

Future Play

A **resource** for anyone making, touring
or presenting performance for children

Created by Fevered Sleep

Note to reader

This booklet has three sections:

The front section (on the smaller pages) maps the background to Future Play, the shape of the project, and the wider contexts in which we worked.

The middle section (on bigger pages, with coloured dividers) shares what we've learned through Future Play, describing what we did, what proved successful, and how others responded. With tips and suggestions, links to further resources, and evidence that you can use in other contexts, this middle section is designed as a practical resource.

The back section (on the largest pages) reflects on the legacy of Future Play.

It's been quite a challenge to condense the learning from a four-year research project into a document that's accessible and succinct. While we've included everything we think is most important, there are some additional resources that we've had to leave out. These are available online at feveredsleep.co.uk/fpresources¹

We really hope this booklet will be useful, and will be used. Please don't just shelve it. Read it. Write on it. Argue with it. Tear out the pages that are most important to you and stick them on the wall. Pass it on to a colleague. Try things out.

The fact that you're reading it means that you're passionate about performance for children, and that you're open to the possibility of change. What a brilliant place to start.

¹ Whenever there's a downloadable resource referenced in the text, you'll see this symbol 🌟

Please take a few minutes to tell us what you think about this publication. We'd love your feedback. We've created an online survey which you can find at feveredsleep.co.uk/fpsurvey

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We're driving on the road at night,
headlights flaring through the pouring rain,
heading north, towards the next venue,
towards a new audience.

We're drenched in water in a rainshower
beneath blazing theatre lights.

We're in a darkened room, hushed voices,
fifteen children feigning fear as they weave
through an imaginary forest, conjuring
something that doesn't exist into being.

We're surrounded by people, altogether,
children and adults, all watching together,
a temporary community, a family, home
from home.

We're in a tech, late at night, getting ready
for our first show first thing in the morning;
plotting. We're in a café, plotting what
project to do next. We're in an office,
plotting figures on a spreadsheet, trying
to make things stack up. A balancing act;
a tipping point; a challenge; a risk.

We're in a room full of artists and
producers, sharing stories, positive news
and wild frustrations, plotting change.
A turning point. Time to do something,
time to take risks, time to act.

* * *

In 2010 Fevered Sleep launched The Future Playground, an online community and series of annual gatherings of artists, producers, and funders, who came together to talk about art and performance for children, and how it might be created imaginatively, produced adventurously, and presented widely. How artists' wild ambitions might meet children's wild imaginations, and how producers, funders, programmers and venues might create opportunities for this to happen. In 2011, with support from Paul Hamlyn Foundation, we embarked on Future Play, a four-year research project that set out to investigate existing models for touring performance for children. We wanted to discover how new collaborative relationships between artists, producing organisations, presenting venues and audiences might lead to new ways of thinking, new ways of working together, and new ways of touring. This publication shares our learning from Future Play.

Whilst reflecting on three touring shows that we presented between 2011 and 2014, we're mindful that we write at a time of uncertain economic futures, shifting educational focuses, and ongoing debates about the social and cultural rights and status of children. Our first reaction to these challenging political and economic contexts might be to return to what we know, to limit our imaginations and our ambitions to what seems most achievable with the increasingly scant resources we can muster, and to play to what we think audiences want: to play it safe. But perhaps the turbulence of our times can also stir things up a little, unsettle things, and bring about change.

It seems to us that *now* is the time to create our most ambitious work. *Now* is the time to dream wildly and imagine fiercely. *Now* is the time to take risks. This may

seem counterintuitive, or even foolish, but history shows that it's always been in times of political and economic upheaval that art and artists flourish and bring about change. What's at stake is too important to play it safe. What's at stake is the possibility for artists to make their best work, and to present it as widely as possible. The possibility for audiences – and especially audiences of children – to encounter the very finest art, in all sorts of places. The possibility for art to be lovingly woven into places of learning, and places of play, woven into people's communities and into their lives.

This bold, ambitious view has driven Future Play, and helped us navigate the real – and at times really difficult – economic and political contexts in which we've found ourselves. Whilst we're all too aware of the challenges of the landscapes in which we work, we also believe in the importance of continuing to challenge ourselves to do the very best we can, and to work closely together to help each other achieve that.

This publication names the risks in this approach – for artists and producing companies, for presenters, and for audiences. It addresses the challenges these raise, and suggests practical solutions to approach and maybe overcome them. It calls for a future marked by inspiration, ambition and hope, underpinned by a strong political and philosophical belief in the vital role of art in children's lives. It's best seen as a toolkit: a series of practical strategies, tactics, and things to do that can be extrapolated from the specific context of touring three Fevered Sleep projects, to the wider ecology of touring performance for children, and indeed beyond that to all touring, whoever the work is for.

We hope that the insights we give, and the approaches we suggest will be useful to you, whether you're an artist, a producer, a programmer or a venue manager, or any other advocate for brilliant art, and outstanding performance, for children. We're not describing a fixed way of working, and certainly not proposing one, not for ourselves nor for anyone else. What we share here is offered in the spirit of collaboration, common experience, and mutual ambition for change.

David Harradine
Artistic Director, Fevered Sleep
November 2015

Why did Future Play start?

At the first Future Playground gathering in 2010, we met in a spirit of celebration and opportunity. At that time the landscape was shifting, and we created The Future Playground as a space in which a growing group of artists working across artforms and across age ranges, alongside a group of visionary funders, programmers and producers, could reimagine what art for children could be.

The day began with provocations inspiring us to play, to explore new ideas and chart new territories.

As the day progressed however, the discussions shifted to the challenges and limitations we faced. These were familiar. And we'd all talked about them in different contexts before.

We discussed whether there was an embedded hierarchy within the arts that didn't value work for children; how policy and funding hadn't provided a sufficiently supportive framework; and why new and existing artists weren't driven to create work for children.

We reflected on the most common touring model in which to present work for children, and the limitations this model brought:

- Work is programmed at weekends or during holidays due to programming hierarchy and established audience attendance patterns
- Sales potential, not quality, can drive programming choice for children's work, lowering standards across the sector
- Box office pricing structure is unsustainable
- Work for children is often programmed on top of other performances, limiting technical sophistication and production values

These established ways of working; assumptions about audiences and their perceptions of quality; and practical limitations on how we might imagine and tour our work were holding us all back. So we decided, after that day of talking, that it was time for action. We decided to do something. In 2011 we launched Future Play.

The vision and aims

The overarching **vision** of Future Play was to create new contexts for performance for children under 7 in the UK.

The **aims** of the project were:

- To carry out an action research project to test a new touring model for presenting performance for children
- To use our findings from this research to advocate for an improved landscape and raised ambition for making and presenting work for children

In order that:

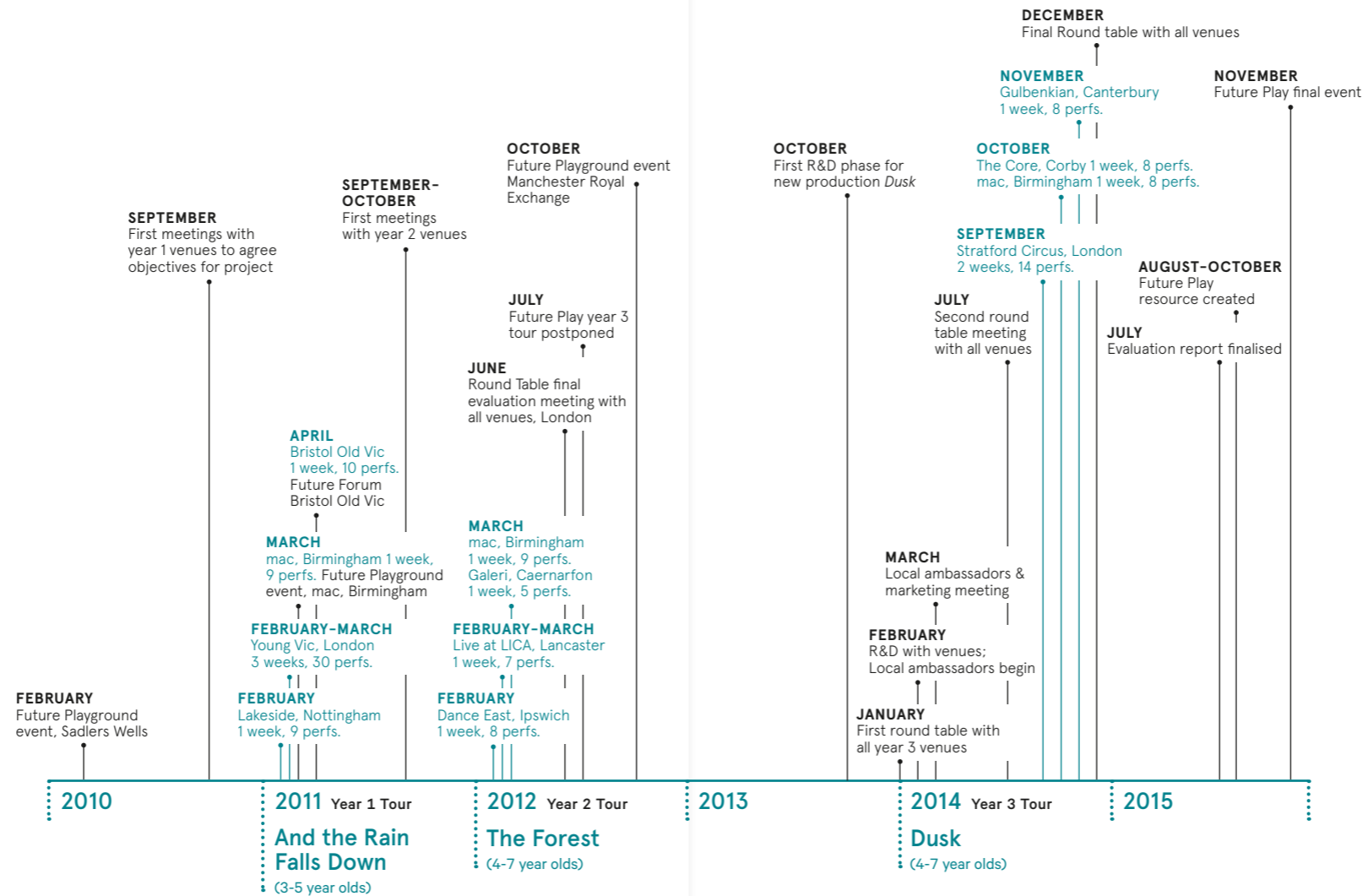
- More children would have access to great art
- The quality of arts provision for young audiences would have the space and conditions to improve

Facts and figures

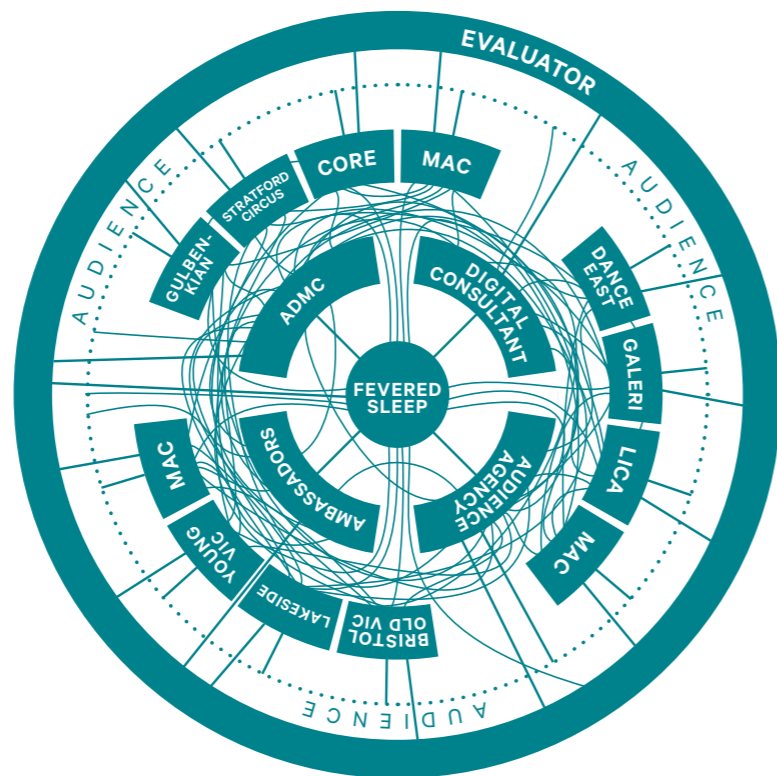
Through Future Play we:

- Toured **3** productions. **2** shows were revivals, **1** was new. We went to **10** different venues in **8** different UK regions across **3** different years
- Reached **7,627** people through **125** performances, achieving an average capacity of **81%**
- Met **184** artists and arts professionals through **2** Future Playground events at mac, Birmingham, and the Manchester Royal Exchange, and **1** Future Forum event for arts producers at Bristol Old Vic
- Created an online forum for discussion and debate which attracted **580** artists, producers, venues, programmers, funders and other arts professionals as members
- Led **71** creative workshops for **1,661** children in schools and nurseries across the UK
- Supported **408** teachers through workshops and resource packs

Future Play timeline



How we worked together



Our approach

We created Future Play as an action research project. We wanted to do what we had done since 2004, to tour work for children alongside our wider portfolio of work for adults, but to do it self-consciously, so that we could try new things and learn along the way.

