

South East Libraries Touring Enquiry Report 2019-2020



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Foreword

In January 2020 Arts Council England published our new ten-year strategy for 2020-2030 'Let's Create' with our vision that the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish, and where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. 'Let's Create' sets out three outcomes to achieve that vision: Creative People, Cultural Communities and a Creative and Cultural Country. As the national development agency for public libraries in England, Arts Council England recognises that libraries have a central role in delivering Let's Create and we will support libraries four universal offers of Health and Wellbeing, Information and Digital, Reading and Culture and Creativity.

"We believe that England's network of public libraries provides a vital resource for the development of creativity and the promotion of culture across this country. They are the country's most widespread and well-used cultural spaces, sitting at the heart of communities and often providing the first point of access to cultural activity. They help to build stronger, happier communities, support social prescribing, develop readers and promote digital literacy. They will be central to our delivery of this Strategy, and over the next 10 years we will increase our investment in them".

('Let's Create': Strategy 2020-2030. Arts Council England. 2020 p22).

'Let's Create' also undertakes to continue to support the development of touring at all scales, especially into places with the least access to publicly funded culture and where engagement is low. Libraries "sitting at the heart of communities" are important in places such as rural areas which lack infrastructure and as trusted, open spaces can help arts organisations reach audiences from all backgrounds and of all ages, including those who do not currently engage in cultural activities.

In the context of the new strategy the South East Libraries Touring Enquiry project delivered by Creative Arts East and partners including Farnham Maltings, Applause Rural Touring, the National Centre for Writing, the National Rural Touring Forum and south east library services is welcome and timely.

The project has produced tangible resources for the benefit of the sector including videos from library colleagues on programming, communications, audience development and arts partnerships and two useful learning resources “Hosting Touring Arts Events: The Really Useful Guide for People Working in Libraries” and “The Really Useful Guide for Artists Touring to Libraries”.

This report was completed prior to the suspension of building based activities and increased digital delivery as the cultural sector responded to the immediate impact of Covid-19. We are supporting the sector in three phases: Response, (distributing emergency response funds) and Stabilisation (supporting reopening where possible), followed by Reset. In the third phase, Reset, starting in early 2021, we will support the sector to adjust and adapt to the ‘new normal’.

As we deliver ‘Let’s Create’ in partnership with the sector, we hope this report will encourage libraries, artists and arts organisations to talk to one another regionally and nationally about collaborating on touring work, both physical and digital, for the benefit of libraries and the diverse communities they reach.

Amy Vaughan,

Director, Touring and Cambridge.

Sue Williamson,

Director, Libraries.

Introduction and Background

In 2019 Arts Council England asked Creative Arts East, as a rural touring organisation with 25 years of experience of touring arts to non-traditional settings, to carry out an enquiry into the current shape of the libraries touring landscape across the south east. Libraries are public venues with an expanding footfall and an increasingly diverse user base. Arts Council recognise that they offer a unique position within the cultural sector to access some of the most culturally under-engaged groups and want to ensure that this is being utilised to its full potential.

The aim of the enquiry was to identify the level of experience of libraries touring arts activity across the south east. Which libraries were programming touring arts; what models of funding, staffing, planning and evaluation were being used; and what the various motivations and objectives were for hosting touring arts at libraries, and crucially, what support is required to further develop libraries touring?

Similarly, we wanted to discover from artists their level of interest in libraries as a touring circuit, how they have found the experience of touring their work to libraries if they are already doing so, and what obstacles arose. We wanted to know what can be done to highlight the opportunities that are available to ensure that artists are well prepared and have a clear understanding of what that touring might involve.

In conversation with Arts Council, for the purposes of this enquiry we define 'touring arts' as the delivery of professionally produced artistic experiences across two or more venues. This might range from theatre to visual arts experienced by audience members in both the physical and digital realms.

Approach to Enquiry

Methodology

We wanted to approach the enquiry with a listening ear, an open mind, and freedom from assumptions. We were aware of the terminology and culture differences between both the library and arts worlds and we endeavoured to consider this when reaching out to libraries and artists. As a rural touring organisation, we wanted to remain neutral and ensure our own experience and perspective didn't complicate the enquiry. I was tasked with leading on the project as a new recruit to Creative Arts East from a museums and heritage background, so that there was neutrality when holding conversations with collaborators.

As we planned to speak with both artists and libraries, we decided the approach would be slightly different for each. For example, we expected that artists would be familiar with arts council terminology and that they would most likely be communicating their most successful experiences of libraries touring. However, we felt we needed to take a more detailed approach to asking about libraries' touring experiences and knew that homing in on the areas of their arts programme relevant to the enquiry would take more investigation.

We also knew from early conversations with local libraries that library staff at varying levels of the workforce may be involved in touring arts and so we wanted to hear from not only senior

level library representatives, but those working at the library frontline during arts events. Often these people would be volunteers or members of friends' groups, so we took a broad approach to the types of voices we wanted to hear from. We were also sensitive to the fact that different services across the region would be at different points on their journey in offering touring arts to their audiences. We were careful that when communicating the touring arts activity of one service with other services, we framed this as just one approach. We celebrated the differences between services whilst realising the benefits of sharing ways of working and examples of best practice.

We wanted to acquire quantitative data to paint an overall picture of broad aspects of libraries touring; we also wanted qualitative information to give us a rich and detailed insight into the subject from both an artist and a library perspective. Therefore, we contacted libraries as early on as possible, and had one-to-one conversations where feasible, to gauge that service's independent and honest response to the topic. This led to many active and engaged participants forming our reference group; representatives from library services across the south east met in person three times across the enquiry, sharing ideas, feeding into our approach and ensuring all aspects of the enquiry were as library friendly as possible.

Information collection

Alongside the phone calls and meetings, we ran two surveys – one for artists and one for libraries.

The libraries survey covered many aspects of libraries touring including regularity of arts events and the content and art form of these, staff involved, funding available, ticketing, understanding and confidence in touring arts and libraries touring, opinions on the benefits of arts to both library services and their users, and facilities available in individual libraries as well as ways in which art is selected by them. The libraries survey was designed to accommodate for responses from those at different levels of the library workforce and therefore there were three 'tiers' to the survey. The first tier was for volunteers, friends group members, and library assistants – these were asked in depth information about the facilities at the libraries, as well as the regularity of arts events, and communication with artists. These respondents were not asked some of the more strategic questions. The second tier was for community librarians, library managers and area managers, who were asked a mix of strategic and logistical questions. Finally, the third tier was for cultural/development officers/programmers, senior management and heads of service and these were not asked some of the more 'on the ground' questions, however, were asked about budgets, projects and other strategic questions. There were also questions which were asked to all three tiers, for example knowledge and confidence levels of libraries touring, and the perceived

benefits of touring arts to individuals, libraries and local authorities.

The artist survey included questions on the regularity of touring, type of art, funding, target audiences, reasons and motivations for touring to libraries, and their experiences of this.

The surveys were sent using surveymonkey.com and were distributed in September 2019 through arts and library networks. In total, we received 165 responses – 110 from the libraries, and 55 from the artists' survey. The full list of questions asked can be found in appendix 2.

Information sharing: during the enquiry

We planned to share learning throughout the enquiry, to more widely distribute, and seek engagement with, the ideas arising from the face to face libraries touring discussions taking place, and also to contribute to the national discussion around developing libraries as cultural hubs. We knew library representatives would organically share their experiences within the reference group meetings, but due to the size of the area and the nature of these types of enquiry, this would be exclusive only to those who could attend.

Therefore, to provide a more structured framework for experience sharing, a series of 15-minute vlogs were created, led by reference group contributors and resulting from the issues arising from the face-to-face discussions and survey results.

The topics covered included: working with arts partners, challenging

perceptions of libraries, communicating about arts events, identifying quality markers when programming, and the importance of evaluation for libraries touring arts programmes. These vlogs could be used as a focus for library team meetings or as support for a libraries team starting out with a new touring arts programme.

Information sharing: resulting from the enquiry

“Hosting Touring Arts Events: The Really Useful Guide for People Working in Libraries” was created as a means of consolidating and sharing the practical tips and learning that came from the reference group. It is a simple, easy-to-use guide, developed from a previous commission by Suffolk Libraries and Creative Arts East. The guide was redesigned with input from the enquiry reference group and incorporates survey findings and our own experience of touring arts. As a small, hardcopy booklet that supports readers through the whole process of planning and managing a touring arts event, it is a handy and accessible resource that can be kept in a staff room and shared at team meetings. Links and resources are a key part of this toolkit, ensuring signposting to further reading and support from partner organisations where needed. A digital version of this booklet is also available for wider sharing, along with some further information sheets and templates that could be useful.

We also created a ‘mirror’ of this resource – “The Really Useful Guide for Artists Touring to Libraries”. This

resource is a digital reference guide aimed at artists and companies prior to undertaking library touring work. It sets expectations, provides insight into how library services operate and encourages good communication and clarity.

Survey Results

Libraries Survey Findings

We were pleased to receive 110 responses to the libraries survey, from 21 of the 26 library services in the south east, with an even spread across the region: from West Sussex, along to Kent, up to Norfolk, right across to Buckinghamshire. We heard from both urban and rural libraries.

Most individual respondents were library assistants, followed by library managers, community librarians, cultural or developmental officers, then heads of service or senior management. The smallest groups of respondents were friends of library group members/volunteers and area managers. This breakdown likely reflects the actual staff structure of most services, with several of the workforce in 'front-of-house' roles. A full list of library survey respondents can be found in appendix 1.

