

Insights and Approaches to Inclusive Practice in Arts Organisations



Findings from Explorers II

***Explorers II* Project Evaluation Report, 2024** **Lucy Keany (lead author) and Kara Jarrold (contributor)**

Summary

Through the lens of the *Explorers II* project, this report focuses on what was learnt about inclusive practice within arts organisations. It highlights current challenges within the sector and how improvements could be made. The document is designed to share learning and also provide ways for organisations to initiate and develop new approaches to inclusive practice.

Explorers II was a UK-wide visual arts project (2021- 24) focused on challenging systems of exclusion through promoting the rights and representation of neurodivergent artists¹. The project sought to address the omission of neuro minorities, as visual artists, participants and audiences, through distinct partnerships and programmes designed to generate meaningful, long-term change.

Our approach to the evaluation focused on learning more about the organisational systems and approaches which enable and inhibit equity, visibility and representation for neurodivergent artists; and where *Explorers II* managed to make meaningful interventions into these systems. We chose to take a smaller more in-depth view, engaging multiple times with three project partner organisations and three artists to gain greater insight into the learning and adaptive practices that took place.

Findings from the evaluation call attention to the many persistent reasons that neurodivergent and disabled people are largely excluded from the arts. We hope that by highlighting the attitudes and conditions that both impede and foster inclusion, organisations can reflect on alternative ways of designing and delivering their programmes and operations.

The document is split into 3 chapters. Chapter 1 provides background and context to *Explorers II* and sets out the aims of the evaluation and its methods. Chapter 2 *What are the Challenges?* details what was found to be inhibiting inclusive practice within organisations, highlighting adverse attitudes, hierarchies and models of working, which are present across the sector.

Finally, chapter 3 *Focusing on Change* poses two concepts to improve equity, visibility and representation for neurodivergent and disabled artists. These are an *Ecology of Support*, which conceptualises the relationships, resources, organisational attributes and approaches that organisations and artists are likely to require in order to flourish; and a *Programme of Entry Points*, which is predicated on the need for diverse approaches to engagement and programming, appropriate for diverse populations.

¹ The term neurodivergent 'means to have a brain functioning style which *diverges* or differs significantly from the dominant societal standards of 'normal' (Walker, 2023)'

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CHAPTER 1: Background to *Explorers II*

Introducing *Explorers II*

Taking place between 2021 - 2024, *Explorers II* was a national arts programme led by Project Art Works. The project brought together a consortium of partner organisations to explore ways to increase the visibility and representation of neurodivergent artists through devising equitable processes.

The project centred on developing artists, cultural organisations and the sector. *Explorers II* set out to:

- Create platforms for neurodivergent artists.
- Create pathways for cultural organisations to deepen their understanding and commit to inviting neurodivergent people and carers into their spaces.
- Work towards changing the discourse of how neurodivergent artists are positioned and described in culture.

Explorers II followed the first iteration of *Explorers* which took place between 2017 - 2020. In total, the *Explorers* project ran for 7 years (2017 to 2024 with a two-year gap during the pandemic) and was funded by Arts Council England and Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

The first 3 years of the project were evaluated by Phyllida Shaw in a separate report (See Appendix III: further resources/reading).

Project Art Works, founded in 1997, is an arts organisation collaborating with people with complex support needs, families and circles of support. Working from their studio base in Hastings and also in temporary studio set-ups during off-site projects and workshops, Project Art Works facilitate personalised creative pathways, providing the conditions for a broad range of autonomous and collaborative practices with neurodivergent artists, who take part on their own terms.

The organisation's practice continues to respond to the functional and ethical structures of diligence and care, respecting self-determination and privacy whilst working towards greater visibility and understanding of neurodiversity in culture.

'We don't necessarily position ourselves as an organisation promoting the work of neurodivergent artists. We're much more about working with communities and using cultural spaces as a catalyst for social change.' Tim Corrigan, Creative Director, Project Art Works

Explorers II objectives: equity, visibility and representation

Explorers II aimed to develop equitable approaches within arts organisations as a way of increasing the visibility and representation of neurodivergent artists. Equity recognises inherent differences between individuals, and therefore allocates specific resources and personalised opportunities needed to allow people starting from different places to reach an equal outcome.

By creating the right conditions for artists to be included, the project proposed that there would be greater visibility of artists, which would in turn result in greater representation. The project moved between the micro, promoting equitable approaches within organisations, to the macro, challenging cultural sector biases, in order to achieve its goal of greater inclusion of neurodivergent artists.

Through deploying this formula for change, *Explorers II* sought to counter dominant and wide-spread models, which persistently exclude the views and perspectives of neurodivergent artists, particularly those who may not identify as artists, self-advocate or use verbal language to communicate.

'What we want is equal representation, equity and space within cultural programming for this area of different states of living to be seen and made visible. Kate Adams, Artist Director & CEO, Project Art Works.

'it's about positively impacting communities... improving people's outcomes and social care... connecting people, walking beside people. All that work actually is really what creates change for people, for individuals, for families.' Tim Corrigan

Devising Explorers II

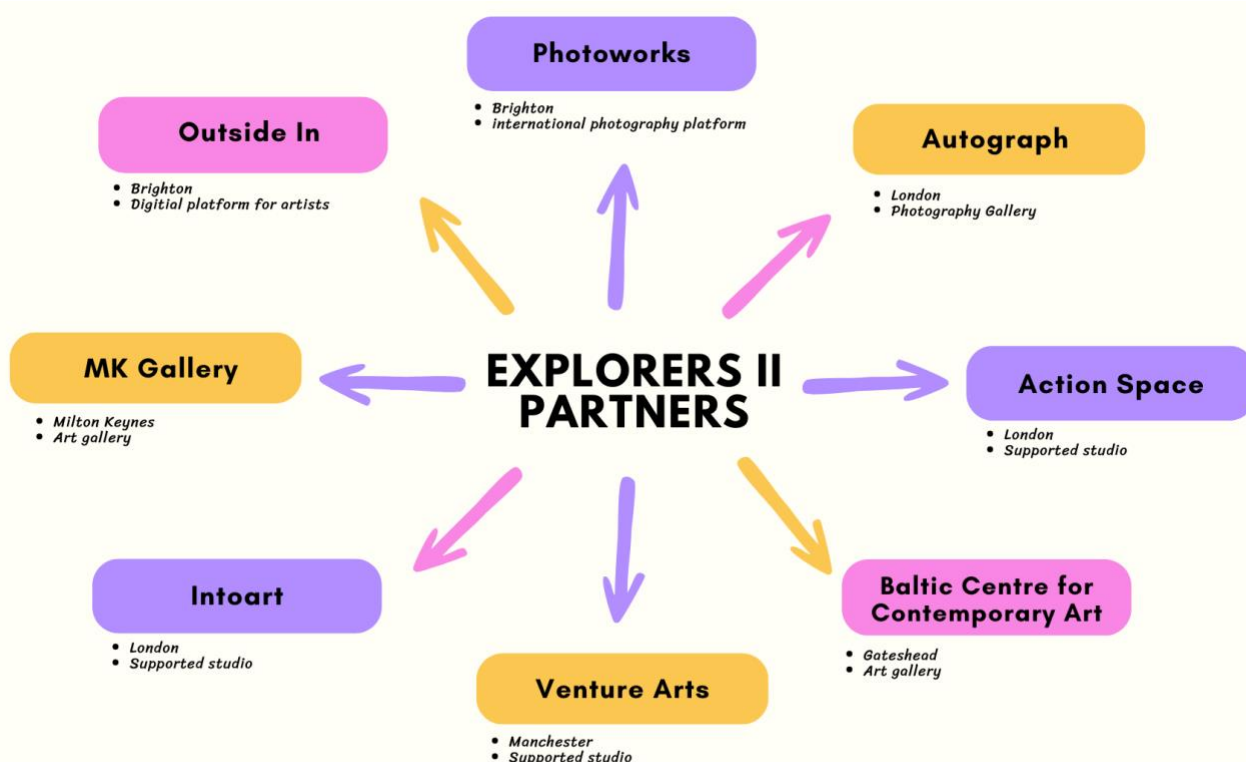
Project Art Works devised and led the *Explorers II* project, initiating the partnerships with arts organisations, which were key to rolling out the vision for change, and building on the previous iteration of the project. The project was forged from a mutual set of values and collective ambition to raise the profile of neurodivergent artists. Framed as an ecosystem, and inspired by social justice campaigns, *Explorers II* hoped to pull together silos of action into a unified goal to greater effect.

For almost a decade Project Art Works has been developing a methodology for collaborating with institutions in order to create awareness about neurodiversity and disability. Building on this work, Project Art Works sought to collaborate more deeply with a group of partners so that these organisations could learn from one another, taking successful methods forward to initiate change more widely.

Explorers II partners

The eight *Explorers II* partners consisted of three supported studios and five art organisations/platforms spread across England. Many of the partners had existing relationships with Project Art Works and had worked together on *Explorers*.

The eight visual arts partners employ a range of delivery and output models including: exhibitions, commissions, digital platforms, learning activities, studio practice development and events/talks.



What is a supported studio?

Supported studios provide an environment for neurodivergent and disabled people to explore and develop their creative interests alongside facilitators and mentors. Studios, which usually operate on a smaller, more bespoke scale, sometimes work in collaboration with larger organisations, curators and galleries to profile artists' work. They also hold archives of artists' work, fulfilling an important function in promoting greater visibility of neurodivergent and disabled artists.

Discussions with Project Art Works indicated that supported studios are often overlooked by mainstream arts spaces and this was something *Explorers II* was keen to address.

'I think one of the outputs of the Explorers project as a whole is a much higher profile for supported studio organisations and the need for them and the need for mainstream cultural programmers and institutions to work more closely with them.'
Kate Adams

Supported studios

Focus on providing studio practice development time with mentors

Curation support and archiving of artists' work

Focused participant group (i.e. disabled adults)

Links created with artists' families / carers / support networks

Often long-term relationship built with artists

In-depth understanding of artists' engagement needs

Understanding of social care & legal frameworks around care

Established links to communities of interest

Engaging in a longer term process of cultural advocacy with curators, commissioners and stakeholders

A note on describing *Explorers II* artists

'Neurodivergent artists' is the term Project Art Works used in their funding and partnership documents to describe the artists they wanted to support and spotlight through *Explorers II*. The term neurodivergent 'means to have a brain functioning style which *diverges* or differs significantly from the dominant societal standards of 'normal' (Walker, 2023)', and the idea that there are varied cognitive differences within populations. Although there is no clear universal definition, in recent years, 'neurodivergent' is commonly used to describe people with autism, ADHD, dyslexia and dyspraxia.

For the purposes of the evaluation we refer to 'neurodivergent and disabled people' in order to reflect the diversity of artists involved in the project, and the common barriers that prevent access to participation in cultural life.

Neurodiversity is the biological fact that there is a natural diversity of human minds..."infinite different ways of thinking, learning, communicating and processing and responding to information among humans" (Chapman, 2021).

Neurodivergent (ND) means to have a brain functioning style which diverges or differs significantly from the dominant societal standards of 'normal' (Walker, 2023).

Neurodiverse is a word used to describe a group of people with different brain functioning styles.

Neuronormative refers to the idea that societal norms, structures and values are centred around the most common brain functioning styles (the neuro-majority or neurotypical).

Neurotypical someone who's style of processing, thinking, behaving conforms with the cultural and societal expectations

Neurotype a style of brain functioning e.g. autistic, ADHD, neurotypical

Evaluation focus

Explorers II involved eight partner organisations from across the UK. Each partner delivered a programme of work agreed with Project Art Works; with artist outputs spanning residencies, mentoring, exhibitions and publishing.

In consultation with Project Art Works, we proposed that the evaluation would focus on highlighting the *organisational systems and approaches which enable and inhibit equity, visibility and representation for neurodivergent artists*; and where *Explorers II* managed to make *meaningful interventions* into these systems. Project Art Works favoured a document which could be used for further stakeholder knowledge exchange and wider sector learning.

In order to better understand the process of intervention and potential change, we decided to take a more in-depth view of *Explorers II* by conducting fieldwork with a small sample of three partners and artists. This was with the intention of gaining greater insight into their experiences; and allowing more time for bespoke person-centred consultations with neurodivergent and disabled artists.

The fieldwork focussed on three areas of enquiry:

<p>1. Recruitment* of the artist and the pathway to accessing the opportunity.</p>	<p>What was the recruitment process for the artist? How was this pathway adapted by the organisation? What support was put in place for artists to engage in the process? How was the experience for the organisation and the artist?</p>
<p>2. Process of practice development.</p>	<p>What ongoing support was provided for the artist? What was learnt about engagement barriers? Any evidence of organisational practice/ system change? What impact has the opportunity had on the artist and their development?</p>
<p>3. Evidence of longer-term impacts on organisational and artistic practice.</p>	<p>What happens next? Any new opportunities for artists? Have any changes as a result of <i>Explorers II</i> been embedded in organisational systems and/or future planning? What were the most effective approaches at raising the visibility and representation of artists - how will these be sustained?</p>

* The term 'recruitment' is intended as a catch-all to describe a variety of ways of coming into contact with artists and involving them in a programme/project, for instance via a partner, an open call, or an invitation.

Methodology

Brief	Met with Project Art Works to discuss project aims & objectives Created evaluation plan designed to understand organisational experience of what helps or hinders the delivery of inclusive practice
Sampling	Created sampling framework to select 3 organisations with a range of characteristics/experiences, including: Previous experience of working inclusively Type, size and remit of organisation Planned activities with artists falling within evaluation period
Baseline	Collected baseline data from 3 organisations via questionnaire and introductory interviews Developed fieldwork schedule including 3 x interviews with organisations and 3 x interviews with artist/s each focussing on a specific theme
Fieldwork	Conducted 3 x fieldwork interviews with 3 partner organisations (9 interviews) Interviews or observations with 4 artists (7 fieldwork activities) Interviews with Project Art Works (3 interviews)
Analysis	Undertook a thematic analysis of interview transcripts focussing on key issues affecting change and delivery of projects within organisations and what helps or hinders their commitment and ability to deliver inclusive practice
Reporting	Created a summary report of key findings and issues elicited from fieldwork Report is intended for use by organisations and the sector as an advocacy report on ways forward for inclusive practice

Sampled organisations

Three organisations: Photoworks, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art and Intoart were selected in collaboration with Project Art Works to gather a range of experiences across a mix of organisation types. It was important to the evaluation that each organisation was working in depth with an artist during the evaluation period between February 2023 - April 2024.

