

Rachel Blanche



Queen Margaret University

EDINBURGH

**Embedding quality  
insights from  
participatory arts  
into Arts & Health  
commissioning**

# What I'd like to share today

= insights from participatory arts sector on quality & commissioning

New opportunities for commissioned arts are a great development for the sector!

...but it's important that commissioning supports artists in delivering their highest quality work with and for beneficiaries

Recent evidence highlights **weaknesses in procurement processes & partnerships**, affecting quality. Luckily these also suggest what's needed to enhance next practice

# Where these insights come from:

Unprecedented coverage and engagement of sector across whole UK

Artworks UK initiative

My parallel research for Creative Scotland

Investigating broad concepts of quality and how best to foster it

Major arts-in-healthcare pathfinder programme, concluded last year

England's Cultural Commissioning Programme

# Artworks: Quality Features

- *Inspiring and engaging*
- *Participant-centred*
- *Purposeful, hands-on*
- *Progression for participants*
- *Ownership for participants*
- *Suitably situated and safe*

Participant outcomes hinge on quality & authenticity of their experience

'Global' laws tell us that quality features can only be designed in at outset

(Chartered Quality Institute)

For participatory arts this means focusing on what supports the best participant experience/outcomes and *building in* those elements ...

This has obvious significance for Tendering & Conception

## Another global 'truth':

The only part of quality that can be actively managed is **ensuring conditions are in place** for it to occur...

And then making sure that **subsequent processes don't 'degrade' them**

(Marino 2007)

Artworks data reveals what artists believe are essential conditions for quality ... and that they are often missing

# Essential conditions for quality occur only 'sometimes' or 'rarely'

## Occurs Frequently

- JOINT PLANNING or DEVELOPMENT (57%)
- CREATIVE INPUT TO BRIEF (48%)
- FEELING PROFESSIONALLY VALUED (35%)

## Only Sometimes

- BUY-IN AND TRUST (70%)
- TIME TO BUILD RELATIONS (61%)
- REALISTIC PARTICIPANT #'S (61%)
- REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS (56.5%)
- CLEAR CONTRACT (52%)
- REFLECTION TIME (43%)
- UNDERSTANDING OF BENEFIT (65%)

## Happens Rarely

- ADEQUATE RESOURCES (52%)
- REFLECTION TIME (48%)
- REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS (30.5%)
- TIME TO BUILD RELATIONS (28%)
- REALISTIC PARTICIPANT #'S (22%)

