

# let's get *real*



*How digital adds value for cultural audiences, communities and organisations*



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# Foreword



*Anne Torreggiani*

CEO, The Audience Agency

**When The Audience Agency merged with Culture24 last year, the initiative I was most excited about was Let's Get Real. The Culture24 team have spent twelve years refining this inspired approach to collaborative learning and action research. But my enthusiasm was not just about building on an elegant, tried and tested model. We urgently need the insights, capabilities and confidence it nurtures, as never before.**

Let's Get Real opens up the space for cultural practitioners to reflect, reinvent, test out ideas, share learning and – from this strong foundation - to make positive change. In other words, it encourages the habits of innovation, measured risk-taking and collaboration essential to navigating change in times of crisis.

As a frugal 2024 drew to a close, we reflected on the effects of austerity across the cultural sector. Colleagues everywhere report the strain of having to do more with less. It seems likely that the year ahead will see more organisations go to the wall. The risk of personal burnout, well-documented through the pandemic, has scarcely receded. And there are few signs that this situation is going to get better any time soon.

Meanwhile, the world around us is changing at a terrifying pace. Our audiences behave in unpredictable ways and technology, with the capacity both to help and harm, constantly morphs around us.

As we're frequently told, we must learn to ride this change, sweat our assets, shift our models, seize new opportunities. But as we've all experienced, the prospect of managing change when our backs are to the wall, when time and resources are stretched, can seem overwhelming.

In this climate, Let's Get Real is a revitalising tonic. This edition tackled the concept of value and as such went right to the heart of why we do what we do – and how digital can help us do it more effectively. In this report, you'll hear frank stories from our brave and generous cohort of learner-leaders which demonstrate that we all share similar challenges. More than that, however, they also show that by being honest with ourselves, by adopting an experimental mindset, and supporting each other to embrace the new, we can learn to relish the prospect of change.

# Overview

**Let's Get Real: Value (LGR Value) focused on the ways that using digital can add value for cultural audiences, communities and organisations, supporting positive internal change and deepening engagement.**

Across an eight-month period, between February and October 2024, 19 arts and culture organisations undertook a journey of interrogating, understanding and developing their approach to the value of their digital work.

Since emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic and through the cost-of-living crisis there has been unprecedented pressure on the budgets and resources of audiences as well as arts and culture organisations. With this pressure comes greater expectations around the potential value of digital, alongside a much stronger focus on monetary value in general. But through this phase of LGR, we wanted to encourage the participating organisations to look more deeply at value and to be brave enough to not just focus on the monetary value.

Across those organisations, small scale experiments were conducted within their current and planned digital activity, all looking at understanding and developing the different types of value of that work to audiences, organisation or both.

Some of the participating organisations focused on their internal practice, such as how they report on success across different departments or sites. Others experimented with audience-facing initiatives, such as improving the content and navigation of their events listings and understanding the value that adds. Whatever the focus was, the key is that it was small, manageable and realistically achievable.

This year's project brought together an exciting community of people and organisations from across the arts and culture sector, from museums to national theatrical venues. Together, they tackled the challenge of understanding the value of digital through openness, honesty and collaboration. The project also offers us insights into the state of our sectors relationship to digital in 2025.





# Partnership



Institute for Digital Culture

We ran LGR Value in partnership with our long-term collaborator the **Institute for Digital Culture** at the University of Leicester, working with their Director Professor Ross Parry.

This provided a fantastic space for our first in-person workshop and also gave us access to brilliant academic thinkers and researchers who helped us frame our thinking around value at that first workshop.



# What is Let's Get Real?



**Let's Get Real (LGR) was Culture24's flagship collaborative action research programme, brought over to The Audience Agency (TAA) when the two charities merged in November 2023. Since 2012 it has supported eleven cohorts of cultural organisations to become more relevant, resilient and responsive to digital cultural change.**

Each year we gathered cohorts of people from arts and cultural organisations to tackle different digital challenges together in a collaboratively funded annual project. The LGR approach is always tailored to the cohort's needs and contexts and takes a human-centred design approach, characterised by:



**Learning from others:** we bring in a variety of voices and perspectives from within and beyond the cultural sector, to inform, support, guide and reflect on the challenges at hand



**Learning by doing:** we support participants to test out and experiment with new ways of working in the context of their everyday activities



**Learning together:** we create a community of supportive peers with a shared sense of purpose, actively seeking out ways to foster and promote collaborative exchange

Our LGR projects follow the fundamentals of design thinking, which we embed into our workshops and mentoring sessions as well as encouraging the cohort to adopt this approach through their experimentation.



**Understand:** pinning down the key issues/ themes in the project



**Define:** relating project issues to each participant according to personal and organisational contexts



**Ideate:** generating project ideas in creative and non-restrictive ways



**Plan:** shaping experiments based on the best fit between the define and ideate stages



**Test:** everyone runs their experiments (and iterates, if time and scope allow)



**Review:** analysing where everyone is at and focus on approaches to unblock any issues or problems



**Reflect:** everyone reflects on their work and key insights to support their ongoing work and activities, post the LGR approach

Each LGR project follows a structured process that combines collaborative discussion with expert input and individual practical action.

Our process includes the use of two framings designed to help understand and define both digital skills and digital activity within the context of the cultural sector. They were developed as part of the AHRC funded One by One project and have been extensively used, tested and validated across many TAA action learning, training and consultancy projects in both the UK and internationally.

All sessions build the personal confidence, understanding and digital literacy of the participating individuals. They also give them the opportunity to collaborate with and learn from a supportive, engaged community of peers with a shared sense of purpose. You can read about the specific structure of this year's Let's Get Real project in the 'What we did' section.



# Participating organisations



*Organisations in the 2024 Let's Get Real Value cohort*

In LGR Value, 19 arts and culture organisations took part in the collaboratively-funded project, each contributing between £1,250 and £2,650 depending on their size.

The organisations that signed up to take part in the project were:

**Amgueddfa Cymru (Museum Wales)**

**Bradford District Museums and Galleries**

**Bristol Museum**

**British Council**

**Edinburgh International Festival**

**English National Opera**

**GLAM University Oxford**

**Goethe-Institut London**

**Museum of the Home**

**National Museums Scotland**

**National Trust**

**OperaUpClose**

**Royal Academy of Arts**

**Shakespeare's Globe**

**Thackray Museum of Medicine**

**The Box**

**Wellcome**

**Welsh National Opera**

**Wessex Museums**



Being part of a cohort has been hugely useful, interesting and fun. We learnt so much from our peers and valued the peer support network LGR provided

*Royal Academy of Arts*

# Framing the value within digital

**With increased pressure on budgets and time, knowing the value of digital work to our cultural organisations has never been more important. Why are we choosing the digital activities we do? Are we measuring the right things? Are we paying attention to what is working and what is not? Do we know how to get better value with only the resources we have?**

Through the cost-of-living crisis there has been unprecedented pressure on audiences to cut back and for organisations to find new revenue streams. Much of this pressure has been put on digital teams and digital engagement, as a source of potential income. This pressure is unhelpful and often unrealistic.

Our experts helped us to define the different ways in which digital can add value. Value is multi-dimensional, meaning different things to different people and it changes over time. The workshops created a space for the group to speak openly about what value might mean to their organisations specifically. The space for this conversation was highly valued and demonstrated that to properly address the question of value it needed to be spoken about openly, and we can only understand it by giving it life and meaning through dialogue.



Guest expert Sejul Malde talked about how as a sector we can become blinkered in thinking about value as primarily financial. Sejul argued that financial value is actually an extension of other forms of value, giving the iPhone as an example. Yes, the device costs the consumer money, but the true value for the consumer is in how it can connect them to other people, make work easier, support the consumption of media, and so on.

Sejul set out a series of prompts to help the cohort kick-start conversations within their own organisations about the value within their digital activities:



**Why is it important to you?** Consider the various hats you might wear when considering that question: for example, as a human, an employee, a collaborator, a sector representative, etc.



**Who is this value for?** Consider here yourself, your colleagues, volunteer, audiences, fans, leaders, etc.



**What type of value to do you want to create for them?** Consider, for example, personal meaning, knowledge, emotion, connection, expression, etc.



**When might value be created for them?** Consider here whether value is created during the process, when it is used, as an output, as an outcome, etc.

These prompts provided a foundation for the group to use when designing the experiments they would carry out within their own channels. They were a real turning point for many of the cohort, who had signed up assuming that their focus for their experimentation would be on monetary value.

In fact, we encouraged the cohort to look beyond the more obvious financial value of digital such as income from ticket sales, and look instead for other kinds of value that matches organisational priorities.

That is not to say that there is still not more to be done to better grasp the economic value of digital activities more fully. **In a 2024 report by the Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre** they have begun this important task in their case study of the Art UK platform. They conclude *“Our results add to the small but growing evidence base that through careful sampling strategy and questionnaire design, contingent valuation techniques can be used to estimate the economic value of digital cultural services”*.

There is also a significant 2024 **Department for Culture, Media and Sport report by Frontier Economics** that concludes the value of engaging with culture and heritage can improve the health and wellbeing of UK adults aged 30-46 to the tune of £8bn every year. Their methodology created 13 separate models, each corresponding to existing evidence produced by the Social Biobehavioural Research Group and other researchers, to investigate the impact of a specific type of cultural or heritage engagement on a specific outcome, for a specific group of the population. These models offer a way to explore the monetary value of the benefits to an individual’s quality of life using either ‘quality-adjusted life-years’ or ‘wellbeing-adjusted life-years’.

Beyond this LGR cohort it is clear that more work is needed to consolidate the evidence around the different values from the digital activities of our sector.

# What we did



**Through the LGR Value programme, we looked to the sector and beyond for best practice examples, inspiration and approaches. Some of these we delivered ourselves, as a project team, and others were delivered by invited speakers.**

Measuring success is nothing new for the sector and we have had themes in past Let's Get Real programmes which have focused on just that. Understanding the value of that success, however, is different – particularly when the prevailing focus for value is on money. So we structured the programme to focus on framing different aspects of value through a digital lens and keeping that concept of value central to the workshops and the cohort's experimentation.

We used our tried and tested methodology to support the cohort in their research and learning. This consisted of:



Four online workshops, delivered through Zoom between March and July 2024



Two in-person workshops, one at the start delivered at the University of Leicester and one at the end delivered at the Wellcome Collection in London



A series of six, hour long support sessions for each organisation with a member of the programme team



Self-led research periods between the workshops



Online social drop-ins and troubleshooting sessions



Online collaboration between all participants via Mighty Networks platform as well as write-ups of the workshop content on Mighty Networks



**The support sessions were especially helpful, and a big thanks to Anra, Jane and Alec for their advice and reflections throughout**

*National Museums Scotland*



# Learning from others

**In LGR Value we worked with talented, knowledgeable and experienced leaders, thinkers, researchers and practitioners to help support the project and the cohort.**

Each individual brought their experience and insights on the subject of digital value which helped to build a strong foundation of ideas, practice and case studies. The programme was further boosted by the experience and insights of the participants from each organisation.



## Dr. Will Darler

*Lecturer in Applied Analytics and Digital Economy, Enterprise Lead (CSSAH) at the University of Leicester*

Will shared insights from his research into using AI and data analysis to understand changes in human and business behaviour across a variety of different industries. His talk looked at how to translate academic research into tangible real-world impacts.



## Oliver Mantell

*Director of Evidence & Insight at The Audience Agency*

Oliver spoke about ways of thinking about evidence and thinking with evidence and he unpacked how we might better understand valuing digital experiences. You can read more about his approach in Appendix One.



## Bob Christer

Operations Manager, **Bamboozle**

Bob spoke about the role of digital tools and processes in enabling experiences and interactions for people with disabilities or neurodivergence. In particular where there can be deep, profound value and how can we quantify and plan for that organisationally?



## Sejul Malde

Collaborative Research Initiatives Manager (College of Arts and Social Sciences), *The Australian National University*

Sejul has contributed to numerous LGR cohorts, first as an employee at Culture24 and now as a researcher. He spoke about this work to better understanding value and the importance of understanding what value means to individuals and organisations. He posed that there is no getting away from the importance of financial value, but that digital practice is often unhelpfully held out as a solution to all problems, including generating income. He shared his work looking how there are attributes of value which align with different people and different organisations & sectors.

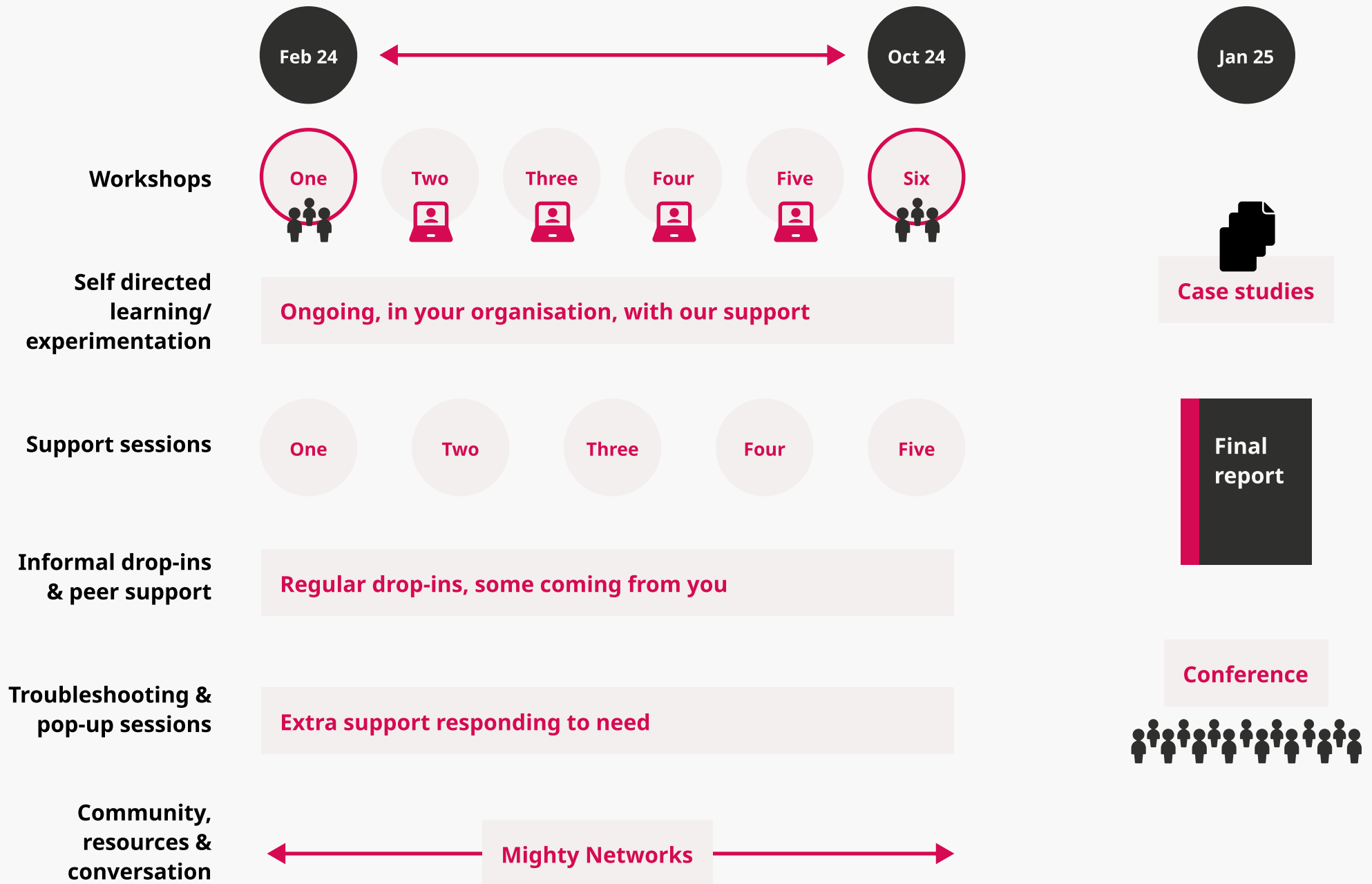


## Professor Ross Parry

Director of the **Institute for Digital Culture**, *University of Leicester*

Ross was a regular presence at our online and in-person workshops, providing insights, reflections and support for the cohort of organisations and The Audience Agency

# LGR Value programme structure



team. He held a digital lens to our discussion of value, reflecting on what the other speakers had shared. He argued that it is important to reflect on how digital, in itself, is changing the way we think about value, what we value and how we value it.



## Dr. Sophie Frost

*Lecturer in Creative Leadership, University of the Creative Arts and Research Fellow at the Institute for Digital Culture*

Sophie's work focuses on the impact of digital technology and innovation on cultural and creative work. She shared her research around the hidden and emotional labour inherent in digital work and connected this to the value that we place upon labour.



## Uzma Johal MBE

*Partner, **Counterculture***

Uzma is a passionate advocate for the transformative power of culture, media, technology and the arts in the pursuit of social change. She facilitates and advocates for the use of data insights and principles of co-design to maximise the impact and reach of the sectors contribution to civic society, fostering collaboration and advising strategic decision-making in the places she has worked.

Her work includes the development of creative place-making strategies, strategic business & programme planning, organisational change, talent development and stakeholder engagement with a focus on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

# Learning by doing

**Through the programme we supported each organisation to develop, plan and assess their own small experiments.**

To do this, we used agile-based methodologies focusing on clear objectives, audience and organisational involvement, a willingness to create and iterate and a culture of accepting and learning from failures. This approach was supported by the workshops, mentoring and networking and has been developed and iterated across all the Let's Get Real programmes.



Taking an enormous project (like the play pages) and saying, 'what's the small-scale experiment' showed how we can make data-informed decisions and manage projects more effectively going forward.

*Shakespeare's Globe*



Experimentation must have clear goals, practical actions, be small in scale, use existing resources and be both time-bound and measurable. The process of experimentation is often one of the most appreciated aspects of the Let's Get Real programme for participants.

All the experiments had the following characteristics:

- They sought to answer a question or address a hunch
- They involved practical actions
- They were simple and small in scale
- They used existing resources, content, channels and technologies
- They were time-bound
- They had feedback or tracking mechanisms built in

the audience agency Let's Get Real - Experiment Planner

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Organisation |  |
| Goal         | Our experiment will explore or test...                       |
| Action       | We will....  |
| Success      | If the experiment succeeds it will...                        |
| Evaluating   | We will track or measure this by...                          |
| When         | Our timescale will be..                                      |
| Who          | This will be done by and with..                              |
| Next steps   | Building on what we find out, our next iteration might be... |

© The Audience Agency

Picture of LGR experiment planning card

# Learning together

**A core component of the Let's Get Real approach is to create a sense of community and shared purpose for the participants.**

We foster open, honest and collaborative learning between the participants as a cohort of peers. Through in-person workshops and online tools, we encouraged and supported the cohort to share their experiences, their concerns, their successes and their failures.

