

Digital Inclusion and Exclusion in the Arts and Cultural Sector

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Executive summary

Everyone has the right to lead a culturally rich life, and it is essential to ensure that everyone is able to access enriching arts and cultural experiences, whether they are engaging in person or online.

Digital delivery has become increasingly prominent in the arts and cultural sector over the last decade and the outbreak of COVID-19 has super-charged this trend. Looking ahead, online channels are likely to be vital to engaging audiences and participants during the national recovery, and beyond.

Digital delivery has the potential to enhance inclusion within the arts and cultural sector through providing opportunities for people to enjoy content and experiences that they would not be able to access in person. It also provides the opportunity to maximise the social benefits of engaging with arts and culture (such as improved wellbeing).

However, there is a need to implement 'digitally inclusive' approaches to online delivery so everyone is able to participate and benefit from arts and culture (including those who struggle to get online). This report explores: how the arts and cultural sector can harness the potential of digital without compounding the digital divide; and how the sector can play an important role in promoting digital inclusion more widely.

Introducing the digital divide

The UK has a 'digital divide' between those who do not have the access, skills, motivation or confidence to access the internet (the 'digitally excluded'), and those who do (the 'digitally included') (Yates and Good Things Foundation, 2020). Digital

inclusion and digital exclusion are not binary categories; the 'digital divide' occurs along a spectrum, and is closely related to a person's social, economic and cultural context (Yates et al., 2020).

2.6 million people in the UK are offline and 1.5 million households do not have internet access (Ofcom, 2021; Lloyds, 2021). Even among those that do, challenges may still arise if a person's level of access is limited - for example, 21% of internet users in the DE socio-economic group are smartphone-only users vs. 10% in the general population (Ofcom, 2021). Beyond digital access, a person can also be digitally excluded if they do not have the digital skills to engage with the internet in a meaningful way: 11.7 million people in the UK do not have 'Essential Digital Skills for Life' (Lloyds Bank, 2020). A lack of confidence or motivation may also stop someone getting online: among non-users, the most commonly cited reasons for not using the internet are: 'it's too complicated'; 'it's not for people like me, I don't see the need or I'm not interested'; 'I didn't have the right equipment' and 'it's too expensive' (Ofcom, 2021).

Many arts and cultural organisations are already delivering high quality, inclusive, digital experiences, which are designed to be equally accessible and enriching for all (no matter the level of digital access, digital skills or digital motivation / confidence of audiences or participants). However, these practices could be more fully embedded across the sector.

Headline findings and recommendations

Embedding and promoting digital inclusion at an audience / participant level

Findings

Audiences and participants may face a range of barriers to engaging with arts and culture online such: as a lack of awareness; a lack of digital access; accessibility barriers; a lack of digital skills; a lack of confidence / motivation; or a home environment which is not conducive to engagement.

Recommendations

Arts and culture is the perfect 'hook' to encourage audiences and participants to engage with digital for the first time.

Arts and cultural organisations should talk to their communities to understand what is stopping people from engaging with their content online, and to work with them to develop appropriate solutions.

Online delivery should be designed to be 'digitally inclusive' by default i.e. equally accessible and enriching for all (no matter the level of digital access, digital skills or digital motivation / confidence of audiences or participants).

Embedding and promoting digital inclusion at an organisational level

Findings

Some organisations may face internal barriers to delivering in a 'digitally inclusive' way such as: a lack of digital resources / infrastructure; a lack of staff capacity, will or expertise to deliver digitally; a lack of expertise in delivering 'digitally inclusive' experiences; difficulty adapting content for online; and difficulty delivering an inclusive experience for all.

Recommendations

Organisations should work to identify and address internal barriers to inclusive delivery. Tools such as Arts Council England's '**Digital Culture Compass**'

(<https://digitalculturecompass.org.uk/>) can be used to benchmark digital delivery, identify areas in need of improvement, and to develop a strategy for making these improvements.

The route to becoming a more digitally inclusive organisation may require accessing funding streams outside the arts and cultural sector (such as those that focus exclusively on funding digital inclusion initiatives); upskilling staff and volunteers; or working with new partner organisations in the local area.

Promoting digital inclusion at a community level

Findings

Arts and cultural organisations are an important player in the social infrastructure of their communities, but they may need support to identify useful local partners, and to advocate for their inclusion within community digital inclusion networks.

Recommendations

Through forging local partnerships in their local area, arts and cultural organisations can: build their capacity to deliver inclusive digital experiences; support the development of a more joined-up approach to digital inclusion; and promote the importance of arts and cultural organisations within the local, social infrastructure.

There are a wide range of potential partners that arts and cultural organisations could work with such as: other arts and cultural organisations, local authorities, libraries, health and care services, housing associations, local charities and digital inclusion experts (e.g. **the Online Centres Network** (<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/our-network/about/>)).

Embedding digital inclusion at a sector level

Findings

Some arts and cultural organisations need support to understand what constitutes a digitally inclusive experience, and how to put this into practice.

Other organisations with greater levels of experience in digital delivery would like to have the opportunity to promote and share their learnings.

Recommendations

It is important for peer-to-peer learning to be embedded across the arts and cultural sector. Arts Council England's 'Digital Culture Network' is one channel through which arts and cultural organisations can access this peer-to-peer learning, alongside training and support in relation to digital delivery.

When applying the learnings from elsewhere in the sector, it is important for arts and cultural organisations to consider the local context that they are working in.

Embedding and promoting digital inclusion in society

Findings

The arts and cultural sector can play an important role in the move towards a '100% Digitally Included UK' (Good Things Foundation, 2020) but they need better national visibility to be able to do this.

The sector can also play an important role in the pandemic recovery, particularly given the positive health and wellbeing outcomes that arise from participating in arts and culture.

Recommendations

It is important to highlight and promote the crucial role that many arts and cultural organisations play within their community's social infrastructure.

Through embedding digitally inclusive practices, arts and cultural organisations can start people on their digital inclusion journey and help to arm them with the digital skills and confidence they need to be online - positive social outcomes that extend beyond the arts and cultural sector. These positive social outcomes need to be evidenced and shared.