Tier	Tier responses	Library role	Survey responses
Tier 1	43	Library Assistant	35
		Library friends group member/volunteer	8
Tier 2	44	Library Manager	22
		Area manager	7
		Community Librarian	15
Tier 3	23	Cultural/Development Officer	12
		Head of Service/senior management	11

Chart 1 – Library respondents

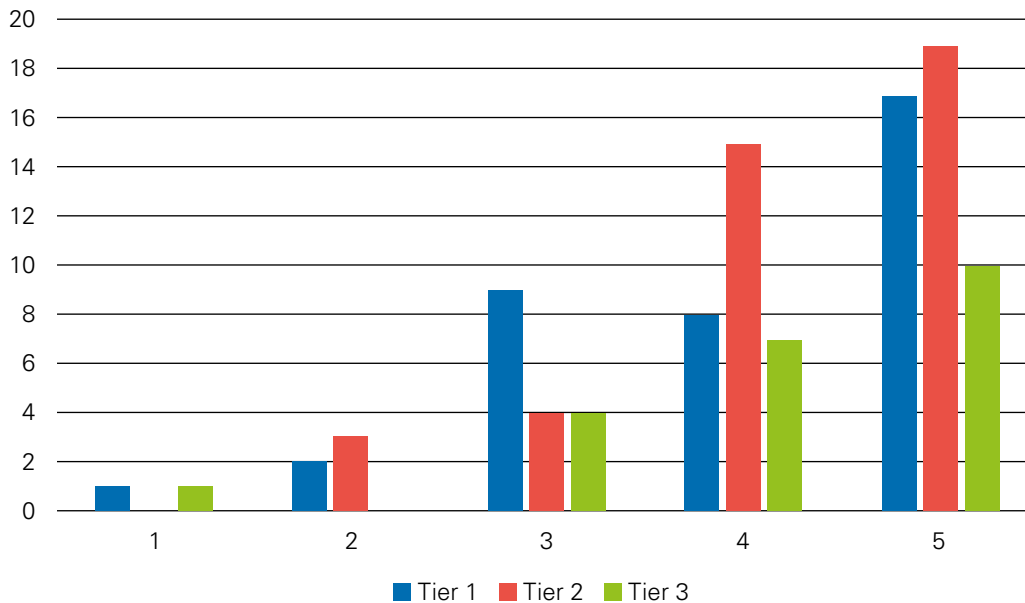
It is important to state again that we are aware that library services are at different stages in their libraries touring journey and the areas described below reflect the overarching landscape of libraries touring in the south east. In the charts below, we have sometimes compared responses across different levels of responsibility within a service. As shown in the table above – *Chart 1: Library respondents*, these are grouped in the following tiers:

Tier 1 – Volunteers, Member of Library Friends group or Library Assistants

Tier 2 – Library Managers, Area Managers or Community Librarians

Tier 3 – Cultural or Development Officers, Heads of Service or Senior Management

Rate your current level of interest in touring arts in libraries. 1 = low 5 = high



Library staff interest in touring arts

The key areas of interest are identified in the quotes below, with interest levels shown in the chart above. We found that overall, library staff had a keen interest in touring. There was still a little uncertainty amongst Tier 1 staff and volunteers. As this Tier are the “on the ground” workers, who are going to be presenting and promoting the events, this is something that could do with some development to ensure success of events that take place.

How does touring arts in libraries interest you?

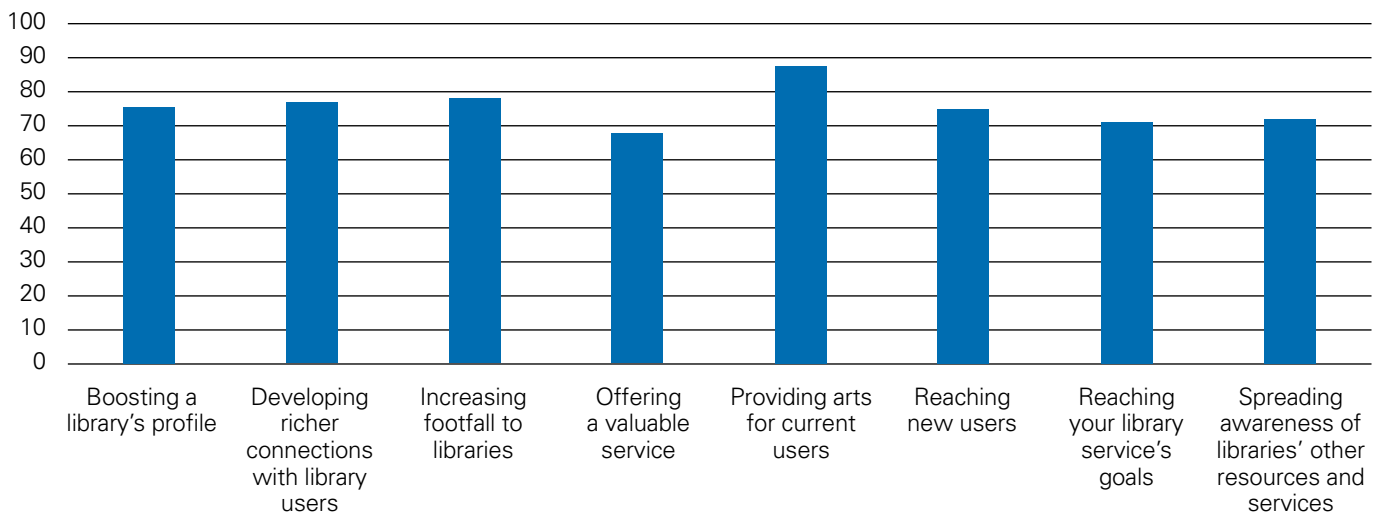
“It brings a wide range of wonderful arts events from theatre, creative arts to comedy and music events to the community and makes them accessible to all. These events are also affordable which is a big plus. There is something for everyone! It is great for libraries to be involved as a venue and in the promotion of arts events because this reflects the way in which the role of libraries is changing in the 21st century, becoming a hub and focal point for the local community with the space being used more creatively. Arts events can potentially attract new customers into libraries as well as enhancing the service for regular users, Friends, staff and volunteers”

“It brings new people into the library and makes it a more appealing place to visit”
It offers something new and different to our customers and adds variety to my day as a worker as we get to see new exciting things too”

Direct quotes from library survey responses.

We asked all levels of staff to highlight the benefits of touring arts to their libraries or services – and as you can see from the results below, this is reassuringly broad and evenly spread, suggesting that there is a universal appreciation that touring arts can have a positive impact on all areas of a library’s offer. The data is collated in this instance as there was very little difference across all tiers in this aspect, implying that the reduced level of interest in touring arts is not because staff and volunteers don’t see it as being beneficial to their library.

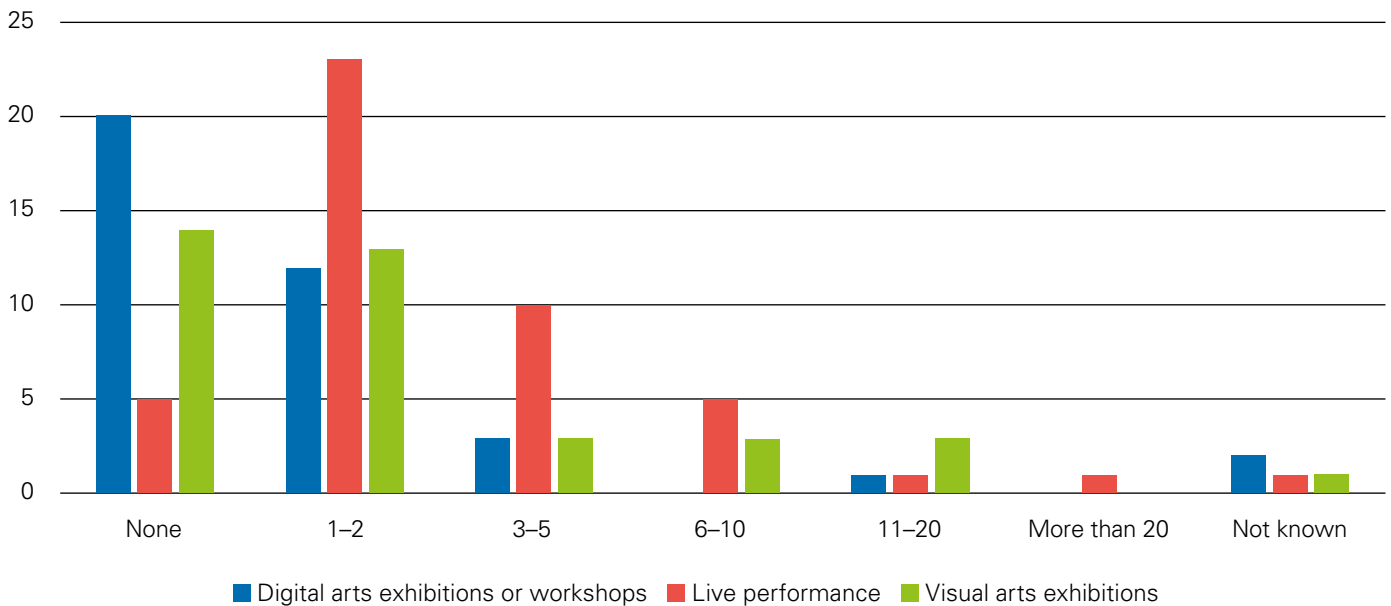
Touring arts to libraries can benefit your library service in which of the following ways?



Current Library Touring Activity

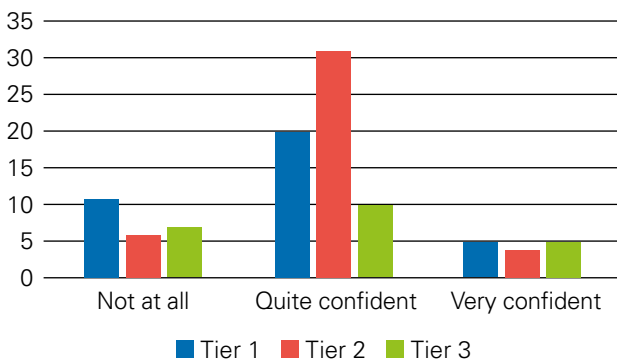
The data in the chart below is across both Tier 1 and Tier 2 of the library service, which in most cases means the numbers are for an individual library, although we know that library managers and community librarians often cover more than one venue – which may be an explanation for the 11–20 + arts events taking place in one year. The majority of libraries are not seeing any digital exhibitions or workshops (our understanding from conversations is that these are often focused on main, centrally located libraries, not visiting more rural locations) and most are seeing only one-two live performances in a year.

