

Creative Case NORTH

Creative Case NORTH 2012-2015

A Review: Executive Summary



June 2015

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Thinking Practice

THINKING
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1. Background

The Creative Case is the Arts Council's approach to diversity and equality, setting out how diversity and equality can enrich the arts for artists, audiences and our wider society. The Creative Case argues that art placed in the margins through structural barriers and antiquated and exclusive approaches has to be brought to the centre of our culture and valued accordingly.

Creative Case NORTH is a programme of sector led activity exploring the Creative Case for Diversity, developed by a consortium of arts and cultural organisations convened by Arts Council England from across the North area. Partners include Alchemy, ARC Stockton, Artlink, BALTIC, Contact Theatre, Contemporary Visual Arts Network, Freedom Festival, GemArts, STAY, ZENDEH.

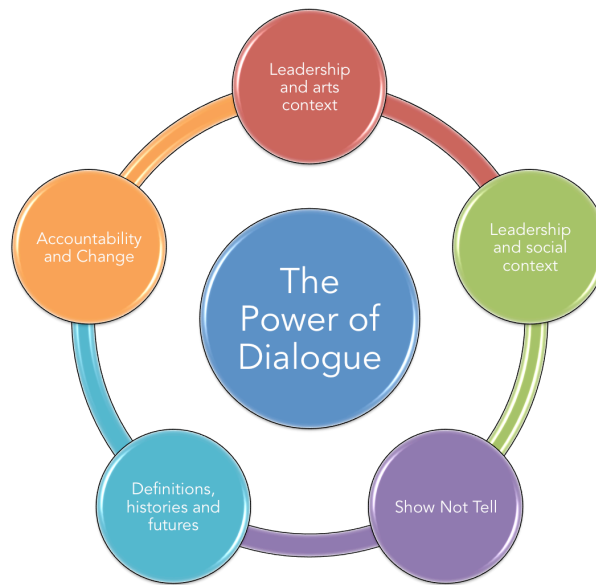
The consortium commissioned Thinking Practice to review the programme between 2012 and 2015, identify themes and achievements and to inform planning for future activity.

2. Creative Case NORTH activity

Creative Case NORTH evolved from 3 separate regional strands of activity in 2012-2013, in response to Arts Council's launch of The Creative Case for Diversity. Activity since 2013 has been distributed across the North. This included:

- **2012-2013:** 3 programmes in Yorkshire, North West and North East, including events ranging from artist provocations, workshops and open space discussions, to presentation of innovative artistic work, and strategic research and development.
- **2013-2014:** 2 'seeding' events to share best practice in partnership working, and explore practice through shared enquiry. Creative Case NORTH Residencies seeded 4 partnerships. 93 individuals engaged over 4 months, including representation from 65 National Portfolio Organisations and 3 Major Partner Museums.
- **2014-2015:** Dialogues (practical peer to peer sessions), 6 Explorations or Residencies creating partnerships across art form/museum, spectrum of scale, and level of experience, and 2 North Area 'Gatherings' to share learning and explore ambitions. 137 individuals engaged, 20 in more than one aspect of the programme.

3. Themes from the programme and review



The Power of Dialogue

Creative Case NORTH enabled people to come together to have powerful conversations or dialogues. It has gradually been able to move most people from simply meeting, sharing and building rapport to a dialogue in which they explore ideas and experiences together. A generative dialogue where mutual understanding can be developed from expanded individual understandings, and where new ideas can be generated does not, however, happen for everyone at the same event. What some people feel was retreading old ground could be revelatory for others, what frustrating for some, a new experience for others.

Contributions from big, small, diverse-led, and mainstream were all necessary to the best dialogue. Some feel more could be done by some 'big' NPOs to demonstrate their commitment to the Creative Case. Action, adapted decision-making and partnership working were seen by many as necessary 'end results' for the conversations, no matter how interesting they had been conceptually.

Accountability and Change

The kind of 'ideal dialogue' Creative Case NORTH aspires to in some of its strands can be difficult or even impossible if inequalities in power are not considered and acknowledged. Although Creative Case NORTH could never remove all tensions around these issues it has created spaces in which people's sense of responsibility and accountability come into play. The one-to-one accountability of arts practitioners to each other is central to this – as is encouraging more people to feel it. This includes, but goes beyond, the accountability Arts Council expects of its NPOs to something essentially more

personal – to do with people not just plans. Despite the frustration at the pace of change felt by some, what was described as ‘the different urgency of responsibilities’ for different organisations can be seen as coming together more effectively over time, although much remains to be done.

Leadership and the social context for the Creative Case

Political and social change appears to be an issue ‘front of mind’ for many people working to advance the Creative Case. At a practical level, changes to welfare regimes and work support are reported as making it more difficult for disabled people to engage in culture and to play a full role within the workforce. Reductions in public spending and a greater emphasis on personal provision, often through paying for services individually, and a concomitant shift for arts organisations toward earned income are resulting in what one person felt amounted ‘infrastructural depletion’. The Creative Case needed, many felt, to pay greater attention to this context.

