

# THE HUMAN FACTOR

## EXPERIENCES OF ARTS EVALUATION

VERSION 1.5 (11/2009)

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‘Social objects are not like stars or stones, which exist independently of how humans think about them; social objects are partly created by human perceptions and beliefs, and when those perceptions and beliefs change, social objects change with them. This introduces an element of uncertainty in our world that makes us even more prone to error than Popper believed: we can never have objective knowledge of society, if only because our shifting beliefs are continually changing it.’

**John Gray<sup>1</sup>**

# 1 INTRODUCTION

*'I was feeling uncomfortable about using a model I didn't believe in, a system that gave results that were spurious. I almost felt apologetic – there was a lot of resentment [from those involved]. In the end I didn't use it with the kids.'*

My understanding of the impact people's feelings have on how evaluation actually happens had been developing over a number of years but this conversation showed just how important those feelings could be. Here was a professional evaluator with a high degree of expertise reporting an unbridgeable gap between what the commissioner was asking them to do and what they believed was right. In this case, the person resolved the difficult situation by silently adapting the model they were required to use but reporting in the approved manner. The validity of the resulting data, especially when combined with that from other projects supposedly collected in a uniform manner, is open to question; but so is data gathered through a flawed methodology that, in the professional judgement of those supposed to use it, produced 'spurious' results.

The rights and wrongs of this story are beside the point – and that is true of many similar dilemmas reported in this paper. What does matter is that, in the rush to develop robust evaluation systems capable of answering the searching questions that have been asked of the arts in recent years, insufficient attention has been given to what the people feel about them and still less to the way in which those feelings may fundamentally change both the systems *and the knowledge they produce in their use*.

Debates about evaluation have focused on questions of policy, of methodology and even on belief positions about the value of the arts. They have not considered what actually happens when artists and managers are asked to evaluate their work, when evaluators are commissioned to produce reports on arts practice or when those reports are received by funding agencies. And yet how people feel about this most tender of professional areas – where, after all, their work, their careers and even their values are under scrutiny – can have profound influence on how evaluation is done.

The study therefore asked: *How do people professionally involved in arts evaluation feel about their experience of it and how does their experience influence the process?*

I planned a short, focused study to explore the impact of evaluation on those involved and particularly the gap between theoretical and policy discourses around the issue and what happened in everyday arts practice. The most appropriate research method-

ology was to interview the people concerned so semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 11 arts professionals, each with extensive experience of arts evaluation but from different perspectives and practices; (a fuller account of this research process will be found in the Appendix).

Working from the hypothesis that people's experience would vary according to their roles in the evaluation cycle, the study identified three broad categories within which to consider what the interviewees reported. These were:

- **Practitioners**<sup>2</sup>, by which was meant artists, managers and other professionals who had been required to deliver evaluation reports about their own arts projects as a condition of funding;
- **Evaluators**, by which was meant independent professionals, including consultants and employed researchers, who had been commissioned to evaluate arts projects, programmes or organisations with which they have no other connection; and
- **Commissioners**, who included arts managers and staff in public or independent funding bodies who had been required to commission or receive evaluations on behalf of their organisations.

The people interviewed naturally had different experiences and stories and some had occupied more than one of the three roles during the course of their working lives. As reported here, individual comments are linked to the role they were playing at the time of the experience they describe, but their insights are often enriched as a result of having moved from one role to another.

This paper reports on the findings of the research. It first sets a context for reflecting on people's experience of evaluating the arts by tracing the rapid emergence of this aspect of arts policy and management during the past 15 years (since the wealth of the National Lottery began to be disbursed to the arts) and some of the resulting tensions, including those relating to purpose and method. It then looks in turn at people's experience of planning, undertaking and reporting evaluation. Describing complex and interlinked experiences in sections corresponding to a typical evaluation process is inevitably artificial and some flexibility has been necessary here.

The paper concludes with some reflections on my own experience in undertaking this research, which it seemed appropriate to recognise in this context. Finally, it raises some questions that have arisen during the course of the study, not as an exhaustive account of the issues raised, and certainly not in the hope of answering the many uncertainties inherent in evaluating arts programmes. Rather they map out some areas

that would benefit for further reflection, particularly on the part of the funding agencies that are so often the engines of the current concern with evaluation in the arts.

This study's hypothesis is that the experiential aspects of evaluating and being evaluated in the arts have been underestimated in discussion of the practice and its relation to policy. Whatever else it has found, the study reasserts the inseparability of people's thinking and feeling – the subjective experience that makes each one of us uniquely ourselves – from the theories with which they frame their professional practice.

John Gray observes that 'we can never have objective knowledge of society, if only because our shifting beliefs are continually changing it' (Gray 2009:110). Yet judgements must be made, personally and politically, for human beings to act; and it is better that those judgements should be shaped by knowledge, however imperfect, than that they should depend on mere preference or prejudice. The critical challenge, in accepting the elusiveness of objectivity, is to be aware and take account of one's subjectivities (Grosser 1989:7). It is with this idea in mind that the paper draws on my own experience of arts practice and of evaluation over the past 30 years, mapping some of my own 'shifting beliefs' and their influence on my work.

It is therefore wise, in creating knowledge about such complex aspects of human experience as engagement in the arts, to be tentative and provisional. The character, meaning and value of postmodern culture flutter restlessly in this space.

## 2 A CONTEXT FOR ARTS EVALUATION

### 2.1 THE ARTS WORLD BEFORE EVALUATION

*‘When I was first working in the funded arts sector in 1989 to 94, there was very little use of the word evaluation.’* EVALUATOR<sup>3</sup>

During the past 15 years, the place of evaluation in the arts and cultural sectors has been transformed. As director of a community arts organisation in the early 1990s, I secured regular grants from public bodies including the Regional Arts Board, local councils, social services, schools and health authorities; funds were also received from charitable trusts and, more rarely, from private sponsors and government agencies. At the time, none of these bodies required any form of reporting that could properly be considered evaluation, although – particularly in the case of education, health and social services funders – they financed our work because of the social benefits they considered our programmes to offer their clients.

In my six years in post, the organisation was rarely asked for more than a brief activity report, and often not even that. Some funders spoke of ‘monitoring and evaluation’ in their guidelines but this did not mean more than providing a post-completion report. The idea of using our limited resources to pay for external evaluation did not arise and, if it had, we should not have known where to find someone qualified to do it. We did publish formal reports for more ambitious programmes connected to national issues such as Care in the Community and the Arts Council’s Year of Dance in 1994, but the impetus for doing so was internal. The team’s motive was to understand its practice better and to raise awareness of the work to which we were committed.

Today, such a practice is hard to imagine. Though it may seem idyllic to hard-pressed arts managers struggling to evaluate their work in the technocratic style increasingly required by funders, it was certainly not idyllic in reality. Externally, it reflected the comparative lack of importance then placed on the arts by British governments and a general lack of interest in their functions and operations, even within the arts sector. Internally, it revealed a real weakness in the arts sector’s capacity – and willingness – to reflect critically on those same functions and operations, while making largely unsubstantiated claims for their importance.

The steady rise in the arts sector’s engagement in evaluation over the past 15 years is therefore to be welcomed in principle although it has brought many problems in prac-

tice, some of which are explored in this paper. But before turning to those, it is necessary to consider why evaluation has become such a central part of current British arts and cultural management.

## 2.2 THE EMERGENCE OF EVALUATION

Few people who now work in the arts, in museums, in libraries or in other parts of the cultural sector funded through taxation would disagree that evaluation has become a major preoccupation of the bodies that provide their resources. The reasons for this are partly do with the changing position of the arts in contemporary Western societies and partly to do with the dominant political ideology since the 1980s, especially in what are sometimes referred to as the Anglo-Saxon countries. It is neither possible nor necessary to do more than sketch the outline of each here.

The idea that the arts are on the margins of society, neglected or feared by the bourgeoisie and its government, is widespread, especially among artists, but it does not bear much examination. The powerful have always used the arts as ideological tools even as the weak and marginalised have used them for transgression and resistance. If the British state, until recently, seemed much less interested in culture than its peers, that was in keeping with its way of projecting power by seeming not to: this is the country, after all, that told the world it had acquired an Empire merely by absent-mindedness.<sup>4</sup> Whatever the truth of that, the arts and culture have become increasingly important in Britain during the course of the past half-century.

Much of this is a result of deep societal and economic changes, including the weakening ability of religion and politics to provide people with satisfactory ideological narratives and value systems, and the emergence of a consumer society much (but not all) of whose population is better educated, more prosperous and more leisured than before the Second World War. Governments have been influenced by and influential in this change and many administrative, legal, policy and financial adjustments have been made in direct and indirect response. Assumptions and beliefs have changed too.

Take, for example, the economy, where the value of the creative industries is now recognised across a spectrum of products and services: indeed, the label's invention and the struggle to define its application is one sign of the reach of cultural ideas. The arts and culture are increasingly seen as key to economic prosperity and regeneration: from Bilbao to Singapore, everyone wants to be a creative city. The UK, with its commercial and utilitarian traditions, has played a distinctive role in driving this change and cities like London, Birmingham and Manchester, along with a host of less

likely places from Gateshead to Woking, can show the results in an armada of new cultural venues that look like retail outlets and shopping centres that sell ‘experiences’.