How many of the following have you been involved in hosting in your library over the last year?



Confidence and Experience

How confident do you feel in offering touring arts for your library users?



Rate Your Current Knowledge and Experience of Touring Arts

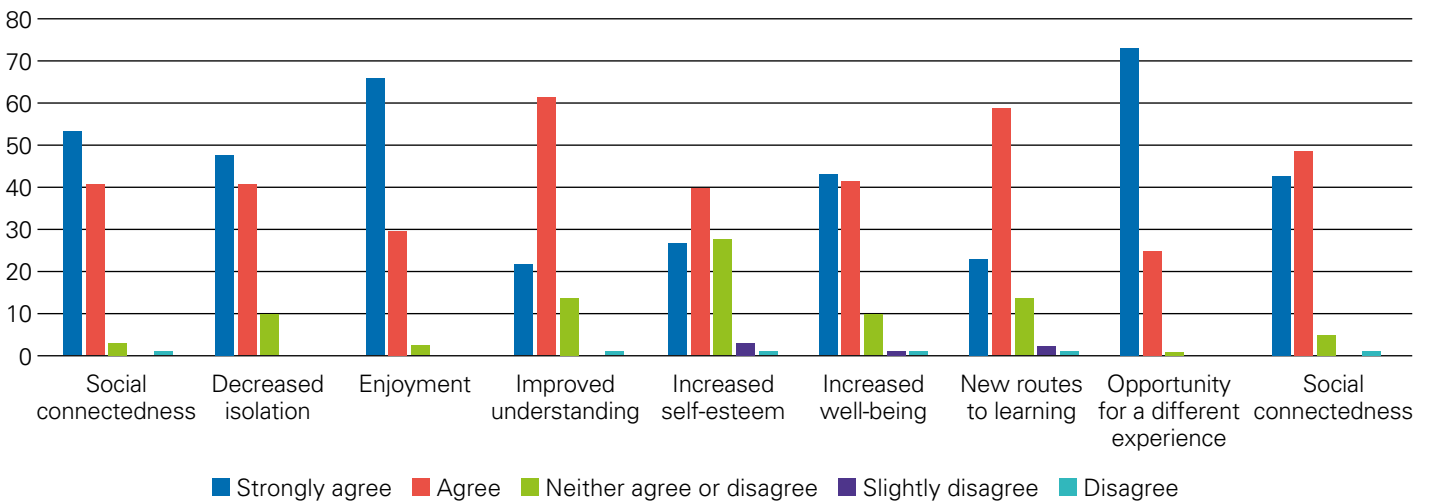


Across all three Tiers there are varied levels of confidence, which isn't necessarily in line with the levels of knowledge and experience, showing that even for staff with high levels of responsibility in the service, who all have some knowledge and experience, they are still not feeling confident in making the arts offer.

Conversely, there are some respondents from Tier 1 and Tier 2 who are feeling very confident but are still stating their knowledge and experience as only moderate. Interestingly in knowledge and experience, this clearly splits the tiers, where we know that those 'on the ground' staff and volunteers who are likely to be performing front of house duties are the ones that need to feel the most knowledgeable. This may well have a direct impact on their interest levels too.

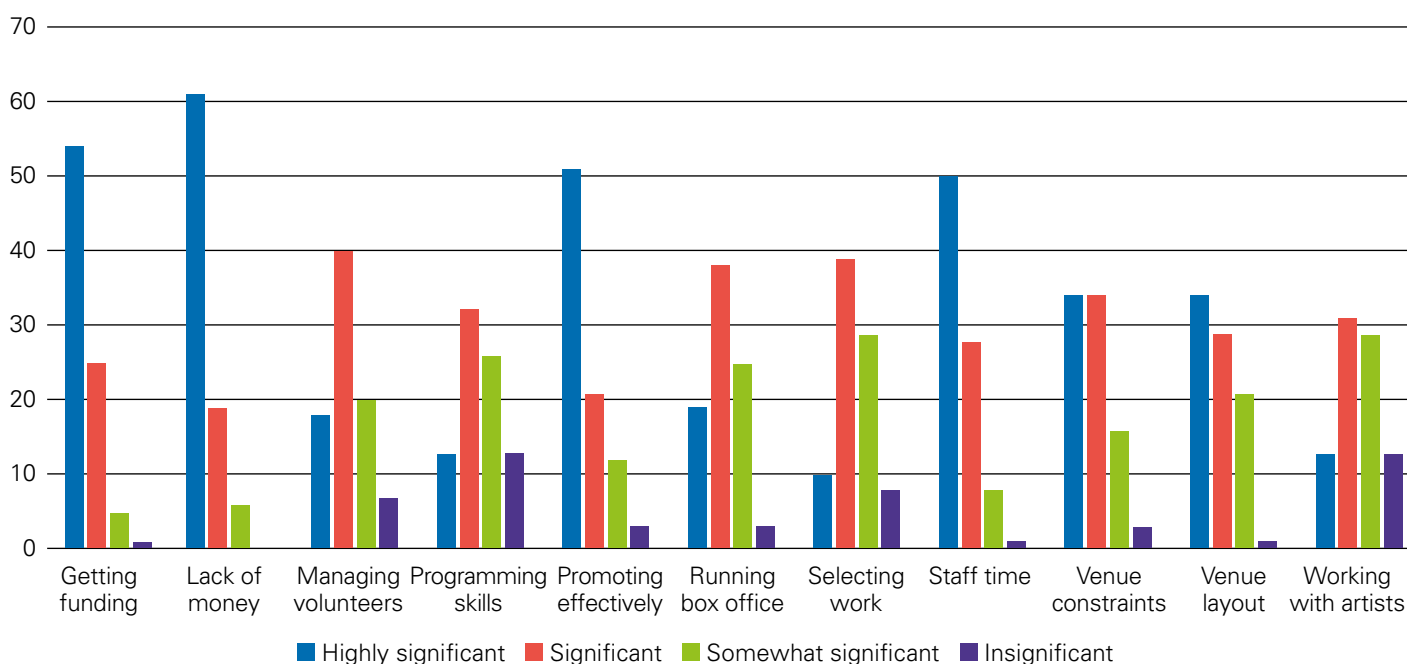
Skills and understanding

Rate how strongly you agree that your users would receive the following benefits from accessing arts in your library



Across all areas, there is a clear understanding of the benefits of touring arts to the individual users of a library, whilst those highest scores are around the enjoyment and the experience itself, benefits to users' well-being and social interaction are closely behind, with new routes to learning and improved understanding a little lower, which are the two areas that would be mostly affected by the content of the events that take place.

How significant are the following challenges for touring arts in libraries?



It is clear to see where the gaps are from the responses to the question on challenges faced by libraries. The clear headline is that lack of money as well as getting funding are challenging areas for libraries. Therefore, this points to library staff not feeling confident in how to go about finding the money that they need to make the activity happen on a regular basis.

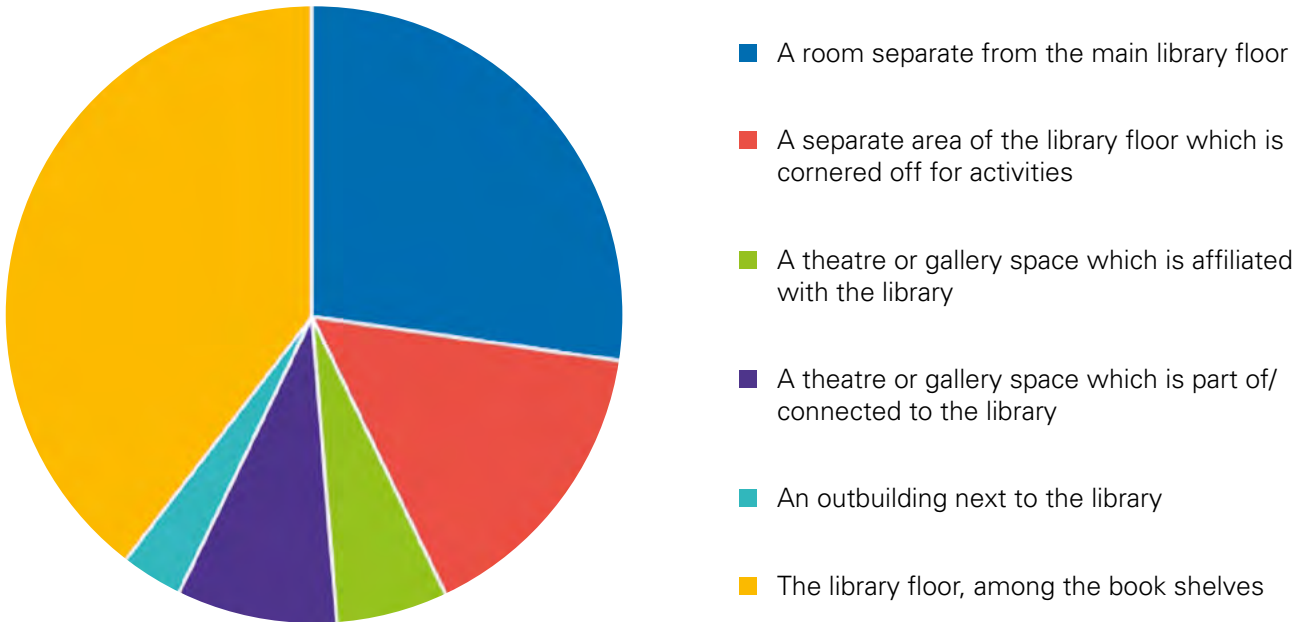
Staff time is also a big concern for libraries. Even if events are run outside of usual opening hours, the responsibility for the venue, space and resources needs to be managed, and indeed the volunteers who could take on some of the front of house roles at the events. We could reasonably presume that is why 'managing volunteers' is also rated as a significant challenge.