Intoart	Photoworks	Baltic
Supported studio based in London	National remit for photography but no physical venue	Contemporary arts centre in Gateshead
Founded in 2000	Founded in 1995	Opened in 2002
Provides a full-time studio programme spanning art, design and craft	Provides an international platform for photography via an online and in-person programme	Offers a year round free programme of art, talks, performance and activities
Intoart is a pioneering visual arts organisation championing its founding vision for people with learning disabilities to be visible, equal, and established artists and designers	Photoworks champions photography for everyone. Their programme brings new experiences to audiences and opens up new ways to experience photography	Baltic creates and produces exhibitions, activities and opportunities that explore understanding of the world through diverse contemporary art by artists from across the world
Average audience exhibition reach pa: c16,000	Average audience exhibition reach pa: 200,000-300,000	Average audience exhibition reach pa: 300,000-400,000

What did sampled organisations deliver?

Each partner designed their own project plan and outputs for Explorers II, which involved multiple and varied activities. Within the scope of this evaluation we focused on one element of each partner's delivery.

Involving artists:

Each of the organisations worked with neurodivergent and/or disabled artists during the course of the project and we wanted to include their testimonies and experiences within the evaluation. We were flexible about how best to capture this insight and consulted with artists and organisations about their preferred method of engagement, including: mentor-led sessions, interviews in person, by zoom, observations of their working practices, creation of art-based feedback, and viewing/discussing portfolios. We chose to employ a mix of observational and interview approaches, where artists shared their experiences and showed us their work in the studio independently or with their studio mentor.

'I think that we saw that success isn't something that you can describe through those normalised ways of measuring an art project. Actually, it needs to be much more individualised, and that individualised approach to the evaluation does actually mirror how we think about the individualised way that people engage in and benefit from the project; and that it would be completely different for each person and each organisation as well.' Martin Swan, Off-site Programme Manager, Project Art Works

Intoart's project

Intoart runs a full-time studio programme in Peckham, spanning arts, craft and design, for people with learning disabilities. For the *Explorers II* project Intoart set individual long-term goals with four Intoart artists that are yet to have a solo presentation of their work in the public domain: Nancy Clayton, Lisa Contucci, Uduehi Imienwanrin and Lisa Trim. The activity focused on supporting the production of substantial new bodies of work.

By supporting these artists to develop personal research interests and material expertise through comprehensive studio-based education and facilitation, the focus was on artists gaining the opportunity to work in and beyond the studio, to design, develop and realise their own artistic programmes, via collaborations and opportunities. www.intoart.org.uk

Each artist was offered a range of opportunities and tools to develop their practice:

1. Weekly studio time
2. Access to new material expertise and techniques
3. 1-2-1 support with an artist-facilitator
4. Professional development, such as gallery visits
5. Photographic and video documentation of works made

'Intoart aims to shift the perception of art and design made by artists with learning disabilities from solely 'therapeutic activity' towards investing in meaningful, useful production, whose outcomes rival - in ambition, conceptual relevance and aesthetic pleasure - any artists' workshop/collective.

Investing in artists with learning disabilities to develop work on such an ambitious scale places them in a strong position to bring about long-term change and impact on the diversity of artists that are included in contemporary art and design programming on a local, regional, national and international platform.' Sam Jones, Programme Director, Intoart

Lisa Contucci

The evaluation focused on learning more about the experience of one of these artists, Lisa Contucci.

Lisa has been attending the Intoart studio since 2018. She learnt about Intoart via a person that she knew who was attending and consequently decided to try it herself. Having enjoyed the experience, she decided to continue. There is no prerequisite to have an existing creative practice or portfolio to join Intoart; instead, an autonomous practice often emerges once people start attending the studio.

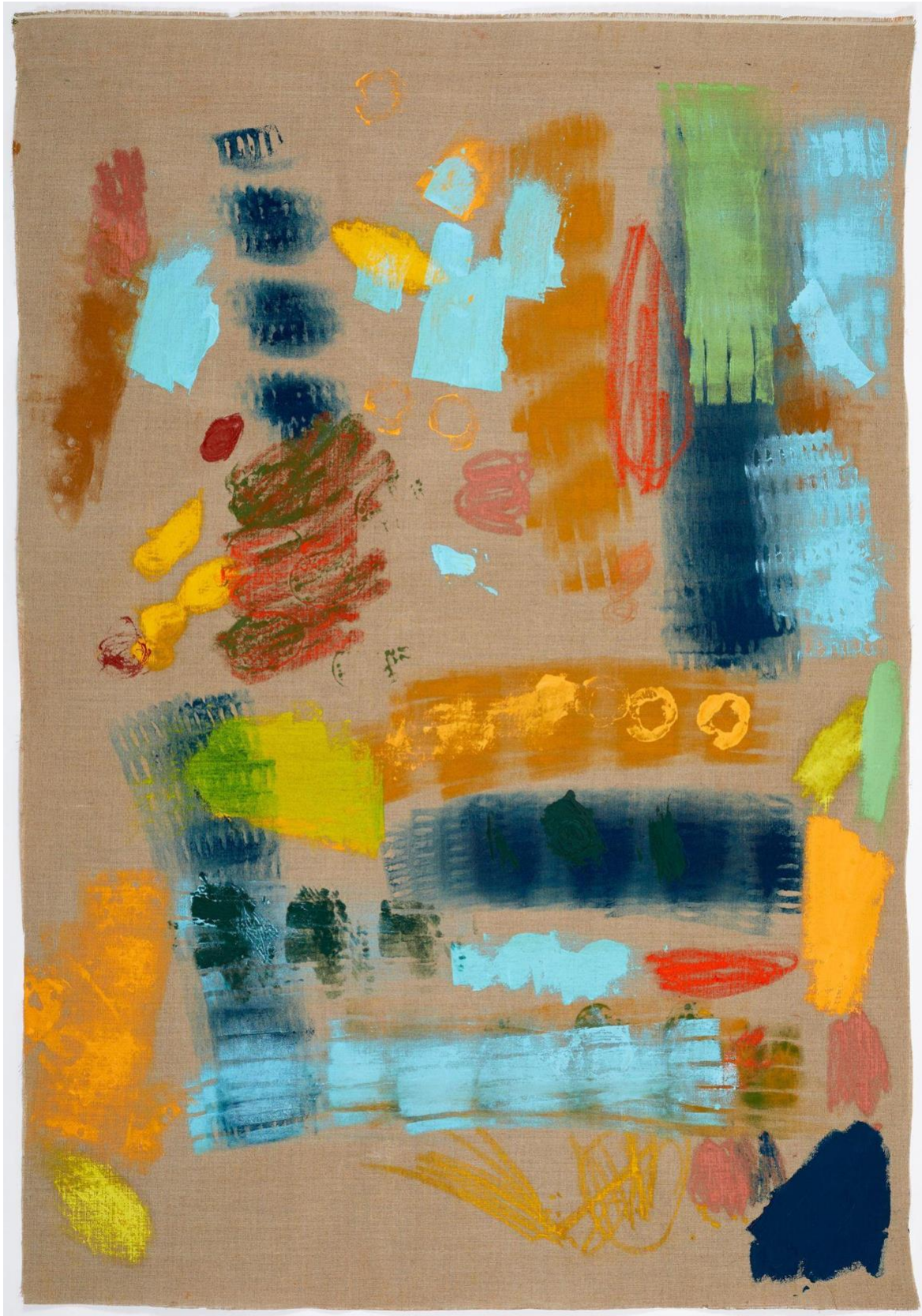
In her concertina sketchbooks Lisa Contucci tests out combinations of drawing and painting materials in continuous spreads that explore colour and form. She then develops this coherent visual language further in her paintings which range widely in scale and medium, spanning works on paper, canvas and wood, mixing materials including acrylic paint, oil

pastel, plaster and marble dust applied with brushes, drawing implements, tools and found objects that she adapts for painting. <https://intoart.org.uk/artist/lisa-contucci/>

Lisa Contucci working in the Intoart Studio 2023:







Lisa Contucci, *Journey to Nonna's*, 2023



Lisa Contucci, *Textures of the Landscape*, 2023

To learn more about Lisa's experience, we observed Lisa working in the studio with her artist-facilitator Kelly Frank, and at a later date met with Lisa to discuss the work she had made.

Evaluator observation whilst watching Lisa work with Kelly Frank:

'Lisa enjoys the sounds of making her work. Kelly narrates what Lisa is doing. Lisa seems happy and engaged, at times joyful.'

'Lisa is asked what tool she wants to choose and chooses freely from the selection. Kelly rotates the canvas for her, explaining what she is doing as she does it. Lisa doesn't wait for Kelly's instruction – she does as she likes with the tool.'

During *Explorers II* Lisa has been experimenting with a wide range of materials to expand her practice. Working in the Intoart studio with new material resources she has added plaster, clay, marble dust, marbling and print making to her painting vocabulary. Her paintings on wooden board, linen and plaster have been made in response to extensive research visits to museums including the National Gallery.

Lisa has an array of tools she uses to make her paintings, these include pebbles, shells, brushes/bristles, afro hair comb, rollers, bone, driftwood and a masher. Her tools produce unique textures and patterns. Lisa joyfully scrapes and taps while she works, exploring the physical and auditory potential of her tools.

During an Intoart trip to the National Gallery, Lisa took photos of the museum environment. She interpreted the gallery in her own way, to focus on the marble, ornate frames and colours in the paintings. She photographed elements of paintings that she was interested in such as an apple and pear, inspiring her to print with apple and cucumber in the studio. Similarly, Lisa's trip to Rome and photographs from her personal albums also influenced her new body of work.

Photoworks' project

Photoworks is an organisation championing photography 'for everyone'; and have been collaborating with neurodivergent artists since 2016. www.photoworks.org.uk

For *Explorers II* Photoworks delivered:

- An inclusive commission, called *In Focus*, for a neurodivergent artist to create a new body of work for a solo exhibition at Aspex Portsmouth
- Five inclusive photography clubs at Aspex, led by artist Kate Watson
- Training for support workers and a suite of digital resources supporting 'everyday creativity' led by artist Becky Warnock
- Five artist micro-commissions

Photoworks identified early-on that developing inclusive commissioning and their audience development strategy are two organisational ambitions for change. The commissioning process at Photoworks is focused on supporting artists, often over a year-long period to make new work. The process is slow and in-depth and enables Photoworks to learn and adapt to specific needs; creating a bespoke process which is designed to appropriately support the artist.

For the evaluation we focused on their delivery of the *In Focus Commission* awarded to neurodivergent artist Lauren Joy Kennett. The recruitment of Lauren was carried out via an open call. The application process included a video/audio submission option, the chance to discuss with staff before applying and to have a home studio visit during the process. Upon selection, Lauren filled out an access rider for Photoworks, which guided the team in how best to support and communicate with her. Lauren worked from her home studio receiving 1-2-1 mentoring online/phone with Photoworks curator Julia Bunnemann to discuss ideas, general progress and challenges.

'This second edition [of Explorers] has led us to redesign our open call system to be more accessible, and to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment. Explorers has helped us build deeper connections between curating and learning at Photoworks. And from a curatorial perspective, it's through learning engagement that we try to broaden our audience, but also create pathways for people who may not have traditionally had access to the art world.'

'We have shifted towards a more bespoke relationship and understanding of each of the artists we work with as every individual faces different challenges and a standardised approach is unsustainable and overly general. This shift in approach is rooted in our values and ongoing learning, which means that it will continue to pursue a better way of working beyond the commissions of neurodivergent artists specifically.' Photoworks

Lauren Joy Kennett

Lauren Joy Kennett is an autobiographical artist exploring love and loss, working across photography, hand cut collage and text.

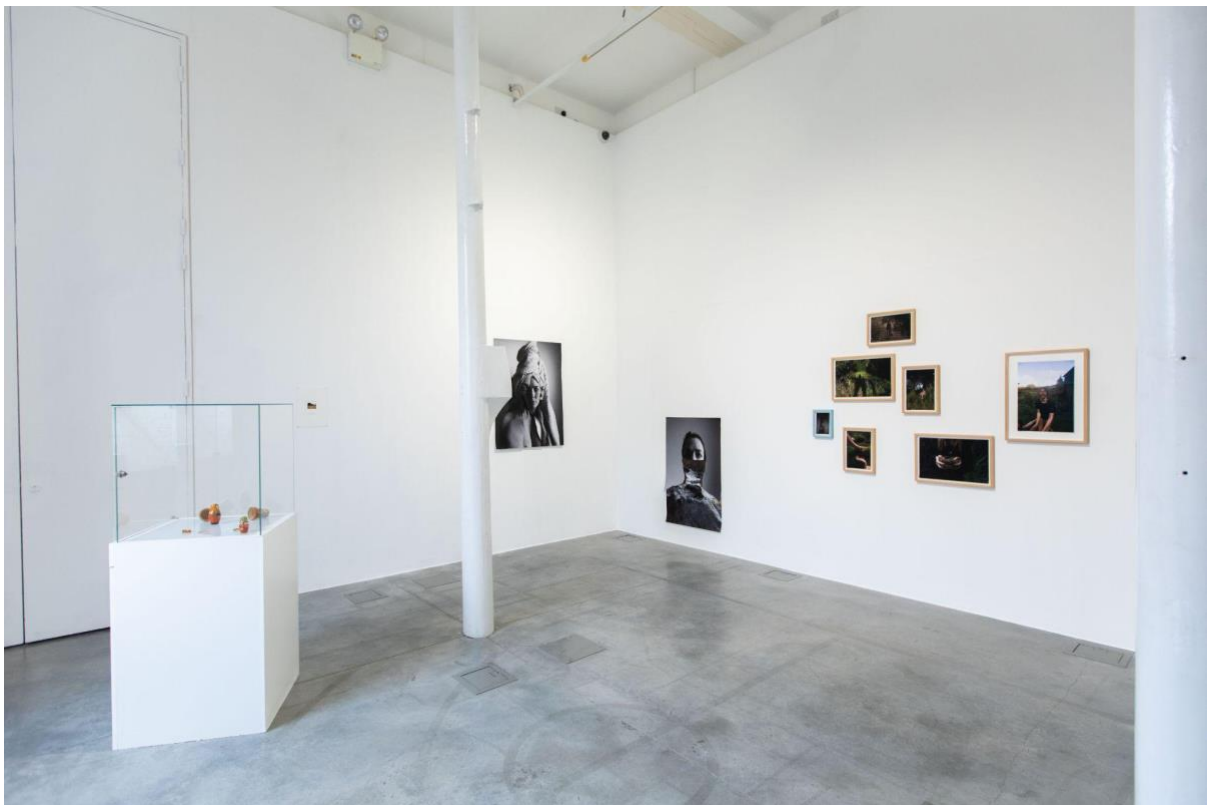
'Being Autistic makes it hard to process my thoughts and emotions and I discovered photography as a tool to help me understand what I am going through. I've been documenting my personal life and relationships over the past six years, capturing the physical and emotional challenges I faced on my journey to becoming a mother. I work with photocopy prints and a scalpel to combine intimate black and white portraits with symbolic landscapes, to give form to the unconscious. Exploring themes of love and loneliness, my work tells a story of sex, abortion, miscarriage and mental illness.' Lauren Joy Kennett www.laurenjoykennett.com/photography



Lauren Joy Kennett. Still from Artist Film by Piotr Sell.