As with previous Let's Get Real projects, we suggested that each organisation sign up with two participants. This helped to create a larger pool of potential collaborators on the project and it aimed to increase the likelihood of embedding change within the organisations, by having a partner to advocate for the work and approach.



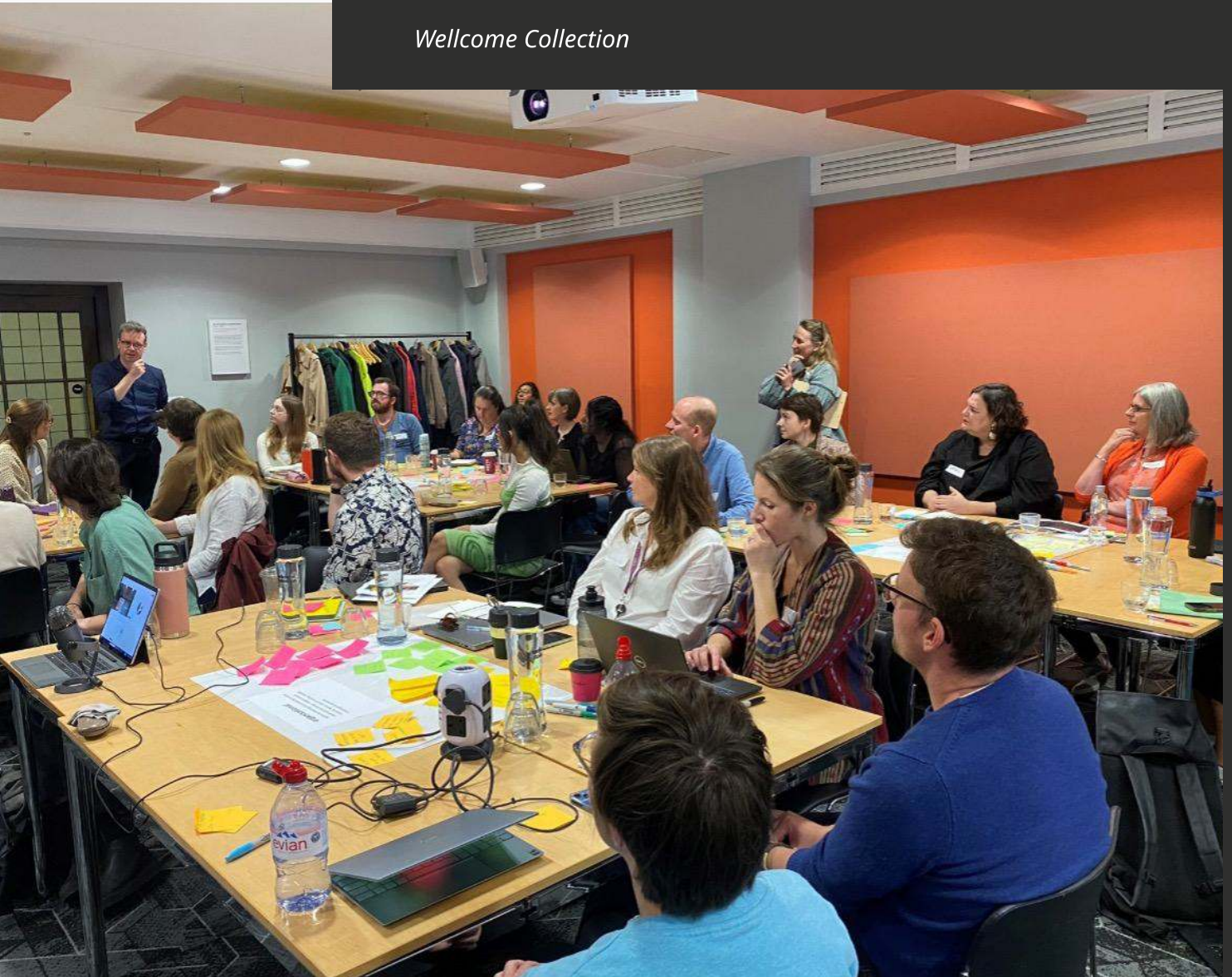
**The in-person workshops were particularly valuable, offering opportunities for informal exchange with colleagues from other institutions.**

*The Goethe-Institut London*



The final in-person workshop was a fantastic opportunity to see the breadth of projects people had worked on and the different approaches - there was a lot to take away from that one day.

*Wellcome Collection*



# The experiments: a summary

## **Amgueddfa Cymru (Museum Wales)**

Improving and enhancing Amgueddfa Cymru's What's On pages. Focusing on user experience and processes involved in getting them published on the website.

## **Bradford District Museums and Galleries**

Gathering user insights and data to identify user interest areas, direct work programmes and show value through newsletter and blog content.

## **Bristol Museum**

Experiment one: understanding what challenges people faced working digitally across the organisation, with the context of the study being the need for a digital content strategy that multiple stakeholders could buy into.

Experiment two: exploring the value of digital content to online and in-person audiences, in particular audio content related to exhibitions and displays, looking at how user needs and behaviour connect or diverge in these environments.

## British Council

Whether Artificial Intelligence (AI) can streamline the processing of 'Creative Tech' grant applications, aiming to bolster resource alongside avoiding human error and ensuring compliance with data policies.

## Edinburgh International Festival

Investigating whether our 'Warm Up' content gives audiences what they need to feel welcome and to know what to expect. Does it also give the right information to connect deeply with the performance and finally, does it provide a special and memorable International Festival experience?

## English National Opera

English National Opera took part in the programme up until the point of starting an experiment, but due to extenuating circumstances, beyond the scope of the project, they were unable to continue.

## GLAM University Oxford

Experiment one: trailing a framework for understanding the digital value of existing content – within their blogs – to assess if they are still the right channel to meet the goals of their audience and their organisation.

Experiment two: investigating if a whole team, (40+ staff), were interested in auditing its digital skills, what it values about that knowledge, and how the results can be used as a basis for improvement.



## Goethe-Institut London

Creating a data-driven dashboard that aggregates relevant data to enable their institute directors to understand and optimize their institute's digital communication effectively. The aim was to develop an intuitive tool that serves the information needs of leadership, providing a basis for strategic, data-informed decisions.

## Museum of the Home

Testing the effectiveness of a story-driven approach for a general donation request on Instagram, through video, based on the success of an earlier crowdfunding campaign delivered through Instagram.

## National Museums Scotland

Investigating whether content shot as informal video (mobile phone footage) can sit alongside their high production value video and get similar engagements, whilst improving resource in the team.

## National Trust

Experiment one: testing live streaming tours using the NT standard video calling platform, Webex, in an indoor and outdoor location as a way of providing audience engagement at a site unable to easily host physical visits.

Experiment two: creating a process to allow National Trust properties to set up and manage digital innovation experiments themselves.

## OperaUpClose

Utilising postcode mapping to identify gaps in audience engagement, particularly in nationwide touring efforts, as well as exploring tailored content for donors on their preferred platforms.

## Royal Academy of Arts

Exploring how they can improve the ways they manage website requests from stakeholders, specifically around the web-navigation. The aim was to add value to the stakeholder by providing data in a simple and standardised format; and to add value to the team by developing a commonly used process.

## Shakespeare's Globe

Testing the most effective way to present general information about Shakespeare's plays (plot, characters, themed events at the Globe) to a generalist audience on their website, via a series of 'play pages'. These play-by-play pages will eventually form part of a new 'Shakespeare's Plays' hub area on the website.

## Thackray Museum of Medicine

Investigating if Wikipedia could boost engagement with collections on their collections site, through strategic editing, improving and linking from Wikipedia articles relating to their key collections and stories.

## The Box

Evaluating the impact of their recent temporary exhibition, Beyond the Page, testing social media content on Facebook versus

engagement. Specifically looking quantitatively at the numbers and qualitatively at whether they reflected their values as an organisation.

## Wellcome Collection

Developing an accessible exhibition campaign for organic and paid social media that's optimised for all channels and maintains momentum for the exhibition's 10-month run.

## Welsh National Opera

Exploring whether email automation could help Welsh National Opera to target audiences more impactfully, while also allowing them to introduce efficiencies to their workflow.

## Wessex Museums

Understanding how cross promotion between museum partners, within Wessex Museums, on social media could impact partnership awareness, engagement, and audience reach.

**A full overview of each of the case studies, detailing the goal, actions taken, measurements of success, challenges, learning and take away can be in found in Appendix 2**

# Project insights

**As we reflected on the learning across LGR Value, from the workshops, mentoring sessions, participant experiments, troubleshooting sessions and cohort discussions, key insights began to emerge.**

We have found that over the 12 years of LGR cohorts some insights and themes have remained consistent. It has become clear that these represent the big ongoing challenges that our sector faces.

This year was no different, with the recurrence of common challenges around how to measure success, organisational culture and data analysis. There is also one that has remained consistent across all of the LGR cohorts and was particularly profound this year. It was the value of experimentation and experimental working in unlocking the learning and insights that can drive positive change. Feedback from participants confirmed this, with all of the cohort stating they plan to continue experimenting in the future.

# Theme #1 | Unlocking change through experimentation

**The process of shaping an experiment helped the cohort to break down what felt like overwhelming challenges into manageable chunks. It offered a safe space to try something out and was a powerful tool for helping people to become agents of change inside their own organisations.**

For Bradford Museums it gave the digital team permission to work on projects generated from within the team, adding weight to their ideas and helping them to advocate for time to try things out.

Across the cohort, the defined nature of small experiments offered a perfect way to reflect on the value of the different kinds of data generated. For the Thackray, their experiment gave them the data to construct a business case for further investment in a Wikipedia project, whilst also helping them to try something they have been wanting to do for a long time.

Over the course of the project, it helped the cohort to value the approach that experimental working gave them and the permission to try new things in a low-risk way. For the Royal Academy, framing something as an experiment was a useful way to mitigate resistance internally to change, giving them a useful tool to bring people along with them on their journey. The proactive nature of experimentation, with feedback loops and period of analysis helped them to be proactive, influence strategy, rather than wait to get orders.

Edinburgh International Festival tested various digital initiatives to deepen audience engagement, helping to inform strategy and investment. Both Goethe-Institut and British Council focused on



experiments leveraging digital tools such as dashboards and AI to enhance their decision-making and efficiency.

National Trust's experiment on digital streaming provided a way with limited resources, and a slow institutional buy-in process, to try out something new and innovative. The Box's experiment helped them uncover and reconcile institutional priorities with their audience needs.

For many, balancing qualitative and quantitative measures of success was an area of focus and investigation and several of the cohort worked with TAA, using tools such as Audience Spectrum and population profiles to provide contextual data for further data analysis.

“ We're in a technological revolution, it is here. It's here to stay. It's part of our everyday. So it's about getting people again to understand how you take advantage of that to maximise where you're trying to get to.

*Uzma Johal, Partner, Counterculture*

Digging deeper into quantitative measures, the Wellcome Collection's experiment with inclusivity campaigns offered them a way to redefine value beyond monetary terms to include connection, inclusion, and audience experiences.

# Theme #2 | Valuing the right data

**The need for greater data literacy and data-informed decision-making has been on the agenda for our sector for many years and a lot of good work has taken place in this area.**

TAA's own track record in this area is well established with extensively used tools such as **Audience Spectrum** and **Audience Answers**. The Clore Leadership's **World of Work reports** highlights the pressing need for the arts sector to enhance its digital literacy.

Valuing data was not something the cohort needed to learn and was a starting point of many experiments. The challenge came however in knowing which data to value? All digital activities by their nature, generate a lot of data and most organisations have digital tools to capture and analyse that data. The data is often gathered and shared in generic reports that aggregate what data is available. Interpreting data, telling stories with it, interrogating it with specific questions in mind is not only challenging, but time consuming. This often means that organisations can fall out of the habit of data analysis around their digital activities as it is simply too difficult to realise the value in the time investment, or to evidence the value of the activity against their own mission and priorities.

For many of the cohort, their experiments were trying to understand what data they could collect to evidence success in areas that matter to them. Doing this means expanding your concept of what value is beyond simply the transactional and financial. It requires you to define what evidence you can collect to illustrate something specific to your goals.

This challenge shows all of us how important data literacy, data skills, workflows & processes are and how they underpin our ability to understand value in all its dimensions.

For OperaUpClose, data analysis busted some myths and helped them understand their audiences better, using segmentation to identify who they are most successfully engaging with. For The Box, their experiment looking at social media analytics provided starting points for deeper audience insights.

With Oxford GLAM, their experiment has helped to establish data analysis as a guiding star with built in feedback loops at regular intervals.

National Museums Scotland's experiment played with the differences in how informal and formal video content reaches diverse demographics.

The British Council used AI to experiment in sorting language within funding applications in ways that can support informed decision-making. The Goethe-Institut created and implemented a dashboard correlating audience engagement metrics across different platforms.

# Theme #3 | Evolving organisational culture

**This theme has come up within every LGR cohort and is also something seen in all of TAA's other research, development and training work across the UK and internationally.**

**Storythings'** Director Matt Locke's talk on organisational rhythms has become a touchstone for every LGR cohort since he first delivered it back in 2018. He describes rhythm as being the '**most important thing about your organisation that you don't understand**'. Essentially, it is about how the existing culture and working rhythms inside each cultural organisation, that are unique to each individual context, shape and define the environments we all work in.

Organisational rhythms, culture and attitudes to change came up again as obstacles in all of the cohort's experiments. In particular, organisational and personal tolerance towards failure.

For National Museum Wales, the experiment helped them to change perception of the digital department from being a service that is reactive to requests, to being proactive with new content and ideas themselves. This values the expertise of the digital team, using that expertise to get more value from their work.

Many of the cohort were struck by Sejul Malde's talk at the beginning of the programme that asked questions to help define different types of value. These questions helped shift the mindset of some organisations, helping them appreciate the need for value to be better defined.

For Bradford Museums the programme built their confidence, helping them feel positive about being honest and admitting

'failure' when things are not working. At Bristol Museums they are now working to introduce new staff to experimental working and building the learning from this into their philosophy going forward.

For National Trust the programme offered big changes and a very positive step forward. They found their experience of LGR generated insights that can influence where they can go with properties going forward.

For Wellcome they felt the main value from participation has been the fact that what they have learned on the project, can now be taken and used in the way they work together going forward and how they think about digital and show the value of their comms work to the rest of the organisation.

Shakespeare's Globe are moving towards embedding digital as a core organisational value rather than a bolt-on feature. At Wessex Museums they are cultivating collaborative frameworks and cross-departmental partnerships to help ensure the greatest value from their investment.



# Recommendations

**Below are seven recommendations for the arts and culture sector, for those who want to grow their digital maturity and improve the value and impact of their digital activities:**

1

## **Foster a culture of experimentation**

Encourage small-scale, manageable experiments within organisations to explore digital opportunities. These should have clear objectives, use existing resources, and include feedback loops. Experimentation not only mitigates risk but also fosters innovation and can serve as a tool to overcome a resistance to change.

2

## **Expand the understanding of digital value beyond financial metrics**

Shift the focus of digital activity from monetary value to include personal, social, emotional, and community-based impacts.

Define and measure value in alignment with organisational priorities and audience needs, exploring metrics like inclusion, connection, and audience experience.

3

### **Prioritise data literacy and meaningful analysis**

Develop internal capabilities to identify, collect, and analyse what is the "right" data that aligns with your organisational goals. Move beyond generic data reporting to storytelling and actionable insights to support decision-making.

4

### **Embed digital literacy and leadership**

Ensure staff across all levels are equipped with the skills and confidence to leverage digital tools effectively. Invest in training that focuses on both technical competencies and the strategic application of digital in organisational contexts.

5

### **Adapt organisational rhythms to embrace digital transformation**

Recognise and address cultural and structural barriers to digital adoption. This includes fostering tolerance for failure and creating spaces for dialogue and innovation. Embed digital thinking into the core values and operations of organisations rather than treating it as an add-on.

6

## Collaborate and share learnings across the sector

Leverage peer networks to share successes, failures, and insights.

Participate in sector-wide initiatives to develop common frameworks and methodologies for understanding and demonstrating digital value.

7

## Adopt a human-centred design approach

Tailor digital activities to the specific needs of audiences and communities, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility. Regularly involve stakeholders in the process of designing, testing, and refining digital initiatives.

# In conclusion

## *The truth about change*

**After twelve years of LGR there are very clear themes that emerge across the numerous programmes and with the hundreds of participants and range of organisations, and this year's cohort is no different.**

In Zak Mensah's article 'Have we learned nothing' from the LGR8 report, he reflected on how those of us who see the moment after the pandemic as a potential catalyst for improving how we operate, are asking ourselves the question "Surely the future of how we operate isn't just doing what we have always done?"

Looking back over the LGR years, the picture is not 100% positive with many challenges remaining very much on the agenda even after ten years. It can feel in some ways as if we are standing still as a sector when it comes to truly embracing the changes that digital transformation have brought to society and other sectors.

Of these challenges, three remain consistent and finding ways to deal with these going forward needs to be a priority for our sector.

# Change is hard work

**Everyone wants to transform but no one wants to change! Exacerbating this is the current cost of living and environmental crisis that faces us all.**

There is a real sector-wide problem with many staff feeling overwhelmed and struggling with burnout. To quote our guest expert Dr Sophie Frost's research into the hidden emotional labour of digital *"...the environment in which we're all operating... there's this idea of those who get it and those who don't and where they sit within your ecosystem, those who are potentially gatekeepers to what you're trying to do. And that can be very tiring. You're talking about the emotional labour that comes with that, and how that could really wear you down over time."*

Going forward it prompts the question of not 'how can we do more with less?', but 'how can we do less better?' How to prioritise our resources (human, environmental and technological) and make sure we see meaningful value from that investment.

## *Embrace the uncomfortable*

**Doing less better, relieving the pressures from overload, doing the hard work of positive change, often require organisations to make difficult, uncomfortable decisions.**

And it is the individuals inside those organisations who actually have to make those uncomfortable decisions. This can cause anxiety and issues around confidence for many that without an openness to the possibility of failure, is almost impossible to manifest. We need both an organisational approach to change that can better tolerate risk and a culture that support individuals to manage the uncomfortable that can come with those risks. Asking difficult questions, challenging the status quo, analysing data to look for evidence are vital stages in ensuring all our activities have real value (whether it be social, financial, environmental, health or a combination).