The next level of challenges is more focused around staff skills, which is to be expected as most staff will have had no prior experience of running arts events and it will be an additional task for them – at the very least in perception. Promoting effectively is particularly high which, based on conversations we have had with library services, is to do with the Tier 1 staff who host the events not always being the same people that have selected and programmed the work.

Other staff skills that are considered a challenge to touring arts in libraries are programming and selecting work, which will be difficult without prior experience, or specific new job roles in a service filled by someone from an arts background. This could also take a long time to develop, which may be why a lot of library services are

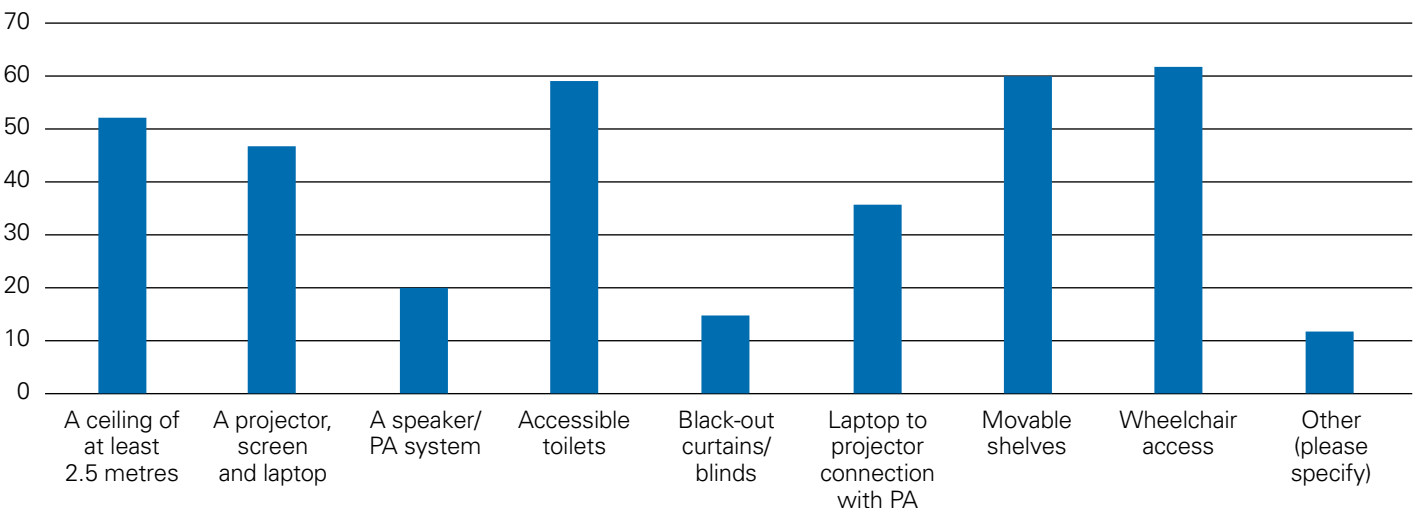
We also asked library representatives what spaces, facilities and features their libraries had.

What kind of spaces do you have available for touring arts events at your library?



A surprising majority had either a separate room, or specific separate area that events could take place in and there were several responses stating an arts-specific space available. Of course, we don't know how large these spaces are, but from a rural touring perspective this is certainly not a problem. Even though an expectedly high proportion of libraries only had the library floor, among the bookshelves, we have seen a lot of very successful events take place in this type of space and most libraries can move bookshelves to create a larger performance area when needed.

What features does your library have?

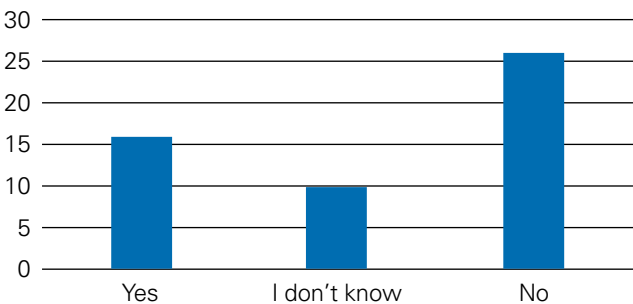


Understanding the value of what libraries can offer over and above traditional arts venues is key to a library’s successful arts programme. Many respondents to our survey didn’t feel confident that their library was suitable for an arts event, particularly a live performance. However, when we asked what facilities and features were available at their libraries, the information we received supported our view that libraries are often more than equipped to host a touring arts event. For example, while blackout blinds are justifiably not always available, most libraries had a ceiling of at least 2.5 metres, movable shelves and a projector and screen, and of course most were very accessible. Again, from a rural touring perspective, rather than a more mainstream view of what an arts venue should look like, this demonstrated to us that the spaces were very suitable for a wide range of different types of events, activities and performances.

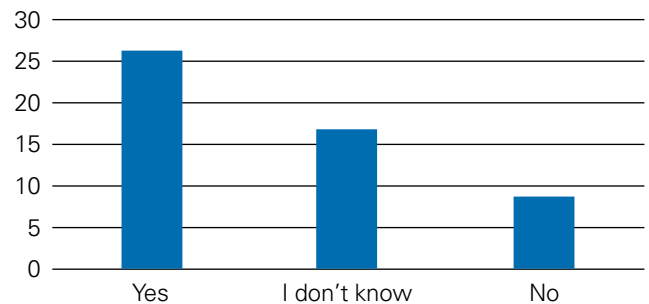
Funding, programming and staff structure

The survey question about library service budget was only asked of Tier 2 and Tier 3 staff within the service and it was clear that as well as there not being a specific arts and culture budget, there was also a reasonable proportion of staff that didn’t know either way. As a library service has to split a budget into a wide range of different areas across a large number of spaces it is possible that money that could be used for arts and culture is within a larger pot, which is why not all staff are aware that it exists.

Does your library service have a budget related to touring arts or culture?

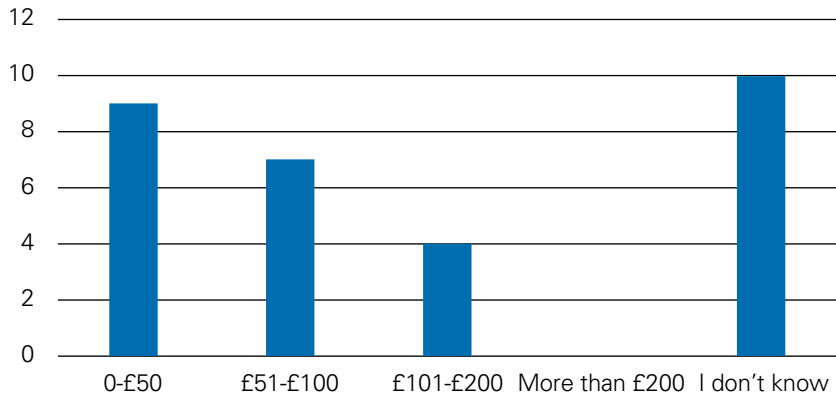


Were any of the touring arts events you hosted last year subsidised by external funding?



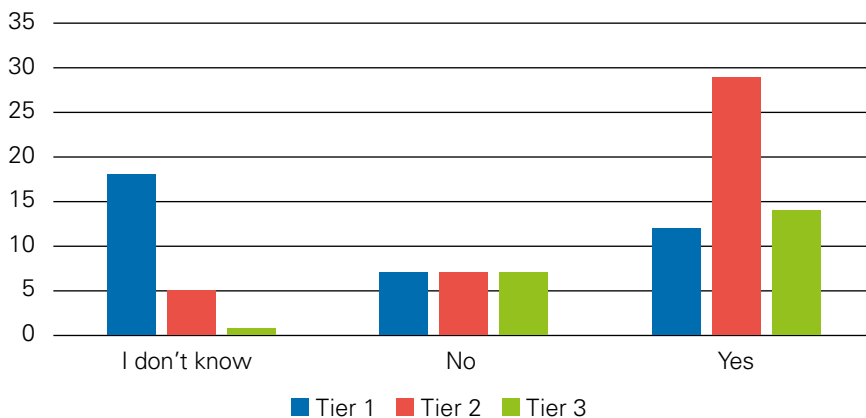
The knowledge of external funding is mixed, but again this probably sits with more senior members of staff. Most of these funds were from Arts Council, but some were cited as ‘income from friends’ group’ or ‘local council’ which would likely be at a more local scale. The level of budget stated covered a very broad spectrum from £1000 – £35000 for the year.

What is your approximate average box office income for an event?



When asked about the average box office income, the results were very low. In consultation with libraries, we believe this is for two main reasons. Firstly, that library users are accustomed to accessing their libraries and the services they offer for free, so a shift in mindset is required to get audiences to understand why they need to pay for this offer. Secondly, library staff are uncomfortable with charging an appropriate cost for the events, due to user expectation as stated above, their perception that their library cannot offer an experience that people will be prepared to pay for and, most critically that both staff and audiences are not aware of the costs involved in the arts activity being created and toured to their venue.

Is there a designated member of staff who deals with/could deal with the library touring offer?