Leadership and arts policy context

Creative Case NORTH is sector-led, working closely with Arts Council. There was a strongly positive response to this approach. A facilitative rather than directive approach from Arts Council had allowed for a level of collaboration that has helped create the conditions for dialogue, experimentation and reflection leadership from Arts Council around the Creative Case remains vital and should not be allowed to reduce in visibility. Clear messaging from Arts Council around expectations, definitions and accountability are still important, especially in encouraging those less engaged with Creative Case NORTH to properly deliver on their Creative Case commitments.

Definitions, histories and futures

There is a persistent fear of tokenism, labeling and box-ticking in relation to diversity and the groups referred to in under that heading. Related to this is a sense that standard definitions are changing and shifting. The intersections of different protected characteristics become more crucial to explore and tackle through partnerships and artistic projects. More could be done using critical discussion and audience-facing promotion of work around definitions, histories and the future for diverse groups.

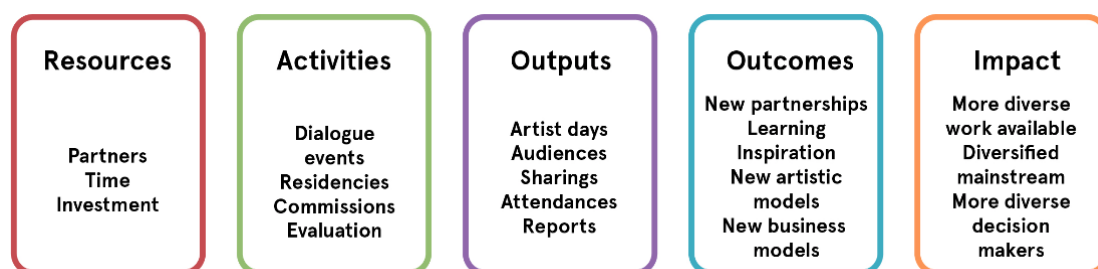
Artists can be expert in avoiding being labeled. One statement resonated: ‘I diversify my practice. I don’t diversify who I am.’ This combination of retaining identity whilst diversifying activity could be central to the way forward for the Creative Case.

The power of 'show not tell'

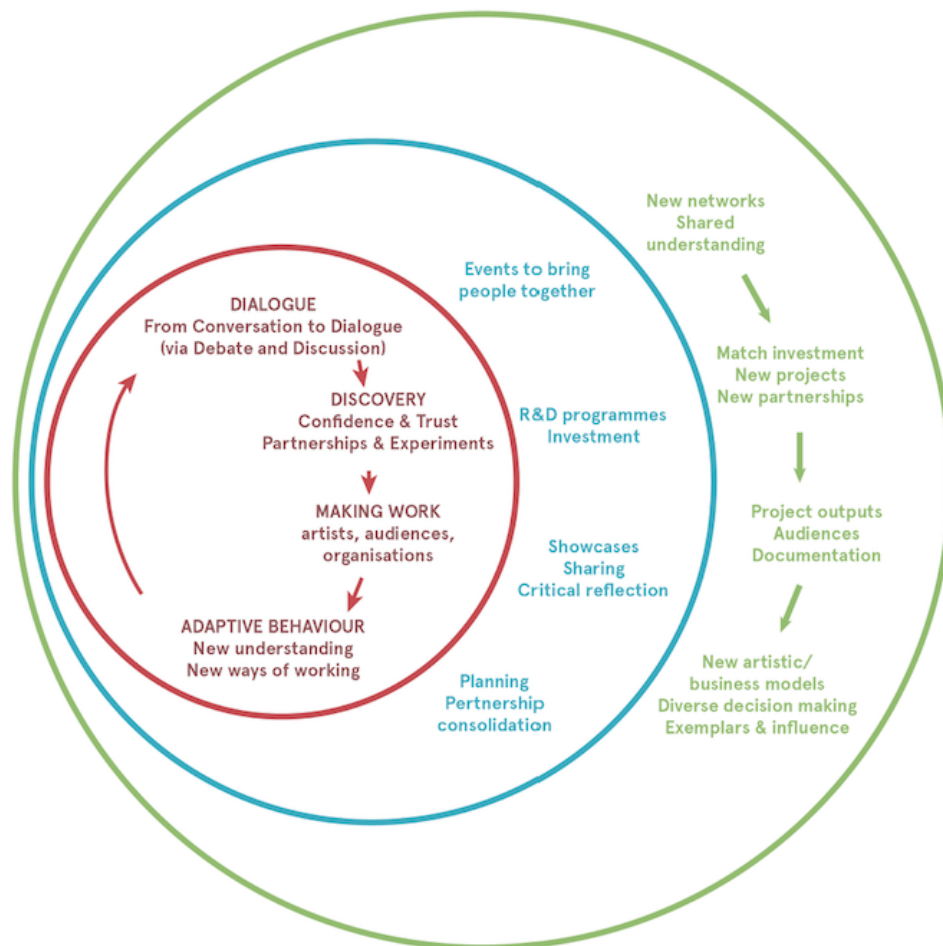
Creative Case NORTH events and projects have been able to demonstrate approaches, to develop vocabularies and ways of working together, artists with curators, director and organisations, in different settings, and to interrogate those. This has helped generate the ability to work differently. The 'show not tell' approach has been powerful in building confidence. Over time there are less frequent references to fear and nervousness, and more positive references to risk, collaboration and making work. The sharing model has, some felt, been more successful in communicating the creative *and* business case for diversity. There is a clear opportunity to share and showcase the model Creative Case NORTH has developed. There was appetite for this to be shared across other Arts Council 'areas' and with audiences nationally and internationally.