Lauren Joy Kennett. Still from Artist Film by Piotr Sell.



Sorry I'm Not Sorry, Lauren Joy Kennett, 2024. Exhibition installation image by Phoebe Wingrove



Sorry I'm Not Sorry, Lauren Joy Kennett, 2024. Exhibition installation images by Phoebe Wingrove



Sorry About Me, Lauren Joy Kennett, 2024

To learn more about Lauren's experience of the commission and exhibition, we had three meetings with her, two online and one in person, which involved looking at work in progress.

During *Explorers II* Lauren developed a new body of work, which explores her experience of living with undiagnosed autism; *Sorry I'm Not Sorry* was presented as a solo show at Aspex Portsmouth. Through autobiographical and archive photography, Lauren used cutting and collaging techniques to explore self-discovery, confronting life's traumas and experiences that have shaped her existence. *Sorry I'm Not Sorry* not only reflects Lauren's personal story but also resonates with the wider late-discovered autistic community.

These fragmented and reassembled self-portraits serve as a visceral expression of the autistic experience. They capture the frustration of perpetual misunderstanding and difficulty to articulate inner turmoil; as well as associated loneliness and effort to conform. Using old family photographs, she reconstructs and reinterprets childhood memories; a process of dismantling and piecing together her identity to understand her past.

Lauren described to us how the commission had 'changed her life'. Particularly, because it came about at the same time as she was working through her 'autism discovery'. It provided a platform to explore difficult past experiences and feelings of failure, and how through expressing these in her work she has been able to come to terms with the challenges she has faced.

'[the commission] has been so important to my understanding of myself and acceptance of myself, and it is just so nice that the thing that's enabled me to not feel like a failure anymore has been getting to talk about all the things that made me feel [different]' Lauren Joy Kennett

Her experience was overwhelmingly positive. The sensitive care Photoworks extended to Lauren, meant that the small, nuanced changes they made to support and adapt to her needs led to important impacts.

'I felt quite able to unmask actually, which is a big thing because I don't really feel in control of that sort of thing still.' Lauren Joy Kennett

Culminating with an exhibition opportunity was also significant, as it enabled Lauren to view herself differently and use her 'voice' in a way she hadn't been able to before:

'I feel confident, I feel really supported. I feel understood, I feel accepted ... [I felt like] maybe no one's going to come [to the exhibition] but loads of people came and I had a really nice feeling where I felt like nobody knows who I am, but I do feel more understood than I've ever felt before.'

'And then the day after the opening, we went back to the exhibition and I was in the space on my own and it just felt completely my voice. It felt like it had spoken exactly the way that I would've wanted, and that was just the best feeling. I feel like I haven't had a voice.' Lauren Joy Kennett

Baltic's project

Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art creates and produces exhibitions, activities and opportunities that explore understanding of the world through diverse contemporary art by artists from across the world. www.baltic.art

Baltic hoped that being part of *Explorers II* would help them build long-term relationships with neurodivergent artists and makers, nurture local talent, as well as make their building more accessible and welcoming to neurodivergent people and their carers.

For *Explorers II* Baltic delivered:

- A commission for an exhibition called *Residential*, where Project Art Works showcased the work of more than fifty neurodivergent artists, comprising an installation of paintings and a new film exploring artmaking and speaking and non-speaking communication.
- Regular drawing and painting workshops for invited community partners, led by Project Art Works in a temporary studio at the Baltic.
- An onsite residency for two neurodivergent artists, adapted from an existing residency programme called Foundation Club, which provides young artists with the time and space to research new ideas, make new work, develop new networks, create meaningful exchanges and interact with the artistic community in the North East.

For the evaluation we focused on the Foundation Club residency for two neurodivergent artists, Axel and Blossom. The recruitment of Axel and Blossom took place via a workshop 'getting to know' process, led by Project Art Works, rather than their typical open call route. Both the artists attend the same SEND school and are 16 and 17 years old. The residency offered them 2 days/ week working at Baltic for 3 weeks during school hours. Artists were supported through providing a calm, quiet environment and sensory breaks; alongside access tools developed by Baltic such as a visual guide of staff.

The artists were also paired with a freelance artist-mentor to deliver technique-based learning related to individual creative interests. A lot of consideration was given to finding the right mentor/artist pairing, and both mentors had prior experience working with neurodivergent artists.

'The year-long partnership of awareness-raising and relationship building with Project Art Works has had a lasting impact on Baltic, deepening our understanding of the barriers faced by our neurodiverse audiences, creatives and their carers. Baltic worked with Project Art Works to celebrate and make visible the contribution that neurodiverse artists and communities make to art and culture regionally, and in the UK.'

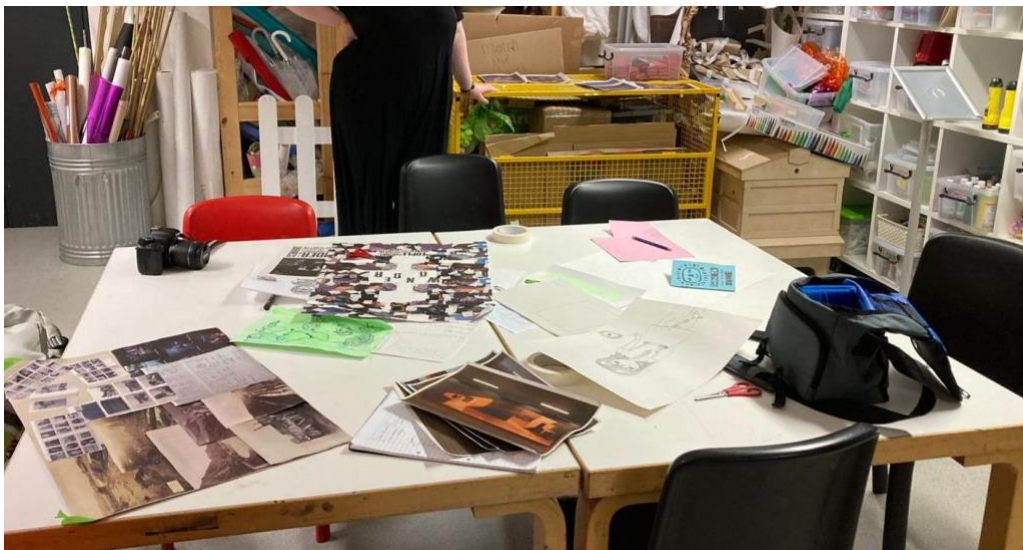
Reflecting back on the collaboration, we recognise that we are at the beginning of a journey and still have much work to do. The project has encouraged Baltic to continue to prioritise accessibility, inclusivity and sustainability, and to approach exhibition-making in new and radical ways; it has also encouraged us to talk with and

listen to our neurodivergent and /or disabled audiences who face attitudinal and systemic barriers, and to learn from them.’ Baltic

Axel and Blossom

Axel and Blossom are students at Cedars College in Gateshead, part of Cedars Academy Trust, which is a SEND-specialist educational provision in Tyne and Wear. The college was part of the Baltic Awareness Raising Programme working with local partners in July 2023. Axel first took part in workshops in the gallery in September 2023, and Blossom in October 2023. Both students were supported to apply for the Foundation Club programme through Cedars College.

Axel and Blossom working in the Baltic studio, 2024:



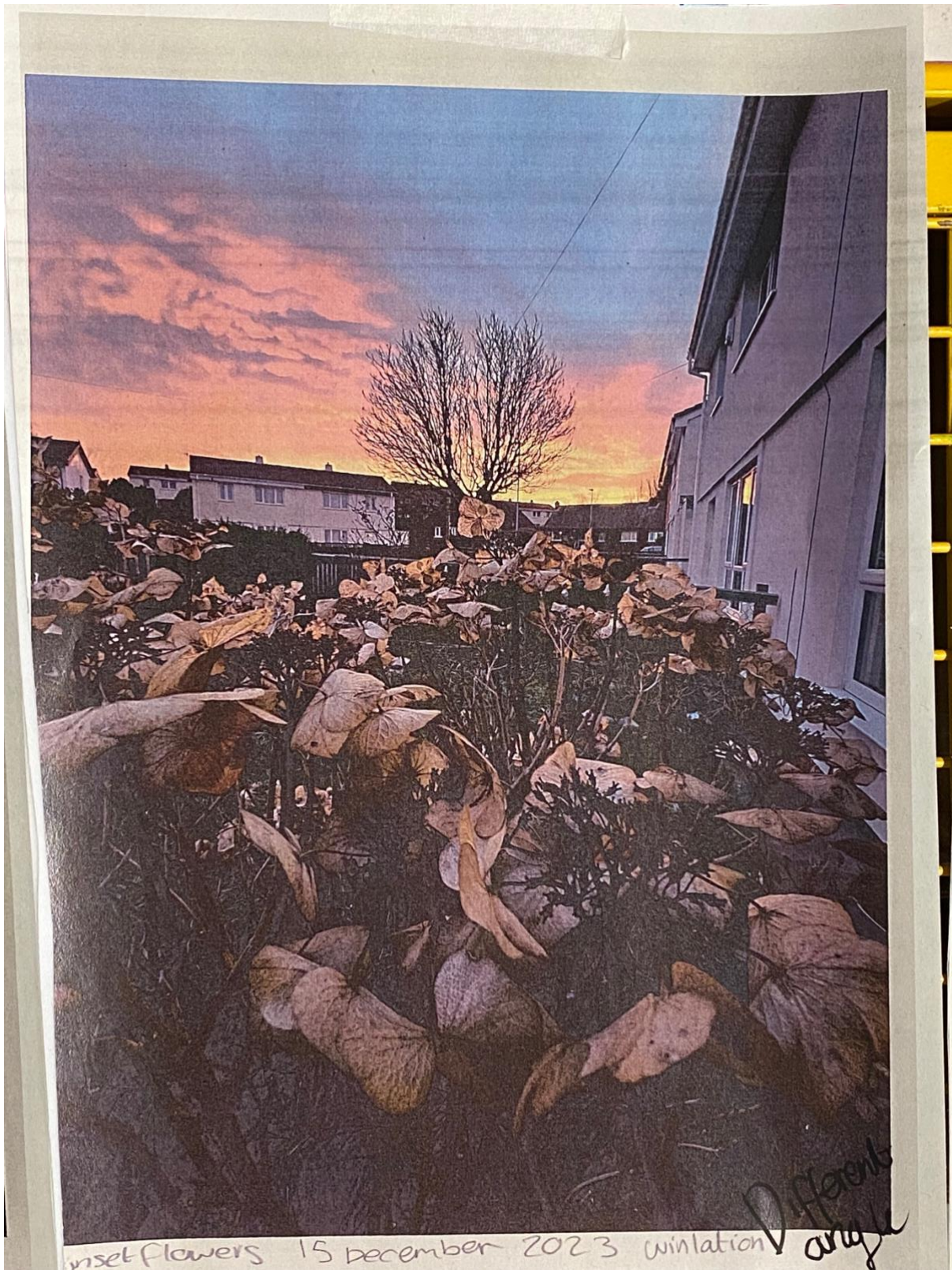
Axel and Blossom working with Project Art Works in the Foundation Club taster session



Blossom's artwork in progress



Axel's artwork in progress





To learn more about Axel and Blossom's experience, we had two meetings, one online and one at their studio space in the Baltic, which involved looking at work in progress.

Axel and Blossom had visited the Baltic once prior to starting the residency. They also said that they don't engage with any other galleries or museums, and that there is limited time to explore creativity within the school environment. Axel and Blossom both really enjoyed their residencies and particularly liked that the Baltic was 'organised, peaceful and calm'. They benefited from the knowledge of Baltic staff, finding it inspiring being introduced to new artists that they hadn't heard of.

Blossom: 'Yeah I found out that David Lynch exists and I'm very happy about that.'

Axel: 'I learned about different photographers.... Martin wrote a list of different photographers and stuff that I was interested in that fit my work.'

Baltic staff said that both artists hadn't had much previous experience of being able to express themselves freely and so staff encouraged them to consider diverse approaches to artistic practice. Both artists really valued the opportunity to experiment.

Axel: 'Just experimenting here has given me more confidence to try new things and do things here that we can't do at home and other places.'

Blossom: 'We can be more messy and have more freedom here... I have been able to explore what themes I like without people expressing concern. I can experiment more freely without being judged. I can show people work without being sent to therapy.'

Staff at their school, and family members, expressed how Axel and Blossom's confidence improved as a result of engaging in the Baltic residency, as well as describing positive changes in their general wellbeing and communication approaches.

CHAPTER 2: What are the Sector Challenges?

