are difficult to agree upon. A wellcrafted framework can provide a common language which can be used for the review, evaluation and development of organisations, projects and individuals...The framework is essentially a guide for defining what is excellent professional practice. For every occasion where you might need to review performance or make a judgement regarding quality, set a development goal or a benchmark for an outcome you can use the framework, and be confident that your definitions will be commonly understood

[\(http://participatoryartslearning.wordpress.com/downloads/\)](http://participatoryartslearning.wordpress.com/downloads/).

In terms of participatory practice and project work, Helix Arts and Collective Encounters are two organisations which have developed quality frameworks. As noted earlier, Toby Lowe of Helix Arts sees a key need for critical discourse about quality in participatory arts:

What makes for good participatory arts practice? If we do not ask this question of ourselves, it means we struggle to learn and improve as artists and organisations that make participatory work. If we can't provide a response...[we] will always be judged by other people's standards (Lowe, 2012: 2).

As well as contributing to developing a critical discourse, *A Quality Framework for Helix Arts' Participatory Practice* provides 'tools which help people to understand and assess quality in practice' (ibid: 2), working from five principles 'for what makes good dialogic participatory art' (ibid: 6) in the context of the two key elements of 'creating space' and 'artists' practice'. For 'creating space', Helix Arts has developed a self-assessment framework with questions to support measurement against quality criteria/standards, grouped under the headings of understanding context – recognising particular situations and histories; building relationships and facilitating engagement with the participatory process; and enabling participatory arts processes to function well (ibid: 9). However, for 'artists' practice', the quality mechanism is that of dialogue, in the form of 'Critical Conversations' involving project presentations by

the artist responding to questions derived from the principles, followed by facilitated critical reflection with others involved in the project (ibid: 11-12).

Collective Encounters has an *Evaluation Policy and Quality Framework* in which evaluation activity is linked to both assessing and improving quality as 'good evaluation...will help us to consistently develop and improve our work' (Collective Encounters, 2012: 5). A set of quality indicators covers process, product and management with 'social change determinants' also described (ibid: 3). The key quality improvement element is the attention to learning and development – at practitioner and programme level – through agreed processes proportional to the activity (i.e. from a one off workshop to an annual programme) and which includes periodic whole company evaluation in relation to whether identified improvements needed have been implemented.

Effervescent Social Alchemy is an organisation developing a holistic approach to quality, from the standpoint that 'the entire body of our work, from initial engagement with potential clients, through delivery, to reporting and archiving, is our arts practice' (Effervescent, 2012: 1) and informed by a key driver of 'We all want to do better'. A *Framework for Quality Development and Delivery of Socially Engaged, Collaborative, and Site-Responsive Arts Projects* draws on François Matarasso's paper on quality for the Arts Council in Ireland, *Weighing poetry: Exploring Funding criteria for assessing artistic quality* (2000). It takes the quality criteria headings of 'technique, ambition, individuality, resonance, connection, magic' into every stage of work, from initiation to devising and planning, managing, delivery, artefacts, showing work to audiences, documenting, evaluating, archiving and advocacy (Effervescent, op. cit: 2). The framework is being developed to contain 'prompts' for each stage and quality criteria in the context that 'not every prompt will be used on every project, but all should be considered' (ibid: 2).

Lastly, we need to note the quality assurance and quality improvement roles of both Ofsted (whose strapline is 'raising standards, improving lives') in relation to early years and childcare; children and families services; schools; and further education and skills; and also The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). While it is beyond the remit of this paper to detail the quality codes and frameworks

to which these sectors and these inspection and regulation bodies work, individuals and organisations working in the arts in participatory settings may well come into these particular quality worlds.

In summary, there is a wide and diverse range of tools and frameworks in existence – and in development – that could support artists in self-reflection and improvement; commissioners in developing projects; and funders in grant making. These share common elements and offer a range of approaches that can be adapted and used within the sector to support continuous quality improvement. There is no need to invent new tools or recommend the adoption of any one approach, but rather to generate an awareness of what exists and use this to ensure greater shared understanding – and then action.

## **5 Considerations and recommendations**

The remit of this Working Paper is to

- Build a clear collective understanding of quality and quality frameworks including reference to organisational and project management; participants' experience; artists', project managers/producers' and commissioners' practice; and training and continuous professional development (CPD)
- Collate and distil relevant material from the ArtWorks programme and beyond
- Offer considerations and recommendations about how the programme can make meaningful use of such material.

We have looked at the meanings of quality; explored issues and challenges in thinking about and articulating quality; reported on a range of quality factors; and identified some of the approaches to quality in terms of assessment, assurance and improvement.

