

Evaluation of the Cultural Destinations Fund (Phase 2)

Evaluation Case Studies



Background and context

The Cultural Destinations Fund programme set out to maximise culture's contribution to the local visitor economy in several places across England by supporting partnerships that brought arts and culture, and tourism partners together. The second phase of the programme invested £4.2 million between April 2017 and January 2021 to support eighteen consortiums of local partners (including at least one cultural organisation and one Destination Management Organisation) to build on culture's potential to help grow local visitor economies.

The cultural and the tourism sectors are each, in their own right, significant contributors to local economies. Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) data valued the arts and culture industry in 2016 at £10.8 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA), supporting over 137,000 jobs.¹ Tourism also has a significant and growing role in the British economy, and in 2017 contributed £106 billion (GDP) and supported 2.6 million jobs².

Culture is closely intertwined with tourism and both sectors form part of the visitor economy. The cultural sector is already making a major contribution to the visitor economy; £4.5 billion of spending by inbound visitors, more than 25% of annual spending by international visitors, is attributable to the UK's culture and heritage sectors.³ Cultural destinations are attractive to domestic and international visitors and in 2019, 18 of the top 25 most visited attractions in the UK were in the cultural sector⁴.

About this report

This report presents four case studies that were developed as part of the evaluation of the second phase of the Cultural Destinations Fund programme, undertaken in 2020/21.⁵ The purpose of the case studies was to identify key learning from the programme to inform the delivery of future interventions. The case studies focus on four themes:

- Working with private sector partners
- The impact of longer-term participation
- Resilience of cultural organisations
- The use of digital in project delivery.

The case studies were informed by consultations with 16 project leads and a review of Cultural Destinations Fund project documentation, provided by ACE to SQW in June 2020. The evaluation research and reports were undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic did not have a significant impact on project delivery, as this was largely complete when the outbreak occurred. However, its containment measures including closures and lockdowns will impact the achievement of longer-term and sustained outcomes. This case study report should be read in this context.

¹ Cebr (2019) [Economic impact of arts and culture on the national economy](#). Arts Council England

² VisitEngland/VisitBritain (2017) Tourism in England. <https://www.visitbritain.org/value-tourism-england>

³ HM Government (2019) Industrial strategy: Tourism sector deal <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tourism-sector-deal>

⁴ Association of Leading Visitor Attractions (2019) <https://www.alva.org.uk/details.cfm?p=423>

⁵ The final evaluation of the Cultural Destinations Fund programme (Phase 2) can be found on Arts Council England's website.

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1. Case study: Working with private sector partners

Introduction

- 1.1** This document sets out the findings of one of four case studies that have been developed as part of SQW's final evaluation of the Cultural Destinations Fund (phase 2). This case study is focused on **partnership working with, and the involvement of private sector partners in funded projects**. This aims to understand the role and the impact of the private sector in project delivery and the extent to which project activities will be sustained locally through, or with the involvement of the private sector.

Findings

- 1.2** Private sector partners were involved in nearly all of the Cultural Destination Fund projects consulted with (14 out of 16). The extent of this involvement, and the ways in which private sector businesses participated in the project, varied significantly. For some projects, businesses had a direct role in the delivery of the project; this was typically tourism-related businesses. For other projects, business engagement was indirect, such as in the form of funding or sponsorship. Further detail regarding how private sector partners engaged with the projects and the impact of this is set out in the sections that follow. This includes a discussion of the challenges and key lessons identified by project leads in engaging private sector businesses in project delivery.

Working with tourism-related businesses

- 1.3** Many of the projects (9 out of the 16 projects consulted) engaged and worked with private sector tourism-related businesses. This included businesses such as accommodation providers, transport companies, and hospitality businesses.
- 1.4** To facilitate increased awareness and partnership working between cultural organisations and tourism businesses, four projects delivered a series of local briefings and workshops. For example:
- In Birmingham, Marketing Manchester and Wakefield Cultural Consortium, training/upskilling workshops were conducted for cultural organisations and businesses. In Manchester this was focused on the Cultural Concierge model, while in Birmingham, the workshops focused on understanding how the tourism sector operates, including the role of travel trade, and the timescales and lead times for event/ product development. Wakefield Cultural Consortium developed 'Yorkshire Passion', a training course delivered to partners including those in the private sector which promoted the importance of the cultural sector and tourism to the local economy as part of a customer service training programme.

- Halifax also organised culture and tourism briefings for local volunteers working in the sectors, including briefings for the hospitality sector to present the cultural offer available, and the project provided content for their website.

1.5 The briefings were described as particularly effective in creating a better understanding between the sectors and many cultural organisations reconsidered their activities as a result, including the products they could deliver to enhance the visitor offer. One consultee noted the innovative nature of tourism businesses compared with cultural organisations. Therefore, enabling these groups to work together has resulted in cultural organisations becoming more innovative and willing to experiment with new ideas. Another consultee described how engaging with private sector partners had enabled cultural organisations to act more commercially and efficiently.