The project took place around three tours of three different Fevered Sleep productions for children. Each year we worked with four venues in a new way through a new kind of partnership. One venue worked with us on all three tours, so over the three years we worked with ten venues in total.

This project was about quality not quantity. Through Future Play we wanted to work with our partners in a much deeper way and very differently to the usual touring/receiving model.

We recruited **associates** with specialist skills to provide knowledge and help us all to build capacity. The associates changed each year depending on the focus of our research as it evolved, and the changing needs of the different partner venues.

Working together in this way enabled both Fevered Sleep and our venues to share and benefit from additional resources. By being connected more closely in a networked way, we were able to test new ideas and approaches, and take more risks in order to find practical ways to address the challenges we all faced.

- An audience development and marketing coordinator
- An Audience Agency researcher
- A digital consultant
- Evaluation consultants
- Local ambassadors

Venue snapshots

LIVE AT LICA (NOW LANCASTER ARTS)

Multi-arts: theatre, classical music and research. Located on Lancaster University campus.

Region Lancashire, North West

Audience 67,000 visits in 2012

GALERI, CAERNARFON

Multi-arts: film, music, theatre, art, dance, comedy and workshops. A development trust supporting regeneration of the local community. Located in Caernarfon town centre.

Region Gwynedd, Wales

Audience 56,500 visits in 2014

MAC

Multi-arts: theatre, dance, independent cinema, music, spoken word, comedy, exhibitions and special events. Located in Cannon Hill Park, south of Birmingham city centre.

Region Birmingham, East Midlands

Audience 850,000 visits per year

BRISTOL OLD VIC

Theatre: producing and presenting theatre with a focus on supporting local and emerging talent. Located in Bristol city centre.

Region Bristol, West Midlands

Audience 88,500 in 2014

LAKESIDE ARTS CENTRE

Multi-arts: theatre and musical performance, exhibitions, workshops and talks. Located on the University of Nottingham campus, in Highfield Park.

Region Nottingham, East Midlands

Audience 200,000 visits per year

THE CORE AT CORBY CUBE

Multi-arts venue: national and international music, comedy, dance, theatre, digital arts and workshops. Opened in 2010 as Corby's primary arts venue. Located in the town centre.

Region Corby, East Midlands

Audience 32,000 visits in 2014

DANCE EAST

Dance: theatre, workshops and classes. Located on Ipswich waterfront.

Region Ipswich, East region

Audience 64,000 in 2013

STRATFORD CIRCUS

Multi-arts: dance, theatre, music, comedy, literature and circus.

Located in Stratford, Newham, near the Olympic Park.

Region London

Audience 125,000 visits per year

YOUNG VIC

Theatre: producing and presenting international and UK performance with a focus on developing young directorial talent. Located in Central London.

Region London

Audience 254,500 in 2014

GULBENKIAN

Multi-arts venue: music, comedy, theatre, dance and film. Located on the University of Kent's campus.

Region Canterbury, South East

Audience 98,000 visits in 2014

Future Play in context

It's impossible to talk about what we learned through Future Play without considering that it's taken place against a backdrop of major and rapid upheaval. The landscape is radically altered from when we launched the project in 2011 in all sorts of ways.

Art and money

ACE's budget has been **cut by 36%** since 2010 and they've been asked to model further cuts of **40%** ahead of the 2015 spending review. Increases in lottery funding are plugging some of the gaps, but there's no getting away from the fact that, with the recovery from the financial crash of 2008 slower than expected, and a politics of austerity prevailing, there's a lot less money available now compared to 2010.

Art, money and children

"**[The arts are] every child's birthright**", according to Achieving Great Art and Culture for Everyone, ACE's landmark strategy launched in 2012. Yet, whilst **children under 12** make up around **15%** of the population, just **1%** of **public funding** is directed towards work created directly for them.¹

¹ Action for Children's Arts, *Putting Children First*, 2012

Art and education

Despite robust evidence demonstrating how important the arts are for a rounded education², the numbers of young people taking formal exams in creative subjects is dropping³, and the exclusion of arts subjects in the soon to be compulsory English Baccalaureate is causing widespread concern that art is being devalued. At the same time, it's getting harder for schools to spare both the time and the cash to take children to see live performance. The Unicorn, Little Angel and Polka theatres have all publicly stated that they've noted a drop in schools bookings in the last academic year, with some having to cancel performances as a result.

Art and participation

Between 2008-09 and 2014-15, there's been a **16%** drop in the numbers of those aged **5-10** participating in dance activities outside school, a **19%** drop in music and a **15%** drop in theatre and drama⁴. Only **8%** of the population can be defined as 'culturally active'⁵. This worrying trend can't be blamed on funding challenges alone.

² See *The case for cultural learning* available on the Cultural Learning Alliance's website

³ The Warwick Commission on the *Future of Cultural Value* states that, between 2003-13 there has been a 23% drop in the number of students taking GCSE Drama, and between 2007-13 a 25% drop in other craft-related GCSEs

⁴ Figures taken from Taking Part survey data quoted in Arts Professional.

⁵ The Warwick Commission on the *Future of Cultural Value*

A call to action

"The arts are not just important in themselves but fundamental to democracy. Kids need to think about ideas. If you teach them self-expression, you are adding to democracy."

Bob and Roberta Smith, contemporary artist who stood against Michael Gove in the 2015 General Election

The art world has rallied in response to these seismic changes. We're applying our creativity to finding better ways of articulating why the arts are important and encouraging more people to get involved. The What Next? movement and Cultural Learning Alliance, amongst others, are bringing people together to make the case for the arts, and the Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value aims to provide a blueprint for the continuing success of the arts in this country. NESTA are pushing back against a systemic problem in our education system that pushes children to choose 'art or science' instead of both; and the AHRC is supporting research on better ways to measure the value of the arts beyond simple economics. The battle is by no means lost.

Catherine Monks
Development Director, Fevered Sleep
October 2015

Is anyone else thinking this?

As we embarked on Future Play, we asked fifteen other producing companies that were making work for children to answer a survey about the realities of touring their productions. Nine of them responded. Seven of these received ACE funding, one received Creative Scotland funding, all nine made work for children, all nine toured their work for children, three made work for adults too.

Their responses resonated with much of what we were already thinking.

"We have to ensure that our more risky work is balanced with an adaptation in order to keep programmers happy."

"It takes as many resources to build a family audience as it does an adult audience – and often resources are not pushed in this direction with equal vigour."

"Although children's theatre can be more innovative, inventive and meaningful than some adult theatre, the latter has more prestige associated with it. This is largely to do with the way children are perceived in society. This needs to change."

"There is more pressure to create shows for very young children with unlimited audience capacity when work we want to make for this age group works best with restricted numbers."

"The barriers are cost and low return from fees and box office so the equation is difficult to balance. It is possible to make high quality work which is widely available but it needs subsidy."

In 2015, we asked eight of those producing companies about their experiences of touring work for children four years on. Their responses made it clear to us just how important it had been to invest our time and energy in Future Play.

"We find it's harder to tour work if it doesn't have a very clear link to the curriculum. We've been successfully touring work that is a known quantity for bookers; new projects that aren't from known writers are much tougher. We also find that touring work into schools is much easier than getting schools to book visits to venues."

"Touring has changed significantly even in the past four years; the model for touring needs to be much more flexible – a more scattered date profile; less demanding tech needs – being more fleet of foot in all areas; and working in partnerships more with venues building more sustainable relationships so that a play's success/failure (how it is received by audiences; how it sells) is jointly managed."

"Certainly in the last four years we have noticed theatres are nervous about low capacity, high immersion children's shows because of the reduced box office. There are also reduced technical deals, with some venues unable to provide enough technicians or a pre-rig without a contra in the fee."

"It does seem that the industry perceives work for children as more of a financial risk these days, possibly because of reduced school trips. The capacity of venues to take our scale of show for more than a day, or weekend has been reduced."

"There is a great need for developing and enriching young audiences, stimulating their imaginations, offering alternative views to society, and making them aware of their place in a global world. A generation of children may lose out in the experience of theatre. Unfortunately, that generation is our future audience."

A call to a programmer

"HELLO, I wondered if I could talk with you about a performance we're touring next spring. It hasn't been made yet. We're developing it on a theme. No it's not a fairy-tale or known story or book adaptation. We think it's for 3-5 year olds or it might be for 4-7 year olds. We'll know more once we start the research next month...

...The set is a 10 metre long gilded stage with 15 real trees... a watertight structure weighing 3 tonnes that requires access to mains water... 47 lanterns, 40 dimmers, 75 lighting cues... we need 4 ushers to help distribute the 94 hand made tails for the audience to wear... help to gather 3000 conkers...

...The get in takes 8 x 4 hour sessions and needs the help of at least 4 crew...

...We need exclusive use of the theatre over at least a week...

...Oh and the audience capacity is a maximum of 80 so everyone can see and has the best experience possible."

(LONG PAUSE... FOLLOWED BY DEEP SIGH)

On paper, Fevered Sleep's work for children is almost impossible to tour. The support asked of venues is huge. The ticket sales won't get close to recouping the investment needed and even with generous subsidy, the cash and in kind resources are a big ask. The work is obscure, often not made when it goes on sale, so audiences need to be persuaded to take a risk when booking.

However, Fevered Sleep has managed to tour extensively since 2004. This is thanks to the

commitment of visionary programmers who are prepared to invest their budgets and give over a week in a middle-scale space, lots of staff and marketing support to reach 500 young children. They painstakingly piece together a programme that enables children to experience a range of art from the pantomime (that will break even), to the experimental type of performance Fevered Sleep makes (that won't).

Over recent years it became increasingly clear that despite a hunger from venues to show our work, the Fevered Sleep risk factor was becoming more and more difficult to swallow. Lack of programming budgets, reduction in staff time and diminishing schools audiences were threatening our regular touring partners. We realised that to continue giving our work a national reach, we needed to be far more proactive in sharing this risk. The once traditional tour-booking model of the company making a show and the venue offering a deal to sell the show to audiences was redundant.

Future Play was dreamed up in order to find some extra capacity and time to work together with venues, to see if we "the company" could make a difference and share the responsibility with "the theatre" to find the audience, an audience that might never have experienced performance quite like ours before. We hoped that by working together we could push against the need to pare work down or make it more commercially viable, so that we could continue to do what we'd been doing for years – challenging and inspiring children with intimate, surprising, technically complex and 'impossible to tour' performances.

Sophie Eustace
Executive Director, Fevered Sleep

About the shows

Fevered Sleep's productions for children are devised around ideas and themes not texts or books. Their dramaturgy is one of sensation and experience, driven by detailed research into the worldview of a child. They often take place within highly visual environments, in spaces that are kept intimate by designing for a small capacity.

They're technically demanding and ambitious to tour, requiring high levels of technical support from presenting venues. Each show requires a designated performance space with at least two days to get in and at least four hours to get out. This small capacity work has a model that's more akin to midscale touring.

Why do we work like this? To create the most captivating, memorable, intriguing or provocative experience for young children that we can. And to create inspiring and liberating processes through which artists might achieve their best work.

Does it make the work better quality? We believe it does.

And the Rain Falls Down (2011)

Performed on a water-tight stage, with drips, trickles, puddles, a fountain, a flooded floor and a lot of rain, **And the Rain Falls Down** is a playful, visually striking and poetic celebration of water.

Target audience
3-5 year olds and their schools/families

Audience capacity
70, a maximum 35 children and 35 adults



Photograph: Keith Pattison

The Forest (2012)

A contemporary dance piece inspired by mythical and real forests. **The Forest** is performed on a set made of metal, mirror, glass, 15 real trees and 3000 conkers.

Target audience
4-7 year olds and their schools/families

Audience capacity
92 (56 children and 36 adults)



Photograph: Matthew Andrews

Dusk (2014)

In **Dusk** the audience are at the centre of a story that interweaves film, participation and live performance. Wearing lifelike tails, the audience follow the epic journey of a lost member of their community as he tries to find his way home.

Target audience
4-7 year olds and their schools/families

Audience capacity
80 (maximum 60 children)



Photograph: Matthew Andrews

What we learned

The following sections describe in more detail what we focused on, what we did, and what we discovered during Future Play.

Each section, separated by coloured dividers, is broken down into key findings. For each of these we share our top tips, suggestions and practical strategies. These sections can be read in any order.