There has been a similar transformation in government engagement in the arts, symbolised by the mutation in 1992 of the old Office of Arts and Libraries first into the Department of National Heritage and then, in 1997, into the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), led by a Secretary of State with one of the more high-profile cabinet posts. Public spending on the arts has grown hugely in the past 15 years and if that has not always translated into higher levels of satisfaction among artists it is partly because the numbers of people entering the profession has grown at least as fast.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the single most important change in British cultural policy in the past 15 years was the creation of the National Lottery whose profits are dedicated very largely to culture. Between 1994 and 2004 the Lottery injected £2 billion into the supply side of the arts economy, enabling both the new venues already mentioned and a huge range of new activities funded through Arts Council schemes such as Arts for Everyone and Grants for the Arts (ACE2005:3). This money has had a big impact on the quantity of public arts provision in this country, leading some, such as Sir Brian McMaster, speaking at the 2008 launch of his DCMS report on excellence, to adopt a Panglossian tone:

‘British society today is, I believe, the most exciting there has ever been. It has the potential to create the greatest art ever produced. We could even be on the verge of another Renaissance.’<sup>6</sup>

One important aspect of this new money was its source. It came from the pockets of the general public and disproportionately from its poorer members. When the Arts Council’s funds were relatively small and came as government grant-in-aid, there was limited public interest in how they were used. Once the Arts Council was spending ‘the people’s money’, the rules changed literally and in more subtle ways. The regulations governing the Arts Council’s distribution of Lottery money are different from those that govern its use of grant-in-aid, but the important change came from the idea that those who contributed the money by buying Lottery tickets should benefit directly from the use of the resulting funds. In 1996, in his last speech to the Labour Party annual conference as Leader of the Opposition, Tony Blair told delegates:

‘I can today make an announcement on our plans for the National Lottery. It has been a great success. But has all the money gone to good causes? We want to fund specific environment, education and public health projects through the proceeds of the National Lottery. I want the people’s money to go on the people’s priorities.’<sup>7</sup>

If millions of ticket buyers' pounds were to be spent on the Royal Opera House or the Churchill papers, to name two early controversies, money would also have to go to poor neighbourhoods and to more popular forms of cultural expression.

During the same period a more gradual change had also been taking place in the British public sector as education and health authorities, regeneration agencies and even the criminal justice system began to see the arts as means of achieving some of their objectives. The art in health movement had been growing since the 1970s and was gaining support in public and community health. The place of the arts in education received a boost when a government enquiry under Ken Robinson eventually led to the establishment in 2002 of Creative Partnerships, a joint initiative of DCMS and the Department of Education managed by Arts Council England, which aimed to use artists to build creativity and attainment in 1,500 of the poorest schools.

By turn of the Millennium then, the place of the arts in Britain was very different from what it had been a generation earlier. While these changes certainly led to an increase in the production and consumption of culture, and therefore to its political importance, they do not wholly explain the rapid growth in arts evaluation. The expansion of public spending on arts and culture is only part of the reason for the simultaneous expansion of evaluation.

Account must also be taken of the market-oriented reforms introduced by successive Governments to the British public sector since the 1980s. Sometimes referred to under the overarching term of New Public Management (NPM), these sought to make public services more responsive to individuals – often now re-titled 'customers' – and more accountable to Government. One aspect of this was the creation of a new culture of target setting, monitoring and reporting, partly modelled, like much else in NPM, on an idea of private sector practice. Value for money under the Conservatives then 'Best Value' for New Labour became key issues in making public sector expenditure decisions and assessing performance, incidentally generating a new demand for evaluation that have made it, in the words of two leading theorists in the field, 'a sweepingly successful social movement' (Pawson & Tilley, 1997:xi).

This change in public culture has been sharply criticised, notably by the philosopher Onora O'Neill in her 2002 BBC Reith Lectures, when she argued that:

Instead of working towards intelligent accountability based on good governance, independent inspection and careful reporting, we are galloping towards central planning by performance indicators, reinforced by obsessions with blame.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, the wise counsels of O'Neill and others sceptical of the way in which accountability and evaluation were being applied to the public sector have not been

much heeded by government, and it is in this context that a rhetoric and practice of arts evaluation has grown up. As one experienced commissioner said in an interview for this study:

*'You had this sense of people on a Holy Grail quest all the time to produce the evaluation that once and for all was going to demonstrate the value of what they were doing and it would finally answer all the questions – [but] nothing ever seemed to do the job.'*

COMMISSIONER<sup>9</sup>

For the arts, the growing focus on evaluation since the mid 1990s may be understood as arising from a combination of related factors, including their increased economic, social and cultural relevance; greater public investment; funding through the National Lottery; the engagement of new stakeholders in health, education, regeneration and other fields; and the public sector reforms of both Conservative and Labour governments. If the origins of evaluation's current importance in the arts and cultural sectors can thus be accounted for, the results are quite another question.

### 2.3 EVALUATION AND ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

It would be helpful at this stage to form a clearer picture of the extent to which evaluation is now undertaken in the arts in England; helpful, but not easy. The first difficulty is simply to define 'the arts in England'. In terms of scale, the largest sectors are those concerned with commercial, voluntary and informal arts production. Data are limited about each of these and especially about the third area of activity, which tends to escape observation and analysis.

If the degree and character of evaluation practice in any of these sectors is difficult to assess, it is easier to describe the extent of evaluation within parts of the public sector, at least in principle. In practice, the approaches of different local authorities and public agencies vary greatly and mapping this would be a research project in its own right. Although it is one funder among others, the work of Arts Council England is central to the arts in this country and so its approach to evaluation is influential.

Arts Council England's expenditure on the arts (not including capital expenditure on buildings) falls into three broad areas. The first, which accounts for by far the larger part of its budget, is the money given to its regularly funded organisations (RFOs). The second area, which forms a variable proportion of the annual budget, includes time-limited programmes such as Creative Partnerships or Decibel; these are generally run by ACE or under its direct control. The third major element is the project funding distributed to organisations and individuals through the National Lottery funded

scheme, 'Grants for the Arts'. According to the 2008-09 ACE Annual Review, the proportion of expenditure in each of these areas was:

- RFO Grant in aid: 68%
- Other grant in aid commitments: 4%
- Lottery grant commitments (Grants for the Arts): 19%

The evaluation regimes applied to each of these areas of funding varies considerably. The 900 or so regularly funded organisations (RFO) have an annual appraisal based on agreed targets, and are required to submit evidence of performance, including an annual data return designed and collated by Arts Council England. Bespoke evaluation processes are used for major programmes like Creative Partnerships and Decibel and are generally contracted out to consultants, universities and other competent bodies. Awards made through Grants for the Arts require an evaluation report to be submitted and approved by the Arts Council before the final 10% of the funds is released.

It is sensible to adopt different approaches to evaluation for different kinds of grants. Where the relationship between a donor and a grantee is long-term (and many of the Arts Council's grant relationships stretch back over decades) a high degree of mutual knowledge and trust can be expected. Indeed, it might be argued that the annual appraisals used to monitor RFO performance and outcomes broadly meet O'Neill's challenge 'to concentrate on good governance, on obligations to tell the truth and on intelligent accountability' (O'Neill 2002: 59). Whether this is actually so remains an open question. The systems used tend to be mechanistic: the likelihood of something being monitored seems more closely associated with the ease of doing so than with its importance to arts policy or practice. Anecdotal evidence, in the form of conversations with those who supply data in this way, suggests that the process is seen as bureaucratic, inflexible and, at worst, disconnected from the business of arts management.

Investment in innovative or experimental programmes requires a different approach capable of testing the theoretical basis and results of the new intervention. Creative Partnerships is an instance of substantial investment in evaluation, both internal and external, supported by formal research and review by independent bodies such as Ofsted<sup>10</sup> and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)<sup>11</sup>. The results of both evaluation and research were instrumental in securing government support for the independent development of the programme from April 2009 in its present form as Creativity, Culture & Education (CCE).

Grants for the Arts gives award recipients wide latitude in how they evaluate and report on their work. An information sheet on self-evaluation is provided (ACE 2005) and an Arts Council publication, *Partnerships for Learning* (Woolf 2004), is recom-

mended along with other sources of guidance. However, evaluation is not a significant factor in assessing applications in this scheme and is referred to only in the context of ‘additional criteria’.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, informal conversations with recipients of ACE lottery funding suggest that they tend to take their duty to evaluate and report very seriously, even when, or perhaps because, they are unsure of knowing how to do it. This concern may reflect the different relationships with ACE enjoyed by regularly funded organisations and by new or irregular applicants,

This is certainly a much more substantial commitment to evaluation than was in place 15 years ago. But, as has already been suggested, how people perceive and experience this system is another question. In December 2007 Arts Council England made a series of funding decisions that proposed, *inter alia*, to withdraw regular funding from some 200 organisations and make new awards to a further 100. These changes were received with understandable hostility by many of those whose grants were threatened. Central to the opposition was the basis on which decisions were made. In a public statement dated 17 January 2008, the National Campaign for the Arts alleged that:

ACE’s funding proposals do not always appear to be based on reliable evidence and that inaccurate data informed some recommendations.<sup>13</sup>

The fairness of this allegation is not the point. Attacking how conclusions are reached, as a way of avoiding the substantive issue of whether they are right, is a common enough tactic in political arguments about culture. The problem is that many people, including many of those whose work was subject to ACE appraisal and evaluation, felt that this critique of the organisation’s approach to evaluation chimed with their experience. How else to explain the vituperative nature of the reaction, symbolised by the confrontation between theatre professionals and ACE’s then Chief Executive, Peter Hewitt, at the Young Vic in January 2008? As *The Stage* reported at the time:

Arts Council England has been delivered a ‘vote of no confidence’ at an emergency meeting organised by Equity and attended by leading figures from the UK theatre industry including Ian McKellen, Peter Hall and Kevin Spacey<sup>14</sup>

This tempest – which had huge emotional impact on many of those involved – was a striking indication of the importance of how people experience evaluation and the consequent impact on what happens. Partly in response to the challenge it faced then, Arts Council England has subsequently consulted on the value of self-assessment and peer review.<sup>15</sup> It remains to be seen how this will be developed in practice (one of the many issues involved is the cost in terms of artists’ time spent assessing their peers rather than producing their own work) and how it will integrate with other valid forms of monitoring and evaluation.