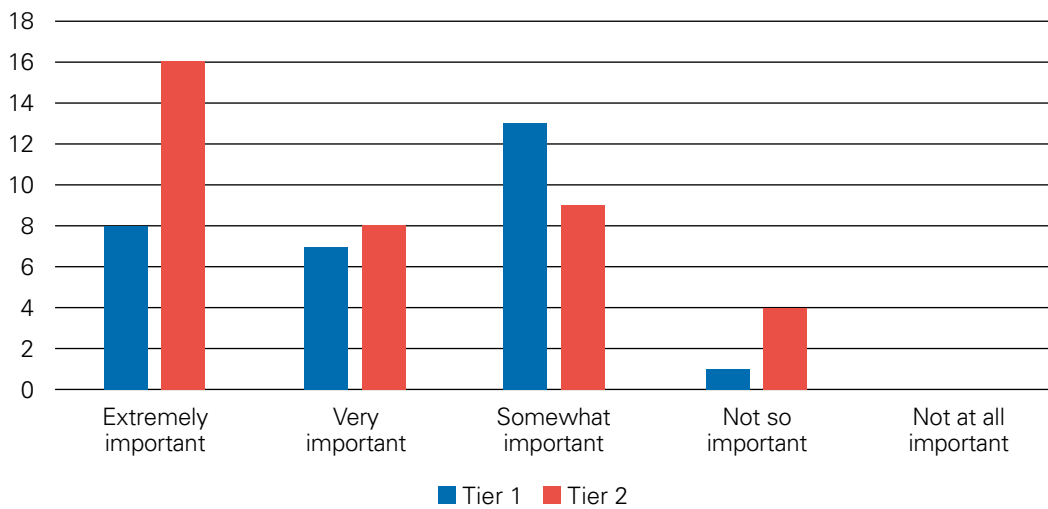


Similarly, there seemed to be a difference of knowledge across the staff within a service as to whether there was a designated staff member that would be responsible for managing the touring arts offer. Whilst again, it is quite possible that a member of staff has this as one of their responsibilities among many others, it is worth noting how many people are not aware of who that individual is.

Understanding the meaning and value of professional arts

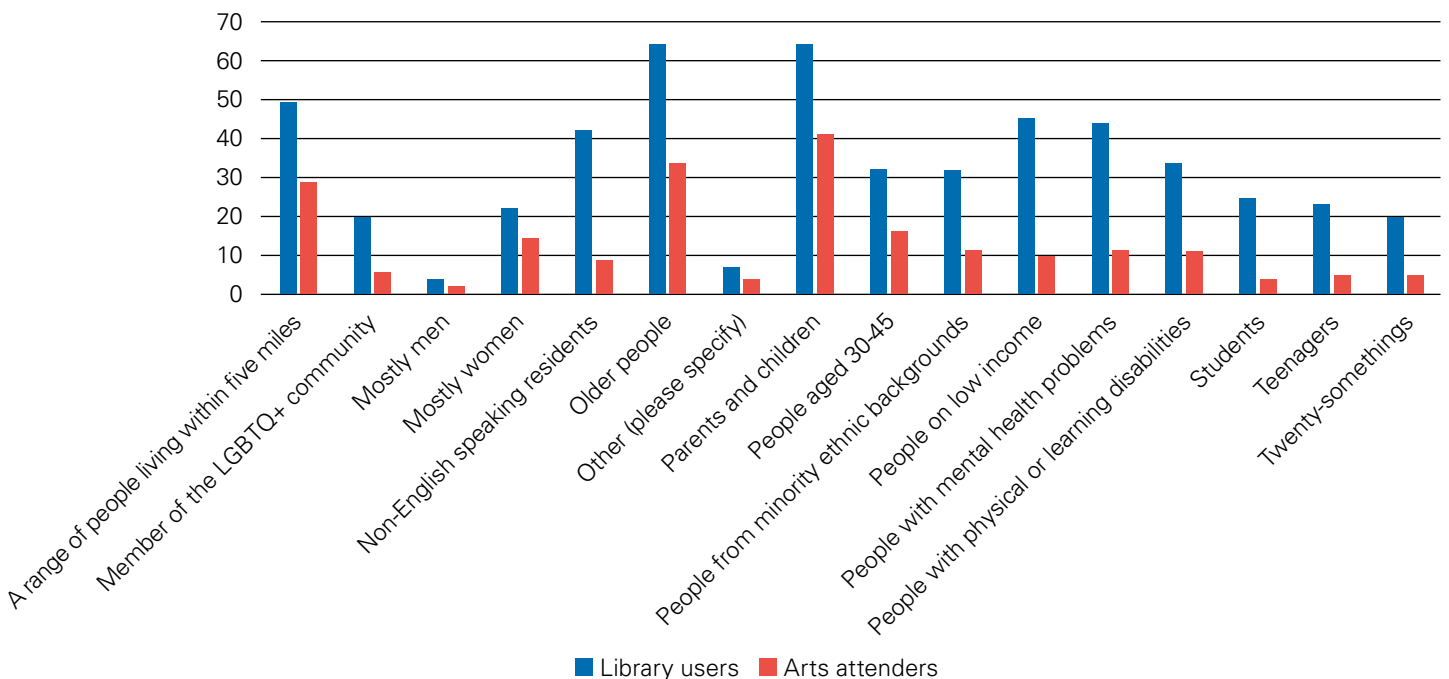
The chart below shows how most library managers and community librarians (Tier 2) think it is extremely important to have an understanding of the arts they are programming in their libraries. This is a positive finding for the future of libraries touring. However, only half the amount of library assistants or volunteers believed this to be important, reinforcing the idea that these front-line staff are perhaps lacking in motivation or a feeling of ownership over their library’s arts events.

How important do you think it is for you to have a good understanding of the art that is/ could be touring to your library?



Audience participation barriers: reaching under-engaged audiences

Groups using the library and groups that attend arts events at the library

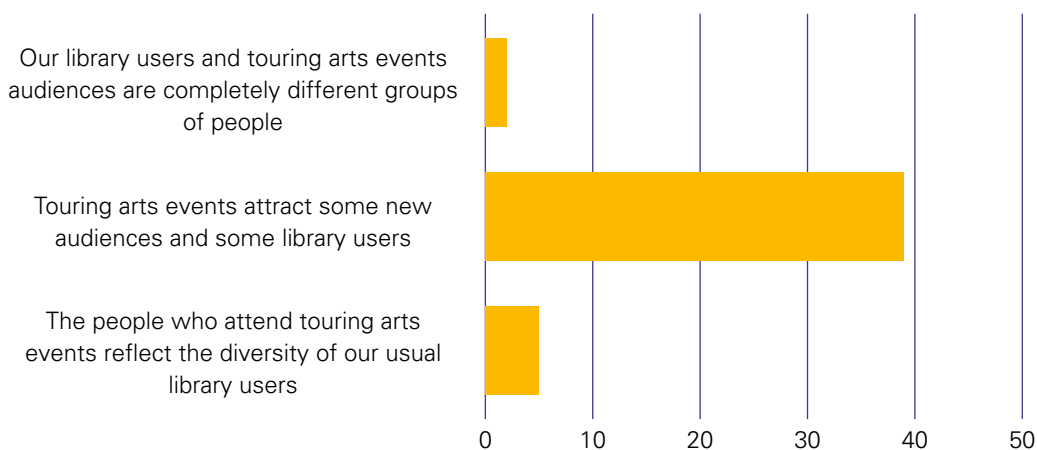


Parents and children, as well as older people, were the most regular of library users, which coincides with themes raised in conversations with libraries and artists about who their work is for. Local people, those on low income, and those with mental health problems were the next most regular library users. However, while parents and children and older people’s attendance at arts events reflected their usership, it appears groups from minority ethnic backgrounds, those on low income, and those with mental health problems are not reflected through their attendance at arts events in the same proportion.

Financial, geographic, social and other barriers to participation could be the reasoning behind the demographic differences between regular library use and library arts events. It appears from the data that some touring arts weren’t attracting existing library users, but rather were bringing in new audiences who weren’t necessarily regular library users. Working on removing perceptions amongst some library users that ‘arts aren’t for me’, as well as travel and cost barriers, by rethinking language and marketing, discounts and event timings would work well to address this disparity.

Most libraries said that their touring arts audiences were a mix of regular library users and new audiences. It seems target groups such as teenagers, LGBTQ groups, ESOL groups, and low-income groups, were using libraries, but not necessarily attending arts events.

How much do you think the audiences for your library touring arts events reflect your usual library users?



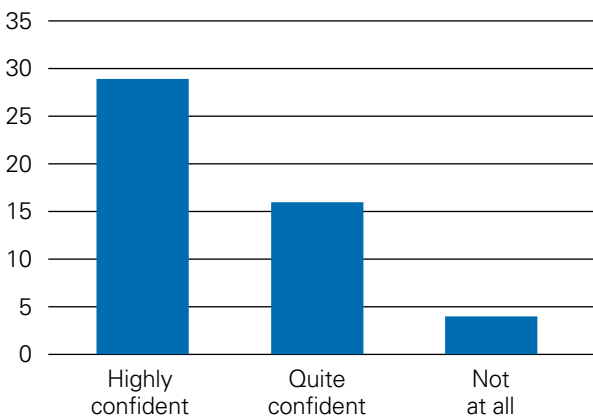
Artists Survey Findings

We heard from 55 artists/touring companies from across the south east as well as those from beyond the region who had toured their work to south east libraries. Almost 50% were company representatives, followed by over 47% who were individual artists, and over 10% other arts organisation representatives such as theatre company director or booking agent, and lastly one respondent was a touring scheme representative. Most were involved in live performance including theatre, dance and music, and some worked with visual arts, ran writing or craft workshops, or poetry, spoken word or storytelling.

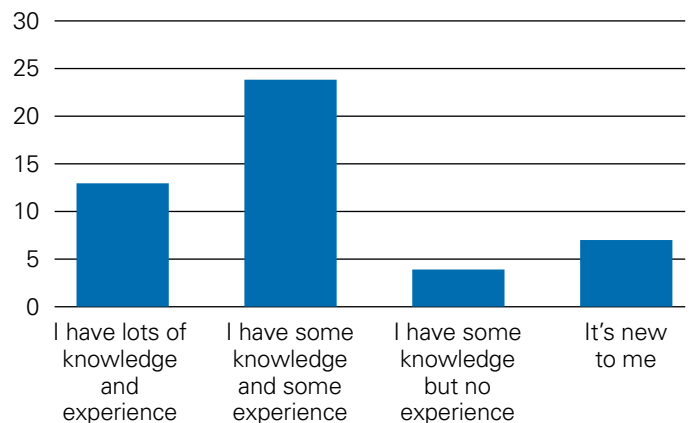
Experience and areas for development

It is clear that most respondents to the survey feel confident enough to tour their work to libraries, with most having had some knowledge and some experience of libraries touring – (only 7 out of the 55 had not toured their work to libraries). Below it is apparent that more strategic funding, better communications with library staff and tour management support are areas which would aid artists and touring companies to further develop libraries as part of their touring circuit. This is closely followed by networking opportunities, co-production with library staff or users, and designated resources and guidance on library-friendly marketing materials. One suggested area of support was highlighted by one respondent, which aligns with our findings from libraries themselves: ‘help for library staff so they are not afraid to book work.’