Introduction

In this chapter we outline what was learnt about barriers inhibiting inclusive practice at the organisations. Drawing on interviews with staff and the Project Art Works team, various attitudinal, operational and systemic barriers were discussed. Within this context, we note that organisational decisions are set against a backdrop of sector-wide constrained finances and competition for funds. The demand on organisations to stay relevant and reflect communities, whilst also making decisions about capacity and resources isn't straightforward. Nevertheless, the chapter provides an opportunity for organisations to reflect candidly on their current approaches and where changes could be made.

The challenges

Explorers II exposed a range of causes and factors which exclude neurodivergent and disabled people from cultural life. Although the evaluation wasn't a comprehensive investigation into wide-spread barriers, the findings provide insights into how attitudes, approaches and structures might persistently replicate across many arts organisations, and hinder the ability to evolve and change.

These challenges have been folded into the following areas:

1. Institutional anxiety
2. Institutional hierarchies
3. Discriminatory resourcing
4. Exclusive organisational missions and models
5. Gulf between adult social care and the cultural sector
6. Language – barrier and enabler

1. Institutional anxiety

'What I think we experience [from institutions] is a lot of anxiety, sort of collective organisational, institutional anxiety about disability.' Kate Adams

Project Art Works have been working in partnership with cultural organisations and institutions for many years and recognise the difficulties of managing institutional anxiety related to engaging with neurodivergent and disabled people. They note that there is a deep lack of confidence amongst many people working in organisations, especially around language and terminology (and the potential to 'cause offence') and this has resulted in some people being excluded specifically in order to prioritise the comfort of staff.

The highly diverse nature of neurodiversity and disability, can stoke institutional fears of working with unfamiliar groups and therefore organisations tend to default to the domains they feel more confident in:

'I think there's still a great fear ... about working with people who are non-verbal for example, or who have challenging behaviour.... Within Explorers, the artists have relatively mild learning disabilities or autism. They're mostly people that we encounter, people that ... have exhibitions or get to be part of events and tend to be people who are able to articulate themselves and advocate for themselves.'

Martin Swan

These anxieties also manifest as perceived reputational risks, often associated with the production of marketing materials, particularly, how/or whether to describe disability, and the capacity to meet the access requirements and associated practicalities of neurodivergent and disabled participants/visitors.

'We're asked questions [by institutions] about, what are the risks? How are we going to manage these communities coming into [our] building? ...' Kate Adams

Organisational fear stemming from a sense of potentially 'getting it wrong' and neurodivergent and disabled people as presenting 'risk' is problematic. These attitudinal barriers will inevitably impede organisations from being able to openly reflect on existing approaches, try new things and learn about how to better shape arts spaces for neurodivergent and disabled people.

Some partners described how being able to tap into Project Art Works' knowledge had alleviated anxieties. Where organisations acknowledged that they felt under-equipped, Project Art Works' experience was seen as very helpful, especially as a resource to sound out ideas and seek reassurance. This suggests that a specialist sector support organisation or network of organisations would be a valuable resource for organisations as they develop their plans.

'What I like is that there was an organisation [Project Art Works] that we could rely on and we don't feel we need to know it all ... we don't have the background...' Juliette Buss, Learning and Engagement Consultant, Photoworks

Kate Adams recognises the significant support organisations need to confidently open up their programmes and venues to neurodivergent and disabled people:

'I think if we were to do this again [Explorers], I think we need a team that's dedicated to the interactions with organisations... it is always difficult to work with institutions...it's still huge, the amount of handholding that's needed.' Kate Adams

This quote provides an insight into what it might take to see a sector-wide shift in engagement practices and the implementation of new approaches.

It was felt that neurodivergent and disabled people who have the highest support and communication needs remain excluded and that a radical shift is required within arts organisations. Confidence to evolve practices and a willingness to explore uncertainty, through engaging groups often perceived as 'too complex' is essential to developing radically new approaches to engagement. Project Art Works recognise the importance of these receptive attitudes:

'...it's easier, it's less costly, it's less time consuming [to work with familiar groups]....I don't think it just comes down to a lack of understanding... Most people understand that there are people in the world that live in a much more complicated way than others ... it is not just a case of not knowing... it is more a case of what's ... more straightforward perhaps in terms of the work.' Tim Corrigan

We found that institutional anxiety was a significant factor influencing who was involved in *Explorers II*. Based on this, we suggest that more focus needs to be given to how organisations can overcome anxieties and how staff can develop more confidence working with diverse groups. It would be wise to consider long-term support for arts organisations including a period of 'hand-holding' provided through site visits, training and on-hand practical advice and support for organisations as they work to make changes to their delivery and practices. Greater exposure to different types of artists will likely result in increased confidence.

Considerations

- What kind of support does the arts and culture sector need in order to develop confidence, and who or what is best placed to provide that support?
- Is there a need for an independent sector organisation (or network of organisations) who could act in an advisory capacity for organisations?
- What models for practice-based sharing and knowledge exchange, between organisations, could be initiated to encourage wide-spread learning and adoption of new approaches?
- Would drawing on interdisciplinary knowledge be useful rather than focusing solely on experience within the cultural sector?

2. Institutional hierarchies

Challenges associated with institutional hierarchies were discussed multiple times across evaluation interviews and were seen as a significant barrier to inclusive practices being able to proliferate. All organisations operate with an internal hierarchy of some description, but some organisations have a less willing executive function which can slow down change.

'I think it's replicated in all the organisations we work with, that there is a hierarchy in the structure that inhibits greater inclusion of the voices of marginalised audiences.'
Martin Swan

Entrenched organisational hierarchies and fragmented practices, for instance the dichotomy between curatorial and education teams, or the disparity between senior leadership and front of house staff, were discussed as a barrier to being able to unify attitudes and build consensus around strategic priorities and the development of new practices.

In relation to everyday encounters between audiences and organisations, we found that a gulf between frontline and executive teams has the potential to overlook simple changes that make venues more inclusive. An example of which, relating to building works, is described below. Listening to the perspective of staff members who encounter the audiences that enter and spend time in the building, is an important way of identifying what is happening on the ground:

'... A lot of the crew members who experience public audiences on a day-to-day basis and the minutia of their needs for example, weren't listened to in a consultation about building adjustments. None of them felt that their voices had been heard or acted upon. The adjustment to the main entrance and the disabled entrance [at Baltic] was that the steps were put in so that disabled people had to go quite a long route around the side of the building, to get in at a level which they would then have to take a lift down to the main welcome desk. And the staff crew felt very compromised by that, deeply, personally compromised because they couldn't support the inadequacy of that.' Kate Adams

Project Art Works, and some partner organisations, expressed frustration at the lack of joined-up collaborative working across institutional departments. They described how this tends to hinder the development of coordinated goals and fluid working practices; and is exacerbated by the marginalisation of less senior workers from influencing and taking part in decision-making despite often having extensive and relevant personal or professional experience.

'And so one of the real things that needs to change in organisations structures and systems is a breakdown of hierarchy and a greater emphasis on the empowerment of people who actually keep the organisation going and who interact with public audiences.' Kate Adams

It was also discussed whether better representation of neurodivergent and disabled people at a governance level would have a filter down effect on organisational values and practices

that lead to greater inclusion. Even within sympathetic organisations, Juliette Buss described the challenges of trying to change attitudes towards governance and inclusive leadership at Photoworks:

'I did want to invite [artist] from Project Art Works [to the board] but senior management at our end declined because they felt we couldn't give the level of support that was needed to someone at board level to participate and contribute. But I think until we change that culture, we're gonna keep coming up against these barriers and these mistakes.' Anonymous

The various examples used show how institutional hierarchies can create structural and systemic barriers within organisations, often hindering the ability of motivated, passionate staff to advocate for and drive change forward. Creating an open culture requires the development of new approaches to management and governance. Without this, the preservation of exclusive institutional hierarchies will continue to prohibit progress and maintain an adversary status-quo.

To evolve inclusive approaches, we believe that there is a need to include more voices into the knowledge exchange processes within organisations. Our findings suggest that frontline staff working within the everyday reality of supporting people to access organisations are well placed to offer practical insight into how spaces might accommodate and welcome more people. More discussions between frontline and executive staff to develop future plans for inclusion would be advantageous. Furthermore, the absence of neurodivergent or disabled voices at an executive level was felt by us to be inhibiting inclusion.

Considerations

- What governing structures and attitudes would need to be in place to support the development of inclusive practice?
- What types of cross-team planning strategies are needed to join up priorities across organisations and avoid an over-emphasis on siloed working?
- How can senior leadership teams ensure they are not isolated from the day-to-day realities of engagement work with neurodivergent and disabled audiences?
- How can organisations better identify and listen to those who work with audiences when planning and designing new programmes or spaces?

3. Discriminatory resourcing

The ways in which expenditure is prioritised within organisations, especially in relation to staff time and individualised support, was observed as a factor excluding disabled people from cultural life. Interviews revealed that value-based decisions around the resourcing of activities have the potential to discriminate.

Helen Charlton, Development Director, Project Art Works, says that they often hear arts organisations say things such as:

'There is no money for transport [for disabled people to get to a venue], but we've got the money for a photographer [for PR].'

'Or there's money to support an artist, a neurotypical artist who uses a wheelchair but no money for someone who is neurodivergent and who has access needs that are around communication... the understanding [of access] is still very kind of unsophisticated within the art world.' Martin Swan

We perceived there to be varied ideas within the sector around what constitutes access needs, and a hierarchy of value placed on these.

Project Art Works propose that unchallenged and uninterrogated prejudices often shape organisational decisions around resourcing. These decisions inevitably have a direct impact on the potential of neurodivergent and disabled people to be able to participate in a creative life and cultural opportunities. Discussions about value, outside a monetary context, are important to establish how and where to focus resources that have an impact on inclusion. Until the requirements of neurodivergent and disabled people feature more prominently in the budgets of organisations, they will continue to be excluded from arts spaces.

Access and the costs associated with supporting neurodivergent and disabled artists needs to be better understood across the sector. Our findings suggest that access needs and associated costs are not fully understood or budgeted appropriately, particularly with regards to staff time which impedes the sustainability of inclusive practices. We heard some great examples of discussions with artists that enabled organisations to understand the personalised support approach needed but actually attributing the appropriate amount of staff time was problematic.

Considerations

- How can access needs and costs be better understood and quantified in terms of staff commitment?
- How can organisations reflect equity and equality in the way they set budgets?
- How can budgeting be integrated to accomplish audience development priorities, as opposed to adding in a generic 'access budget'?
- Who can interrogate a new budget or resource planning meeting - is there an opportunity for an internal/external body to support these discussions?

4. Exclusive organisational missions and models

Conversations with Project Art Works revealed how differences in organisation missions and audience priorities shape models of working related to neurodiversity and disability. Most often inclusion and neurodivergence is part of a much bigger organisational remit; therefore, mission-related goals, and where emphasis is placed on the spectrum of artistic vs social outcomes, vary widely.

There is an acknowledgement that working with differences in communities requires devising new approaches and not all organisations are motivated to re-think traditional practices.

'You have to completely reframe what the role of the gallery or organisation is... it's a much more radical thing for a gallery to actually have to completely rethink how to reach and work with people who don't identify as artists, and with communities on the real social care and political edge...' Tim Corrigan

The majority of visual arts organisations are centred on working with self-identifying artists within neurotypical and ableist social structures. Therefore, to work with and invest in people who don't identify as artists, requires a new paradigm of operation. Tensions around who is and isn't an artist, who can and can't be an artist, invoke age-old conversations around what constitutes artistic quality; and again highlights the elitist systems which exclude neurodivergent and disabled people from creative opportunities.

'There's conversations around how the art world sees people who are not part of the art world, and that actually is just about how the art world works and we know that's not going to be massively different anytime soon. So we're always having to come from a particular angle of challenging some of that elitism really.' Martin Swan

'I think with arts organisations there's a tendency to prioritise individuals who can articulate and identify as artists because our remit is to support artists and I guess there are quite profound barriers between the two types of people....And reaching beyond that barrier, I think, is an entirely different way of working that arts organisations aren't necessarily set up for... I think it's to do with the way that arts organisations prioritise and are structured.' Juliette Buss

Photoworks reflected on notions of 'quality', within their programme, and how neurodivergent and disabled people are often excluded from advancing their work because of a lack of access to resources, tools and the support needed. They found that the medium of photography itself created barriers, due to equipment and processing costs, as well as the range of motor skills needed.

'We're looking for certain level of quality, photographic quality, which I think adds another layer when it comes to neurodivergence and kind of adds [social] class into that also in terms of who is able to capture images and also who has the equipment and the facilities to be able to produce things of aesthetic quality. I guess those

questions then created an inherent exclusion to a majority of people...' Ricardo Reverón Blanco, Curator/Programme Manager, Apex Portsmouth

During Photoworks' open call for an artist, they experienced criticism that the process was ableist. The feedback provided an opportunity to reflect on entrenched ways of working within arts organisations and the challenges of trying to reimagine new approaches and adapt existing ones.

'One of the accusations levelled at us as an organisation was that we were taking an ableist approach to commissioning... I think that's a really interesting statement to explore because he was right. We are, we do, despite our best efforts to dismantle that process and take it apart and find an alternative, it is our starting point, isn't it, its within that context of ableism and we're asking people to conform to a culture of working that's deep rooted and has been like this for many years'. Juliette Buss

Partners described how challenges around measuring project successes felt complex to resolve. Project Art Works expressed how neurotypical ideas of 'success' are often disconnected from the individualised experiences of neurodivergent and disabled people. Sector-wide performance frameworks tend to de-personalise, prioritising generic data over nuanced experience, and don't adequately present a holistic picture.

'We know there are a lot of artists who self-identify as neurodivergent and wouldn't describe themselves as disabled. And so the whole idea of working in very formalised ways with KPIs and things like that relies on this kind of structure. That's a very neurotypical structure, a very neurotypical way of approaching diverse groups and it doesn't necessarily fit the way that we've always worked...' Martin Swan

The development of sustainable inclusive practice is also hindered by the tendency of organisations to prioritise short-term vs long-term working. Many organisations are working on a project-by-project basis, which constrains the ability for organisations to broaden impact and embed meaningful change through long-term activities that may require diverting resources away from other priorities. Criticism of this type of work is that it is tokenistic and lacking rigour.

