

Horizon

Performance
Created in England

Evaluation of the Horizon project → Interim Report: Executive Summary

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Santra Consulting Ltd.
February 2023

→INTRODUCTION

Horizon is the performing arts showcase for England at the Edinburgh Festivals. It aims to use a new approach to build deep and sustainable collaborations and to celebrate visionary artists and cultural leaders, with a view to significantly rejuvenate the existing ecology of the live performance sectors across the UK. Horizon is commissioned by Arts Council England and led by a consortium of six organisations: Battersea Arts Centre, FABRIC, Fierce, GIFT, MAYK, and Transform. The consortium also works with four Associate partners reflecting different specialisms and art form focuses: Kakilang (formerly Chinese Arts Now), Tara Arts, The Cocoa Butter Club and Unlimited, and three Artist Leads.

In Year 2 Horizon delivered its first in-person showcase at the Edinburgh festivals, presenting the work of ten showcase artists/companies, and supporting eight early-career artists to experience the festivals.

In July 2022, Dr Ulrike Chouguley (trading as Santra Consulting Ltd) was commissioned to evaluate Year 2 and Year 3 of the Horizon project. The evaluation serves a dual purpose:

- **Formative evaluation**

To monitor and assess progress towards the objectives of the Horizon project and draw out key learnings, with a view to shaping and improving its ongoing delivery.

- **Summative evaluation**

To look back and assess what has been achieved and what impact the project has had in Year 2 and Year 3, thus helping the project consortium and delivery team to report back to existing funders, as well as making the case for future funding and further development.

The interim report presents the findings from the evaluation of the Horizon activities delivered in 2022 (Year 2) and is based on an extensive scoping phase and research tasks that included online surveys of Showcase artists, Bursary Artists and Showcase Delegates, as well as 20 interviews with 30 representatives of Consortium and Delivery Team members, Associate Organisations, Artist Leads, Artists, Strategic Partners and Funders.

→KEY FINDINGS

While the preparation for the 2022 Showcase was still affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic, Horizon engaged a diverse range of artists, delegates, audiences, industry representatives and participants.

ARTISTS & CREATIVES

33

showcase lead artists and performers in 10 showcase productions (Target: 8-12 productions) and 8 bursary artists (Target: 10)

3

artist leads (Target: 4)

847

employment days for 29 other creatives and specialists

DELEGATES & INTERNATIONAL PRESENTERS

39

delegates in the 'core' delegates' programme (Target: 30)

49

wider delegates engaging with Horizon showcase performances (Target: 100)

AUDIENCES

2,531

audiences¹ at showcase performances (Target: 3,000)

¹This figure does not include the show 'I Am From Reykjavik' by Sonia Hughes, which was free and unticketed.

£21,781

box office revenue (Target: £20,000)

Horizon

→KEY FINDINGS

PARTICIPANTS IN DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

43

artists & delegates at networking events and 49 at social events

31

artists & delegates at online pitching session

15

consortium & delivery team members

INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVES & WIDER PUBLIC

40

industry attendees at CPD & knowledge-sharing events

25

attendees at talks for wider public

The short-term outcomes discussed below focus on the change that occurred as a direct result of the Horizon activities and outputs. The medium-term outcomes are predicted to occur sometime after the actual project intervention; therefore, it is expected to see less evidence for them at this interim reporting stage.

→SHORT-TERM OUTCOME 1

Artists have increased international touring prospects and opportunities

The evidence from the evaluation shows that Horizon is **successful at facilitating new relationships**, especially between artists and delegates. However, stakeholders emphasise that there is a role for Horizon to help build and maintain international relationships over a longer period of time. The evaluation further demonstrates that Horizon has played a positive role in **increasing artists' ambitions and understanding of international opportunities and touring**. This was particularly relevant to the early-career bursary artists, but less so for showcase artists, the majority of which had prior international touring experience.

Horizon **brought together delegates with influence and decision-making ability to commission artists**: while almost half were new to the Fringe and the cohort was perceived as different to other showcases, they reported to have local and regional influence and decision-making ability. Nonetheless, some stakeholders feel that more attention could be paid to this aspect. Overall, there was a good fit between the showcase programming and the expectations and interest of delegates, although some delegates had hoped for more boldness and programme innovation.

71% of artists felt more confident about securing touring opportunities in England, and reported having increased profile, awards and associated funding as a result of Horizon. This in turn **supports them to further develop work for international markets.**

While these aspects clearly show that in 2022 Horizon has increased artists' touring prospects and opportunities, stakeholders (especially those more external to the organisation) raised the question of whether internationalisation of artists was sufficiently prioritised by Horizon.

→SHORT-TERM OUTCOME 2

Audiences and delegates have experienced high-quality, bold and diverse showcase performances

Horizon was **successful in its aim to showcase and involve artists from diverse backgrounds**, especially in terms of their ethnicity, sexual orientation and socio-economic background. Stakeholders also felt that Horizon has showcased **diverse art forms** and most thought that the programme **presented bold and innovative productions.**

However, the evaluation findings are **less clear about the extent to which Horizon has showcased high-quality and high-impact work.** While the overall programme was judged to be of high quality, there was concern that high-impact work of scale was missing from the selection and that some pieces of work were under-developed.