## *Quantifying digital value that is not financial is complex*

**The experiments carried out in this project have highlighted and explored different ways of investigating the value of digital, across a range of different organisational contexts.**

Whilst there are clear patterns, recurring themes and common issues, more time and resources are needed to investigate and define a common language, definitions and framework. Others in the sector, in addition to TAA, are already working on this area. The 2024 DCMS report showing that the value of engaging with culture and heritage improves the health and wellbeing is an important document, as is the case study on the economic value of digital culture and the Art UK platform. But more work needs to be done in joining these, filling in the missing parts and creating a framework for understanding what value digital adds that can help organisations to prioritise better. How to balance financial, social and cultural value simultaneously, and making decisions which keep them in the right balance for each of our organisations. With so many facing insolvency, redundancies, restructuring etc, the desire to experiment, or try anything new can feel almost impossible. A framework to help guide people to better decisions is not only needed but possible.

# Appendix 1

## **Making a Reckoning:** *Reflections on evidence as a tool for thinking*



**Oliver Mantell**

Director of Evidence and Insight, The Audience Agency

**Data is important for understanding audiences, but it's equally important to remember that in the end, it's a tool for thinking with.**

We're not trying to achieve scientific proof, or establish facts from first principles. It is useful to free yourself of preconceptions as far as possible. But it would be foolish to pretend not to know what you do in fact know.

At the opening session for LGR Value, in Leicester, I spoke about a way of using a simple spreadsheet to create calculations of value which would allow you to see the effect of adjustments to the relative value you placed on particular outputs. The purpose of this approach wasn't to make all value neatly calculable. It was to make the judgments about value more explicit, and to make the elements that *could* be calculated more visible (e.g. the cost of different activities: they're not the whole story, but they are a clearly

quantifiable factor). This then left the factors that *weren't* as easily calculable. But about these too, it was at least possible to be more explicit. For example, you could say "I choose to do activity A because it has twice the impact in value areas X, Y, Z as activity B, for the same cost" or "I choose to do activity A because it has three times the impact on area X as B does on area Y, and I think X is more than half as important as Y". Now the choice becomes more visible as a set of either factually testable claims, or clearly stated valuations. You can also see whether changing those valuations makes a difference to decisions (or which valuations those decisions are most sensitive to, and therefore where it might be worth spending more time and attention).

We can apply 'made up' numbers to make similar 'leaps' in other areas. For example, during the project, some organisations needed to look at usage figures from different channels and platforms that weren't commensurable: they weren't calculated the same way, or with the same units. You can still use a similar method. For example: "we don't have an exact way of comparing, but on current usage, we think our website has twice the audience visibility/reach as our social channels. So, if nothing else changes but the latter treble in visibility/reach, then they are likely to take over as the more important channel for us". Now you've got a combination of things you can measure, and things you've made explicit estimates of, that you can use to think more precisely.

This approach (which appears more mathematical than empirical) can seem abstract. But - and here's the key trick - it lets you bring into play lots of things that you do already know. You've *already* made lots of decisions based on the presumed relative value of your website/social channels, for example, and so evidence of your relative valuation is all around you. They've often also had implicit agreement from a range of colleagues, too (in the budgets signed off by Finance, the interest paid to results from each, how keen people are to provide content for one or the other, for example). If

you can see everyone acting as if a valuation is true, that's a reasonable place to start for what that valuation actually is. And if you think those valuations are wrong (or contradictory), it lets you focus on what you need to challenge, or where you need to explore further.

We can also pan out to apply this approach on a much wider scale. There are many debates about whether the arts have value, or which methods can be used to value the arts. The 2024 report on **Culture and Heritage Capital from Frontier Economics** and UCL identified £8 billion of value from arts and culture a year, based on a conservative estimate of the health and wellbeing impacts of general arts attendance on 30-49 year olds alone, based on improved quality of life, reduced use of health and social care services and increased productivity. If this applies equally to the whole population (the researchers are clear about the assumptions behind the estimate) the figure is around £18 billion.

What proportion of the value provided by the arts is 'health and wellbeing from general attendance'? Presumably not most of it (or we'd talk about the arts principally as a health service). But not a negligible amount either (or we wouldn't talk about the health benefits when discussing the value of the arts at all). We could, perhaps, apply estimated maximum and minimum percentages. We could look at other related figures, too. How many arts organisations are explicitly focused on health and wellbeing. Or report on it as an outcome. And so on. It's imprecise, but it would allow us to edge towards an overall valuation of the arts.

For example, if we assume that the value of 'health and wellbeing from general attendance' is 10% of the value of arts attendance: that'd suggest a total value of £180 billion a year. That's 7% of the UK's GDP (approximately £2.7 trillion), although a smaller proportion of all value created in society (if we assume that there's at least some that GDP misses). So we can ask: does this fit with

other things we know? The amount of people's time spent on it. How many people engage in it. The proportion of the workforce dedicated to it (0.8% in music, performing and visual arts in 2022, **based on DCMS figures**). What people list on dating profiles, or talk about on social media. The proportions of newspapers dedicated to it. And so on. We can at least show that there's a lot of value produced, especially for the size of the sector (whether based on people or funding levels). And if someone thinks the estimate should be on the higher or lower end of the range, it allows you to test which of the assumptions they think are producing that higher or lower valuation.

In all of these examples, we can use numerical reasoning, in combination with things we know or see about us, to start to draw conclusions that would otherwise be elusive. Although it's easy to be drawn into a false aspiration towards 'scientific' evidence, it's important to remember what we're doing it for. Evidence is a tool for thinking, not an end in itself.

To put this into practice here are a few suggestions:

- Identify an area (or two) that you want to be able to value, but know is difficult
- List out some things that would affect that value (e.g. money or time inputs), or follow from it (e.g. if it had a particular effect, whose behaviour would be different? How much?)
- Test some options (try a few and discard those that feel weakest: but remember you're trying to establish a range of results, not a singular approach)
- Look at some equivalents: what else might be similar, or a useful comparator? If it was better or worse than those comparators, what would happen? Does it?
- Establish a range, based on your estimates, and where within the range is most likely

- Test your thinking with a colleague: have they got other examples/ideas? Do they agree with your reasoning? What would their best guess be? (remembering the **'wisdom of crowds'**).
- Look for sources of existing data that could help (even if they don't directly answer your question, they may provide useful context)
- Come and talk to us at The Audience Agency: we've had lots of practice trying to solve challenging research and analysis problems.

[hello@theaudienceagency.org](mailto:hello@theaudienceagency.org)



# Appendix 2

## *Full case studies of experiments*

ORGANISATION:

### Amgueddfa Cymru - Museum Wales

**Nia Martin-Evans** | Digital Content Manager

**Richard Edwards** | Digital Content Editor

#### **What was the research question behind your experiment – what did you want to test or find out?**

How do we improve and enhance Amgueddfa Cymru's What's On pages. Focusing on user experience and processes involved in getting them published.

#### **Why was this important to your organisation?**

The Museum has been through a time of change and there's been an increase in the commercial focus over the last year or so. As members of the Digital Media team we were keen to explore how we could increase the user experience of our What on pages, and increase their value to the Museum. Not only the potential monetary value from updating them, but their value as promotional tools and source of information to our visitors and users.

#### **What did you do? Please give an overview of your process.**

We started the process by benchmarking our own What's On pages with other organisations. We carried out extensive research looking at examples of What's On pages and what was included on them, the research was carried out across multiple sectors, not just Museums.

We also had discussions with key members of staff, those who are active in creating What's On pages. We shared some of the findings of our research with them and asked them if they had any ideas on how to improve the pages.

We asked each person responsible for creating a What's On page to complete a survey which provided us with both qualitative and quantitative results on their experience. In creating pages, it gave us an insight into processes and the use of the CMS system.

Once we'd completed the research, we created a template and updated one small event with that template. We sought feedback from both internal and external users on the new template and also tracked web visits and engagement via GA4.

Having received positive feedback from the template we discussed our experiment progress with our head of department. That buy in to the process allowed us to speak with our developer and look at expanding the project further by rolling out the template across all What's On pages

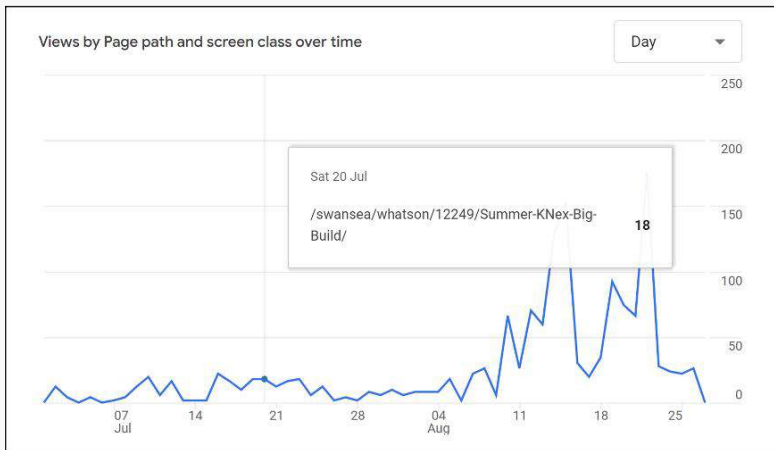
## What happened?

The positive feedback received to the template, the data and support by Heads of Department meant that we could expand the remit of the project further than we'd anticipated. Updating the What's On pages had been something we'd wanted to achieve at the Museum for years and the research and findings allowed us to explore that further. Our developer updated the CMS to simplify the process of adding additional content to the page, he also standardised the template as a new stylesheet and by doing so was able to roll out the new template for each What's On page.

The data on the initial templates showed an increase in number of visits to the page, interviews with both internal and external web users provided positive feedback with each person preferring the new template to the old version.

|               | <b>Views</b> | <b>Active users</b> | <b>Engagement</b> |
|---------------|--------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| <b>June</b>   | 82           | 26                  | 1m 50s            |
| <b>July</b>   | 266          | 109                 | 29s               |
| <b>August</b> | 1,452        | 484                 | 28s               |

*Data showing increase in page views following the updating of template*



Graph showing the spike in page viewers.

## Was anything easier than you'd expected?

The process itself was easier than expected. Six months was the perfect length of time to run this experiment, and the steps that we followed passed by seamlessly. We also had quick and timely responses to the changes that we were making and there seemed to be a real appetite to see what the outcome of the experiment might be.

Completing the experiment itself was also much easier than expected, we had complete buy in from colleagues who were genuinely invested in the success of the project, and in seeing how we could advance even further.

## What did you each learn?

**NIA:** I learnt about the power of experimental projects. Although I've been involved with LGR in the past, I have truly found an appreciation for what experimental work can achieve within the workplace. Also, making space within the workplace for carrying out such experiments is key. I am keen to adopt this way of working with specific projects (which I've already earmarked!) in the future, especially those where there isn't a clear answer or solution to them. From a personal perspective, I have realised my value within the department and organisation. During the project I gravitated towards the strategic and data side of the project, and was quite happy in that role. Although it's part of the work I do day to day, I can see that that's where my strongest skillset lies. Which has helped me understand what I can offer projects moving forward.

**RICHARD:** I learnt about the importance of focus and simplicity during this project. Having a clear aim and outcome was key in the success of our experiment. I also saw the benefits of working within a small team which

enabled more flexibility and faster decision making. These are guiding principles I learnt and developed during LGR and keen to adopt in future projects. I too have realised my value within the department and organisation. During the project I gravitated towards the problem solving and creative side of the experiment which is my strongest skillset and what I do day to day.

## What did your organisation learn?

Overall, the feedback has been incredibly positive. All people we spoke to could see the value in the work we were carrying out and were supportive of that work.

The only negativity we've received has been based around the changes to processes and the way colleagues are used to working and developing pages. Something we're addressing through training. This reaction was expected to some extent, and we had already started planning training and documents to manage this change and address any pushback.

## What's next?

We're currently running training on creating the new What's On pages. We are keen to empower our colleagues to fully utilise the new templates. We're also looking ahead at adopting the experimental way of working with further web updates which will work hand in hand with the What's On pages.

We're also planning an article to share with colleagues describing the process and learnings in the hope of encouraging others to adopt this experimental way of working in projects in the future.

We continue to trust the process and our findings, using data to reaffirm the need for change.

## Three tips or insights about doing your experiment that might be useful for other cultural sector people in similar contexts to you:

- Keep it simple
- Start with a small-scale experiment
- Make time for research

ORGANISATION:

# Bradford District Museums and Galleries

**Elizabeth Llabres** | Collections Manager

**Heather Millard** | Community Curator

## What was the research question behind your experiment – what did you want to test or find out?

We wanted to gather user insights, data to identify user interest areas, direct work programmes and show value.

## Why was this important to your organisation?

- Previous decisions and work planning for social and digital activity had been rather ad-hoc
- To support and advocate data-driven strategic decision making
- To embed the idea of data-collection as part of the process
- Better understanding of the organisation's digital literacy and identify training needs
- To better place us to advocate for the value of digital work within the service

## What did you do? Please give an overview of your process.

Initially, we created a digital tracker to track the digital data. We looked at/gather data from multiple sources:

- the e-newsletter
- the blog posts
- web analytics for both the main museum website and the photoarchive website

We then carried out some analysis on the data to:

- identify patterns of interest on the website
- unique click throughs on the e-newsletter

- Interest in historic content (i.e. existing content)

We analysed approximately 6 months' worth of data (from start of LGR onwards). We have since retrieved historical data for the last 10 years to allow for more detailed, longer term analysis to be carried out in due course.

## What happened?

- Used the data to refine monthly newsletter layout, and advocate a particular approach
- Patterns emerged for areas of interest
  - Quirky historical stories
  - Bradford District specific stories
  - Blogs about people
- We noted that exhibition blogs got more interest when the exhibition was up but weren't always the content that generated additional website visits - whilst local heritage content was consistently popular.
- Analytics allowed us to identify improvements to the website (which underwent a large change during the time frame of our experiment)
- We have been able to make recommendations for content generation on the basis of evidence

## What was difficult?

Finding time to collate the data - and the time to retrieve the historical data was particularly tricky, as we realised it had never been consistently collected. Identifying what data we wanted to know and needed to know was trickier than we thought - there's so much out there, we had to narrow our focus for it to be useful, meaningful and actionable.

## Was anything easier than you'd expected?

Sadly, no! We've learnt that the digital literacy within our organisation is challenging - so getting key members of staff to fully understand the value of the work.

## What did you each learn, as individuals?

**ELIZABETH:** To be more experimental and to encourage mine and the wider service team to be more experimental and to recognise failure as a learning tool, not a negative.



How the data can be utilised to direct strategic development, thinking and planning and can be fed back into wider work programmes to move the organisation forward.

The basics often get overlooked and going back and starting with the basics is an important part of strategic planning and nothing to be embarrassed by. It can be an essential part of organisational reflection and sustainability planning.

**HEATHER:** Finding some new tools for obtaining the data - and the possibility of additional tools for analysis. It was gratifying to be able to find and produce evidence to back up decision making for what we were focusing on digitally. That it's ok to \*not\* to know everything straight away.

## What did your organisation learn?

We are still working on implementing some of the learning across the wider service teams. However, on a practical level, it's been embedded into some of the process for our digital and social planning, as it has allowed us evidence of some of the decision making.

## What's next?

We will continue to collect the data we identified as important to then feed onto future decision making.

We are continuing to book in time to collect and analyse it.

## Three tips or insights about doing your experiment that might be useful for other cultural sector people in similar contexts to you:

- It's OK to admit you've not even got the basics yet - focusing on getting that up and running is just as valuable as more 'techy' projects. It's OK to be right at the beginning of the journey
- We started off with no data collecting in place - this project gave us the space to set up a structure for collecting it
- Start small - focus on something manageable. In our case we focused mainly on the blogs and on the newsletter as they were things we could easily get data, and that we could act on that data quite easily

ORGANISATION:

# Bristol Museums

**Fay Curtis** | User Experience and Commercialisation Officer

**Mark Pajak** | Head of Digital

## What was the research question behind your experiment – what did you want to test or find out?

**Experiment 1:** We wanted to understand what challenges people faced working digitally across the organisation. The context to our study was the need for a digital content strategy that multiple stakeholders could buy into. As a digital team we wanted to develop a method to frame digital projects that are inevitably messy and complex and spanning across teams and platforms. Success for us would be a way to better scope future projects during the development, taking in a range of stakeholder perspectives in order to avoid the chaos that we sometimes experience.

**Experiment 2:** To explore the value of digital content to online and in-person audiences, in particular audio content related to exhibitions and displays, looking at how user needs and behaviour connect or diverge in these environments. We also wanted to compare third party platforms with self-hosting, and explore audio description content in terms of accessibility vs more general audio guides

## Why was this important to your organisation?

This research has helped us gain insight into staff digital literacy, spread awareness for a developing digital strategy, informed the strategy about specific areas to focus attention on in order to address the challenges. As an organisation, the value of digital for staff collaboration and productivity is well regarded however as a team we experience difficulties working and supporting multiple teams and projects with different needs and perspectives as well as keeping the ship afloat.

To inform digital content strategy for audio content and put in a framework for how and where we upload digital content for online and in gallery audiences.

## What did you do? Please give an overview of your process.

**Experiment 1:** We focused on digital content production and used this as a test case to unpick the challenges. We used the USE/MANAGE/CREATE/UNDERSTAND framing of digital activity to design a survey for staff and stakeholders involved in content creation and publishing. This consisted of a simple MS Form, sent out to 34 staff across various teams involved or affected by digital content production.

**Experiment 2:** We uploaded 18 audio description files for the *Constable in Bristol: Truth to Nature* exhibition using a native WordPress audio playlist function. These files were available to people who purchased tickets to the exhibition in advance as well as during their visit. We added event interactions to GA4 to track usage, including progress when people got to 10%, 20% etc of the way through the audio file. This was intended to better understand how users were consuming the audio content we were producing.