How confident do you feel about touring your work to libraries?

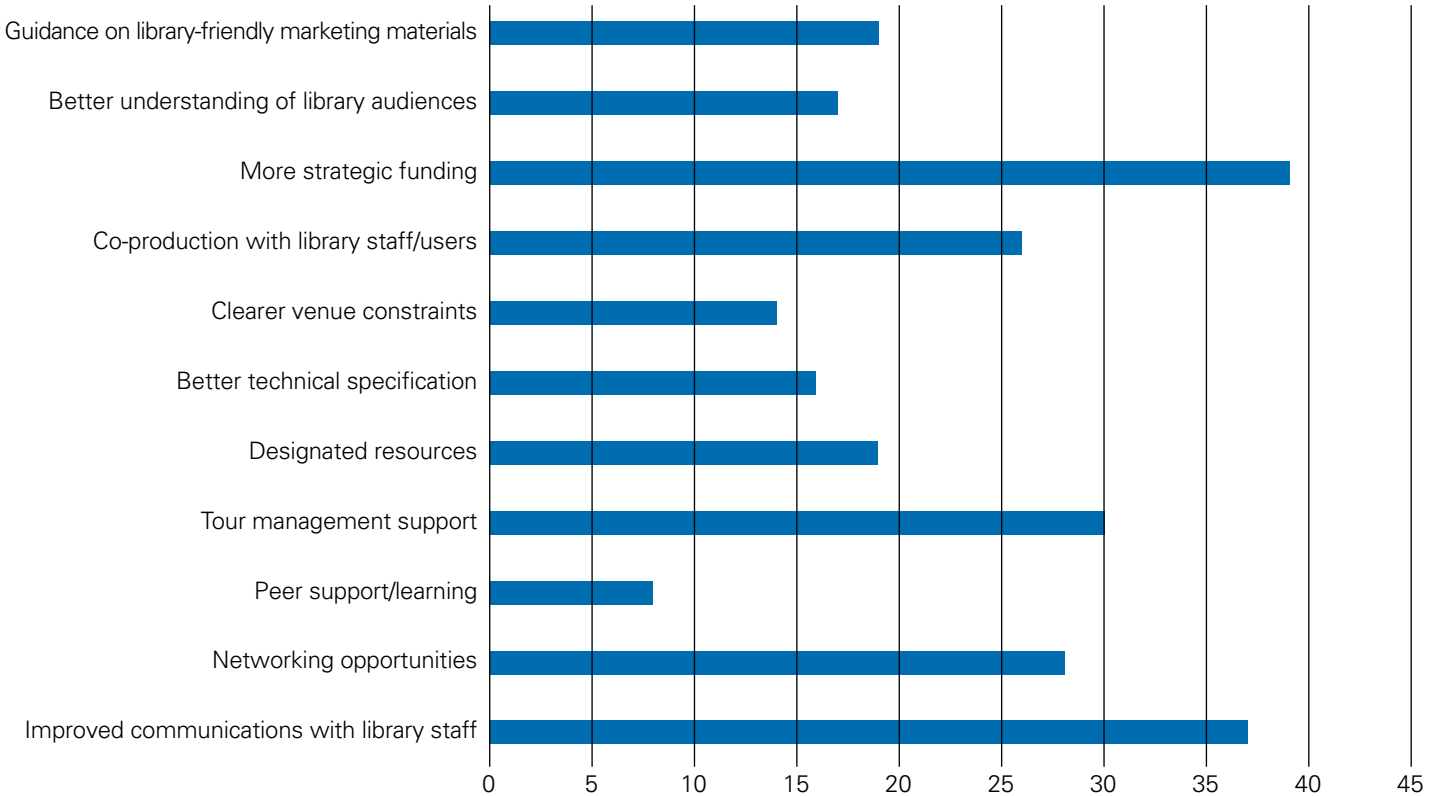


Rate your current knowledge and experience of touring to libraries



Audiences

What would help to tour arts to libraries more effectively?



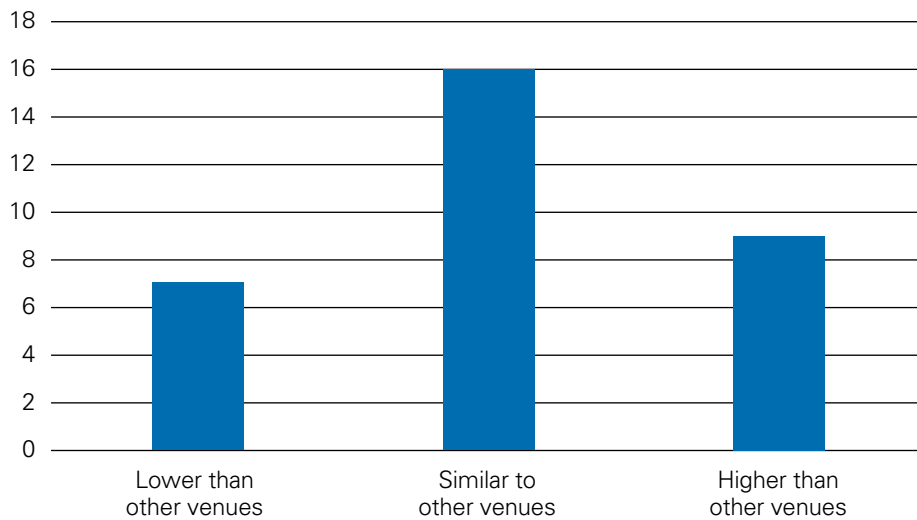
The vast majority of respondents said their work was primarily for parents and children, followed closely by a broader audience of 'a range of people living within five miles.' Older people were the next most popular audience to make work for, with work for people on low income and people from minority ethnic backgrounds following closely behind.

It is clear in the chart that less than 10 out of all respondents had made work to tour for the other groups listed, of which many are minority groups or those which may be faced with access issues. However, this data and the artist applications received from Pitch Up does demonstrate that family work is the most obvious choice and is seen as a natural fit for libraries from an artist perspective. When in fact, library staff have told us that they are keen to broaden their users and to offer something that might bring in new audiences, because they already cater well for the parent and child market.

The word cloud below shows the kinds of responses we received when we asked the open-ended question about audiences that touring companies are trying to reach.

Below the chart shows most touring companies and artists told us that their shows in libraries were just as well attended as those in other venues. In some cases, the libraries touring shows were better attended than other venue tours. The least respondents told us their library shows were less well attended. This data supports the view that there is opportunity for more touring arts in libraries.

Overall were your arts events in libraries as well attended as those in other venues?



Funding, ticketing and cost

The chart below was created from the information we received to an open-ended question about ticket prices. Of those respondents who knew the range of ticket prices libraries were charging for their show or event, we have created the following categories from their responses. No touring company knew of a library charging more than £12 for a ticket and the majority were free, or donations based.

Ticket price range of show/event if any



Out of the 33 respondents who had recently toured their work to libraries, 25 were subsidised by external funding, and eight were not. Most funding was Arts Council, and many artists told us they had local or private/independent funding such as NHS, local authority or local arts organisations, or library commissions.

The amounts touring companies charged libraries varied, but all live performances averaged within the region of £300 to £800 with some all-inclusive of travel, accommodation and so on, while full or half day workshops of other art forms were in the region of £150 – £300. Some expressed the importance that either the library or the touring company would need external funding.

Recommendations

These overall recommendations apply to library services, artists and touring companies, as well as being pertinent to the relationships and communication between those and the wider arts landscape. We identified from our enquiry, and we fully recognise, that library services across the south east are all at different stages of their journey in hosting touring arts in their libraries, and all have different models and approaches to it. Certain recommendations will be more immediately relevant to some services than others, but we hope that all will be of interest to libraries across the south east and to Arts Council England in how artists and libraries may be encouraged to engage with libraries touring.

Short term

In order to work with existing budgets and programmes already set, there are several ways for libraries and touring companies to build upon current practice.

Upskilling staff

Event management is an area in which many library representatives are experienced due to their core library event activities such as author talks, one-off workshops by a local artist, or storytelling activities. There are some aspects of this role however, that may be delivered slightly differently when dealing with touring arts. For those libraries or services without a current highly developed touring arts offer,

existing skills can be developed upon to involve aspects such as artist liaison with a touring company, longer lead-in times for planning/tour scheduling, using marketing created by a company, sharing audience feedback with the company for their funders, and so forth. The learning resource created through this enquiry provides a structured start for skills development. This is available in hard copy and online – link in appendix. Further development of relevant CPD and associated resources will continue to assist in the progression of workforce skills.

Promoting effectively

A common theme arising from our enquiry was libraries' underestimation of the positive impact of good quality marketing, and also how much budget should be allocated to this aspect of the planning. The services which were further along in their libraries touring journey had identified the need for good quality marketing, and many worked with external designers to deliver this. Considering a brand identity for the libraries touring programme was also a sign of a well-planned and well-attended libraries touring programme model.

Both library staff and artists can take steps to develop promotion for touring arts events in libraries. The libraries and artists' resources ('Really Useful Guides') which we created are helpful aids for front of house staff in the short term, to better plan for events in the pipeline,

or even already scheduled in. A deeper understanding of the benefits of putting more resource into this particular aspect of libraries touring, for both artists/touring companies and libraries, whether through focused promotion, higher quality printed materials, or other methods, would support a positive impact in the short term for upcoming events.