## 2.4 PURPOSES AND METHODS

Having considered both the origins of the growth in arts evaluation and the difficulties of applying it to the complex management and policy work of one public body, we are confronted with at least two further problems: the purpose for which evaluation is being undertaken in the arts and the ways in which it is being done. Although the focus of the present paper on people's experience of evaluation is quite separate from these two issues, each has an important influence on that experience so it will be useful to touch on them in turn.

### **The purpose of evaluating the arts**

There are three conventional reasons to evaluate: to account for resources, to assess the effectiveness of policy and to learn from and improve practice. While by no means exclusive, each stems from a different motivation and a different socio-political context; each implies a difference of focus and ultimately each describes a different reality.

For most artists and arts organisations, the rise of evaluation has been seen principally in the context of the first purpose: accountability. In practice evaluation is just part of the funding agreement, the necessary final stage of a project when the grantee has to report – or be reported on – to the donor. The focus of this reporting tends to be on what was done and particularly on the results produced. The guidance on evaluation published by Arts Council England for its lottery programme spells this out clearly:

‘Evaluation involves gathering evidence before, during and after a project and using it to make judgements about what happened. The evidence should prove what happened and why, and what effect it had (ACE 2005:1).

More complex questions, for example about why those effects occurred or how they might be replicated, are rarely considered in the accountability framework. Yet those questions are important to the second purpose – that of assessing the effectiveness of programmes or policy. As Helen Simons says, ‘evaluation is about judgement, determining the merit or worth of a programme’ (Simons 2009:17). This is what donors often say is the purpose of their evaluative effort and investment but, as will become clear later in this paper, the experience of those directly involved suggests that this does not happen consistently.

Most valuable to artists and practitioners (and arguably therefore to the arts themselves) is the third purpose of learning from practice in order to improve it. Felicity Woolf, in the only substantial guidance on how to evaluate arts programmes yet published by Arts Council England, says that:

Evaluation is a powerful tool for learning. It is a structured way of thinking about what happens during your project, and why (Woolf 2004:7).

Again, the research reported in the rest of this paper suggests that, while people may aspire to this, their experience is somewhat different.

One factor in this divergence between expressed intention and actual experience is a degree of confusion about the purpose of evaluation within and beyond arts funding bodies. It seems that in practice both sides – those who require evaluation to be done and those who have to fulfil that requirement – shift their expectations, albeit unconsciously, according to where they stand, the point they are at in the project cycle, who they are addressing and other factors. One explanation for this unstable focus on purpose may be found in Simon's observation that:

Evaluation is inherently political, concerned with the distribution of power and the allocation of resources and opportunities in society (Simons 2009:17).

Whether people are looking to prove (in the Arts Council's telling word, above) the effect and thus the value of their work, to test the effectiveness of their policies or to learn from and improve their practice depends partly on the degree of pressure they face to justify their work. And that pressure affects those at all stages of the food chain: Arts Council England has targets set out in its funding agreement with DCMS, which in turn has targets agreed with the Treasury. It may be asked how far honest, rigorous, consistent and thoughtful evaluation can be fostered in a context of such shifting expectations and to what extent accountability can be compatible with learning in a funding relationship.

### **Methodologies of arts evaluation**

If the purposes of arts evaluation are unclear or shift according to context, it is not surprising that the methods used are also contested. After all, without consensus about *why*, agreement about *how* is hard to imagine.

One of the traps into which the arts are prone to fall is that of exceptionalism – the idea that their very nature and practice sets them apart from other areas of human life that an impartial observer might see as similar. The self-defensive ideological strength of this position is that objections to it can be presented as proof that the objector fails to understand the subject. In this thinking, anyone who does not see a unique character to the arts merely demonstrates their own lack of artistic sensitivity, thus invalidating their own objections. It is this claim to be different that underlies both the view that the arts cannot be evaluated at all and, more moderately, that doing so requires the development of new methods and tools uniquely calibrated to the task. This posi-

tion, whether implicit and explicit, would stand more scrutiny if its advocates demonstrated greater knowledge of social science or the established theories and methods of evaluation in other fields.

In fact, as Susan Galloway has shown, debates about research and evaluation methodologies in the arts show little awareness of existing (and better-informed) debates about social science research methods (Galloway 2009). That may be because, in the arts at least, methodological arguments have been used as a surrogate terrain for political arguments or, in attempting to discredit the methodologies themselves, for avoiding political arguments altogether.<sup>16</sup> Within the academy, evaluation is the subject of intense and informed debate around contrasting theoretical positions (Pawson & Tilley 2006:1ff). Similar debates in the arts can be equally intense, but the evaluation concepts and terms are so variously understood and so loosely used, that the value of the resulting discourse is much more questionable.

If, however, we reject the idea – in the absence of verifiable evidence – that the arts are so different from other human activities that understanding them requires wholly new research methods, then the particular methodological challenges involved in evaluating them can be addressed using the established theory, discourse and procedures of evaluation practice and the social sciences more generally.

## 2.5 THE HUMAN ASPECTS OF EVALUATION

The purposes and methods of arts evaluation have received a certain amount of attention in recent years, though much less than the growth of the practice merits. More importantly, in focusing on policy questions (why is evaluation used?) and methodological questions (how is it being done?) the debate has failed to contextualise the arts within either public policy or social research. In frequently concluding that there is a need for more, better and longer evaluations, it has implicitly adopted positivist ideas about the possibility and nature of social change (Galloway 2009).

One consequence of the way that the debate about arts evaluation has developed is the marginalisation of the people most intimately involved with the process. While academics and commentators debate, the artists, practitioners and managers whose work is ostensibly the subject of the discourse are sidelined. In particular, little attention has been paid to the impact of evaluation on those who have to carry it out and their impact on how it is done. How people feel and think influences what they do and how they do it. For example, if they see a task as an unreasonable imposition, they may do it superficially, ‘going through the motions’. On the other hand, if they understand and support its purpose, they may invest it with a great deal of care and imagination.

Because evaluation is something that has largely been introduced to the arts rather than being sought and developed by the profession, people's responses to the changing requirements of funders may be particularly important. This is an issue that has concerned me for some years. In 2002, I outlined some of the dangers of evaluation in a paper for the Arts Council of England (as it was then):

The danger of distorting practice, as people come to think more about what is being measured than what is important [...]; the danger of encouraging bureaucratisation, managerialism and unwarranted caution in arts organisation; the danger of undermining individual judgement, whether in arts organisations or in the funding system; the danger of fuelling mistrust between those who pay for or buy services and those who deliver them; the danger of encouraging people to think that the information which is produced about the arts is the truth, rather than a contribution to understanding which imposes responsibilities of judgement on those who use it (Matarasso 2002:4)

This study takes some of that thinking forward, on a modest scale, by asking how people professionally involved in arts evaluation think and feel about their experience of it and how their experience influences the process. At the heart of the study was a wish to talk in depth with people about their various experiences of evaluation and to build sufficient confidence to be able to open up some potentially difficult issues.

### 3 EXPERIENCES OF PLANNING EVALUATION

#### 3.1 BECOMING INVOLVED IN EVALUATION

The extent of evaluation now being undertaken in the British arts sector is unprecedented. Consequently, many people who entered the profession with skills and training in the arts now find themselves dealing with conceptual and practical issues of which they may have no previous experience. Two or three of the people interviewed for this research had studied science or research as undergraduates and had been able to draw on that knowledge in approaching evaluation. Such experiences or aptitudes made the subject interesting for some, as this interviewee commented:

*‘I wanted to see what I could do with it: I had a sense of the value of evaluation.’*

EVALUATOR<sup>17</sup>

Another had studied social sciences at university and enjoyed being able to use that knowledge in their current profession. However, these were exceptions. Whether in their roles as arts practitioners reporting on their work, as consultants undertaking evaluation or as programme managers and funders commissioning it, most of the interviewees had learnt about evaluation by doing it.

The way that arts professionals have adapted to meet the need to evaluate their work demonstrates their flexibility and convertible creative skills. On the other hand, few of the practitioners or evaluators interviewed had received any education or training related to evaluation. Instead, they had learnt on the job, by adapting enquiry skills used in arts practice, by working with more experienced colleagues, by using evaluation guidance from funders, by transferring skills learnt in other fields (at university and the workplace) and by using published resources, which the Internet has made much more accessible. Commissioners in funding agencies and arts organisations had used all these routes, but had also learnt from the evaluators they have contracted.<sup>18</sup>

This pragmatic autodidacticism has enabled the arts to engage with evaluation fast and with relatively little external professional input. Still, it has limitations and some of the difficulties that interviewees spoke of may be attributable, at least in part, to the *ad hoc* way in which evaluation has been introduced to the sector and the unstructured nature of knowledge of the discipline that many arts practitioners have gained as a result.

This seems also to have contributed to the sense of disempowerment in the face of evaluation that several interviewees spoke about. Even people who had been evaluating their own work for years spoke of it warily, as if they felt on soft ground, where someone with more knowledge might challenge them. One person, experienced in arts practice but not in evaluation, spoke of feeling unable to question the analyses and interpretations of evaluators they had worked with, even though they had disagreed strongly with them. A consciousness of the limits of their own evaluation expertise undermined their usual sense of authority about their practice.

It is perhaps surprising then that interviewees generally did not see a lack of training in evaluation as problematic; few had identified this as a way to strengthen their knowledge and authority in the field. Indeed, several were themselves surprised to be asked about professional development in this context. This may be accounted for by the relatively limited training opportunities still available.

### 3.2 COMMISSIONING EVALUATION

#### **The commissioners**

Although a lot of self-evaluation is now undertaken to satisfy funders' requirements, most formal and independent arts evaluation is the result of a commission, usually from a funding body such as Arts Council England, a charitable foundation or some other public body investing in arts programmes. Some are commissioned directly by the arts organisations themselves, though this has obvious risks. Understanding people's experience of commissioning or being commissioned to do evaluation is made more difficult by the place of planning in the process. In some cases, the commissioner recognises the need for evaluation and recruits someone with the expertise to design and execute the work. In others, the commissioner has knowledge and experience of evaluation (or just strong opinions about it) and so recruits a contractor to execute a previously determined evaluation brief.