Programming	TURQUOISE
Audience development and marketing	PINK
Schools and nurseries	YELLOW
Pricing and scheduling	RED
Partnership working	GREEN
Evaluation	BLUE

Remember whenever you see this symbol ✨, we've made some additional materials available online at feveredsleep.co.uk/fpresources

Programming

Through Future Play we wanted to respond to the restrictive programming pattern of a Saturday morning slot or a Christmas holiday run. We set out to build a network of venues that were willing to programme a week-long residency for a show that was not based on a known title, at different times of year.

Would we find the venues?
Would we find the audiences?
This section tells you more.

- 1 The audience is out there
- 2 Children's theatre isn't just for Christmas
- 3 It's not all in the name
- 4 Cast the net wide
- 5 Small capacity doesn't mean small-scale touring

The audience is out there

You can find an audience for a week-long run of shows outside school holidays. All our venues did.

Our audiences averaged **81% capacity** at the 10 venues over three tours.

238% more people saw our productions because of our week-long residencies at venues.¹

"To put a piece for children on for a week in our theatre in prime programming time was a big step but one that has been hugely beneficial in terms of sending a clear message to audiences and artists about what is important to us." Programmer, mac

We're not saying that finding these audiences is easy. There were challenges for all 10 venues we worked with, and there were also some surprising results.

Galeri in Caernarfon, a rural venue nestled in the foothills of Snowdonia, had never programmed work for young children for more than two performances at a time. They had serious concerns whether there were even enough children living within driving distance of the venue to fill more capacity than this. We presented **The Forest** for five performances and they set an initial target of 65% capacity (or 300 children) which was ambitious. We achieved a remarkable 85% of capacity.

Galeri attributed this success to the multi-platform marketing tools we provided around the show, the translation work we embarked on together for their Welsh as first language audiences, and the fact that four shows were attended by schools who came because of the targeted audience development activity and flexible workshop package provided.

TOOLS

A microsite dedicated to the show with creative content including films, blogs, photographs, directors notes and insights

Show flyers (both print and digital)

Email templates with visual identity of the show

Direct mail letters (versions for schools and public audiences)

A promotional slideshow (English and Welsh versions) for use on screens and in the venue cinema

Bespoke workshops for a local SEN (Special Educational Needs) school to support the children's experience of the production

Breakdown of audience capacity and sales 2011-2014

	NO. OF PERFORMANCES	SHOW CAPACITY	TOTAL CAPACITY	ACTUAL SALES	% CAPACITY actual	100% CAPACITY if weekend perfs. only
2011						
LAKESIDE	9	70	630	469	74	140
YOUNG VIC	30	70	2100	1895	90	420
MAC	9	70	630	534	85	140
BRISTOL OLD VIC	10	70	700	646	92	140
2012						
DANCE EAST	8	89	712	619	87	178
LIVE AT LICA	7	89	623	518	83	178
MAC	9	89	801	471	59	178
GALERI	5	89	445	379	85	178
2014						
STRATFORD CIRCUS	14	67	938	750	80	268
MAC	8	80	640	499	78	160
THE CORE	8	80	640	421	66	160
GULBENKIAN	8	60	480	426	89	120
TOTAL	125	923	9339	7627	81%	2260

¹ If our shows had only been programmed at weekends (and taking an average of two shows per weekend) then the audience figure at 100% capacity would have been 2256. By programming a week's residency we actually reached 7627 people which is at least 5371 (or 238%) more people.

Children's theatre isn't just for Christmas

We've often encountered an anxiety from venues that autumn dates will directly compete with sales for the Christmas show, or that teachers and their classes are settling in after the summer and so won't go on theatre trips.

During Future Play, two tours ran from February to Easter and one from mid September to October half-term, demonstrating clearly that it is possible to tour work for under 7s both in the spring and autumn.

Stratford Circus programmed the first tour dates for **Dusk** after the summer break. They were nervous about filling the shows. However, with research and development workshops taking place in schools/nurseries in May and a big marketing push before the summer break, they had 60% school pre-sales from infant classes before holidays began. They achieved this through targeted, face-to-face meetings with each school's 'decision maker' and by offering them a package that included the show, a resource pack and a workshop.

"The bookings show that schools are able to see theatre as important in education and that it doesn't just equal a treat or Xmas show." Programmer, Stratford Circus

"Schools plan so far ahead so having the advance knowledge and engagement from the company was really valuable." Programmer, mac

TOP TIPS
Consider the timing of tours alongside the age range of the production. For example, it's hard to get reception classes to book in September during the settling in period (but not impossible) and some junior year groups will be busy with exams in May. The variables you need to think about are specific to different year groups.

Get marketing information out to schools as soon as you can so they can make an informed decision about which part of the programme to book rather than sticking with the Christmas treat.

It's not all in the name

There is audience demand for children's shows that are not book adaptations or well-known stories. Fevered Sleep's work is devised and theme-based, never adapted from recognisable, known titles.

We asked audiences what they thought of our performances via a post-show online survey:

85% said that the show they saw was **different** from what they had expected

73% rated the show 5 or 6, where 6 is **excellent**

79% said that it was **important** that more shows like the one they had seen were available to them in the future

Difference can be a really strong selling point if audiences are guided with confidence through the booking process. This requires everyone at the venue (from box office and marketing to education and outreach) to be fully briefed about what the production can offer audiences beyond something safe and familiar.

TOP TIPS
Celebrate difference when marketing shows without a known title.

Identify the key selling points. Local ambassadors were really useful in helping us articulate what these were for local audiences.

Invest in the quality of the marketing materials. Use the strongest and most arresting images you can, not the most obvious. Use the best paper stock you can afford.

"The show felt challenging and a bit risky – so refreshing compared to much of the work out there which assumes that children need to be spoon-fed a narrative, preferably with lots of slapstick!" Audience member on Dusk

"It is completely unpatronising and great to experience work targeted at young people that is so compelling for audiences of all ages. The design and sensory nature of the work marks it out from a lot of other work made for young people." Programmer, Bristol Old Vic

Cast the net wide

Finding the right fit between programmers and producing companies is a lengthy process. The time it takes to turn interest from venues into full commitment and a booking should not be underestimated. For each tour we spoke to a wide range of people before confirming our four Future Play partners.

For **And the Rain Falls Down** we approached 28 venues over a six-month period prior.

For **The Forest** 59 venues were contacted (36 said no immediately and we had active discussions with 23).

For **Dusk** we initiated discussions with 12 programmers 18 months in advance.

"There is always the commercial vs aesthetic equation. You have to look at the bigger picture. It can't just be about chasing money but when you do, use it to support brave companies pushing what children's theatre can be."

Programmer, mac

Useful resources

Example of information sheet for programmers

Check out the following sites that connect producing companies and venues:

tour-finder.org is a new online resource for companies and artists to post listings about their tour-ready productions, and for bookers to easily search for shows for their programme

itsagobo.com is a subscription service currently being developed to help theatre makers minimise the time spent searching for a venue and to help presenting venues find a greater diversity of work to choose from

tourbook.org.uk is an online tool to support rural touring in Scotland. It connects rural promoters with each other, and with professional performers of all genres

We enabled programmers to make an informed decision by discussing the following:

- Why their audiences will want to see the show
- How it builds on their current audience development work
- How much it costs in terms of the financial deal but also in-kind support, fit-up time, crew and front of house staffing
- The marketing strategy and who is leading on and paying for which elements
- What else the company is providing (e.g. additional activities for schools or public audiences)
- Whether the dates work and if they allow enough time to find the right audience

Armed with the right information venues saw the opportunity to take risks, offer something alternative to existing audiences, and to build new audiences.

"Two weeks after Dusk, a mainstream show was presented that sold £11,000 across four shows but through Future Play we forged on-going relationships with three new primary schools creating a strong legacy for future engagement, it's a balancing act."

Creative director,
The Core at Corby Cube

TOP TIPS

Touring companies – don't just go to the usual suspects. There are visionary programmers out there. It might take time to find the right fit or the right moment to collaborate on the right project.

Programmers – remember that what often feels like a high-risk programming choice can be a new opportunity.

Turning interest into full commitment when booking a tour requires trust, transparency and time.

Small capacity doesn't mean small-scale touring

Creating beautiful, intimate, immersive environments for children demands high production values, which in turn requires the right technical support to tour. Even though the audience capacities for work for young children are often small, the technical demands of the work can be more aligned to middle-scale touring.

When the equation between technical costs of a production and sales potential doesn't balance, it's important to consider the audience's experience and the value of offering something different.

The Core at Corby Cube presented **Dusk** on the main stage and not the studio in order to **“develop our offer for our youngest audiences; to reach the same ambitious standards of quality as our work for audiences aged thirteen and over.”** Creative director, The Core at Corby Cube

The Gulbenkian wanted to **“surprise audiences and raise expectations. Quality experiences for families will bring them back. Everyone from 4 to 75 was fully engaged.”** Producer, Gulbenkian

“What was wonderful was that piece was made for that space, it wasn't just a touring piece wedged into a theatre, it really made a difference.”

Audience member on **Dusk**

We surveyed teachers during **Dusk** and all respondents agreed that the levels of engagement of the children, and their ability to feel empathy towards the central character was down to the small audience capacity and immersive set design. Audiences were also asked specific questions about the capacity and space in the post-show online survey, and feedback endorsed these teachers' views.

Audience Development and Marketing

We found the audiences for our week-long residencies. But how?

Crucially, we recognised that building young audiences requires as much resource and time as building adult audiences. We were working with diverse venues, some small and rural with limited resources, some large multi-arts centres with busy and varied seasons. Some had established programmes of work for children of all ages, others were presenting work for young age groups for the first time. But for most it was a shift in emphasis. To support this we added capacity via the project associates, to help research, reach, engage and build new audiences.

- 1 Audience data can be friendly
- 2 Knowledge is the key to warming up coldspots
- 3 Building audiences requires manpower
- 4 Local diplomacy influences sales
- 5 Local ambassadors can be entrusted as envoys
- 6 Local ambassadors appreciate formalities
- 7 Selling newness is a challenge and a creative opportunity
- 8 Make lead times long
- 9 Reaching new audiences is only the first step

Audience data can be friendly

Future Play created a new opportunity for us to work alongside venues to research our shared audiences, especially since, as a producing company, our access to audience data can be limited.

During Future Play we observed some weariness or anxiety around audience data among some of the venues. And as a small company touring to a wide range of different venues with varying marketing capacities, we initially shared their concerns. Data for data's sake doesn't help anyone, but through the project we honed the analysis of these often confusing numbers and codes, creating understanding of where audience development time and resources were most needed.

We worked with The Audience Agency to gather data in two stages, pre show and post show.

This was the **process**:

- Benchmarks were provided by The Audience Agency for each venue from population data and venue audience data for attendees of work for children
- Venues identified areas for investigation in relation to geography or certain audience types. To support decision making, The Audience Agency provided profiling and mapping: demographic, behavioural and geographic
- The data was analysed with the help of Fevered Sleep's audience development and marketing coordinator, enabling venues to draw up a targeted strategy
- Post-show box office data was analysed and profiled to monitor the success of these strategies

"We realised that we can improve data gathering and that the example of one show shines a light on others going forward."

Marketing officer, mac

"The data was really good. It told us that 75% attendance was from the immediate borough and that we need to target the outer 'doughnut' to widen audiences."

Marketing director, The Core at Corby Cube

Knowledge is the key to warming up coldspots

Through a combination of venues' knowledge of their local audiences, and the profiling of audience and population data, we worked together to create specific objectives for the audience development and marketing activity so we all knew what the focus was. This helped to think about specific approaches to reach those audiences.

Bristol Old Vic used the analysis of its box office data to identify three areas outside the city centre, in socially diverse districts, from which people were not attending. Together we identified key community groups and contacts within the specific boundaries. We created a strategy and action plan for different ways to approach and engage the groups, including face-to-face meetings. This action plan was supported with the creation of three different template letters, information packs, copy for newsletters and a detailed contacts database. Bristol Old Vic tagged any new audience members in order to track future repeat attenders. Although the target of 100 new attenders from these areas was not met, the venue established relationships with two proactive community organisations that acted as future advocates.

TOP TIPS

Join audiencefinder.org for free, to build a clear picture of audience behaviours and profile locally and nationally for your kind of work.

When mining your box office be clear about what you want to know and which criteria will be useful.

Use audience research to connect with existing plans to present work for children and to inform future plans. This information can help long-term strategic planning.

Take time to understand your school catchment areas. Some council websites publish lists that can help build a picture of school demographics.

As Future Play gathered momentum, reaching new audiences from coldspot areas was firmly established as a key objective with all four venues in the final year of the project. On average across the venues, **34%** of bookers were first time attenders, and **26%** from the lower culturally engaged segments. Both of these met our Future Play targets. On average, **52%** of bookers had not previously attended work for children at the venue.

mac used postcode sector mapping and profiling reports to understand where the areas of low attendance were. They focused on streets close to the bus routes that would bring new audiences to the venues, and an area in their Arts Champion (a Birmingham City Council initiative) constituency. The strategy included working with their local ambassador to identify local community groups and organisations. The ambassador also attended a local festival with our artistic director who delivered two creative workshops.

