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Impacts 08 (2009) – *Liverpool's Arts Sector – Sustainability and Experience*



# Liverpool's Arts Sector – Sustainability and Experience:

how artists and arts organisations engaged with the  
Liverpool European Capital of Culture

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## Executive summary

This report is based on research which explores the perceptions of individual artists and creative practitioners, and also of arts and cultural organisations based in Liverpool, working in the city, the sub-region and beyond. The research sought the views of participants on their experiences of Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2008 and explored issues of sustainability in the context of such an intervention. The key findings of this research are set out below.

A number of clear messages from respondents emerged from this research, which may have particular relevance to those engaged in developing cultural policy and strategy, and which suggest key themes for consideration in order to provide an environment which nurtures artistic and creative practice in Liverpool in the future.

- The Liverpool ECoC was viewed as a success in terms of raising the profile of the city, the profile of the arts and cultural offer of the city, and bringing visitors and the local population in to enjoy this offer.
- There was also great pride in the fact that participants, particularly arts organisations, had been able to bring in and work with international artists and companies during 2008 because of the additional funding made available for programming the year.
- There was concern about the use of 'external' contractors to deliver some work during the Liverpool ECoC which locally-based artists felt they could deliver themselves.
- Over four fifths of artists responding to the survey have picked up work which was directly or indirectly attributable to the Liverpool ECoC, with more than two fifths attributing more than a quarter of their work in the previously twelve months to the Liverpool ECoC.
- Improved networking across the sector, for both artists and arts organisations, was generally seen as one of the positive outcomes of the Liverpool ECoC.
- There were some criticisms of the way funding, commissioning and tendering processes were handled as part of the Liverpool ECoC, and desire for greater clarity in the future, within the context of a more explicitly strategic approach; following the new post-2008 grants process from Liverpool City Council there was, however, praise from some participants concerning the improvement in approach. It is important to note that there was something of a polarisation of opinion regarding the performance of Liverpool Culture Company, depending on the individual/organisational experience of the Liverpool ECoC and often, though not exclusively, related to success or failure in bidding processes.
- There was a clear tension between the temporary nature of an intervention like the Liverpool ECoC and the infrastructural investment that many individuals and organisations felt they needed for long-term sustainability.
- Future investment – whether project-based or revenue-based, and from a range of potential sources - was a preoccupation for all participants, particularly in the current economic context.

### Important note on citation:

Note this report is not to be quoted or summarised without reference to Impacts 08: The Liverpool Model – European Capital of Culture Research Programme. Suggested reference format: Impacts 08 (2009). *Liverpool Arts Sector, Sustainability and Experience: how artists and arts organisations engaged with European Capital of Culture 2008*. Liverpool, UK: Impacts 08 [online <http://www.liv.ac.uk/impacts08/Publications/projectreports.htm>]

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## 1. Research aims and methods

### 1.1. Introduction

This report has been produced as part of Impacts 08's exploration of the 'Vibrancy of the cultural system' in Liverpool and the sub-region. It sits alongside work which has explicitly looked at the creative industries in the sub-region. This project has sought the views and experiences of individuals and organisations who work within the maintained or subsidised part of the cultural system, and whose experience is often predicated, at least to some extent, on the availability of public funding and the decision-making process around it. Whilst there are potential overlaps in the categories of participant in this report and the research into the creative industries which has been undertaken by Merseyside ACME<sup>1</sup> and Burns Collett<sup>2</sup>, efforts have been made to separate participants and contributors to ensure that the view from the creative industries will be a reflection, broadly speaking, of 'commercial' enterprises, whereas this report concentrates on those individuals and organisations who are in some part dependent on public subsidy.

In addition, this report contains reflections on the Liverpool ECoC, and particularly on the management process leading up to and including the event year. The 'Philosophy and management of the process' of the Liverpool ECoC is a separate thematic cluster within the Impacts 08's programme,<sup>3</sup> and so the project includes some qualitative data which may be important for consideration within the context of this other area of research and which offers a coherent, though not unmixed, response of one sector to the questions within this theme.

### 1.2. Aims

The first part of this report explores the experiences of individual artists and creative practitioners during Liverpool's year as ECoC. It looks at how visual artists, musicians, actors, film makers, designers and other creative practitioners were affected by the Liverpool 08 programme, and explores their views of how the Liverpool ECoC has affected their future prospects. Specifically, the research investigated:

- the profile of the sub-sector of artists and creative practitioners in Merseyside;
- how the sub-sector was affected by the Liverpool ECoC;
- to what extent artists and creative practitioners were provided with opportunities to engage with the Liverpool ECoC;
- what was the artists' and practitioners' experience of developing their practice in Liverpool during 2008;
- how the Liverpool ECoC impacted on the sustainability and viability of individual practitioners;
- how the presence of large arts organisations in the city supported or otherwise affected individual artists and practitioners;
- what expectations artists and creative practitioners had in relation to the future of their practice, working within Liverpool and the sub-region.

The second part of this report studies the experiences and reflections of arts and cultural organisations based within Liverpool, focussing on six case studies of organisations of different sizes, working in different art forms. The research aimed to identify factors which affected arts organisations' capacity to sustain themselves, especially within the following areas:

- management, administration and governance;

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<sup>1</sup> Merseyside ACME is the body which exists to support and develop the creative industries sector on Merseyside. It has recently moved to be hosted by Liverpool Vision, the city's economic development company.

<sup>2</sup> Burns Collett is a research and project management consultancy; Marc Collett has been a key adviser for Impacts 08 on all the work which has been undertaken on creative industries, and works regularly with Merseyside ACME.

<sup>3</sup> See: [http://www.liv.ac.uk/impacts08/Findings/Philosophy\\_%26\\_Management.htm](http://www.liv.ac.uk/impacts08/Findings/Philosophy_%26_Management.htm)

- funding and income streams;
- local, regional and national policy agendas;
- networks and partnerships;
- marketing, publicity and PR activities;
- external and internal perceptions of Liverpool (particularly of culture in Liverpool);
- the potential impacts of the Liverpool ECoC on the development and sustainability of their organisation.

### 1.3. Methodology

#### 1.3.1. Gaining responses from artists and creative practitioners

Two methods were used for gaining responses from artists and creative practitioners. Data was collected from an online survey completed by 39 artists and creative practitioners, and this was supported by information provided through two more detailed case studies. Whilst much of the analysis which follows is presented in a quantitative form, the total number of respondents meant that it should be emphasised that these numbers are not statistically rigorous. They should rather be viewed as qualitative results expressed in quantitative form.

The survey was open from October 2008 to March 2009, seeking to capture responses towards, or after, the completion of the Liverpool ECoC. A link to the online survey was distributed via a range of networks for creative professionals, artists and community practitioners including 08 Business Connect, Small and Medium Arts Collective (SMAC), Liverpool Community Network's Arts and Culture Network (ACN), and via a number of informal Facebook groups for Liverpool and sub-regionally based artists and practitioners.<sup>4</sup>

The survey asked for responses from 'artists, musicians, designers, actors, or any other type of creative professional', specifying that they should be 'working freelance or running a business with less than five employees'. This definition enabled us to reach a group for this study which is distinct from that surveyed in the Impacts 08 research which looks at the impact of ECoC 2008 on the creative industries sector on Merseyside<sup>5</sup>. It also enabled us to exclude small arts organisations which function as charities with a board or similar governance structure, rather than as small businesses or collectives, and who are covered within the separate work on case studies of arts organisations (see section 3).

The illustrative examples and quotes which inform this report, as well as being taken from the survey responses, are based on two case studies as part of the eight case studies looking at sustainability in the arts sector. The two case studies included in this portion of the report are:

- Hannah Peel, a freelance musician, musical director, composer and teacher
- The Royal Standard, an artists' studio based on a small industrial estate on the outskirts of Liverpool City Centre, which houses 26 artists, many early in their careers. The organisation, or collective, is led by six directors, all of whom are also tenants. This case study focused on the experiences of individual artists based within the building, rather than the experience of the organisation.

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<sup>4</sup> Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium (LARC) were not contacted for the online survey, as responses were explicitly being sought from individuals and the LARC network constitutes the eight larger, maintained cultural organisations in Liverpool.

<sup>5</sup> Given the possibility for some cross-over between participants responding to this survey and participants who might be involved in the creative industries work undertaken by Merseyside ACME and Burns Collett, explicit questions were placed early on in the survey to attempt to avoid duplication, but also to ensure that small, non-commercial enterprises or collectives were not omitted from both projects. The results of the ACME and Burns Collett work are published in a separate Impacts 08 report, *Liverpool's Creative Industries: Understanding the impact of Liverpool European Capital of Culture 2008 on the city region's creative industries*, Impacts 08 (2009).

### 1.3.2. Responses from arts and cultural organisations

Six further case studies were undertaken with arts and cultural organisations based in the city of Liverpool. Organisations were selected to give a variety of:

- Regularly Funded Organisations (RFOs) and non-RFOs, at both local authority (Liverpool City Council) and regional level (Arts Council England, North West)
- Organisations who had received different kinds of funding from Liverpool Culture Company<sup>6</sup> under the ECoC 2008 programme, including some who had been unsuccessful in applying for some kinds of funding
- Arts or cultural forms
- Sizes
- Audiences/visitors/participants/beneficiaries
- Willingness to engage and offer senior staff time/time from board members

Each case study was undertaken with a minimum of one in-depth one-to-one interview with a senior member of staff or board member from the organisation; most of the case studies involved two or more of such interviews. Additional information was sought to support these interviews and for background reference. This information came from financial and annual reports, business plans, evaluation documents and other statements of purpose or mission.

## 2. ECoC 2008: the experience of artists and creative practitioners

### 2.1. Profile of survey respondents

More respondents to the survey worked in the visual arts than in any other media. 19 respondents, out of a total of 38, placed themselves in this category, with another three in crafts, and one designer. In contrast, 12 (about a third) worked in the performing arts in some form, across the categories of 'film and video', 'music', 'performing arts', and 'television and radio'. There was one respondent in each of the categories of 'advertising' and 'publishing', and one 'other'. Of our survey respondents, almost half (18) were combining full or part time employment with creative freelance work, while a further three were employed and seeking to develop a creative business. 15 were self-employed; of these, two ran a business with less than five employees, while the remaining 13 operated as sole traders.

Respondents were asked to describe their job and artform and the responses suggest that many artists had portfolio careers, developing and using a diverse skill set in order to capitalise on opportunities and support themselves:

'Artist and curator'

'Educator, artist, project manager, mainly digital media'

'I act, run drama workshops and design/make theatrical costumes'

'Poet, writer and editor'

'I'm a painter with some design experience, currently gaining classroom experience in preparation for a teacher training course'

'Videographer/designer/creative workshopper'

<sup>6</sup> The Liverpool Culture Company, set up by Liverpool City Council, was the body in charge of delivering ECoC 2008.

Hannah Peel, one individual who was interviewed as a case study, described her work as follows:

‘I’m getting more and more paid work now as a musician, and more opportunities. But my main income still comes from teaching.’

Jemma Egan, a Director of and Artist based at the Royal Standard spoke particularly about the balance of artistic and non-artistic work:

‘I don’t think there are any of us who are managing to survive solely on what we make from our own artistic work. We’ve got part time jobs in bars and shops, there are exhibition technicians, some of us teach and we deliver workshops in schools and on community arts projects.’

