



# Unlimited Impact: Making a Difference?

Evaluation of Unlimited Impact  
Programme Outcomes

Final report May 2016

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- Interview participants and survey respondents
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- Unlimited artists, partners, presenters and audiences.



# Introduction

## Background

Following the success of the Unlimited project held as part of the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad, the Unlimited Commissions Programme 2013 - 2015 was initiated to support established disabled artists to develop, produce and show high quality work. The Unlimited Impact Programme was later introduced to expand the reach of Unlimited's work by supporting young disabled people, presenting venues and festivals, and thought leadership.

Shape and Artsadmin are currently delivering both Unlimited programmes on behalf of funders Arts Council England, Creative Scotland, Arts Council Wales and the Spirit of 2012 Trust, and in collaboration with strategic partners such as the British Council, Southbank Centre, Tramway and Disability Arts Online.

The Unlimited Impact programme offers a powerful means to provide additional support where most needed, extending and complementing the support offered through the main Unlimited Commissions programme. It is the largest of four inclusive arts and disability projects funded by Spirit of 2012 (at the time of interview) that are designed to address the barriers, attitudes and perceptions faced by disabled people.

The Impact programme includes two main strands:

- **Ambassadors** - which works with young disabled artists, activists and enthusiasts to develop and present high quality artwork, learn and develop new skills in arts marketing, increase access to support and boost their confidence to develop their careers in the arts.
- **Allies** - which intends to create and extend strategic alliances with cultural venues and festivals, so that they engage with disabled artists, develop strong links with disabled communities and develop new audiences.

The Impact programme has aimed to support other organisations to undertake activities in these areas, rather than the Unlimited team deliver them directly themselves. The Unlimited team has brokered, rather than delivered, projects partly due to capacity and partly as an embedding mechanism.

## Evaluation context

Between June and November 2015, Shape and Artsadmin commissioned consultants Morwenna Collett and Tandi Williams to conduct an evaluative stakeholder analysis to examine the question 'Is Unlimited changing the way in which disability and creativity are viewed within the cultural sector, and if so, how can it do it better?' Their report titled 'Unlimited: Making a Difference?' showed that overall Unlimited is a 'tremendously successful programme', having a big impact beyond the artists funded.

Indeed the transformative experiences of some artists, presenters, funders and partners confirm that Unlimited is delivering remarkable outcomes. Focusing on the



areas of profile, programmes/artists, presentation/exhibition and funding/delivery, the original report identified key strengths and opportunities for improvement. It also highlighted the need for both programmes to continue for some time before the work of disabled artists is truly embedded within the fabric of the cultural sector.

Nearing the end of the first three years of the Unlimited Impact programme and on the eve of an application for further funding, the time is right to specifically assess the Impact programme's outcomes. In February 2016 the consultants were approached to produce a subsequent short report focusing on the Unlimited Impact programme. The key objectives were to:

- Analyse the extent to which the Unlimited Impact Programme is making a difference in the cultural sector and beyond, and re-contextualise evaluation data with reference to Spirit of 2012's own evaluation framework
- Evaluate how Unlimited Impact plans to measure their impact and continue to embed the project outcomes after any further funding ends.

## Methodology

A mixed methods approach was adopted for the original evaluation, with care taken to include stakeholders who knew Unlimited well (such as staff members, funding bodies and supported artists) and others who know the programme by name only (such as leaders of relevant industry bodies, non-disabled artists & international programmers).

In total, 35 individuals were interviewed, 8 staff members participated in a focus group and 92 people responded to an online stakeholder survey (providing a survey response rate of 37%). Survey respondents include a balance of genders (41% male and 55% female), and both disabled (41%) and non-disabled (53%) people (some preferred not to say). Most were based in the United Kingdom, although there were also participants from Japan, Qatar and Australia. Almost one-third (27) were artists, 15 were artistic directors or programmers, 14 were executives or directors and 12 were producers.

The consultants also observed a range of performances, forums and discussion events within the consultancy timeframe, including at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

For this report, the consultants returned to the original data collected and re-analysed it based on the above objectives. The consultants also reviewed the following:

- Spirit of 2012's Theory of Change and InFocus evaluation report
- Unlimited website, including Unlimited Impact films
- Internal Unlimited documents, including 'Unlimited impact funding overview' 'Spirit of 2012 Evaluation update document' and other evaluation documents.