1.6 Through the Cultural Destination Fund projects, consultees described how relationships between cultural organisations and tourism businesses had formed for the first time. For example, Birmingham, Islands' Partnership, Marketing Manchester, Bristol and Bath Cultural Destinations and Halifax Culture Hub all worked with accommodation providers and hospitality businesses that they had not previously worked with. In most cases, these relationships were built by the project by providing cultural content for businesses to engage with and/or promote. For example, Marketing Manchester developed a Cultural Concierge network⁶, including hoteliers, to promote the cultural calendar (i.e. a model of tourism that focusses on curating cultural itineraries). In these four cases, consultees felt there had been an improvement in the perceived value of collaborating with cultural organisations from private sector partners, possibly due to an increased understanding of the sector and the potential benefits it can deliver.

“We worked with local hotels, they are very commercial by nature. Bringing in a strong commercial element is really useful, and more private sector engagement is good because you have to run more efficiently.”

1.7 A quarter of the projects (4 out of 16) consulted had engaged with transport providers; mainly local train companies. For example:

- Stoke-on-Trent Cultural Destinations Partnership developed a Cultural Concierge programme that brought cultural organisations together with transport providers for the first time to promote the cultural offer and to provide transport offers; the project lead

⁶ The Cultural Concierge model involves the development of a network of concierge teams in hotels and visitor centres and the distribution of knowledge among the teams of the local cultural offer. This might include a training programme aimed at developing culture product-knowledge, or it may be a central online resource that teams can access to find out about the what cultural offers are on.

described that transport providers “*would not traditionally collaborate with culture and tourism organisations*”.

- In Birmingham, West Midlands Trains, a pre-existing partner to the West Midlands Growth Company, provided financial support of up to £20k to support the promotion of Cultural Destinations Fund activity. This was primarily supporting a marketing campaign that targeted demographics at certain stations along the Euston to Liverpool train line (e.g. in Stafford, Crewe, Liverpool).
 - Similarly, Bristol and Bath Cultural Destinations received funding from Bristol Airport, and had begun conversations with other local transport businesses as part of a project campaign. The project considered their relationship with Bristol Airport to be potentially very significant for cultural organisations across the area and it is hoped that this will lead to further collaborative work, such as exhibitions in the airport.
- 1.8** The collaboration with transport providers delivered a number of benefits for the projects, including: an improved visitor offer, a greater reach to potential visitors, increased awareness of the Cultural Destinations Fund project, and the formation of new working relationships/partnerships that would not typically collaborate. However, a number of challenges were discussed notably in relation to working with accommodation and transport providers in developing specific offers and packages. This is discussed further below.

Working with other private sector partners

- 1.9** Projects described many ways in which other private sector partners were engaged in the project. This included: through the delivery of training, by providing funding, sponsorship and/or in-kind support for project activities, and working with the local Business Improvement District (BID).
- 1.10** Six projects mentioned delivering training and/or setting up networks with private sector businesses. For example:
- A network of over 160 local businesses were set up in a ‘Business Club’ in the Coventry City of Culture project, through which, business champions for culture were identified. This supported the alignment across sectors and enabled new collaborations to form. It was noted, however, that this initiative was in part driven by preparations for the City of Culture.
 - In the Stoke-on-Trent Cultural Destinations Partnership project, partnerships were developed with private sector businesses through the Cultural Concierge network. This was used to disseminate the place making rationale for supporting projects to promote the cultural sector within the business community. Marketing Manchester also set up a Cultural Concierge network through which the cultural calendar in the city was promoted.
- 1.11** Other projects invested time and resource in engaging local businesses to understand the appeal and unique selling points of their local area. For example, the Halifax Culture Hub

project spent a significant time on outreach to understand independent businesses and how to use their offer alongside the project activities to deliver more rounded promotions and marketing activity.

1.12 Four consultees noted that private sector businesses had provided funding and/or in-kind support for Cultural Destination Fund activities:

- In the Islands' Partnership project, a clothing retailer provided sponsorship and in-kind support, including marketing for a festival. Subsequently, a more significant sponsorship package had been discussed, which was unfortunately delayed due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The relationship developed with the retailer has significantly improved the online and social media presence/reach of the Island.
- Partners in the Nottingham Contemporary project, through the programme-funded 'Grand Tour', worked with and presented to many private sector businesses. Following these events, some businesses got back in touch with the project leads to offer their support and to co-promote activities and small projects.
- In Coventry City of Culture, consultees noted an increase in collaboration between private sector businesses and the cultural sector, including through the provision of sponsorship to cultural organisations locally, such as theatres. However, as highlighted by one consultee, securing large donations from large, multinational businesses based locally was more challenging.
- Lincoln City Centre Partnership received engagement and support from businesses in the development of trails made to celebrate the Magna Carta.

1.13 Three projects have developed relationships with or worked closely with the Business Improvement Districts (BID):

- Lincoln City Centre Partnership– through the programme, the area has connected Visit Lincoln, the education sector, and businesses; Visit Lincoln has since become part of the BID. As such, the project leads act as a conduit between the visitor economy, other private sector businesses, and the creative sector. Being part of the BID has meant the project were able to facilitate relationships more easily.
- Wakefield Cultural Consortium – working with and using the funding from the BID sponsorship as well as sponsorship from a local shopping centre, the project was able to organise a major city centre event, which was expected to deliver visitor outcomes including increased footfall in city centre. The event has been delayed due to the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Nottingham Contemporary – strong relationships with the Destination Management Organisation (DMO) and the BID were developed, in part, as a result of the Cultural Destinations Fund programme.