Although mac fell just 2% short of its target for reaching 20% audiences from lower engaged audience segments, **“overall mac achieved its objectives, and the work focused around lower-engaged geographic locations along the bus routes was successful in attracting audiences.”** The Audience Agency

Useful resources

- ✦ Local contacts, networks and listings for developing audiences of children and their families
 - ✦ The Audience Agency stage 1 mapping and profiling report
 - ✦ The Audience Agency analysis and recommendations report
- Check out culturehive.co.uk and familyarts.co.uk/resources for a range of resources relating to child, family and schools audiences

“We encouraged people to approach this show differently. Promoted it face-to-face with goodie bags and conversations at the family fun day and Moseley Folk Festival.”

Ambassador, mac

Building audiences requires manpower

Through Future Play we were able to tour our work with additional audience development and marketing man (actually woman) power for the first time. This was critical to the success of finding, developing and securing new audiences, especially since all the venues' resources were already stretched. An audience development and marketing coordinator worked on **And The Rain Falls Down** and **The Forest**. This role was also accompanied by four local ambassadors during the tour of **Dusk**.

"The audience development and marketing coordinator role was critical but it was delicate and the postholder had to balance her input with the experience of that of the marketing teams."

Evaluator

"The role was important, it gave us great support. She walked the line very well between the company and the venues, mediating and acting as a bridge between them." Marketing officer, The Core at Corby Cube

The role of the audience development and marketing coordinator (ADMC), recruited and managed by us, involved:

- Being a central liaison between Fevered Sleep and the venues
- Using the data from The Audience Agency to work with venues to identify objectives and targets
- Making recommendations about audience development priorities and working with venues to create bespoke strategies
- Helping venues deliver tasks to meet targets and objectives which differed from venue to venue but included:
 - creating or updating a database of schools and public contacts (also important for future marketing activity to this audience group),
 - creating bespoke print and digital tools for venues,
 - supporting multi-artform or multi-use venues to gain insights into the behaviours and opinions of their audiences or building users through research. For example the ADCM worked with mac to research casual centre users, converting a percentage into bookers; with Dance East to convert class attenders into bookers; and with Bristol Old Vic to survey past family and schools audiences about the best times for scheduling shows for young children.

MANPOWER WANTED

— Qualities required —

Enthusiasm, patience and persistence

An audience development and marketing coordinator needs to allow time for venues to get to grips with the opportunities that the role presents, so that they can plan strategically and make the most of the additional support. It takes time for venues to adjust to working with a new team member, especially someone contracted by another organisation.

Flexibility

An audience development and marketing coordinator needs to be light-footed and offer tailored working and bespoke solutions in order to respond to each venue's differing needs.

Tact

An audience development and marketing coordinator needs to understand the unique experiences within different venues. To know when to offer ideas and advice when needed (without teaching anyone how to suck eggs).

Useful resources

- ✳ Audience development and marketing coordinator job description

Local diplomacy influences sales

In response to audience development challenges from the first two years of the project, and drawing on examples of successful schemes from across the sector, we worked with local ambassadors during the final year. These new roles were universally acknowledged by our four venues as a key success factor in influencing sales.

Even when in one venue the target audience changed and a decision was therefore made to change the ambassador, her successor had a big impact in a short timeframe.

Ambassador profiles

Each of the four venues adopted a different approach to finding their local ambassador. The five people who held the roles were very different, with different skills, but were chosen because of their fit with the venues' diverse priorities.

The Core at Corby Cube – an artist and mother

mac – an artist tutor

Stratford Circus – a front of house volunteer

Gulbenkian (two ambassadors) – a retired headteacher and a part-time box office assistant

Ambassador work plan

The work plan opposite was customised for each local ambassador and venue.

“At mac we are thinking about how we can work with more of our artist tutors to be ambassadors around the wider programme and the knock on effects of this in linking courses to the programme.”

Programmer, mac

“The success of the ambassador role has led all of the venues to consider how they can maintain the function in different ways. All intend to adapt the ambassador model for future use.” Evaluator

January Ambassador recruitment and induction
Involving audience development and marketing coordinator (ADMC), programmer and venue marketing lead

February Audience knowledge/research
ADMC and ambassador used data from The Audience Agency alongside personal local knowledge to pinpoint target areas of low attendance

List of target schools/nurseries/ community groups created

Groups for cross promotions identified

Local events researched

March Communication and marketing tools
Collective meeting with all ambassadors to hear artistic update, discuss barriers to people attending and how to overcome these

Marketing materials received from ADMC. Decision on how best to use them

Cultivation plans for schools created using research workshops/meetings with teachers

Letter/email/telephone script templates created by ADMC and ambassador

April/May Making contact, first steps
Email and hard copy letters of introduction sent to schools/ groups

First follow up calls made
Promotional activity at local events
Activity and responses logged and interest passed onto marketing leads

Local half term events attended. Activities and packs developed for those events

June/July Follow up
Visits to schools that had not responded
Bespoke ticket deals agreed with marketing lead and offered to schools who couldn't afford the show

August Project update
Ambassadors saw the show in development and discussed progress with other ambassadors and marketing leads.

Final push planned with marketing lead including promotional activity at local events, cross promotions and local press

September Workshops and show
Ambassadors attended preview performance at Stratford Circus

Tour began. Ambassadors met local contacts attending performances at their venues
Ambassadors visited workshops with schools

December Evaluation
Ambassadors attended round table evaluation in London

Communication

Local ambassadors joined a Facebook group, had catch ups with the ADMC every two weeks, and completed activity logs (Excel documents) for the ADMC/venue every month

Local ambassadors can be entrusted as envoys

Through close management and support, the ambassadors were equipped as emissaries for the venues and Fevered Sleep. We armed them with as much information as possible, empowered them and trusted them. As a result they were confident to go into the local area and speak directly to local groups, schools, and nurseries. They took part in school workshops, attended local events such as festivals, set up craft tents in parks during the school summer holiday, distributed flyers in targeted areas, and arranged local PR opportunities such as shout-outs on local radio stations.

A key stage in the process of developing relationships and ownership of their roles was their involvement in a **Dusk** work-in-progress sharing session, led by our artists. All ambassadors came together at this event and met for the first time.

"It was amazing to feel trusted by the company to speak on their behalf, (but a little scary)." Ambassador

And again the value of the face-to-face contact with audiences that the ambassador roles enabled was underlined by venues. In one venue our local ambassador's conversations with schools' receptionists continually resulted in a generic email address, to which emails were sent and never responded to. She then went to the schools directly and used the postcards to talk about the show and engage the teachers.

"Word of mouth is crucial. More new conversations took place and we learned a lot." Programmer, Gulbenkian

TOP TIP

Don't wait for the call.

Ambassadors can visit schools unannounced, but make sure the visit takes place in lesson time. Never visit at the end or beginning of the day when receptionists are too busy. By speaking to the school office directly you can ask receptionists to pass on information via pigeon holes or to share the named email address of the right contact.

Local ambassadors appreciate formalities

Ambassadors can flourish when their role is given a sense of importance. We created this through a formal recruitment process with job specification; a line-management structure where they reported to the audience development and marketing coordinator while working alongside the venues' marketing teams; and clear objectives for their role drawn from individual venues' audience development strategies. And we also paid them.

"We felt the local ambassadors were as important as the permanent staff at the venues and we wanted to support them properly."

Audience development and marketing coordinator

TOOLS

Ambassador toolkit
Flyers, postcards, colouring sheets, stickers, materials from the shows, regular Fevered Sleep creative updates, up to date copy with key selling points... and Ferrero Rocher

TOP TIPS

Consider ambassadors as a more formal marketing approach when deciding where to invest marketing spend.

Don't underestimate the time needed to manage and support ambassadors. To get the best results ensure ambassadors have a **dedicated person** to report to.

Skype can be an excellent tool to ensure ambassadors don't feel isolated and have ongoing support.

Don't ask the obvious person – start from the audiences you want to reach and then identify who's best placed to reach them. Cast the net as wide as possible.

Try and ensure the recruitment process is a **joint venture** between venue and producing company.

Useful resources

- ✦ Ambassador information pack
- ✦ Ambassador recruitment pack

Selling newness is a challenge and a creative opportunity

Selling devised work is a marketing conundrum. All our venues expressed challenges around finding the right way to sell something new to audiences.

We found that our theme-based work offered exciting opportunities to create tailored, unusual marketing strategies. Across the three shows we worked with venues to draw inspiration from the creative process, so that they could make audience development and marketing tools as interesting and versatile as possible.

And The Rain Falls Down – Audiences were sent instructions of how to make paper boats before the show and were invited to launch them on the lake next to the venue in Nottingham.

The Forest – Venues invited audiences to take part in a conker-collecting weekend before the show. Online treasure hunts were set up through geocaching.com and linked to our microsite inviting audiences to explore local woods and forests.

Dusk – A series of postcards with images of, and messages from, the central character in the production were sent out to build anticipation among audiences. The postcard was designed as a template to be personalised by each venue, and schools in particular enjoyed them. Some venues did express frustration at having to fill in the salutations by hand; we'll be creating a more generic version next time.

Colouring sheets were created for **Dusk** to be available at any event leading up to or during the run of performances.

We created **microsites** that shared our making and touring story. Venues were able to link audiences to the site and offer tasters to the show to build anticipation. Contents included blogs, video diaries from the artists, creative activities linked to the resource packs, a gallery of production images, and Twitter feeds. Over 1000 visitors accessed these microsites each year.

"Here to see The Forest show at LICA – what a lovely place for a find!" Posted on geocaching.com

"Craft activity was an important first step for some people."
Ambassador, The Core at Corby Cube

"If we don't feel confident in something it is hard to sell. There was a risk because Dusk was in development (as is often the case) but not every company is clear about what that means. It was brave of the company to be so clear from the outset." Marketing officer, Gulbenkian

Useful resources

- ✿ Dusk colouring sheet
- ✿ Dusk postcard

Check out an example of our microsites itstheforest.com

TOP TIPS

Budget for newness. Touring costs and marketing budgets need to reflect the additional work needed to sell devised performances. We shared the costs and included a request for funds for additional audience development support in all our fundraising proposals, over and above the costs of standard marketing activity.

Signal quality. Marketing materials need to reflect the quality of the production, especially since adults are the gatekeepers to sales, not children.

Find the right words. Deciding on the right copy for describing something different needs to be a collaborative process between the producing company and the venue. This can be particularly challenging when a work is being devised and you want to try and give an accurate representation of the audience experience. Think carefully about language and words and phrases that will have different meanings for different audiences. If necessary, be prepared to work with each venue to customise the copy for the people they're targeting.

Consider cross-promotions with other organisations. We worked with woodland and forestry clubs to connect with the environmental theme of **The Forest**, and Kids Club cinema screenings to promote **Dusk** (which used film).

Include the creation of digital content in the production schedule during the making of the work. You'll need members of the creative team to be available and contracted to contribute to this activity.

Don't forget that as well as more unusual conceptual ideas, really **clear marketing messages** in a simple form are essential. Consider creating a quick and cost effective piece of print with dates, times and basic information as soon as dates are confirmed. Often a brochure or tour leaflet comes later and our experience shows that the earlier you have something physical to share with audiences the better.

"Postcards to drip feed to schools were beautiful and effective, but we also needed practical information with key marketing details which should have come first." Marketing officer, Stratford Circus

"We initially received artistic driven copy that needed to be localised. Translating something that 'sounds amazing' to actual sales is hard and you need genuine hooks to grab an audience."
Marketing director, The Core at Corby Cube

"The audience development and marketing coordinator helped to 'translate' the show from company to venue. How are we selling the show? Does this align with the directors' wishes?"
Programmer, Stratford Circus

Make lead times long

Long lead times are essential for effective audience development and marketing campaigns. However, different programming deadlines, fundraising decisions and a multitude of other factors can influence when a show eventually gets the green light.

Once dates were confirmed for our first two tours, we met with venues six months before performances, and began to set clearly defined objectives together. The audience development and marketing coordinator (ADMC) began work with venues on bespoke audience development strategies at least four months ahead. This wasn't long enough. For our final show **Dusk** we tried to front load this planning time so audience development could start as soon as possible. We hosted a round-table meeting for all programming and marketing staff in January 2014, eight months ahead of the tour in September, and the ADCMC began work from that point.

Dusk was a completely new show, so we felt the additional pressure of two very different sets of deadlines (those of our creative process and those of the marketing teams). From our perspective it was challenging to create copy and an image that accurately represented the potential audience experience when the show was still in development. In some cases venues created their own materials. This process required compromise and negotiation.

"It doesn't have to be much, just a picture, a line of copy. I think being brave and just putting something out there is crucial for grass roots audience development. Especially schools, who plan so far ahead."

Audience development and marketing coordinator

"It is difficult for marketing/Box Office as there is so much programmed for them to get their heads around. A systematic, long term approach is required."