Of 37 respondents who specified their location, around two-thirds (26) were based in Liverpool, with four in Wirral, three in Knowsley, one in Halton and one in St Helens. A further two respondents were working in the North West, based outside Merseyside. This ‘over-representation’ of Liverpool based artists reflects the distribution pattern of the survey through Liverpool based networks; it may also suggest a concentration of creative practice within Liverpool as the city within the sub-regional area.

## 2.2. Perceptions of the impacts of the Liverpool ECoC

Artists were asked what the impact of the Liverpool ECoC had been on their business since January 2008. Respondents consistently identified similar positive impacts of the Liverpool ECoC to each other. These were:

- the increased press coverage and the raised national and international profile of Liverpool's cultural scene;
- the growth in local enthusiasm for and interest in the arts, and higher numbers of visitors to the city, which translated into a growth in audiences;
- the positive attitude, energy and creativity of artists themselves in contributing to the Liverpool ECoC and making things happen, and development of local artists' networks;
- the increased investment resulting in new projects and commissions.

Similarly consistent negative impacts were described by most respondents, and can be summarised as:

- an emphasis on the development of major projects and events, which did not result in opportunities for small providers;
- Liverpool Culture Company's focus on delivering a major events programme rather than improving the infrastructure for the arts in the city;
- the failure by survey respondents to secure grant funding;
- a more limited availability of free advertising space compared to previous years;
- the perceived lack of opportunities to apply for commissions – “there were no commissions to apply for and those that existed were hard to find”<sup>7</sup>

Many of the described negative impacts can be summarised as part of the same perception which emerges clearly from many survey responses: the feeling of many locally based artists that as independent practitioners or small organisations they were excluded from the Liverpool ECoC, and their participation in the programme of activity for the year was not facilitated.

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<sup>7</sup> NB: What is being referred to here as ‘commissions’ refers to opportunities for individual artists to receive a commission to create a piece of work, rather than to the formal ‘Commissions’ funding programme of Liverpool Culture Company as part of the Liverpool ECoC.

### 2.3. Impacts on business development and growth

The survey asked respondents to estimate what percentage of their work over the last twelve months had been for clients based locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. 64% of commissioned work had come from Merseyside based clients, with a further 16% coming from clients based elsewhere in the North West, and 12% from the rest of the UK. 8% of work was commissioned from international clients. Responses suggested that the climate for artists throughout 2008 had been robust, despite the global economic downturn and credit crunch, with half of respondents stating that their business had grown in the previous twelve months and a further third whose level had stayed the same.

Hannah Peel stated that:

‘I would say that in 2007 most of my work was outside the North West and in 2008 most of my work was in Liverpool.’

Over half (18) of respondents felt that the Liverpool ECoC had a positive impact on their business in the past twelve months, while a further 13 did not perceive either a positive or negative impact. Only 2 respondents felt that the Liverpool ECoC had impacted negatively on their business.

Where artists did identify growth in their business, various significant factors were cited, which can be categorised as follows:

- the increased interest in the Liverpool arts scene resulting in bigger audiences, more events and positive word of mouth;
- the increased demand for workshops in community and schools projects;
- work which was generated directly by Liverpool Culture Company and the delivery of the Liverpool 08-branded events programme;
- the reopening of the Bluecoat<sup>8</sup>;
- an improvement in artists' own skills in applying for funding and commissions and marketing their work.

However the survey respondents also identified a range of perceived barriers to success and growth prior to, and during, 2008:

- the availability of free cultural provision from some providers, mostly larger ones, made schools reluctant to commission any creative projects that they had to pay for, with a resulting impact on small companies reliant on fees from schools for income generation;
- the limited opportunities for local artists, particularly those from black and ethnic minority groups, and the perceived 'importing' of practitioners from outside the city;
- the perception that Liverpool Culture Company favoured particular providers and that processes for tendering and seeking commissions lacked transparency;
- some increased competition in the city, not necessarily related to the Liverpool ECoC, felt by some respondents – “too many companies fighting over underpaid pitches”;
- the global economic downturn and credit crunch (mentioned by a minority).

When asked to look back over the last five years (since the ECoC 2008 award to Liverpool was announced), a marginally less positive picture emerges, with those claiming a positive impact on their business from Liverpool's designation as ECoC 2008 over those five years – from winning the bid to delivering the year - dropping a little to just under half of respondents (15). It must be borne in mind, however, that many artists, if they are working at capacity, committed to part time jobs or juggling creative practice and family

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<sup>8</sup> The Bluecoat is an arts centre based in Liverpool City Centre, which was closed for a period of refurbishment from 2005 and reopened in 2008; it is the subject of one of the case studies later in this report, in section 4.6.

responsibilities, are not necessarily in a position to grow their businesses regardless of the opportunities presented, and that these figures may therefore under-represent the potential for development which was offered by the Liverpool ECoC.

The survey asked what percentage of the artists' work in the previous twelve months was directly or indirectly attributable to the Liverpool ECoC. For nearly a fifth of respondents (6), none of their work was related to the Liverpool ECoC. 13 respondents attributed up to a quarter of their work to the Liverpool ECoC, and a further third (10) felt that up to half of their work had been related to the Liverpool ECoC. 3 respondents attributed more than half of their work in the previous twelve months to the Liverpool ECoC.

Taken together, these findings present a mixed picture for artists on Merseyside. Positively, the survey results suggest that artists are not over-reliant on any one source of income, and have a flexible approach and a mix of skills which enhances their employability. The Liverpool ECoC has accounted for some of their growth in recent times, especially in the past year, but for most did not represent their main source of work and opportunities. However the survey does illustrate the precarious nature of this way of working. Many of the respondents are combining part time work with freelance creative practice, a proportion of which has recently come from involvement in the delivery of the Liverpool ECoC. The transition to a post-ECoC funding landscape, combined with the wider economic downturn, may result in hardship for artists on low incomes who could be affected simultaneously by a downturn in the availability of temporary and part time work, in the amount of commercial creative work available, and in opportunities to support delivery of a local cultural programme.

Artists' own analysis of the future of their practice is discussed in section 2.8 below.

#### **2.4. Media coverage and the profile of Liverpool artists<sup>9</sup>**

The survey asked whether respondents felt that the profile of Liverpool's arts and cultural sector had been affected by the Liverpool ECoC, and also whether their own profile had improved.

Over three quarters of respondents (21) agreed that the profile of Liverpool's 'creative sector' had been strengthened by the Liverpool ECoC, a further 6 feeling that it had stayed the same. Respondents were also confident about external perceptions of Liverpool in comparison to other UK cities, with nearly half of respondents believing that 'Liverpool's creative sector is viewed by people outside the city as stronger than other UK cities (outside London)'.

There was a broad consensus that the Liverpool ECoC had a range of positive outcomes for the profile of the city. These included:

- attracting more media attention to the city and to its regeneration;
- more national and specialist arts coverage of events within the Liverpool 08 branded programme;
- improved presence of Liverpool events in regional and national listings;
- showing the city in a better light and addressing some of the negative external perceptions of Liverpool;
- increased opportunities for local artists and performers to be featured in the media;
- developing Liverpool's reputation as a creative city;
- widening external perceptions of the culture of the city beyond the Beatles.

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<sup>9</sup> Impacts 08 has conducted parallel work to assess the attitudes and thematic emphasis of local, national and international media coverage over the last decade and, particularly, since the ECoC 2008 nomination in 2003. Findings and reports are available at: [http://www.liv.ac.uk/impacts08/Findings/Identity%2C\\_Image\\_%26\\_Place.htm](http://www.liv.ac.uk/impacts08/Findings/Identity%2C_Image_%26_Place.htm)

Over half of respondents (15) agreed that the profile of their own work has been strengthened by Liverpool's status as ECoC, with only 2 respondents feeling that their profile had been weakened. This was attributed to a range of factors, including:

- the status of events they have delivered being raised due to their marketing as part of the Liverpool 08 programme.
- opportunities for involvement in bigger projects than they are usually able to work on;
- increased interest of professional peers outside the city in Liverpool artists, leading to increased opportunities for national and international collaboration;
- increased audiences and higher numbers of visitors to the city.

## 2.5. Access to opportunities

Based on responses to the survey, it appears that artists are using a wide range of sources and networks to find out about new opportunities.

The most commonly cited was the Art In Liverpool website, which was described as 'unbeatable locally' for its coverage of the visual arts.<sup>10</sup> Other frequently cited sources included Arts Council England's Arts Jobs mailing list, Hope Street Limited's website ('high calibre and constant communication through the Knowledge Network of Hope Street Limited'), the ACME e-newsletter and Creative Partnerships Merseyside. Two respondents referred to the role of local authority arts officers in Halton and St Helens in sharing information about tenders and opportunities. There were no references to use of the Liverpool 08 or Liverpool City Council websites as potential sources, and indeed the role of Liverpool Culture Company in supporting artists to access opportunities was the subject of much negative criticism within the survey responses, discussed further in section 2.7 below.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, five respondents described how use of social networking sites MySpace, Facebook and Flickr had provided them with a platform from which to network and develop contacts.<sup>12</sup> One respondent said

'Artinliverpool.com is useful for finding out about local calls for submissions, exhibitions etc but still I have to say that the most productive website for me personally has been MySpace....it has given me an opportunity to make contact not only with potential clients but with international artists I may not have known about otherwise.'

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.artinliverpool.com/> The Art In Liverpool website includes Liverpool 'art and culture news', listings of exhibitions, links to information about artists based in the area, a blog including reviews of exhibitions, an amazon.co.uk powered shop and classified advertisements.

<sup>11</sup> Large-scale tenders (as opposed to Grants or the formal 'Commissions' process) as part of the ECoC 2008 were advertised through the Liverpool City Council website; other tenders were advertised through Hope Street Ltd, an arts organisation based in Liverpool. The absence of these sources of information being mentioned broadly supports the findings concerning the perceived lack of information received by individuals and organisations, inasmuch as what is clear is that individuals and organisations were not accessing the information from those sources. It is difficult to say what the reason for this is; it is, perhaps, worth noting at this stage that some of the multiple funding lines run in association with the Liverpool ECoC will largely have been a new experience for both the local authority and the artists and arts organisations, including the formal 'Commissions' process and the opportunity for individual artists to apply for grants directly.

Liverpool Culture Company also set up a practitioner pool of pre-approved artistic contractors. This access route has not been mentioned by any of the participants in this project, but as this project does not include a comprehensive survey of all potential stakeholders within the sector, it is not possible to comment on the sector's experience of this particular initiative.

<sup>12</sup> Additional assessment of the impact of online platforms in the context of ECoC 2008 will be published as a separate Impacts 08 report towards the end of 2009.

## 2.6. 'Horizontal' and 'vertical' networking

Around two-thirds of respondents agreed that networking and information sharing between artists on Merseyside is improving, with a further third stating that levels of networking and information sharing have stayed the same.

The development of networking across the sector was generally seen as one of the positive outcomes of the Liverpool ECoC. Across a number of questions in the survey, respondents made reference to having been able to develop new contacts, to improve their local, national and international networks and to capitalise on opportunities. One respondent said:

'I have really felt the benefit of being based in Liverpool, and the creative opportunities Liverpool's Capital of Culture Year has brought. After working in Manchester for four years, Liverpool feels more open artistically, and I have found the high level of fine art practice here, the number of studio groups and collectives and independent gallery spaces inspiring. All of these factors have contributed to me gaining great creative opportunities as a young emergent curator.'