The Digital Divide Within Arts and Culture

Digital Exclusion in the UK in Numbers

2.6 million people in the UK are offline (note 1)

17 million people use the internet for limited purposes (note 2)

46% of non-users do not go online because they think it is 'too complicated' (note 3)

9 million people can't use the internet without help (note 4)

11.7 million people do not have 'Essential Digital Skills for Life' (note 5)

17.2 million people do not have 'Essential Digital Skills for Work' (note 6)

Digital Engagement with Arts and Culture in Numbers

% UK who have done the following (online) since March 2020 (note 7):

33% watched performance/ event

15% participated in virtual tours

15% browsed a cultural collection or archive

9% engaged in an online participatory activity

People who are highly engaged with arts and culture, offline, were more likely to engage online

%who have engaged with cultural events online during the pandemic by frequency of attendance in person (note 8)

- Attended offline events less than once a year **44 %**
- Attended offline events once a year **44 %**
- Attended offline events 2-3 times a year **51 %**
- Attended offline events more than 4 times a year **72 %**

Barriers to Digital Inclusion in Arts and Culture (note 9)

Individual

- Unaware of experience/ activity
- Do not have a device or internet connection
- Cannot afford to engage
- Do not have digital skills to engage
- Do not have motivation / confidence to engage
- Activity / experience is not designed to be accessible
- Home environment is not conducive to engagement

Organisational

- Old / insufficient in-house digital infrastructure
- Lack of digital resources to deliver digitally inclusive experience
- Staff do not have skills, capacity, or will to deliver digitally
- Staff do not have the skills to deliver inclusive online experiences
- Activity / experience is hard to deliver online
- Difficulty adapting to needs of different audiences

Community

- Integration within the local and social infrastructure
- Lack of capacity or resources for digital inclusion strategies within the area
- Absence of a shared digital inclusion strategy

Sector/Societal

- Best practice in digital delivery not consistently shared
- Lack of clarity about who is responsible for digital inclusion
- Insufficient recognition of the important role the arts and cultural sector plays within the social infrastructure

Notes:

1. Ofcom, 2021.
2. Ofcom, 2020a; Yates and Good Things Foundation, 2020.
3. Ofcom, 2021.
4. Lloyds Bank, 2020.
5. Lloyds Bank, 2020.
6. Lloyds Bank, 2020.
7. Audience Agency, 2020.
8. Mantell, Moffat and Bradbury, 2020.
9. Research Interviews and Literature Review, Good Things Foundation 2020.

1. Introduction: digital delivery in the arts and cultural sector

In its ‘Culture is Digital’ report, Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (‘DCMS’) set out its vision for using digital technology ‘to engage audiences, to enhance the digital capability of cultural organisations and to unleash the creative potential for technology’. (DCMS, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a huge catalyst in encouraging many arts and cultural organisations to try digital delivery for the first time. Looking ahead, online channels are anticipated to be very important for engaging audiences and participants during the national recovery, and beyond.

One of the strengths of digital delivery is its potential to enhance inclusion within the arts and cultural sector through providing opportunities for people to enjoy content and experiences that they would not be able to access in person. For example, digital delivery has the potential to reduce geographic inequalities of provision; to reduce the cost to engage for people in financially vulnerable situations; and to provide a ‘safe space’ for people who lack the confidence to engage with arts and culture.

“Having digital really enhances our access in terms of people who are excluded from the arts...there are certain buildings that are no longer as inclusive as they once were... there are people who are put off by a theatre because they think ‘that’s not for me’.”

(Theatre company, staff member)

Digital delivery also has the potential to enhance the social benefits of participating in arts and culture. Research indicates that real health and well-being benefits can be achieved through the social prescribing of arts and culture (Arts Council, 2018). However, often the people who could benefit most from the health and wellbeing benefits of arts and culture are the least able to access these opportunities face-to-face. For example, someone with a disability may find it difficult to engage in person due to a lack of accessibility at a venue, or a person experiencing mental illness may not feel able to attend in person. Digital delivery provides the opportunity to expand the health and well-being benefits of arts and culture more widely, by allowing people to engage in their own home.

“Sometimes if you have anxiety it’s the physical burden of getting dressed, getting out of the house that can stop you.”
(Focus group participant)

However, despite these potential benefits, the increasing use of digital technology within the arts and cultural sector also has the potential to compound existing inequalities. The UK has a ‘digital divide’ between those who do not have the access, skills, motivation or confidence to access the internet (the ‘digitally excluded’), and those who do (the ‘digitally included’) (Yates and Good Things Foundation, 2020). It is important to ensure the use of digital technology within the arts and cultural sector does not further compound this divide by preventing people who are digitally excluded from accessing enriching arts and cultural experiences.

Many arts and cultural organisations are delivering high quality, inclusive, digital experiences designed to take account of the digital divide - producing online content which is equally accessible and enriching for all (no matter the level of digital access, digital skills or digital motivation / confidence of audiences or participants).

However, there is also evidence to suggest that digitally inclusive practices are not fully embedded across the whole sector, and that, in some areas, digital delivery may actually be compounding the ‘digital divide’. During the first six months of the pandemic, 33% of people within the UK watched a performance or event online, 15% took a virtual tour, 15% browsed a cultural collection or archive and 9% took part in an online participatory activity. The segments of the UK population who engaged with digital content during this time were more likely to be highly engaged with live arts and culture pre-COVID. (The Audience Agency, 2020a).

Everyone has the right to lead a culturally rich life, and it is important to ensure the use of digital technology within the arts and cultural sector does not prevent people who are digitally excluded from accessing enriching arts and cultural experiences.

More broadly, arts and cultural organisations also have an important role to play in supporting people to become more active participants in their communities and society - both online and offline. DCMS explains that ‘a key aim of the Government’s Digital Strategy and Industrial Strategy is to improve the digital skills of UK businesses and citizens in order to make the UK a world-leading digital economy - one in which our cultural sector can play its part’ (DCMS, 2018). Therefore it is not sufficient to understand how to make digital delivery inclusive, it is also important to understand how the sector can contribute to creating a more ‘digitally inclusive society’.

To address these questions, this report explores:

- How the arts and cultural sector can harness the potential of digital, without compounding the digital divide
- How the arts and cultural sector can play an important role in promoting digital inclusion more widely

When exploring these questions it is important to consider what is needed at an audience / participant, organisational, community, sector and societal level - and this is the framework that is used to inform the discussion within this report.