This report explores how and where the Unlimited Impact programme is making a difference, and how it can do even better work in terms of its profile, Ambassadors, Allies and overall delivery and evaluation.



# Detailed findings

## Profile

### Branding and scope

The concept of Unlimited is highly regarded throughout the sector, and most stakeholders believe its branding is a core strength, as Rebecca Hanna-Grindall from Southbank Centre comments:

‘The people working on Unlimited have done a great job in branding what they’ve been doing and I think it creates clarity around thinking for programmers in venues and festivals.’

The name ‘Unlimited’ is well regarded across all stakeholder groups, however the main evaluation identified some confusion between the Unlimited Commissions Programme, the Unlimited Impact Programme, Southbank Centre Unlimited Festival and projects like Unlimited Access (previously run by the British Council) and social enterprise resource UnLtd.

The Unlimited Impact brand is not well known among stakeholders, and those that do know it question why a separate identity is needed. There is also confusion about the word ‘Impact’ in Unlimited Impact’s name – as it can be unclear whether the subject is Unlimited’s impact or the Unlimited Impact programme itself.

It is worth considering whether the distinction between the Commissions Programme and Unlimited Impact work is really needed – and what makes most sense for artists, presenters, the cultural sector and the public. If the different strands – Impact, Commissioning and Festival – could be united under one ‘Unlimited’ banner, the programme could leverage greater synergies in shifting perceptions in the wider cultural sector and beyond.

In the short term, Unlimited Impact could improve understanding of what it does by expanding the ‘about’ page of the website to include a fuller description of what it does (its activities and scope).

### Communications and media

The Unlimited programmes have been successful to the point that stakeholders often perceive them to be bigger and broader than they are. It is clear that Unlimited overall is punching above its weight and is achieving a lot with a little – definitely a small scheme with a big ambition.<sup>1</sup>

The programmes are usually perceived as being approachable and supportive, which is connected with the ethos of the team and extent of personal contact offered by staff

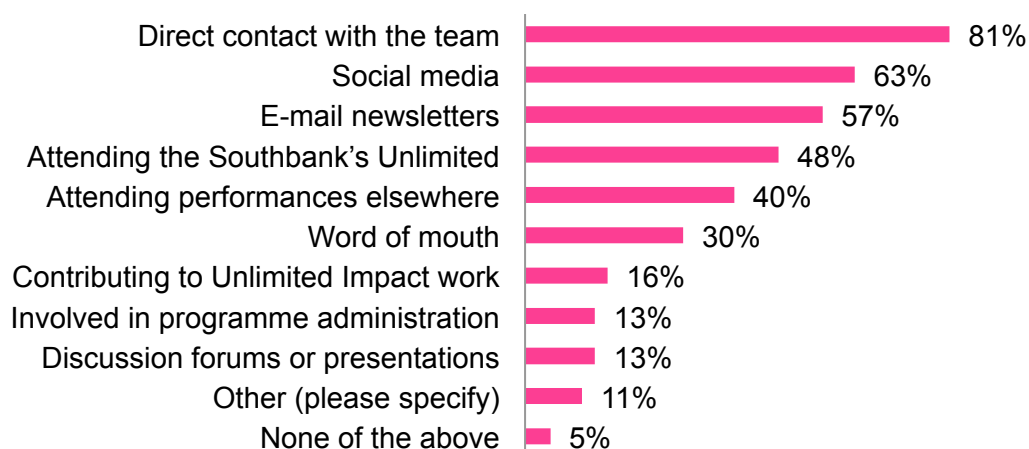
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<sup>1</sup> Unlimited 2015, ‘Unlimited Allies’, accessed 5 November 2015 at [www.weareunlimited.org.uk/unlimited-allies/](http://www.weareunlimited.org.uk/unlimited-allies/)



members. Four out of five stakeholders say that they communicate directly with a member of the team (see Figure 1), and 16% say they have contributed to Unlimited Impact work.

**Figure 1 – Ways that people engage with Unlimited (2015)**



Unlimited has been publishing interesting blogs, captivating images and videos on its Impact programme website, sharing the stories of funded artists and organisations. The content is very high quality – with important messages delivered in an engaging, captivating way.