Challenges and key learning

- 1.14** The overall feedback from consultees was that the engagement of private sector businesses in project delivery had a positive impact on project outcomes. However, there were various challenges described by consultees in engaging and working with private sector businesses.
- 1.15** Consultees reported challenges in regard to the capacity of private sector partners to engage. For example, challenges were experienced in engaging independent businesses in the Halifax Culture Hub project due to capacity constraints within smaller businesses. Similarly, one consultee noted that whereas the project had been successful at securing support from smaller organisations, this will become more challenging going forward due to the COVID-19 crisis as smaller businesses will be focused entirely on survival.



Getting arts and culture to talk to private businesses will require arts organisations to translate timetables and business activities into longer term plans.



1.16 Several projects highlighted issues around engagement with local, and, generally, larger hoteliers and accommodation providers; this was noted as an impediment to developing visitor packages. This was described as difficult for two reasons: firstly, for larger, corporate hotels, their policies on who they can develop packages with is developed centrally, and therefore the local hotel manager has limited local discretion. Secondly, many hotels are reluctant to, or do not have the authorisation to pay commission to the tour operator delivering the packages. Consequently, the Birmingham project found that it was easier to work with small, independent hoteliers in developing packages.

1.17 Other challenges experienced included the differences in timetables and lead times for project and event planning between the cultural and tourism sector, and reluctance from cultural organisations to commercialise their activities. For example, *“arts organisations will be working for the next season or the one after that which could be just months away; whereas tourism, especially international tourism, are looking to engage tour operators and handlers two years away from the deadline. The whole timescale for businesses is very different”*.

2. Case study: The impact of longer-term participation

Introduction

- 2.1** This document sets out the findings of one of four case studies that have been developed as part of SQW's final evaluation of the Cultural Destinations Fund (phase 2). **This case study is focused on the impact of continued participation in the two phases of the Cultural Destinations Fund programme.**
- 2.2** The first phase (phase 1) of the Cultural Destinations Fund was a three-year programme, delivered between 2014 to 2017. Phase 2 of the programme, the subject of the final evaluation, commenced in 2017 and will complete in 2021. The programme budget was £3 million and £4.2 million for phase one and two respectively, and the overall programme objectives were broadly the same: to build stronger partnerships between organisations in specific localities with a view to increasing the resilience of both the tourism and cultural sectors. Ten projects were awarded funding in phase 1; eight of which went on to secure funding through phase 2 of the programme. A total of 18 projects were funded in phase 2. The eight projects include: Creative Kernow, England's Creative Coast, Halifax Culture Hub, Lakes Culture, Lincoln City Centre Partnership, Nottingham Contemporary, Sheffield Theatres for Sheffield Culture Consortium and Bristol and Bath Cultural Destinations. Table 1 sets out the total funding received by each of the projects from phase 1 and phase 2 of the Cultural Destinations Fund programme. This shows that, with the exception of England's Creative Coast, the amount of funding received under phase 2 was notably lower than phase 1.

Table 1: Total funding received by eight projects in phases 1 and 2 of the Cultural Destinations Fund programme

Project title	Programme funding phase 1	Programme funding phase 2
Creative Kernow (Cornwall)	£340,031	£150,000
England's Creative Coast (Kent)	£330,500	£500,000
Halifax Culture Hub	£292,500	£150,000
Lakes Culture (Kendal)	£324,000	£128,000
Lincoln City Centre Partnership	£293,400	£150,000
Nottingham Contemporary	£350,000	£150,000
Sheffield Theatres for Sheffield Culture Consortium	£271,390	£150,000
Bristol and Bath Cultural Destinations	£350,000	£150,000
Total	£2,551,821	£1,528,000

Source: Arts Council England

- 2.3** This case study explores the impact of continued support through the programme on the outcomes delivered by projects.

Findings

- 2.4** For projects that participated in the two phases of the programme, there were various benefits described in relation to delivering the project over a longer-term period. This is primarily in the ability to focus resources on specific activities, such as developing and refining the project in the initial stage and focusing on delivery of activities in the second stage.
- 2.5** The impact of participating in two phases of the programme on quantitative outcomes achieved by projects, such as increased visitor numbers, is less clear. This is for two reasons: projects have different starting points, in terms of the existing foundations for partnership working and the cultural/ tourism infrastructure in the locality, and baseline data has not been collected for projects and therefore it is not possible to robustly assess change.
- 2.6** The next section sets out the key benefits described by projects of longer-term participation in the Cultural Destinations Fund programme and the challenges in ascertaining the impact of longer-term participation on project outcomes/ performance. The case study concludes with a discussion of the challenges and key learning identified by projects.

Benefits of longer-term participation

- 2.7** Three main benefits of continued participation in the Cultural Destinations Fund programme were identified by consultees:
- the opportunity to develop, test and refine the project focus and activities, based on stakeholder and audience consultation
 - the ability to develop and solidify partnership arrangements between cultural organisations and between cultural and tourism organisations
 - following the development of partnerships, the capacity to focus on strategic activities and/or delivering a new visitor offer.