Marketing officer, mac

Venues' wish lists

Venues who presented **The Forest** told us directly what worked best from their perspective.

The 'as soon as possible' wishlist:

- Agreed joint audience development and marketing objectives (between producing companies and venues)
- Detailed marketing pack. Really useful contents include:
 - I a direct mail letter to schools
 - II a direct mail letter to public audiences
 - III good quality video clips and images
 - IV a press release and quotes
 - V flyers (interactive are really good – e.g. colour by numbers, follow the maze)
- Accessible briefing sheets for front of house and press and marketing

The 'would be fantastic if possible' wishlist:

- Show and tell with the company. A short two hour session with directors, open to anyone from front of house and press and marketing. This could include:
 - I a question and answer session with the directors
 - II an opportunity to see short excerpts of the show
 - III an opportunity to meet and chat with members of the cast
- A past venue to advocate and share best practice

Useful resources

- ✦ Future Play activity schedule
- ✦ Audience development and marketing coordinator's work plan

Reaching new audiences is only the first step

We know that building child and family audiences for non-mainstream work needs a long-term, incremental approach. As we've said repeatedly, it doesn't happen overnight, and Future Play attempted to increase knowledge and expertise that would enable venues to continue to build audiences in the future.

We've had to rely on the long-term artistic strategy of our partners to continue offering a programme that will bring families, schools and children back into their theatres. For some this is clearly evident, and the investment of time and capacity has an ongoing positive impact.

However, six out of ten of our partner venue programmers or artistic directors have moved on from their organisations during the life of the project, taking with them their commitment to presenting the best possible work for young children.

We hope that Future Play has helped place passion for, and commitment to, performance for children at the heart of organisations, by involving a whole range of people across multiple departments, and not just individuals. Only time will tell.

"It genuinely raised the bar in terms of quality work for audiences of that age group and fits in wonderfully with Bristol Old Vic's aspiration to invite inspirational world class artists into the programme for our audiences." Programmer, Bristol Old Vic

"Working on Future Play has inspired us to be ambitious, bold and adventurous around our offer. It has helped us firmly put programming and producing work for children at the centre of our development plans. We want to create year round provision for family audiences, with a particular focus on early years." Programmer, mac

Schools and Nurseries

We are all acutely aware that schools are under ever increasing pressure to deliver results in the classroom. Teachers are finding that organising and paying for extracurricular activity is hugely challenging.

Through Future Play we learned that not only is working with schools a key way to fill capacity for children's shows, it is also one of the best ways to reach a diverse audience. A total of 30 different schools made up 63% of our audience across the three tours.

The Taking Part data suggests that in an average class, just under a third of children aged 5-10

years old, may get taken to the theatre by parents.¹

If we want more children to access high quality theatre, working with schools is essential. We tried a number of different ways to get them on board. This section shares what we learned.

- 1 Teachers like to get creative
- 2 Workshops work
- 3 Curriculum-linked resource packs are essential
- 4 Meeting face-to-face works best
- 5 Cost is a barrier
- 6 Your work may be more accessible than you think
- 7 School groups and the public don't always mix

¹ Taking Part 2014/15, Annual Child Report Statistical Release, DCMS, July 2015

Teachers like to get creative

We collaborated with some brilliant teachers during Future Play and found that involving them in the creative process gave them ownership over the project. This both translated into sales for the shows and aided their development as creative professionals.

While making **Dusk**, we ran research and development sessions with schools and nurseries near all four venues to test the themes and content for the piece. This provided a powerful opportunity to connect teachers with the journey of the project and gave them the chance to sit back and watch their children working creatively.

"The workshop was one of the strongest ones we've done. It was well pitched and very interactive. The children and staff gained something from working with a professional. It explored a different kind of dance to what they normally do (street dance) and taught teachers new ways of introducing it into lessons." Teacher, The Forest at mac

"Harnessing the skills and expertise of the directors, we reached out to three nurseries (105 children and teachers) for the first time, most of whom had never been to see theatre before. The workshops were a wonderful professional development experience for teachers and the whole scheme ensured that these children's first experience of live professional theatre was totally magical." Schools and colleges project manager, Young Vic

Workshops work

Offering workshops is really good incentive to secure bookings and extend teachers' confidence in, and children's engagement with, the work. We delivered over 70 free workshops during the project. These were always led by a key member of the creative team, not a separate education officer. Direct engagement with children feeds back into our creative process, and working in this way signals to teachers the value we place on developing relationships with schools.

Live at LICA used **The Forest** to build relationships with seven schools, three totally new to the organisation.

Workshops took place during the research and development process of the shows up to seven months before the tour started, which both enabled us to test ideas for the performance and gave teachers the confidence to book tickets. We offered additional pre and post-show workshops while we were on tour.

"Workshops, resource packs and Fevered Sleep staff support were valued and key to attracting schools' uptake. Feedback was very strong and we are already engaging new teachers in future projects." Marketing Manager, Live at LICA

"The research workshop package was found to be a real 'hook' and incentive for early bookers."

Programmer, Stratford Circus

TOP TIPS

Devise a schedule that is as flexible as possible and do this in consultation with teachers as availability can be really tricky for schools, especially when using the hall around lunchtime or P.E.

Work with a venue to organise meetings with teachers to discuss the content and logistics of workshops.

Expect the unexpected.

We all communicated as clearly as possible with schools that the workshops were for a maximum of one class of children and needed a clear hall space for 45 minutes. We often turned up to find 60 five year olds with no additional adult helpers in a classroom. We had to think on the spot; so be prepared.

What artists want isn't the same as what teachers need. Teachers usually want the whole class or year group to access a workshop, whilst we wanted to work with a smaller number of children in order for them to have a richer experience. We've had to compromise at times or build in repeat visits to schools. Establishing

good relationships with schools is key to managing such different needs and expectations.

Build workshop costs into funding applications

so that you can offer them free of charge to schools. Don't expect the workshops to subsidise the show *and* to work as audience development.

You could also try...

Adapting schools workshops for family audiences. During **And The Rain Falls Down**, Lakeside's learning officer adapted our schools workshop in order to offer additional wrap around activities for family audiences. They delivered 12 more workshops, extending the reach of the project.

Offering workshops as a stand-alone activity.

The same venue offered the workshop to nurseries as a standalone activity (without the show). This was a useful tool in developing relationships with nurseries who found it difficult to travel to the venue.

Curriculum-linked resource packs are essential

Children's shows that aren't based on known texts or titles really need contextual information. In particular, when engaging schools in a more 'risky' offer beyond the mainstream, we've discovered that creating follow-up activities linked directly to the curriculum is really important.

Historically this is something that we resisted because we wanted to engage with children as artists, not educators. Our approach now is to provide curriculum-related resources that retain a distinctive artistic voice.

We met teachers in informal sessions to plan content for our packs. This gave us the chance to discuss the show's themes and initial suggestions for activities. The teachers could indicate how effective these would be in a classroom situation and hear more about the ideas behind the productions.

"The interactive resource pack helped teachers embed the topic into the school setting."

Education manager, Lakeside



TOP TIPS

Get resource packs to schools in good time.

Teachers need to plan their classroom content in the previous term so it's too late when the show is on tour. But if it's not ready in time for teachers' planning stages then an outline of your show's curriculum links will be really helpful.

Make resource packs in hard copy and as downloads.

Teachers told us that they prefer resource in hard copy, but downloadable packs were also really well received. With *And The Rain Falls Down* 153 packs were downloaded (compared with a hard copy circulation of 45).

Teachers and children love photos and music. Some of the most popular elements of our packs have been laminated hard copies of production photos and music from the show.

Make elements of the packs accessible to family audiences. Some children love to do follow up activities at home and online packs allow everyone access to them.

Make sure your content is open enough for all types of audiences. Schools for children with special needs will want to pick out activities suitable for their particular children.

"The pack provided shortcuts for teachers – they need them." Ambassador



TOOLS

Visual prompts

We know that parents often don't know what their child has done at school ("what did you do today?" "nothing!") and so we decided to make children something to encourage them to talk about what they experienced in the theatre at home. These ranged from:

- stickers
- paper conkers
- glossy raindrops

Each had a simple image from the show and "ask me about what I saw today". Feedback from schools and parents confirmed that this prompted interesting discussion at home and helped extend the live experience.

Useful resources

- ❖ **Dusk** resource pack (Key Stage 1 Curriculum)
- ❖ **And The Rain Falls Down** resource pack (Early Years Curriculum)

Meeting face-to-face works best

Reaching the decision makers at schools and convincing them that your offer is important means making the right approach in the right way, often over a long time frame.

Of all the approaches we tried, our ambassadors provided a really important resource for persuading schools to come.

Our audience development and marketing coordinator worked with ambassadors to write a letter of introduction to new schools from areas of low attendance. Together they developed a script through role-play for follow-up telephone conversations highlighting the key messages for schools about **Dusk**. These were also used at local events and festivals. But most importantly ambassadors visited an average of eight schools/early years' settings in person to hand out marketing materials and talk face-to-face to teachers about the show which translated into between one and three new school bookings for each venue.

"Schools can be really excited about engaging with an arts offer, but we need to make it as easy as possible in order for them to understand the benefits."

Education officer, mac

TOP TIPS

Face-to-face and hard copy communication are far more effective than email or phone calls.

Time, trust and transparency are key.

There is a lot of competition for schools' attention. It takes patience and determination to build relationships.

Make contact with schools at least one term before the show.

This is essential to allow teachers to plan how to tie the performance into their curriculum learning. Even if you are presenting work in the autumn term, talk to schools in the summer term before. Stratford Circus's 60% summer presales figure is evidence of how successful an early approach can be.

Useful resources

✿ An introduction letter to schools

Cost is a barrier

One major barrier to schools and nurseries buying tickets was clearly financial. Overcoming this barrier was possible when good relationships were in place.

Developing audiences requires everyone to realign sales targets. Three of the four venues presenting **Dusk** noted a tension between audience development and sales imperative. Flexibility enabled a solution.

"Trust is important and we need to build relationships over time – direct contact affords opportunities to create bespoke solutions. For example, we negotiated a price through conversations for more than one group to come along when we realised there was a price resistance for the group."

Programmer, mac

TOP TIPS

Provide a package with transport. It's a good incentive, even if you just deduct the cost of public transport from the ticket price.

Offer workshops at the venue on the same day as the show so schools don't have to travel twice and have a full day out. Remember to make sure you have space for the groups to eat lunch.

Offer multi-class discounts, especially when working with bigger schools so that they can bring more of the same year group and save money on travel.

Be realistic about pricing when targeting areas of low attendance. Many venues had schemes in place where they fundraise to allocate a proportion of tickets to those who can't afford to buy them such as Stratford Circus's Every Child a Theatre Goer funded by the London Borough of Newham.

Your work may be more accessible than you think

We have consistently found that our devised, non-narrative work is highly successful in engaging children with special educational needs. This creates a real opportunity for companies making work that is not rooted in text.

For all types of schools there is often an element of anxiety about what to expect and about what is expected of them and their children, especially for more unconventional performance. However, even if you're not a specialist company, it is possible to allay those fears and make shows and workshops accessible with simple adjustments.

Galeri successfully used **The Forest** as an opportunity to forge a relationship with a special SEN school. Our artistic director and Galeri staff approached this together as follows:

- We visited the SEN school to introduce the performance
- We led a physical pre-show workshop with teaching staff
- We designed a story-board to prepare the children for the pre-show workshop experience
- We created a social story¹ which was used to prepare the children fully for what to expect
- We met each class to talk through the social story with the teachers and children and answer any questions
- Each child was asked to bring a pine cone or leaf with them to the performance. This was to ease anxiety about a new experience, give children a sense of purpose and connect them with the show before the event. These 'gifts' were left behind in the theatre

¹ Social stories, created by Carol Gray in 1991, help teach social skills to people with autism. They are short descriptions of a particular situation, event or activity, which include specific information about what to expect in that situation and why.

We hosted a "relaxed" performance for **Dusk** during which the capacity was reduced to 45 to create a very intimate environment for selected groups. Teachers came to see the performance first to advise on other measures we could take to make it fully accessible. The only alteration to the performance was to slightly increase lighting levels. The staff prepared the children using a social story of the whole experience and we ran a pre workshop in which children could handle some of the props used in the performance.

TOP TIPS

Talk to teachers about any children with special needs in mainstream school and what might enhance their experience of the work.

Build social stories and bespoke workshop opportunities using hands on techniques in small groups. Think of ways to connect children with the venue such as bringing something with them to the performance. Visit autism.org.uk for more information on how to write a social story.

Communicate any surprising elements of the show in advance to teachers so they are prepared for students' reactions to it.

"What an extraordinary show! The relaxed performance was my students' first theatre trip and we were amazed by how the show allowed children with autism the freedom to be totally immersed in the experience. They loved it and are still talking about it three months on." Deputy headteacher, after **Dusk**

School groups and the public don't always mix

Sometimes it works...