Ticketing strategically

Considering strategic discounts or ticket deals which are bespoke to a library's unique user base can go far in removing financial, and social, barriers for arts events. Using language around ticketing to highlight the fact that 'this arts event IS for YOU' could get 'bums on seats' for upcoming libraries touring programming. When deciding on ticketing structures it would help to recognise that an event taking place in a library enhances its quality, providing an intimate experience, a friendly and welcoming environment, and a familiar set of people. Investing in the audience experience a little more with refreshments, ambience, and high-quality marketing and branding can help libraries have confidence in their ticket price. Krystal Vittles, Suffolk Libraries Service Manager told us: "We found £7.50 is the sweet spot – with wine, and music in the background."

Raising awareness of the cost of high-quality professional work is key to libraries realising they can justifiably charge higher prices for tickets. Tying in with this is the importance of library staff understanding how their arts offer is not lower standard; in fact, there are vital things they can offer which arts centres cannot.

Broader awareness of what an arts offer could be

Many library services offer a wide range of arts events in their programme, and have a good awareness of the wider arts scene, and connections to make use of when looking to programme. The Pitch Up Libraries event organised by house and Farnham Maltings in conjunction with this project enquiry is an ideal start to connecting library staff with the wider cultural map. Some library representatives expressed an interest in gaining a wider knowledge of programming sources to support their selection; up to date sharing of arts organisations, forums and events for libraries would be a useful step for those who are not already well-informed, as well as those who are experienced and knowledgeable, but seek some up to date information and networking to refresh their confidence in touring arts.

Realising that many high quality, professional touring shows are perfect to programme in a library space is so important. Knowledge that not all shows need complex tech and large open spaces would broaden the opportunities that libraries take on. We would suggest that libraries become more aligned with the rural touring outlook and where possible buddy up with their local scheme(s) – if a show can work in a scout hut; it can probably work in a library! A rural touring programme has already done much of that quality assurance and logistical analysis.

Continuation of a ‘reference group’ to keep sharing ideas and experiences

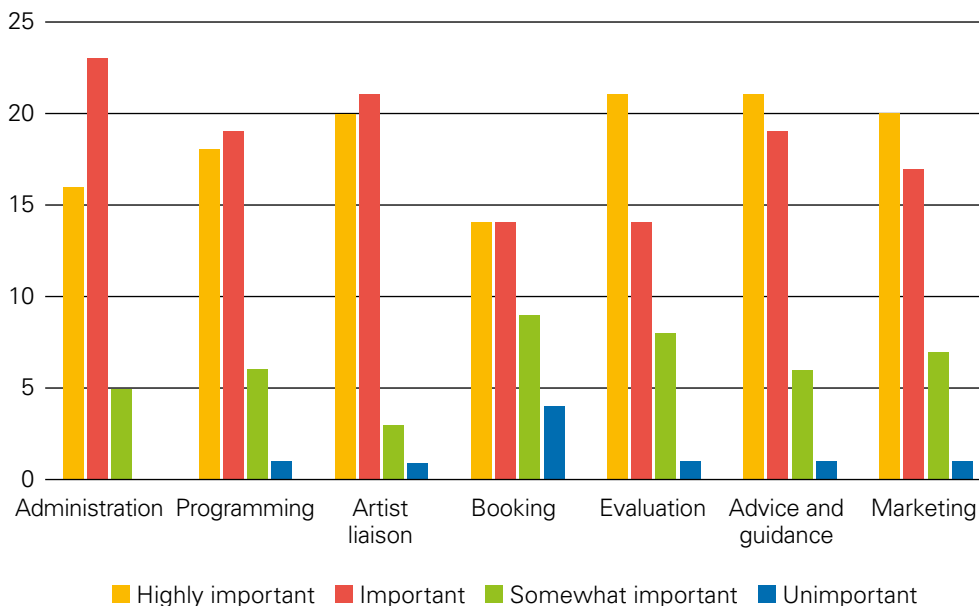
The reference group was successful in bringing together library representatives from across the south east as a forum. It was clear libraries were keen to share their experiences, challenges, and highlights of libraries touring, and indeed of their arts programmes overall. If the reference group could continue, whether digitally or in person, it would be an achievable way to continue the conversation, share developments and advice, and monitor the progression of libraries touring as a region-wide group. In the medium- and longer-terms it could indeed lead to collaborative funding application and consortium working.

Starting or building on partnerships for mentoring and inspiration

Marrying with the previous two points, it appears that partnerships, including informal ones, can be a fantastic way for services to learn new skills, discover improved approaches, and receive

guidance and support in areas of work that may be new, or that may address gaps in existing working knowledge. This partnership could be either with an arts partner such as a local rural touring scheme or arts venue, or another library service. Mentoring and support can be shared to pool resources and knowledge from the parts of an entire network of arts and culture. As well as practical skills and knowledge, partnerships can inspire action and motivate individuals and organisations to see a wider picture and can support an awareness of the benefits of libraries touring. This may encourage new and different ventures. If partnerships are already in place, perhaps a reassessment of how to best make use of this for both parties could be helpful. The chart below shows key areas of touring arts to libraries which arts partners could assist libraries with. Many libraries told us that evaluation, advice and guidance, marketing and artist liaison were areas which were highly important for arts partners to provide support with.

Importance of libraries touring tasks which an arts partner could take on



Evaluation

There are varying approaches to evaluation between library services across the south east, and each is bespoke designed to suit their own needs. However, overall, the evaluation frameworks appear similar in their need to collect information to support local authority aims, and collection methods appear to be comparable across most services, with most asking audience to complete short feedback forms to gather information on the impact of the event, as well as demographic data. The effectiveness of different software used to process the information collected is mixed, and there is room for an efficient and area-wide sign up to an arts touring evaluation tool for many library services to access. There is already a robust framework being used by Kent County Council, as well as an updated and developed evaluation tool in the pipeline for Norfolk Libraries.

Highlighting the Culture and Creativity Offer

It is clear from a lot of the survey responses where we compared results across different tiers of the service, that why, what and how library services are making their Culture and Creativity offer varies greatly. The difference between a volunteer sharing a creative skill and a visiting professional artist sometimes seems unclear to libraries. Expressing to their users and fully appreciating the benefits of touring arts as professional, high quality experiences, is something that needs to be developed more broadly.

Medium term

The following areas for development for the medium term have been identified. These are a step further than the short-term recommended courses of action and could be actioned as a springboard and in preparation for more long-term goals for libraries touring – many of these depend on workforce confidence, prior knowledge and strategic partnerships.

Funding

Some library services told us their journey with libraries touring started with project funding – a small amount to get them off on a good footing and to get some experience under their belt. Arts Council National Lottery Project Grants are available for libraries, individual artists and other community and cultural organisations, and making use of these types of funding pots are an excellent way to set the foundations for future applications such as National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) funding, if this is the long-term aim of a service. Project funding can be the boost that a service or library needs to get some professional, relevant and high-quality touring arts programming off the ground. However, more support is needed for library services to access this funding. Libraries working in partnership with organisations who are more informed in applying could be one solution to this lack of familiarity and confidence in applying.

For funding bodies offering funding for libraries work, it will be important to ensure there is a balance of different genres, as libraries are already able to access suitable family work and would benefit from support with channelling work for other audiences to their circuit.

With regards to our finding that the availability of internal budgets specifically for arts events was often not known by all library staff, we believe that as Culture and Creativity is one of the four Universal Library Offers, it would be useful for this arts budget to be more clearly allocated, and the limits or remit of it to be more widely known.

Informal Arts partners

Joanne Gray, Project Manager for The Library Presents, Cambridgeshire County Council told us: “For libraries that might not have an arts partner, they need to think about how they’re going to choose quality art.” Many library service personnel, for example community librarians, area managers or volunteers, expressed difficulty in selecting arts they were confident would be professional, high quality and relevant to their audiences. This may also reflect a need for artists’ information to be clearer and more accessible by libraries who might not be familiar with arts jargon. The good news is there are a wealth of arts organisations out there for libraries to connect with to seek advice about programming professional arts in their venues. Understanding the different qualities and impacts of different artistic experiences is important, as is understanding the depth and cultural value that professional arts can offer over and above simple monetary value. Many library services told us they regularly book storytellers to perform at libraries – in fact storytelling was one of the main types of arts that were mentioned. The challenge for library staff then is to consider how they source and programme work which develops and

broadens their audience’s experience, understanding and enjoyment to ensure that people visiting the library as a cultural hub can have access to the highest quality and broadest range of cultural experiences.

Most library services have worked with their local arts organisations in the past and many are currently doing so. We would highly recommend cultivating and developing these relationships further so that resources and expertise are shared rather than being doubled up on. It isn’t expected that libraries will have all the knowledge and experience necessary in-house for a successful touring arts programme – sourcing this from partners in return for sharing links with audiences or groups is a positive step towards benefiting everyone without wasting time or duplicating skills and services.

Audience development

Whilst libraries identify a diverse user demographic, this diversity is not necessarily reflected in their arts audience profile. However, one of the unique elements of libraries as arts spaces, is the potential to reach out and engage a significantly under-engaged audience. Many arts venues struggle to get this demographic across their threshold – this is not the case for libraries. However, the offer needs to be tailored and specific to persuade these groups to stay in the library to consume a broader cultural offer. Therefore, we would recommend libraries put more resource and planning into reaching out to culturally under engaged groups when programming and organising events, in ways which are accessible and relevant.

This could be through marketing and event-related workshops engaging certain groups leading up to an event.

Librarian Theatre, a company that creates plays designed for libraries, told us that one city they toured to with 'The Green Ship' offered an interesting experience with audiences. A matinee performance of the show in a school had an audience of children from a range of ethnic backgrounds. However, later that day, an evening performance of that same show organised by the local library (in the same postcode as the school), brought in a very limited demographic of adults. This suggests even in one small area there are different pockets of people that may be experiencing barriers to arts events, barriers which do not exist around school events.

Documentation and Evaluation for forward planning

Strategic forward planning for a service's longer-term goals in terms of arts provision and touring should include preparing feedback, evaluation, and documentation of events so that these can inform the direction of a future cultural offer and be used as supporting evidence in future bids. Documentation could be in the form of photographs, or audio or video footage of events, or 'vox pops' of audience talking about their experience. This kind of documentation forms a strong foundation from which to share evidence of existing work in this area and to make the case for new and more offerings.