*Frequency of essential quality conditions, from artists' viewpoint*

Reported by percentage (%) of artists

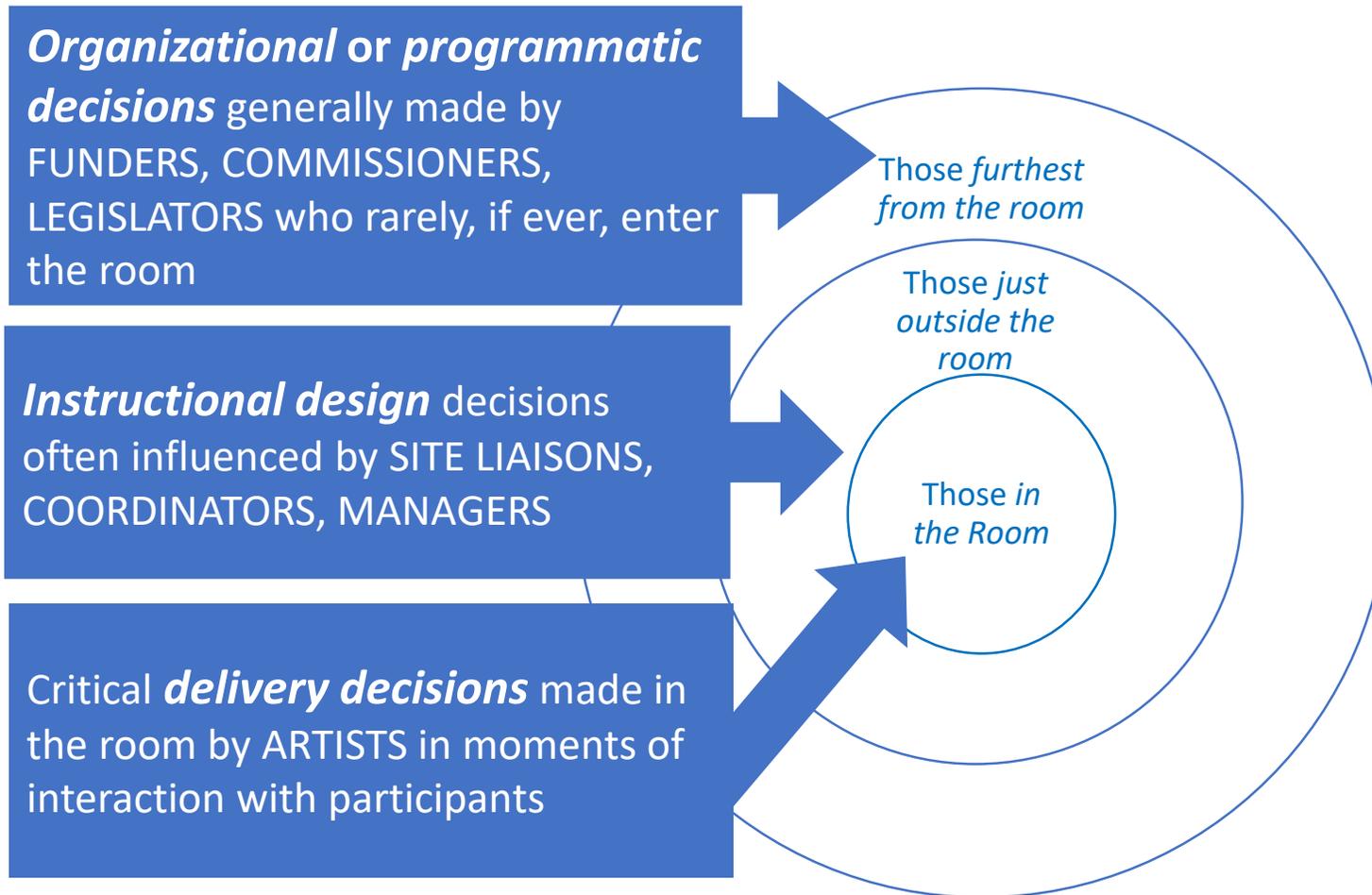


Why does this  
happen?

• **Quality often isn't within full control of the artist** commissioned to deliver the activity or project...

Many **preconditions are in the power of external partners** or stakeholders who are not there on the day 'in the room' with beneficiaries