## What happened?

**Experiment 1:** Using the framing of digital activity as a lens to help diagnose organisational challenges was a useful approach to embarking on a digital content strategy. By encouraging colleagues to reflect on abstract concepts around digital challenges, it helped broaden our understanding of the issues. We had a good response rate (22 respondents) and the breadth of responses contained a lot of useful information around organizational challenges for digital content. This reaffirmed the value of digital as the interface between teams, organisation & audiences. Staff realise the value of digital in what we do, how we communicate and what we create, but need support in managing and understanding digitally. Whilst we already knew the situation around digital content production in our organisation was far from ideal, it was extremely useful to hear from a range of stakeholders involved how the issues manifest in their respective areas of work. The diversity of problem areas spans multiple domains including skills, software, resource, coordination, communication, audiences, standards, analytics – the list goes on but this demonstrates the implicit value of digital to the organisation. It has got us thinking what are the opportunity costs in the gap between the ideal state and reality, where to focus attention, and what new systems and activity should we try to address with a content strategy. Using the framing was useful to examine different aspects of our organisational challenge at once and reveal many entry points for addressing the problem. It might not be 'fixable' but small improvements across different areas offers hope to deliver the potential added value that digital has to offer.

**Experiment 2:** The audio content was used far more than we had expected with people listening to tracks for longer. The tracks gained 1,964 plays over a five-week period. There were 979 track completions, which is nearly 50%. Each user had listened to an average of four tracks. Of the different audio files published describing the exhibition, it was mostly the 'intros' that were listened to and that shows us that people are after more generalised info in audio descriptions. This will inform how we develop and publish similar content in future.

## What was difficult?

**Experiment 1:** Taking people on a journey to think strategically is hard for teams facing pressures to deliver as well as teams that come with their own sense of what should be done. Exhibition planning happens far in advance, and this includes concepts for digital content production, yet the output is often left to the digital team to make work. This content production vs thinking cycle made it hard to communicate the outcomes of the experiment.

**Experiment 2:** The usual limitations in getting time from people as well as planning in work in a chaotic environment. Starting to map out all of the different audio types, from oral histories to audio descriptions and how we manage that content across multiple platforms. Thinking about the appropriate audiences for each when this wasn't always considered during the creation of the file. Navigating the GA4 system takes a lot of headspace so we needed to get third party help in configuring it for our experiment.

## Was anything easier than you'd expected?

**Experiment 1:** New features in MS Forms made it super simple to develop the survey and send it out to colleagues and gather the results.

**Experiment 2:** Working with our developer to build the template for uploading audio tracks onto the website was straightforward.

## What did you each learn, as individuals?

**FAY:** There is a demand for audio, but we have a lot of work to do in terms of thinking about audio with regards to digital content strategy and we need better internal processes for developing, storing and publishing audio across platforms.

**MARK:** As a manager I learned how better to unpack and empathise how hidden digital labour can present itself both in the Digital Team but also for colleagues working in other areas, potentially struggling due to a range of issues (skills, software, organisational boundaries). Being able to better communicate this upwards to senior management will be a key feature of helping our organisation grow and cope with the ever-increasing range and impact of digital working in all its forms.

## What did your organisation learn?

We joined the programme with a sense that we had something to prove to the wider organisation in terms of the value of digital, but we all had something to learn. Processes set up by one team to cope with a high workload can be seen as a hindrance to other teams. By widening the scope of the survey to a broad range of teams this helped encourage better collaboration and a positive attitude to solving these kinds of conflicts. How people feel about digital can be just as important as what they do with it, and having people on board for any change project is key. Digital tools can be so negative and so positive, in different ways and it was useful to hear similar stories coming out across the cohort.

## What's next?

Once we feel ready to roll out our content strategy, we will engage with the stakeholders identified to help them share understanding and develop dialogue around the issue. We hope that having an action plan directly related to issues they have expressed will help gain buy in for the changes we may propose as a result of this.

We will be setting up GA4 analytics on our in-gallery QR system and comparing stats to compare on site vs online audio consumption.

We would like to explore more whether the tracks were listened to pre/during/post visit. If during, why didn't people use the QR codes?

Thinking about platforms and hosting we will be considering moving the audio/QR system to our main website or to collections online for in-gallery content.

We will be experimenting with different types of audio content on the Listening Room for online audio and our Collections Online platform.

We will be undertaking observations of how audio content is interacted with on kiosks/setting up analytics on kiosks which (not a simple task for offline kiosks!)

## Three tips or insights about doing your experiment that might be useful for other cultural sector people in similar contexts to you:

- Appreciate the hidden digital labour: we are a small-medium digital team but there's a huge amount of digital work that we should/want/have to do.
- Minor changes to analytics configuration can yield great insights, and proving narrative around the insights is equally beneficial.
- Solutions we came up with five years ago are today's problem. That's a tough pill to swallow when we have so many new systems in the pipeline.



ORGANISATION:

# Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM), University of Oxford

**Helen Adams** | Head of Audience and Engagement Support, GLAM Divisional Office

**Emily Fildes** | Digital Engagement and Website Manager, Bodleian Libraries

## What was the research question behind your experiment – what did you want to test or find out?

At the Bodleian Libraries we wanted to trial a framework for understanding the digital value of existing content – our blogs – to assess if they are still the right channel to meet the goals of our audience and our organisation.

Within the GLAM Divisional Office (centrally operating team working with 6 GLAM sites), we wanted to see if a whole team (40+ staff) were interested in auditing its digital skills, what it values about that knowledge, and how the results can be used as a basis for improvement.

## Why was this important to your organisation?

**EXPERIMENT 1:** We have over 40 blogs from different aspects across the libraries – from exploring our unique collections to talking about the academic resources available to researchers in our reading rooms. These blogs have been accumulated over a long period of time. They started as an experiment, in days gone past when blogs were the “trendy” thing, for empowering staff across the organisation to communicate directly with their own audiences. But there was not a guiding star for what they were trying to achieve and they have - to a degree - lost their way.

Some are well loved, some are no longer active and there is very little oversight of them - whether for all the staff time that goes into creating them they are having the desired impact with audiences; whether it is worth ensuring a comprehensive training programme to ensure staff are up to speed with web content changes; and whether the overhead in technically managing a separate platform to deliver them is worthwhile.

A large portion of the content is unique and niche so we can't just use raw numbers as a measure of success to keep or remove content. By experimenting with a framework we wanted to be able to engage with staff editors to objectively re-evaluate their effort and work out whether it was still the right platform for them.

**EXPERIMENT 2:** Digital Transformation is a key piece of work for the University and the central IT team are keen to look at digital skills in terms of mapping and development in order to retain a culture of excellence and relevance at Oxford, refine job roles and retain and attract talent (students & staff), and streamline process and working practices. GLAM has lots of people with diverse skills but often they work in silos or their skills are not put to good use. It's useful to have a way of identifying skills strengths and gaps.

## What did you do? Please give an overview of your process.

**EXPERIMENT 1:** For the blogs project, we selected to trial a framework with four blogs which focus on our special collections: Archives and Manuscripts; Maps; Printed Ephemera; Conservation and printing processes. We took a three-pronged approach:

- Metric evaluation: looking at the analytics to understand which blog posts were being visited; where traffic was coming from; and how long users were staying
- Audience research: a qualitative survey to understand why visitors were coming; aligning them with internal segmentation; and finding out what they valued about the blogs
- Content editor interviews: to understand the background of why staff were blogging; who were they writing for; and what they were they hoping the impact would be

At the end the aim was to pull these three sources of information together to gauge whether the internal and external views of each blog were in alignment, or whether there were differences between these internal and external expectations which would enable an open conversation with stakeholders about a change in the content written or indeed whether a different channel was more appropriate instead.

**EXPERIMENT 2:** For digital skills there was a clear process:

- Getting my manager on board

- Identifying the tool we would use (Jisc Digital Capabilities Framework, used in HEIs)
- A communications plan for prospective participants and managers
- Getting in external expertise and advocacy (this helped convey to colleagues that this isn't just my 'pet project')
- Inviting Divisional Office staff to complete the digital skills self-assessment with clear instructions and timeframe for completion. This would be sent to me and that person's manager for a degree of confidentiality
- I collated results by manually aggregating scores
- I asked each manager to use the scores to create one L&D goal relating to Digital Skills in annual staff Professional Development Reviews

## What happened?

**EXPERIMENT 1:** There were some key headline findings from the blogs project:

- That there was a real variation in how staff - content editors - approached blogs. I discovered that these blogs had been encouraged over a decade ago for staff to engage with a 'new' platform, but the scaffolding and support for this had ebbed away. Only one of our interviewee areas were actually given time within their jobs to create blog content; the rest were trying to fit it around other priorities with little space given to it. Some rationale for blogging was about offering training opportunities - so that students or interns could provide examples of work they had done on site and had 'published' this - but this training was not formalised around wider digital skills such as writing for the web, managing media or accessibility.
- The blogs don't have a strong purpose but have generally been used as a record of work and have an outlet to show work around our collection areas and as a place to put information where it doesn't live elsewhere - for example a catalogue.
- Very little thought was given to an audience and little to no evaluation was done on whether it had met any aims. When probed - the majority of assumptions on audience were that they were similar to the authors, so coming from a more academic perspective and with knowledge of the physical libraries.
- Overall staff valued having a forum where they could have their own voice. All interviewees were reticent about the idea of stopping having a blog. But there was some admission about needing support - about guidance on web content or ways to reach audiences - and that content creation and scheduling takes time that few had.

- The quantitative data showed a few key headlines: that (as expected) some older content floats to the top in raw numbers terms; that users are not necessarily based in the UK; and that - from analysis - content about collection stories and behind the scenes had more traction than content about what was happening in the reading rooms (news, events) etc.
- The quantitative data opened up some interesting avenues. For example, it showed that the majority of respondents were highly educated but were looking at this content to support personal interest rather than their own research; that whilst the majority were coming for intellectual reasons - those who came for an emotional or inspirational connection with the content believed it fell short; that respondents valued images and integrity. Interestingly - whilst some valued that this content came from the Bodleian Libraries - for others they were unaware of us being the content provider which really threw questions onto the brand integrity of this content. Is it of value for us if people don't know who has written it?

## **EXPERIMENT 2:** Digital Skills project

- Using a tool like Jisc was a great way to help foster confidence in the project - here was something that was endorsed by the university, that asked questions that levelled the playing field (asking about confidence and types of tasks, not granular questions about how good you are at a piece of software). The downside is that it's not made for museums/cultural organisations, so the six competency areas (digital creation, digital learning, digital identity, digital information, digital communication and digital productivity) are quite generic.
- The data was presented as a radar chart, itself generated by a self-assessed numeric score. The chart was pretty and immediately visual, but annoyingly, you couldn't access the raw data to be able to easily aggregate results at team level. I had to do this manually to appoint a score to each person. Also, the radar chart only showed three ratings - 'developing', 'capable' or 'proficient' and there was quite score range for each one (e.g. no nuance if you were bottom or top of rating).
- The results of 25 submitted assessments showed that collectively there was strength in media, information and data literacy, communication and collaboration. Overall weaker in participation, problem solving, innovation, and wellbeing.

## **What was difficult?**

**EXPERIMENT 1:** For the blog project, some of the challenges were around:

- Getting survey responses on some blogs. This was an interesting test for the framework and going forward we'd need to think about survey triggers, incentives, the timing of a survey within the year, and how long we should leave a survey running, to make sure we get meaningful results.
- That some staff content editors really aren't interested in an audience - the value is in the process and the publishing, rather than having an impact on an external audience.
- The institutional memory - almost all the colleagues I interviewed were in post when the blog started (so much longer than I have been in post). They had strong recollections of what a past version of the team had advised on blogs and were surprised - and sometimes shocked - that this had changed a decade on. I think this speaks to the fact that whilst you can devolve content creation, you still need touch points with those teams so that they come with you as audience understanding, and potentially institutional changes, happen.

**EXPERIMENT 2:** For the Digital skills project:

- Goal was 80% completion rate. Achieved 55%. People don't really like surveys
- JISC tool built for HEIs not GLAMs - some people felt the questions and areas weren't relevant to their work
- Self-assessment is highly subjective - one person's good is another's middling
- Tool doesn't assess efficiency
- So slow to get project moving – meetings are our main mechanism for getting buy-in and they don't happen that often
- Willingness to share personalised reports

## Was anything easier than you'd expected?

**EXPERIMENT 1:** For the blog project, the easier bits were:

- The technical implementation of quantitative testing. We had Google Tag Manager on our blogs and it was quite straightforward to set up a simple pop up survey to trigger via this.
- That staff were, in the main, more willing to be interviewed by me and to make the time to do this than I expected.

**EXPERIMENT 2:** For the Digital skills project:

- People didn't need much persuading that it was a 'good idea' (thought I'd need to argue this), just lots of nudging to actually do it.

## What did you each learn?

**HELEN:** That we don't, as a department, spend enough time in our 121s, team meetings and annual reviews talking about skills and development. We focus on operations, deliverables. This is a shame. I learnt that some people have amazing skills but aren't deploying them in their current job roles. Also, that we do most of our digital learning reactively: have a problem → watch a YouTube tutorial on how to use some software/tool. I saw, clearly, a gender difference. Males were apt to score themselves higher than women. e.g. a male working in collections documentation scored himself better at digital communications than our Head of Communications!

**EMILY:** My two main learnings were:

- The "archiving" mentality: this was new to me but within the libraries it goes against the grain to remove record-keeping - and in a vast majority of cases this is what the blogs have become to stakeholders. The business of the institution is to keep records (within its collecting policy remit) including of our own work; so navigating this and getting to grips with the mentality that once something is committed to an online publication platform it means it will be kept forever was a new learning for me.
- That stakeholders want and value a voice - both to be able to talk to you about what they are doing; and to be able to communicate outwards about their work without feeling that this is mediated by another team. I think this creates an interesting dynamic between autonomy but also that my experience from this project is that there needs to be a framework or points of reflection to continue to understand if the channel and route for this voice is still having the impact desired.

## What did your organisation learn?

**EMILY:** Overall, the blog project has enabled us to open up a conversation with staff about this platform and to slowly initiate thoughts about what it is being used for and to ask questions about its value for us as an organisation. We have still to roll this out at scale and make major changes off the findings, but I was surprised how many stakeholders were open to finding out more about their audiences and were curious about what this might reveal to them.



It has also enabled us to focus on the audiences for a particular platform which has been pretty unloved for the last few years, and so it has been really valuable to have this insight and to be able to share with colleagues more widely in Oxford. I think the major surprise was that working within the Let's Get Real project - with the accountability of a partner and check in sessions - meant that I was able to progress this project much more than I was expecting which was a positive.

**HELEN:** I agree with Emily about using each other to 'get stuff done' even though our projects didn't really cross-over. We were also able to act as critical friends to each other. My experiment is not complete, I have yet to find out if digital goals were set in PDRs (I find out in November) but I think overall the response is positive. It has opened up an opportunity to talk to the Learning and Development team about how people can or should make choices about the admittedly rich array of training, courses, talks, etc. available to us as university staff. Sometimes the menu of things is overwhelming and it's unclear if people should be learning for their job (now) or learning for their career (longer term). It has also connected GLAM to the University's Digital Transformation team in a positive way as an example of best practice in the University.

## What's next?

For the blogs project, our next step is to share our results with stakeholders and see what comes of those conversations. We're also planning to gradually roll out the framework to some more of our blog content to keep the project working.

Digital Skills - review digital goals set with managers and as a management group discuss identified skills gaps or opportunities for shared training. Work with Data team to unpick the radar charts properly for more nuanced results.

## Tips or insights about doing your experiment that might be useful for other cultural sector people in similar contexts to you

For the blogs project: I think my key tip is don't get staff involved in a 'trendy' new platform without providing moments of reflection and some scaffolding around the project about why you are doing it and whether it has the impact you need. Staff value a forum to share their own content, but without that wider framework you'll be a decade in, with it embedded in job roles and work

practice, generating a lot of work but not really sure what it is doing and scratching your head trying to unpick it!

#### Digital Skills:

- Definitely use a 'third party' tool if one is available and point to others that have used it - this embeds trust that this is a rigorous and endorsed assessment method.
- Find a champion / ally (ideally someone higher up than you) to endorse the project and ensure it feels strategic.
- Also ensure you map your stakeholders so you know who needs to be kept informed / involved - and how regularly - in order to keep your project visible but not over-bearing. People hate being left in the dark more than they dislike being asked to do something.

ORGANISATION:

# Wessex Museums and Dorset Museum & Art Gallery

**Claire Brown** | Marketing & Digital Lead

**Ella Gibson** | Marketing Assistant

## What was the research question behind your experiment – what did you want to test or find out?

We aimed to understand how cross-promotion between museum partners on social media could impact partnership awareness, engagement, and audience reach.

## Why was this important to your organisation?

Expanding our digital audience is an ongoing goal for our museums. Strengthening collaboration and building a cross-promotion strategy across all partner museums were also top priorities. With Swindon Museums joining the partnership in 2023 and several staff changes across marketing teams, this was the first opportunity for all seven museums to collaborate on a cross-promotion initiative. It was important for Wessex Museums to provide a sustainable framework for the museums to use throughout the experiment.

## What did you do? Please give an overview of your process.

We launched the #WessexWednesday Instagram campaign, where each week, a different museum would co-post content with the Wessex Museums account. Other partner museums would then share this content to their Stories to maximise reach and engagement to a wider audience.

The campaign content focused on themes from our interpretation strategy, which helped us frame our collection items. Themes included:

- Wessex Land and Water – exploring the region's landscapes and waterways
- Ancient Wessex – highlighting artefacts and stories from the region's ancient past

Throughout the campaign, we collected data on reach, engagement, and audience interaction to measure the impact and success of these posts.

## What happened?

The campaign ran successfully with content going out each Wednesday. We conducted a qualitative benchmarking survey, gathering feedback from teams before, during, and after the campaign. This revealed that staff felt there was strong potential for future cross-promotion opportunities, and implementing the campaign improved working relationships.

On the quantitative side, we measured follower growth, reach, and engagement. The campaign notably increased reach for smaller museums, showing that cross-promotion had a greater impact for them compared to larger museums.

The campaign benefited us from a collective approach, with buy-in from all museums, which allowed for consistent posting, sharing, and reporting. Introducing this experimental approach became a starting point for cross-promotion initiatives and helped align our internal working structure across different organisations with varied management styles.

Lastly, we recognised that digital value isn't solely measured by data and conversions. The campaign provided a foundation for exploring new strategies for digital collaboration across our partner museums. It being sustainable and not providing clear expectations played a part in that.

## What was difficult?

Managing stakeholders was challenging, as the campaign relied on active participation from everyone involved, seven museums' marketing staff and then some approvals from their line managers.

Communicating the digital value was more complicated than expected due to the uneven distribution of benefits, with smaller museums seeing a more significant impact.

Additionally, accessing certain data and analytics through Meta posed limitations, and it was difficult to attribute results solely to the campaign.