The benefits of this 'horizontal' networking between artists and practitioners, especially in the visual arts, were also reflected on by the experiences of artists within The Royal Standard, who described a positive atmosphere in the Liverpool art scene. Penny Whitehead, a Director of and artist based at The Royal Standard stated that:

'Everyone attends each other's openings and shows and it's not as bitchy and competitive as elsewhere.'

In the music sector, Hannah Peel had also been able to develop networks and contacts through the year, and felt she had been supported by improved networking in the local live music scene:

'There are lots of new bands and musicians around and the music scene seems refreshed.'

There appears also to be effective 'vertical' networking in the arts in Liverpool, between independent artists and small businesses and larger arts organisations. The Royal Standard as an emergent new studio and venue has been able to coincide their opening with the launch of the Liverpool Biennial, and work by The Royal Standard studio members has been included in the Bluecoat's Autumn 2008 show, *Made in Liverpool*. Two survey respondents had studio space in the Bluecoat and described how this has influenced their development:

'I have benefited from being selected to have a studio in the Bluecoat, and have undertaken several workshop projects with young people with the Participation team there as a result.'

'I moved into a studio at the Bluecoat, giving me direct access to more participation work with them. At the same time I have developed a closer relationship with METAL.<sup>13</sup>This has meant that I have had two commissions through them.'

Other survey respondents cited Hope Street Limited, National Museums Liverpool, FACT, Novas Contemporary Urban Centre and Williamson Gallery as larger organisations they had worked in partnership with, or been employed by, during 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Metal was founded by Jude Kelly OBE in 2002 and provides residency space for artists in their two locations, Liverpool and Southend on Sea. The organisation also supports exhibitions, events, performances, discussion and publications.

## 2.7. Experiences of engaging with Liverpool Culture Company

The survey results show a polarisation of opinions between different respondents, depending on their personal experience of the Liverpool ECoC. Some clearly had positive experiences throughout the year, with initial commissions and contacts leading on to further work. For example Hannah Peel, following a successful application through the Liverpool Commissions process to run the Audiovision festival<sup>14</sup>, was then invited to participate in a range of other events managed by the Liverpool Culture Company, performing at the Liverpool ECoC opening show that also served as the opening of the Liverpool Echo Arena, the Transition event that acted as the formal Liverpool ECoC closing show, and participating in the Cities on the Edge project.<sup>15</sup>

One survey respondent described a similar experience:

‘Having worked on a Liverpool Culture Company project in 2006 I developed a reputation for producing high quality projects – this meant that I have been asked on six subsequent occasions to work on similar projects.’

The same respondent did, however, have some criticism to offer concerning the behaviour of repeat commissioning:

‘The last minute nature of appointments means that Liverpool Culture Company are using the same people again and again, when the opportunities could be advertised wider to benefit more of the creative community.’

Three survey respondents expressed frustration, explicitly suggesting that Liverpool Culture Company did not create clear channels of communication with local artists in order to develop, for example, a better understanding of their needs or to offer feedback on unsuccessful funding applications. There was also criticism of the lack of transparency in terms of accessing opportunities to fund projects or to be appointed to short term or freelance opportunities:

‘As a single freelancer I don't think we are on their radar.’

‘I have asked about tenders and email lists at the Culture Company and have never had a reply or been able to get on a relevant email list. I am trying to stay positive about Capital of Culture but in reality have given up on Liverpool for work.’

There were formal routes established by Liverpool Culture Company for feedback/early scoping of funding through specific staff, and advertised through the website. There was also, as has been noted earlier, a formal route to allow ‘Cultural Practitioners’ to register with Liverpool Culture Company to receive information about potential work opportunities. This research does not provide evidence to determine why some artists felt they did not receive suitable feedback or support, or could not access work opportunities. As suggested earlier, it is worth noting at this stage that a number of the approaches to funding and procuring work would have been new, both to staff within Liverpool Culture Company and the local authority, and to artists and practitioners in the city.

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<sup>14</sup> A festival featuring ‘visual installations, live VJ'd music performances, artist screenings, visual workshops and an outdoor bike-in theatre’, held September 2008 at Pier Head, Liverpool.

<sup>15</sup> Cities on the Edge was a partnership of six European cities - Liverpool, Bremen, Gdansk, Istanbul, Marseilles and Naples – brought together for a project in order to ‘explore their roles as historic ports and their sense of themselves as city-states, as islands within their nation’. The programme included ‘explorations, exchanges, debates, conferences, films and publications’.

## 2.8. Post-2008: expectations for the future

Respondents were asked how they felt about the potential for future growth and opportunities for artists and creative practitioners post-2008. None of the respondents claimed to be very positive about the future, but just over half described themselves as quite positive. A fifth of respondents were quite or very negative about future prospects for artists and creative practitioners.

These results suggest some cautious optimism amongst the majority of respondents. Expectations were expressed in a low-key fashion, but all of those who commented on this question intended to continue to develop their practice. Artists felt positive about the benefits of their increased exposure during 2008 and thought that this would support them through 2009. Others were concerned about the potential effects of a reduction in spending on arts and culture in 2009. Several described projects that were continuing, or had new projects in development. When asked about longer-term plans, two artists were considering moving to London, and three were embarking on postgraduate study. Several were looking to build on existing national and international contacts to develop new projects:

'I am at a very early stage in my career. I know I cannot rely on my artwork to bring in enough money to support me, and I have accepted a place on a teacher training course. In the next 3-5 years, whether I stay in Liverpool or move away, I hope to have taken part in more exhibitions and to have my name known, at least among local arts organisations.'

'Maybe not to grow exponentially, but to keep on rolling steadily.'

'Vision to work full time as an artist with an international reach – but still based in Liverpool.'

'I want to continue growing professionally within Liverpool's creative community and hope the city can sustain the energy (whilst the money inevitably dwindles) as this is the most important factor to the continuation of the city's successes this year.'

'To grow steadily, build on reputation and achievements.'

## 3. Experiencing the Liverpool ECoC within arts organisations: overarching findings

### 3.1. Case Study Participants

As explained within the Methodology section, case studies were undertaken with six different organisations:

- Fuse: New Theatre for Young People
- Windows Project
- 20 Stories High
- Arts in Regeneration
- Merseyside Dance Initiative
- The Bluecoat

The choice of case studies tried to ensure a broad variety of profiles in terms of size, age, funding base and art form. The participants include what might be understood within the cultural sector as small, medium and large organisations. Some had staff of as few as two; the largest had a staff list of 38 employees. The oldest organisation was the Bluecoat with a 290-year-old building and a gallery dating back to 1968; the youngest was 20 Stories High, who were founded in Liverpool in 2006.

Two of the organisations had broadly similar backgrounds: Fuse and the Windows Project were both RFOs (regularly funded organisations) of Arts Council England, and had both previously been RFOs with Liverpool

City Council until 2007. Both organisations were founded in the 1970s, within two years of each other, and both were unsuccessful in applying for Commissions funding from Liverpool Culture Company, though they received money through other project pots, commissions and tenders.

Two of the organisations were particularly artist-led in their staffing: the Windows Project whose staff were all writers as well as administrator and workshop-deliverers; and 20 Stories High, whose two directors had previous experience in acting, writing, directing and producing, as well as in leading educational work.

In terms of artforms, the group includes two small theatre companies, Fuse and 20 Stories High; one poetry and literature based organisation, the Windows Project; one cross-art form 'training' organisation, Arts in Regeneration; one dance based organisation, Merseyside Dance Initiative; and one large, venue-based, cross-art form organisation, the Bluecoat.

## 3.2. Factors affecting sustainability

### 3.2.1. Revenue funding

Revenue funding – mostly denoted by whether organisations had RFO status from Arts Council England and/or from Liverpool City Council – was a preoccupation for all the organisations interviewed. In some cases RFO funding made up at least half if not more of their income in any given year, and in most cases it was crucial to ensuring a baseline of overheads, staffing, management and governance which allowed the case study participants to operate as an organisation at all.

For the majority of the organisations in receipt of RFO funding it was clear that, whilst the funding did cover a baseline and ensured a core administrative and artistic unit to be employed and resourced, it often went no further. The major challenge beyond securing RFO status, therefore, was to secure programme funding, for making activity happen and for any kind of research and development activity.

There were significant issues with a number of organisations around changes in RFO funding from Liverpool City Council. Changes in 2006 and 2007 had seen two organisations lose their funding – Fuse and the Windows Project – and one organisation become a new RFO – Arts in Regeneration. All three organisations expressed concern and frustration over the lack of any explicit or transparent decision-making process at this point.

At the time at which the interviews were being undertaken all the organisations were applying to be RFOs, either at 'cultural driver' or at 'cultural contributor' level as part of Liverpool City Council's new arts investment process.<sup>16</sup> Whilst this process caused some concern, particularly around the brevity of the timescale and the extent to which Liverpool Culture Company/Liverpool City Council staff would be available to provide advice to individual organisations, there was also praise for the clarity and openness of the process in the bidding stage.<sup>17</sup>

RFO status was highly prized by all the organisations interviewed, representing financial stability, often allowing a three-year horizon for planning. Organisations without any core funding expressed difficulties

<sup>16</sup> More information about the process is available through the Liverpool City Council's website here: <http://www.liverpool.gov.uk/Images/tcm21-155352.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Interviews were undertaken prior to the outcome of the RFO competition being announced, and so views on the process expressed here reflect only the pre-results experience of organisations. Winners from the process included the Windows Project becoming a cultural contributor (following its previous removal from RFO status), the Bluecoat as a cultural driver, and 20 Stories High and Arts in Regeneration maintaining their RFO statuses as cultural contributors (though Arts in Regeneration's investment was reduced). Fuse failed to gain back RFO status, though subsequently benefited from a substantial project grant in partnership with Merseyside Police, and Merseyside Dance Initiative lost their status after applying at cultural driver level and not being awarded at this level.

around the critical mass of their organisation; it was difficult to source funding which would otherwise support administrative posts and resources, to free up staff for artistic or creative activity, and to balance the time spent speculatively on project funding applications which might not be successful. Lack of core funding also means that many organisations are operating with a minimal core staff and are therefore particularly vulnerable to staff turnover and illness.

### 3.2.2. *Project and programme funding from all sources*

The speculation of time for creating applications for project funding referred to in the previous paragraph was a particular issue for a few of the smaller organisations who were interviewed. Other issues around the process of project funding included the level of bureaucracy which was often attached to funding, and there was a particular criticism of Creative Partnerships<sup>18</sup> funding by one interviewee, who felt that the process of applying for funding was overly bureaucratic for the possible investment which could be received.

Such a judgement suggests a degree of maturity of experience in applying for funding; the capacity to judge whether the bureaucracy surrounding a pot of funding constitutes a proportional response to the investment available or not requires the ability to compare funders and their processes against each other. The consideration for the arts organisation in this case is whether the speculation of staff time towards the completion of the funding application will entail a proportional return on investment for that speculation.

A breadth of project funding was referred to from a variety of sources: local authorities, other statutory partners such as Merseyside Police, 'community' sources, and others. There was also suggestion by some interviewees that organisations were going further afield than previously to find that funding. One referred to the process of learning how to gain project funding which was specifically for outputs and outcomes around the social inclusion agenda; the suggestion was not that the funding itself was new, but that accessing the funding as an arts organisation was.