#### **Recruiting evaluators**

Large organisations, such as Arts Council England, Creative Partnerships or Youth Music, have knowledgeable staff to design good evaluations and the resources to finance them. They commission a range of evaluators, including freelance consultants, university researchers, think tanks associates and others. Even so, interviewees with experience of recruiting evaluators spoke of the difficulties they often had in choosing the right person or team. One reason for this is the wide range of methods and of theoretical – though not always theorised – positions being used to evaluate the arts. The development of a taxonomy of these is beyond the scope of this paper, though it

could be a valuable contribution to understanding the field. For the present, it is sufficient to note a spectrum that includes approaches rooted in social science, business, arts management, marketing and other professions, as well as in evaluation itself.

The interviews suggest that the theoretical basis of planned evaluations is rarely stated, except by university researchers. Instead proposals focus on methodology, which is also what is usually required in evaluation briefs published by funding agencies. The choice commissioners then have – once issues such as price, record and so on have been considered – is between approaches. Typically, the offers could be differentiated according to the degree of openness or flexibility in the proposed methodology: in the arts, this variation may be interpreted wrongly as reflecting a distinction between quantitative and qualitative evaluation.

Qualitative approaches are often specifically requested in arts evaluation briefs, especially those published by arts organisations rather than funders, though what the term is taken to mean is rarely explained. However, there is also a strong tendency, especially among larger organisations and funding bodies, towards evaluations with a clear quantitative basis that hold out the prospect of the kind of factual evidence that seems to have political credibility.

Understanding the beliefs and assumptions that shape the decisions of those who commission evaluation is one more intriguing question that must be passed over here. What the interviews with commissioners do show is the thoughtfulness that can be applied to identifying an appropriate evaluator. In some ways, this is not surprising, since the commissioner is often closely involved in the project or programme to be evaluated and may be both interested and expert in the practice issues involved. At the same time, they must ensure that evaluations can meet their organisation's quite practical, even political, needs. For example, while university researchers were seen as having authority and interesting approaches to research, the results did not always satisfy and it was suggested that *'they're on their own trajectory'*<sup>19</sup>.

Interviewees spoke of the problems caused by commissioning qualitative research only to be disappointed by interesting but unusable results.

*'I was in a bit of a fix at the end because when this discursive 80-page document landed on the table of my boss, it looked as if I'd just commissioned a free-thinking individual to reflect on something without any real rigour.'* COMMISSIONER<sup>20</sup>

Consequently, they may feel obliged to contract evaluators who offer a more obviously structured and therefore seemingly reliable approach:

*‘I would compare that with the alternative [proposal] which was saying “Okay, we’ve got 80 days, we’ve got six orchestras, we’ve got X number of interviews, we’ve got Y amount of time to assess that, and we’ll put it into a document” – and it was almost like a piece of clockwork.’*

COMMISSIONER<sup>21</sup>

But experienced commissioners also recognise the danger of appointing evaluators for whom the project is just another job:

*‘When you get something that is very professionalised you’re sort of buying something off a shelf as a commodity; [...] you have to get very involved in it to make sure it’s what you think you’re buying.’*

COMMISSIONER<sup>22</sup>

For the commissioner to get actively involved in managing an evaluation may be neither possible nor desirable, but not doing so can leave them feeling vulnerable because they are unconfident that the work is being done satisfactorily.

Several commissioners spoke of tensions in their role, particularly in larger organisations where different people might be involved in evaluation. One organisation made a distinction between ‘*project evaluation and programme evaluation*’<sup>23</sup>, and the commissioner felt that the internal authority with regard to evaluation lay elsewhere:

*‘There was a bit of a war going on over where evaluation sat and whether it was the remit of programmes or the remit of research officers and that, as ever, had a little element of personal politics.’*

COMMISSIONER<sup>24</sup>

In another case, the number of people involved in different parts of the organisations gave one commissioner

*‘This sense of a machine producing data, but nobody knew why or what needed to be done with that data, or what questions it needed to answer or how that would help the organisation.’*

COMMISSIONER<sup>25</sup>

Several interviewees thought that, although individual evaluations they commissioned and managed were good, their organisations did not use them well or benefit as much as they might. In focusing so much on *how* evaluation should be done, principally so that its results could meet short term needs, the issue of *why* it was being done had been neglected.

Consequently, while evaluation reports might fulfil immediate management requirements, interviewees felt that it was much harder to ‘*extract the learning*’<sup>26</sup>, despite this often being their stated purpose. The situation that interviewees described, common to several different commissioning bodies, was one where evaluation served a tactical

need without a unified strategic purpose to support it. The result was an accumulation of separate evaluation studies, often good in themselves, which did not cohere to provide a larger body of knowledge capable of guiding organisational policy or the sector more widely.

### **Getting commissions**

The evaluators interviewed sometimes found the processes through which they were identified and commissioned problematic, for example where correct open tendering procedures were not used. Several interviewees reported being offered substantial contracts simply because someone thought they would be a good person to evaluate the programme.<sup>27</sup> Although trust was clearly a major factor in these offers, such conduct raises important issues, even apart from the obvious matter of equal opportunities. First, it is desirable for both management and research reasons, to commission through a process capable of testing a range of potential offers and approaches. Secondly, rather than establishing a contractual relationship between commissioner and provider, in which professional and ethical questions can be properly set out, the gift of work can create a compromising if unacknowledged dependency.

However, it must also be acknowledged that competitive tender processes have their own problems, aside from the obvious ones of time and cost.<sup>28</sup> One issue raised by interviewees was that tender processes usually required them to specify their proposed methodology in considerable detail – the ‘how’ question again. But evaluators did not always believe they had sufficient knowledge of a situation and the people involved to do this well at such an early stage.<sup>29</sup> Some would prefer to submit a tender that set out a methodological approach and its theoretical and ethical basis but left the detail to be agreed following an inquiry process among stakeholders. In this model, a full evaluation plan would be prepared and signed off only after appointment but they feared that such an approach would not win the contract if the commissioners wanted, as one evaluator put it, ‘*a marketing tool to do more of that work*’.<sup>30</sup>

Some evaluators felt that commissioners did not always have adequate theoretical or empirical knowledge of evaluation to make good decisions between tenders (although that was not true of those interviewed for this study). In those circumstances, evaluators believed that a specious methodological precision could appear more convincing than an approach relying on open interviewing, case studies, observation and methodologies closer to social anthropology than management consultancy. One commissioner confirmed this perception, saying of a body where they had worked:

*‘If you use a third party evaluator, if you have a sort of mechanical mechanism to your process, then it is [seen as] a ‘robust’ and ‘objective’ process, and that isn’t necessarily the case.’*

COMMISSIONER<sup>31</sup>

One evaluator, while clear about the value of a rigorous process, was frustrated at the refusal of the project commissioner to allow more open questioning and even the possibility of unanticipated outcomes. For this person, the uncertainty involved in an open inquiry was essential:

*‘Where I live most naturally is to feel my way in the dark, enjoying the fact that there are outcomes we couldn’t know about.’*

EVALUATOR<sup>32</sup>

Few people in the arts have a tertiary-level science education and this may contribute to the weight often given by them to evaluation approaches that they feel have intellectual authority. A degree of scientism – the belief that scientific method is the only proper form of inquiry – in the arts may stem from lack of confidence in other forms of inquiry (including those of art itself) and also from a perception that scientific discourse has greater political credibility (Pirsig 1974: 253).

At the same time, anti-scientific attitudes are also common in the arts, associated with the exceptionalism described in 2.4 above. As one evaluator said:

*‘I also come across [...] suspicion and indeed hostility towards the attempt to rationalise or quantify the outcomes and impacts of artistic activities and experiences. Before I started presenting research and hosting seminars in the arts world I had no idea that people could get so angry about data!’*

EVALUATOR<sup>33</sup>

The ‘Two Cultures’ identified by C. P. Snow in his 1959 Rede Lecture have older roots and the division continues to shape not just how evaluation is conceived but much else in contemporary arts practice and policy.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.3 PURPOSE AND EXPECTATIONS

#### Establishing purpose

*‘The problem here is that no one knows what questions they’re trying to answer.’*

COMMISSIONER<sup>35</sup>

These tensions over the purpose of evaluation were widely reflected in the experiences of the interviewed practitioners, evaluators and commissioners. Though the last group might be expected to be able to resolve them, they did not always feel in control of the

process. Several interviewees spoke of the pressure to meet the expectations of their superiors, boards or external stakeholders.

They were usually supportive of the work whose evaluation they were commissioning – indeed it had sometimes been their own idea – and were personally interested in the lessons about practice that might be produced. At the same time, they understood their organisation’s culture and politics, and they needed an evaluation that could make a credible contribution to its work. In some cases, commissioners thought there were more fundamental problems. In one case, for example, the interviewee found commissioning difficult because there was no real connection between evaluation and operational planning:

*‘I felt you had [...] people constantly evaluating against a black hole where the organisational objectives should be.’*

COMMISSIONER<sup>36</sup>

Practitioners reported various, often simultaneous reasons for undertaking evaluation. These included accountability (for instance in checking on the work of a contracted artist), knowledge of the impact of their work and learning about how their audiences or participants saw that work. Inevitably, given the funding imperatives, a blurring of evaluation with advocacy was evident: as one practitioner said, *‘it provided a useful source of quotes’* which helped justify their work.<sup>37</sup>

The position of evaluators was different in that they did not generally set the purpose of the evaluation. Instead, they often found themselves negotiating clearer agreements about purpose between a project and its funder. Their interest tended to lie first with knowledge and learning. While practitioners and commissioners shared this interest in principle, it was easily overtaken in practice by the demands of accountability on the one hand and advocacy on the other.