The findings of this report are based on: a literature review of the existing evidence in relation to digital inclusion / exclusion (generally and within the arts and cultural sector); 7 interviews with organisations delivering arts and cultural arts experiences; 2 interviews with organisations supporting people to access arts and culture online, and a focus group with 7 people facing digital barriers to accessing arts and culture online.

2. Defining digital inclusion and digital exclusion

‘Digital exclusion’ occurs when a person does not have the access, skills, motivation or confidence to use the internet, whereas ‘digital inclusion’ relates to the presence of these factors. (Yates and Good Things Foundation, 2020).

‘Digital exclusion’ occurs when a person does not have the access, skills, motivation or confidence to use the internet, whereas ‘digital inclusion’ relates to the presence of these factors. (Yates and Good Things Foundation, 2020).

Just as the levels and types of internet usage have evolved since its invention, so too has the discourse about digital inclusion and digital exclusion. On the whole, the discourse has converged around four key themes: digital access; digital skills; motivation and confidence; and levels of usage. These themes are discussed below, alongside an analysis of their link to other social, economic, and cultural factors.

Digital access: A primary way in which a person may be digitally excluded is through not having access to the internet within their home. This could be because they do not have an internet connection, do not have a device, or cannot afford to pay for a connection or device. 2.6 million people in the UK are offline and 1.5 million households do not have internet access (Ofcom, 2021; Lloyds, 2021).

Even among those with an internet connection and a device, access can vary. One way in which access might vary is by type of device: 21% of internet users in the DE socio-economic group are smartphone-only users vs. 10% in the general population (Ofcom, 2021). Broadband and mobile coverage can also create geographic inequalities because coverage tends to

be lower in rural areas (Ofcom, 2019). A person's ability to pay may also impact their level of access. People on lower incomes may not be able to afford a reliable, high speed, internet connection. During COVID-19, 11% of households had to make changes to a broadband or mobile internet service to make it affordable and 4% cancelled a service because they couldn't afford it. (Ofcom, 2020a)

Digital skills: It is not sufficient for someone to have access to the internet, they also need to be able to use it in a meaningful way. The Government's Essential Digital Skills Framework measures the extent to which a person has the digital skills to be considered digitally included. The framework is broken down into 'Digital Foundation Skills', 'Essential Digital Skills for Life', and 'Essential Digital Skills for Work'. 'Digital Foundation Skills', underpin all essential digital skills (and include things like being able to turn on a device). 'Essential Digital Skills for Life', and 'Essential Digital Skills for Work' are the skills needed in a personal and work context in relation to: communicating, handling information and content, transacting, problem solving and being safe and legal online (Gov. uk, 2019). 9 million people in the UK do not have 'Digital Foundation Skills', 11.7 million do not have 'Essential Digital Skills for Life' and 17.2 million do not have 'Essential Digital Skills for Work.' (Lloyds Bank, 2020).

Confidence / motivation: The extent to which a person is digitally included is strongly influenced by their confidence and motivation to go online. Among non-users, a key reason for not using the internet is that they are 'not interested / do not see the reason for it / think it is not for them' (Ofcom, 2021).

Research has shown that this motivational / confidence barrier is underpinned by four subbarriers (French, Quinn and Yates, 2019):

- **‘It’s not for me’**: This is where a person does not see the personal benefit in being online, or does not see a need to go online;
- **‘The support I need is not available to me’**: This is where a person feels they do not have the support to either get online or the devices required to do so;
- **‘It’s too complicated’**: This reason may be used to hide the fact that a person feels they do not have the skills or knowledge to use the internet;
- **‘Cost of going online is too much for me’**: This is where a person is not able to afford the devices and / or the cost of running these devices.

Limited users: Even when a person has the access, skills and motivation / confidence to get online, it is important to consider the extent to which they are using the internet. Digital inclusion and digital exclusion are not binary categories; the ‘digital divide’ occurs along a spectrum. Recognising this is important, because it has major implications for the link between digital inclusion and a person’s ability to actively participate in society.

Research has indicated internet users can be segmented into seven groups according to their levels of usage (Yates et al., 2020). Among these seven groups, two can be described as ‘extensive users’, one as ‘general users’, and one group is made up of non-users. The remaining three groups use the internet in a more limited way:

- **Social and entertainment media only users**: This group are low users of the internet, except for social media, and audio visual apps and sites;

- **Limited social media users:** This group are similar to social and entertainment media only users, but use a narrower variety of apps and sites;
- **Limited (no social media) users:** This group are low users of the internet and use a narrow variety of apps and sites.

The impact of social, economic and cultural factors (note 1): A person's position on the digital divide is closely linked to their social, economic and cultural context (Yates et al., 2020). Geographic analysis shows that the risk of digital exclusion is highest in the north east and lowest in the south east (Yates and Good Things Foundation, 2020). Demographic analysis highlights that non-users, 'limited social media users' and 'limited (no social media) users' are more likely to: be older; in social grades DE; have left school at 16; and live in areas of high deprivation (Yates et al., 2020). The profile of 'social media and entertainment only users' is slightly different: they are more likely to be younger, in education, in social grades DE, and live in areas of higher areas of deprivation (Yates et al., 2020). This shows that although there are common risk factors, digital exclusion can exist in multiple contexts.

There is also overlap between the profiles of people who are digitally excluded, and those who are less likely to engage with arts and culture. For example, people are less likely to engage with arts and culture if they are from a deprived geographic area (Gov.uk, 2020) and were less likely to have watched a performance / event or engaged in a participatory activity online during the first six months of the pandemic if they were older or lived in the North East (The Audience Agency, 2020).

Note:

1. There is limited data available about the relationship between ethnicity and digital inclusion, so this is not discussed here.

3. The route to digital inclusion at an audience / participant level

The role of arts and cultural organisations in promoting digital inclusion among audiences and participants

A key way to persuade those who do not have the confidence or motivation to get online is to use a hook to help them see how it can be relevant to their lives (The National Lottery Community Fund, n.d.). Arts and culture is the perfect 'hook'.