## Was anything easier than you'd expected?

Gaining initial buy-in was smoother than anticipated. Discussions around themes and capacity were straightforward, as everyone understood the campaign's goals. Additionally, being part of the LGR course provided a clear rationale for the trial beyond simply "thinking it was a good idea", which helped people come onboard.

## What did you each learn?

**CLARE:** I learned how to better understand the needs and perspectives of different stakeholders, which helped us align our goals more effectively. I also recognised the importance of data driven decision making, not just in analysing social media statistics but also in considering other forms of value, in this case the benefits the experiment had for staff. Overall, the experiment demonstrated the necessity of adaptability; the digital landscape changes rapidly; and being too attached to a single idea can lead to losing audiences or missing out on opportunities that would be more beneficial for the organisation.

**ELLA:** I learned how to collect, process and analyse data and became more familiar with extracting data from Meta Business Suite and being able to use this in a meaningful way.

The experiment also enabled me to engage with people from the Wessex Museums partnership that I hadn't worked with before (as I was new to the organisation), and I learned more about them as individuals, their ways of working and their organisations. On a wider scale, through interacting with other organisations on the course, I learned about the similar problems faced by others working in digital, best practices and other approaches to combating or managing these challenges.

## What did your organisation learn?

We learned that smaller museums gained more value from this cross-promotional approach than we initially anticipated. This insight highlighted how we can implement ongoing cross-promotion strategies that distribute value more evenly among all partners.

While our original aim was to achieve strong results from the social media campaign, we found that it didn't perform as well as we had hoped. As the experiment progressed, we shifted our focus away from just the campaign and recognised the value emerging from our internal collaboration and plans for future cross-promotion. This adjustment has created a strong foundation for future initiatives and demonstrated the potential for continued cross-promotion efforts.

## What's next?

We will continue to develop our cross-promotion strategy by holding regular meetings within the Wessex Marketing Working Group. The

#WessexWednesday campaign will feature selected themes extending into 2025. Additionally, we plan to implement other initiatives that will offer larger museums a more evenly distributed value.

We have adapted the framework to be suitable for other channels, e.g. newsletter cross-promotion starting in October and will also explore the possibility of creating a shared TikTok account for promoting touring exhibitions.

### **Three tips or insights about doing your experiment that might be useful for other cultural sector people in similar contexts to you**

- Numbers aren't everything - value can come from other places and this may be unexpected
- Experiment and be prepared to fail
- Try something small then scale up



ORGANISATION:

# Edinburgh International Festival

**Jean Burke** | Digital Experience Manager

**Kirsty Dickson** | Audience Insights Manager

## What was the research question behind your experiment – what did you want to test or find out?

Does *The Warm Up* podcast series:

- Give audiences what they need to feel welcome and know what to expect?
- Give them the right information to connect deeply with the performance?
- Provide a special and memorable International Festival experience?

## Why was this important to your organisation?

One of the International Festival's strategic aims is to provide a distinctive audience experience with broad appeal that results in a deeper culture of listening and understanding. We have specific objectives to attract and warmly welcome new, diverse audiences, and encourage them to return, as well as to maintain the high level of satisfaction of valued loyal audiences.

One of the ways we hope to achieve this is by providing a range of supporting materials that help people know what to expect (practical information, atmosphere), provide them with the Festival context (why was it programmed? how does it fit with the theme?) and let them hear directly from the artists (what was the inspiration behind the work etc). The intention is that these will provide a warm welcome and help audiences connect more deeply with our performances.

The audio introductions require a significant amount of resources, both in terms of cost and staff time. They were first introduced in 2023 but the only measure of success we had was the number of listens. To justify continued investment we need to better understand who is using them, how they feel about the content, and where they sit within the wider ecosystem of contextualisation materials.

## What did you do? Please give an overview of your process.

We set out to measure the audience response to the audio introductions via post event email survey, followed up with focus groups.

### The process:

- Commission 37 audio introductions for 2024 events
- Set up SMS process with crowdEngage and explore analytic capabilities
- Explore analytic capabilities within Spektrix / DotDigital
- Upload audio guides to SoundCloud, embedded on website and in members and bookers encouraged to engage
- Audio guides sent to bookers throughout August via email and text message
- Set post-festival survey, include questions on *The Warm Up*
- Hold focus groups to collate qualitative data

### *The Warm Up* Podcast:

A long-term objective for the Festival is to bring artists and audiences closer together. Our audio introductions, originally introduced in 2023, are a key delivery for that objective. Now named *The Warm Up*, the audio guides were expanded for the 2024 Festival.

*The Warm Up* was created to encourage audiences to dive deeper into various performances and get more from their International Festival experience. These mini podcast episodes were hosted by International Festival Director Nicola Benedetti and BBC presenter Kate Molleson, as they spoke to artists, contributors, and programmers, giving extra insight before arriving at the venue.

37 audio introductions, titled *The Warm Up*, were created to guide the audience in learning more about a performance, theme, or genre. That represents a 15% increase from 2023's 32 audio introductions. *The Warm Up* received 32,632 plays, an increase of 33% plays from 2023. The audio files were embedded in the event pages, included in pre-show emails and included in SMS along with the performance tickets.

The start of the month proved the most popular for listening to *The Warm Up* – with 1,954 plays on 4th August. Unsurprisingly, guides for multi-date events proved more popular as there was a larger audience (over multiple days) and more opportunity to listen.

## Research Methodology:

### Audience Survey

- Sent to all 2024 Festival bookers post-attendance
- 4,487 responses
- Top line quantitative questions with opportunity for qualitative feedback

### Contextualisation Survey

- Sent to the EIF Audience Panel and eNewsletter subscribers
- 626 responses
- More in-depth quantitative questions

### Focus Groups

- Focus Group 1: 6 x EIF core classical music bookers, regular attenders, Audience Spectrum segment Metroculturals or Commuterland Culturebuffs
- Focus Group 2: 8 x EIF mixed genre bookers, infrequent attenders, Audience Spectrum segment Experience Seekers
- Discussion around the value and usage of a range of contextualisation materials (souvenir programmes, freesheet, surtitle screens, audio introductions, pre-show emails and website)
- Activity to design their ideal package of materials, spanning pre-show comms, in-venue information and post-event follow up

## What happened?

### Audience Survey:

- Usage: 80% of respondents used one of the listed contextual materials. The highest was the freesheet (72%) followed by the audio introductions (54%) and souvenir programmes (27%).
- Content: When asked if the audio introductions provided context and depth to International Festival events connecting people with the human stories behind the works of art, 23% strongly agreed and 68% agreed overall. This was slightly lower than the freesheets (27% strongly agreed with 69% agreeing overall) and significantly higher than the souvenir programme (11% strongly agreed and 40% agreed overall).

- Qualitative: 31 people made a positive comment about the audio introductions, and these were generally welcomed as improvements to the experience. 12 people made improvement comments on the audio introductions with several people saying the information was not the right content and others asking for these to be available earlier.

## Contextualisation Survey

- Users: There was a positive response with users finding *The Warm Up* informative (67%), welcoming (60%) and relevant (55%). 75% agreed that it enhanced their experience of the event(s) they attended. The majority felt the timing (85%) and length (84%) was about right. 14% felt the link was sent too late and 9% felt the length was too short.
- Non-users: For people who had not used the audio introductions, the highest reason was a lack of awareness (36%); in addition, 10% weren't sure what it was. The second highest reason was not being interested (24%) with this being higher for people who expressed a lack of interest in editorial content (37%). 13% gave another reason with the main comment being lack of time.

## Focus Groups

- Content: most participants felt the tone was friendly and the content accessible. Anecdotes from performers were particularly well received. A common request was to reduce the repetition of generic introduction sections across the series.
- Delivery: there were mixed feelings about whether people would like to receive them by text or by email. One participant had a strong preference for them to be hosted on Spotify. Links are sent to the booker, but participants expressed that they would like to be able to share them with friends/family more easily.
- Usage: people were not always using them as intended, as a pre-show warm up. Some participants preferred to use them after the event as a deep dive, while others thought they could be a useful format to help them decide what to book.

## What was difficult?

The analytic capabilities of some of the tools we use are limited - SoundCloud (audio hosting service) and crowdEngage (text communication service).

Even our email delivery analytics were not straightforward - we had to build other approaches in, like the use of Bitly links which adds another dimension to the journey.

Workload pressures meant that we were unable to incorporate action research into the design and delivery process (e.g. AB testing). Our findings are reflective rather than iterative but will be used to help inform activity for the 2025 Festival.

Timing on delivery of the final audio guides limited their use across other platforms - they were also very last minute for embedding, writing copy etc

## Was anything easier than you'd expected?

Embedding the audio guides on the website and making use of anchor text to link directly to the guides made for a much cleaner audience journey

## What did you each learn?

**JEAN:** I widened my understanding of value, outside a monetary-driven ROI. Although still very important in the sector, having a widened definition broadens the way I look at and approach projects. Working with new frameworks was interesting and always useful to test, adapt, and evaluate projects. Working with our own research and results, I was pleasantly surprised at how much the Festival audience embrace digital communications, that was a real learning for me from the survey and focus groups.

**KIRSTY:** One of my key takeaways from this experiment is the way in which we select our focus groups. Historically we have used genre preference or customer loyalty. For this project we used the Audience Spectrum segmentation model, which provided a greater level of distinction between the groups and helped facilitate more meaningful conversations and unearth deeper insights.

## What did your organisation learn?

There is real audience value in *The Warm Up* series. Audiences have embraced and engaged with audio content and it has deepened their relationship with the Festival.

Surprises:

- Audiences don't always engage with content the way we expect or intend. *The Warm Up* was designed to be listened to before a performance, but

feedback revealed that many people tuned in afterward or binge-listened to multiple episodes at once. This insight has prompted us to rethink our messaging to encourage listeners to engage at any point in their Festival journey.

- We also need to address the repetitiveness of the intros, which became noticeable when episodes were listened to back-to-back. As *The Warm Up* wasn't originally created with this behaviour in mind, the 2025 guides will aim to reduce or streamline the intro segments, ensuring a more seamless listening experience.

## What's next?

Our survey results and feedback will be shared internally with all teams. We will hold a session with relevant teams to dive into the findings and discuss their impact.

As part of our wider Contextual Research we are already planning where *The Warm Up* fits for 2025 Festival. We are committed to developing *The Warm Up* and using the content across channels - something that didn't happen this year due to time constraints.

Internal meetings will point to a strategy for *The Warm Up* for 2025.

## Three tips or insights about doing your experiment that might be useful for other cultural sector people in similar contexts to you

- Very Festival specific - but working to a project timeline and a festival timeline are never going to sync so realising what you can deliver when at the start helps with planning.
- Stay open to changing the aim of your project - as you work through frameworks and discuss internally, the project is very likely to adapt and grow.
- Be vigilant about attending the sessions - block time out and stick to it. The sessions provided a lot of additional resources and reading materials but also real-life experience for the cohort.



ORGANISATION:

# Goethe-Institut London

**Gosia Cabaj** | Head of Digital Innovation

**Nico Sandfuchs** | Head of Internet Department

## What was the research question behind your experiment – what did you want to test or find out?

Our research question focused on creating a data-driven dashboard: “How can we design a dashboard that aggregates relevant data to enable our institute directors to understand and optimise their institute's digital communication effectively?” The aim was to develop an intuitive tool that serves the information needs of our leadership, providing a basis for strategic, data-informed decisions.

## Why was this important to your organisation?

Given the limited resources available for digital communication, it was crucial for our organisation to create a data-informed foundation for decision-making. By consolidating analytics from our website, social media, and sales platforms into a single, accessible dashboard, we aimed to provide our management with a comprehensive view of our digital footprint. This integration supports more strategic resource allocation and empowers institute directors to make impactful decisions.

## What did you do? Please give an overview of your process.

Our approach was iterative and user-centred. We began with in-depth interviews with our target group to identify key needs. Following this, we developed a prototype using a digital post-it concept, allowing for flexible adaptation. This prototype was tested by the target group, refined based on feedback with real data, and subsequently tested in a second round. This cycle enabled continuous improvement and responsiveness to user insights.

## What happened?

The interviews underscored the need for a closer correlation between web data, social media metrics, and sales figures. All three directors engaged with the prototype, discussing its utility with their teams and recognising data as a

valuable catalyst for strategic conversations. As a decentralised organisation, we were encouraged by the positive reception from our institutes, confirming that a unified dashboard met a critical need for centralised support and guidance.

## What was difficult?

The primary challenge was aggregating data spread across multiple departments, each using distinct platforms and metrics. Once data collection was achieved, significant time was invested in determining effective correlations between organic social media engagement and conversion rates. As a global organisation with 151 branches in 98 countries, the complexity was amplified by diverse digital behaviours and platform preferences, making it difficult to design a universally applicable prototype.

## Was anything easier than you'd expected?

Surprisingly, scheduling time for the experiment was more manageable than anticipated. The structured deadlines proved instrumental in helping us carve out time in our schedules, ensuring focus for each phase of the project.

## What did you each learn?

**GOSIA:** I learned that framing conversations around being “data-informed” rather than “data-driven” can engage stakeholders who may be less enthusiastic about data, fostering a more open dialogue.

**NICO:** I realised that effective data dashboards are less about presenting a complete dataset and more about focusing on critical insights. Prioritising key metrics helps decision-makers better understand and guide their digital communication strategies.

## What did your organisation learn?

While we anticipated valuable insights from learning about the experiences and approaches of other cultural institutions, the most significant benefit emerged from our hands-on experimentation. Our communications data dashboard prototype was received well by the colleagues involved, underscoring its practical relevance. This process further highlighted the importance of establishing a strong, data-centred foundation for digital communications at the institute level, an insight that will inform our future digital strategy.

## What's next?

The next step is to extend the prototype's review to a broader group of users, allowing for diverse feedback and refinement. Additionally, we aim to collaborate with our data experts to explore automation opportunities, ensuring that the dashboard can scale efficiently. Ultimately, our goal is to make this tool accessible to a larger number of institutes, creating a robust foundation for data-informed digital communication strategies across our network.

## Three tips or insights about doing your experiment that might be useful for other cultural sector people in similar contexts to you

- **Secure Executive Support:** Garnering backing from senior management is essential for resource allocation and buy-in, facilitating smoother implementation.
- **Set Realistic Goals:** Manage expectations by defining clear, achievable objectives that keep the project focused and feasible.
- **Collaborate with a like-minded partner in your experimentation.** Having a teammate who shares your vision will provide invaluable support and drive, especially during challenging phases of the experiment.

ORGANISATION:

# Museum of the Home

**Alice Painting** | Head of Development

**Emma Rumford** | Marketing Officer

## What was the research question behind your experiment – what did you want to test or find out?

To test the effectiveness of a story-driven approach for a general donation request on Instagram. In early 2024, we ran a successful crowdfunding campaign on Instagram and wanted to see if we could replicate that success with a general donation request. To test this, we used a story-driven approach to see how our audience would respond to a broader appeal for support

## Why was this important to your organisation?

This project aligned with the organisations need to grow in unrestricted income.

## What did you do? Please give an overview of your process.

**Planning:** We began by identifying our goals, determining resources needed, and reaching out to the relevant team members.

**Audience Insight:** We contacted past crowdfund donors to understand their motivations for supporting our previous campaign.

**Script Creation:** Based on donor insights, we crafted a script highlighting our learning programs with a clear call to donate.

**Filming:** We recorded our Creative Learning Producer at the Museum, showcasing some of the new learning activities.

**Content Sharing:** We plan to upload this video as an Instagram Reel and also share it on our Instagram Stories with a link to donate. A week later, we'll re-share the stories, this time including a link to join our mailing list.

**Evaluation:** After the campaign, we'll assess engagement and donation metrics to understand the impact of this approach.

## What happened?

We discovered that our crowdfund donors differed from our regular Museum audience—they contributed because they were strongly moved by the story-driven approach and clear ask.

While we haven't launched our new donation post yet, we plan to gather data on the following metrics to assess its effectiveness:

- Reel metrics: views, likes, saves, shares, comments, and average watch time.
- Engagement: number of accounts engaged.
- Stories metrics: likes, link clicks, profile visits, and views.

This data will help us evaluate the reach and impact of our story-driven donation request on Instagram.

## What was difficult?

Staff capacity was a significant challenge, as it was difficult to prioritise this project amidst competing demands. Over the summer, we completed a major capital project that required substantial time and resources, leaving the team with limited availability to focus on additional initiatives. As a result, many staff members had other pressing priorities, making it challenging to allocate the attention needed for this campaign.

## Was anything easier than you'd expected?

One aspect that was easier than expected was gathering feedback from our crowdfund supporters. Donors were eager to share their reasons for giving, offering valuable insights into what resonated with them about our campaign. This enthusiasm provided us with helpful perspectives and reinforced the impact of a story-driven approach.

## What did you each learn?

**ALICE:** I gained a better understanding of the challenges faced by our comms team, and an appreciation that just because a digital output on surface might seem simple it often actually takes a significant amount of work to deliver. I didn't really have a grasp of the breadth of what is considered digital and the ways in which it can be utilised to grow audiences or support our organisation strategically.

**EMMA:** The importance of dedicating time to evaluate our digital campaigns and overall online presence. In our fast-paced environment, we often move quickly from one project to the next, missing opportunities to analyse what worked, what didn't, and what impact we actually made. This project required us to slow down and gather insights from past crowdfund supporters, as well as to review the data from that campaign.

While I'd been aware of the need for reflection, this experience highlighted just how valuable it is - and the importance of making time to prioritise this moving forward.

## What did your organisation learn?

The power of partnerships: we recognised the importance of partnerships in expanding our reach and engaging new audiences through digital channels. Collaborations can amplify our message and bring fresh engagement to our campaigns.

Creating space for experimentation: we saw the need to establish a more flexible rhythm in our work that allows room for experimentation. By making intentional space in our schedule, we can more effectively test and refine new approaches, such as story-driven donation asks.

Training for donation requests: we found that not everyone on the team feels comfortable making a direct donation ask, even with a clear script and team support. This experience highlighted the need for additional training to help staff build confidence and skill in making these appeals.

## What's next?

Launch and test Instagram posts: we'll proceed with posting our initial Instagram Reel, followed by a version with the donation ask placed at the beginning. This will allow us to compare engagement and see which approach resonates more with our audience.

Frequent donation asks: we plan to incorporate donation asks more consistently into our content to better understand which types and frequencies of asks drive higher engagement.

Evaluate engagement vs newsletter sign-ups: we'll assess the relative value of direct donations versus newsletter sign-ups. By encouraging newsletter subscriptions, we aim to build long-term relationships, allowing followers to gain a broader understanding of our Museum's offerings, along with opportunities to support.