2.8 One of the main benefits of continued participation in the programme was that it enabled projects to test, refine and implement new ideas for cultural products/ services. Three of the eight projects that received phase 1 and 2 funding mentioned using the longer duration of the programme to do this. For example, England's Creative Coast focused on conducting extensive audience research and trialling new ideas within the area in phase 1. In phase 2, the project built on the learning from the testing and research and enhanced and delivered the products. Similarly, Halifax Culture Hub used the second phase of the project to build on the learning from the first phase; the project utilised and developed many of the original elements that were found to be successful and used the evaluation findings to inform the project objectives and targets for phase 2. For these projects, participation in phase 1 enabled them to focus their time and efforts on initiatives that were likely to have a greater impact on target outcomes.

2.9 The second positive impact from continued participation in the programme raised in consultations is the ability to develop and build on partnerships. Four of the (eight) projects that had been involved in both phases of the programme highlighted that the two rounds of funding and the prolonged delivery period was critical in enabling projects to solidify and build upon the relationships developed. For example, in phase 1, projects (such as Nottingham Contemporary, Halifax Culture Hub, Cultural Lincoln and Bristol and Bath Cultural Destinations) focused resources on partner engagement and consortium building, developing relationships and laying the foundation for more collaborative work in phase 2. Consultees reflected that the continued engagement of partners enhanced the level of collaboration and increased the likelihood of sustaining those relationships, following programme completion.



**Arts Council England
were amazing in
terms of identifying a
consistent
programme of
funding over a
longer period.**



2.10 As a result of the partnership arrangements established in phase 1, projects were able to be more strategic in phase 2 focused on delivering their collective vision and objectives. For example, the Lakes Culture project established strong partnership structures in phase 1 of the project and, as a result, were able to utilise the partnerships developed to deliver two core projects in phase 2: World Heritage Inscription and Lakes Ignite Festival.

2.11 The initial focus on developing consortia or partnership arrangements and refining and testing products was common across all projects, including those that had not been involved in phase 1. For example, the Cheshire East Council project spent the first two years in which they had received funding developing and refining ideas that they built on in the third year. Similarly, the Wakefield Cultural Consortium project initially focused on engaging partners and setting-up a cultural consortium. In the latter stages of the project, there has been increased focus on using those networks to deliver collaborative activities.

2.12 Conversely, the feedback from most of the projects consulted that were not involved in phase 1 was that the length of time of the funding had not been sufficient to deliver on their objectives fully. For example, despite reportedly exceeding their expectations on some aspects of project delivery, consultees from Cheshire East Council felt that they were still at the start of their journey. This was because they had not been able to continue to implement and refine the learning they had gained from the first two years of delivery. In the Islands' Partnership, it was felt that by the end of the project, they had built up momentum that without further funding would not be possible to sustain. This was due to the limited cultural infrastructure and partner networks the project had to draw upon when the project began. Marketing Manchester reported that having the commitment of funding had enabled the project to deliver a more structured and impactful project, based on more meaningful consultation with local stakeholders.

2.13 The findings from the consultations suggest that projects needed approximately two years to engage partners, to develop ways of communicating and ways of working, and identify mutual priorities before they could even start delivery. The learning from the delivery of activities then shapes and further develops the collaborative relationships that underpin the Cultural Destinations Fund partnerships.

The timeframe to observable impact

2.14 As noted above, the impact of participating in two phases of the programme on quantitative outcomes achieved by projects is uncertain. In part, this is because projects have different starting points, in terms of the existing foundations for partnership working and the cultural/tourism infrastructure in the locality.

2.15 Some projects started from a position where there were no or very limited foundations to enable cultural tourism when the Cultural Destinations Fund project commenced. For example, Sheffield Theatres for Sheffield Culture Consortium noted that when they first received phase 1 funding, the city was not recognised at all as a cultural destination. Similarly, on receipt of funding, the Islands' Partnership project had very little infrastructure in terms of cultural attractions to enable cultural tourism. In such cases, increased and/or longer-term funding would be required to enable the change in perception or to deliver the infrastructure required for outcomes to be achieved and evidenced. For example, Sheffield Theatres for Sheffield Culture Consortium noted that it had taken five years for the perception of the city as a cultural destination to change. In other localities, the cultural infrastructure and attractions were already available at the start of the project, such as the Marketing Manchester project, or the level of partnership working and stakeholder engagement was



The second phase aimed to build on the successes of the first and to continue many of the original elements, as well as applying the learning from the evaluation.



already showing positive signs of progression, for example, England's Creative Coast. Therefore, the level of progress and outcomes achieved by the projects is not directly comparable, and the scale of outcomes achieved should be measured based on projects' starting point.

Challenges and key learning

- 2.16** Project consultees that participated in the two phases of the programme indicated that while this delivered various opportunities (as described above), they would have benefitted from having knowledge earlier that funding for a second phase would be available. This would improve overall project planning and delivery. For example, rather than splitting resource to develop partnerships and consortia in parallel with delivering an enhanced cultural offer, projects could allocate resources in the first phase of the project on engaging partners and taking time to formalise structures to facilitate collaborative working on phase 2 of the project. Phase 2 could then focus on delivering the strategic aspects of the project collaboratively, such as enhancing the visitor offer and/ or promoting the role and value of culture.
- 2.17** To better measure project outcomes and to understand the impact of continued participation in the Cultural Destinations Fund, the programme would benefit from undertaking baseline analysis on key programme outcomes (e.g. visitor numbers) for each of the projects, prior to the projects starting. This would enable the evaluation to assess the extent to which supporting projects through two phases of the programme delivers greater quantitative cultural outcomes for the locality.