Indeed the need to prove worth was a recurring tension that many interviewees felt could fatally undermine an evaluation: one interviewee recognised that, as far as their organisation was concerned *‘a lot of it was certainly advocacy-led.’*<sup>38</sup>

### **Communicating purpose**

In the interviewees’ experiences, if tensions existed in an evaluation’s purpose or brief they tended to spill over into its conduct. Both evaluators and practitioners felt the consequences, since they were actively involved in doing the work or being evaluated. Several of the evaluators interviewed described difficulties in meeting the expectations both of commissioners and of those whose activities were the subject of evaluation. This tension was especially acute where community groups or other partners outside the arts profession, such as schools, were involved.

At the heart of this problem was a perception that commissioners and practitioners sought different outcomes from the evaluation (though both, still in different ways, sought validation of their work). While the first wanted a comparative assessment of performance in order to inform spending decisions, the second wanted to understand better the strengths and weaknesses of their practice in order to bring about improvements. There seems to be quite a subtle power issue at stake here, with the evaluator caught between positions; as one interviewee explained:

*‘The commissioner has a need for an evaluation to show things – quite a genuine need to be able to demonstrate x, y, z, so they are looking for the evaluation to do that, or they have fears and they are looking for it not to demonstrate x, y and z. [...] If you are good evaluator and you’re working with your client, the evaluation will get framed to maximise that possibility.’*

EVALUATOR<sup>39</sup>

Yet there are ethical, methodological and cultural reasons why both commissioners and evaluators find such an approach uncomfortable, so it may be mitigated by aspirations to work with those whose work is being evaluated, to take their interests into account and to prioritise the learning outcomes of evaluation. However, the need ‘to demonstrate x, y, z’ is felt by the more powerful stakeholder and so, with the best will, that priority tends to dominate as the evaluation progresses.

How this works on the ground is illustrated by the experience of one practitioner working in a school nursery, who described how problematic it had been to have the work reviewed by an external evaluator. The artist was confident both about the work and its impact on the children’s development, but felt that the commissioner’s attractive language about evaluation did not match the evaluator’s actual behaviour:

*‘They say all these things, but [the evaluator] doesn’t act in a very reassuring way. It’s not clear whether it’s monetary accounting or if they really want to find out what the impact is on the children.’*

PRACTITIONER<sup>40</sup>

The practitioner also felt uncomfortable on behalf of the teachers they had been working with:

*‘Everyone’s getting really, really stressed because [the evaluators are] not talking to anyone about what they’re doing. [...] The teachers feel they’re being put on the spot, [that] they’re being assessed – it’s not evaluation.’*

PRACTITIONER<sup>41</sup>

Whatever the commissioner’s or the evaluator’s intentions, in this case they had failed either to communicate effectively or to keep to the actual purpose of the evaluation. The teachers saw it as an exercise in monitoring and the practitioner didn’t feel there was real interest in the learning everyone had gained in the project.

Recognising the power issues, some of the evaluators interviewed saw their task as being primarily to support those who deliver arts projects by helping them review, learn from and improve their performance. Reporting to funding bodies was necessary, not least because they had directly or indirectly paid for the evaluation, but some evaluators did not see it as particularly useful, especially if they felt that it produced little change. Several interviewees spoke about this tension between what people said they wanted to focus on (the learning) and what they felt compelled to address (accounting for resources).

### **Large-scale evaluations**

As evaluation has grown in the cultural sector, it has also become an increasingly important part of major programmes initiated by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, Arts Council England, the Museums Libraries and Archives Council and other funding bodies. In the arts, these programmes include Creative Partnership, Youth Music and Find Your Talent among others. Since most of these new initiatives have begun as experiments or pilots, they have naturally invested substantially in evaluation. In doing so, they have tended to seek a single, consistent approach able to ensure that data from different projects in various parts of the country can be collated and compared. This was the case, for example, with Creative Partnerships, which developed a consistent internal evaluation system as well as commissioning external research and evaluation.<sup>42</sup>

Several of the evaluators interviewed spoke of difficulties in working within these types of established systems. Although they were intended to be flexible and to reflect the local circumstances, interviewees felt constrained by methods in which they had limited confidence and seemed not really negotiable. The process of reporting on evaluation experiences, advising on changes and working to improve process was experienced as frustrating and time consuming. In large programmes, national managers, acting as commissioners, were seen as controlling what was to be evaluated and how but with little knowledge of local circumstances.

In speaking of these experiences, evaluators used phrases such as '*the command came down that we were to use the national model*'<sup>43</sup> or '*an edict came out that they were revising it*'<sup>44</sup>, which speak of poor communication between the national managers and the people who evaluate their programmes locally. The evaluators' frustration was exacerbated when they were consulted on evaluation design but then felt that their advice had been ignored. This tended to further undermine their confidence in and willingness to follow the established systems.

### **Focusing evaluation**

Several interviewees spoke about the difficulty of focusing an evaluation when there were many interesting issues to explore and so many stakeholders to satisfy.

*'The trick with evaluation is not to load too much stuff into it; the problem with arts people is that, if they've got a lot of money for evaluation they think they need to get as much out of it as possible.'*

COMMISSIONER <sup>45</sup>

This may reflect the common view among arts professionals that the arts are marginal to public services and that there is a need to make the case for their impact and value more effectively. As one commissioner reflected:

*'People felt a lack of confidence about articulating the value of what they were doing in the culture sector generally and [they] thought the solution to that was more research, more evaluation.'*

COMMISSIONER <sup>46</sup>

Whatever the case, several of the more experienced evaluators and commissioners thought that their best work had a precise and limited focus. It addressed a clearly defined question in an appropriate way and so produced knowledge that could be built on either internally or in considering the future of a programme with its funders.

## 4 EXPERIENCES OF UNDERTAKING EVALUATION

### 4.1 PRACTITIONERS' EXPERIENCES

#### Initial feelings

The older and younger practitioners interviewed saw evaluation quite differently. One person in their early thirties had never done a project that had not required it: they saw evaluation as a part of reflective arts practice and did not feel threatened by it:

*'I remember wanting to be evaluated actually; I wanted to know the impact of what I'd done – maybe I wanted the evidence.'* PRACTITIONER <sup>47</sup>

While this also speaks of the personal confidence of the individual concerned, artists of whom evaluation has always been expected do seem to have a different relationship with it. Others, perhaps less self-assured or who had worked for years without having to evaluate, found it less natural. In the past, and for some practitioners still, evaluation was imposed by the funding system or by senior managers:

*'It was always and add-on at the end; it always felt a bit of a task that you had to get through and do.'* PRACTITIONER <sup>48</sup>

Practitioners generally had less interest in evaluation as a practice or a source of ideas than evaluators or even commissioners, though this naturally varied between individuals and there may also be a generational difference.

#### Practitioners' experiences of being evaluated

Practitioners' experiences of evaluation fell into two kinds: being the subject of an external evaluation and undertaking self-evaluation. In both cases, however, the human factor was very evident in how different people experienced being evaluated. Their personalities and histories, and those of the evaluators, played a fundamental role. So one person could describe working with an external evaluator as

*'Cathartic, because I had been so close to the project and then gone straight into evaluating it, it was good that someone sat me down, because I needed [...] to think about it from my perspective.'* PRACTITIONER <sup>49</sup>

But for others, being evaluated was a source of real stress. Although evaluators and programme managers were often supportive and spoke about policy and impact rather than individual performance, those whose work was under review did not always feel the distinction. For one practitioner, the answer was detachment: *'I'm going to try not to get emotionally involved; it's a bit frustrating'*<sup>50</sup>. Another felt silenced at the end of an evaluation, despite thinking the evaluator's interpretation was wrong:

*'What other people see isn't necessarily what it is [...] but I had to kind of just very humbly smile and accept the feedback.'*

PRACTITIONER <sup>51</sup>

Practitioners spoke most positively of their experiences of working with academic researchers, perhaps because this work combined authoritative methods with a discursive process. They felt it was better able to reflect the nuances of their practice and the issues in which they were most interested: As one practitioner explained, *'it was great to work with people who understood that side of things but also could link that with a theoretical base'*<sup>52</sup>. Those practitioners who had worked with academics were more inclined to speak of what they had learned as a result than those who had only worked with evaluation consultants.

The language and norms of evaluation can cause difficulties in appearing to cut across those of practitioners themselves. Paradoxically, this was most likely to be the case when the evaluation was following good practice in issues such as establishing consent. The formalities that would be considered essential in academic research – for example, in ensuring that an interviewee fully understood their rights and the potential consequences of taking part – can seem heavy-handed to an artist who may have spent days gaining people's confidence. One practitioner working with university researchers appreciated the ethical standards used but felt that *'it makes it look like some horrendous process'*<sup>53</sup> for the participants. The ethical, theoretical and methodological issues involved make this a particularly sensitive area of evaluation.

### **Self-evaluation by practitioners**

Practitioners saw self-evaluation both as more helpful and more enjoyable and interviewees often described it as a normal part of their practice. As one person put it:

*'It's part of the cycle [...] My career has been about learning, checking what I've learnt and what I haven't learnt, reflecting on that and then investing that information and that experience into the next episode. I think I've always done that.'*

PRACTITIONER <sup>54</sup>

If such a self-consciously reflective approach to practice cannot be taken for granted, some at least of the practitioners interviewed think a lot about evaluation because they

care so deeply about their practice. Their wish to understand and communicate their work's effects was strong, but so was their honesty about it:

*'I needed to know where my weaknesses were, where the gaps were and I saw it as an opportunity to do that [...] I wanted to learn.'* PRACTITIONER<sup>55</sup>

Good arts practice requires courage, rigour, discipline and integrity, as well as talent. The practitioners interviewed in this study were sensitive to the risks of bias and optimistic reporting in their self-evaluation but their commitment to improving their work made them self-critical both of it and of their evaluation practice. In several cases, they had sought out partners in academia or professional evaluators to challenge and improve their work in this field and all the interviewees were keen to do it better as their work progressed.