'It is a bit of a box ticking exercise for institutions to say that we've worked with this community, isn't it? And we know that, and it's something that we talk about quite a bit.... So for [organisation], for example, they've had relationships with quite a few different organisations in the [area] who work with learning disabled and autistic adults, but it'll be a project, it'll be something that they do for six months and then they don't work with them again for the next five years.' Martin Swan

Our findings showed that exclusive organisational missions and models manifest in a wide variety of ways. Much of this mirrors existing awareness that cultural organisations are not inherently geared up for working inclusively and reporting via KPI metrics limits the nuance needed to explain the impact of inclusive work. Further work needs to be done around formulating how inclusion goals align with methods of delivery, and exploring root to branch integrated approaches to access.

Considerations

- How can organisations (and funders) challenge themselves to think differently about their goals and approaches? How can traditional display-based, ableist models of operating be reimaged?
- If 20 - 25% of people identify as disabled (UK disability statistics ONS), how can this percentage be reflected in organisational audience development plans and priorities? And also in cultural policy?
- Could supported studios share methodologies for how they capture personalised outcomes for disabled people? Could a broader conversation be initiated around what personalisation means in project reporting?
- In order to support longer-term work involving neurodivergent and disabled people, what funding and policy level support is needed? Are there efficiency savings in the longer-term that can be shared?

5. Gulf between adult social care and the cultural sector

'There's still an issue with institutions [not] having relationships with adult social care, which is where a lot of [disabled] people exist within'. Martin Swan

In order for arts organisations to reach people with complex disabilities and devise ways to welcome them into their spaces, they will more than likely need to develop relationships with adult social care services, such as day centres, residential services, paid and unpaid carers and support staff. Connections between arts spaces and care services are often hampered (on both sides) by preconceived ideas of who fits the profile of an arts participant/visitor, and the realities of bringing personal care into public spaces.

Where social care has largely gone unacknowledged by the art world, elitism and exclusivity continue to dominate. However, Project Art Works recognise that wide-spread change is also hampered by senior leadership/ policy level barriers that exist within social care.

'I mean hierarchies exist in social care too and certainly in health. Some of the people who have attended different workshops or symposia understand the value, but you don't often get commissioners or directors of social care or health in the room. That's still a barrier we've got to attend to because it clearly has a very big potential impact on cost benefit, wellbeing, the health of people, the health of carers, and their ability to continue. Caregivers need to be seen and feel like they're seen and valued.'

Kate Adams

The climate is challenging. The effects of austerity have been far reaching and profound. Social care provision is fragmented across the country, with services being shut down or depleted. As a result people are much more isolated within their communities and difficult to find.

'We didn't have a really good connected relationship with the integrative care board or health commissioners or adult social care commissioners because actually they're much more hidden and behind barricades than they were five years ago, six years ago... They're overworked.' Kate Adams

The increased and varied pressures within social care inevitably create challenges when trying to initiate new connections. There is no easy solution to bridging the gulf between social care and the arts sector, but advocacy and dedication is needed if we are deeply committed to neurodivergent and disabled people taking their place in cultural life.

Relationships between arts organisations and formal statutory services are necessary to reach people who don't traditionally enter creative spaces. The emphasis of these relationships should not be solely based on the holistic importance of including access to culture within marginalised lives through designated programmes (linked to social prescribing, wellbeing or mental health, for example) but also to advocate for the simple right to enjoy, participate in and experience culture in the same way most of the community is able to.

Considerations

- How can organisations develop inclusive practice across existing programmes as well as develop new initiatives to target specific people or groups?
- What strategic conversations and policies need to be developed between organisations such as Arts Council England, Department of Health and Social Care and regional adult social care commissioners, to ensure people with complex disabilities, and their carers, have access to cultural life?
- How can organisations reflect on and address elitist attitudes to include a wider range of people in their programming and audiences?

6. Language – barrier and enabler

Explorers II highlighted the complexities and limitations of language in describing human experience. Ambiguity stemming from a broad definition of ‘neurodivergent and disabled’ artists arguably led to the exclusion of people with complex support needs in the initiatives developed for *Explorers II* and, as a result, fewer innovations in ways of delivering opportunities.

A recurring theme in the interviews was a perceived lack of clarity about who organisations should target, in some cases resulting in a mismatch between the ambitions of Project Art Works and what partners delivered.

‘...we didn’t talk about what we meant by neurodivergence and we didn’t talk about what we mean by complex support needs; and clearly we know that some partners have a different idea of what that is compared to what we think.’ Martin Swan

Our interviews revealed that organisations use a wide variety of terms and characteristics, for example: people with learning disabilities, neurodivergent artists, people with complex needs, artists who can’t self-advocate, people without cognitive privilege. This partly explains the broad range of participants involved in *Explorers II*, from dyslexic artists through to artists who have specialised care.

‘...we’ve learned that the language that we use needs to be more nuanced, we also need to make less assumptions about what partners know and give them much more information... That’s something that we should have done better when we wrote the partnership agreements... When we talk about neurodiverse minorities, when we talk about marginalised people, when we talk about how we engage people, we are quite specific about it.’ Martin Swan

Broad definitions can paradoxically impede inclusion because specific needs can be neglected.

‘You understand that inclusivity of language, but in some ways it creates another set of barriers to people with really quite important and specific needs and therefore you could lose something around how you support those needs if you’ve got everybody in a catchall phrase’. Sarah Munro, Director, Baltic

Historically, Project Art Works have described the artists they collaborate with as having complex support needs, which places the emphasis on the support being complex rather than the individual. It can be used to characterise individuals who need complex support structures to allow equitable participation but may encompass multiple conditions spanning communication, cognition, sensory (vision and hearing) and physical aspects. People with complex needs usually require specialised support in daily life, and therefore engaging with systems of care is necessary and fundamental to the work of Project Art Works. Project Art Works recognise that there are a range of intersectional social and personal factors that determine how marginalised someone is by their disabilities. For instance, support from

family, community and social care vary, as well as economic circumstances, which all affect someone's capacity to engage in a creative life.

'To give you an example, there are two people that we've worked with in Liverpool. One of them has quite complex support needs but has a lot of support from family and from social services. The other is more capable of self-advocacy, but their social circumstances are very different. They don't have someone who supports them in the same way. So actually you've got two people here who both need in some ways supporting... but their social circumstances, their personal circumstances, are very different. And I suppose it's acknowledging those nuances, which is something that we maybe haven't done in the same way in the past.' Martin Swan

Our findings are under the backdrop of these complexities. It became clear that there was a lack of shared language and understanding between project partners when describing target participant artists. As target artists didn't concur across partners, the ability to compare related outcomes and successes wasn't possible. Explorers II instead highlighted the highly diverse nature of neurological difference, the challenges of communicating these differences and the tendency of arts organisations to stay within range of their prior knowledge and experience. Evaluation findings demonstrated that encouraging organisations out of their comfort zones, to develop new and unfamiliar relationships with neurodivergent participant groups, needs support and guidance. This will need addressing in a future project, to ensure that artists and people with complex support needs are better represented.

'I don't think [Explorers II] necessarily progressed the voices and understanding of people with very complex support needs into mainstream spaces... without being clinically specific, it's really difficult to define and that's a difficult political barrier to really interrogate.' Kate Adams

'Whenever we talk about neurodivergence, we actually have one perception of it and other people have another perception, that's just the way it is with language'
Kate Adams

Support for organisations to move into new territories and develop a common understanding will help the cultural sector become more adept at inclusion. Better articulation around who is missing from the picture of cultural engagement will be helpful because without that, certain groups will not be counted in participation figures, rendering them effectively invisible. Providing clarity will advance accountability, prompting the sector to do more.

'Language is a living thing and it moves and it changes, it's alive. And I think there's something about when you're a broader generalist space like us and you're working with people with real specialism [e.g. Project Art Works], that's a very good combination of how to take frontline practice if you like and shift it to the mainstream. And I think that covers language as much as it does creative practice'. Sarah Munro, Director, Baltic Centre of Contemporary Art

Our discussions with organisations highlighted the language barriers that can impact on shared inclusion goals. Being able to define participant groups will help guide decisions around how to reach people and shape personalised support for them to participate, but this needs to be done collaboratively with communities. Based on this finding, we recommend that there is a space to discuss the complexities presented by the 'language barrier' and that this should include the perspectives of those with lived experience.

Considerations:

- What outcomes would there have been if there was more guidance on target participant artists in the *Explorers II* partnership agreement?
- What might have happened if partners had worked on developing this guidance together?
- Is it possible for arts organisations to develop a framework describing marginalisation without it being reductive? – could it achieve different outcomes?

CHAPTER 3: Focusing on Change

Introduction

Following on from the challenges outlined, Chapter 3 looks outwards, reflecting on how learning from *Explorers II* could be applied to initiate new approaches to inclusive practice. Drawing on evaluation findings, we propose two concepts that could help organisations provide favourable conditions to welcome neurodivergent and disabled artists into their programmes.

The first concept, an *Ecology of Support*, looks at the range of relationships and networks (straddling both the personal and professional) that are best placed, or essential, to support organisations and artists. *Explorers II* revealed that organisations found it helpful when there were support structures in place to help them fill knowledge gaps, develop new ways of working and engage with a broader range of people. The concept of an ecology illustrates what was learnt about the different connections and support that could co-exist to encourage progress.

The second concept is the development of a *Programme of Entry Points*, centred on providing a diverse 'menu' of targeted options within organisations for reaching and engaging neurodivergent and disabled people, including those most marginalised. Underpinning this, is the idea that in order to reflect the diverse nature of neurodiversity and disability there logically needs to be a diverse approach to inclusion:

'We've learned that one opportunity isn't going to be suitable for everybody and there's no way around that. And so what we need to do is think of it as a programme of different kinds of opportunities.' Juliette Buss

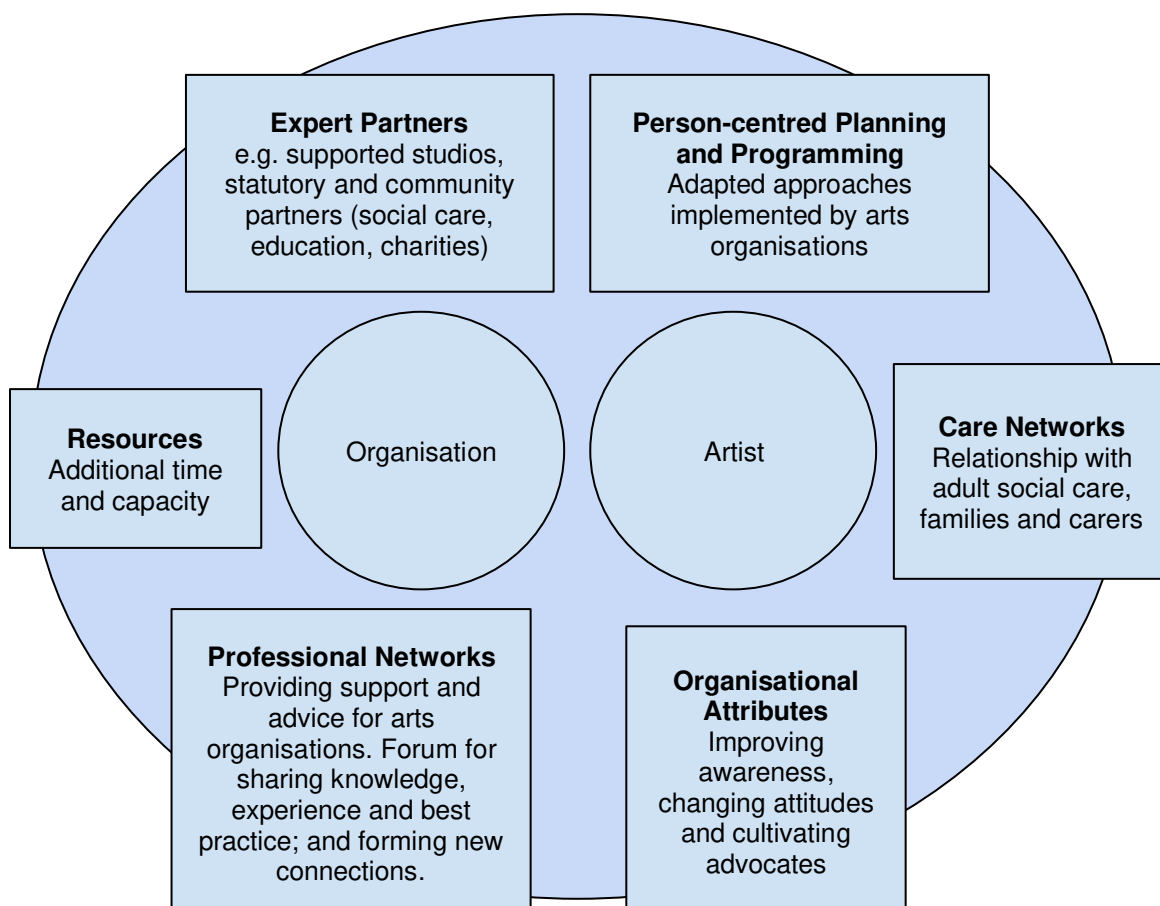
A *Programme of Entry Points* recognises that there are multiple starting points at play for both individuals and organisations, who will each have their own experiences, knowledge, confidence and awareness as the backdrop to their motivation and involvement. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to providing an inclusive programme, in fact a process of trial and error will be fundamental to moving away from adapting existing programmes towards co-designing new models of inclusion. A *Programme of Entry Points* proposes a diverse and flexible approach to inclusion, focused on widening the range of neurodivergent and disabled people engaging with arts organisations, through bespoke person-centred approaches to programming.

In the spirit of experimentation, these two propositions are not directive, but instead aim to open up areas for further exploration. How these are applied will depend as much on individual organisations and their unique goals, activities and systems as on the individuality of neurodivergent and disabled people. With multiple dynamics at play, operating at a systemic and individual level, organisations will need to deploy a roadmap towards inclusion that suits their individual strengths and resources.