The Young Vic filled additional seats not taken up by nursery groups for **And the Rain Falls Down** with family bookings and theatre studies students from further education colleges and universities. This worked well as they were smaller nursery groups, not in uniform and accompanied by lots of adults due to the age range (3-4 year olds).

Sometimes it doesn't...

mac experimented with advertising **Dusk** schools shows to the public for the first time. However, this did not work for them as a few family attendees were surrounded by multiple Year One and Year Two classes clearly distinguishable by their uniforms and behaviour.

Remember...

Schools have set expectations of their children's behaviour on theatre trips. Teachers often want them to display a respectful and focused attitude to what they are watching ("sit down"... "shhhhh" shouted across the auditorium). Young children need to be free to verbally and physically respond to the work (as long as this is safe for others). It's sometimes hard to get the balance right. We sent written guidance to all teachers ahead of the show explaining what to expect from the performance, the support they would get from the front of house team and directly requesting that they allow their children to respond freely to the work (whilst supervising their wellbeing and safety). A member of our team also met them as they arrived at the venue to brief them again on the logistics and expectations. Teachers really appreciated this as it eased their anxiety, enabling them to share and enjoy the experience alongside their children.

"If schools were late it meant holding the show and this inconvenienced members of the public - we need to think this through better." Programmer, mac

Pricing and Scheduling

At the outset of Future Play we wanted to test whether, as a sector, we had made an assumption around pricing children's work that was untrue. Were audiences willing to pay more than we thought?

We also wanted to find the best times for presenting work for children to ensure that scheduling made attendance as accessible as possible for family, schools and early-years audiences.

- 1 Audiences are willing to pay a bit more
- 2 Pricing incentives work
- 3 The sums may never add up
- 4 Best show times for children vary

Audiences are willing to pay a bit more

Some venues tried a new pricing structure that, when tested, appeared to suggest little price resistance.

For **And The Rain Falls Down** the Young Vic tried an £8/£10 ticket price (their standard adult ticket pricing for the studio space we performed in) on early years audiences for the first time. They achieved 90% capacity across a three-week run.

Our multi-year venue (mac) raised their ticket prices from a split ticket of £6/£8 for **And The Rain Falls Down** to a new single price ticket of £8 for **The Forest** and reported that there was no particular resistance to having a single price for adults and children.

Dance East charged a £6/£10 split ticket price for **The Forest** and achieved 88% capacity across the run.

With support from the audience development and marketing coordinator, Bristol Old Vic surveyed their existing family audiences to ask about pricing and scheduling ahead of the tour. This informed a slightly higher full ticket price of £9 for **And The Rain Falls Down**.

The Core at Corby Cube charged £8 instead of their usual £7 and although school bookings were very good, they only sold 15% of public show capacity and found it challenging to get families to book. They plan to review this price in the future.

Sales were good across the venues with an average single pricing structure of £8 and an average capacity of 81%. From our online audience survey data 77% of respondents agreed, or strongly agreed, that their ticket was value for money.

At the outset of Future Play we had hoped to test some more unusual pricing approaches, such as a 'pay what it's worth' scheme, to see what value audiences placed on shows for children (particularly non-mainstream work). However, even within the context of Future Play, our venues did not feel able to take excessive risk when the sales imperative was already high for a show that required considerable subsidy.

Breakdown of pricing, concessions and capacity

SHOW	VENUE	PRICE	% CAPACITY
And the Rain Falls Down	LAKESIDE	£6	74%
	YOUNG VIC	£10/£8 concessions/schools	90%
	MAC	£8/£6 concessions/schools	85%
	BRISTOL OLD VIC	£9/£6 concessions/schools	92%
The Forest	DANCE EAST	£10/£6 concession/schools	87%
	LIVE AT LICA	£8	83%
	MAC	£8	59%
	GALERI	£5	85%
Dusk	STRATFORD CIRCUS	£8/£6 concessions/family ticket £24	80%
	MAC	£8	78%
	THE CORE	£8	66%
	GULBENKIAN	£8/£6 group of 4+	89%

Pricing incentives work

We knew from the first two years of Future Play that resistance from some school groups was linked to cost. So in year three some venues created discounts for school groups which were mostly agreed through negotiation on a case-by-case basis and in line with a venue's evolving relationship with the school.

Gulbenkian, who presented **Dusk** during half term so could not target schools, offered a family ticket of £6 per person to boost sales. This accounted for 33% of their final sales.

Galeri wanted to keep their pricing for **The Forest** as low as possible to make it affordable for schools, particularly due to the additional travel costs faced by people living in a rural area. It worked. They achieved 85% capacity, way over their original target.

TOP TIP
Remember that different schools have different timeframes for allocating their budgets. Some we spoke to work a year ahead, and others keep funds back to take up opportunities during each term. When talking with schools make sure you find this out.

The sums may never add up

Even if we can charge a little more for children's shows, the sums will ultimately not add up for small scale touring. Box office **will make a loss**. If we want to raise the quality of work for children, ensure production values are high, and that children have the best experiences possible, and if we want to ensure that ticket prices are accessible, then children's theatre **will require subsidy**.

Everyone across the venue organisations needs to understand this including marketing and sales teams.

We believe in the value of a child's experience of art for its own sake. But it's also the case that extraordinary theatre for children grows tomorrow's audiences and artists. Accepting short-term box office loss might turn out to be a worthwhile long-term investment.

TOP TIPS
Venues - Join up your thinking. Ensure that all departments talk about the tension between sales imperatives and audience development and the need for a long-term view.

Producing companies and artists - put yourself in your venues' shoes. They have demanding targets. It's hard to prioritise selling a show if it will make a loss. Inspire them to work with you.

Best show times for children vary

Over the project we wanted to discover the optimum times for scheduling work for children. However, we soon discovered there are multiple variables that make this impossible, from age of the children, nap times, lunch times, school year groups, the specific term, local area, and journey to venue, all of which have a big impact on scheduling choices. Despite no one model emerging we found the following:

10am/10.30am and **1pm/1.30pm** appeared to work best for school visits (enabling travel to and from the venue with lunchtime factored in)

Saturday shows timed at **10.30am/11.30am** and **1.30pm/3pm** worked well as did **Sunday** performances.

Many venues wanted to test the appetite of family audiences for shows scheduled at tea-time. Performances of **And The Rain Falls Down** proved particularly successful. The Young Vic achieved 85% take up on 4.30pm Friday afternoons, Bristol Old Vic 73% and mac 65% sales for midweek tea-time shows. However, mac repeated this offer for **The Forest** at 4.15pm but this was not popular for the older age range (5-7 year olds) and the show had to be cancelled. mac realised it was too early for school-aged children to get to the venue. In future they plan to schedule 5.30pm performances for this age range in term time.

TOP TIPS

The best way to get the timings right is to **consult local audiences** in advance about the schedule.

Touring companies – **negotiate each performance schedule** carefully with venues, making sure the start times work for audiences. And allow enough time between shows for your company.

Build in flexibility so that schedules can change if needed. For example we varied the start times for **Dusk**, when requested by specific schools visiting mac, to enable more travel time or lunch before leaving school. Working to accommodate the needs of particular groups really helps build the long-term relationships that will bring them back to the venue.

Useful resources

❖ Example of an audience scheduling survey

Partnership Working

Partnership working was the secret of Future Play's success. To a small company like Fevered Sleep, working with multiple partners (venues, schools, associates, local ambassadors and evaluators) felt complex and unwieldy. We questioned whether we could get everyone on board to do what we had set out to achieve. However, by working differently with individuals and organisations, we felt a subtle but fundamental change taking place. In this section we explore the impact of capacity building, cross-department and cross-venue working, and our role as arts makers in providing the glue to hold it together.

- 1 The status quo is there to be challenged
- 2 Building capacity builds bridges
- 3 Being SMART together helps
- 4 Making work together deepens partnerships
- 5 Artists need to be brave
- 6 Touring companies can broker relationships within venues
- 7 Touring companies can broker relationships between venues

The status quo is there to be challenged

We need to create deeper, stronger, better relationships between all partners involved in making, touring and presenting work for children to build the trust needed to take risks and enable audiences to experience the best work.

As our evaluator explained, within the linear model,

“The artists make the work, sell it to the venues who then sell it on to the audiences. Often the relationship between these components in the chain is fragile and unclear and it can mean that the artist is disconnected from the audience as the channel of communication is not their channel. It can often also mean that the venue is disconnected from the artistic process and is selling something that they don’t really know. The consequence of this is that venues play it safe by programming well-known titles or other less risky work.”

Future Play tested this supply chain by creating multiple ‘bridges’ and connections between the producing company, venues and audiences, and as a result, artists were more connected with their audiences, and venues with the artists.

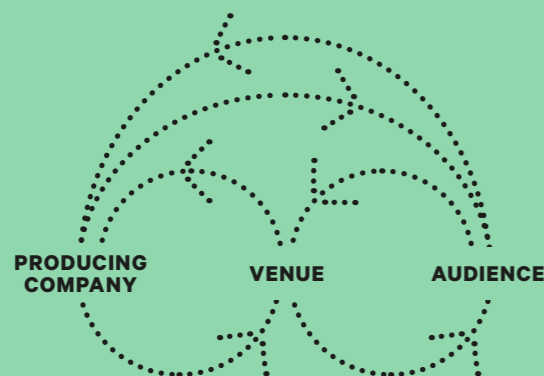
“Shared ethos and commitment between the company and the venue is critical. It creates the conditions for creating audiences.”

Programmer, mac

The new kind of partnership working at the heart of Future Play changed a traditional **linear** model of working that looked like this:



To a **non-linear** partnership model that looked like this:



Building capacity builds bridges

Future Play provided additional staff who were able to bring specialist knowledge to the project and support professional development within both Fevered Sleep and venues.

The associates recruited were able to respond to the individual needs of diverse venues and, when these needs changed as the project evolved, the associates did too. At the outset in 2011, for example, digital capacity was a key need for Fevered Sleep and some of our venues, but by the final year it was clear that the audience development and marketing coordinator and local ambassadors would provide the most valuable support in reaching audiences.

Although recruited and contracted by Fevered Sleep, our audience development and marketing coordinator worked independently. She provided an impartial overview of the project and could respond sensitively to the different challenges each partner faced.

Remember that additional resource often creates workload before it relieves it.

We became aware quite quickly that experts and consultants couldn't build capacity within organisations without the opportunity to work alongside existing staff. This required organisations' staff teams to make time to induct additional project associates in order to make the most of the opportunity they offered.

TOP TIPS
Think about the end at the beginning by considering wherever possible the legacy of short-term additional capacity with partners.

Consult partners before providing extra staff. Don't make assumptions. Acknowledge that more manpower could be a burden rather than a support.

Be clear with partners at the beginning of the project that additional staffing will require their time and focus to be successful.

Allow lead times that will accommodate the transition from additional capacity feeling like a liability to becoming an asset.

"The ambassadors have been internal 'bridges' between the programmers and the marketing team."

Evaluator

Being SMART together helps

SMART may be one of those acronyms that makes you groan. But we have to be honest: agreeing, setting and sharing objectives between the producing company and venues at the outset and making them SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed) was crucial to the successful management and delivery of Future Play.

Our overarching objectives for Future Play were drawn from sector debate, discussion and feedback about reoccurring challenges in touring performance for young children. We discussed these in early conversations with venues to make clear what the ambition of Future Play was and how we were going to try and achieve change through practical solutions.

We tried creating bespoke objectives with each venue but found, in the third year, that setting a broad framework for objectives, with individual targets against them, made it easier to draw comparisons and track the project's progress overall. Objectives included targets around audience development, new audiences, areas of least engagement, box office, capacity building, and advocacy.

TOP TIPS
Be open about your objectives, including those relating to any funding commitments.

Agree your objectives up front. This is crucial to ensure that all partners are working together in a unified and constructive way.

Be SMART. Clarity of objectives enables multiple partners to focus resource and time in the right direction.

Contracts or letters of agreement issued by touring companies can be an essential way to outline partnership expectations in detail. You can include SMART objectives and additional staff in these.

Useful resources

✿ A Future Play letter of agreement

Making work together deepens partnerships

The third year of Future Play was a turning point. An unexpected turning point. And it was thanks to an unsuccessful funding application.

We always planned to carry out Future Play over three consecutive years and tour three revivals of existing shows. But when match funds for our final year were not secured we paused, took stock and began building a consortium of venues with whom we wanted to create a brand new piece of work.

This took partnership working to a new level. We really made the most of this opportunity and learnt a lot about the value of creative engagement for everyone involved in making, touring and presenting work that doesn't yet exist.

The timeline opposite shows all the ways we enabled everyone to feel connected to the making of our new piece, including potential audiences in tour locations through involvement in research and development.

The unanimous verdict from our venues was that this approach and these moments for creative engagement were central to the success of Future Play in our final year.