3. Case study: Resilience of cultural organisations

Introduction

- 3.1** This document sets out the findings of one of four case studies that have been developed as part of SQW's final evaluation of the Cultural Destinations Fund (phase 2). **This case study is focused on the resilience of cultural organisations.** In particular, this will explore the extent to which participation or engagement in the Cultural Destinations Fund programme has, or is likely to, increase the resilience of cultural organisations. For the purpose of this case study, resilience is defined as an organisations' ability to respond to and recover from difficulties. This is explored, in part, by reviewing the impact of, and cultural organisations response to the COVID-19 outbreak, and the associated health and safety measures implemented by the UK government.

Findings

- 3.2** The extent to which cultural organisations' resilience has increased was explored through the consultations with project leads. The questions focused on the extent to which organisations had experienced outcomes relating to improvements regarding: their operations, their visitor offer, and their financial situation – as indicators of resilience.
- 3.3** Organisational resilience was interpreted in different ways by consultees which meant their overall reflections on the extent to which resilience had changed differed. There were two general interpretations, the first was an increase in financial income for some cultural organisations was said to be indicative of increased resilience. Second was that greater collaboration and partnership working might increase confidence and capacity to innovate and provide opportunities for sharing resources. This could lead to increased financial turnover and thus ensure resilience.
- 3.4** The first part of this case study sets out how resilience might increase as a result of the two factors described above. The latter part of the case study presents the implications of the COVID-19 outbreak on organisational resilience, as described by projects, and how the outcomes from the Cultural Destinations Fund programme have supported cultural organisations in this context.

Greater collaboration and partnership working

- 3.5** Project leads said that collaboration, being well networked and having the capacity to develop partnership approaches to working were helpful for building resilience.
- 3.6** The majority of projects said that partnership working and collaboration between cultural organisations, and across cultural and tourism businesses had increased and/or improved. Four consultees reported how the Cultural Destinations Fund programme had changed cultural organisations' perception of the value of collaboration and how to collaborate. As a

result, partners have continued to collaborate beyond initial expectations and the lifetime of the project. For example:



Improved partnerships will enhance resilience, particularly within the context of COVID-19 when collaboration is a key focus.



and maintains their awareness of wider visitor activities taking place. A marketing consortium was also developed including representatives from tourism businesses, arts organisations and museums. The consortium meets every six weeks and delivers an agreed, structured work plan.

- In Birmingham, Coventry City of Culture and Lincoln City Centre Partnership, consultees noted an increase in collaboration among local artists and cultural organisations that had been brought together through the Cultural Destinations Fund programme. In Lincoln, the network of artists has continued to work together following project completion.
- Consultees noted that the networking and partnerships delivered through the Look Sideways: East project has meant that cultural organisations are now represented on the Business Improvement District (BID) Board; this increases their exposure to tourism businesses and maintains their awareness of wider visitor activities taking place. A marketing consortium was also developed including representatives from tourism businesses, arts organisations and museums. The consortium meets every six weeks and delivers an agreed, structured work plan.
- The Stoke-on-Trent Cultural Destinations Partnership lead was invited to join the local BID as a Director for Place Marketing. This led to several initiatives aimed at developing a new approach to enhancing the visitor experience and showcasing businesses by collaborating with the cultural offer. For example, through the BID a 'Create Fund' was established to fund a series of small projects alongside cultural organisations, such as pop-up exhibitions, that would showcase the city centre. The partnerships developed through the Cultural Destinations Fund had also enabled cultural organisations to begin to work more closely with DMOs.
- The Cheshire East Council project steering group, established through the Cultural Destinations Fund project, has been sustained following project completion. Culture and tourism organisations continue to meet on a regular basis to identify opportunities for increased join-up and collaboration.
- Similarly, a cultural consortium has been created in Wakefield with representatives from various cultural organisations. The consortium has decided to continue meeting regularly following the project and has commissioned an organisation to work with them to establish a formal governance structure moving forward.

3.7 In some cases, collaborative working was also associated with finding cost-efficiencies. For example:

- Three cultural organisations that received support through the Birmingham project created a Marketing and Communications Officer post to work with all three projects, meaning the financial cost of this would be split three ways.
- In Coventry City of Culture, the partnership arrangements between the cultural organisations and tourism businesses meant that the attractions, such as museums, which were under-resourced, could rely and draw on support and advice from the tourism partners.

Increased financial income and commercial focus

3.8 Due to the challenging economic context resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak, it was difficult for project leads to assess whether organisations' income had increased as a result of the programme. Moreover, two project leads explained that this was not a specific aim of their projects, and the scale of funding is not expected to deliver such outcomes. However, six projects described two income streams that had increased prior to COVID-19: through increased ticket sales or visitor numbers, and by securing additional funding.