Expand video experimentation: we'll continue experimenting with social media as a tool to drive unrestricted income.

Share and apply learnings: we'll document our findings and share them across the organisation, ensuring our team can learn from and build on these insights in future campaigns

### **Three tips or insights about doing your experiment that might be useful for other cultural sector people in similar contexts to you**

- Give yourself time: be prepared for tasks to take longer than expected. Between planning, creating content, and gathering feedback, allow extra time for unexpected delays.
- Involve others early: the earlier you bring team members and collaborators on board, the smoother the process will be. Early buy-in fosters better collaboration and clearer communication down the line.
- Ask for audience feedback: before launching your campaign, engage your audience to understand their motivations and preferences. This insight will help shape your messaging and improve the effectiveness of your ask.

ORGANISATION:

# National Museums Scotland

**Hannah Barton** | Head of Digital

**Megan Jones** | Digital Content Manager

## What was the research question behind your experiment – what did you want to test or find out?

Can content shot as informal video (mobile phone footage) sit alongside our high production value video and get similar engagements, whilst improving resource in the team.

## Why was this important to your organisation?

NMS is a large and complex institution, and the Content Team work across every department, museum and programme. We need to adapt the way we produce content to make us more agile and able to react when social media-worthy things are happening around us, without the longer lead-in time to publishing that high production value video requires.

## What did you do? Please give an overview of your process.

We bought an iPhone for the Content Team, and booked in time to visit our National Museums Collections Centre where we know objects are often out and visible. We started off slowly, filming the process of conservation of a jet necklace, and asked the conservation team to inform us during each future stage of conservation, for capture. At the same time, during exhibition meetings particularly, we asked to be included in BTS (behind the scenes) style shooting during installs.

## What happened?

Our informal video shot content sat equally alongside our high production value content in terms of reach and engagement. The informal video took dramatically less time to shoot and edit to a publishable state.

Embedding the fact that this would be non-invasive, iPhone shot content was a big internal mindset shift for other departments too - particularly in the

concept of what BTS exhibition install capture means. Curators are beginning to ask if we can shoot 'Reels' on the iPhone with particular objects too - e.g. jewellery.

We worked closely with Comms colleagues to improve our ways of working with this new content shooting: they're now comfortable using our informal videos to pitch to press, and are happy with self-shooting and forwarding on to the Content Team when we aren't able to be there.

## What was difficult?

Our experiment wasn't especially difficult - but part of the challenge was understanding how to shoot in a new way with an iPhone, and how to get this new style of shooting across to colleagues. Similarly, as a new way of working within the team, it was important to work closely with the Content Production team on how high-quality video would work alongside this new informal shooting style.

## Was anything easier than you'd expected?

Our Content Producer Laura picked up the skills of shooting informally very quickly, and was able to shape copy and edits to fit this new informal style in tone too. Editing has become a very quick process (e.g. around 1 hour for the first draft of a short Reel).

## What did you each learn?

**HANNAH:** The LGR content experiment demonstrated the value of providing the team with space to trial a new approach to developing content. A learning that came out of this was that there is added value found in specifically articulating this content approach as an experiment - meaning that we allowed ourselves room for trial and error along with successes as we pursued it. This offered a framework for our team to engage in "R&D" with all the room for manoeuvre that affords, and for our evidenced learnings and findings to be shared within the team and with wider stakeholders to further clarify why and how this approach has benefited the organisation.

**MEGAN:** Being (very) new to the role when we began LGR, the experiment taught me that the team are very quick to adapt and pick up new styles and suggestions. This has fed into our wider creative thinking around content for the new year too, which is centred around trialling creative formats conceived by the Digital team - and both things I think fall under the umbrella of us being

more autonomous with the content we're creating. Informal video is a tool we now feel comfortable with, and which will help us to carry out those creative ambitions next year.

## What did your organisation learn?

There weren't any surprises internally with this - colleagues have been very quick to understand and pick up on this new style of shooting, and the more we do it, the more embedded it becomes.

## What's next?

We'll keep shooting in this way, and begin to refine our style a little more. During LGR embedding the shooting style was the experiment - but now we'll be exploring how we brand our content, and will begin on a content style guide in the new year. We also have a second Content Producer, Theresa, who has since joined us - so Laura and Theresa will be working on how they produce iPhone content as a pair.

## Three tips or insights about doing your experiment that might be useful for other cultural sector people in similar contexts to you

- It's OK to start small - in large/complex institutions, sometimes small changes can make big waves.
- Communicating these small changes internally is really key to creating understanding, and advocates, for your new methods.
- It's worth investing time into working out how you can be reactive in your content production.

ORGANISATION:

# National Trust

**Lauren Milsom-Harris** | Experiences and Partnerships Curator

**Alexandra Tarling** | Communications and Marketing Consultant

**Jeremy Grimoldby** | Project Manager

## What was the research question behind your experiment – what did you want to test or find out?

**Primary:** To test live streaming tours using the NT standard video calling platform, Webex, in an indoor and outdoor location as a way of providing audience engagement at a site unable to easily host physical visits

**Secondary:** Creating a process to allow National Trust properties to set up and manage digital innovation experiments themselves

## Why was this important to your organisation?

**Primary:** It gives us an opportunity to reach more people who don't have physical access to our properties, but who could be inspired about our work and the properties we care for.

**Secondary:** To provide greater signposting within a large organisation, reduce risk by ensuring property teams could speak to specialists for advice, reduce the amount of siloed knowledge and learnings by sharing findings across the Trust.

## What did you do? Please give an overview of your process.

For our primary goal we:

- Identified potential audiences and needs and researched methods tried in other NT places and other external organisations.
- We then set up some preliminary testing of the live streaming process we identified as potentially deliverable within currently available NT kit and platforms (Webex Conference):

**Test 1** small scale to see which phones, networks and mics worked best. We tested the following kit:

- Software : Webex Webinar facility
- Hardware peripherals: RØDE Wireless Go II external mics
- Samsung A32 NT phone to record video DJI Osmo Mobile 6 Phone Gimbal

**Test 2** on a larger scale with an audience to test different viewpoints of presenter.

We used the hardware to capture live audio and video content to create a live streaming tour via the Webex platform Webinar facility.

**Test 3** filming a live tour with a view to use as a pre-record with a live Q and A. The live video tour was streamed using NT Staff standard Wi-Fi via Webex Webinar online to a pre-booked and signed-up audience of industry colleagues, invited via standard email.

In **Test 3** we used an invited audience to sign up, using GDPR approved process. Once in the live tour, we used the Chat function to give access to an online evaluation form after each section looking at:

- The ease of setup of the events for the production team
- The ease of registering and joining the live stream for the attendees
- The quality of the video
- The quality of the audio
- The viewer's preference of either presenter-held or cameraman-held presentation style
- General feedback on the live streaming experience



*Spring garden display at Munstead Wood, was a challenge to live stream.*

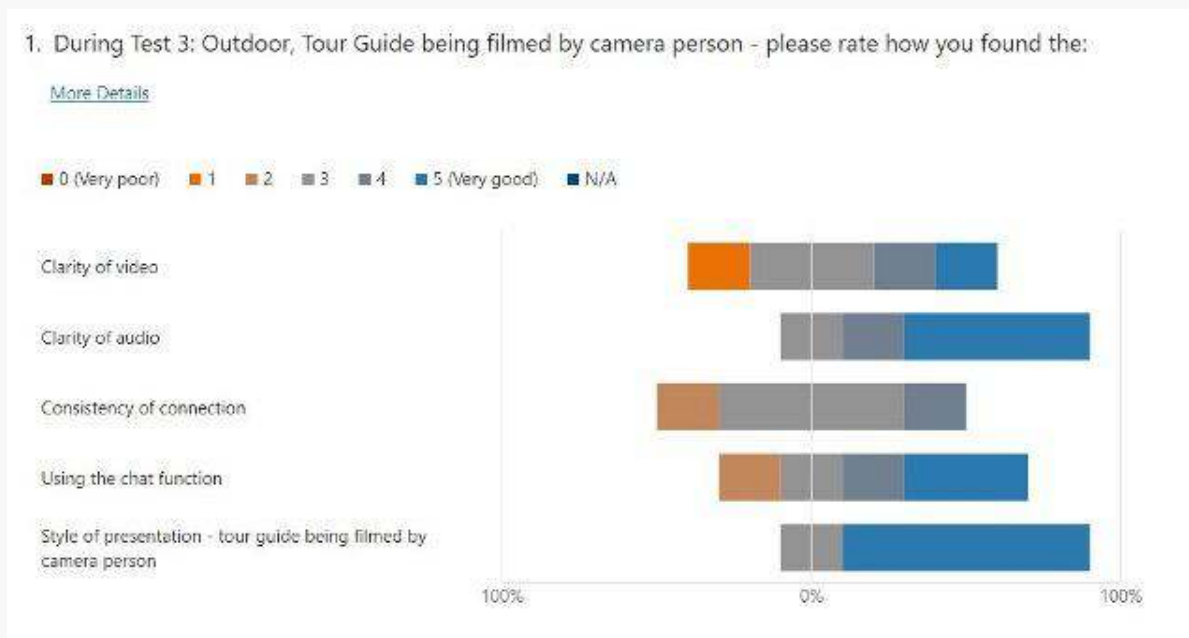


For our Secondary Goal we:

Created a process and framework for property teams to carry out their own digital innovation tests in a way that minimises risk and ensures learnings can be shared across the organisation. Within this process we needed to:

- Created a 'stripped back' design thinking framework that allows properties to propose innovation tests based on audience insight and identified opportunity statements.
- Ensure properties know to consult their local IT BRM (Business Relationship Manager), Innovation Team and Experiences and Partnerships Curator.
- Ensure property tests comply with IT Security, Commercial and Data Protection requirements.
- Ensure property teams have a robust evaluate plan in order to determine success/failure of test.
- Produce a case study template for property teams to share their learnings in a consistent manner
- Use the livestreaming test as an opportunity to road test the process and to feed back on how it could be refined.
- Ensure IT buys into process in order to support local-level testing.

## What happened?





*Images: Popular option: Facing camera being filmed by camera person*



### Primary Goal:

- Invest in current, compatible tech. Using older tech within the organisation can present problems
- Getting people into the calls could be difficult
- Video on calls in general very pixelated when live, worse outdoors
- Quality of tour guide important - everyone mentioned they enjoyed the tour, because of the quality of delivery and content
- Audio still OK outdoor
- The live element isn't as important as we thought – sweet spot: pre-recorded tour visuals plus live narration and Q&A?
- Time needed was challenging, including travelling to be together for onsite testing and time to review and report
- People preferred the presenter being visible on the screen being filmed by someone else
- Need to think about where the presenter stands when presenting, usually with what they're talking about behind them like a weather presenter
- People wanted to see chat comments from other people
- Clean your camera lens every time...sigh...

### Secondary objective:

Slowly bedding-in process with IT. IT becoming more comfortable with tests being run by properties, supported by the Central Innovation Team.

## What was difficult?

### Primary Goal difficulties:

- Beware older tech in organisation
- Getting people into the calls could be difficult
- No NT process for running experiments like this
- Not having signed off official equipment to use – meant we had to use personal devices to upgrade mic firmware
- Navigating internal departments – IT teams didn't understand what we were asking about
- Getting time to work on the project around day job commitments
- Getting users signed into the calls
- Lag in live calls
- Filming a live tour with members of public present made capturing GDPR compliant content hard

### Secondary Goal challenges:

- Navigating internal departments – IT teams didn't understand what we were asking about
- The limitations of the NT Staff standard Wi-Fi link meant there was a lag in live calls
- Filming a live tour with members of public present made capturing GDPR compliant content hard
- Improved signposting: the Trust is a large organisation – it can be difficult to know who can support or advise on digital solutions
- Reduce risk: property teams are generalists and therefore need support understanding whether solutions are GDPR compliant or IT secure
- User centric: it is easy to jump to solutionising – we want to ensure experiments are framed around clearly identified user needs.
- Reduce siloed knowledge: the size of the Trust means that information is not always shared leading to siloed knowledge and duplicated effort. We want to ensure results from tests are easily available across the Trust so they can be learnt from and built upon.

## Was anything easier than you'd expected?

- Audio worked well when live streaming tour both inside and outside
- Having a confident high-quality presenter and high quality content meant people were engaged in the topic of the tour
- Valuable feedback on video style showed both had their place and did not detract from the quality of the experience overall.

## What did you each learn?

**LAUREN:** There was genuine interest and enjoyment of the quality content presented, which showed the potential for a variety of digital offers being produced, for more targeted audiences. Making the processes, platforms and systems easy and efficient is the key - we have no shortage of talented and passionate presenters, and fascinating stories and learning to share.

**ALEX:** Content doesn't have to be super slick and polished for the audience to enjoy it. Also, sometimes we overcomplicate things as a bigger organisation. It was a pleasant surprise that audiences would probably enjoy a pre-record tour with live voiceover rather than the gimmick of an actual live tour!

**JEREMY:** It's challenging providing enough guidance and process without overwhelming property teams and ensuring that they don't feel put-off by the process. There are a lot of teams to align in order for this process to be a success.

## What did your organisation learn?

Need leadership investment and support to take the time for developing this model.

## What's next?

- Share innovation/testing process more broadly using our intranet once finalised and signed off.
- Running a test of the pre-recorded visuals plus live narration
- Writing up an NT Digital innovation case study
- Going back to Munstead Wood team with more user insight to look at their plans
- Looking at the ticketing process for selling a digital tour like this

## Top tips or insights about doing your experiment that might be useful for other cultural sector people in similar contexts to you

Short simple experiments to test an idea are really valuable to help keep your outcome audience focused.

ORGANISATION:

# Royal Academy of Arts

**Ed Bankes** | Website Content Manager

**Sarah Fuller** | Digital Product Lead

## What was the research question behind your experiment – what did you want to test or find out?

We wanted to explore how we can improve the ways we manage website requests from stakeholders, specifically around the navigation.

The aim was to add value to the stakeholder by providing data in a simple and standardised format; and to add value to the team by developing a commonly used process.

## Why was this important to your organisation?

Our website is a useful tool for almost all areas of business – from selling exhibition tickets to processing applications for the Royal Academy Schools. In a recent website refresh project, we reduced the amount of content in the primary and secondary site navigation. During that process, we realised we needed better tools to make a data-led case for this sort of user-facing change.

## What did you do? Please give an overview of your process.

We reviewed our current processes and upcoming projects to decide where we could add the most value.

We focused on site navigation because it's highly visible but not widely understood, often seen as a 'quick fix' for discoverability.

We reviewed our processes and the frequently asked questions we receive from stakeholders.

We considered the team and stakeholder value of each process.

We built a report using Lookerstudio that combines the navigation story, real-time GA4 data, supporting documentation, and within that identified common pain-points.



## What happened?

Although we didn't have an opportunity to test the framework on a real stakeholder query, finding the right format to present data in a shareable way was enormously useful.

The act of producing documentation threw up useful questions about our processes. For example, we discovered when formalising our style guide that parts of our UX were inconsistent.

## What was difficult?

It was sometimes hard to make time for our experiment.

We learnt that this sort of important process-work is difficult to fit into the rhythm of business as usual.

But when we do, it helps us a lot.

## Was anything easier than you'd expected?

Lookerstudio was easier to get to grips with than we thought it would be. We work on different teams within the organisation but found collaborating easy, useful and fun.

## What did you each learn?

**ED:** I deepened my understanding of Google's data tools. I also learnt a lot about the UX of internal dashboards and systems.

There were fascinating support sessions during Let's Get Real. A discussion of Matt Locke's framing of organisational 'rhythm' has given me the language to discuss team processes in a new way, which has been invaluable.

Sarah and I fostered a great working relationship during this project – a collaborative approach that's continued beyond Let's Get Real.

**SARAH:** Likewise, my understanding of Google reporting tools has significantly improved during this project. It gave me the space to learn a new and useful skill that will improve other projects in the future.

The values framework covered in an early session has been useful with conversations outside of this project to help illustrate the real worth of competing options within a project.

## What did your organisation learn?

We were well-supported during this process. Although we're yet to test the framework with stakeholders, honing in on our internal processes in this way has laid the groundwork for a broader approach to dashboards and documentation.

## What's next?

We're expecting to discuss updating the site navigation with our Learning team in the new year – a real-world test of our new framework.

We think this kind of framework will help us to manage our internal processes and be more transparent with colleagues around other areas of business. As a result, we're looking to identify other regular processes that can be standardised in a similar way to present data-led decisions in an easy to digest format.

Possible next areas to develop could include:

- Reporting on content performance
- Site speed and accessibility
- Site search

## Three tips or insights about doing your experiment that might be useful for other cultural sector people in similar contexts to you

- Data needs context. Presenting data in a more narrative format helped us to unlock our approach
- Making time to focus on internal processes is difficult but essential
- Different stakeholders not only have different requirements but also different levels of understanding and so require storytelling in different ways to meet their needs

ORGANISATION:

# Shakespeare's Globe

**Miranda K. Gleaves** | Digital Manager

**Matthew Hodson** | Head of Digital and Data

## What was the research question behind your experiment – what did you want to test or find out?

Our experiment aimed to test the most effective way to present general information about Shakespeare's plays (plot, characters, themed events at the Globe) to a generalist audience on our website, via a series of 'play pages'. These play-by-play pages will form part of a new 'Shakespeare's Plays' hub area on the website.

An additional goal of the experiment was to trial the 'culture of experimentation' way of working, and to find out how this working mindset could be beneficial for our team and the wider department/organisation.

## Why was this important to your organisation?

Prior to this experiment, we had no 'about the plays'-type area on our website. This represented a missed opportunity for us to reach audiences.

- We also recognised that from an SEO perspective, we're losing market share by not having any 'always-on' pages about Shakespeare's plays. When we have a production-related show page live, it performs well in terms of SEO and will generally find its way onto the first page of Google search results. Therefore, we want to capitalise on this with all Shakespeare's plays, all the time – so that if someone googles Timon of Athens and we're not currently showing it, Shakespeare's Globe info and resources will still be top of the listings.
- We also wanted to find out more about the potential value of these kinds of pages, whether that be internal value (conversions/sales etc.) or public value (people finding out about the plays and the Globe), as this feeds into wider conversations about how we measure success at the Globe.
- As is often the case in larger organisations, projects can often be delayed or hindered by a mindset of 'it needs to be perfect', with so many internal stakeholders working to ensure a high-quality product that the timeframe of the project can warp and extend beyond what may actually be needed.