*'What we're trying to do here is to inject some rigour in a reporting sense.'* PRACTITIONER<sup>56</sup>

At the same time there was sometimes resistance to using methods from other disciplines or professions and a wish to use evaluation and reporting methods that were both of and appropriate to the arts:

*'My argument would be that I'm educating people who are questioning it by saying this works because it's the only way we can do it that really tells the right story, the true story, without going down the university or medical route.'* PRACTITIONER<sup>57</sup>

However, there was a substantial diversity of views among the practitioners interviewed about self-evaluation, perhaps because they were so personally affected by it and also because the nature of their arts practice varied widely. In comparison, there was more common ground among evaluators and commissioners, whose roles in evaluation tended to be more consistent and similar.

## 4.2 EVALUATORS' EXPERIENCES

### Trust

Evaluators occupy an odd position, engaged with, but separate from, the people they work with and for. It is not surprising then that all the interviewees spoke of building relationships as both essential to their work and personally rewarding. Evaluators commonly expressed feelings of personal commitment or even loyalty to those whose work they were reviewing, especially in longer projects where there was time for people to get to know one another. The professional relationships that developed were similar to those between a consultant and a client, where the latter's needs may be

served best through challenge or even criticism. Where trust had been established, both evaluators and the project team felt more secure. The process of giving and receiving critical feedback was more effective because those involved had confidence in the evaluator's underlying support for their goals and practice.

One evaluator spoke about feeling that they had become '*almost an arm's length member of the team*'<sup>8</sup>, attending project management meetings and able to contribute guidance based on the data being gathered. While aware of the risk of losing impartiality by becoming too closely involved, they felt that the benefits of being able to inform the project's evolution outweighed the risks. In this instance, evaluation was a formative process whose value could be tested by how far it contributed to improving project work and outcomes, not an exercise in monitoring and accountability.

For several evaluators, the quality of the relationship they built with the people whose work they were evaluating was a factor in how they assessed their own performance. This was partly because strong, trusting relationships enabled them to gather data and to report in ways that supported learning and changes in practice. But it was also because it made the work more personally enjoyable and satisfying.

Evaluators' relationships with commissioners were more distant and more ambivalent, except where they were commissioned by those whose work they were evaluating. Here, several interviewees described tensions caused by lack of engagement or failure to act on findings. Lack of trust by the commissioners in their professional skills and judgement was a recurring complaint from evaluators, a perception familiar to some commissioners, who saw things differently. Again, the accuracy of these perceptions is not the issue: the point is that people's thoughts and feelings influence their behaviour in all circumstances.

### **Implementing evaluation plans**

Larger programmes and particularly those with an experimental aspect, such as Creative Partnerships or Find Your Talent, have tended to develop ambitious evaluation plans since their future depends on being able to demonstrate successful outcomes. This is not to suggest that their approach to evaluation is biased by such concerns. Actually, the risk may be that, wishing to produce unimpeachable evidence of their impact, they develop evaluation systems that are inflexible and over-complex. This was certainly the view of several evaluators who had been commissioned to evaluate projects only to find that their task was simply to implement an existing model. While interviewees recognised the importance of consistency within a national programme, it could be very frustrating to feel there was no scope for the evaluator to use their own skills and creativity in approaching the task.

Some commissioners, however, believed that direction was necessary to secure consistent results from evaluation:

*'You feel a little bit as if you're resorting to a prescriptive approach, but when people get that right it will start to breathe and be more flexible – because where that evaluation model is being used well, it's fascinating.'* COMMISSIONER<sup>59</sup>

But problems did arise if the evaluator did not agree with the model's concept, methods or values. Some interviewees spoke of their sense of disempowerment when they had no input into the conception or planning of the evaluation. As one person put it, speaking about a project that they had been recruited for but had not yet begun:

*'No doubt I will be told to go in and ask the questions, record the answers and write up my impressions'.<sup>60</sup>*

This sense of being an operative tasked with executing a system designed by others was a cause of resentment. Another evaluator had tried, in the first year of a three-year national programme, to adapt the system they were required to use. When the agency concerned took no account of the critique of this model made by them (and others), they simply did not use it in the second year. Instead, they evaluated the work using methods they believed were more appropriate. In that evaluator's view, the commissioners did not notice the discrepancy or raise questions because they *'looked at [the report] quickly and moved on'*.<sup>61</sup>

If this is more than an isolated incident, it calls into question the way in which national programmes with local delivery are evaluated. A centralised model, however good in itself, risks seeming inappropriate to people working locally in differing situations. If they feel they cannot meaningfully influence what they are asked to do, they may subvert the model (deliberately or not) and undermine its integrity through the introduction of inconsistent data.

### **Small scale evaluations**

The interviewees felt that their most successful, rewarding and enjoyable evaluations were almost always of relatively small projects with clear and focused objectives. As a result, the evaluation itself was able to define precise and meaningful questions and secure real engagement from the people delivering the work. Funders' expectations, if not actually low, tended to be limited because of the relatively low importance they attached to these projects. And so, with less high stakes, the evaluators felt able to establish the learning culture that was so often their purpose in evaluation.

These smaller, exploratory evaluations were not always cosy. One interviewee spoke of an experience that had been *'very miserable for everyone'* because of the fluidity of

the project process. However, the difficulties experienced in this case had eventually focused the commitment of those involved to learn from the experience and develop better approaches to their practice:

*‘Actually, it was a very interesting evaluation because [the project] didn’t go well and that made the material much more interesting. [...] They actually got out of [the project] more than they realised at the time so it was a useful evaluation because it reminded them that there was value in the process.’* COMMISSIONER<sup>62</sup>

In a culture where funding bodies are often driven by utilitarian objectives in evaluation, this commissioner valued the possibility of learning from an evaluation whose outcomes lay more in personal development and the emergence of new knowledge than in a tidy report with policy recommendations.

### 4.3 OBJECTIVITY AND KNOWLEDGE

Although the interviewees had very different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives, there was a consistent thoughtfulness about their work and the complex challenges of evaluation. Evaluators and commissioners, who tended to have the deeper and more varied experience of evaluation, were all cautious in their assessments of what could be known and with what degree of certainty. The following observation is worth quoting at length as a representative example of the care with which people approached the subject:

*‘To what extent can you do a truly scientific evaluation of a single intervention? If you can then it’s hugely valuable, but if you’re in a world where there are complications around multi-interventions, of not being able to have control groups, of “getting a sense of”, but having to make judgements and estimates, [of] having a level of depth to the observations that can never be claimed to be objective [...] then the use of the words “objectivity” and “robustness” have to be treated very carefully.’* COMMISSIONER<sup>63</sup>

This commissioner was very sensitive to the gaps between the different discourses and values, needs and expectations, of artists, researchers and funders. Their thoughtful approach was far removed from how arts evaluation is sometimes debated by those with less knowledge of the practice.<sup>64</sup> The interviewees who were actually engaged in evaluation had the time and opportunities to contextualise their experiences, They were therefore able to speak more broadly about the reality of practice, the different expectations of practitioners and commissioners, and the less than ideal circumstances within which most action research and programme evaluation in the arts takes place.

## 5 EXPERIENCES OF REPORTING EVALUATION

### 5.1 APPROACHES TO REPORTING

‘The world of research has gone berserk/Too much paperwork’

(Bob Dylan, ‘Nettie Moore’)

The conventional output of evaluation is a written report that collates and presents the findings and allows them to be shared with others, including people with no direct involvement in a project. On a more human level, it makes visible the days, weeks or years of time spent observing, interviewing, analysing and thinking: it meets a basic need to have something to show for one’s efforts. These reports are the currency of evaluation and can function as ‘calling cards’ for the evaluators: it is not unusual for commissioners to require consultants to submit copies of past reports with their tenders or applications.

It is striking then that most of the interviewees questioned the value of these documents. Evaluators in particular thought that they were not always effective in enabling the reflection they wanted to put at the heart of evaluation, and preferred to report face to face. Practitioners also valued this approach. One person spoke of their frustration when there was not enough time to share experiences and insights in an evaluation process: the report, they said, was not an alternative to discussion and reflection. One difference between these reporting processes is that documents tend to be read by individuals, while discussion naturally happens among groups: being able to hear and respond to other people’s reactions to the findings of an evaluation may be an important part of learning, especially in projects that have been shared.

For one experienced evaluator, the report served only two purposes: to satisfy the commissioner’s requirement for a tangible output of the evaluation and to help them organise their thinking so that they could present the work effectively to the people whose work was being evaluated.<sup>65</sup> For this consultant, evaluation is a process of reflection and change in which all stakeholders need to engage actively:

*‘What I expect of people is that they play the game. If they do that, change doesn’t happen on paper, it happens in their heads.’*

EVALUATOR<sup>66</sup>

Reporting was an essential part of evaluation for all those interviewed, but it did not require a lengthy report that would be inaccessible to many of those whose work it discussed and that few would read.

## 5.2 INTERIM REPORTS

Evaluation briefs often ask for formative evaluation, by which is meant evaluation that can inform the development of a project while it can still be changed. However, the evaluators interviewed felt that this aspiration was forgotten once a project was under way. Several people spoke of their difficulties in getting programme managers to take account of interim findings and to change plans they were already committed to.

Evaluators working on longer and larger projects were frustrated that the problems they drew attention to in interim reports were often repeated the next year. They felt that programme managers did not give serious attention to the evaluation's potential to influence the development of a project. One was damning in their assessment: *'I think the reports were almost without value, if value is measured in terms of impact.'*<sup>67</sup>

These interviews suggested that commissioners do not fully appreciate the ethical and methodological issues associated with formative evaluation. For example, this approach can compromise the independence of an evaluator who may, in a programme's later stages, be evaluating the results of changes made on their advice. They also hinted that there may sometimes be less appetite for learning, and therefore for change, in the arts sector than is often assumed.