More broadly, a number of the organisations made references to funding pots which required an explicitly instrumental approach to employing the arts in different settings, and two interviewees from different organisations expressed particularly strong views about the importance of undertaking more such work. Particular areas of instrumental approach which were referenced were social inclusion issues, and health and well-being agendas.

In terms of more explicit reference to the impacts of funding of the Liverpool ECoC, all of the organisations interviewed indicated that they received some funding as part of the additional project and programme monies available. Some had had disappointing experiences in applying for particular pots – the Liverpool Commissions<sup>19</sup> programme of funding had been applied for by at least three of the organisations interviewed, with only one being successful in gaining funding. There was criticism of Liverpool Culture Company's handling of both open funding competitions and more discreet tender/commission appointments, with a number of interviewees expressing dissatisfaction over the perceived lack of clarity and transparency of processes.

In addition to this, there was an issue raised by two of the organisations interviewed about the difficulties of having to compete for project funding wherever it could be found, even if the funding was attached to work

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<sup>18</sup> The national Creative Partnerships model is the Government's flagship creative learning programme, which is intended 'to develop the skills of young people across England, raising their aspirations and equipping them for their futures'. The basis of the model is the development of partnership working between schools and 'creative professionals'. Creative Partnerships Merseyside, now named Curious Minds, is the local delivery body for the programme.

<sup>19</sup> The 'Liverpool Commissions' funding stream from the Liverpool Culture Company was directed at Liverpool and Merseyside-based small and mid-scale arts organisations and artists not receiving programme enhancement support through Liverpool Culture Company's 2008 programme budget. It sought 'exciting, innovative arts projects of international quality'. Applications were made in February and March 2007, with an upper project funding limit of £50,000.

which might not fit within an organisation's artistic or creative vision or approach. 20 Stories High talked about the lure of tender work in order to secure cash flow, but suggested that they had turned down tender opportunities in favour of focusing on work in which they had a greater control over the artistic or creative direction and outputs.

Fuse, following the cessation of their revenue funding from Liverpool City Council, suggested that they had sought and taken on tenders and commissions to fill the funding gap, but that – as the money was often tied to specific project outputs – this situation had placed additional pressure on the small staffing resources of the organisation and diverted attention from the work it wished to undertake. There was some question about what impact undertaking such work might have on the stability and sustainability of the organisation, particularly if this work did not add to or support the organisation's artistic reputation and vision.

Following on from this, some of the organisations who were significantly dependent on project funding regardless of the source, talked about the difficulties of forward-planning where long lead in times for projects – caused by the need to fundraise and match fund each new project individually – made such medium and long-term forward planning impossible. To some extent, it appeared as though project funding was creating cycles of work for organisations, but that progression in terms of artistic and creative production, practice and vision as well as in terms of financial stability and growth of administrative and other capacities could be severely limited by such funding.

### 3.2.3. *Political will, profile and understanding*

All of the organisations talked to some extent about how well arts and culture were 'understood' by policy makers and politicians, and particularly about the relationship between the arts and cultural sector and other sector, agendas and infrastructural players. The raising of the profile of the arts within other sectors and agendas – particularly education, social and community agendas and health and well-being – was considered an area of priority and there was no suggestion or consideration by any of the organisations interviewed that engaging with such agendas, which necessarily cast the use of arts and cultural activity in, at least, a partially instrumental fashion, might deter them from their core activity or purpose.

### 3.2.4. *Networks*

All the organisations referred to their involvement with networks within to the city's arts and cultural sector. The Bluecoat referred to the value of work it was undertaking with the Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium (LARC)<sup>20</sup> and with Visual Arts in Liverpool (VAIL)<sup>21</sup>. Merseyside Dance Initiative expressed some frustration with LARC, as a member of the Small and Medium Arts Collective (SMAC)<sup>22</sup>, and felt that LARC could improve its engagement with some of the larger SMAC partners. This frustration perhaps particularly reflects Merseyside Dance Initiative's place as the only large dance-based organisation in the city, an art-form which is not represented within the members of LARC.

Other SMAC members were Fuse and the Windows Project, who both found the network useful for making contacts. 20 Stories High belonged to the Arts and Culture Network (ACN) of Liverpool Community and Voluntary Services (LCVS) and also found such membership useful to making contacts and receiving

<sup>20</sup> LARC members are: the Bluecoat, FACT, Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse, National Museums Liverpool, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Tate Liverpool and Unity Theatre. The consortium developed significantly from 2006, in the lead up to 2008, and is now in receipt of Arts Council England 'Thrive' funding to support its development further. In addition it has gained funding to support projects around cultural leadership and Creative Apprenticeships, and has led in securing one of the ten national 'Find Your Talent' pathfinder pilots. LARC now has its own web presence at: <http://www.larc.uk.com/>

<sup>21</sup> VAIL is a 'campaign' bringing together the following visual arts organisations: A Foundation, the Bluecoat, FACT, Liverpool Biennial, Metal, National Museums Liverpool, Open Eye Gallery and Tate Liverpool. The campaign has its own web presence at: <http://www.visualartsinliverpool.info/>

<sup>22</sup> SMAC network was set up in 2007 and led by Hope St Ltd. It comprises around 50 small and medium-sized arts organisations from Merseyside. Whilst there is some duplication in membership with the Arts and Culture Network, there is no overlap with LARC members.

information. Arts in Regeneration had been a member of both SMAC and ACN but had dropped out of both because it did not find them useful.

The fact that all interviewed organisations were able to refer to a membership of one of the three arts and culture networks in Liverpool – albeit an abandoned membership in one case – suggests that this is a particular strength in the city, particularly as two of these networks – LARC and SMAC – are effectively run by the member organisations themselves, rather than by a supporting organisation.

Other networks which were referred to were often specific to a particular art-form practice, such as 20 Stories High's involvement in the North West hub for sustainable Black and Minority Ethnic theatre, or with particular parts of the city or sub-regional infrastructure, like Liverpool First's Culture Task Group.<sup>23</sup>

### 3.2.5. *Partnership and interdependence*

Partnerships were seen as important by all the organisations interviewed, and this importance was expressed in a variety of ways. Some organisations pointed to delivery partnerships with other organisations, and of particular interest was the significance to smaller organisations of partnering with larger, often venue-based cultural organisations in the city. Such partnerships often took the form of a smaller organisation being commissioned by a larger one, and the relationships were felt to be mutually beneficial and reinforce the sense of an interdependent ecology in the city's arts and cultural sector.

Other partnerships included: similar-sized organisations sharing office space together; seeking partnerships with other organisations working with the same art-form, perhaps to support the develop of a critical mass, working with sub-regional infrastructural partners, such as local authorities; being provided with office and other space by a larger organisation; and having a network of venues within which an organisation regularly presents work. None of the organisations suggested they had no partners, and many listed several with great confidence. Partnership is clearly a feature of everyday work life for arts and cultural organisations, and it was viewed universally as a sign of strength by interviewees.

### 3.2.6. *Clients*

Few of the organisations interviewed talked about 'clients' as opposed to 'partners', 'audiences', 'visitors' or 'participants'. One organisation, however, did refer specifically to school-based clients and to the importance of having repeat clientele – i.e. schools who would continue to book the organisation to deliver work on a regular basis.

### 3.2.7. *Competitors*

As with clients, few of the organisations interviewed suggested that they had 'competitors'. Indeed, the Bluecoat was particularly keen to suggest that it did not compete with the offer of other LARC members, but had its own 'unique selling point' as a cross art-form organisation and having a literature strand to its work. One organisation did, however, name a competitor: Creative Partnerships. The organisation did a significant amount of work in schools, and felt that it found itself in direct competition with the work which Creative Partnerships also undertook in schools.

## 3.3. Reflections on the Liverpool ECoC

Organisations offered positive reflections on the Liverpool ECoC, particularly around the opportunities for presenting work which the additional programme funding for the year supported. There was great pride from some organisations at the way in which the year had allowed them to present international work, often bringing

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<sup>23</sup> Liverpool First is Liverpool's Local Strategic Partnership, bringing together key stakeholders such as major businesses, government organisations, public sector agencies, and representatives from voluntary and community groups. It is charged with preparing and implementing Liverpool's Sustainable Community Strategy and its Local Area Agreement, and with providing joint responses to the Comprehensive Area Assessment and other areas of government policy.

to the city international partners and artists to work with, as well as the way in which the Liverpool ECoC had captured the attention of the art world, particularly nationally, with events like British Dance Edition (BDE) coming to the city.

The influx of visitors to the city was also recognised, though more organisations were interested in and supported the view that the Liverpool ECoC had helped to bring more arts and culture to people in the sub-region and vice versa. A number of organisations suggested that the local population felt more of a 'right' to access arts and cultural activity than they had previously. Organisations also suggested that policy-makers and politicians had learnt how to understand the benefits of arts and culture throughout the year. One organisation suggested that Liverpool Culture Company had, prior to the year, talked about the strength of the arts sector in Liverpool without really believing it, but that by the time 2008 dawned there was a real understanding in place.

Criticisms predominantly focused on three areas:

- the perceived lack of transparency and clarity around funding, commissioning and tendering processes;
- the quality of the marketing support for events, including capacity and knowledge of the 'product' which was being marketed;
- the use of 'external' contractors – bringing other companies and individuals into the city to deliver work which locally-based individuals and organisation felt that they were capable of undertaking.

There was also, perhaps inevitably, criticism of the way in which Liverpool Culture Company had operated, including one particular interviewee who felt that the structural relationship between Liverpool Culture Company and Liverpool City Council was unhelpful.

Section 3.2.2. above discussed some of the specific issues with project funding and it is clear that, whilst the Liverpool ECoC provided programme and project support, it also necessarily – as a temporary intervention - created a funding 'bubble' for enhanced or special programme activity which could not be stretched into future years. This is likely to have affected slightly smaller organisations more substantially, where revenue funding only covers basic staff costs and overheads and all programme activity is then funded on a project by project basis. One of the smaller organisations did, however, praise the funding for helping it to build relationships with larger partners and local authorities, and to fund longer-term work than the organisation was usually able to undertake. Whilst the funding may dissipate, some partnerships remain.

### 3.4. Post-2008: expectations for the future

The economic downturn and future public spending implications were raised as concerns by some of the organisations, but did not by any means preoccupy all interviews. The new RFO application process with Liverpool City Council was, understandably, a preoccupation for all, placing the hangover from the glut of project and programme funding which the Liverpool ECoC had brought to the city into a longer-term context: crucial for most was the future revenue funding. In that sense, the approach that was taken in 2006 to extend multi-year RFO agreements over a comprehensive spending review break to encompass all of 2008 should be recognised as a supportive act for the arts sector, as was the subsequent and renewed process for the final two years of the current comprehensive spending review period.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> In early 2006 Liverpool City Council agreed three-year regular funding packages for 27 arts and cultural organisations, encompassing the financial years 2006/2007, 2007/2008 and 2008/2009, thereby guaranteeing funding across the break between two comprehensive spending reviews and throughout Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture. The subsequent two years of the latter comprehensive spending review were covered by agreements made under the new RFO and project grants process, which was launched towards the end of 2008, to cover the financial years 2009/2010 and 2010/2011.

A number of the organisations expressed concerns over infrastructural issues, and there was no particular confidence that these issues would find resolution, especially in the context of a funding environment that, it was felt, would become more competitive. Most organisations were, however, already positive about the strength of their future programming and excited about work which was already scheduled to take place.