This project offered us an opportunity to see if the experimental mindset might offer an alternative to this process, whereby we can iterate more rapidly within the safety of a rigorous testing process.

- During the experimentation process, we also realised the value and responsibility of providing high-quality, trustworthy, and socially-conscious information on the internet, especially as Shakespeare's Globe is a trusted source of information in an online world full of misapprehensions and toxicity. This aligns with our organisational goals and is important to our approaches to future web development.

## What did you do? Please give an overview of your process.

### Developing Test Pages

- In the long-term, we aim to have one webpage per play, each capturing all the Globe has to offer, themed on a play-by-play basis. This will give audiences a play-led way to discover our work, and the works of Shakespeare. However, creating almost 40 test pages to cover every play for this experiment was neither feasible nor useful.
- Therefore, the Web team brainstormed different ways of presenting these webpages (leaning into different organisational priorities), and then narrowed our ideas down to just six test pages.
- These six pages were divided into 3x A/B tests, as follows:
  - Test 1: Generating Income vs. Sharing Knowledge. Test 1 pitted a conversion-led page about Macbeth, with events and the shop at the top of the page, against an info-led page about Romeo & Juliet, which led with the plot and characters before going on to the shop etc underneath
  - Test 2: Short App-Style Copy vs Longform Web Page. Test 2 had a very short, stripped-back page about A Midsummer Night's Dream contrasted against a really long-form deep-dive into all things Twelfth Night.
  - Test 3: Traditional Web Page vs Advert-Style Web Page. Test 3 had a very traditional Globe-style webpage for Hamlet against a new idea we'd had for a more image-led advert-style page format for King Lear.
- We chose six different plays for the testing so that we could launch them on the website and see how they performed organically; having six versions of the same play page would not have been a pleasant user journey. With this in mind, we chose six of Shakespeare's most popular plays (to maximise traffic) and paired them logically through the A/B testing (putting comedies together etc).

- We hoped that the outcomes of these tests, plus holistic feedback across all six pages, would give us enough information to have some really concrete results.

## Testing Phase

- We built the six test pages on our website, and created a landing page for them called 'Shakespeare's Plays'
- We set up a Meta campaign to drive traffic to these pages, as we didn't have long to complete the data collection period of the experiment and needed to ensure we had sufficient traffic
- We created a survey, asking people about their experience on the play page, their awareness of different Globe products, their understanding of the play, and their intentions after visiting the page. We set the survey up in both Hotjar and SurveyMonkey surveys to maximise responses. We created separate links so we could distinguish between each of the play pages in the survey responses. The surveys were embedded in the pages in what we hoped would be an engaging way (Hotjar popped up on scroll, and SurveyMonkey was linked from a Call to Action at the foot of each page)
- We also recruited five members of the public to conduct 1-1 user testing over Zoom, going through each page in turn and expressing their thoughts. We worked with our web developers to ensure the recruitment and questioning was rigorous and dependable
- We used GA4 and Microsoft Clarity to gain additional metrics over a six-week survey period.

## What happened?

### Value of Play Pages

- In terms of the value of these 'play pages', we discovered that visitors to these pages were simply not converting to purchase pathways, and that the value of these pages lies in their informative nature, not in their capacity to drive revenue.
- Even on the pages where we frontloaded conversion-led content at the top of the pages (putting things like the shop and forthcoming events ahead of information like the plot of the play), no organic users of the site reported that they would plan to make a purchase as a result of visiting the play pages, though some people viewed the pages after making a purchase.
- This made us re-evaluate how we typically understand the 'value' of our webpages and wider work. We must proactively seek to understand the

value to our audiences, not the value that we're trying to get out of our audiences. We must recognise that we can't prescribe value.

- We asked our user testing group for some use cases that they could imagine using the pages for. Answers mostly involved sending a link to the page to a friend/family member who is less familiar with Shakespeare prior to visiting the Globe together to see a show, so that they would have an initial grasp of the plot and characters. Other people mentioned that they might visit the page after seeing a show to find out more information about the play or the production (e.g. via blog posts), or that they might recommend the pages to teachers. People also mentioned that "rather than googling, I might go [direct] to the Globe website and check out if they've got a page on that [play]". None of these use cases directly link to a purchase journey, though they indicate that visitors to these pages may be more likely to bring friends/family to the Globe if they have informative resources explaining the play that they can share in advance.
- Therefore, moving forward, we can argue internally that the value of these pages lies in teaching the public about Shakespeare, and show that not all areas of the website can or should be financially-driven.

## Structure of Play Pages

- In terms of how we structure the play pages, we found that overall, our most traditional 'Globe-style' webpage (Hamlet) did the best across all metrics – it was very reassuring to find that our existing web model is clearly working well. This page also performed best in terms of how well-informed users felt after visiting the page.
- However, findings from all six pages will be critical to inform our next iteration of these play pages.
- We found that when listing events in a carousel, if we led with three family events before going on to other events (e.g. specialist tours or free talks), users without children would assume that the whole carousel was just family events and would scroll past without finding the additional non-family events. Going forward, therefore, we'll ensure that our carousels offer a range of events in that initial display.
- Our audiences didn't enjoy chunky paragraphs of text, and were likely to scroll past or click away from the page when confronted with these. In terms of the plot of the play (where a lot of information needs to be presented on the webpage), the best option was to have simple 'tombstone' information on the page outlining key characters, when the play was written etc., along with 2-3 short paragraphs outlining the plot very briefly, with no major spoilers for the ending of the play. Audiences then wanted a button



linking to a separate page with a fuller synopsis (6-7 short paragraphs), which could include the ending.

- In terms of tone of voice, fun calls to action were the most successful – for example a ‘Treat Thyself’ button linking to the shop.
- When presenting more in-depth content such as links to blog posts, info about past productions, or on-demand show recordings on Globe Player, we found that a concise list of the content on offer was not remotely appealing to our audiences. The most engaging approach was via image-led tiles, with around 30-40 words outlining what to expect; who had written the blog, for example, or the mood and setting of the production.
- Our experiment showed that including the author of a blog post – especially if they are a Dr or a Prof – led to more engagement. Similarly, images of famous actors performed better than those who are not household names. The known actor or respected academic credential seems to offer audiences a kind of social proof, and encourages them to click into the content.
- We also discovered what kinds of photos are most engaging on our site. The only thing every user tester spoke about and agreed on – without being prompted – was how much they loved the photo we used on the Hamlet play page. On further investigation they revealed that they were drawn to the fact that it was an action shot with the Globe (and the standing audience in the yard) clearly visible. They spoke about how the image captured the unique experience of seeing a show at the Globe, and the action made it look really engaging. For our next iteration of the play page experiment, therefore, we will choose photos for the other five play pages with similar action-led Globe-specific framing; the other images we used in this first round of experimentation were largely close-ups of actors in key scenes, which were dramatic but on reflection could have been taken in any theatre. This experiment pushed us to consider how much our audiences love the Globe itself as a venue – we can often take it for granted as we see it every day. These learnings can be implemented across our whole website and wider marketing campaigns going forward, too.

## Our ways of working

- We found that a key outcome of this experiment was the experiment itself – conducting it provided proof that for many of our future ideas, experimentation is the most effective way of working through a project. Setting a clear question for this experiment [“what is the best way to present information about Shakespeare’s plays on the Globe website?”], and having a clear goal in mind really helped us to hone in on the objectives and outcomes of this project. This was a departure from our usual approaches,

which tend to be either highly planned, multi-stakeholder, long-term projects which almost inevitably (with so many people involved and such a long timeframe) lose their original purpose by the time the final product takes shape; or very quick fixes which solve a problem in the short term but aren't durable solutions for the future.

- Taking an enormous project (like the play pages) and saying "what's the small-scale experiment" showed how we can make data-informed decisions and manage projects more effectively going forward. The experiment was low-fi and inexpensive, but the testing and evaluation was robust and constructive.
- Going through the experimentation process challenged us to take a step back from the usual 'go go go' attitude at the Globe, and made us approach the project in smaller, more considered steps. This is a learning that we're now working out how to implement in our team and beyond - how not to 'go go go'.
- This experiment has given us a really useful set of models to work from, and has helped us to think about embedding elements of experimentation across all our work. It has given us a structured way to be data driven. We talk a lot about being data driven - but in this experiment we actually are, rather than looking at old data or relying on old instincts.

## What was difficult?

- Time constraints around other projects was a bit tricky – Miranda was also on holiday for a couple of weeks which cut down our analysis time.
- Narrowing down the scope of the experiment was hard. Building the experiment web pages itself was fine, but we underestimated the amount of data it would yield.
- Very few people filled out the Hotjar and SurveyMonkey survey. Luckily the responses echoed the user testing qual data and the GA4/Microsoft Clarity quant data, so we were able to build the results into our evaluation, but in isolation the results of the surveys along wouldn't have been immensely useful.
- There was also the holistic challenge of undertaking mindset change in the team – we needed to accept that we can't solve everything straight away. We have made excellent progress with this through this experiment, and will continue to work on it over the coming months.

## Was anything easier than you'd expected?

We were lucky in that an anticipated challenge was bringing other people on board – but everyone saw the value of it.

## What did you each learn?

**Miranda:** I found this a really valuable way better to understand the mindset and motivations of our website audience. At the outset of this project I was still relatively new to the Globe and to the wider world of Theatre, and through this project I was able to learn really constructively about what our website visitors are (& aren't) looking for. This project has therefore helped me to apply a more critical eye to our existing website and planned future digital projects, as I am better placed to evaluate the value of these proposals to some of our key audiences.

**Matthew:** A key new learning for me, as a department leader, was the importance of processes when trying to embed an experimental approach. For years, we've been attempting to develop a test and learn culture but often have just said those words and told our teams that 'it's okay to fail' without anything tangible to make them feel safe and confident in doing so. This process has given me a clear process and documentation to use to embed with the team so they've got a clear way to structure their experiments, track them and learn from them.

## What did your organisation learn?

- We haven't yet embedded our learnings across the whole organisation, but working within the Digital and Data team, we've started to build a culture of experimentation. We've learned about the value of phased testing, and the freedom to trial new ideas that an experiment structure provides. We anticipated that learning how to experiment successfully would be a key outcome of the LGR programme, and it will be wonderful to see the continued utility and success of the mindset in future Globe projects, in the Digital and Data team and beyond.
- One unexpected mindset shift was the changeover from consistently creating webpages with a mentality of "what is the value we can get out of customers?", towards asking "what is the value that customers want from us?". In other words, through this experiment, we've shown that not all our webpages need to exist to drive financial conversions (such as ticket sales or shop sales), and that it is also vital to consider other forms of value – such as capturing new audiences; sharing the work of the Globe; ensuring that people have a great first interaction with Shakespeare & Shakespeare's

Globe; and crucially providing reliable, accountable, socially-conscious information from a trusted source (us) on an Internet that is often otherwise filled with misinformation and harm.

- There have been lots of learnings like this that we can take from our Let's Get Real project and apply to other areas of our website and wider digital engagement. Of course, this change process will take time, but we've already begun to implement change and are planning next year's work with these learnings in mind.

## What's next?

We will present the results of our experiment to the wider Audiences department (and beyond) at Shakespeare's Globe. Key learnings and the teams within the department to which they are most applicable are as follows:

- **Digital & Data** – findings relating to customer journeys through the website, image choices, language and tone, plus the value of experimentation.
- **Design** – findings relating to engagement with different kinds of images, such as the higher levels of user interaction on the webpages with action-led images showing the Globe.
- **Content** – findings relating to images, language, and tone may also be applicable to our content producers when making video content.
- **Marketing** – findings about language, tone, and the way we present information on the website to ensure maximum engagement, such as the aversion to lengthy paragraphs and how successful the 'fun' call to actions were.
- **Comms & PR** – findings about language and imagery may be beneficial in terms of our presence on social media, for example.
- **Membership** – incidental findings from the experiment about what the user group expected our membership offer to be, vs. what they discovered it to be on closer investigation (it emerged that with the lower rungs of membership commitment, people were most likely to engage if there was a clear benefit to them such as discounts or rewards).

We will also develop a framework for experimentation within the Digital & Data team. This is in itself an experiment, and once we have iterated it successfully, we can then roll it out/recommend it to other teams across the Globe. Let's Get Real taught us that there can be a lot of value in a 'quick, not perfect' approach, and we will work to ensure that this is embedded wherever it is relevant.

## Three tips or insights about doing your experiment that might be useful for other cultural sector people in similar contexts to you

- User focus groups are (fairly) easy to set up and yield vast amounts of valuable insights.
- Don't be scared to put something on your website! You can do that, you can test it for a month, you can take it down. Small-scale experiments are great.
- Take that breath, take that step back. Don't just rush into things. What are you trying to achieve, and how can you test that? What will the testing achieve for you? Taking an hour to ask yourself those questions will align your thinking.

ORGANISATION:

# Wellcome Collection

**Michelle Doyle** | Senior Content and Social Media Producer

**Alice Evans** | Marketing Manager

## What was the research question behind your experiment – what did you want to test or find out?

Develop an accessible exhibition campaign for organic and paid social media that's optimised for all channels and maintains momentum for the exhibition's ten-month run.

## Why was this important to your organisation?

- Typically, paid social media is produced by one team and organic is produced by another. This experiment was about finding shared ways of working between two teams, to create content that's streamlined across paid and owned channels.
- We hoped this experiment would act as a blueprint for future exhibition campaigns, informing decisions and strategies for paid and organic social media.
- We wanted to prioritise accessibility throughout – both showcasing what we offer to visitors and prioritising accessible collaboration with a disabled artist.

## What did you do? Please give an overview of your process.

- Engaged an external production company and the artist to co-develop the content.
- Approached content production like a family tree: YouTube sat at the top of the tree with our paid and organic content branching off.
- Some of the paid ads were filmed on phones, alongside filming on cameras for YouTube, to feel authentic on different channels.
- We planned and scripted our YouTube videos so they could easily be cut into multiple standalone one-minute Reels (for organic) and 15-30 seconds ads (for paid social media) – in total, 14 pieces of content.
- Separate to YouTube, we produced a bespoke TikTok video focusing on access provisions at Wellcome Collection.



- Built accessibility into our whole plan – shoot days and scripts were planned to accommodate for the artist’s health; we worked with a disabled voiceover artist on our video about the social model of disability; and we tried to tell empowering (but not superhero) stories about disability.

## What happened?

The series got low engagement on organic (but when we did targeted promotion on YouTube they reached engaged audiences). It suggests that trying to reach ‘cold’ audiences with an unknown artist might not have been the right approach – but with paid we can connect with the right audiences.

We ended up with *\*too many assets\**, and towards the end they felt same-y. With so many different videos we didn’t end up testing optimised ads against re-appropriated organic reels given that the content we were already running was performing well.

Comparing the high-spec videos produced in this project against in-house videos, we saw that the ads were more efficient and had the cheaper cost per 6s views.

Reviewing the age of users clicking ads from each of our ad channels, TikTok played a significant role in growing awareness within younger audiences which is something we’ll want to experiment with further if growing this younger target audience.

One of our objectives was to build the artist’s profile – and through positive comments and engaging new audiences, we feel confident we’ve done that.

## What was difficult?

Planning and managing:

- Aside from factoring in the artist's health, we also had a lot of stakeholders, wrote all the scripts, planned shoot days, managed the 14 final videos. As a two-person team driving the project, this was very time-consuming.
- We struggled with the volume of content to produce, edit and publish.
- Maintaining momentum towards the end was hard. Given all our videos centred on one voice, we found it became repetitive – and could have benefitted from different voices responding to the work.
- Getting audiences to care about an unknown artist was harder than expected. If the artist was Picasso, would we have struggled as much to break through the social media noise?

## Was anything easier than you'd expected?

We got tremendous support and buy-in from the artist and colleagues, and accessibility was planned in from the start meaning we didn't have to shoe-horn it in at any stage. Having planned in accessibility – including elements like doing a voiceover to reduce the artist's time, then involving a disabled voiceover artist to do the voice – made the project manageable for our stakeholder (the artist), but also meant we were involving new, lived experience of disability and working with someone who can relate. (Note: we never publicly advertised this is what we did; but internally it was important to us).

## What did you each learn?

**MICHELLE:** Our idea, in principle, was good – but sustaining one artist's voice over ten months is difficult and feels repetitive. If I was doing this again, I'd make one YouTube video (not three) that we can take apart for social like a Russian Doll, but I'd also consider how we can bring in more voices and perspectives into the video – e.g. an activist, a disabled person, a parent or carer who has lived experience of caring for an ill child, as well as involving our curator / internal staff.

**ALICE:** The project was a useful testing ground and I learnt a lot from collaborating with an external team and artist. The reality was that the planning, editing, stakeholder management took a lot more time than anticipated and wouldn't be a sustainable model for every exhibition campaign. If I started this exact project again, I would focus on the first YouTube video producing a set of ads from this film, then step away from the production of the second and third YouTube films. We didn't see any stand-out benefits to the ad campaign with having so many different assets, the TikTok results were by far the most interesting for future campaigns focused on younger people.

I'd be curious to test how much better 'optimised' ads perform against re-appropriated organic Reels, this was something we didn't end up testing given the volume of assets we ended up with.

## What did your organisation learn?

We were successful in taking people with us on the journey and getting buy-in early on to facilitate progress throughout the lifetime of the project. Stakeholders could see the value of our work and outputs and we were successful in influencing content on the website which is quite a culture shift for the organisation and shows potential for closer collaboration with digital

editorial/UX teams in order to better support the visitor journey and experience.

Our organisation does appreciate the value of digital but it would be helpful to have a clearer idea of the organisation's digital practice, technologies and culture so that departments can be more joined up, to spot opportunities and skills across the organisation.

## What's next?

- Showcase our findings to colleagues; ask for feedback from stakeholders and iterate our findings – encouraging them to see it differently too.
- Aim to do less but do it better.
- Involve different voices, rather than prioritising one point of view.
- We will also be presenting our findings and research in a wrap-up report, and all our future planning will take the learnings from this project.

## Three tips or insights about doing your experiment that might be useful for other cultural sector people in similar contexts to you

- Aim for diversity of voices, over quantity of material.
- Advocate what's best for your channels, not what stakeholders want.
- Build accessibility from the initial discussions – don't start trying to plan them in later on.

ORGANISATION:

# Welsh National Opera

**Martina Fraser** | Head of Marketing and Digital

**Naomi Griffiths** | Digital Marketing Communications Officer

## What was the research question behind your experiment – what did you want to test or find out?

Could email automation help WNO to target audiences more impactfully, while also allowing us to introduce efficiencies to our workflow.