Arts and cultural organisations can play a key role in encouraging people to get online, 'providing people with safe, non-threatening environments where they can learn about digital technologies.' (Moffat, 2019). When introducing people to digital, arts and cultural organisations also have an important role to play in ensuring a person's first online experience of arts and culture is a positive one - a person's first online experience has the potential to frame their perception of digital as a whole.

More broadly, arts and cultural organisations have a responsibility to design their online delivery to be 'digitally inclusive' by default (Heselwood and Pritchard, 2019): this means online delivery should be equally accessible and enriching for all (no matter the level of digital access, digital skills or digital motivation / confidence of audiences or participants).

The barriers to digital inclusion at an audience / participant level

A person is unaware of the activity / experience: If most of the communication about an activity / experience is online, some people may be excluded due to not having access to the internet, or not using the channel in question - for example, 'social media and entertainment media only users' may miss communications distributed outside of social media and entertainment media channels.

A person does not have a device or internet connection to access the activity / experience: Engaging with arts and culture online can require a high level of digital access. In order to engage in a meaningful way, a person needs:

- A high speed internet connection that covers data intensive experiences (such as streaming);
- A device that is suitable for the delivery platform - for example, it is harder to engage via Zoom on a mobile phone than on a desktop, laptop or tablet;
- A device that encourages full participation and engagement - for example, younger people may find engaging on a laptop too formal, or someone using a borrowed device may be worried about breaking it.

A person is unable to afford to access the activity / experience: An upfront cost to engage is also a barrier to accessing arts and culture online for people in financially vulnerable situations. Some organisations raised concerns that the level of free content available online may decline post-COVID, as arts and cultural organisations try to recover lost revenue.

“Some arts and culture organisations have made their online work / services free during COVID-19. If we go back to face-to-face it might not be free anymore (as arts and culture have also suffered business-wise), and therefore it may not be affordable and accessible for everyone.”

(Community support organisation, staff member)

The activity / experience is not designed to be accessible:

Some support organisations mentioned that online content and online delivery within the arts and culture sector was not as accessible as it could be. This runs the risk of excluding particular groups from engaging with arts and culture online - such as people with lower levels of literacy, people with disabilities or impairments, and people who have English as a second language (Stone, Rae Evans, Maye, 2020)

“Websites, online events and shows are rarely, if ever, made accessible. Text colour, website layout and graphics can all play a part in making online interfaces off-putting and inaccessible for people with a learning disability.”

(Community support organisation, staff member)

A person does not have the digital skills to engage: In order to engage with arts and culture online, it is necessary for people to have the specific digital skills required to engage with the specific activity or experience in question (e.g. the ability to use a particular platform). Some organisations explained that they had spent a significant amount of time teaching people digital skills, before they could even think about delivering.

“I didn’t know how to turn it on. I needed support and someone having the patience to encourage me, write it down and help me to learn the skills.”

(Focus group participant)

“We had one gentleman calling into Zoom each week, but in order to enable him to do that, one of my colleagues had to go out each time for 5 weeks to tell him how to do it from a distance, from his doorstep.”

(Arts and events charity, staff member)

A person does not have the motivation / confidence to

engage: In order to engage with arts and culture online people have to overcome two motivational and confidence hurdles: deciding to engage with arts and culture, and then deciding to do this online. Organisations mentioned that, in some instances, they had had to put in a big effort to encourage people to engage online, (and that this encouragement was required on an ongoing basis). Some organisations also raised concerns that people’s motivation to engage online may decline once the pandemic is over i.e. when it is no longer essential.

“They wouldn’t do it again unless they had to.”

(Arts and events charity, staff member)

A person’s home environment is not conducive to the

engagement required: When engaging with arts and culture online, a person may face challenges that are not present if they were accessing them in a face-to-face setting. For example, a person may not have access to a quiet space; a person may not be alone when engaging with the experience; a person may not have access to the resources required to engage; or a person may not have access to the support they need to engage in a meaningful way. Delivering to people in their homes also makes safeguarding more tricky to implement.

“We had a lady that came to our dance session. It was at her lunchtime, and her lunchtime couldn’t change because she lives in quite a traditional setting. Normally she would be up and dancing, but she just sat and ate her sandwiches instead.”
(Arts and events charity, staff member)

“You might have mum or dad cooking in the background...it’s not easy being a participant”
(Children and young people’s participatory arts company, staff member)

“We work with adults with learning disabilities and support is really key. If you have a parent that is not very skilled in digital, and is reluctant, but is up for it, you will be fine, you will get there. If you’ve got someone who isn’t up for it, it’s an uphill struggle”
(Learning charity, staff member)

Organisations delivering ‘participatory experiences’ have a two-way interaction with audiences which provides the opportunity to adapt delivery in response to a participant’s environment. However organisations delivering ‘viewing experiences’ may have less opportunity to do this. ‘Viewing experiences are often delivered in a ‘top-down’ way, and an organisation may have less knowledge about the context in which audiences are engaging with their content.

Enacting digital inclusion at an audience / participant level

In order to be successful in encouraging audiences / participants to engage with arts and culture online, it is important for arts and cultural organisations to identify the digital barriers that these audiences / participants face, and to

support them to overcome these barriers (either through providing support directly, working with a partner organisation to provide support, or referring people on to another organisation).

“It can be really inclusive, you just have to find where you’re not being inclusive and then just do it.”

(Theatre company, staff member)

Carmi and Yates note that with regards to digital inclusion ‘there is no one-size-fits-all programme...people with different socioeconomic backgrounds, age, education and ethnicity need to have education programmes that make sense to their everyday lives’ (Carmi and Yates, 2020). Therefore, arts and cultural organisations should talk to people within their local communities to understand what may be stopping people from engaging with their content online, and work with them to develop a solution to overcome these barriers.

“Arts organisations need to speak to the people they are doing it for and ask why they are doing it.”

(Theatre company, staff member)

Considerations for designing inclusive digital experience

- How can audiences / participants who are offline and limited users be made aware of the activity / experience? Is the activity / experience being advertised through offline channels, and through the online channels that limited users are more likely to use, such as social and entertainment media?
- Is practical support required for people who do not have an internet connection or device (e.g. distribution of devices or data dongles)?