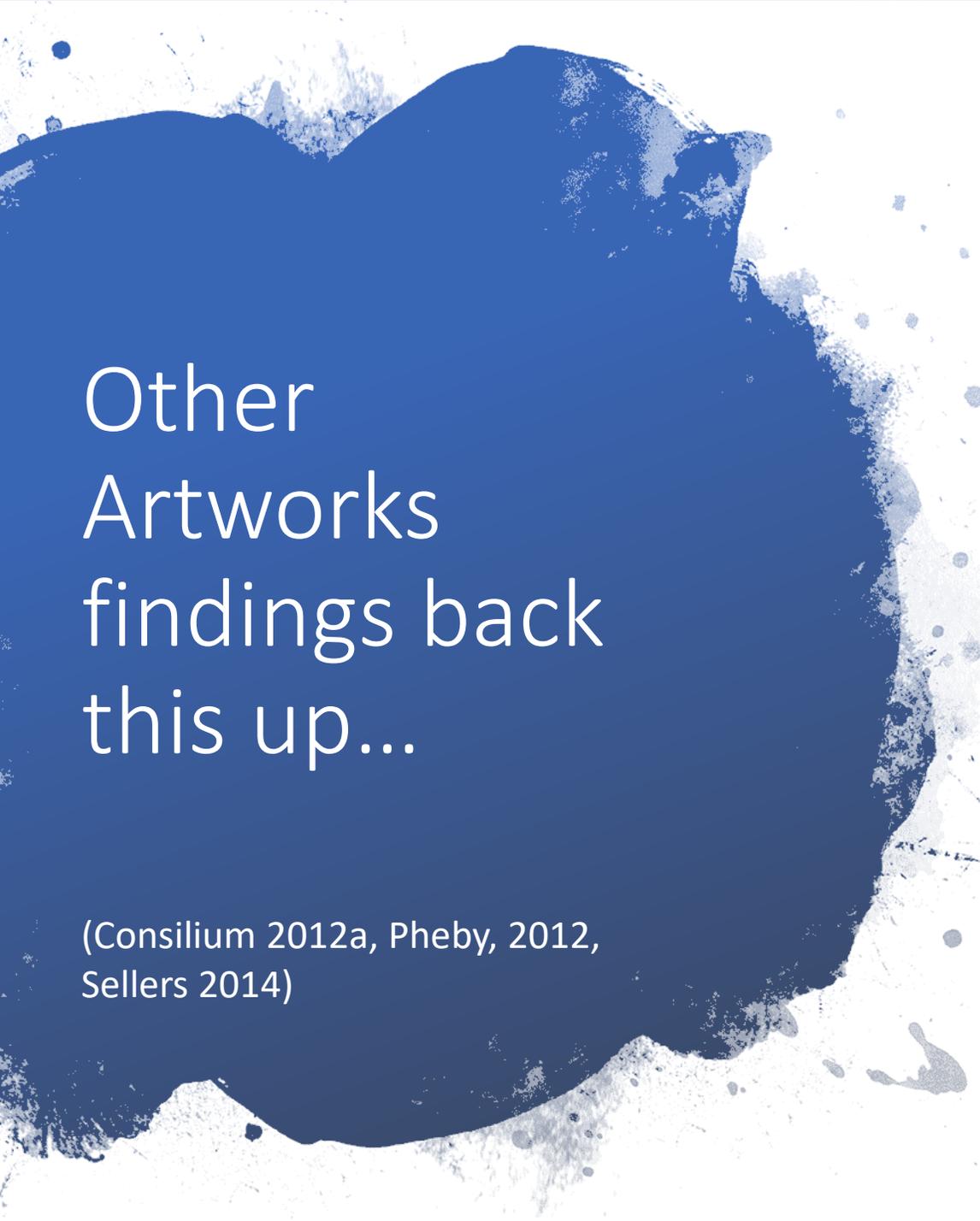
i.e. participant recruitment, facilities, resource



Arts education evidence from USA reveals how **decision-makers “outside the room” have powerful influences on the likelihood that those in the room will have a high quality experience**

Therefore *mutual understanding* between partners is vital and those with influence to fulfil conditions must be brought into dialogue on quality

(Seidel et al 2010)



# Other Artworks findings back this up...

(Consilium 2012a, Pheby, 2012,  
Sellers 2014)

Research capturing artist experiences with partners reports decisionmakers:

- influencing outcomes in ways that practitioners find unsatisfactory
- enforcing unsuitable content control

Consultations in Scotland highlight:

- under-developed relationships
- unrealistic expectations of work
- absence of a common language

# Cultural Commissioning Programme report suggests such issues persist specifically

**Gaps in contracting practice** from both the artist and commissioner sides

Artists lacking experience / expertise in **negotiating service contracts**

Commissioners **limiting scope of arts work by predetermining service parameters** in tenders

... observing that “existing systems are often not fit for purpose”

(NEF 2016)

# What does this mean for arts & health commissioning?

Our commissioning and contracting process is when partnerships are forged and discussions had about the work and what it will achieve. This is when quality features need to be identified and built in.