1. Ecology of Support

An *Ecology of Support* conceptualises the relationships, resources, organisational attributes and approaches that organisations and artists are likely to require in order to flourish. It is not weighted in favour of any particular type of relationship, instead it is a dynamic and fluid concept where organisations may require support from others at various times to address skills/ knowledge gaps and overcome anxieties around inclusive work. Similarly, it acknowledges that neurodivergent and disabled people often need a combination of existing and bespoke systems of support in order to engage with arts organisations.

The diagram below describes an *Ecology of Support* as it materialised within *Explorers II*. It reveals an important set of considerations for arts organisations, which deviate from traditional ways of working. How these elements are weighted and utilised will depend on the organisation and individual involved, but by drawing on this ecology both organisation and artist are likely to experience better outcomes and inclusive practice is more likely to proliferate.



The following sections will expand further on the elements listed within the *Ecology of Support* and will cover:

- Organisational Attributes
- Person-centred Planning and Programming
- Expert Partners
- Care Networks
- Professional Networks
- Resources

Organisational attributes

Explorers II revealed numerous systemic and structural challenges affecting the cultural sector's ability to be more inclusive. However, empathetic organisational behaviours were shown to be powerful mitigating factors able to bring about change. Improving awareness and changing attitudes towards neurodiversity and disability, as well as cultivating advocates for neurodivergent and disabled people, significantly improved an organisation's capability to develop and deliver inclusive approaches.

'Actually, if you're going to create systemic change, systems need to change. Systems are full of people, so everybody needs to [be involved]'. Sarah Munro

Improving awareness

People with complex disabilities are often marginalised from engaging with wider society, creating a deficit in public awareness of differentiated needs and experiences. To address these gaps Project Art Works devised Awareness Raising and Encounters sessions, a model designed to bring together entire organisational teams, from senior leadership to front of house staff, to create alongside neurodivergent and disabled people. These sessions generated new connections and promoted learning across the organisational hierarchy, increasing awareness, inspiring new attitudes and leading to new developments in programming.

'The biggest change that you ever notice is when there's a sort of a personal shift with one person within that organisation... it has this real impact and then hopefully if that happens with enough people within an organisation, then that can generate a new way of looking at something. And I think that definitely happens and that tends to happen during the encounter workshops and these kinds of moments where we bring people together.' Tim Corrigan

Explorers II showed that equipping staff with a better understanding of the lived experience of neurodivergent and disabled people, was key to creating more inclusive organisations. As Julia says:

'...awareness throughout the whole team, throughout the whole organisation. That's important from the top to across team members'. Julia Bunnemann, Curator, Photoworks

Changing attitudes

Attitudes sit at the heart of organisations, shaping and driving values and goals. Discussion around organisational attitudes towards neurodivergent and disabled people were prominent in conversations with Project Art Works and partner organisations; and it was accepted that success at developing and delivering inclusion goals, approaches and outcomes are dependent on attitudinal biases.

'The core mission of creating visibility [for disabled people] in culture is to change attitudes towards disability and to change... public audience workers, cultural workers attitudes about disability and what [disabled] people can contribute.'

Kate Adams

Project Art Works identified some of the key attitudinal qualities, which underpin greater success at delivering inclusive approaches within organisations:

Shared values and goals	Sharing values and goals across organisation teams (and partnerships), was shown to be more conducive to advancing change.
Commitment from organisational leadership	Commitment from leadership teams was repeatedly highlighted as being fundamental to shaping and driving new approaches within organisations. In particular, sustainability of organisational progress became challenging when people left job roles; demonstrating the need for unified goals across teams as opposed to inclusion responsibilities sitting solely with specific individuals.
Open and reflective organisational culture	Organisational culture played a big part in supporting the implementation of new approaches. The organisations which revealed a genuine appetite for change, were willing to reflect, review, try new things, take risks and respond to feedback, seemed to make most progress. These were the organisations interested in opening up the work they do, learning from diverse ways of being, and were prepared to adapt how they operate and deliver.
Motivated staff	Having passionate advocates driving new approaches within organisations, was shown to be key to achieving progress.

Cultivating advocates

Advocacy enlists the support of a person, organisation or group to help express someone's views and wishes, in order to meet their needs and rights and to influence decisions. It is a term that puts the focus on supporting the visibility of people, who otherwise would struggle to be seen and heard. Project Art Works have undertaken an advocacy role in the delivery of *Explorers II*, centering the visibility of neurodivergent and disabled people, to influence wider sector development in inclusive practice; and foster greater representation of neurodivergent and disabled people as audiences, participants and artists.

Explorers II revealed how developing organisational awareness and attitudes enabled the cultivation of advocates within teams. These advocates played an important role in influencing and maintaining a focus on delivering inclusive practices. Interviews revealed that advocacy processes within organisations can require persistent effort, with success largely dependent on attitudes across organisations. Nevertheless, advocates were powerful voices representing the rights and needs of marginalised groups and shining a light on their absence from the sector.

Person-centred planning and programming

Explorers II revealed that person-centred approaches are crucial to enabling a wide range of neurodivergent and disabled people to have creative experiences and participate in cultural life. Therefore, if organisations are committed to inclusive practice, person-centred approaches will need to be introduced into the way they work.

A person-centred approach within the arts describes providing tailored support to enable a neurodivergent and/or disabled person to access cultural activities and opportunities. It places the person at the centre of planning, treating people as individuals, in order to personalise support to their requirements. The purpose of a person-centred approach is ultimately to improve the experience of neurodivergent and disabled people and enable them to participate where they might not have otherwise been able to. The methodology of 'person-centred' originates from person-centred approaches within the care sector.

Kate Adams describes what it means to explore person-centred approaches within arts organisations:

'Well first of all, take responsibility, make space open up to what we do not know or understand, build resources. It's costly to work in equity with people who may need support in all areas of their lives, but you just have to take that on, ask questions, attend to needs, and personalise our offer, except that there are no easy solutions. Place people at the centre of our spaces alongside revered artists and accepted practitioners, know that true inclusivity and equity comes when we change environments and not people, engage in and with difficult conversations.'

Kate Adams

The idea of changing 'environments and not people' is central to the idea of providing person-centred support. *Explorers II* partners found that flexible, agile and responsive organisational models were needed to deliver the level of personalisation required. Taking a generic approach to engaging neurodivergent and disabled people would be to miss the 'subtleties of inclusion' and maintain the conditions that exclude them.

Martin Swan describes the benefits of being flexible:

'The successes have been where curators and staff at institutions have said, okay, well we're just going to actually allow this situation to evolve and to respond to each individual or each access need or each support need on an individual basis.'

Martin Swan

Similarly, Photoworks reflects on the need to be responsive in real-time:

'There needs to be a priority on making sure that the time allocated is right and that [organisational] responsiveness is as fast as possible because of the people that you're working with... being able to have that flexibility... knowing that we just have to be very responsive...or just even if something doesn't work, making sure that we could potentially react quickly enough to be able to adapt and, and be agile.'

Ricardo Reverón Blanco

Explorers II revealed that creating bespoke, person-centred systems of support requires a certain amount of trial and error. New approaches to access are often experimental, at times challenging, and require additional resources. Project partners adopted an organic and exploratory action-learning approach to personalising support. They worked hard to balance a mix of wider operational considerations and individual support requirements, whilst also grappling with the tension between maintaining structure and delivering flexibility. The process worked best when partners were reflective and responsive to learning, taking an iterative approach to delivery.

...'accessibility is a journey. It's not a destination. You don't get to a point and say, okay, well, we can tick all of those boxes now we're done, actually, we're always on this journey of understanding how we do things ourselves and we get things wrong.'

Martin Swan

As highlighted in Chapter 2, the fear of 'getting it wrong' can stifle innovation within arts organisations. For person-centred approaches to grow, it's important that a culture of support, for responsive learning, permeates throughout organisational hierarchies enabling staff to be progressive in their approaches.

Expert partners

Expert partners provide the knowledge and experience, which is often needed by arts organisations to design and deliver person-centred activities and programmes. They have an important role to play in developing and supporting organisational inclusion goals; whilst also facilitating connections between the cultural sector and neurodivergent and disabled people. Expert partners could include: statutory and community partners, such as social care, education and charities, as well as supported studios.

During *Explorers II*, Project Art Works became an 'expert partner' supporting the organisations who needed it. Evaluation interviews showed that Project Art Works adopted an advisory role, providing a sounding board to test out ideas, field questions and reflect on what was learnt; this support was highly valued by partners. Had Project Art Works had more time and capacity, partners said they could have benefitted further from this mentor/mentee relationship.

'I do think that it would've been great to have more of that input [from Project Art Works], that kind of critical thinking and space to reflect on what Explorers means for the organisation and how we connect with other partners that are part of Explorers. I

think it would've been nice to have a bit more of that this time around and I think the team would have benefited from the space to ask the difficult questions to be supported in that process because there's been a little bit of learning the hard way with some things, which is natural. You have to fail to learn. And I'm not saying we failed, but I think there were some challenges and having Project Art Works support in dealing with those challenges previously was really beneficial' Juliette Buss

A note on Supported studios

Supported studios have an important role to play in incubating and advancing the artistic practices of neurodivergent and disabled people. They are in the unique position of being able to provide comprehensive personalised support for individuals, whilst also having the skills to build connections with organisations; fulfilling a critical function in an ecology of support. However, the artistic work generated, and the expertise of studio teams, is often under-utilised by the sector.

As explored in chapter 2, sector perceptions of who is and isn't an artist, and what is and isn't an artistic practice, are inevitably influenced by dominant ableist attitudes embedded throughout cultural life. Consequently, without the unique role of supported studios, neurodivergent and disabled people risk being marginalised from opportunities to explore and develop their creativity; and the cultural sector risks continuing to represent a finite view of the world.

'Because in a sense, anyone that's given the opportunity to be creative could have an artistic practice whether someone else identifies that. And I think this is one of the things that we talk about quite a lot with communities, with people that we support, that don't use language to communicate, for example, or don't identify as artists, we say that they have an artistic practice, they wouldn't necessarily describe that themselves in that way because that's not something that's an important part of how they live necessarily... So I think this is one of the key areas is how we talk about what artistic practice means in the context of people who are neurodivergent.'

Martin Swan

Sam Jones, Programme Director at supported studio Intoart, conveyed that they are keen to invest in ambitious artistic production and for the high quality of this work to spearhead perception change within the sector. Sam described how Intoart were always looking for ways to support artists to develop their practices, and they aim to match what would be expected for any artist. Intoart have found that the artwork itself is the most powerful advocate for increasing the visibility and representation of neurodivergent and disabled artists within mainstream venues. The challenge they face is where funding is predicated on developing new ideas, but existing models are felt to be successful and in need of further investment:

'The reason why I think it [Intoart's project] was [successful] is that we thought really carefully about what we wanted to do, and it's something that we've done before with a proven track record. We know there's six artists who've had this sort of investment in the past in the studio, so we just knew that if we took another four it would have an

impact. ... there's a point there ... organisations do actually know what they need to do sometimes and what they need to resource, but sometimes the challenge is always having to repackage that as something new when actually what they need to do is more of the same' Sam Jones, Programme Director, Intoart

The notion of an ecology of support acknowledges that arts organisations all have different missions and capabilities, some are more embedded in specific communities than others and some are more adept at delivering person-centred approaches than others. To address the gaps and build on strengths, these variations in abilities need to be recognised and invested in accordingly. Supported studios have a critical role, hidden and easily overlooked, but highly skilled and instrumental in facilitating diverse creative practices and perspectives.

Care networks

Engaging with care networks (families, adult social care, carers, residential care, community-based care services) is often essential to engaging with neurodivergent and disabled people. Care networks form part of an ecosystem in the lives of the individuals they support. They are an important interface for arts organisations, as they can potentially provide guidance, momentum and logistical help.

By bringing care networks and the cultural sector closer together, to learn from each other and build alliances, neurodivergent and disabled people will have an improved chance at greater visibility and representation within cultural life.

However, *Explorers II* revealed that relationships between care networks and the cultural sector are either non-existent or still at a very early stage of development:

'There definitely, in every community we work with, has been an impact and the impacts are different, but one of the elements is a sense that suddenly social care becomes visible to the gallery and the gallery becomes visible to social care.'

Kate Adams

Project Art Works acknowledged that there wasn't enough focus on social care in *Explorers II*, which became a pitfall of the project. There was a missed opportunity to build bridges between social care and the cultural sector which would have (in particular) enabled more participation from people with complex support needs.

'The social care side... I think that's the thing for me that feels like we missed as part of Explorers II, which is that we didn't find a way to include systems of care in the way that we probably should have done.' Tim Corrigan

Similarly, recognising the importance of carers in people's lives and building activity around them would have been a productive area to explore. It poses a future opportunity to see how programme development and delivery might be influenced and informed by these networks of support.

However, Project Art Works also recognise the challenges of encouraging arts organisations to engage with social care, and although they have found methods that work, they know it isn't possible to apply a generic blueprint due to the many variables at play.

'We know that mapping the social care sector and contacting people and building relationships, it all works. And we're kind of proving that it's working in the Baltic again, but it requires much more time and effort now than it did ... It's a completely fluid thing, and it's completely down to the institution and the individual and the circumstances and the geographical location...' Martin Swan

What might social care engagement look like?

Photoworks had tangible success building relationships with social care, enabling them to develop an important programme for people with complex support needs who are normally marginalised from creative activities. Their programme of *inclusive photography clubs* led to the development of an extensive network of social care contacts, opening up opportunities to reach the most marginalised groups in the future:

'The inclusive photography clubs ... I'd say that's definitely something I'm most proud of. We'd never really worked in Portsmouth before, and we've now got this database of over 30 adult social care providers or charities. We ran four inclusive photography clubs, two of which were with groups that were non-verbal and had complex support needs. And it was quite a big challenge to build those relationships in a new place, get things off the ground and encourage attendance. And then to have the support worker training and to have some sort of sense that there's a legacy and some ownership by Aspex [a gallery in Portsmouth], but also by a group of individuals, and something that we can continue, that feels like a definite win.'