- Is the activity / experience enriching for audiences / participants irrespective of their device or internet speed?
- Is there a way to provide a lower cost (or free) way for people in financially vulnerable situations to engage online?
- Do any adjustments need to be made to improve the accessibility of online content e.g. for people with lower levels of literacy, people with disabilities or impairments, and people who have English as a second language?
- Is digital skills training required in order for people to engage?
- Is support required to help people to see how the experience is of value to them, and to encourage them to continue participating?
- Is the experience / activity designed to take account of the resources and support that someone has at home?
- Are there any safeguarding concerns related to delivering this experience /activity online?
- How does delivery need to be tailored to the specific audience or group of participants?
- Have you consulted with people in your local community about the barriers they face in accessing your activities / experiences online and the best ways to address these barriers?

Case Study: Cross Gates and District Good Neighbours' Scheme CIO

Cross Gates and District Good Neighbours' Scheme CIO works with, and for older people to: reduce loneliness and isolation, support independence, promote healthy lifestyles, and try new things. One of numerous opportunities it provides for its users is to take part in art classes. Traditionally these art classes had been delivered face-to-face, but during lockdown these were delivered online.

Cross Gates and District Good Neighbours' Scheme CIO provided a wide range of upfront support to help people to be able to access these art classes online - they trained people to use Zoom, sent out guidance packs to help people log into Zoom, delivered one-to-one practice calls before the art classes, and had people on hand to help support those that couldn't get on to Zoom for the first couple of sessions.

Case Study: Purple Patch Arts

Purple Patch Arts exists to improve the lives and life chances of people with learning disabilities, complex needs and autism. It uses drama, dance, music, art and multi-sensory activity to engage learners, support the understanding of complex subjects, and develop participants' confidence, independence, communication and social skills.

In response to the outbreak of COVID-19, Purple Patch Arts started delivering its 'Lifelong Learning Programmes' via Zoom, and published daily activities and weekly colouring pages on its website. Purple Patch Arts also used lockdown as an opportunity to reach people beyond its community; holding monthly Zoom discos, open to everybody.

Purple Patch Arts supported people facing digital barriers to be able to access its learning programmes by distributing devices, and supporting participants to access digital skills training. Purple Patch Arts also posted out activities and colouring pages, and made weekly phone calls to people it was not possible to get online.

4. The route to digital inclusion at an organisational level

The role of arts and cultural organisations in promoting digital inclusion in their delivery

It is critical that arts and cultural organisations recognise how digital delivery can be used to promote equal access to arts and culture, and to make a strategic commitment to putting digitally inclusive practices into practice.

To maximise the potential of digital delivery an organisation needs to assess: in which instances digital delivery can support equality of access; where face-to-face delivery may be more appropriate; and where mixed delivery is the best solution. 'To realise the potential of a hybrid model, organisations could learn from principles of what works best in each: deep personal relationships and the shared live experience of offline working, along with the networked infrastructure, participant-centred experience and accessibility of online working' (Macfarland, Agace, Hayes, 2020).

The barriers to digital inclusion at an organisational level

Old and insufficient in-house digital infrastructure: Just as some individuals do not have access to the appropriate technology and services to engage with arts and culture online, some organisations do not have access to the appropriate technology and services to deliver online. Some of the organisations we spoke to mentioned that the ability to deliver quality digital experiences would entail significant capital investment.

A lack of digital resources to deliver an inclusive

experience: Beyond having the resources to deliver digitally, organisations also need the digital resources to deliver inclusive online experiences e.g. a website platform which supports accessible design, or the technology to provide adjustments for people with disabilities or impairments. Some of the organisations we spoke to do not have this digital infrastructure in place, or the financial resources to invest in it.

Difficulty identifying and accessing funding for online delivery and digital infrastructure upgrades:

Some organisations mentioned that they had not been able to identify or access funding that would allow them to invest in their digital infrastructure and digital capabilities. Some organisations also mentioned that they felt there was a lack of recognition from funders that - when done well - digital delivery costs the same amount, if not more, than face-to-face delivery.

“[The online learning tool] is going to provide a free membership and paid membership. It is a difficult project to get funding for, the only way that we can continue to make content and pay hosting costs is to charge a monthly membership. We know that will be a barrier.”

(Children and young people’s participatory arts company, staff member)

“If you are specifically creating theatre for the screen, that is the same cost as a whole show.”

(Theatre company, staff member)

Staff do not have the skills, capacity, or will to deliver

digitally: Many of the organisations we spoke to had little experience of digital delivery prior to the outbreak of COVID-19. Among those new to digital delivery, getting staff buy-in could be difficult. Some organisations mentioned that staff were

reluctant to deliver online, and were keen to get back to face-to-face delivery as soon as possible.

“Doing drama online can suck the life out of it.”

(Theatre company, staff member)

Even where there is the will and the ability to deliver online, capacity can also be an issue.

Some organisations mentioned they did not have the time to provide both face-to-face and online delivery. There is a huge amount of work required to maintain a vibrant digital presence including: advertising experiences; managing ticket sales or participant sign-up; maintaining a social media presence; and keeping a website up-to-date. This is a large undertaking for staff who may also be balancing this against creating arts and cultural content, and providing support to audiences and participants.

“Mixed delivery is challenging because it requires teaching in different ways. It also takes more time, it’s effectively running two projects.”

(Arts and events charity, staff member)

Staff do not have the expertise to deliver digitally inclusive experiences: In order to ensure that digital delivery doesn’t compound the digital divide, arts and cultural organisations don’t just need the skills to deliver online, they need the skills to deliver inclusive experiences online - some organisations mentioned that they needed more training and support to be able to achieve this. Some activities / experiences are easier to deliver online than others: Some organisations mentioned that they had expected some of their face-to-face activities to translate better online than they had done in practice. For example, one organisation mentioned that delivering to young

people online created a sense of formality that wasn't there in person - the online delivery format provided less scope for the young people to socialise and chat among themselves, which in turn created an environment which felt more educational than participatory.

“You don't get the same level of rapport, you don't get the same level of engagement. I think there is a danger of pupils feeling like they are sitting watching TV at home or in the classroom.”
(Children and young people's participatory arts company, staff member)

Some organisations mentioned that when delivering online they had to make adjustments to make the content more participatory. Participatory practices allow an organisation to adapt delivery according to the digital skills and environment of the participants. In a participatory setting, organisations can also introduce guidelines to make the experience more inclusive (e.g. asking people to raise a hand before speaking, or using 'breakout rooms' to give everyone the chance to contribute).