This balanced view reflects, perhaps, a rather wearied acceptance that the arts and cultural sector is in perpetual transition, from one funding regime to another, from one intervention or policy to the next. None of the organisations expressed surprise over this transitioning; nor did they express undue concern. Whilst there was an acceptance that the future might be a tough environment in which to operate, many already had strategies and approaches for tackling this head on.

## 4. Experiencing the Liverpool ECoC within art organisations: findings by Case Study

### 4.1. Fuse: New Theatre for Young People

#### 4.1.1. Background

Fuse was established in 1978 as Merseyside Young People's Theatre (MYPT): a dedicated theatre company producing work for children and young people. The organisation developed a reputation for the production of excellent physical and visual theatre, produced some innovative work for very young children, and eventually became more focused on primary school age audiences.

By 2003, MYPT was producing a regular programme and in addition was developing multi-arts work for early years, running a youth theatre and working with adults with learning disabilities. The organisation was in a financially precarious position and there was a recognition that the company was spreading itself too thinly in attempting to address so many different audiences.

As a result the Arts Council, one of MYPT's core funders along with Liverpool City Council, instigated a review process in 2004, providing a grant for a Chief Executive salary and an organisational review. This was intended to stabilise the company and allow a development plan to be put together with the board.

The review, completed by Kathy McArdle, who then stayed on as Artistic Producer, identified a need for a new brand for the company which supported a clearer artistic vision, the closure of the youth theatre and a widening of the age range for productions to include secondary age pupils, and the development of the board to widen the skills base available to support staff.

As a result, 2005 saw two new productions, one aimed at primary and one at secondary audiences, and the company focused on building external partnerships, which resulted in a commission from Unity Theatre. In 2006/7, the company focused on re-branding, developed its website, and implemented new policies and ICT and marketing systems. The company was re-launched as Fuse: New Theatre for Young People Company Limited in 2007.

#### 4.1.2. Funding and Activity

Fuse's core income until 2007 came from regular funding from the Arts Council and Liverpool City Council. This funding, amounting to around £105,000 in the 2005/6 financial year, covered the core staffing and overhead costs of the company. Funding for productions and projects was then sourced from a variety of sources including Arts Council grants, trusts and foundations, with additional income from ticket sales. However in 2007, Liverpool City Council removed Fuse from its list of regularly funded organisations. This caused a staggered drop in Fuse's core funding from Liverpool City Council, from £17,500 in 2005/6 to £10,800 in 2006/7 and £1,200 in 2007/8, potentially compromising Fuse's ability to deliver its ambitious

development plan. In the same period Arts Council England agreed a development grant for Fuse to allow the organisation to carry out specific activities such as the rebranding and re-launch.

Fuse's emerging strategy for income generation and growth was to respond to invitations and commissions. As a result, over 2007 and 2008 the company developed a range of projects in addition to its core productions. These included:

- A storytelling theatre piece for World Book Day.
- Development of an after school production commissioned by National Museums Liverpool.
- Stage management for Liverpool Slavery Remembrance Day.
- Delivery of various Liverpool Culture Company projects including Portrait of a Nation and Little Acorns.
- Delivery of five projects in schools with Creative Partnerships Merseyside.

Due to this significant increase in restricted, project specific funding, Fuse's total income rose from £156,012 in 2006 to £249,980 in 2008, and the company's output in terms of work delivered and audience reach also significantly increased. Fuse also secured a significant uplift in its core funding from Arts Council England for the three-year funding period commencing 2008/2009. Assuming that the financial year 2008/2009 would otherwise have seen a standard increase in the core funding of c. 3%, this uplift constituted a real increase in ACE RFO funding of just over 18%. The organisation was also able to point to a grant from Liverpool City Council secured for a project to be delivered in 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 as an indication that it had not lost engagement from the local authority, despite its prior loss of RFO status.

#### 4.1.3. Audiences, Partners and Networks

The growth in income has created both opportunities and pressures for the company. Staff cited the following as positive outcomes which have emerged from their experience of growing the company in 2007 and 2008:

- Much improved links to networks across the region, including SMAC, Children First Forum, Creative Partnerships and Liverpool First's Culture Task Group
- Increased audiences for theatre and higher audience awareness of Fuse
- Opportunities to promote and showcase their work to opinion formers in the North West cultural sector
- New commissioning partnerships with National Museums Liverpool and Bookstart/Liverpool libraries.

#### 4.1.4. Infrastructural Development

Despite Fuse's increased income in this period, the growth in the company's programme created some significant challenges. The new funding was specifically attached to projects, and has therefore not been available to increase staffing or improve organisational infrastructure. Consequently, staffing was very stretched at times throughout this period. The commissions and tenders Fuse have taken on have also diverted attention away from initiating their own projects and articulating and delivering a core programme, particularly as there has been little management time available to raise funds for the production of work instigated by Fuse.

#### 4.1.5. Reflections on the Liverpool ECoC

Fuse emphasised that they have had a very successful experience of the Liverpool ECoC, with many projects including Portrait of a Nation, Little Acorns and Small Worlds<sup>25</sup> having emerged from Liverpool Culture Company or been funded by them in 2007 and 2008. The company has delivered a lot of high quality output in 2007 and 2008, with a resulting increase in their profile and reputation. However the company also experienced some disappointments, particularly in their Liverpool Commissions bid, which was shortlisted but

<sup>25</sup> Further information is available about Portrait of a Nation and Little Acorns here: <http://www.liverpool08.com/participate/CreativeCommunities/Schools/index.asp>; and about Small Worlds here: [http://www.fusetheatre.co.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=61&Itemid=15](http://www.fusetheatre.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=61&Itemid=15)

ultimately not successful, and staff clearly felt concerned about the complexity of application processes and a lack of transparency in some of Liverpool Culture Company's decision making – for example Fuse, having had an application to work on a particular project rejected, were then offered opportunities to work with other projects without any application process. Staff were aware of other organisations whose failed Liverpool Commissions projects were subsequently funded by Liverpool Culture Company utilising processes which Fuse were not aware of.

Staff also cited a wider series of changes created by the Liverpool ECoC which may have an impact on the company in the future. There had been an unprecedented increase in the amount of cultural programming in schools or other settings for young people, and this could lead to a longer term increase in demand, and more enthusiastic and informed young audiences. However, much of the programming supported by the Liverpool Culture Company was offered to schools and other organisations at no cost. It remained to be seen whether in future there will be a willingness to pay for high quality cultural programming in schools when the cost comes from the school's core budget. The business plan for Fuse and other similar companies relied on the development of a commercial market and the ability to generate income from ticket sales.

#### 4.1.6. Future Sustainability

The current and future sustainability of Fuse remains in question. Positively, the company has a strong and committed board membership, a clear development strategy and business plan, and the continuing support of the Arts Council. However in the latest grant round, the company was not successful in winning back its status as a Regularly Funded Organisation of Liverpool City Council. As a result, while current salary and overhead costs are secure, the company has little flexibility in its core budget with which to carry out essential developments such as improving its marketing, or the quality of its accommodation. Core funding does not provide any support towards the cost of developing new productions, and fundraising remains a significant burden on the organisation in terms of taking up management time and slowing the development process for new projects. In many of these concerns, Fuse is similar to other small arts organisations, and there is no reason why the company should not survive and continue its tradition of innovative development and programming.

## 4.2. Windows Project

### 4.2.1. Background

The Windows Project is a charitable trust which was established to "diffuse the knowledge and appreciation of language as a creative medium, thus improving the facility in that language ...for those who have need by reason of their youth, age, infirmity or social or economic circumstances."<sup>26</sup>

The Project was founded in 1976, following an invitation to poets to create poetry workshops for Liverpool playschemes. The trust now delivers workshops with playschemes, in youth clubs, schools, libraries, colleges, day centres for elderly or disabled and residential institutions for care or custody, working in Liverpool and further afield in the sub-region and region.

The Project activity seeks to improve the availability of advice and assistance to developing writers, by allowing them to train as part of the delivery of the workshops and working alongside teachers, librarians and other supporting staff in communities with which the organisation works. The Project also provides: advice and guest writers to a variety of writers' groups; runs open advice sessions in libraries; and advice by post, phone and email to individual enquiries.

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<sup>26</sup> Extract from Deed of Trust

The Windows Project has a producing and publishing aspect to its output, including publishing a workshop manual, publishing in booklet-form writing of people from workshops, and publishing *Smoke* magazine. Finally, the organisation also puts on events, readings and talks by visiting writers.

#### 4.2.2. Funding and Activity

The current organisation constitutes a team of five employees, some of whom are part-time. Key roles are in education, fundraising, the website and finance, and in general administration. There is a Co-ordinator of the Project, Dave Ward. All of the team are practising writers, poets and a film-maker, making The Windows Project the only organisation in this selection of case studies in which the professional arts administrators are also the lead creative practitioners within the organisation.

In the year to April 2008 the Project states that it ran over 1,100 sessions. Of these, 59% were held in places not normally associated with education, 17% were specifically directed to people with mental or physical difficulties and 64% were for children and young people in areas actually designated as being educationally deprived.

The Windows Project is an Arts Council England (ACE) regularly funded organisation (RFO), and this core grant makes up around a third of the organisation's total income. The organisation had been an RFO of Liverpool City Council for more than ten years until the changes to the list of RFOs in 2007 stopped their funding. Communication around this change was poor – the organisation discovered it had lost RFO status and funding through the Liverpool Echo<sup>27</sup>, and had been unaware that its RFO status was under question.

Like Fuse, the Windows Project gained significant project funding from the Liverpool Culture Company in the run up to 2008 and throughout Liverpool's year as ECoC; in fact the organisation stated that it received slightly more funding via project grants and special funding that it would have received as an RFO, though it described the funding as 'administratively top-heavy' and 'late'. The Project, again like Fuse, also submitted an unsuccessful Liverpool Commissions bid; staff commented on how disappointing this was, given how much time had been speculated in putting the bid together.

The rest of the Windows Project's funding is made up of earned income and of project income, sometimes from local authorities in the Merseyside sub-regional area, sometimes from trusts and foundations.. The organisation reported success in getting project funding for innovation and development of new activity, as well as in establishing match funders, often bringing two or more funders together for a particular strand of work. In addition, the Windows Project said that it was becoming more successful at finding money for work that had a stated intention of engaging with social inclusion/exclusion issues, particularly from community grant sources.

Work which the Windows Project was involved in, in the lead up to and throughout ECoC 2008 included:

- Generation 21
- 'In Among Them' football project
- Poetry Café projects, in partnership with the Bluecoat, FACT and Maggie May's, a local café.
- Bold Street Festival in 2007 and 2008, celebrating Bold Street, its character and wealth of independent traders.
- Participation in the 2008 Liverpool Biennial
- Amazing Push Poem Machine at The Gathering, a Four Corners project in Granby.

<sup>27</sup> The Liverpool Echo is a daily evening newspaper published by the Trinity Mirror Group. It has the second largest circulation of any evening newspaper outside London.

#### 4.2.3. Audiences, Partners and Networks

The Windows Project identified a number of programming partnerships in their work, including regular relationships with The Bluecoat, Liverpool Biennial, Merseyside Play Action Council (MPAC), the Writing on the Wall festival, Sefton Park Palm House and The Black-E (formerly known as The Blackie) community arts centre, which was newly reopened following a £6m refurbishment. In addition the organisation shared office space with the Dead Good Poets Society and was exploring a possible partnership with another literature organisation based in Liverpool, The Reader.