"We went on a journey with the work and so it didn't feel like we were buying it in. We invested in it and it was a partnership that enabled me to get buy in from colleagues." Programmer, Stratford Circus

"We talked more and were more engaged in the process of making the work itself which is unusual for a receiving venue to connect with the creative process. This made people more excited." Marketing officer, mac

- January** Round table meeting between us, venue programmers and evaluator to kick start the project. This included venues giving contextual information on their programming, audience development strategies and aims for the project, an outline of the project from us including ideas for research and development activity, plans for ambassador recruitment and discussion about the best ways to evaluate the project.
- February** Three research and development workshops with The Core at Corby Cube
- March** Three research and development workshops with mac
- Half-day session** with all venues' marketing teams, local ambassadors and audience development and marketing coordinator to discuss our approach to making work, the themes and form for the project, how to best describe it, and barriers to people attending. Everyone got to hear an artistic update following research and development sessions.
- April** Three research and development workshops with Stratford Circus
- Monthly artistic updates start from our artistic director, circulated to venues, ambassadors and other associates.
- May** Two research and development workshops with Gulbenkian
- July** Second round table meeting for venue programmers to share progress on the project, and discuss the work of ambassadors, sales and the artistic development of the piece.
- August** Opportunity to observe the creative development of the project where we shared the first film cut with ambassadors, marketing teams and programmers, and discussed their responses to this and our plans for finishing the piece ahead of the tour in September.
- September** Ambassadors invited to come and see a preview performance at our first venue, Stratford Circus
- Tour begins

Artists need to be brave

The opening out of the creative process around **Dusk** was risky and challenging, especially for our artists.

This sense of ownership was essential in order for venues to navigate changes as the project evolved. Following the research and development workshops with children it was decided that the age range for the piece needed to change from early years (3-5 year olds) to older children (4-7 year olds). We realised that the participatory elements of the piece would limit numbers (from an experiential, artistic and safety perspective). Our ideas for the piece had changed significantly since we wrote the first drafts of copy.

Venues were all able to be flexible and respond to evolving creative decisions because they understood that it was a project in development. They also felt able to offer constructive criticism as the work evolved, as well as feeling that they were listened to.

"The artist monthly update is the one thing that anyone running a touring arts project should do, everywhere. Five minutes of typing makes a massive difference to the support you will get." Audience development and marketing coordinator on **Dusk**

"Sales staff don't get to see work often enough and don't engage with the programme. This was different. Hit and runs are the norm but we felt more involved and connected through things like the briefing." Marketing officer, mac

TOOLS

Monthly artistic updates about how the work is evolving to circulate across partners and departments. Rather than receiving a finished product to sell, venues will feel part of something new as it is being created and have a clearer understanding of it before people call to buy tickets.

Box office/Front of House briefings – run by the audience development and marketing coordinator and/or programmer at the beginning of a season to give a clear understanding of the type of work being presented and how to best describe it.

Microsite content – not just created by producing companies and artists. Invite venues to create content for a microsite such as blogs, tweets or films about how it feels to be hosting a company making work in their venues.

"It's really hard, being in the middle of the process of making a new show, and thinking about marketing and copy and writing creative updates, or to feel confident enough to allow people to see the work, when we knew it wasn't ready. But it's just the nature of the beast. If we want to make these projects which aren't immediately easy to describe, we have to accept that we need to do this extra work to bring people on board, to give them an insight, to make connections. And in the end it's worth it – we reaped the benefit because everyone really wanted to make it happen." Artistic director, Fevered Sleep

"The fact that the venues were engaged in the process and on the journey meant that there was little resistance to changes." Evaluator

"We understood what we were getting – exposing and opening up the processes was invaluable. It was important that Fevered Sleep were so open. Some artists don't work like this." Programmer, Stratford Circus

TOP TIPS

Engage all members of staff in your venues – not just the programmer and senior management but also the Box Office team, the marketing team, the people who work in the café. Direct contact between the artists/company creating the work and the staff working to bring it to the public is priceless and the best way to enthuse and inform everyone about what you're doing and why it's important.

Show you care – in small ways. Venue box office teams loved the chocolates we sent them with their briefings. This gesture recognised their importance in connecting with our audiences and acknowledged that our shows might be a bit more tricky to sell.

Useful resources

- ✿ Box office briefing sheet
- ✿ Artist monthly update

Touring companies can broker relationships within venues

At the centre of Future Play was the pursuit of artistic excellence. As producers we were in a unique position to use the process of **making art** as the catalyst for generating debate and collaboration between our very different partners. And so as makers we became important relationship brokers **within** venues and **between** venues.

Through Future Play we became well-placed to act as a bridge to aid better communication and align different agendas between departments. The project encouraged more holistic working practices, with people stating that they felt a more collaborative approach would be adopted moving forward.

“Team members commented on the greatest value of the project for them being the opportunity to meet and discuss the performance, how to add additional value, to share concerns, and to address wider venue questions for long-term planning.” Director, Live at LICA

“The project encouraged us to take a joined up view between marketing, technical, learning and programming.” Programmer, Stratford Circus

“Where we used to say, ‘This is her thing’ – now we know it’s not, it’s ours.” Box office, Gulbenkian

TOP TIPS

Senior management need to champion risky projects. Their endorsement will give teams confidence to think about how a project contributes to the mission of their organisation. If a project is not advocated for from the top, it can leave a programmer trapped between a sales target and an outreach agenda. We had conversations with artistic/executive directors during the tour booking process so that they endorsed what we were trying to achieve.

Be clear, open and specific when discussing the needs of a project. Don't make any assumptions. How does it fit with long-term strategic objectives? How does it challenge existing working practices?

Face-to-face sessions were identified as the most effective way for multiple partners to communicate, even in our digital era. Initial assumptions that venue staff would be too busy to travel to group meetings were wrong. The feedback we gathered showed that everyone – from programmers to

marketing staff – valued the opportunity to talk together. These meetings were a far more effective partnership building tool than any digital mechanism we tried (blogs, group emails, Facebook pages, online forums).

A project specific role (such as the audience development and marketing coordinator) can mediate across different departments and their potentially conflicting agendas. Through providing an outside perspective and focused support this role helped staff collaborate more effectively.

“I genuinely think the success we had was down to the eye contact we all made, mutual encouragement and collective journey we established. That is truly exciting as it can be replicated for free!”

Audience development and marketing coordinator

“It was really refreshing to turn up at a venue and to find that everyone knew what we were trying to do, and to feel supported by everyone, from the tech team during the fit up, to the front of house manager, to the programmer. We felt really supported, because everyone got it. They all got it.” Artistic director, Fevered Sleep

“We will be linking participation, audience development and marketing and joining up as we go forward.” Artistic director, Galeri

Touring companies can broker relationships between venues

It was also clear that, as the producing company, we were well-placed to act as a bridge **between** venues too.

We toured to all sorts of venues, from a small arts centre in rural Wales to university campus complex; a new multi-space hub, to a city centre regional producing theatre. This is not unusual; most tours consist of a range of different organisations with different demographics, presenting spaces and turnovers. What was incredibly exciting about touring like this in the context of Future Play were the interesting conversations that started to take place between venues. These were not just about specifics but also more philosophical debates about the value of young audiences and why ambitious projects are worth the risk.

"This was a learning opportunity for the whole marketing team, we were inspired by the day in London when we met other venues, developed new skills, marketing knowledge and responsibility."

Marketing director, The Core at Corby Cube

"I am looking forward to the event in December when we are able to reflect back on the project together – we don't get enough chances to do things like this as we are all working in such tight financial situations. Arts centres have a broad brief and we need to connect more. This project allowed us to do that."

Programmer, mac

Although we didn't build a formal consortium, there were opportunities across the project for staff from different venues to come together. These often seemed to provide a new framework for individuals to carry out their roles in a new way and think differently about habitual organisational and sometimes sector-wide approaches to performance for children.

Despite all being plugged into various regional and national networks, without Future Play some venues would not have encountered each other. No matter how big the differences in the size or type of venue or staffing structure, there were always things to share.

"It seems that this could be an important role that touring companies could play moving into the future – as a broker of networks of venues."

Evaluator

In addition to working directly with 10 venues we also organised three events, two Future Playground gatherings and one Future Forum, all inviting wider participation. We shared our learning, but also took the opportunity to consult others on their experiences of the then context. These sessions were invaluable for us in terms of informing the project, and were universally well received by others as a chance to meet, learn from and be inspired by the stories of other artists, venues and companies.

"Be brave, be audacious, take a punt and stay real. That was the feeling I came away with. And... there are good people out there to play with." Artist feedback from The Future Playground event

Evaluation

Ensuring that we were asking the right questions at the right time in order to gather the information we needed was a huge task and we knew it had to be carried out by somebody independent. Evaluation became central to the project. It guided us through four complicated and busy years. But it was not always easy.

We worked with three different evaluators, and different methodologies were adopted within different frameworks. It's been a challenge to maintain a holistic approach.

Despite this, learning and impact were measured across three strands:

- Project partners and associates
- Audiences (including children, their parents, carers and teachers)
- The sector

This section focuses on the first two strands.

- 1 Evaluation is about looking forward, not back
- 2 Evaluation takes commitment
- 3 Choose your evaluators carefully
- 4 Feedback from adults needs encouragement
- 5 How and when do you ask for children's feedback?
- 6 Measuring quality is a thorny issue

Evaluation is about looking forward, not back

We learned that retrospective evaluation is very hard and not very meaningful.

It is crucial to build evaluation into the earliest project planning stages, and by doing so it becomes an effective tool during the life of a project, especially when there are multiple partners involved.

Articulating overarching project objectives and specific individual venue objectives before the activity took place was really important. They were very useful reference points to help multiple staff members from different organisations to prioritise and maintain focus.

As an action research project, Future Play facilitated a reflexive process. The evaluation methodology invited partners to think about what was working well and what less so, across the whole life of the project. Venues and associates commented on the value of this.

“Getting a feeling of the difference between ticking boxes for the sake of it and actually using the process to encourage reflection and integration of existing practices. Really feeling the value of it as a tool for long-term learning not just retrospective reportage.” Producer, Bristol Old Vic

In year two our evaluator passed feedback on to us from partner venues if she felt that it signalled a need for us to rethink our approach to specific areas of the project.

In year three our evaluator described part of her methodology as: **“Ongoing support as a critical friend throughout the process for the team as the journey unfolded.”**

TOP TIPS

Use evaluation to help you plan for what you want to achieve by the end. Make sure you build thinking and discussion about evaluation into the earliest stages of project planning.

Ensure staff members across departments are aware of objectives when those objectives impact on decision-making and workload.

Take time to consider what your end goal is for the process (e.g. written report, website, body of evidence, quantitative statistics or verbal presentation) and who the audience is for this. From that starting point you can think about how the evaluation methodology can be best structured to suit that form.

Think about accessibility – consider how the language of evaluation can be translated for your intended readers without losing the depth of learning that the evaluation process has unearthed.

Evaluation takes commitment

The importance of evaluation as a key component of Future Play was clear to us from the outset. We were committed to it.

It's become really clear that good evaluation isn't just a way to gather data and evidence – important though these are. It's more subtle and deeper than that. The best evaluation process enables ongoing learning and stages of reflection and change. But that can only happen if enough time, focus and commitment – and indeed money – are invested, by everyone involved, from the start.

Various approaches were adopted by our evaluators to gather the right information that could track and measure the learning among our partners. All processes aimed to limit the burden on everyone's time. Some of the approaches were more successful than others:

- **Baseline and endline telephone interviews** – Interview questions were sent ahead for key staff in organisations to prepare answers, and then followed up with a telephone interview led by evaluators. **This worked well when staff made time to plan responses and gather information from colleagues to fill in knowledge gaps.** But it required thought and coordination to maximise the quality of information.

- **Monthly online tracking** via an Excel template was designed to be a simple, non-intrusive and speedy format for gathering feedback from individual staff members from different departments across organisations. **But the monthly requirement proved onerous. Multiple perspectives meant it was hard to gather meaningful learning as the project was happening and the monthly cycle offered little time for reflection.**
- **Recorded team meetings** at venues were adopted to minimise time commitment **but some individuals found the recorded nature of these meetings off-putting and the agenda tended to wander into other non project-related issues.**
- **Round table discussion** involving all venues was used as an endline evaluation of learning in year two and **proved so successful that it was used by our evaluator in the final year of the project at three key points in the project's delivery.**

TOP TIPS
Bring people together. Monitoring elements of the project in isolation diminishes the impact on individuals or organisations learning from each other.

Don't assume individuals won't meet face-to-face. The human side to evaluation can generate the best feedback and result in subsequent actions that make the project better and stronger. It's easy to ignore a spreadsheet or avoid a phone call. When you're sitting around a table everyone has the chance to be heard and have their contribution valued.

Discuss the proposed evaluation methods with your partners before your project starts. Everyone has to 'own' evaluation and to feel there is something in it for them – they are learning too.

Give partners a clear list of the type of information needed and a timeframe for this so everyone knows what is needed and can allocate time accordingly.