“Online you have to try and keep people interested much more than when it's on stage – something has to happen every 20 seconds.”

(Theatre company, staff member)

Delivering an inclusive experience for all: Some organisations mentioned that it could be tricky to deliver engaging experiences where audience members or participants had different levels of digital access, skills, motivation and confidence, and support. This problem can be particularly acute for those delivering to young people and children: some may be engaging on a statutory / borrowed device while others may be using their own device, and some may have parental support while others may not.

“If every child had the same computer, or the same tablet, and had the same software, we could do some amazing things on Zoom”

(Children and young people’s participatory arts company, staff member)

“Some parents want to take part with the child, some want to be able to leave the child to do it independently, it’s hard to accommodate that range.”

(Children and young people’s participatory arts company, staff member)

Enacting digital inclusion at an organisational level

Arts and cultural organisations need to identify any barriers to digital inclusion within their online delivery, and determine how these can be resolved.

In the first instance, organisations should use tools such as Arts Council England’s **‘Digital Culture Compass’** (<https://digitalculturecompass.org.uk/>) to assess the existing digital capabilities within their organisation, as well as talking to staff and volunteers to understand the institutional barriers to delivering inclusive experiences.

The route to becoming a more digitally inclusive organisation may require accessing funding streams outside the arts and cultural sector (such as those that focus exclusively on funding digital inclusion initiatives); upskilling staff and volunteers; or working with new partner organisations in the local area.

Considerations for becoming a more digitally inclusive organisation

- Is digital inclusion being considered as part of your organisational strategy?
- How can face-to-face and digital delivery be used to maximise the number of people who are able to access your activities / experiences?
- Have you consulted with staff / volunteers to understand the organisational barriers to digital delivery, in general, as well as the barriers to delivering inclusive digital experiences?
- Have you assessed your organisation's digital capabilities by using tools such as Arts Council England's '**Digital Culture Compass**' (<https://digitalculturecompass.org.uk/>)?
- Is any training required to improve staff / volunteers' digital skills, or their ability to deliver digitally inclusive activities and experiences?
- Have you explored partnerships in your local area which could help support your organisation to deliver more digitally inclusive activities / experiences?
- Have you explored funding opportunities outside the arts and cultural sector which could support you to enhance your digital capabilities and support you to deliver more digitally inclusive activities / experiences?

5. The route to digital inclusion at a community level

The role of arts and cultural organisations in promoting digital inclusion in their communities

In its ten year plan, 'Let's Create', Arts Council England laid out its commitment to creating 'Cultural Communities'. Arts Council England explains that the 'Creative People and Places' programme offers clear evidence that when communities are involved in shaping their local cultural provision, a wider range of people participate in publicly funded cultural activity. And when the cultural sector works closely with community partners, the activity itself is richer and more relevant, resources go further, and greater civic and social benefits are delivered.' (Arts Council England, 2020).

Just as arts and cultural experiences are enhanced through communities working collaboratively, so too are digital inclusion efforts. Through working with partners in their community, arts and cultural organisations can: build their organisational capacity to deliver inclusive digital experiences; support the development of a more joined-up approach to digital inclusion in the community; and promote the importance of arts and cultural organisations within the local, social infrastructure.

The barriers to promoting digital inclusion at a community level

Insufficient integration within the network of local organisations providing support and services to people within the community: Some organisations mentioned that, although they recognised that some people were unable to access their digital activities / experiences, they did not have

the resources to resolve this internally, and lacked knowledge about the support that was available in the local area.

“We need other experts, people who are doing it already to come and take our content”

(Theatre company, staff member)

Lack of capacity or resources for digital inclusion strategies within the area: In some instances the digital inclusion experts within the area may not have the capacity or resources to provide holistic digital support. For example, libraries have traditionally played an important role in promoting digital inclusion within their local communities. However, due to staffing and funding costs, their delivery is predominately a self-serve model in a supported environment; they provide people with the opportunity to access devices and a digital connection, but are less able to offer digital skills training.

Absence of a shared digital inclusion strategy: Where organisations had a strong focus on digital inclusion internally, difficulties can arise if they were partnering with an organisation that had less expertise in this area. Where collaborative work is concerned, it is important that all links in the chain have a shared digital inclusion strategy and a joined-up way of enabling people to interact with digital services.

“Very few organisations actually properly use ICT to support people getting access to arts and culture online...the places we visit rarely have a dedicated person leading this.

(Community support organisation, staff member)

Enacting digital inclusion at a community level

There are a number of ways in which arts and cultural organisations can work with local partners to promote digital inclusion within their local communities:

Working with other arts and cultural organisations to share resources / expertise: The arts and cultural organisations within a community are likely to have different areas of expertise in relation to promoting digital inclusion. For example, a library may have devices, a participatory arts organisation may have expertise in using arts and culture as a hook to encourage digital participation, and a theatre may have expertise in creating accessible online content. Through creating strong partnerships, arts and cultural organisations can share 'digital inclusion resources' with other organisations in their area, rather than having to develop and deliver everything internally.

Working with digital inclusion experts to help get people online: Where an arts and cultural organisation does not have the resources or expertise to resolve a digital inclusion barrier internally, there is scope to partner with a local digital inclusion expert to overcome this barrier. For example, this could mean asking a digital expert for advice about how to make a website more accessible, or working with an organisation to provide digital devices to audiences / participants. **The Online Centres Network** (<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/our-network/about/>) is a useful place to start for arts and cultural organisations looking to link up with digital inclusion experts in their area.

“The relationships with the charities has been really important because we don’t have budgets to be able to supply 60 or 70 women with really good devices, nor can we improve their internet connections”

(Theatre company, staff member)

Working within the network of local organisations providing support and services to people within a community: Engaging with arts and culture brings a wide range of health and wellbeing benefits. Arts and cultural organisations can work with local organisations (such as local authorities, health and care services, housing associations, local charities and local community organisations) on a ‘social prescribing’ basis - which has the dual advantage of bringing benefits to the individual, and helping arts and cultural organisations to build a more diverse audience.