Staff from the Window Project had attended SMAC meetings, and found them useful for maintaining and making new contacts.

#### 4.2.4. Reflections on the Liverpool ECoC

One member of staff cited the winning of the 2008 ECoC by Liverpool as a contributing factor in deciding to stay in Liverpool and not move to London. In the bidding process itself The Windows Project felt it had had significant involvement, being active in meetings and making contributions. However there were criticisms of the communication around the Liverpool ECoC post-bid, with a suggestion that the opportunities to contribute to a dialogue around planning for the year disappeared. There was criticism of the handling of the Artistic Director's period of office, as a 'missed opportunity'.

The organisation said that many arts organisations felt 'undervalued' and that, at the beginning, Liverpool Culture Company was prepared to talk about the strength of the Liverpool arts sector but then did not fully engage with it. Staff suggested that this situation had now changed significantly, and that Liverpool Culture Company improved in its understanding by 2008. There had been changes in attitudes within the City Council, the business sector and further afield, improving the profile of the arts sector generally, and of the Window Project's own work. One staff member particularly suggested that the Liverpool ECoC had helped to improve funders, commissioners and teachers' attitudes towards interventions involving writers and the capacity for impact.

A staff member who was involved in directly delivering projects which were funded by the Liverpool Culture Company as part of the programme leading up to the Liverpool ECoC talked about the way in which those projects had strengthened their ability to work in partnership with larger organisations, and particularly with local authorities. The staff member also cited the length of those projects as a particular strength, allowing the organisation to deliver more than just one-off sessions.

#### 4.2.5. Future Sustainability

Staff at The Windows Project were, at the time of interviewing, preparing their application for funding from Liverpool City Council under the new process. They commented favourably on the transparency of the new process, and the sense that this would promote greater fairness, but mentioned some concern over timescales (as the process cut across Christmas 2008) and the availability of advice from City Council officers.<sup>28</sup>

Broadly, the organisation was positive about the future. There was a sense that funding – particularly core or regular funding – would be harder to gain in the future, but that the Project was learning to diversify its funding base. The organisation had a good, established client base that would 'book' work again.

There was a particular sense that the Project was benefiting from the improved understanding of partners and communities about the possibilities of culture, and from the subsequent increased demand for and sense of right to access to arts and cultural activity.

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<sup>28</sup> The Windows Project received funding from Liverpool City Council as a 'cultural contributor' under the innovation strand, for two years until the end of FY 2010/2011.

### 4.3. 20 Stories High

#### 4.3.1. Background

20 Stories High is a theatre company, and is the newest of the organisations case studied within this research, set up in 2006 by Keith Saha and Julia Samuels who are the only two 'permanent employees'. In addition there is a part-time administration and finance manager. The organisation was originally set up, with support from Liverpool Community and Voluntary Services (LCVS), as a limited company. At the time of interviewing, it was about to become a charity, and was supported by Board with five members.

Keith Saha is originally from Liverpool and Julia Samuels worked at the Blackie (now known as the Black-E) in the mid-nineties, so the directors knew Liverpool prior to moving back to set up 20 Stories High. Attendance at a meeting to explore issues around diversity and race relations in Liverpool in 2006 allowed Julia to make a number of contacts which resulted in the new company being offered space in Metal, where they are now the theatre company in residence. There was also encouragement from Arts Council England, North West office, who, the company reported, felt that there was 'not enough high quality culturally diverse arts activity happening in the city'.

The theatre company creates 'dynamic, challenging theatre', seeking to attract new audiences. It delivers a mixture of professional productions, youth theatre and community projects. 20 Stories High engages in cross art-form work and supports new writing.

#### 4.3.2. Funding and Activity

The first project which 20 Stories High delivered was a forum theatre project which toured schools and youth clubs in Autumn 2006, funded by Arts Council England. In January 2007 a hip-hop theatre show was put together for a scratch performance, which was subsequently selected by the Liverpool Culture Company as one of the Liverpool Commissions. In Autumn 2007 the company toured a play called *Slow Time* by a Black British playwright Roy Williams, to schools, youth clubs and theatre venues in Merseyside and Manchester, with support from Liverpool Culture Company<sup>29</sup>, ACE, Knowsley MBC and the police and fire services.

20 Stories High was also in receipt of Arts Council funding for a young people's participatory theatre (YPPT) project, setting up a youth theatre using spaces around Liverpool for rehearsals, including Novas venues and the Black-E. Other participatory work has been developed in partnership with Metal. The company now has programming mapped out for 2009/2010 and 2010/2011, which constitutes a pattern of:

- two touring theatre productions in each year, one with an emphasis on Merseyside community and schools spaces and the other with an emphasis on regional and national theatre venues
- the youth theatre, involving a production each year and a skills development project each year

20 Stories High benefited in its first two to three years from significant project funding from both Arts Council England and Liverpool Culture Company so, whilst it is not an RFO of either, the two funders have been the company's main source of funding. Other project funding was gained from Merseyside Expanding Horizons (MEH), a social inclusion organisation, part of which helped to fund a part-time administration and finance manager.

One of the interesting approaches to fundraising which 20 Stories High cites is the involvement of the young people from the youth theatre in advocacy and fundraising for the youth theatre's future. Young people involved in the company's youth theatre were subsequently involved in presenting to Kensington Regeneration's Chief Executive and succeeded in securing further funding to take the youth theatre through until March 2009.

<sup>29</sup> The project was funded as part of the city's commemorations of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the British abolition of the slave trade.

Another significant – and timely – development was the company's successful application to the Esmée Fairburn Foundation to establish funding for salaries for two years from January 2009.

#### 4.3.3. *Audiences, Partners and Networks*

20 Stories High list a broad range of partners with whom it has worked, and its website explicitly seeks to credit funders, partners in producing and delivering work and key clients for that work. It was not a member of SMAC at the time this research was carried out (although the company has joined SMAC since as a result of the award of RFO status by Liverpool City Council), but is a member of the ACN as well as benefiting from the community of artists and arts organisations in Metal and beyond Metal in the Merseyside area.

#### 4.3.4. *Infrastructural Development*

The company identifies itself as having ongoing infrastructural issues, and has particularly struggled to identify how to fund administration and finance support. They cited issues with the cost of high quality administrative support and a sense that administrative duties were taking over time which should have been for creative activities. Whilst being hosted by Metal – at no cost – has been crucial for helping to support 20 Stories High in establishing themselves, and the company are now moving into Metal's new Edge Hill Station development, there is also a sense that eventually 20 Stories High may need to seek space for further expansion.

20 Stories High also talked about the tension between the need to keep funding coming in – sometimes through tendering opportunities – but the potential that certain kinds of work might be too much of a compromise to take on. The organisation recognised that this would be an ongoing issue.

#### 4.3.5. *Reflections on the Liverpool ECoC*

The organisation located itself in Liverpool in 2006 partially because of the opportunities which the Liverpool ECoC offered, and sought to build partnerships and relationships with Liverpool Culture Company from its inception. It cited dialogue with the Cultural Infrastructure Manager<sup>30</sup> and a good relationship with the General Manager – Arts<sup>31</sup>, which resulted in 'good links' with the artistic team. There was some frustration, however, about initial difficulties in building relationships with the Creative Communities team at Liverpool Culture Company which have since been fully resolved.

There was significant criticism of the marketing support for the Liverpool Commissions, one of which was delivered by 20 Stories High. Typing errors and other mistakes in the copy of the marketing literature was referred to and some disappointment around the level of national press attention which was sought and gained for the Commissions. However, there was also significant praise from the company for the involvement of Nick Birkenshaw<sup>32</sup> who had been brought in by Liverpool Culture Company in order to support the successful commissions.

#### 4.3.6. *Future Sustainability*

At the time of interviewing, the organisation was in the process of producing its first full business plan, and of applying to Liverpool City Council for RFO status under the new funding arrangements for arts and culture.<sup>33</sup> 20 Stories High hope to secure ACE RFO status in 2011 (the end of the current three-year agreements) at

<sup>30</sup> The Cultural Infrastructure Manager at Liverpool Culture Company had been previously employed within the Arts Unit at Liverpool City Council, being one of a number of internal secondments into the Liverpool Culture Company.

<sup>31</sup> The 'General Manager – Arts' at Liverpool Culture Company (not a seconded from Liverpool City Council) was later promoted to be 'Executive Producer' with responsibility for developing the arts programme.

<sup>32</sup> Nick Birkenshaw was engaged by Liverpool Culture Company as an individual; he also had a long-term association with Arts in Regeneration and with the arts in Liverpool. He was one of an open pool of practitioners, set up for utilisation throughout the programme.

<sup>33</sup> 20 Stories High received funding as a cultural contributor, under the young people and communities strand, for two years until the end of FY 2010/2011.

which point they could offer a track-record of five years of sustained activity. The company suggested that it was well-placed for discussions with ACE as it has a strong track record of partnership work with the ACE, including previous project funding, ACE's use of their participatory youth theatre work as a national model of best practice, and Keith Saha's leading role as Chair of the North West Hub for sustainable BME theatre.

#### 4.4. Arts in Regeneration

##### 4.4.1. Background

Arts in Regeneration was established as Artskills in 1995, as a Home Office funded pilot with joint sites in the Dingle and Speke areas of Liverpool. Originally the organisation was funded by Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and European Social Fund (ESF) to deliver arts-based training for young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). The two geographically-based parts of the organisation separated in 1999 and the Speke-based part became Arts in Regeneration. Its mission was to bring a creative dimension to the regeneration of Speke Garston.

The organisation was sustained by operating as an established creative training provider with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) as well as receiving voluntary sector funding from Liverpool City Council. In 2004 Arts in Regeneration lost the majority of its funding as a result of changes in LSC funding policy and a move towards funding larger providers, and the winding up of Speke Garston Partnership and its funding strands, and had to make 13 members of staff redundant, leaving one employee in place. For a period the organisation delivered nothing until it received money for a Year of Faith project later in 2004, followed by a small amount of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) funding and a Service Level Agreement with South Liverpool Housing. It also moved in the year to the Granby Learning Centre in Toxteth.

The organisation is still geographically specific – to South Liverpool – and is beginning to express its work less in the language of training and more in the language of participatory arts, calling itself the 'principal participatory arts development agency' for the area, although it still retains a commitment to the delivery of informal training.<sup>34</sup> It operates as a charity and a limited company.

##### 4.4.2. Funding and Activity

In 2006, when Liverpool City Council revised its arts and cultural RFO allocations, Arts in Regeneration was made an RFO, gaining c. £70k over a three-year funding agreement. The process required no formal application or lobbying process, and so the funding was, at the time, considered surprising by the organisation themselves, despite a previously good track record of delivery. This was the first time the organisation had received mainstream, arts focused LCC revenue funding.

When the Four Corners project<sup>35</sup> began Arts in Regeneration tendered for and received funding to work across South Liverpool. The project proved very successful and the organisation was commissioned to continue the project in the next year. The project included a substantial engagement with the community of Granby, and the receiving of a Superlambanana – known as Mandy Mandala - for display on Princes Boulevard. Arts in Regeneration also received a commission from Liverpool Culture Company to deliver 'Light Up Your Street' for the transition/closing event of the Liverpool ECoC.

##### 4.4.3. Participants, Partners and Networks

The organisation said that it had dropped out of involvement with ACN and SMAC, not finding them useful, but had since rejoined SMAC. Other than funders – predominantly Liverpool Culture Company – no other partners were particularly cited.