In terms of making meaningful use of the material we have brought together in this Working Paper and looking to develop future 'support solutions', the following are offered as three key principles in promoting a 'quality approach to quality':

- embedded awareness of, and attention to, quality – as it doesn't 'just happen'
- a focus on dynamic continuous quality improvement, not just quality assessment and assurance
- as a sector, confidently taking the lead in congruence with our practice

Starting with the last principle, this suggested isomorphic approach resonates with Matarasso (our emboldening):

There are many traps for the unwary hoping to track down quality in participatory arts practice...but it is not the traps that matter most. It is **the quality of the thinking that everyone involved in participatory practice can share** (Matarasso, 2013: 12).

In the context of placing the participant experience at the heart of our work and with key national funding bodies currently reviewing their quality assessment processes, **we need to support an understanding of the work and also to demonstrate our active commitment to its enhancement.** While discussions are underway about the development of a 'practice statement' (Schwarz, 2013b: 23), ArtWorks Pathfinder partnerships continue to describe arts in participatory settings as dialogical, situated and reflexive – qualities which need to inform how we think about, and work with, quality. So, for example, **as a dialogical practice, everyone involved shares an articulation of the intention and quality factors of work; as a situated practice, those factors are context specific and sensitive; and as a reflexive practice, everyone undertakes 'reflection in action' to inform, evaluate and improve the quality of work.**

To support an embedded awareness of, and attention to, quality, this paper has identified a wide range of quality ‘tools’ available to artists and arts organisations, not least those being specifically developed by ArtWorks Navigator to support artists’ individual professionalism and to ensure practice is professional and ethical, as key contributors to quality work. A range of ‘frameworks’ – ways of formally addressing quality in projects, programmes or organisations – have also been reviewed.

From this work, ArtWorks can advocate thinking about, and planning for, quality:

- for every stage of planning, delivery and evaluation
- in every aspect of inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes
- including every person – artist, participant, project manager/producer, partner and employer/commissioner/hirer

There is a wealth of resources and guidance from which artists and arts organisations can draw or create quality approaches that are fit for purpose and readily adopted to deliver better outcomes for participants. Rather than produce an overarching quality framework for the sector, **ArtWorks has a key role to encourage and support artists and arts organisations to action those approaches within the fundamental framework of CQI (continuous quality improvement)**. This is about asking the right questions, in the right way, at the right time, of the right people in order to understand, reflect on and improve the quality of work. Core quality improvement questions are ‘Am I doing this well? How do I know? Can I improve on what I am doing?’ – and, because of the nature of our practice, ‘Are we doing this well? How do we know? Can we improve on what we are doing’ – with the participant voice key. The core quality improvement process is a cycle, like a learning cycle, of doing, reflecting, concluding, planning what to do next... and doing it – ‘Because we all want to do better’.

As well as advocating CQI to artists and arts organisations working in participatory setting, **ArtWorks can work with organisations to demonstrate the sector’s active commitment to CQI and to inform policy and funding**. These

organisations include the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and other major trusts and foundations; national arts councils; and local government e.g. through the LGA (Local Government Association) and AD:UK (Arts Development: UK). As a workforce development initiative, **ArtWorks can also work with training and CPD providers to ensure quality is a subject within provision – and that provision is subject to quality improvement.**

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## Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Paul Hamlyn (1926–2001) was a publisher, businessman and philanthropist. In 1987 he set up the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for general charitable purposes, and on his death he bequeathed the majority of his estate to the Foundation, making it one of the UK's largest independent grant-making organisations.

The mission of the Foundation is to maximise opportunities for individuals to realise their potential and to experience and enjoy a better quality of life, now and in the future. In particular, the Foundation is concerned with children and young people and with disadvantaged people.

Paul Hamlyn Foundation works across the UK through three programmes – Arts, Education and Learning, and Social Justice. Each comprises an Open Grants scheme, to which organisations can apply with proposals for funding innovative activities, and Special Initiatives, which are more focused interventions that aim to have deeper impact on a particular issue. The Foundation also has a programme of support for NGOs in India.

The Arts programme Open Grants scheme encourages innovative ways for people in the UK to enjoy, experience and be involved in the arts. Arts programme Special Initiatives include ArtWorks: Developing Practice in Participatory Settings, Our Museum: Communities and Museums as Active Partners, the PHF Awards for Artists, and the Breakthrough Fund.

Detailed information on the Foundation's work, and case studies related to past grants, can be found on the Foundation's website, [www.phf.org.uk](http://www.phf.org.uk)

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