Working with community support organisations to provide motivational support: Persuading someone who ‘doesn’t think the internet is for them’ to engage with arts and culture online requires a lot of encouragement and support. Community support organisations (i.e. non-profit organisations providing support services to people in the local area) have deep, trusted relationships with the people they support, and are experts at helping people to overcome motivational and confidence barriers. Partnering with community support organisations could help arts and cultural organisations to focus on delivery, while ensuring that those that feel less confident about accessing arts and culture are well supported.

Sign-posting people to organisations offering digital support (e.g. local charities, libraries or The Online Centres Network) (<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/our-network/about/>) : Building strong partnerships in the community will enable arts and cultural organisations to sign-post people in need of digital support to the organisations who

will be best able to cater for their needs - facilitating a joined-up approach to digital inclusion within the community.

Advocating for a place-based digital inclusion strategy:

Arts and cultural organisations should work with local partners to advocate for a place-based funding for digital inclusion initiatives. The **Power Up** (<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/what-we-do/our-partnerships/jobs-and-money/power-up/>) programme (a digital inclusion programme which aims to improve digital inclusion through ‘powering up people, places and provision’) demonstrates how taking a place-based approach to digital inclusion can reap big rewards by ‘improving referral pathways, increasing collaboration, and providing better integrated support journeys’ (Good Things Foundation, 2020b). It also demonstrates how organisations which have a core remit outside of digital inclusion - such as housing associations – can still play an important role in supporting digital inclusion initiatives in their communities.

Case Study: Open Clasp Theatre Company

Open Clasp Theatre Company is a women’s theatre company which makes truthful, risk-taking and award-winning theatre informed by the lived experiences of women disenfranchised in theatre and society.

Open Clasp Theatre Company has produced a number of ‘digital-first’ shows including ‘Rattle Snake’ and ‘Sugar’. ‘Rattle Snake’ was made based on the real-life stories of women who have faced and survived coercive controlling domestic abuse. It has been used to train 1500 police officers from Cleveland and Durham Constabularies in response to domestic abuse, been watched by over 16,000 people online, and has been used by over 100 organisations as part of training / awareness raising. ‘Sugar’ was devised with women who are homeless on

probation or in prison. It is available on BBC iPlayer and has been screened in 50 prisons.

Open Clasp Theatre Company's digital productions are designed with inclusivity as a core focus - both in terms of their production and their distribution. The productions are informed by lived experience, and partnerships with community organisations have been crucial to achieving this. For example, 'Sugar' was devised with women in HMP Low Newton, Women's Direct Access Centre and women on probation attending a Women's Hub at West End Women & Girl's centre. Open Clasp Theatre Company's partnerships with community organisations have also helped to ensure that its productions are inclusive in reach. For example, 'Rattle Snake' has had over 100 national and international screenings through charities and community centres.

During lockdown Open Clasp Theatre Company also worked with its partner organisations to ensure that people could continue to access their productions in a safe way.

“It's the devices, WiFi, it's making sure they are safe, making sure that after half an hour of a session if something difficult has been discussed there is someone there to talk to...when we have our physical workshops you can have a cup of tea and a wind down afterwards...that's why, when you're doing it over Zoom, it's so important to have the partner charity to follow up with support afterwards”

6. The route to digital inclusion at a sector level

Embedding digital inclusion across the arts and cultural sector

Digital delivery has the potential to enhance inclusion within the arts and cultural sector by providing people who have barriers to accessing arts and culture in person with an alternative way to engage. However, in order to realise the inclusive potential of digital delivery it is important that a commitment to 'digitally inclusive' practice is embedded across the whole sector.

The barriers to embedding digital inclusion at a sector level

Best practice in digital delivery is not consistently being shared across the sector: Some organisations mentioned they were unsure where to start with digital delivery and need guidance to understand what works well. On the other end of the scale, some organisations, with considerable expertise in delivering digitally, said that they would like to have the opportunity to promote and share their learnings.

“We’ve all battled through how to use Zoom and we’ve all done that individually - that seems like a lot of wasted energy. If anything happens in the future, and there is new software to learn, it would be nice to have a central point to show us ‘this is how you do it.’”

(Learning charity, staff member)

“There is a huge difference between putting a bit of spoken word on a phone and saying that’s digital and what we’re doing working with a theatre director and a film director, those feel like different genres but they are all captured under digital theatre”
(Theatre company, staff member)

Lack of clarity about who is responsible for digital inclusion: Some arts and cultural organisations are unclear about where their responsibilities lie in terms of promoting digital inclusion. There is also a lack of clarity about how the time and resources that are needed to get people online can be shared between different organisations.

Enacting digital inclusion at a sector level

It is important for peer-to-peer learning to be embedded across the arts and cultural sector to facilitate organisations that are experts in digital delivery to share their knowledge with those that are looking to develop their expertise. Arts Council England’s ‘Digital Culture Network’ is one channel through which arts and cultural organisations can access this peer-to-peer learning (along with training and support in relation to digital delivery).

When applying the learnings from elsewhere in the sector, it is important for arts and cultural organisations to consider the local context that they are working in. Delivery guidance can point organisations in the right direction, but it is important for organisations to work with audiences and participants in their community to understand how these principles apply in their community.

7. The route to digital inclusion at a societal level

The role of the arts and cultural sector in promoting digital inclusion in society

As society becomes increasingly digitised, and more products and services move online, it is important to ensure that no one is left behind. In its 'Blueprint for a 100% Digitally Included UK', Good Things Foundation calls for a 'commitment to address digital inclusion from government bodies, local authorities, housing associations, and third sector providers' (Good Things Foundation, 2020). Arts and cultural organisations are an important player in the social infrastructure of their communities, and the sector can play an important role in the move towards a '100% Digitally Included UK'. The sector can also play an important role in the pandemic recovery, particularly given the positive health and wellbeing outcomes that arise from participating in arts and culture.

The barriers to promoting digital inclusion at a societal level

There can be insufficient external recognition of the crucial role that many arts and cultural organisations play within their community's social infrastructure. As a result, arts and cultural organisations may not be considered, in the first instance, by funders who are looking to invest in digital inclusion within communities.