Developing more opportunities for learning and sharing

It is positive to see proactive initiatives to skills development across both the library and arts touring sectors. Examples include the development of an online event management learning module being commissioned in 2020 by Libraries Connected and a national touring libraries development enquiry running with the National Rural Touring Forum until 2021.

Within, or as well as these, senior level staff need additional support to enable internal and external networking, sharing of case studies, and inspiring new projects and partnerships. Our findings suggest that senior management developing stronger lines of communication with more frontline staff about the strategy and resources for their touring arts offer would support all levels of staff to work from the same page. This would aid an increase in levels of interest in and ownership of touring arts amongst those who would usually work directly with the artists.

Long term

Collating evaluation from arts events

A robust evaluation framework is crucial for longer term, strategic development of larger projects. Therefore, an area-wide model could help to inform services, and potential funders, of the real impact and audience reach of their existing touring arts programmes, and of areas with room for development and resource. A meta-analysis of past and current arts events would set up a library service well for future work.

Service-wide adaptations

We would recommend that more ownership is given to the managers and volunteers on which kinds of events they put on and when. Increasing their knowledge, experience and confidence would enable better promotion of events and more joined up thinking at the frontline. However, this does need an organisational strategy, structure and change to ways of working to be of real benefit. Further, a clarity of whose role encompasses culture and creativity within the service is key. A lack of awareness among libraries personnel of the pivotal member of staff leading on arts could be a real barrier to activity at a wide range of levels, especially where suggestions for programming from the ground up are as important as top down decisions.

Formalising the Culture and Creativity Offer

Being an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation is an opportunity for many library services to formalise and cement their Culture and Creativity Offer, but in 2020 not all see it as a desirable or viable pathway. From speaking with services across the south east we understand that while some may be keen to have the security of longer-term funding for touring arts programmes as a service or as a consortium, others believe that whilst their current touring arts offer suits their service's current aims and vision, NPO status would not necessarily align with this and potentially take them off course in trying to make it so. Nevertheless, of the 16 of 26 library services we have directly consulted with over the last 12 months, there is a real commitment to realising, maintaining and/or growing the Culture and Creativity Offer and this enquiry has enabled the beginning of some of our immediate and longer-term recommendations to be realised.

For those services wishing to apply for Arts Council England investment, either by way of NPO or National Lottery Project Activity grants, what will stand them in good stead is formal arts partnerships with the local and/or national arts ecology, a firm sense of their strategic place and cultural offerings within that sector and a willingness to help shape and develop the cultural sector to the benefit of all its constituent parts.

Resources and Further Reading

Creative Arts East: Touring Arts to Libraries Resources for Libraries and Artists
https://www.creativeartseast.co.uk/post/art_news/new-touring-arts-to-libraries-resources

AMA (Arts Marketing Association) CultureHive: Touring Arts to Libraries Toolkits and Templates
<https://www.culturehive.co.uk/resources/touring-arts-to-libraries/>

Libraries Connected Culture & Creativity Universal Offer
www.librariesconnected.org.uk/universal-offers/culture-creativity

Glossary of Library Arts terms
www.librariesconnected.org.uk/resource/arts-and-culture-terms-and-definitions

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Enquiry collaborators

Contributors to survey

Library services: Bedford Borough Libraries, Central Bedfordshire Council Libraries, Cambridgeshire Culture and Community Service, Essex Library Service, Hertfordshire Libraries, Luton Libraries, Norfolk Library and Information Service, Vivacity Peterborough Libraries, Southend Libraries, Suffolk Libraries, Thurrock Libraries, Brighton and Hove Libraries, Buckinghamshire Libraries and Culture, East Sussex Libraries, Kent County Council Libraries, Medway Libraries, Milton Keynes Libraries, Oxfordshire Libraries, Libraries and Culture Slough, West Berkshire Libraries, West Sussex Libraries.

Touring companies: QuirkHouse Theatre Company, Paul Huntley-Thomas, Mole & Gecko, Forest Tribe Dance Theatre, Fishhouse Theatre, Wobblymotion, Freshwater Theatre Company, Fascinating Fens, Sandal Sticks Theatre, Librarian Theatre, Chitrar Soundar, The Spark Arts for Children, Hannah Pickett Dance, Irina Richards, Rachel Wiles Fine Art, The Keeper's Daughter, Angel Exit Theatre, Bob, Inn Crowd, Wriggle Dance Theatre, Pip Utton Theatre Company, Rust & Stardust, Scary Little Girls, Slot Machine Theatre, Theatre Transformations, Circo Rum Ba Ba, On The Other Hand Theatre, Simon Mayor and Hilary James, Nicholas Collett Productions, Scratchworks Theatre

Company, Badapple Theatre Company Ltd, Andrew James Brown, Blue House Music, Frog Morris Presents, Metaphysique, The Bob Hall Show, Alison Neil, Human Story Theatre, The Appreciation Society CIC, The Last Baguette, Tessa Bide Productions, John Osborne, Ensemble, Anita Lehmann, HyperFusion Theatre Company, Total Insight Theatre, Full House Theatre, Becky Edmunds, Barrington Farm.

Representatives in south east libraries touring enquiry reference group

Central Bedfordshire Council Libraries, Cambridgeshire Culture and Community Service, Hertfordshire Libraries, Luton Libraries, Norfolk Library and Information Service, Suffolk Libraries, Buckinghamshire Libraries and Culture, Kent County Council Libraries, Libraries and Culture Slough, Reading Borough Council: Libraries, Farnham Maltings, Applause Rural Touring, Librarian Theatre, National Centre for Writing, National Rural Touring Forum, Arts Council, Creative Arts East, Babylon Arts.

Appendix 2 – Survey Questions

Libraries Survey:

Rate your current interest in touring arts in libraries. 1 = low 5 = high

How does touring arts in libraries interest you?

Rate your current knowledge of touring arts in general.

How confident do you feel in offering touring arts for your library users?

Rate how strongly you agree that your users would receive the following benefits from accessing arts in your library.

Is there a designated member of staff who deals with/could deal with the library touring arts offer?

How significant are the following challenges for touring arts in libraries?

How important do you think it is for you to have a good understanding of the art that is/could be touring to your library?

How do/would you go about gaining more understanding about the shows/exhibitions/workshops that your library hosts? Select all that apply.

How do/would you communicate the information you find about a show/exhibition/workshop to library staff and library users participating? Select all that apply.

Touring arts to libraries can benefit your library service in which of the following ways? Please select all that apply.

Who currently accesses your service as a library user? Please select the groups who use the library most.

Who else would you like to reach? i.e. is there a group within your community you do not think is represented among your library users?

Rate the following statements in terms of how strongly you believe them. Touring arts in libraries can help library communities by:

What features does your library have? Please select all that apply.

Please select the features that are available in any of the libraries you work in.

What kind of spaces do you have available for touring arts events at your library? Please select all that apply.

How many of the following have you been involved in hosting in your library over the last year?

How many of the following have you been involved in hosting in your libraries over the last five years?

Do you ticket your touring arts activities/events/workshops?

Please give details about your ticketing system.

What is the average ticket value range?

Who currently attends touring arts events and activities at your library/ies? Please select all that apply.

Who else would you like to reach and include in touring arts events and activities?

How much do you think the audiences for your touring arts events reflect your usual library users? Please select the statement that best describes your audiences.

Does your library service have a budget related to touring arts or culture?

If yes, what is the approximate annual budget for the library service touring art?

Were any of the touring arts events you hosted last year subsidised by external funding?

If yes, what was the funding source?

What is your approximate average box office income for an event? Asked only to tier 2.

How confident do you feel about working with artists or touring companies?

Do you have any formal arts partners?

If yes, who is/are your arts partners?

If you do have an arts partner, how long have you had this relationship?

How long have you had this relationship with your arts partner(s)?

Please rate the importance of each of the following tasks that arts partners may take on.

How have you found the experience of liaising with artists or touring companies?

Can you tell us some names of artists or touring companies, or shows you have worked with?

Questions only asked to Tier 3:

What would help to tour arts to libraries more effectively? Please select all that apply.

How would you rate your communication with artists overall?

Has your library service applied to become an Arts Council NPO?

If your library service has applied to become an Arts Council NPO, was the application successful?

If your library service has been successful in applying to become an NPO, how has the status changed or improved the way you tour arts to libraries?

What would help to tour arts to libraries more effectively? Please select all that apply.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us? (All tiers had this same question).

Artists Survey:

I am a... company representative/touring scheme representative/individual artist/ other arts organisation

What is the name of your company?

Rate your current interest in touring arts in libraries. 1 = low 5 = high

Rate your current knowledge of touring to libraries.

How confident do you feel in touring to libraries?

What kind of work are you interested in taking to libraries?

Are you an Arts Council NPO?

How important are the different outcomes of touring to libraries? Please rank the outcomes below with number 1 being the most important outcome to you.

Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following statements. Touring arts in libraries can help communities by...

What would help to tour arts to libraries more effectively? Please select all that apply.

Have you toured work to libraries before?

How often do you tour to libraries?

How interested would you be in touring work to libraries again?

Which libraries/library services have you toured to?

Which events/shows/exhibitions have you toured to these libraries?

What kind of art was it? Please select all that apply.

Who was your intended audience?
Please select all that apply.

Please tell us which new audiences you are trying to reach

Overall, do you feel your events in libraries were well attended compared to other venues?

Which member(s) of library staff have you liaised with? Please select all that apply.

Were they there to assist on the day of your touring activity?

What challenges have you faced when touring your work to libraries?

Were you subsidised by external funding for your most recent tour?

What is the ticket price on average for your show/event/exhibition if any? Please give details.

On average how much would you charge a library to tour your work there? Please give details.

How do you gather audience feedback?
Please give details.

How would you rate your communication with libraries overall?

Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Contact us

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