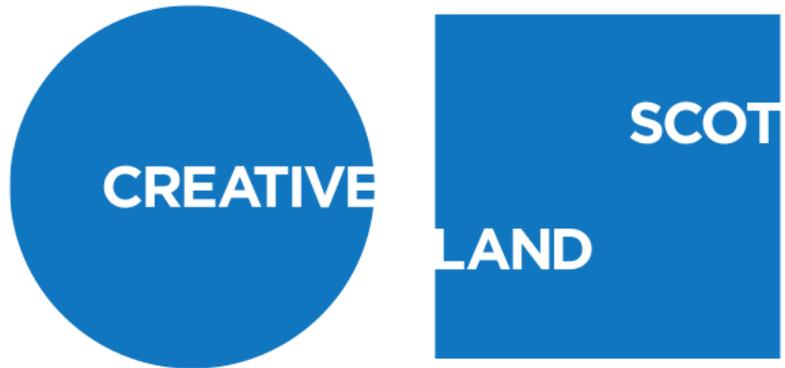
How do we want the project to look and feel for the beneficiaries?

What conditions need to be in place for this desired quality to happen, and how will these conditions be provided for?

How will we know that we've achieved this ideal?

Given the influence of those decision-makers outside the room, **being on the same page on these questions** across the circles is crucial

# Tools for inspired partnerships?



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL

- These insights & dynamics sit at heart of Arts Council Wales' and Creative Scotland's new quality frameworks.
- Scotland's **Is this the Best it can be?** toolkit aids discussion for early planning and design. Artists can use it with partners commissioning or hosting work.
- In 2017 Creative Scotland funded **pilot projects with artists and their non-arts partners** to explore a more engaged partnership approach using the toolkit →