## Why was this important to your organisation?

WNO marketing were looking at ways to make our campaigns more effective as well as where possible improve time efficiency for the team during a period of change, and reduced workforce. Email automation was something we had been hoping to investigate in order to make our campaigns more data-driven which we hoped would mean we were focusing our resource on more impactful activity.

## What did you do? Please give an overview of your process.

We planned an email automation that separated audiences into three categories - clicked opera A, clicked opera B, did not click. From here, we tailored their future email content to their behaviour, meaning that they would receive emails based on what they'd clicked.

## What happened?

We found that monitoring audiences' email behaviour and tailoring content to this resulted in a much higher open rate and click through rate. We also found that our emails were being engaged with more and that we were funnelling audiences to the pages we wanted to. Quantitatively, the experiment was a success. However, when we looked further into the data, we questioned whether the qualitative side was as successful. This was because we were putting a lot of hours into creating these emails, but through targeting audiences, by the third phase of the automation, we weren't actually sending the email to many people at all. This meant that although our CTRs (click

through rates) were about 27%, we had actually only sent an email to about 41 people, which meant only eight people had opened it. When we measured this against the amount of hours we had put in, the qualitative side didn't seem equal to the quantitative.

## What was difficult?

We learnt that technology doesn't always do what you want it to! Our email system wasn't as sophisticated as the experiment we devised, and this only became apparent as we worked through the process. This meant the results as evidenced above did not outweigh additional time added to deliver automation, but it gave us a good foundation to build on.

We also found that pressure on our time as a marketing team didn't really reduce. It was difficult to evidence to the business whether an investment in our time upfront, will have benefits in the future.

## Was anything easier than you'd expected?

Not really. Everything was either as expected or a little harder!

## What did you each learn?

**MARTINA:** I learnt not to overcomplicate things. It's fine to start with small tests and build rather than trying to do everything at once (the consequence of a busy and pressurised marketing department!) and in fact the results can be more fruitful if you take a smaller test and learn approach which takes less resource to implement. It also makes it easier to flex your approach if you hit a challenge

**NAOMI:** I learnt that quantitative success doesn't always mean qualitative success and that it's important to have a balance of the two in order for an experiment to be truly successful.

## What did your organisation learn?

There were definitely surprises along the way, and we learnt that we simply had taken too much on vs the workforce available to us. This caused pressure so when we saw the results we quickly realised that we had simply over complicated things in trying to segment too much, too soon in our experimenting.

## What's next?

At the time of doing the experiment, we were under a huge amount of pressure as a team and had faced redundancies and resignations, meaning we were operating on a significantly reduced level. We'd like to re-do this experiment when our team has grown again, as it would help us to better achieve our aims of introducing automation to increase efficiency (rather than put extra pressure on us).

## Three tips or insights about doing your experiment that might be useful for other cultural sector people in similar contexts to you

- Start small as the results will give you a better indication of what did / didn't work
- Really think about the questions you want your test to answer and whether the metrics will be able to provide the answers
- Always consider qual and quant data as they might not always tell the same story



ORGANISATION:

# The Box Plymouth

**Fiona Booth** | Digital Communications Officer

**Abigail Netcott** | Marketing & Development Manager

## What was the research question behind your experiment – what did you want to test or find out?

Evaluate the impact of a key campaign from last year, testing out social media content on Facebook versus engagement/impact. Looking at quantitative data around whether posts reflect the values of The Box as an organisation.

## Why was this important to your organisation?

This was to inform a piece of audience development and strategic marketing taking place April - September 2024. We wanted to be clear about how digital fits into the overall marketing strategy and where we need to use it strategically to attract different audience segments.

The audience development work that we conducted is currently being implemented across the organisation and in particular marketing has 3 key digital elements reflected in a new way of working:

- Enhance and grow audiences across all channels focused on key audience segments and growth areas
- Ensure every bit of content has a purpose and clear audience segment
- Continue to collect, analyse and use data to inform decisions about programme, campaigns, overall offer

## What did you do? Please give an overview of your process.

We selected 5 top performing and the 5 lowest performing posts by reach through Hootsuite. We changed our original campaign to a summer campaign as it had a more varied selection of outputs and ran for a longer time.

We then decided to experiment with more live/in the moment video content and do a deep dive into the performance of that content. Over the summer we had two opportunities to share video updates throughout two of our events; a

Super Saturday event and a Culture Club Takeover event. We also created more video content for the Culture Club Takeover in the build up, with people talking directly to the camera.

During the deep dive, we used the preceding week's data (looking at our regular content mix) to benchmark against and discussed some of the key measures such as reach and engagement rates, to decide what was useful for us to measure on, that would also be meaningful when reported back on in our monthly/quarterly round ups. We also talked about how other factors can affect these measures, such as time and day.

- Our biggest reaching posts during both periods looked at weren't videos. So in terms of traction, things that went down well in with followers were a competition winner announcement, a volunteer thank you and the post about picnics.

**Finding:** What we think is getting best traction overall is sometimes unexpected. There are variables that can affect reach such as day and time. With us moving in a new direction and things being tested out it wouldn't be fair to just base the value of a post with just this measure.

- All our videos (including the non-takeover videos) performed distinctly better in terms of engagement rate (the likes, reactions, comments and shares which would suggest traction). all our video content during those weeks (including the onsite walkthroughs). The only exception was the picnic post.

**Finding:** Based on this, it would suggest that video will do well in terms of engagement, but isn't always the case. So if we're going to place value on the engagement rate and showing what went down well amongst those who saw a post, we definitely should place video higher in our content mix.

- When looking at video posts alone, there are additional measures that can help give us a view on traction. These are reach, plays, engagement rate, shares, average percentage of video watched, percentage of users who watched the entire video. Also 'follows from Reel' – which seems like a useful thing to note if a video generated this in significant numbers.

**Finding:** When reviewing the types of video content that make up our content mix and what gained traction, it's best to do a deeper dive where possible. We need to remember that day, time and other factors will still play a part, so it doesn't seem an exact science to judge something based just on numbers. But the deeper dive (that is best done in Meta) can't be done for all our content - it's quite time consuming.

- We looked at the best video posts in terms of reach, highest number of plays, highest number of shares, average percentage of video watched, percentage of users who watched the entire video. The final Culture Club takeover post hit three of these 'best ofs'. One other Culture Club video had the highest percentage of video seen, and a preview of the takeover day had the most shares. The non-takeover day videos did well in other measures though, getting the most video completions and an exhibition walk through also having nearly the same engagement rate as the final Culture Club post.

**Finding:** In this experiment, video that was more personable definitely resonated with the audience and we gained positive feedback, so the content was seen to be of value. It would be useful as next steps to carry out at least one more 'deep dive' with more in the moment/people based video as part of our move to change the content mix. This should give more weight towards the values that we want to use to benchmark our content going forwards, as we widen out the video content creation to more staff. We could try this on a weekday too, to see whether this affects the reach too, as most of this content was run on a Saturday.

## What happened?

We discover discrepancies in the data results, particularly around the video plays giving contradictory numbers.

When we compared video output against regular output, the reach was surprisingly lower, but the engagement rate was distinctly higher.

When we compared the 'in the moment' videos against other videos (walkthroughs etc.), these performed best in three measures, so the live content definitely resonated with our online audience.

This work helped to test out some of the changes we thought we needed to make to our content mix, based upon the findings in the audience development work. The work is now feeding into our content planning and we know if we are evaluating the work that there are key measures to help us do this.

## What was difficult?

Differing needs coming from the audience development work, sending us off on tangents but not the original plan.

KPI's set for the NPO not considered properly and were set prior to audience development work and the LGR project so became irrelevant quickly.

Senior buy in was sometimes difficult as automatic perception of value was seen to be monetary.

Time constraints over the summer in particular in moving the project forward.

It was very hard to look at one thing without thinking about digital in a more holistic way as it impacts pretty much everything we do.

Realising that we didn't necessarily have the skillset to deliver what we want in the digital sphere, particularly around marketing.

## Was anything easier than you'd expected?

I'd say that deciding to try out the in the moment video itself was easier than expected, because we worked with trusted suppliers to help do this.

## What did you each learn?

**FIONA:** That the data can turn up unexpected results and I quite enjoyed interrogating the data in this way! Also it's really useful to run experiments in this type of 'no pressure' way and have the chance to really drill down into something that I might have made assumptions on, and really challenge my understanding based on the data. I definitely feel more confident in trying things out now as we move further forward with shifting our digital content in 2025.

**ABIGAIL:** How integral digital is to everything we do and it is very difficult to think about one area with the knock on effects in other areas. The need to upskill constantly and build in work with real innovators in the sector in order to get The Box into a strong place and move us forward.

## What did your organisation learn?

This is not an exact science, especially around reporting. We learnt that we were wildly off in regard to setting KPI's for the organisation and needed to consider that the bigger the number is not necessarily better. Also, value does not equate to money in all situations, it is important to think of impact and engagement on a deeper level using digital first, and building loyalty within our digital sphere of communications.

There will always be fast evolution in this area and staying ahead of the game is challenging.

## What's next?

Initially by presenting to the Senior Leadership Management team and then resetting realistic and relevant KPI's in next year's business planning. Incorporating digital analytics into reporting structures and being confident in the figures.

We are rolling out a new approach to our content mix that's in line with the audiences we are targeting including more video content, giving us the opportunity to put into practice what we've learned.

We have opened up social media to the whole organisation to create Employee Generated Content (EGC), apparently a big trend for 2025. This really helps us to give The Box multiple voices and create authentic relatable stories.

## Three tips or insights about doing your experiment that might be useful for other cultural sector people in similar contexts to you

- Embrace experimental working and be agile in all things digital to test things like AI, AR and digital campaigning. Stick with what works and continuously review.
- Benchmark against other cultural venues to see what best practice and success looks like, whilst realising what is relevant for your own organisation.
- Digital is not stand alone, and should be considered holistically, it's integral to all planning!

ORGANISATION:

# British Council

**Lisa Brook** | Creative Technology Relationship Manager

**Eneni Bambara-Abban** | Creative Technology Relationship Manager

## What was the research question behind your experiment – what did you want to test or find out?

Can we improve the allocation, and therefore assessment of open call creative technology-related grant applications by leveraging AI, specifically natural language processing (NLP)? Specifically, can we use NLP to identify grant applications focusing on emerging and advanced technologies like XR, VR, AR, Gaming, or AI and generate non-expert summaries to allow for allocation of applications to expert assessors?

## Why was this important to your organisation?

The British Council receives hundreds sometimes thousands of grant applications per open call opportunity.

Currently 'creative technology' tick boxes – selected by grant applicants - are the primary mechanism used to sort applications engaging with advanced technologies. However, this is a broad term that can be unrepresentative and misses a lot of critical information. As such the British Council's creative technology specialists often read through many applications that aren't necessarily creative technology-led, and conversely other non-specialist teams are allocated creative technology applications that they don't necessarily have the expertise to assess, often resulting in reallocating and doubling-up of assessment work.

This is time-consuming and ineffective for the applicant and team. It also means that the nuance of projects involving technology can be missed, something which can be problematic when technologies need to be considered through an often complex ethical, legal, and technical matrix.

## What did you do? Please give an overview of your process.

Manually reading each application to allocate to the correct team is time-consuming, so we needed a method that would **automatically detect**



**relevant keywords**, summarize the content, and provide a quick overview without needing to read through the entire application.

The ultimate objective was to **filter and summarize** applications so reviewers could easily assess the context and relevance of each one.

We did this through five key steps:

#### 1. Data Collection:

- To create a small control case of sample data, we collected application data from our online submission portal by converting applications into a CSV file, and used this as the input for the experiment.

#### 2. Keyword Selection:

- We defined a list of keywords to detect applications involving creative technologies such as **XR, VR, AR, Gaming, and AI**.

#### 3. Summarization and Keyword Matching:

- We implemented a Python script using the **pandas** library to read and process the CSV data.
- We utilized **Hugging Face's summarization pipeline** (transformers library) to generate concise summaries of the applications that contained the keywords.

#### 4. Batch Processing:

- Applications were processed in batches for scalability, providing summarized insights with highlighted keywords for each batch.

#### 5. App Creation:

- Next, we created an intuitive user application interface using Streamlit so non-technical colleagues do not have to interact with the code, allowing users to upload CSV files easily.
- Improved upon UI including buttons for example to aid navigation through processed results.

## What happened?

Once the program was run, if a keyword was found, the script generated a summary, highlighted the keywords, and displayed which technologies were mentioned. The summarization reduces the text to a manageable length while

retaining the essential context - reducing the time needed to determine allocation and providing more nuance than simple tick boxes.

#### Example Output:

- Applicant: Jane Smith
- Keywords Found: AR, VR
- Summary: "Our AR application integrates 3D cultural heritage artefacts within VR environments to..."

In doing so, we successfully processed, filtered and summarized applications with multiple text fields, across several batches that contained relevant technologies. By focusing on the keywords and summaries, we were able to reduce the need to manually read through all submissions, focusing only on relevant ones.

As a result, not only did the application allow for the more nuanced and accurate allocation of submissions for review, it also evidenced potential to reduce time taken to review and allocate applications by approximately 97% (1400 application estimate: 700 human hours vs 23 hours)

## What was difficult?

Overall the process raised several complexities to be worked through, both from a technical (key word precision, and processing challenges) and regulatory (data protection, privacy & security) perspective. The nuance of these specific issues is detailed below.

It is worth noting that beyond these two critical areas, if the experiment was to be formally integrated in grant assessment workflows, it would also require user testing, quality assurance, and analysis of foundation datasets being used to train the NLP models leveraged by the experiment. Alongside this it would require transparent communication to stakeholders about how and why AI was being used, assurance that the grant assessment itself was being completed by a human assessor, and provision of opportunities for consultation and recourse from applicants.

#### Keyword Precision:

- It was difficult to differentiate between generic words and **specific technology-related terms** (e.g. distinguishing between "AR" as a technology vs. "ar" appearing in common words like "artistic" or "research").
- Adjusting the regular expressions to search for **exact matches** helped alleviate this issue.

## Technical challenges:

- **Dependency Management:** Issues with package compatibility - versions of numpy, pywin32 & mariadb\_config.
- **Batch Processing:** Balancing the speed of summarization with accuracy while managing large datasets was tricky. We had to implement effective batch navigation for smooth processing.

## Data Protection:

- **Selecting open-source software:** With using open-source software, we had to ensure that all models we used were ethically compliant and had considered potential biases in training data. Ultimately, through our research we decided to use the Huggingface platform as it has **GDPR Compliance in Europe** for data privacy.
- **Security:** Ensuring that application data remained secure during the testing phase on online platforms was a major priority due to their sensitivity thus requiring extensive research. Ultimately Google Colab and a private GitHub repository were selected. Google Colab operates in **isolated, temporary virtual machines with encrypted data transfer** and added 2FA. A **private GitHub repository** ensures that code remains confidential, with restricted access, version control, and encryption for data in transit. All test data was also **deleted after 24 hours** from the repository. Additionally, GitHub and Google Colab are compliant with multiple security standards, such as **SOC 2 Type 2, ISO/IEC 27001, and GDPR**, which means they must adhere to strict data security, privacy, and governance policies

## Was anything easier than you'd expected?

We were surprised at the efficiency of translating test data from our online platform to a CSV file and then into a data frame for analysis. We were able to do this with a few lines of code which gave us more time to tackle the main bulk of the work on key word analysis and application summarisation.

## What did you each learn?

Automating the summarization and keyword detection provided immediate value, drastically reducing manual effort in allocating applications and increasing accuracy of applications for allocation. The app provides reviewers with concise, tech-focused summaries, making it easier to identify projects that use creative technology and capturing nuance of cross-disciplinary work, therefore ensuring that work is allocated to the appropriate expert assessors

## What did your organisation learn?

- **AI to must be used to complement human input and assessment rather than replace it.** The purpose of this application is to ensure that more nuance is surfaced in the assessment of applications, rather than less.
- **Complexity of defining “keywords”.** How we define creative technology needs to reflect how artists and organizations themselves define this, have consistency across our programs, and align with other national funders e.g. Arts Council, Innovate UK, BFI

## What's next?

### Feedback

- Convene **working group and advisory board** to review and feedback on application
- Benchmark against other **industry standards, institutions, and public bodies approaches to AI**

### Quality Assurance, Security & Accessibility

- Align on **AI best practice** with **Digital, Partnerships and Innovation team**, and ensure that, if continued development to continue, quality assurance, data security, and accessibility testing workflows are implemented.
- Ensure **alignment with emergent policy ie. EU AI Act, UK AI Action Plan**

### User Experience

- Create a simple **web-based dashboard** where reviewers can upload CSVs, view summaries, and filter applications based on the keywords found. This would make the system more accessible and user-friendly.
- Implement user testing with a **diverse group of international colleagues**
- **Trial different keywords, summary and sentiment tools** to support allocation of 'mixed artform' applications to the most appropriate team.

### Knowledge sharing

- Share findings and app demo internally, raising both technical and ethical questions about AI tool usage
- Work internally and externally on definitions of creative technology.

## Three tips or insights about doing your experiment that might be useful for other cultural sector people in similar contexts to you

- Technology should not “take over” human input (in this case in grant assessment), however it can significantly compliment =and support our work processes ensuring we work at our best.
- Experimentation and adoption of emergent technologies doesn't have to result in products “going to market” to be successful. We found that based on our willingness to experiment and try new things using AI we have already seen new opportunities for engagement and interest with various stakeholders internally and externally at the British Council.
- There is value in investing in staff development and wellbeing with tools (like this one) that can make their lives easier! Nobody likes a burnt-out team that can't perform at their best. Having thousands of grant applications to mark in a short amount of time, with limited number of staff to do so, is an age-old problem that is not unique to organisations like the British Council. Through this experiment we were able to see how much time and energy could be saved in the assessment allocation process, freeing up time to focus on the critical work of assessing applications themselves.

# Credits

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## About The Audience Agency

We are an independent research and development not-for-profit organisation whose purpose is to enable a vibrant, relevant cultural sector better able to create cultural and creative opportunity for everyone.

We provide research, services and insight which help our network of clients and stakeholders adapt for and with their communities. Our team is a collective of committed specialists with backgrounds in the cultural and creative sectors, research and/or data science who share a passion for arts and culture and its power to transform society. Our approach is insight-led and people-centred.

We work across the UK and internationally, with an extensive range of cultural organisations, academic partners, local authorities and funding bodies. We are funded by Arts Council of Wales, Creative Scotland and a range of other project funders and partners.

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**Many thanks for  
taking an interest in  
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