## 5.3 FINAL REPORTS

The evaluators interviewed spoke about the care they took in drafting their project reports and it is clear that, for some of them at least, these documents are not simply transitory items of arts administration but reflective accounts of transferable lessons. Some of the most successful reporting experiences occurred when the organisation commissioned the evaluator to review their own work. Then, even when there were difficult things to report, the internal nature of the exercise created a safe space for reflection, at least in the hands of a sensitive evaluator.

However, evaluators did face reporting challenges, especially where projects had run into personality or behavioural crises. One person described an experience where

*'They all critiqued each other, but I wrote it such that they all saw their own critique in there, so they read it differently. I got positive feedback from all of them,*

*which was very curious because actually I had included information that was quite difficult for all of them.'*

EVALUATOR<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, at least one practitioner felt that evaluators were not always honest in their reporting, especially in circumstances where there were difficult issues to confront or sharply divided views.

*'When you're talking about cross-cultural collaborations, you've got to talk about some fucking horrible shit going down and it's not helpful to pretend that that stuff didn't happen – people write things out of history.'*

PRACTITIONER<sup>69</sup>

Evaluators were frustrated by what followed the submission of their reports and thought their work was not always taken seriously unless it had immediate funding implications. The lack of interest was alleged of senior managers, of central office staff in large organisations and of funding agencies of all kinds. One evaluator observed simply that *'no-one was interested'*<sup>70</sup> in the findings of their year's work.

Some interviewees thought that the time required to do a good evaluation contributed to this problem. A manager's priorities had often moved on six months or a year after commissioning an evaluation; sometimes, it was the manager themselves who had moved on and their successor had no investment in the outcomes of old programmes. One commissioner who had also worked as an evaluator saw both sides of this issue:

*'[Funders believe] that they are interested in the bigger, deeper picture but in practice by the time the bigger, deeper picture emerges, that agenda is yesterday's history, they're on to something else and they don't have the time or the resources to engage with what is interesting and to engage with the dissemination and often the political picture has moved on.'*

COMMISSIONER<sup>71</sup>

As a result, the rich texture of the evaluation's learning may seem no longer relevant to the commissioner's needs, and their focus narrows to basic questions about outputs that need to be answered so that the project can be closed down and the organisation can turn its attention elsewhere.

*'The major political focus is on the decisions about what's being funded, so it's very hard to resource and focus on what is the value of that funding because by the time they know that, the political agenda of what's important to fund has changed anyway.'*

COMMISSIONER<sup>72</sup>

Knowing that those who commissioned the evaluation did not value the work into which the evaluator had put so much time and care was demoralising: *'What really*

*frustrates me is the thousands of reports on shelves that nobody reads.*<sup>73</sup> Some interviewees felt bitter at working for someone with no interest in the result:

*'I thought, "I'm writing this to justify the use of the funding, but is any fucker going to read it?" And d'you know what? I don't think any fucker has.'*

EVALUATOR<sup>74</sup>

However, from the commissioner's perspective, the problem sometimes lies with the reports themselves. One person spoke about an evaluation they had commissioned that had been thoughtful and, they felt, worthwhile as a process. The problems arose from the evaluator's inability to present the results to the funding body in a form that was relevant and useful to people who had not been directly involved.

Practitioners also sometimes found reports disappointing; one described their reaction to the account of a project in which they had been involved as:

*'Is that all you've got to say about this project we've sweated blood and tears for?'*

PRACTITIONER<sup>75</sup>

In all these cases, poor communication may underlie the interviewees' widely reported sense of frustration. There may be no face-to-face meeting between an evaluator and a commissioner and once the report has been received, the commissioner might not feel any sense of obligation to keep informed a contractor who has finished his work. Perhaps allowing more time to wind up an evaluation and space for all those involved to comment on the findings would be a sensible investment.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

### 6.1 USING EVALUATION

At present we're snowed under with an irrational expansion of blind data-gathering in the sciences because there's no rational format for any understanding of scientific creativity.

(Pirsig 1974:294)

The success of post-war British arts policy has been its support for and stimulation of the supply side of the arts economy. With relatively small amounts of public money (at least in comparison with France or Germany) the UK has been able to increase the scale of cultural production enormously, both responding to and encouraging the social and economic changes touched on in section 2.2 above. The extent of this country's production of cultural goods and services, whether in the public, private, voluntary or informal sectors, has never been greater.

On the other hand, much less attention and much less thought has been given to the demand side of the cultural economy. This was not such an urgent question as long as growing prosperity, better education and more leisure (at least for the majority) were helping to build consumers for this growing cultural production. Since the Arts Council's creation, its only sustained approaches to stimulating demand have been in the development of education and outreach work on the one hand and investment in marketing on the other – both attempts to make an existing offer more attractive or palatable to those who do not already use it or use it enough.

The poor attention given to cultural demand by policy makers at all levels has contributed to the imbalances in the British cultural sectors. It is one reason, for example, why the public arts sector still feels underfunded despite the large increases in public spending during the past 15 years. Funding has increased but the focus on supply has simply led to a commensurate increase in the number of artists and arts organisations who now want it.

There is a parallel here with arts evaluation, the supply of which has grown hugely during the past 15 years but without anyone giving similar attention to the demand. Each year, more 'major reports' are added to the stack of publications about the arts, their management, practice and impact. Most of them are lucky to find a small handful of readers because there is no demand. It is not that there is no interest in the arts and their impact: people have been thinking about that for at least 2,500 years (Belfiore

and Bennett 2008). The problem is that the supply of arts evaluations is produced with insufficient reference to the needs or interests of potential users.

This study, despite its limited scope, has confirmed my growing belief that the arts funding system as a whole and most of the organisations within it have yet to develop a coherent rationale for evaluation. In the absence of such a rationale, it is impossible to answer clearly, consistently or well questions such as:

- Why does the arts sector invest in evaluation?
- What types and methods of evaluation are best suited to fulfilling that purpose?
- How much evaluation is needed to fulfil that purpose?
- On what basis does the arts sector choose where to invest in evaluation?
- What professional standards are set and met for arts evaluation?
- What return does the arts sector get for its investment in evaluation?
- What influence does this activity have on policy and practice?
- What are its outcomes for the wider purposes of arts policy and spending?

Instead, I am left with the image of a conveyor belt pumping out more and more reports which can barely be cleared away into storage before the next ones arrive. Each new report, rather than adding to the sum of knowledge, actually makes it harder to know anything because, in the vast libraries of arts evaluation reports, the good are filed alongside the bad and the ugly without any way of differentiating them. Serious, thoughtful work that should influence both practice and policy is stifled by self-serving advocacy and uninformed polemic. In the end, all is discredited and perhaps even the idea of evaluating the arts falls, unjustifiably, into disrepute.

## 6.2 SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT ARTS EVALUATION

Rather than offering premature conclusions, it seems more useful to highlight some of the issues that have arisen through the study. Three questions are set out below. Obviously, they are not exhaustive: anyone who has read this far will have their own. Rather, they are starting points for further reflection, for conversations between those who commission and undertake evaluation in the arts and perhaps for testing through further research.

### 1 What gets evaluated?

In talking to people involved in evaluating and commissioning evaluation in the arts, it is striking that most of the experiences they report are in the field of access, outreach and education work. Despite what is sometimes said, these are not the main focus of public sector arts policy, planning and spending: analysis of Arts Council England's

accounts shows that the bulk of spending goes to the producing and presenting activities of orchestras, theatre, galleries and artists themselves. Yet evaluation of this core activity seems to be relatively limited compared with outreach work. That raises all sorts of questions about arts policy and its underlying assumptions.

## **2 What is the purpose of evaluation in the arts?**

Many of the problems and tensions that are described in this paper arise from a basic ambiguity about why the arts sector is undertaking evaluation. Is it to account for its use of public resources? If so, it might be better to stress the distinction between ‘monitoring and evaluation’. Is it to develop knowledge about the effectiveness of policy? If so, attention needs to be given to the integration of policy, planning and evaluation. Is it to support learning about practice? If so, thought needs to be given to how arts organisations of all kinds can develop a learning culture and practice. If it is about advocating for the value of the arts – it should not be. Until the arts sector can clearly distinguish between evaluation and advocacy it will do both badly.

## **3 Do organisations want to change?**

The most fundamental question that emerges from even a cursory overview of how evaluation is currently used in the arts sector is whether there is a real interest in knowledge if it challenges existing beliefs about arts practice. More than most aspects of human activity, the arts are governed by faith, not reason: they express values and are defended on that basis. This is a key difference between the two cultures. Science, concerned with knowledge, aspires to hold provisional hypotheses only as long as no better explanation of phenomena is available. Art, concerned with wisdom and other expressions of subjective value, has no comparable test of failure.

Despite the logical positivist claim that ‘metaphysicians are musicians without musical ability’ (Critchley 2001:96) art is not metaphysics. It is created and experienced by human beings in time and space and is therefore as open to inquiry through scientific method as any other physical phenomenon. The question is how artists and those who promote and support their work respond to the results of such inquiry if they do not confirm established beliefs or interests. Or even, more simply, whether there is a readiness in the arts to engage in such a discourse at all.

## 7 APPENDICES

### 7.1 REFLECTING ON THIS EXPERIENCE

It seems appropriate, at the end of a study of people's experience of arts evaluation, to reflect on my own experience, even at the risk of turning in ever-diminishing circles. It has sometimes been frustrating to compress the complexities and ambiguities of arts evaluation in the limited scope of this study. But the focus on how people think and feel about evaluation has been enlightening. At times, both the formal interviews and the other conversations echoed my own experience, providing confirmation of ideas I had been forming; at others, new insights have emerged from differences in values, ideas and working methods.