<sup>34</sup> From 2006-2009 Business Plan

<sup>35</sup> The Four Corners project was run by the Creative Communities team at Liverpool Culture Company, matching specific neighbourhoods with providers, using artists to guide local people in creative projects.

Arts in Regeneration were particularly keen to express the sustainable nature of their engagement with participants, seeing issues around sustainability as being primarily about the sustainability of the community with which they were engaged, rather than about the sustainability of themselves as an organisation. There was a sense from Arts in Regeneration that they felt they were 'leading the way' with this 'community economy' approach, which was particularly illustrated in their frustration around some of the other work delivered as part of the Four Corners project. Arts in Regeneration suggested that many arts partners saw the project as an audience development opportunity for City Centre based organisations when it should have been about community empowerment and the development of resources outside the City Centre.

#### 4.4.4. Infrastructural Development

The current business plan lists 'insecure funding arrangements' as a key weakness of the current organisation. One interviewee elaborated on the particular issues faced by Arts in Regeneration relating to the question of whether the organisation was a training organisation or an arts organisation, and the perception by many funders, including ACE, that it fell between the two when it came to qualifying for funding.

#### 4.4.5. Reflections on the Liverpool ECoC

Whilst Arts in Regeneration felt they had delivered good quality work as part of a Liverpool ECoC commission, and that they had benefited from the funding which had emerged in the build up to and throughout the Liverpool ECoC, there were criticisms of the marketing effort by Liverpool Culture Company. It was felt that the marketing team of Liverpool Culture Company did not adequately understand the events in order to appropriately market them.

More broadly the Liverpool ECoC was thought to have helped Arts in Regeneration to survive, but not particularly to thrive. The opportunities provided by project funding had been particularly timely and had helped the organisation integrate with its local community upon its move from Speke to Toxteth.

#### 4.4.6. Future Sustainability

At the time of interviewing, Arts in Regeneration were applying to maintain their RFO status with Liverpool City Council.<sup>36</sup> The business plan contains a number of actions targeted at lobbying and advocacy around the quality and impact of current activity, seeking to establish a supporting base to ensure continuation of the organisation in the future. The organisations turnover is substantially lower than it was in 2004 and previously when it benefited from LSC funding and, whilst the Liverpool ECoC has helped provide some buffer, the organisation appears to be in extended transition at present.

## 4.5. Merseyside Dance Initiative

### 4.5.1. Background

Merseyside Dance Initiative (MDI) is the development agency for dance across Liverpool and the sub-region. It has a studio for a range of dance classes, and brokers projects and programming in partnership with local venues – particularly theatres – and Higher Education partners. The organisation is an RFO of both ACE and Liverpool City Council, and operates as a charity and as a company limited by guarantee. MDI has an eight-strong team of full and part time staff led by Director Karen Gallagher, and is supported by a Board of seven trustees/directors.

Dance in Liverpool is not as strongly positioned or catered for as in some other cities; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA), Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) and Liverpool Hope University (Hope) both

<sup>36</sup> Arts in Regeneration did maintain its RFO-funded status as a cultural contributor, under the 'Communities and Young People' strand, but with a funding cut from the previous three-year agreement which reduced the investment by about a quarter.

offer dance training, but the city has no conservatoire with which to develop professional dancers. The immediate effect of this for MDI is that their Dance Intensives programme, supported by the Leverhulme Trust, has been heavily oversubscribed. Other long-term issues include the limited space available in the city region for presenting dance.

#### 4.5.2. Funding and Activities

MDI's position as an RFO of both ACE and Liverpool City Council helps to cover running costs, but the funding challenge is usually around finding support for programming. 2007 was noted as a busier year than usual and 2008 was perceived of as a very good year for dance in Liverpool, with MDI receiving substantial enhancement funding in the year and having significant involvement in programmes throughout the year. The year of the Liverpool ECoC saw MDI's turnover double from an average of £280-320k per annum to nearly £700k. It was, however, noted that a lot of time was still expended approaching small trusts and foundations for grants and that cultivating sponsorship remained challenging.

Work during 2008 included:

- the delivery of British Dance Edition (BDE) in 2008 (a significant national showcase and trade fair for dance) and the first major event which MDI had run at this scale
- annual Liverpool dance festival LEAP 08, and in particular a major international commission as part of this festival by renowned choreographer Akram Khan
- Capital Nights festival alongside a two-day seminar, with funding support from Culture Ireland, particularly bringing European work to the city

#### 4.5.3. Audiences, Partners and Networks

There was a confidence that MDI had succeeded in increasing the first-time audience for dance, particularly in the most recent couple of years. In addition, they felt that they were instrumental in 2008 in brokering relationships between dance artists and other organisations, for example between Taciturn Dance Company and the Liverpool Biennial.

Regular venue partners for MDI were Liverpool Playhouse and the Unity Theatre; newer partners included BBC Radio Merseyside and FACT. There was some difficulty in 2008 with potential partner venues – Novas Contemporary Urban Centre and the Bluecoat – becoming unavailable at short notice, but this was understood as being due to circumstances beyond those venues' control.

Regarding networks, concern was expressed regarding LARC and the balance between LARC and the 'bigger players' from SMAC, who were feeling somewhat excluded. This has since been addressed to some extent as the relationship between the two networks develops. MDI stated that it was also part of a wider network of dance agencies, the National Dance Network.

#### 4.5.4. Infrastructural Development

MDI reported that, despite receiving major project funding, the support had only enabled them to take on two additional freelancers and that otherwise the staff team had had to be backed up by student volunteers. There was a general sense that capacity had been very stretched over 2008. There was concern over 2009 and being still in a funding situation in which some running costs could be covered, but without funding for programme development.

#### 4.5.5. Reflections on the Liverpool ECoC

MDI felt positive about having been a significant partner of Liverpool Culture Company, and having been in receipt of substantial project funding. BDE 2008 had come to the city because of the Liverpool ECoC, and the year had helped to develop the profile of dance in the city through MDI's programme and other major dance

events which took place in the year, such as the Viennese Balls<sup>37</sup> and Lisi Perry's 'The Line',<sup>38</sup> which was a Commission as part of the Liverpool ECoC formal funding strand. Some disappointment was expressed at Liverpool Culture Company bringing in an external producer for the Big Dance event in 2008.

Liverpool Culture Company was praised for supporting the press work around MDI's commission with Akram Khan, and good marketing and web support for the project, though there was also concern that such national marketing efforts for Liverpool's cultural offer had been diminished following the Liverpool ECoC. MDI also commented on having good relationships with members of Liverpool Culture Company, and of having had a good relationship with the Artistic Director<sup>39</sup> who had championed dance within the original thinking around programming for the Liverpool ECoC, a commitment then taken up by new incoming executive producers.

In addition, there were felt to have been some positive benefits from the Liverpool ECoC for individual dancers, with a greater amount of work creating a greater number of opportunities for dancers to set up their own companies or to get more work generally. MDI also noted that there had been more opportunities to present work and to teach and deliver workshops in 2008. There was some criticism over the lack of strategic support offered by Liverpool Culture Company to existing arts organisations; MDI suggested, for example, that support in the cultivation of sponsorship relationships would have been helpful. Finally, there was a sense that the bid process prior to the Liverpool ECoC had helped to bring organisations in the city together.

#### 4.5.6. Future Sustainability

Future work for MDI included developing significant health-themed community work, particularly in the South Liverpool area, and ambitions to seek to develop further work in the non-Liverpool Merseyside Boroughs.<sup>40</sup> There was concern over future funding and the capacity to really develop and grow the company. MDI applied to Liverpool City Council in the 2009 funding process to be an RFO as a cultural driver, as it felt that the category was the only which offered the level of funding which was felt to be appropriate.<sup>41</sup> While some funding was granted, MDI did not secure 'cultural driver' status and are working towards this. No funding was available from either Liverpool City Council or Arts Council England, through Grants for the Arts, for the LEAP festival in 2009 (although work is now underway to improve this situation for the future). There was, therefore, overall concern that the funding situation is very difficult, and that MDI faced a significant challenge in maintaining audiences at 2008 levels when programme funding, and therefore activity, was shrinking.

## 4.6. The Bluecoat

### 4.6.1. Background

The Bluecoat is the oldest and largest of the arts organisations that this project looks at. The organisation is named after the building that houses it, a grade 1 listed former school from the early eighteenth-century. Following the relocation of the school to other premises in 1906 a group of painters and sculptors moved into the building and began to establish its reputation as a centre for the arts. In 1968 the Bluecoat Gallery was formally established.

<sup>37</sup> Liverpool Culture Company produced the Viennese Balls at St George's Hall, hiring the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and offering Liverpool residents free dance sessions in advance, and free tickets to the balls.

<sup>38</sup> 'The Line' was a community dance project involving students from Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts (LIPA) and up to 400 professional dancers and participants.

<sup>39</sup> Robyn Archer was appointed in 2004 as the Artistic Director for ECoC 2008, working from Liverpool Culture Company. She continued in the role until 2006, resigning from the post citing 'personal reasons'. The role was not directly replaced.

<sup>40</sup> The non-Liverpool Merseyside Boroughs are: Sefton Council, St Helens Council, Wirral MBC, Knowsley MBC and Halton Borough Council.

<sup>41</sup> Whilst MDI did not achieve Cultural Driver status, Liverpool City Council created a strategic development fund with an allocation of £100,000 for dance development, the application of which was (at the time of writing) being discussed with Merseyside Dance Initiative.

The building closed in 2005 for major refurbishment and the creation of a new wing. The works cost £14.5million and was able to reopen in March 2008 to play a part in the Liverpool ECoC, particularly as a major city centre venue. In May 2008 a fire caused closure of a portion of the building, including the new first-floor restaurant. The space subsequently reopened in November 2008.

Prior to the refurbishment the building was felt to have been patched up, but never properly refurbished and physically very inaccessible. Key issues were the inflexibility and inadequacy of the exhibition spaces, the fact that performance spaces were technically out of date and the general lack of space for educational activity. The original feasibility study for the refurbishment and new build was undertaken at the end of the 1990s, and the refurbishment works were supported by funding from European Regional Development Funding (ERDF), North West Development Agency (NWDA), Arts Council England through lottery funding, and the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The organisation is a cross art-form producer and receiver, with galleries and performance spaces, as well as having a significant number of both artistic/creative and retail tenants. The emphasis is on maintaining a community of artists as well as supporting audiences and participants to engage with a wide range of art forms.

The refurbishment of the building also prompted a degree of internal structural change for the organisation, with the creation of an Artistic Director role for Bryan Biggs, and a new post of Chief Executive that was filled by Alastair Upton. Some changes of Board personnel also took place at this time. Amongst the interviewees there were also references to new ways of working, and encouragement for cross-departmental approaches to delivering activity.

At the time of writing, the Bluecoat lists 24 tenants and has a staff team of 38 led by a Board of 11. The three main elements of the Bluecoat's own programming – exhibitions, literature and performance – are supported by a leading staff member for each working under the Artistic Director Bryan Biggs.

#### 4.6.2. Funding and Activity

There has been a conscious choice made at the Bluecoat, even with improved physical facilities, to attempt not to directly compete with other arts organisations. The Bluecoat cited this particularly as the reason for strengthening its literature offer over the last year, as a 'USP' [unique selling point] amongst other LARC organisations (i.e. amongst the larger arts and cultural organisations in the city). There was also a perceived need for a literature base in the city.