4. The Creative Case NORTH model

Creative Case NORTH has developed into a clear logic model about how investment of resources into activity leads to outputs, and then potentially to impact:



Survey respondents suggest strong indicators of achievement in some of the initial outcome areas, in terms of fresh thinking and new partnerships. Views were more mixed, however, when considering effects on planning and decision-making within organisations. Most people feel progress is being made, and that work so far has laid promising foundations for future development. Some feel there are signs of change within the 'big' NPOs and MPMs, but others remain frustrated at the pace of change. Many people suggested this is a long-term process and it is relatively early days for this new approach.



A process has evolved, set out in the diagram above, which has potential to make significant change over time. This 'Creative Case North Cycle' begins in the process of dialogue between the widest possible range of people, then moves into discovery and making work together. Reflection upon that work shapes adaptive behaviour – new models and ways of working which lead to the kinds of change the Creative Case describes.

5. Recommendations

Our recommendations are clustered around three themes:

- Spreading the story and model of Creative Case NORTH to encourage others to become involved
- Broadening the reach of the work, especially within the broader cultural sector and creative industries and internationalism, and involve other partners and funders in the work
- Improve and deepen the work, exploring different models for events and projects to create long-term change, involving more NPOs

1. Spread the story and the model

- 1.1. The communications messages around Creative Case NORTH should be further clarified, with a particular eye to accessible language being used
- 1.2. Advocacy and think pieces about the Creative Case NORTH model as described here should be developed and placed in appropriate journals and websites. Curated digital content should be developed as part of this work.
- 1.3. Nominated people from the Consortium should actively seek opportunities to talk about the Creative Case NORTH process, model and experience so far at conferences and gatherings.
- 1.4. Creative Case NORTH Consortium members and partners should work with Arts Council to develop national and area events setting out their model and experience

2. Broaden the reach

- 2.1. Creative Case NORTH should seek to involve key allies within the museums and libraries sectors, and within the wider creative industries, broadening the membership of the Consortium and the organisations involved in activities.
- 2.2. Creative Case NORTH should open itself up to, and contribute to, international dialogue around diversity and creativity. Discussions should be had in the context of the Arts Council and British Council's partnership on internationalism, and with other international networks such as IETM and ISPA.
- 2.3. Exemplars of creative diversity should be explored beyond the arts and culture, using examples of good practice from business, public services and the voluntary sector to broaden the conversation.
- 2.4. Creative Case NORTH should introduce its work (building on activity under the first area of recommendations) to other funders with an interest in diversity and culture.

3. Improve and deepen

- 3.1. Arts Council should work with the Creative Case NORTH Consortium to develop a funding package for a further 3 years of activity. Planning for Creative Case NORTH as a whole and for individual activities such as residencies and dialogues should bear in mind the length of time taken to effect change. Funding should be raised and provided on the basis of interventions that support long-term adaptive change rather than one-off projects. The length of residencies should be reviewed.

Consideration should be given to the availability of second stage funding for some ideas that have particular promise.

- 3.2. Additional efforts should be made to engage NPOs who have not engaged with Creative Case NORTH, especially at a senior level. Consortium members and Arts Council should agree a list and approach strategy to ensure all NPO have engaged by the end of the next phase of activity.
- 3.3. Different models for events and involvement of artists should be explored, with a particular view to accessibility for disabled people. The language used around Creative Case NORTH should also be reviewed in this context, as per Recommendation 1.1.
- 3.4. Creative Case NORTH should seek to work with an HEI institution or researcher to provide consistent evaluation interrogation and support through its programme.

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If you would like to read the full evaluation report, please contact Louise Taylor at Creative Case NORTH by emailing north@zendeh.com.

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