Choose your evaluators carefully

If you're working with an external evaluator, take time to research who is the right fit. Talk to other organisations. Finding the right 'critical friend' who understands your vision and aims, but can guide you sensitively towards what you are trying to find out, is essential. He or she is a partner on the project and helps to inform it, not an external legislator you need to report to. It is an intimate journey and requires commitment from both sides.

In our search to find the right approach, we worked with three different evaluators who all had different methodologies and approaches.

TOP TIPS
Don't try to cut corners by under-budgeting for evaluation. If you want to work with an experienced independent evaluator then expect to invest in that expertise.

Develop a brief that outlines the approach you'd like to take and what you need from the process. Once you've found your evaluator, you can always review the brief or develop it together as the first step in establishing your working process.

"There is no 'one size fits all' and no 'right way' to carry out meaningful evaluation. There is a toolbox of methods and approaches but what seems to me to be most important is to ensure that the methodology is developed to 'fit' the organisation and the project and of course to match the desired outcomes." Evaluator

Getting feedback from adults needs encouragement

We tried various ways to encourage adult audience members to feed back to us.

Feedback forms for **The Forest** were designed in the shape of leaves. These were inserted into the programme (with a freepost return address). We had a 25% return rate on these, much higher than we've ever received with a more traditional form.

When gathering more detailed feedback from a smaller sample of audience members we used an online form. Front of house staff at venues approached people after the show asking whether they would be willing to take part and gathered email addresses. Within a week, we sent a link to these people and some venues contacted bookers directly. This achieved a 13% response rate.

During workshops, we handed teachers clipboards with paper feedback forms. We asked them to observe and record children's responses as the sessions were taking place. This achieved an amazing 85% return rate. Previous attempts at retrospective form filling or phone conversations were very challenging and the quality and detail of response was much more insightful.

TOP TIPS
Incentivise your surveys we forgot to do this for **Dusk** and it had a significant impact on the number of people who responded. Amazon shopping vouchers were the most popular.

Make sure that the online survey software you use will sort and aggregate your data so that you can export and analyse it more effectively. One year we had to do this manually.

In the room tracking creates the best response rate. We had assumed that parents and teachers would prefer feeding back later (when they weren't looking after their children). But this wasn't the case.

How and when do you ask for children's feedback?

We view children as active collaborators, central to our thinking about our performances from the very initial exploration of an idea for a project to the moment of watching a finished performance. As part of Future Play we wanted to explore different ways of gathering the views and experiences of young children. We wanted to test ways of doing this directly, without adult mediation, and were interested in exploring if digital technology might help us achieve this. In collaboration with Early Years Specialist Dr Alison Clark we tried a range of methods.¹

- **Close observation** – an obvious but incredibly effective method we used to gauge children's reactions through their gestures, movement and voices. Particularly revealing with young children as they've not learned to censor their physical or verbal response to what they're watching.
- **Written or drawn feedback** – children were invited to write words or phrases to describe their experience and/or draw something that they remembered from the show. These were either handed back to venue staff or posted to us. The responses clearly conveyed key moments and elements of the performance that had most resonance but without being able to talk with children about their choices we weren't able to find out more detail about why.

"The modes of communication may vary depending on the particular performance, the age range of children and opportunities for external collaboration but the intention is to find respectful ways of understanding more about how children make sense of artistic encounters and how children can develop their creative literacy." Dr Alison Clark, Research Associate, UCL

Useful resources

¹ Full report and case studies *Never Ending Story*, by Dr Alison Clark

- **Creating a visual representation of the experience** – children were invited to select a series of photographs of both the performance and theatre environment (cafe, toilets, auditorium). Some used paper and glue and others selected the pictures using an iPad app. The narratives composed demonstrated not only recall of events but a subtle engagement with the staging of the piece, its aesthetic values and links to themselves. Interestingly the children showed more interest in the physical book-making rather than the digital version.
- **Answering questions using interactive boxes** – we asked a combination of multiple choice questions the children answered by pushing buttons and spinning dials, and open-ended questions about their emotional response to the piece using a video box which recorded the children's answers. Although designed for children to use independently, they still needed adult mediation. The video box provided the richer data, indicating how the children's empathy had been evoked and how they'd emotionally connected with the work.

The different methods we tried have given us a clear understanding that one size doesn't fit all in terms of listening to children's perspectives. It's essential to consider a number of factors when trying to elicit meaningful feedback from young children.

TOP TIPS

Consider the timing carefully. When is the most appropriate time to ask young children about a performance? We tested the visual representation method with children back at their nursery a few days after the performance. It was apparent that the children had gained strong impressions from the performance and they demonstrated vivid recall days after the event.

Think about the match between a performance and the modes of communication chosen for collecting immediate feedback. Does form filling or interacting with question and answer boxes interrupt the experience itself?

Involving adults in the feedback process can enrich the results. Having set out to test methods that enabled children to feedback without adult intervention, we concluded that children and adults thinking together about an experience can be a strength rather than a weakness.

Measuring quality is a thorny issue

How we measure quality and who judges whether one piece of work is better than another is a complex and highly charged issue.

The purpose of Future Play was not to promote our work as a benchmark of excellence, but to evidence *audience's* perception of quality, so that this evidence could shape the process of making and touring work for children. Belief in the value and positive impact of child-focused work was a key driver for our research.

Drawing on *Capturing the Audience Experience, a Handbook for Theatre* (New Economics Foundation, ITC, SOLT and TMA) we designed a detailed audience survey to try and get closer to this elusive question of quality. The questions included a basic [rating of the show](#) (when 1 is poor and 6 is excellent); [a question around innovation](#) using 'difference' as a signifier of innovation; and [specific questions asking adults to reflect on their own and their child's experience](#) (both during and after the performance) in the following areas:

- i Engagement and concentration
- ii Learning and challenge
- iii Energy and tension
- iv Shared experience and atmosphere
- v Personal experience and emotional connection

Survey responses gave a clear indication that audience members thought the work was of high quality (73% rating the work 5 or 6), and therefore valuable. They said it was different to what they had seen before; that the experience was intimate and stimulating for their child; and that it was a valued shared experience for them too. Crucially, people told us it was important to them that more work like this was available in the future.

[Useful resources](#)

❖ [And the Rain Falls Down](#) audience survey

Legacy

The discoveries we've made and things we've learned during Future Play are scattered throughout this booklet. They're not offered as concrete conclusions to mark the end of a research project, but instead as the beginnings of new conversations, fresh thinking and, perhaps, different ways of working.

In these final pages, we reflect on the legacy of Future Play, and lay out our hopes and dreams for the future.

"To afford high quality work we have to use our resources in a different way, to support developing relationships like this one. The model we are looking to work with moving forward will involve us sharing the risk financially as well as artistically, creating deeper relationships and dialogue."
Programmer, Stratford Circus

*"We felt we had investment from *Fevered Sleep*, not demands and this is very different to normal touring models."*
Producer, Gulbenkian

A new model?

Dr. Susanne Burns, Evaluator
August 2015

The Future Play programme was ambitious and far-reaching. It achieved its targets and outputs across the four years and evolved as an action research project through a major commitment to learning. This commitment stemmed from the company's aspirations to challenge models of touring work for children and young people, and was also bought into by all the venues that worked in partnership with them.

Future Play did challenge the restricted current model where children's work is programmed at weekends or during holidays due to programming hierarchy and traditional audience attendance patterns. It challenged the agenda of sales potential, not quality, driving programming choice for children's work, and explored new approaches to box office pricing structures, scheduling, audience development, and technical sophistication and production values.

The programme of work has developed capacity and knowledge in the venues and in the company, and has created a body of learning that can now be shared more widely with the sector.

Future Play took place in a period of great economic and social change. The external environment within which theatre is both created and toured is changing and will continue to do so. In the current financial climate, both producers and presenters are having to work with increasingly constrained resources.

The specific additional elements of Future Play may not be replicable due to economic constraints – this was a heavily subsidised programme of work estimated at costing £4,172 per venue. That doesn't mean that the ideas, approach and ethos are not replicable. An inventive approach to repurposing resources could be adopted and some of the following elements which had a large impact in the project are not costly to build into project planning: the box office briefing sheets and artistic updates that cost little time and money; the round table meetings and work in progress sharings attended by venue staff cost a total of £874 in travel and refreshments but were invaluable to the development of the relationships and ownership.

The additional resources supplied to the venues as part of year three of Future Play however were more costly – local ambassadors and audience development and marketing coordinators at £1500 for each venue and £2100 respectively. But business models can change and the relationships between venues and touring companies can be strengthened by simple changes to the ways in which we all work. Time spent on developing relationships, cost sharing on proven and successful interventions such as the ambassador roles and the bridging roles could be achievable and could generate significant change if resources are repurposed.

The potential for cross-venue dialogue and shared capacity building was generated through a creative approach to evaluation and ongoing communication. A network was created and dialogue across the venues was structured into the programme at key milestones. This was not costly and yet the benefits were huge.

Future Play tested and provided a range of practical solutions that could create transformation and change in touring work for young people but also, arguably, in touring work for any market.

Future Play set out to find a new touring model. The impact of the project is not a 'model for touring' as such, rather a set of principles and processes that can enhance the relationships and help to ensure better planning and delivery of touring.

We learned that it is the impact of smaller changes that will matter and change the context. Small but obvious changes in practice matter and make a difference.

Changes are needed in the funding system that allow companies to plan in advance and venues to book in advance so that relationships can develop. The current system prohibits this as a touring company can't make a show until they have funding and can't get funding without bookings whereas, if the learning of Future Play is to be embedded more widely, companies need to be able to start making work, share this with venues to start a journey of relationship building and ownership, and then secure the bookings. This is a major challenge to the current funding system, requiring systemic change.

A final word

Future Play has been both a gift and a curse. Working alongside our peers, colleagues and friends, discussing and debating our aspirations around work for children, and finding ways to realise dreams has been a gift.

But the learning from Future Play weighs heavy with responsibility. How is it possible to have learnt what we have and be satisfied with the status quo? We know now more than ever we need to fight for change.

Has Future Play transformed the landscape? Of course not. Not yet.

At the end of each tour every venue we worked with reinforced their commitment to programming and presenting work for children in a more ambitious way. As we write at the end of the project we cannot say with confidence that this has happened. When our evaluator attempted to carry out longitudinal research on our behalf many important and wonderful people had moved on from the organisations we have worked with.

This makes us and other producing companies like us vulnerable. We worry that progressive thinking is held individually not organisationally. That there are visionary individuals who champion excellence but whose influence is transient. For change to occur we all need to forge on with committed long-term strategies to make, programme and present outstanding work for children. If we don't, all our work to research, build and secure new audiences for performance for children through projects like Future Play is lost. Children will not come to us if we have nothing to offer them.

This resource is an offering. It's our gift to you. We hope it gives you something practical for now and something inspirational for the future. And some courage for continuing to make, tour, present and fund great art for children.

It also gives you evidence that will help you make the case – whether you're a venue or a producing company, an artist, programmer or funder – for the value in doing things differently and taking risks to create excellence.

In these challenging times our commitment is needed more than ever.

We have so many people to thank without whom the Future Play project and this publication would never have been possible. Their dedication was an inspiration. They include the advocates who believed in us; the programmers who took a risk with us; the artistic directors who okayed and championed it; the marketeers who put other priorities aside for young audiences; the teachers who took precious time out of the classroom to help us and watch our shows; the learning and outreach teams co-ordinating our workshops; the box office teams who got to grips with describing abstract work for children; the front of house teams who went the extra mile; the technicians who did watertight, filmic and forest to perfection; our audience development and marketing coordinators for their feats of connection and determination; our local ambassadors for their enthusiasm and bravery; The Audience Agency for their depth of data; our evaluators for their committed enquiry and focus; our digital gurus for keeping us up to date; our artists whose vision is inimitable and unwavering; and finally our audiences whose "ooohhs" and "aaahhs" kept us all going.

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Fevered Sleep was established in 1996 by David Harradine and Sam Butler. We make performances, installations, films, books and digital art, for children and for adults.

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A MANIFESTO FOR THE FUTURE

We reject the idea that children do not appreciate the very finest work of the very finest artists.

We reject the idea that audiences do not perceive quality; that work should speak to the lowest common denominator, who is usually an adult.

We reject the idea that there are areas of investigation that are out of bounds in the context of art for children.

We believe that the more challenging the political context, the more important it is to produce radical, revolutionary, challenging art.

We believe that now is the time for risk. Now is the time for bravery. Now is the time for ambition.

We believe now is the time for change.

We believe if we give up our rights to be brave, be ambitious, and take risks now, we will have an impossible struggle to win those rights back.

We want producers and programmers to make spaces in which artists can be brave and ambitious.

We want artists to work harder than they ever work, in order to make their finest work, when they're making work for children.

We want funders to do whatever they must to make these things possible.

We believe we really have to love and value art.

And we believe we really have to love and value children.