3.9 Three projects described examples of how the Cultural Destinations Fund project had increased ticket sales or visitor numbers for local cultural organisations:

- The Birmingham project described how, through the Cultural Destinations Fund programme, an art gallery worked with a commercial operator to promote an existing canal tour that they offered. Despite their initial hesitance to commercialise their activity to this extent, the partnership was successful and canal tour ticket sales increased substantially.
- The Islands' Partnership project supported increased partnership work between cultural organisations and Higher Education Institutions, notably Falmouth University. These partnerships have resulted in increasing the Islands' online presence and sales, including in low seasons, and new commissions for local artists.
- The project lead for the Halifax Culture Hub noted that a number of cultural organisations had experienced increase visitor numbers which is likely to result in increased sales; for example, "*Eureka had record breaking visitor figures [last year]*", and "*visitor figures trebled*" at Shibden Hall. While other factors are likely to have initially attracted visitors to the area (for example, the 'Gentleman Jack' television series), the resources prepared through the programme has been a factor in informing and guiding visitors to a range of attractions locally.

3.10 Following completion of the Cultural Destinations Fund programme, two projects had secured additional public sector funding:

- The Islands' Partnership project secured £36,000 of ERDF funding in 2020. This 18-month fund will support the project to focus on the two specific outcomes that, based on their work with the Cultural Destinations Fund programme, they felt valuable: supporting the

delivery of events, and development of partnerships with local stakeholders and mainland HE institutions.

- Following project completion, the Halifax project has secured £73,000 of funding from the Leeds City Region Local Enterprise Partnership. This is primarily to support the continued coordination of cultural activities and to provide continued resource for Shibden Hall and the Anne Lister Festival.

3.11 While many projects did not (yet) result in increased financial income for cultural organisations, consultees highlighted ways in which cultural organisations had gained learning and experience that has enabled them to act more commercially. For example:

- Cultural organisations working with the Stoke-on-Trent Cultural Destinations Partnership project were supported to recognise the economic and social impacts of investing in culture, rather than focussing solely on its intrinsic value. As a result, consultees noted an increase in cultural organisations' ability to leverage and secure funding and to find ways of commercialising elements of their offer to build additional income streams, and supplement grant funding.
- The cultural organisations involved in delivering the '2Tone Taxi' experience, as part of the Coventry City of Culture project, gained learning about overcoming challenges to deliver complex exhibitions in a financially sustainable way.

“
Everyone is in a desperate state. Everyone has pulled together and is very keen to get going with campaigning.
 ”

Resilience in the context of COVID-19

3.12 The COVID-19 outbreak and the associated government health and safety restrictions have had a significant detrimental impact on the cultural sector. During the lockdown measures in spring 2020, cultural organisations were unable to open to visitors. Following the relaxing of lockdown measures, organisations have been able to open, however, this has been under very different circumstances and organisations have to adhere to social distancing rules. In addition, local lockdown measures have been implemented in areas across England which has meant that in some destinations, cultural attractions have remained closed. While funding has been made available by the UK Government to support cultural organisations, for example through the Culture Recovery Fund⁷ as well as non-sector-specific funds such as the Job Retention Scheme, the longer-term effects of the COVID-19 outbreak, and the availability of central support funding moving forward is unclear.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/funding-available-through-the-culture-recovery-fund>

- 3.13** Consultees highlighted that initially cultural organisations became very focused on the short-term situation, and became insular, focused on survival. However, as the situation progressed, there were promising signs that the outcomes delivered through the Cultural Destinations Fund could, in part, support with the sector recovery locally.
- 3.14** Following the initial lockdown period, three projects described that the partnership structures and arrangements between the cultural organisations, developed through the Cultural Destinations Fund programme, had enabled the organisations to work together and share information regarding how best to respond. The existing partnership meetings took place virtually and the frequency of the meetings was increased. For example, the Culture Consortium in the Sheffield Theatres for Sheffield Culture Consortium project met on a weekly basis, rather than monthly. The project lead from the Wakefield Cultural Consortium described that, as the meetings were online, attendance of partners had also improved.
- 3.15** The digital skills and knowledge developed through participation in the Cultural Destinations Fund programme enabled organisations to transition to remote working and to adapt products and services for online delivery. For example:
- The Look Sideways: East project has developed a partnership with BBC Radio 3 to deliver one of their larger international festivals online. The project also plans to use the website developed during the Cultural Destinations Fund to encourage local visitors to return post-COVID-19.
 - During the lockdown period, a group of artists that had been involved in the delivery of the Islands' Partnership project, set up a website to continue selling their work online. The project lead noted that this had been "*really successful*". Similarly, the Lincoln City Centre Partnership project created a pool of artists that they continue to work with. The collaborative work with the artists continued during lockdown and they delivered an 'instagrammable moments' campaign.
- 3.16** One project described how the COVID-19 outbreak has accelerated trends around digital take-up and tools. It was noted that the ability of cultural organisations to understand their visitors and to track customer journeys will improve. This is due to the requirement for visitors to book tickets for attractions and/or to register their details under the government track and trace system. For example, museums that have free entry would not have previously collected or recorded visitor information, but they are now required to do this.