The Bluecoat felt that the take-up of studio spaces and spaces for creative industries businesses had been going very well – they were at the time of interview, in fact, full – and that they had been able to be more selective about which tenants to choose, in the context of tenants now being asked to sign up to the Bluecoat agenda. The tenants' charter outlines expectation of a mutually beneficial arrangement between landlord and tenant, from joint and cross marketing and shared marketing intelligence, to maintaining the quality of customer care and contributing to the creative environment and opportunities to develop creative work collaboratively. An interviewee said that several tenants had already been hired to deliver workshops with the participation team.

All interviewees expressed concern over the retail tenancies which were available, but which were not currently being taken up. The reason for this was suggested to be the economic recession and potential drop in consumer spending and there was apprehension over the potential impact on retail income targets in the business plan. In addition, delays in the Liverpool ONE building works were also cited as creating problems for the Bluecoat in selling retail space.

As a recipient of ACE and Liverpool City Council RFO funding, the Bluecoat's business planning for future development was predicated on that funding and, significantly, on an anticipated uplift in funding from both partners. ACE did raise its investment level but the uplift from the City Council came in November 2007 and this had left only a short amount of time to recruit and plan for the opening of the Bluecoat in March 2008.

There was a more general sense from interviewees that the organisation was underfunded, particularly in comparison to similar sized organisations, with perhaps fewer income streams than other comparators. This was felt to impact particularly on marketing activity, which was very challenging due to the large number of niche audiences which the organisation needed to reach to promote its programme.

#### 4.6.3. Local Scene, Partners and Networks

There were several references to LARC, as well as to Visual Arts in Liverpool (VAIL). There was a particular pride in having been involved in LARC in its earliest incarnations, and a sense that there were good working relationships with LARC and VAIL partners that were bearing fruit. A separation was made between some activity emerging from networks – such as the Creative Apprenticeships<sup>42</sup> and Find Your Talent<sup>43</sup> programmes – which were strategically important, and other potential activity, such as sharing administrative functions, which was felt to be practically helpful to the Bluecoat as an organisation. There was also a sense that LARC had begun to develop a more proactive, rather than defensive, approach to other partners in the city, and that this would be key for the future.

One interviewee spoke particularly about the strength of the arts scene in Liverpool, and suggested that it was much stronger than other regional cities with particularly concentrations of small galleries and spaces, and shows in which local artists could exhibit. The Royal Standard was referred to as a particularly entrepreneurial approach for young artists to take, and some of the artists involved in that enterprise were being shown at the Bluecoat that week. There was concern, however, for the future of the development of the city's population of artists with the need for an improved Fine Art degree course in the city. Changes in Liverpool John Moores University's approach to teaching art were cited as an example of a move away from Fine Art teaching.

#### 4.6.4. Infrastructural Development

Whilst the organisation had undergone significant restructuring in the period of the building's closure, there was still a sense that further internal development was required in some areas. Frustration around the timing of rises in RFO grants centred particularly around the ability to employ further staff. In addition, the changes already made to the Board were felt to be necessary to tackle the breadth of future challenge ahead of the organisation. There was also some reference to the possibility of seeking to share learning and education functions at some stage in the future, perhaps with other smaller LARC partners.

#### 4.6.5. Reflections on the Liverpool ECoC

The Bluecoat felt that ECoC 2008 had resulted in people taking Liverpool more seriously as a city. There was reference to increased audiences in the year and to funding opportunities, particularly the enhanced programme funding which supported additional programming in the year, though there was also the acknowledgement that this would create a problem for 2009, when no such funding would be available.

There was significant criticism from one interviewee of the management model for the Liverpool ECoC and of the structural proximity of Liverpool Culture Company to Liverpool City Council. There was also a sense that 2008 had been a crucial year for the Bluecoat because it was reopening, and that it was hard to identify the

<sup>42</sup> The Creative Apprentices programme, run by LARC, was a piloting of the first government-recognised modern apprenticeships in the creative sector, supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and instigated by the Creative and Cultural Skills, the sector skills council.

<sup>43</sup> 'Find Your Talent' was a joint DCMS and DCSF initiative to create ten pilots around the country to trial approaches to delivering five hours of culture every week for children and young people. LARC led a successful bid for a pilot in partnership with three local authorities, Liverpool City Council, Knowsley MBC and St Helens Council.

real net additionality in terms of profile of the Liverpool ECoC, though there was a sense that it had some kind of impact in this area. Finally, there was a view that Liverpool City Council now had a greater awareness of the potential which culture and tourism had to contribute to the city.

#### 4.6.6. Future Sustainability

Priorities for the future included growing regional audiences and seeking sustainability through contributing to social inclusion and health agendas. The work which LARC was undertaking in North Liverpool was felt to be important, and a joint post with LARC partner Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse was also felt to be a crucial part of the jigsaw. The Bluecoat applied for RFO funding from Liverpool City Council in the new 2009 process, to be a cultural driver, and was successful in its application.

Concern over resources available to market activity was clearly felt and this combined with other issues about retail rents and long-term revenue funding levels to suggest that the Bluecoat is still at a point of significant and complex development in less than ideal external circumstances. There was, however, a strong unity of creative vision and ambition from all three interviewees and a confidence about the correctness of that vision.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings in this report emphasise the critical nature of the relationship between funder and cultural organisation and between funder and individual. Both revenue and project funding is explored, as well as funding directly related to the Liverpool ECoC and other funding experiences from within the sector in the same time period, but unrelated to the Liverpool ECoC. Unsurprisingly, whether an applicant has been successful or not in bidding for tenders or funding affects their view of the funding and procurement process. In addition, it is clear that the way a funder designs a process does not necessarily correlate to the way in which it is experienced by potential recipients.

Questions around bureaucracy relating to funding – often a short-hand for the level of paperwork and accountability required around the investment of public funds – have been raised from a number of quarters and in relation to wide range of funding. It is important to reflect on the way in which Impacts 08, as a research programme, has added to the bureaucracy surrounding funding which was distributed as part of the Liverpool ECoC programme, in the requests for particular information which have fed into monitoring requirements.

The impact that third party sources for funding can have on bureaucracy is also worth noting: whilst funding may be passed through devolved functions, such as local authorities, the Arts Council and other vehicles, the point of origin (e.g. DCMS or the European Union) often determines the requirements around accountability, which in turn must be enforced through the devolved function. This can add to the sense of burden in the accounting for public funding, which many in the arts sector expressed in this research, as well as perverting the understanding of the line of accountability.

The findings in this project also expose the interdependency of the sector: the importance of networks and collaborations, the need for a vibrant scene of individual artists and practitioners in the city as well as large-scale organisations with their own space who are prepared to share it with others, and the fragility of the balance of that ecology.

The Liverpool ECoC presented an opportunity which many of the individuals and organisations who contributed to this research grasped, taking new commissions, enhancing their programme, undertaking new projects. It also presented complex challenges: competition for funding; a new funding source (and bureaucracy); new ways of funding and approaches to handling the relationship between funder and funded; competitive programming in the city; some degree of centralised programming in the city; and other companies and practitioners from outside the city coming in to undertake work. The ultimate challenge, though, was felt to be the sustainability of future for the arts and cultural sector after the Liverpool ECoC.

## 6. Appendices

### 6.1. Appendix 1 – Artists' Experience Questionnaire

#### **Section One: Background Information**

Impacts 08 is researching the impact of Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture 2008 on the city. We want to find out about how local artists and creative practitioners have experienced Liverpool 08, and whether the outlook for locally based artists has changed.

If you are an artist, musician, designer, actor, or any other type of creative practitioner, and you either work freelance or run a business with less than five employees, we would love to hear from you.

We would be very grateful if you could take ten minutes to complete the survey below. First, some background information about you and your business:

1. Are you:

- self employed as a professional creative
- the owner of a creative business with less than five employees
- combining full or part time employment with creative freelance work
- in employment and seeking to develop a creative business
- other

2. Where does your main creative practice fit within the following categories?

- advertising
- architecture
- crafts
- design
- designer fashion
- film and video
- interactive leisure software (games)
- music
- performing arts
- publishing
- software and computer services
- television and radio
- visual arts
- other creative activity
- none of the above

3. How would you describe your job and artform?

4. Where are you and your organisation based?

- Halton
- Knowsley
- Liverpool
- Sefton
- St Helens
- Wirral
- Elsewhere in the North West
- Other

5. Approximately what percentage of your work over the past twelve months has been for clients who are based:

- Locally (ie. Merseyside)
- Regionally (North West England)
- Nationally
- Internationally

6. Over the past twelve months has your business:

- Grown
- Declined
- Stayed the same

In what way? Why do you think this is?

**Section Two: The Impact of European Capital of Culture 2008**

7. What impact do you think Liverpool's status as European Capital of Culture has had on your business since January 2008?

- |                       |                       |                                  |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Very positive         | Positive              | Neither positive nor<br>negative | Negative              | Very negative         |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

What has been the single most significant factor?

8. What impact do you think Liverpool's status as European Capital of Culture has had on your business over the last five years?

- |                       |                       |                                  |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Very positive         | Positive              | Neither positive nor<br>negative | Negative              | Very negative         |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

What has been the most significant factor?

9. Approximately how much of your work over the last twelve months has been directly or indirectly related to Liverpool's status as European Capital of Culture 2008?

- 0%
- 1-25%
- 26-50%
- 51-75%
- 76-100%

### **Section Three: Communication and Networks**

10. How do you find out about potential contracts and opportunities?

(Please rank the following list in order of importance - click green arrow to move up or blue arrow to move down)

I generate my own work and projects

Through word of mouth and repeat clients

Websites and email alerts

Locally based professional networks

Working as part of a collective

Responding to advertised tenders

Other

11. Please could you tell us which organisations, websites, networks etc are most useful to you in finding out about new opportunities.

12. In your opinion, is networking and information sharing between artists on Merseyside:

- |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Improving a lot       | Improving a<br>little | Staying the<br>same   | Declining a little    | Declining a lot       |
| <input type="radio"/> |

13. What has been your experience of communication about opportunities for creative practitioners emerging from European Capital of Culture 2008? Please tell us about your experiences both generally, and specifically about communication with Liverpool Culture Company.

14. Have you developed relationships with, or been commissioned by, any larger arts organisations on Merseyside in the past twelve months?

**Section Four: The Profile of Liverpool's Creative Sector**

15. How do you think Liverpool's creative sector is viewed by people outside the city, in comparison to other major UK cities (outside London)?

- Stronger than other cities
- Weaker than other cities
- About the same

16. In your opinion, has the profile of Liverpool's creative sector been affected by European Capital of Culture 2008?

- It's been strengthened
- It's been weakened
- It's stayed the same

Why do you think this is?

17. How has the profile of your own work been affected by Liverpool's status as European Capital of Culture 2008?

- It's been strengthened
- It's been weakened
- It's stayed the same

Please explain - giving specific examples if applicable.

18. How do you feel about the potential for future growth and opportunities for artists post 2008?

- |               |                |                      |                |               |
|---------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------|---------------|
|               |                | Neither positive nor |                |               |
| Very positive | Quite positive | negative             | Quite negative | Very negative |

19. What are your expectations for the future of your own work in the next year?

20. Finally, what are your expectations for the future of your own work in the next 3-5 years?

*Thank you for taking our survey. Your response is very important to us.*