A year ago we didn't know anyone in Portsmouth. If we were to do an open call now we could reach out to all of those individuals and then we could be actually reaching people who have complex support needs, who are genuinely excluded from the networks.' Juliette Buss

Although the inclusive photography clubs were successful in many ways, setting up a project like that wasn't without its challenges. Photoworks discovered that working hyper locally is most effective when dealing with adult social care settings, as those interactions rely heavily on in-person contact. This points to the idea that regional arts organisations have a key role to play in developing hyperlocal links with social care. Outsourcing this work to an external central body is unlikely to be practical long-term.

'Building the relationships with adult social care in Portsmouth, was an additional barrier because we are not working hyper locally [Photoworks are based in Brighton]. I think if we were working hyper locally, we could have fed some of it into the commission, the individuals that we were working with. I could have physically spent more time talking to support workers being in the spaces, explaining what the

commission opportunity was, brokering some of the conversations perhaps between curatorial and adult social care about how we make it fit. But we are a national organisation now and I think that's just an added layer of difficulty that we've got because I wasn't there physically and we could only have certain people in adult social care settings. It's harder to do Zoom calls working in daycare settings. They don't have computers set up like that. They're not used to working in that way. They're on the ground running things. It's just different.' Juliette Buss

Within an *Ecology of Support* model, the concept of 'hyper locality' could influence which relationships are needed. It is important to establish whether there is an organisational imperative to strengthen bonds with local communities and whether there are the resources to do so, or whether the organisations' strengths lie elsewhere, for example platforming local work on a national or international scale.

Professional networks

An output of *Explorers II* was creating a network for neurodivergent artists, supported studios, arts organisations and interested parties. Meetings take place online and address topics related to supporting neurodivergent artists and developing approaches to inclusive practice within organisations. Network meetings weren't formally evaluated for this report but interviews with partners revealed the benefits of having a forum for sharing learning, discussing challenges and tapping into a wider range of expertise. These types of professional networks offer development opportunities for both organisations and artists and have an important role to play in an *Ecology of Support*. Organisations valued a network that met regularly provided a reflective space where conversations can happen, especially difficult conversations about language and exit points for artists.

Resources

Working in a person-centred way, was found to require more organisational time, capacity and resources. Although it might be hard to predict what will be required, more staff time and resources will be needed to achieve successful approaches to inclusion; and this should be accounted for in budgets and schedules.

2. Programme of Entry Points

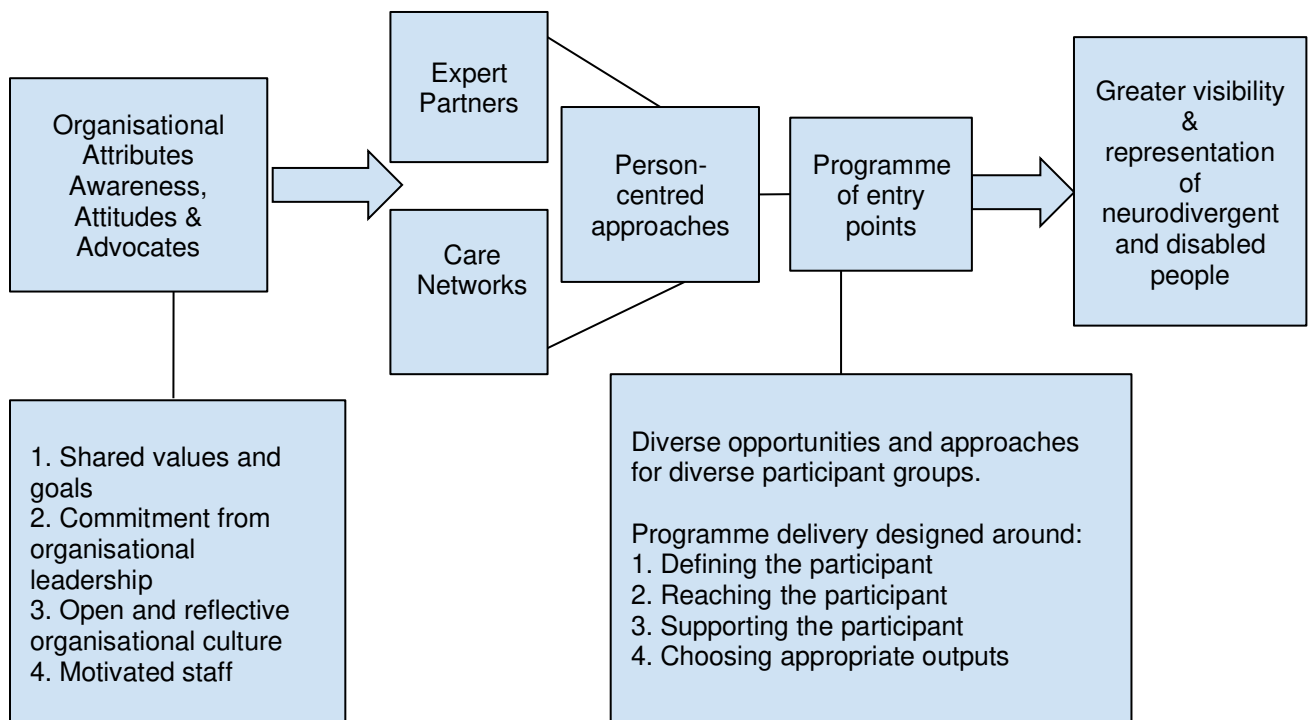
The notion of a *Programme of Entry Points* is predicated on the need for diverse approaches to engagement and programming, appropriate for diverse populations. It proposes that there are multiple possible entry points for people to engage with culture. It recognises that both individuals and organisations will have their own starting points based on their experience, knowledge and motivations. We propose that a programme of targeted entry points, focused on person-centred rather than generic approaches, is likely to yield better results at engaging a wider range of neurodivergent and disabled people.

A *Programme of Entry Points* is an invitation to dismantle and reimagine normative ways of working with artists and devising cultural programmes. Rather than defaulting to familiar processes, approaches and communities, a *Programme of Entry Points* is based on organisations taking a more strategic view of what they offer neurodivergent and disabled people; developing opportunities for cultural engagement in response to a broader range of marginalised experiences and support requirements.

For instance, an open call for neurodivergent artists will reach people who self-identify in that way and will be suitable for those that can apply for and access that type of opportunity. However, if the aim is to reach individuals with less independence and who are more marginalised, such as those that are non-verbal and/or engaging with social care, then a whole different approach will be needed. Developing a *Programme of Entry Points* would enable both groups of people to engage in creative activities through tailoring distinct offers that are complementary to individual support needs, day-to-day lived experience and current levels of cultural/ artistic engagement.

Based on the findings of *Explorers II*, this diagram shows how developing a *Programme of Entry Points*, within arts organisations, is dependent on having a functioning *Ecology of Support*. Cultivating favourable organisational attributes, drawing on expert partners and care networks, and developing person-centred approaches are all factors influencing and informing the design and delivery of a *Programme of Entry Points*. As a proposal for improving inclusive practices within organisations, the diagram illustrates how these key elements can work together to enable greater visibility and representation of neurodivergent and disabled people in cultural life.

The diagram does not apply to supported studios as they already have their own effective methods in place to support artistic development.



The next section will explore the following guiding principles when devising a *Programme of Entry Points*:

1. Defining the Participant
2. Reaching the Participant
3. Supporting the Participant
4. Choosing Appropriate Outputs

1. Defining the participant

As described in Chapter 2, defining neurodivergence and disability is complicated and even the most comprehensive definitions cannot describe the overall realities of individual lived experience. However, creating clarity about who an opportunity is aimed at, enables organisations to identify appropriate resources within their *Ecology of Support* and build programmes that encompass appropriate person-centred approaches, expert partners and relationships with people's networks.

Different people will require different approaches in order to participate. Explicit reference to certain groups can also signal to people that they are welcome. Creating a generic invitation to participate will only appeal to a narrow section of society who are looking for opportunities and are confident that their needs can be articulated, understood and met. Working with partners to create bespoke invitations to participate may yield better engagement.

Programmes can and should be varied in order to reflect the diversity of communities, but the starting point should be defined: who is this opportunity for and how do we reach them?

2. Reaching the participant

There are numerous ways of reaching participant groups, but once the participant is defined it should be logical how to initiate that process. For instance, individual support needs, day-to-day lived experience and current levels of cultural/ artistic engagement, will all factor into decisions of how to begin to engage with target participants. Where online posting to traditional art networks might be appropriate for some, engaging directly with day care centres might be appropriate for others.

Planning suitable ways to reach participants, whilst building and drawing on networks, is central to ensuring target participant groups are reached. Expert partners, care and professional networks can be very useful resources to utilise.

3. Supporting the participant

To ensure a process of ongoing engagement (e.g. through an artist residency or creative outreach activities), organisations will need to deploy person-centred approaches into how they support participants. It is important to determine what type of access requirements and support might be needed either from the individual themselves and/or by consulting their wider care networks and expert partners.

For Lauren, a neurodivergent artist, the relationship with Photoworks was a positive experience due to the adapted application process and how they accommodated her communication preferences.

'The main thing that was really helpful was it said, you can talk to someone, you can talk to Photoworks about the application. And that was definitely the most helpful thing.'

The other thing that was really helpful [for the application] is that you didn't have to have an artist statement. That was really refreshing. I think it was simple and had a purpose. It made much more sense than a lot of other things that I've tried' Lauren Joy Kennett

Whilst the support in place was positively received and had a positive impact on Lauren's ability to apply and engage with the commission, it does pose a question raised elsewhere about whether tweaking existing practices to make them more welcoming to neurodivergent artists, in this case a written application, really go far enough. This is a recurring theme which is described in more detail below.

4. Choosing appropriate outputs

Choosing appropriate outputs is fundamental to ensuring projects are designed appropriately for target participants. Outputs could include things such as: an exhibition/ studio display, public/ celebration event or a series of creative experiences. Outputs will shape who is able to engage in a project and therefore need to be suitable for the target participant. Again, person-centred approaches will need to be applied to supporting delivery.

How defining, reaching and supporting the participant, as well as choosing appropriate outputs is key to developing inclusive opportunities:

The Photoworks *In Focus Commission*:

- They undertook an open call application process for a 'neurodivergent artist', which was publicised via traditional arts networks
- The opportunity was a 9 month commission to make new photographic work, culminating in an exhibition at Aspex gallery in Portsmouth

Photoworks thought carefully about the way artists would engage in their open call application process. They worked on creating a more supportive system, such as by offering the chance for a pre-application call/visit. It was hoped that by offering these extra options it would be a more accessible process for artists.

However, the notion of an 'open call' stimulated many productive discussions about whether the opportunity was in fact inclusive. The concept itself was considered problematic; acting as both a signifier and structure, which reduced applicants down to people able to understand and access this type of opportunity:

'The thing about an open call, it's only going to reach certain people, isn't it? Who see themselves as artists potentially, or just those getting newsletters.'

'This idea that if you do an open call, everybody has this opportunity, but actually as a format, it's a barrier to lots of people. Most people don't know what an open call is and don't operate in a way, don't exist in a certain part of society.'

Helen Charlton

Photoworks spoke candidly about their experiences, sharing valuable reflections and learning about how project design affected outcomes. Juliette reflected on how the commission output (an exhibition) became an important factor influencing who they appointed:

'I'm not saying we failed, but on this particular front, I think we set ourselves up to fail at the beginning because we created an opportunity that was in some ways already exclusive because of the expectation of an exhibition, because of the expectation of being expected to work with an artist mentor So we weren't going to appoint someone who was non-verbal or not operating as an artist. So I think that distinction had already been made...' Juliette Buss

She goes on to highlight the importance of first defining the target participant, and then designing an appropriate engagement process for that individual; suggesting that if she was to do the open call again, she would reconsider the exhibition requirement as it precluded a lot of other 'great people':

'I think looking for an artist who would benefit from the support is one thing, looking for an artist who would benefit from the support but also be ready for an exhibition at the end of that quite short intense period is two quite conflicting pressures. And I don't think we'd questioned it up until this point.

And I just think we possibly jumped into it too easily. At the beginning it was like, yeah, let's do a commission with an exhibition. Great. But now on reflection, as part of our learning of working with neurodivergent artists, there were some great people who weren't selected because they wouldn't necessarily have been ready to show the work publicly at the end.' Juliette Buss

Juliette's comments recall the importance of being clear about who opportunities are for, as well as the need to develop a range of entry points for a broader spectrum of people. In this instance, Photoworks achieved what they set out to do, which was to recruit a neurodivergent artist for a commission (which had tangible benefits for the artist); but in the process it stimulated a lot of questions for them around whether they had really interrogated what they were doing and why. Had they simply fallen into default and familiar ways of working?

Conclusion

Explorers II was an ambitious project, designed to instigate new and varied approaches to inclusive practice within a wide range of arts organisations. We took a smaller, more in-depth view of the project, working with a sample size of 3 organisations (out of 8 partners), and augmenting this with interviews with Project Art Works. There are limitations to the conclusions that can be drawn, but by incorporating the extensive experience of Project Art Works, who have acquired an in-depth knowledge of what helps and hinders organisations during the 6 years that they have been delivering *Explorers*, we were able to get a broad understanding of how the sector is currently responding to issues related to inclusion.

Interviews with Project Art Works revealed the challenges facing the sector, as well as the realities of what it takes to change systems and processes within cultural organisations. *Explorers* offered an important intervention, proposing new strategies and delivering a vital body of work, which generated significant learning and pinpointed areas where approaches to inclusive practice could be explored and developed further in the future. *Explorers* can be viewed as a test case for how inclusive practice can be advanced within organisations and provides a fertile reference for those embarking on similar projects.

Explorers II project design - the learning

Explorers II was designed to be non-prescriptive, instead identifying the value in bringing interested parties together to share experience/ learning and building in flexibility for organisations to develop their own approaches. Whether or not this fluid approach to *Explorers* was the most advantageous has been the source of many conversations during the project. The challenge of how to unify multiple organisations, with different starting points and learning pathways, and the varied levels of organisational support needed, was evident in how extractive *Explorers* was for the team at Project Art Works.