The role of evaluator is fascinating but problematic. He or she occupies an uncertain ground between practitioner and commissioner, accountable to each but also to their own values and professional standards. Although the relationships formed, particularly with practitioners, can be rewarding, an evaluator's obligation to retain a critical detachment prevents their being seen as a colleague. For that reason, the study has also been rewarding in enabling unusual conversations with peers that are essential to enriching one's own thinking.

And I was not alone in feeling that. Several of the interviews concluded with the reflection that the conversation itself had been valuable to the interviewee because it had made them think about and articulate things in new ways. They had learnt about their own thinking and practice by discussing it with an independent person – in itself a good demonstration of how structured reflection can support learning. In the absence of professional associations specifically for arts evaluation and in the context of competition for work, it is hard to develop the collegiate culture that can support exchange, mutual learning and support. And yet, if there is a distinctive practice of arts evaluation and it is here to stay, the improvement of that practice will depend on the kinds of professional development structures used in other fields.

The growth of evaluation in the arts cannot be said to have occurred in a context of serious critical reflection. There is an urgent need to clarify the theory, purpose, practice and uses of evaluation in the arts, even if that means slowing down and making time to think about what is being done. The importance of arts evaluation is not in question: everything else about it is.

## 7.2 CONDUCTING THE STUDY

The research centred on semi-structured interviews with 11 arts professionals. The sample of people interviewed was not intended to be representative of what is now a large and diverse arts profession: the scale of the project would not have permitted that. Nonetheless, the interviewees had a wide range of career paths, professional backgrounds and experience in and beyond the arts sector; there were also differences of age, education, social background, culture and race. So, although their views represent a series of snapshots, each has a quite different point of view.

The interviews were conducted face to face or, where this was not possible, over the telephone, and lasted for between 60 and 90 minutes. Face to face interviews were recorded; telephone interviews were noted and written up at the end of the conversation. Each interview followed the following structure, which interviewees were sent beforehand, along with information about the research:

### **First impressions**

- How did you first encounter evaluation as a practitioner?
- Did you have any training in evaluation then or subsequently? If so, what?
- What were your initial impressions of it?
- Did they change through experience and, if so, how?

### **Experiences**

- What has been your experience of external evaluation, if any?
- What has been your experience of self-evaluation, if any?

### **The impact of evaluation**

- Have your experiences affected how evaluation has happened?
- If so, how and why? If not, why not?
- Have your experiences affected how you work as a practitioner?
- If so, how and why? If not, why not?

### **The future**

- What improvements might be made to how arts programmes are evaluated?
- Is there any other aspect of arts evaluation you'd like to discuss?

Minor changes in phrasing were used for the commissioners' questions, but all the interviews followed the same structure. However, each person was able to answer the questions and reflect on their experiences as he or she wished. Following the interviews, each person was sent a draft of the paper and invited to comment on it in terms of accuracy, fairness and relevance. Four interviewees provided further comments but no changes or corrections were requested.

The interviews provided the core research data reported here, contextualised with published and unpublished written material. The study has also been influenced by informal conversations with arts professionals during the research period and by my past and current work in evaluation.

The people interviewed for this research were: Tom Andrews (Kent); Catherine Bunting (London); Kentaké Chinyelu-Hope (London); Quentin Merritt (Cumbria); Sarah Macnee (London); Matt Peacock (London); Sara Robinson (Yorkshire); Nicky Sugar (Bristol); Becky Swain (London); Pauline Tambling (London); and Hugues de Varine (Paris). The paper also benefitted from a detailed review by Professor Helen Simons, Professor of Education and Evaluation at the University of Southampton.

I am grateful to all those who agreed to be interviewed or otherwise contributed to the study and regret that the final result, already long, cannot do justice to all the insights gained from speaking with them. I should also like to thank Professor Kerstin Mey, Director for Research and Enterprise at the University for the Creative Arts, for her advice during this research and to the Clore Leadership Programme for the award of a Fellowship within which it was undertaken. It only remains to record that none of these people or bodies has any responsibility for the paper itself or for any errors or omissions it contains.

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<sup>1</sup> Gray, 2009:110

<sup>2</sup> The word practitioner is used here in a similar way as in the McMaster review, where it is defined as: 'someone from the cultural ecology, who may not necessarily create art in the same way as an artist. For example a producer, a curator or an editor.' *Supporting Excellence in the Arts: From Measurement to Judgement*, Sir Brian McMaster, DCMS January 2008

<sup>3</sup> Interview

<sup>4</sup> 'We seem, as it were, to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind': often wrongly attributed to Lord Palmerston, the phrase was actually coined by the Cambridge historian, J. R. Seeley, in his 1883 book, *The Expansion of England*; (Armitage 2000:16)

<sup>5</sup> In 2003, 39,242 young people were accepted onto Creative Arts and Design Courses in UK universities; in 2008, the number was 49,188, a 25% increase in five years in the numbers who are training for the arts job market: [http://www.ucas.com/about\\_us/stat\\_services/stats\\_online/data\\_tables/appsaccpssubs/](http://www.ucas.com/about_us/stat_services/stats_online/data_tables/appsaccpssubs/) (accessed 2/9/09)

<sup>6</sup> The claim for the contemporary importance of the arts in Britain is seen by McMaster to justify 'moving away from simplistic targets and recognising instead the profound value of art and culture in itself'. *The Stage*, 10 January 2008 and [http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference\\_library/media\\_releases/2146.aspx](http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/media_releases/2146.aspx) (accessed 9/11/09)

<sup>7</sup> <http://philippalatimer.co.uk/home/?p=80> (accessed 9/11/09)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.open2.net/reith2002/onora\\_oneill\\_trust\\_p2.html](http://www.open2.net/reith2002/onora_oneill_trust_p2.html) (accessed 29/03/2009)

<sup>9</sup> Interview

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Leadership/Management/Creative-Partnerships-initiative-and-impact> (accessed 5/8/09)

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/research-areas/pims-data/summaries/national-evaluation-of-creative-partnerships.cfm> (accessed 5/8/09)

<sup>12</sup> The three 'extra prompts' that may influence how a Grants for the Arts application is assessed are: 'How does the applicant's work build on the lessons learnt through evaluation and peer review (being judged by equals)?'; 'Will the applicant be evaluating the effect the activity has on the people and communities taking part?'; and 'Does the application show how the evaluation will be shared?' ACE,

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*Grants for the Arts Guide 2008*, pp. 49-50; see

[http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/gfta2006\\_electronicfiles.php](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/gfta2006_electronicfiles.php) (accessed 5/8/09)

<sup>13</sup> NCA position statement on ACE funding proposals, 17 January 2008 see

<http://www.artscampaign.org.uk/campaigns/afs/ACE%20RFO%20funding%202008.html> (accessed 5/8/09)

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.thestage.co.uk/news/newsstory.php/19504> (accessed 5/8/09)

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/aboutus/project\\_detail.php?rid=0&sid=&browse=recent&id=1115](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/aboutus/project_detail.php?rid=0&sid=&browse=recent&id=1115) (accessed 13 August 2009)

<sup>16</sup> cf. Mirza 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Interview: this and subsequent references to interviews below refer to those undertaken specifically for this research: names, dates and locations are omitted to preserve confidentiality.

<sup>18</sup> It was suggested to me by Helen Simons that this was similar to 'how many of the early evaluators in US and UK came into evaluation – learning on the job, working out what evaluation was, being flexible, adapting methods from different disciplines, working with experienced colleagues, training on the job, learning from the more experienced [and] writing evaluation theory'. In the UK, academic study in evaluation at postgraduate level, formal training and professional development have only become common in the past 10 years.

<sup>19</sup> Interview

<sup>20</sup> Interview

<sup>21</sup> Interview

<sup>22</sup> Interview

<sup>23</sup> Interview

<sup>24</sup> Interview

<sup>25</sup> Interview

<sup>26</sup> Interview

<sup>27</sup> Interview

<sup>28</sup> One person commented on the costs associated with the increasingly onerous procurement processes now being adopted in the British public sector and the fact that they were preventing small companies and especially individual evaluators from responding to tenders. There is a risk that the diversity of research perspectives, methodologies and values will be reduced with deleterious results for the quality both of public services and of knowledge about them.

<sup>29</sup> Interview

<sup>30</sup> Interview

<sup>31</sup> Interview

<sup>32</sup> Interview

<sup>33</sup> Interview

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Critchley 2001

<sup>35</sup> Interview

<sup>36</sup> Interview

<sup>37</sup> Interview

<sup>38</sup> Interview

<sup>39</sup> Interview

<sup>40</sup> Interview

<sup>41</sup> Interview

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<sup>42</sup> A rather different approach was adopted by the Treasury's Invest to Save Budget (ISB), which was opened to the arts in its eighth round announced in April 2005. Although evaluation was central to ISB's aim of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of public service delivery through experimental projects, no specific approach or method was specified. The difference in approach may reflect the relative confidence of the Treasury – which is at the top of the public sector spending food chain – compared to that of bodies much lower down who feel under commensurately greater pressure to justify their spending decisions. See <http://www.isb.gov.uk/hmt.isb.application.2/BIDDERS/evaluating.asp> (accessed 16 August 2009)

<sup>43</sup> Interview

<sup>44</sup> Interview

<sup>45</sup> Interview

<sup>46</sup> Interview

<sup>47</sup> Interview

<sup>48</sup> Interview

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<sup>60</sup> Interview

<sup>61</sup> Interview

<sup>62</sup> Interview

<sup>63</sup> Interview

<sup>64</sup> Mirza op. cit.

<sup>65</sup> Interview

<sup>66</sup> Interview

<sup>67</sup> Interview

<sup>68</sup> Interview

<sup>69</sup> Interview

<sup>70</sup> Interview.

<sup>71</sup> Interview

<sup>72</sup> Interview

<sup>73</sup> Interview

<sup>74</sup> Interview

<sup>75</sup> Interview