Arts and culture are now being considered as part of the whole business revival following COVID-19.



culture and tourism organisations became more involved in the development of strategic and recovery plans. For example:

- The Islands' Partnership project lead was involved in discussions around how to use the Cultural Destinations Fund work as a central part of the recovery for Scilly; this included extending some of the projects piloted through the programme and harnessing the relationships developed, including with Higher Education Institutions.
- One project noted that due to this change in perception regarding the area as a 'cultural destination', they were hopeful to see a sustained increase in strategic investment in culture and tourism.

3.17 The majority of projects consulted described that culture was playing a significant role in the local plans for economic recovery following the COVID-19 outbreak. This is due to the increased recognition of culture's contribution to the economy, achieved, in part, through the Cultural Destinations Fund programme. Cultural organisations had improved their relationships with local stakeholders such as Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) and Business Improvement Districts (BID). Through these,

4. Case study: The use of digital in project delivery

Introduction

- 4.1** This document sets out the findings of one of four case studies that have been developed as part of SQW's final evaluation of the Cultural Destinations Fund (phase 2). **This case study is focused on the use of digital in project delivery.** This includes the use of 'digital' in developing bookable products and using digital approaches in project delivery, such as online advertising and marketing through social media.

Findings

- 4.2** Overall, 14 out of the 16 projects consulted mentioned some use of digital either as a key component of the project activities, or to enhance project delivery. However, the degree of digital adoption varied between projects, as did the type. The most frequently reported use of digital was with regard to digital marketing, through social media; this was discussed by nine projects and includes training in digital marketing. A few projects used digital innovations to enhance the visitor or audience experience. The following sections discuss each in turn and concludes with a discussion of the challenges and key lessons identified by project leads in using digital.

Use of digital for marketing

“ Social media campaigns were very lucrative in terms of reach and hits and were wide ranging. There were millions of people we were able to reach through those. ”

- 4.3** Digital marketing was used in most of the projects consulted with (9 out of 16) to promote project activities or products. This included the development of content, such as imagery and videos of the local area (Cheshire East Council), and the use of digital marketing to facilitate a joined-up marketing approach. For example, the Bristol and Bath Cultural Destinations project's work with the Bristol Arts Marketing group⁸ increased cultural organisations' take up of digital partnership marketing and increased collaboration within the sector. The success of the project activities led to the creation of a similar organisation in Bath; now established as Arts Marketing Bath.

⁸ A marketing and engagement professionals' network. It enables marketing professionals in Bristol to network, learn, develop their capacity and knowledge and share it across the sector, and develop city wide initiatives.

4.4 A destination marketing website was used by one project (Lincoln City Centre Partnership) to bring together the local culture and tourism offer. This aimed to improve alignment across the sectors and to promote new itineraries. Other projects, including Coventry City of Culture, Nottingham Contemporary, Look Sideways: East and Marketing Manchester, utilised an existing website to create a new ‘what’s on’ web page, including both culture and tourism activities. These projects aimed to develop a central source of information for visitors regarding places to visit and cultural activities available in the area. Consultees noted that this activity increased the exposure of the culture sector and increased the alignment of the cultural and visitor offer. Cheshire East Council used an existing website but created a microsite with itineraries and event listings.

4.5 The use of social media was very common and was found to be highly effective. For example:

- Birmingham made use of the targeted advertising function on social media platforms (e.g. Facebook) to target audiences in Leeds for their Supersonic music festival. The festival content was considered to be quite niche and the project was aware that there was a potential audience for this in Leeds. This approach was considered to be particularly effective, as the postcode data collected from the festival showed higher levels of attendance from Leeds residents.
- The ‘My Stoke Story’ social media campaign, used in the Stoke-on-Trent Cultural Destinations Partnership project, was positively received by cultural organisations within the partnership, and more widely in the area. The campaign comprised of a large-scale public engagement activity that invited visitors to share their experiences on Instagram and Twitter. As a result of the campaign’s success, the project partners made changes to their planned marketing activities to deliver a longer-term social media campaign.

4.6 A number of projects focused on building digital capacity among the cultural organisations to increase their use of digital marketing. Three projects (Coventry City of Culture, Halifax Culture Hub and Wakefield Cultural Consortium) conducted a digital audit of their partner organisations, led by Creative Tourist.⁹ This aimed to understand the online presence and capabilities of their partner organisations to better identify their training needs. Based on the findings from the audit, a series of training workshops were conducted with partners targeting the specific themes that were identified as areas for improvement. Examples of the training themes include: website development, creating video content, copywriting, search engine optimisation and using social media platforms, such as Instagram. Halifax Culture Hub highlighted that a follow-on report conducted by Creative Tourist one year following the delivery of the training found that significant progress had been achieved in their partners’ digital capabilities.

⁹ Creative Tourist are a creative consultancy that work with cultural places and brands to develop their future vision/strategy.

4.7 Many projects recognised the importance of digital marketing for cultural organisations and four projects (Birmingham, Stoke-on-Trent Cultural Destinations Partnership, Bristol and Bath Cultural Destinations and Halifax Culture Hub) delivered training to their cultural partners on how to access free online services:

- Three projects delivered training on how to access advertising services through Google Ad Grants. This provides organisations with charitable status to access up to £10,000 in free advertising per month, subject to meeting certain conditions. Four partners from the Halifax Culture Hub took advantage of this service following the training received. The potential marketing impact/ reach was considered to be significant for the cultural organisations, particularly *“in relation to their scale”*.
- One project organised a workshop with Airbnb¹⁰ which upskilled partners on Airbnb Experiences and the benefits that could be accessed by cultural organisations with charitable status; for example, charitable organisations do not have to pay commission to Airbnb for bookings.