Originally, Project Art Works had intended to deliver a devolved model with less of a supporting role. They planned to focus on the idea of creating a network and critical mass, where partners deployed their own approaches to greater circulation and effect. In reality, however, Project Art Works were much more involved with partners than anticipated, and a lot of their organisational capacity was needed to support institutions and build their confidence. This is an important finding as it illustrates the realities of developing the sector's knowledge and capabilities around inclusion. It suggests that dedicated investment in sector-support initiatives and organisations will be necessary to develop the confidence and strategies needed to improve inclusion more broadly.

Our discussions suggest that organisations with less experience and confidence, could have benefited from more clearly articulated goals. In our sample, there were discussions about the lack of clarity around who the target participants should be and in some ways this caused anxieties and stifled innovation, resulting in some organisations leaning into familiar practices and working with people who were easier to reach. Within the project as a whole, this sometimes led to a mismatch between the ambitions of *Explorers II* (*to include people with more complex support needs*) and what partners delivered, and with a more defined framework it might have been possible to achieve a different range of outcomes.

Project Art Works encouraged innovation from partners, through an open invitation to experiment and test and trial new approaches. However, in reality organisations tended to make smaller more nuanced changes to existing programmes rather than reimagine new ones altogether. Other organisations, already working confidently in the culture and disability intersection, such as supported studios, were able to use *Explorers* resources to extend and scale existing models of practice that they felt were working. Consequently, we didn't see many examples of innovation in practice. However, our findings demonstrated that small changes to existing approaches can still lead to positive differences for individual neurodivergent and disabled people within cultural spaces. In terms of delivering radical change, there is still some way to go; what this practice looks like, and what it can produce, is for organisations to navigate further.

Based on the findings of our work, and as well as the numerous considerations we have proposed, we have identified two overarching elements of programme design that may provide a necessary focus for organisations and generate innovation in a future iteration of *Explorers*. These are: forging relationships with social care and developing co-production methods.

Forging relationships with adult social care

Engaging with adult social care is of critical importance, it became clear during the evaluation that without collaborating with social care, people with complex disabilities will continue to be excluded from cultural life. *Explorers II* highlighted that there is much more work for the cultural sector to do to build links with social care, particularly as current connections seem fledgling and sparse.

Although Project Art Works mapped social care organisations/services within the geographical area of each partner, there seems to be a secondary area of work required to enable the two sectors to build sustainable connections. More focussed time and investment is needed to learn how best to initiate and support the formation of long-term partnerships between the cultural sector and social care. Addressing the barriers that exist on both sides of the divide, requires dedicated attention, a long-term view and engagement at senior leadership levels.

'Maybe the focus of the next big piece of work should be on changing the culture of social care rather than the culture of culture because it is so difficult to get traction from social care. People are still hidden and subject to their quality of life being determined by risk assessments and whether staff turn up to work or not. There's a real human rights issue there.' Kate Adams

Exploring co-production

Co-production presents a rich opportunity to devise more favourable conditions and outcomes for neurodivergent and disabled people and is a familiar method of working within social care. Trialling co-production across the sectors of culture and social care, expert

partners and/or neurodivergent and disabled people could help organisations learn more about how to deliver person-centred programmes and opportunities. In addition, for people with the most complex disabilities, who are dependent on systems of care, co-production opens up ways for arts organisations to facilitate and adapt to a range of support needs.

There was little evidence of co-production in our evaluation sample, suggesting that there is much more scope to explore and develop co-production methodologies moving forward. We recognise that additional time, capacity and investment would be advantageous in unpacking the potential role of co-production in developing new approaches to inclusive practice. Yet, we feel that moving towards a model where collaboration is supported across a range of parties, lessens the top-down approach to arts programming, yielding a more holistic and considerate approach to shaping cultural life.

However, based on our findings and prior knowledge, we recognise that asking artists to advocate for themselves can be difficult when they have had limited experience of doing so. Interviews with artists revealed that they were outwardly very grateful for the opportunities they had had during *Explorers*, but were hesitant to provide critical feedback about the potential for improvements. Therefore, exploring co-production with neurodivergent and disabled artists may need a longer-term approach, in order that entitlements to access/participate in cultural spaces are fully articulated and recognised.

Concluding remarks

Everyone has the right to access the arts. Creative and cultural experiences have the potential to bring significant social and well-being benefits to people's lives, particularly for those marginalised from accessing a wide range of day-to-day opportunities. The arts sector has the chance to lead on providing new forms of provision empathetic to the experiences of neurodivergent and disabled people and those that care for them; cultivating safe spaces that enrich and fulfil the human need for creativity.

Explorers II is part of a bigger movement of change happening within the sector, and despite the pressures outlined, inclusion is a priority for many organisations and there is great work happening. Whether or not the specific changes initiated in *Explorers II* will be sustained longer term, or go even further, remains to be seen and is beyond this project evaluation. Yet there is hope that the wider contextual changes signify a difference in how neurodiversity and disability is understood and represented. Even in the last 7 years, Project Art Works has noted a shift in attitudes since the first iteration of *Explorers*:

'...there's been a big change in awareness and a willingness to work with neurodivergent communities across the time of the Explorers programme. We weren't even using that term neurodivergent at the beginning of the project. So the speed at which things have gathered pace and [the] wave of greater awareness and recognition, that's been really surprising because we spent 20 years banging our heads against brick walls and then it's just all kind of opened up'

Kate Adams

Overall, *Explorers II* was an ambitious and productive model championing sector development and the visibility of neurodivergent and disabled artists and communities. It has raised the visibility of neurodivergent artists through six years of public programming, publishing and partnership work across the UK (most recently hosting a 2-day event at Baltic). However, while gains were undoubtedly made, there is still further to go. More multi-partner programmes like *Explorers II*, led by expert partners, are needed to improve inclusive practice within organisations. Our report identifies common barriers and associated considerations for ways forward, proposing pathways and practical ideas for organisations to explore in a future project.

The cultural sector, built on supporting creativity and imaginative ways of seeing the world around us, has many of the key facets needed to drive innovation. *Explorers II* has shown that it takes a lot of deep thinking to create new models and not default to traditional ableist ways of working. The need for time and resources is inevitably in opposition to its availability. Organisations in our sample, like many across the sector, adapt existing deliverables instead of re-thinking the way they deliver for neurodivergent and disabled people. It is our opinion that the arts organisations who ask questions, try new things and evolve their practice have the potential to considerably improve inclusive practice within cultural spaces; reflecting a richer, more diverse experience of the world and fostering visibility for some of the most marginalised and excluded people in society.

APPENDIX

- i. Collaborations history
- ii. Timeline of *Explorers I and II*
- iii. List of further resources/ reading

I. Collaborations history by Kate Adams, CEO/ Artist Director of Project Art Works

Project Art Works collaborations and methodologies: outline

Since 2010 Project Art Works have initiated projects and collaborations with neurominorities, artists, organisations, institutions and galleries to activate change and greater representation for neurodivergent people in art and culture. The work has radiated out from direct creative workshops and encounters to the inclusion of neurominorities within international cultural programming and audience engagement. We believe that cultural spaces (especially publicly funded institutions), should reflect diversity in programming and audiences.

Approach

Project Art Works' approach to change and inclusion promotes encounters between neurodivergent and neuronormative communities through creative practice, using art-making and personalised collaborative pathways to overcome communication barriers, fears and misconceptions.

Project Art Works establishes links with individuals who have complex support needs and care services in areas surrounding galleries and institutions through mapping and brokering sensitive and responsive relationships. This is to ensure that neurominorities can participate in a way that is open, personalised and relevant to them.

Encounter workshops are environments for neurodiverse participants that facilitate intuitive interrogation of creative collaboration, space and materials. The fundamental aim is to say, "I am here".

Through shared activities of making, nonverbal conversations, signing and discourse the pervading exclusion of neurodivergent people from full civic contribution is challenged. Profound, tender and tolerant connection between contributors is made. Organisations gain a greater understanding of social care and the informal support systems that surround neurominorities and ask questions in a safe space. It will encourage confidence and the application of new ideas, structures and policies for greater inclusion.

Collaboration between cultural organisations and (marginalised groups) aim to reverse the entrenched power dynamic associated with inclusion. Equity of collaboration can provide genuine opportunities for people to represent themselves in cultural programming and audiences. By working together, we can model the adjustments that society must make, and create a replicable methodology that can be implemented within and beyond the cultural sector.

Our emphasis on working with the most marginalised/disregarded groups/individuals is to ensure that the change is about societal attitudes towards difference, alongside the individual rights of ND artists. This often remains within the context of the individual rights-based artist movement (IRBAM) – pathways for ND artists etc. Not necessarily the complicated social care art function model (SCAFM). Our collaborations are about maintaining equity for those without traditional artistic ambition.

Since 2010 Project Art Works has collaborated with many, many neurodivergent artists and individuals, families, care givers organisations and artists. Collaborations and partnership with galleries and institutions include:

MK Gallery, Milton Keynes
FACT, Liverpool
Camden Art Centre
De La Warr Pavilion
Photoworks, Brighton
Fabrica, Brighton
Tate Liverpool
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
Department of Experimental Art, University of New South Wales
Autograph, London
Intoart, London
Action Space, London
Venture Arts, Manchester
Singapore Art Museum
Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead
Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid
Copenhagen Contemporary

II. Timeline of Explorers I and II

EXPLORERS 2017 - 2019 TIMELINE											
2017											
PROJECT EVENTS	PROJECT LAUNCH		Partner Meeting, Fabrica				1st EXPLORERS Seminar				
PAW	Project Launch										
Autograph			PAW Awareness Raising, Hackney				PAW Encounter Workshops		1st EXPLORERS Seminar		
Photoworks			PAW Awareness Raising and Encounter Workshops, Brighton								
Fabrica			Awareness Raising at PAW		Peter Hudson 'In Colour' exhibition						
Tate Liverpool					Tate Exchange PAW takeover						
UNSW								Big Anxiety 2017			
MK Gallery											
DLWP											
2018											
PROJECT EVENTS	Project Partner Meeting, Autograph						2nd EXPLORERS Seminar				
PAW	Glen Affric Recce Visit		Awareness Raising at PAW		Research trip, Friston Forest		Glen Affric Expedition				
Autograph	Project Partner Meeting		Rights in Focus conference		How are we Caring for People event						
Photoworks											
Fabrica											
Tate Liverpool					PAW Tate Exchange and Awareness Raising						
UNSW											
MK Gallery			Inclusive Practice in the Arts programme					PAW Awareness Raising and Encounters			
DLWP										2nd EXPLORERS Seminar	
2019											
PROJECT EVENTS	Project Partner Meeting, Autograph		Formation of Liverpool Project Collective							End of EXPLORERS I	
PAW	Illuminating the Wilderness at MK		Illuminating the Wilderness at Tate Liverpool								
Autograph	Project Partner Meeting										
Photoworks	Photoworks Inclusive Commission call out				In Focus commission development, Photoworks Inclusive Photograph Clubs, Brighton			Anna Farley - In Focus Exhibition, Phoenix Brighton			
Fabrica					Putting Ourselves in the Picture exhibition						
Tate Liverpool			Illuminating the Wilderness Film and Exhibition								
UNSW							Art is for Everyone Exhibition, Big Anxiety 2019				
MK Gallery	Illuminating the Wilderness Film		Inclusive Practice in the Arts programme					EXPLORERS 2019 Conference			
DLWP							Mikhail Karikis - I Hear You exhibition				

EXPLORERS 2021 - 2024 TIMELINE											
2021											
PROJECT EVENTS											Start of EXPLORERS II
PAW											Turner Prize Exhibition 2021, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum
Autograph	Sharif Persuad - Have You Ever Had solo exhibition										
Photoworks											
MK Gallery											Inclusive Practice in the Arts Supported Studio programme
2022											
PROJECT EVENTS	Project Partner Meeting, HAGM										EXPLORERS Event 2022
PAW											documenta fifteen awareness raising, prelude and exhibition
Autograph											Thomson Hall Residency
Photoworks											
Tate Liverpool											EXPLORERS Event 2022
MK Gallery											Inclusive Practice in the Arts Supported Studio programme
ActionSpace											Pardip Kapil Residency - Studio Voltaire
Intoart											Intoart Artist residency Programme
Venture Arts											Abundance Glasgow
Outside In											The Julie Party event
											Naoibh McNamee Residency, NAGW
											Henry Jones Residency, NAGW
											Alex Billingham Residency, HAGM
2023											
PROJECT EVENTS											In Process - EXPLORERS EVENT 2023
PAW											Awareness Raising and Residential Exhibit at Baltic
Autograph											Dexter McLean research trip to Jamaica
Photoworks	In Focus Creative Training										In Focus Commission development
MK Gallery											MKG - Art Riot Collaboration
Baltic											Inclusive Practice in the Arts Supported Studio programme
ActionSpace											Abundance Manchester
Intoart											Intoart Artist residency Programme
Venture Arts	Conversations III at The Lowry										Abundance Manchester
Outside In											Artist Support Days
2024											
PROJECT EVENTS											EXPLORERS Final Event
PAW											Residential book publication
Autograph	Thompson Hall monograph development										Thompson Hall Monograph launch
Photoworks											Lauren Joy Kennett - In Focus Exhibition at Aspex Portsmouth
MK Gallery											Inclusive Practice in the Arts Supported Studio programme
Baltic											Lauren Joy Kennett book publication
ActionSpace											Abundance London
Intoart											
Venture Arts											Abundance London
Outside In											Artist Support Days
											Oscar Vinter film and Roo Dhisou Fanzine

III. Further Resources/Reading:

EXPLORERS 2017-2019 Evaluation by Phyllida Shaw

<https://projectartworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Project-Art-Works-Explorers-Final-Evaluation-Phyllida-Shaw.pdf>

Project Art Works films

<https://vimeo.com/channels/821908>

Project Art Works Pre-EXPLORERS Pilot Study

https://projectartworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/PAW-Pilot-Study_Research-Report_online-version.pdf

Creative Health - The Arts for Health and Wellbeing

<https://projectartworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Creative-Health-The-Arts-for-Health-and-Wellbeing.pdf>

Putting People First - Government Report

https://projectartworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/putting_people_first-HM-Government.pdf