→SHORT-TERM OUTCOME 3

The Horizon Showcase has demonstrated good practice for a sustainable, care-centred and accessible showcase at the Edinburgh Festivals

The evaluation found clear evidence that the **Horizon Showcase Model has been focused on artist care**, with a strong commitment to fair pay and helping to ease the stress and pressure of the showcase situation through the delivery model, practical support and a central concern for the wellbeing of artists. However, some stakeholders felt that the 'care' ethos needed to extend further to actively include artist leads, bursary artists, delivery team and consortium members.

Horizon has been broadly successful in making the Horizon showcase accessible, putting in place a number of tools and services (such as BSL and audio-transcription) to improve accessibility for artists and audiences. However, there is further scope to improve accessibility by paying more attention to individual access requirements of artists (and any tensions with the requirements of others), extending these services to more performances and considering if accessibility can be designed into the productions at an earlier stage.

There was **some evidence that the Horizon Showcase has promoted environmental sustainability**, through an additional digital showcase offer, by consistently encouraging low-carbon means of travel and building environmental sustainability into the eligibility criteria for funding support. Some stakeholders suggested that environmental sustainability should become a greater focus at the 2023 showcase, either thematically or through an extended digital offer.

The evaluation also found that **Horizon was recognised as different and innovative within the context of the Edinburgh Festivals** by artists and – to a lesser extent – by delegates. External stakeholders, however, did – on the whole – not recognise the showcase as markedly different. As some stakeholders suggested, this may be due to the constraints of the ‘Edinburgh-framework’, which only allows for change to a certain extent.

→SHORT-TERM OUTCOME 4

The capacity of consortium members, delivery team and strategic partners has increased

The evaluation found evidence that Horizon **had helped to increase their organisational development**, through capacity-building and skills development of individual consortium members, increasing their financial sustainability, organisational profile and recognition, and gaining valuable experience in collaborative working practices. Horizon also had **some positive impact on artist leads’ financial security and professional development**. But there is scope to further clarify and define the purpose of the artist leads in order to increase impact on their career development.

The findings also support that Horizon has **helped to extend and deepen networks nationally**, especially between consortium organisations and their strategic partners. However, there is further potential to increase networks beyond this set of organisations, both nationally and internationally.

Horizon is also **making a largely positive contribution to strategic partners**, helping them to deliver their organisational objectives. Nonetheless, the criticism raised by one associate organisation suggests that the involvement of strategic partners such as the associates requires review to ensure that it is not solely a ‘tokenistic’ gesture.

There are also some **concerns among consortium organisations about the strategic alignment of Horizon** with individual consortium organisations, as well as with the original vision for the project.

→MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOME 1

England’s live performance art sector has internationalised

With the internationalisation of artists being the primary aim of the Horizon project, artists securing international tour bookings is a key indicator of success. The evaluation shows that Horizon has **increased artists’ confidence in obtaining international touring opportunities**. Horizon is primarily seen as a route to international touring, rather than residencies, exchange or co-creation opportunities, or new commissions, but artists’ levels of **confidence in securing such alternative international work opportunities had still slightly increased**. At this interim stage of the evaluation, **little evidence was collected on any new strategic partnerships** that were formed to support the internationalisation of live performing artists.

→MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOME 2

Awareness of, and engagement with, key issues affecting the live performing arts sector has increased

Horizon aims to increase awareness of, and engagement with, a range of issues that are central to the future development of the live performance art sectors, especially among international partners. The evaluation found evidence that **Horizon has increased awareness of, and engagement with, a range of issues** that are central to the future development of the live performance art sectors, **especially issues of accessibility and diversity, but at present, Horizon had little impact on discussions around environmental sustainability.** Horizon has started **exploring new and improved showcase models**, including options around digital engagement and identifying key areas of support. The question of whether or not a showcase is best hosted in the context of the Edinburgh Festivals is another key issue to be reflected on for the consortium group.

→MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOME 3

The English live performance ecology and art form have diversified and rejuvenated

There is evidence that **Horizon has started to impact the live performance ecology:** as the national showcase, stakeholders feel confident that by giving exposure to artists from diverse backgrounds, Horizon is building the base for wider changes in the industry. Residency programmes in host organisations across the country are also contributing to a greater geographic distribution. While the bursary programme is a way of developing younger artists, stakeholders agree that this element needs to be reviewed. There was **little evidence that Horizon made an impact on art form and structure to-date.**

→ FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The evaluation also highlighted a range of issues relating to Horizon's processes, delivery model and strategic priorities.

These provide areas of 'learning and development' for the next year of delivery and include:

- **Application and selection process:** to ensure that the process remains accessible, reaches out to the right people, engages with a range of stakeholders in a meaningful way, while retaining a focus on the programme aims in its decision-making.
- **Diversity of consortium and delivery team:** to consider whether the experience of marginalised artists and representation can be better embedded.
- **Planning and delivery capacity**
- **Delegates engagement:** to better maintain relationships with delegates throughout the year and be more targeted regarding the type of presenters who are invited in order to have the best chance of generating outcomes.
- **Communications:** to improve communications internally, externally and with strategic partners and groups.
- **Strategic priorities:** to review the programme strands and ensure that Horizon is not overcommitting to the detriment of its potential impact; and to reconsider the delivery model and start thinking about how to re-shape the project beyond its current funding period.

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