“The project drove pioneering work within the cultural consortium on digital analysis, up-skilling and engagement.”

The use of digital to create products to enhance the visitor experience

4.8 Projects used digital and technology to enhance their products and events in innovative ways. For example:

- The Islands’ Partnership project developed a creative technology project called ‘Walking Stories’ which was delivered online. This consists of a series of walks hosted by acclaimed authors who have used their knowledge of Scilly to write short stories about the inhabited islands. Visitors are invited to listen to the stories (available on the Visit Isles of Scilly website¹¹) and listen to them as they follow the routes of the story. Walking stories have also been collated into a book.
- The Nottingham Contemporary project worked with [V21 Artspace](#) to produce a virtual reality (VR) enhanced exhibition of displays in the Nottingham Contemporary gallery to increase the accessibility of the exhibition. This was considered to be a success and, as a result, the project has worked with V21 Artspace on all of their subsequent exhibitions to produce VR versions. This helped in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak as the exhibitions continued to be accessible even when the gallery was closed.

¹⁰ Airbnb is an online company that offers holiday accommodation or tourism experiences. The company does not own any of the real estate listings, nor does it host events. It acts as a broker, receiving commissions from each booking.

¹¹ <https://www.visitislesofscilly.com/experience/things-to-do/arts-and-culture/walking-stories>

- In the Birmingham project, augmented reality was used to project images/ videos of the men making coracles in the original shed that was used to make coracles at Ironbridge (Telford).
- Due to delays in obtaining approval for physical street signs, the Coventry City of Culture project instead invested in iPads as part of their ‘Take Two’ campaign, a campaign focused on encouraging visitors to Coventry to visit at least two cultural attractions rather than only one. The iPads, which were fixed to walls or areas within popular local attractions, replaced the street signs that were originally intended to direct visitors to other nearby attractions by displaying videos filmed with local actors and filmmakers. This aimed to direct visitors to other well-known attractions nearby, letting them know where these were located and raising awareness of why they should visit them.
- As part of their legacy work, Islands’ Partnership discussed several creative technology projects they were developing. This included a ‘WAVE’ initiative, alongside Falmouth University, which would use innovative technologies such as VR headsets to identify locations where shipwrecks had taken place around the islands and enable visitors to hear the stories behind them.

“ Organisations are now more able to move elements of their offer onto a digital platform. ”

- 4.9** Consultees said that as a result of using digital to enhance cultural products and events in project delivery, cultural organisations’ capacity, willingness and confidence to use digital technology had increased.

Challenges and key learning

- 4.10** The benefits of using digital in project delivery were recognised and described by consultees. However, several challenges were also discussed in relation to using digital, including:
- engagement of cultural organisations’ in digital training and capacity building
 - using new technologies in product development
 - implementing new systems, such as websites and booking systems.
- 4.11** Several projects described difficulties initially in engaging cultural organisations to participate in digital training opportunities. The reason for this was twofold: firstly, cultural organisations were reluctant to dedicate time and resources to undergo training due to a lack of capacity. Secondly, there was a lack of awareness among some organisations of the value of digital and the opportunities this offers. This meant that projects invested more time than they had anticipated in promoting the training and recruiting attendees.

4.12 The use of new technologies in the development of new, innovative products did not always deliver the benefits that were expected for some projects. For example:

- Nottingham Contemporary invested notable resources in developing a mobile application that was designed to provide information about what was on in the area. However, on reflection the project lead described that it did not offer any added value or real benefit to the user; in some cases, it added more of a barrier between the audience and the exhibition.
- England's Creative Coast created a treasure trail along the South East coast which used Geocaching to enable visitors to find and unlock cultural experiences which connect to new art works. The Geocaching component of this has been difficult for some cultural partners to understand, as the project lead described "*it is an added tool to use and some have struggled to grapple with it at some points – you have got cultural organisations and then gamers and it is two different worlds coming together*".

“ It took a while to get the project partners to understand why they needed to invest in digital capacity and how to utilise and build on that investment to become more engaged in digital. ”

4.13 Challenges were also described by projects in the development and implementation of new systems, including websites and booking systems. This is mainly in relation to the amount of time and resource required to develop and implement such systems. Two consortium projects noted they had experienced delays in the launch of new websites. For example, the Wakefield Cultural Consortium experienced delays because of issues in securing agreement from project partners on the nature and content of the site. Look Sideways: East also experienced delays in the delivery of the website which were due to several issues relating to the availability of information for the site and a lack of resource resulting from the national lockdown associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.14 The Halifax Culture Hub project had planned to develop and implement a shared booking system for cultural organisations in Calderdale to better align the cultural offer and to enable visitors to book attractions through one website. However, the project has been put on hold due to difficulties agreeing suitable management and governance arrangements and realisation about the level of resource required to coordinate and implement such a system.



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About us

SQW Group

SQW and Oxford Innovation are part of SQW Group.

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SQW

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