Enacting digital inclusion at a societal level

It is important that the sector recognises and promotes the crucial role it plays in the social infrastructure, as well as the crucial role it can play in promoting digital inclusion within society.

Through embedding digitally inclusive practices, arts and cultural organisations can support positive social outcomes beyond the arts and cultural sector by:

- Helping people to start people on their digital inclusion journeys;
- Helping to arm people with the digital skills and confidence they need to access online products and services elsewhere.

Through embedding digitally inclusive practices, the arts and cultural sector can also produce further evidence of the social value of a digitally inclusive approach (such as improved health and well-being).

8. Conclusion

Everyone has the right to lead a culturally rich life, and it is essential to ensure that everyone is able to access enriching arts and cultural experiences, whether they are engaging in person or online.

The findings from our research highlight that digitally inclusive practices are not yet fully embedded across the arts and cultural sector. The barriers to digital inclusion within the arts and cultural sector are multi-layered, and exist at the audience / participant level, organisational level, community level, sector level and societal level. It is important for arts and cultural organisations, and the sector as a whole, to make a strategic commitment to addressing these barriers.

Looking ahead to the digital inclusion landscape of the future

In this report we have outlined the barriers to digital inclusion within the arts and cultural sector as they currently stand. However, the digital landscape is unlikely to remain static, and therefore, neither is the digital inclusion landscape. While we cannot know the full extent of the changes on the horizon, we can anticipate some trends that will be important for arts and cultural organisations to consider:

Increasing ‘Online harms’: Online harms refer to ‘online content or activity that harms individual users, particularly children, or threatens our way of life in the UK, either by undermining national security, or by reducing trust and undermining shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities to foster integration’ (Government, 2019). Reports suggest a rise in online scams, online abuse and online misinformation during

the pandemic (DCMS, 2020), and with the development of more sophisticated technology, the threat of ‘online harms’ is only likely to increase over the next decade.

It will be important to ensure that digital delivery within the arts and cultural sector keeps pace with what is considered to be best practice in delivering ‘safe’ online experiences. This will be of particular importance where digitally excluded audiences and participants are concerned as ‘evidence points to the growing overlap between media literacy, digital literacy, and personal data literacy’ (Stone, Llewellyn and Chambers, 2020). ‘Online harms’ must also be considered in relation to the aim to ‘get better at collecting, using and sharing audience data’ (Arts Council England, 2020). Where data is collected, audiences must be fully informed about the ways in which this data will be used.

Technology developments: In order to ensure that digital delivery remains inclusive over the next decade, it will be important for the arts and cultural sector to understand the potential for new technologies to enhance inclusion, but also the barriers they may raise. For example, an increasing number of people are using smart tech in their home - 58% have a smart TV, 25% have a streaming device and 25% have a smart speaker (Ofcom, 2020b). If the proliferation of these devices leads to an increasing amount of arts and cultural content being aimed at these channels, this would have implications for those that don’t have access to these technologies, or are unable to use them.

Digital in education: Providing children and young people with the digital skills they need to succeed in society has become an increasing focus within education, and is likely to become even more important over the next decade. For arts and cultural organisations delivering to younger audiences, it will be

important to ensure that digital delivery supports the development of the skills needed to succeed in a digital society.

The post-COVID societal landscape: We do not yet know what the lasting impact of COVID-19 will be, but there is the potential for societal structures to be reshaped. One area that may be impacted is how we perceive ‘community’. For example, the rise of digital communication and digital delivery within arts and culture could create a shift from ‘communities of place’ to ‘communities of interest’. While we do not know whether this shift will occur, it is useful to consider, given its implications for partnership working within the arts and cultural sector.

The importance of a continued commitment to digital inclusion

Embedding digitally inclusive practices across the arts and cultural sector requires organisations to commit to reviewing and improving their digital delivery on a continuous basis.

Arts and cultural organisations should regularly consult people in their communities to understand what is stopping them engaging with their content online.

Partnership working (with organisations both within and outside the arts and cultural sector) will also be crucial to sharing best practice, and building the sector’s capacity to deliver inclusive digital experiences.

Embedding inclusive digital practices within the sector can achieve positive social outcomes that extend beyond arts and culture. Arts and cultural organisations play a crucial role within their communities, and as a result, they can also play a vital role in promoting digital inclusion within society.

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About this report

The findings presented here draw on a literature review of the existing evidence in relation to digital inclusion / exclusion (generally and within the arts and cultural sector); interviews with organisations delivering arts and cultural arts experiences; interviews with organisations supporting people to access arts and culture online, and a focus group with people facing digital barriers to accessing arts and culture online. The research was conducted in December 2020 – January 2021.

The research project was led by Jane Mackey, with Dr Alice Mathers and Joseph Chambers at Good Things Foundation. Subject matter expertise was provided by Common Vision's team, Caroline Macfarland and Matilda Agace. The contents and opinions in the report are those of the authors alone and do not reflect the views of Arts Council England or any of its affiliates.

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Good Things Foundation is the UK's leading charity driving social change through digital. Through thousands of network partners in communities across the UK, we help people gain the devices, connectivity, support and skills they need to improve their lives, participate in society and benefit from the digital

world. Since 2010 we've helped over three million people to get – and progress – online.

Common Vision



Common Vision is a not-for-profit think tank with a strategic interest in telling stories and building movements around communities of interest and place. We specialise in shaping positive narratives around civic life, and developing strategic ideas which reframe social and economic challenges as opportunities. The team at Common Vision has expertise in a variety of research and consultation techniques, events organisation and facilitation, and creative public engagement around public policy issues. Our track record includes work analysing the place-based impact of arts organisations, social enterprises, community businesses and other civil society organisations; supporting the business development needs of arts organisations; and advising policymakers at a local and national level on community-led economics and cultural engagement.

We would like to acknowledge the valuable participation of a range of arts and culture organisations who supported this research by giving their time to be interviewed, these include Under the Stars, Open Clasp Theatre Company, Blue Apple Theatre, Purple Patch Arts, InteGreat Theatre and Cross Gates & District Good Neighbours' Scheme CIO amongst many others. Our particular thanks goes to MPower people for facilitating our online focus group with their staff and service users.

**For more information about the project, contact Good Things Foundation on:
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