# Artist-partner case studies reported:

Overall enhanced project outcomes & partner relationships

Opportunities for dialogue that didn't exist before

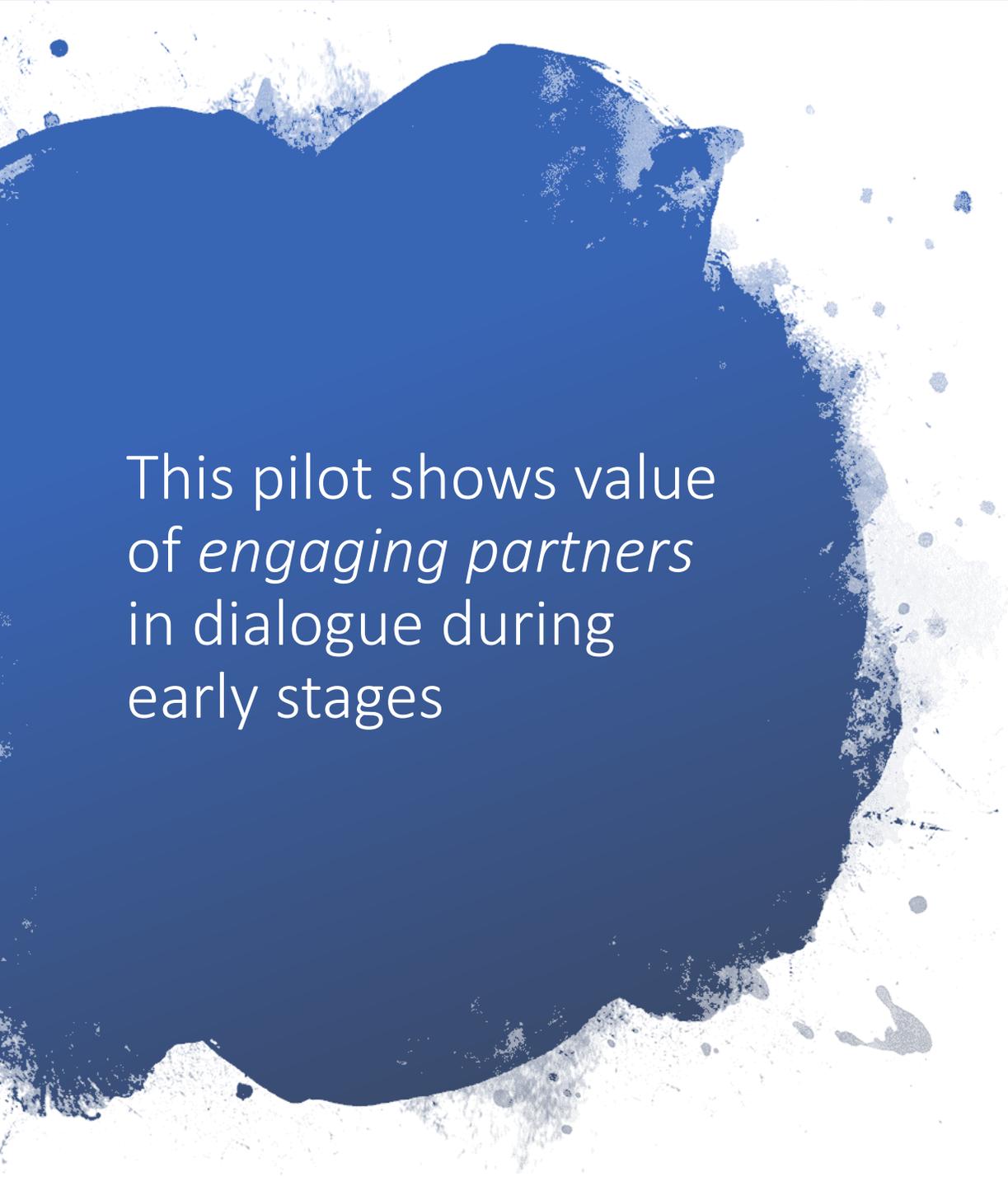
Enhanced mutual understanding

“Neutral ground” for “conversations on a level playing field”

“A safe, open platform to raise concerns in the first stages of new partnerships.”

... **Thereby enhancing communication across the ‘circles’**

“A translation matrix to marry and make sense of partners’ divergent aims”



This pilot shows value  
of *engaging partners*  
in dialogue during  
early stages

By...

- Investing time in **project conception** with partners, placing participant needs at the centre
- Developing **realistic understanding** of desired quality and how to achieve it *together*
- Identifying and **facilitating quality features** from the start

1. Recognising **role of others beyond the artist for quality** - particularly in facilitating quality conditions needed

2. Acknowledging that **roots of quality lie in Conception and Contracting** – emphasising engaged partnership in early commissioning stages

Wrapping up

Two key insights arise from all this

# Opportunities

**OUTCOMES-BASED PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY** and talk of **RESULTS-BASED PAYMENT** → now is an important moment to ensure commissioning systems are **designed to foster quality**

We and our partners all desire for our work to be as good as it can be, to represent the **OPTIMUM INVESTMENT of our time, money and effort** → If partners work together to identify and fulfil conditions for quality, the chances of achieving it increase

Quality is not static but allows **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT** → with inspired 'partnerships for quality' we might continually raise the bar for what is achieved and achievable

Paul Hamlyn  
Foundation

Art Works | Developing  
Practice in  
Participatory  
Settings

## Find out more

Look me up at QMU to access papers  
OR email [rblanche@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:rblanche@qmu.ac.uk)



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EDINBURGH

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Insights for employers, commissioners  
and funders in facilitating quality  
impacts through participatory arts

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Download this BRIEFING  
PAPER online  
(Rachel Blanche,  
November 2014)



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## Links to further reporting & toolkits

- Arts Management Quality article [Redefining notions of quality in participatory arts](#)
- NCVO blog piece, [Embedding quality in your commissioning practice](#)
- [Insights for employers, commissioners and funders](#) – short briefing paper
- [Developing a Foundation for Quality](#) – full report with extensive data
  
- [Is This the Best it Can Be?](#) toolkit, Creative Scotland
- [Quality Principles for Wales](#), Artworks Cymru/Arts Council Wales