However, several people say they can't find information on the website, and the need for two separate websites – and two newsletters – is unclear. Whilst there is excellent content – there is more work to be done to help users find the best, most relevant content for them. Key opportunities include:

- **Identifying the key audiences/stakeholders** groups that Unlimited Impact is speaking to, and what content is most relevant to each
- **Analysing website analytics** and views to identify the most popular content
- Developing content strategies to expand the reach of the best content, and considering filtering or tagging functionality
- **Strengthening media relationships** and potential partnerships that could see more content surfaced in 'mainstream' publications and websites
- **Considering other mediums** that could help bring Impact programme stories to life, including a photo series, feature-length documentary etc.

## Reach and influence

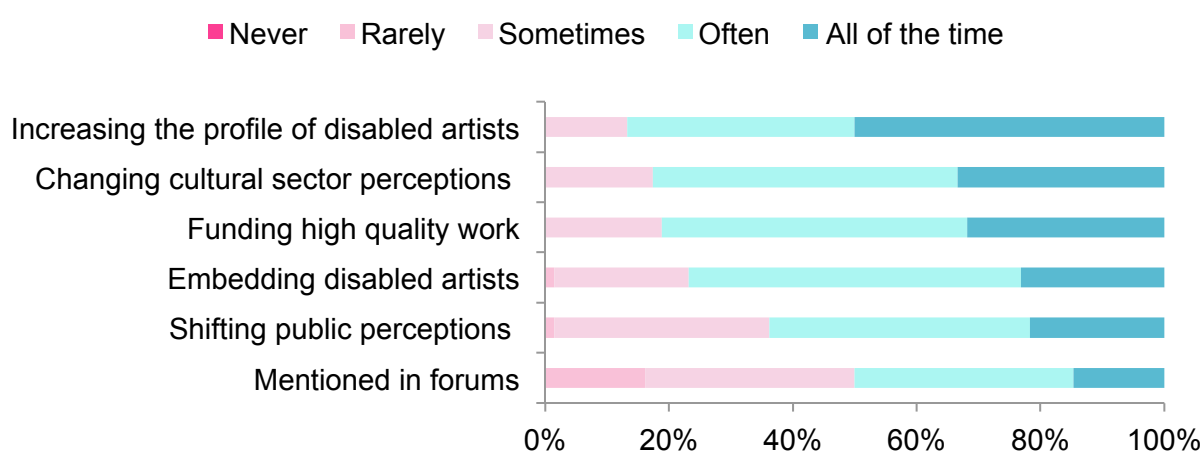
Unlimited has achieved significant influence through its activities in a short space of time, and its influence is growing. About half of the survey respondents say Unlimited is often mentioned in the forums and meetings they attend (Figure 2 below), an impressive result for a programme of Unlimited's nature and size in just a few years – but also an area with room for growth.



Unlimited Impact specifically has achieved a lot in its own right, particularly through its network of 'Allies', and building a community of interest around disability arts issues, however many stakeholders do not distinguish between the two programmes – they simply talk about 'Unlimited'.

There are a small number of vocal advocates raising accessibility opportunities in forums around the UK and internationally, whilst Unlimited's own discussion events and forums are increasingly thought to involve new faces, as Janice Parker comments after the *Disability: a creative advantage* talk at the 2015 Edinburgh Fringe, 'Not all of the people here are from the arts and disability sector. There's greater awareness of people wanting to learn.' This aligns closely with the Spirit of 2012 outcomes pathway of 'challenging perceptions of disability'.

**Figure 2 – Perceptions of Unlimited's outcomes, by frequency (2015)**



Outside the disability arts sector, awareness is growing through word of mouth and public forums, but there is work to be done to build genuine understanding beyond Unlimited's immediate community. For instance, one sector leader comments:

'There's awareness amongst those who are deep in networks and 'in the know' or prepared to look for it. I don't know how extensive that awareness is, but my hunch is that the awareness is partial and it could be greater. It's achieved a great amount in a short space of time, and with a small number of people, so that's not a criticism; it's just a reality that it takes a long time to build a brand.'

Some feel that Unlimited's reach could be expanded to engage new stakeholders, as Moira Sinclair says, 'it can feel a bit as though Unlimited is speaking to itself and its supporters'. Several existing stakeholders suggest that conversations could be more outward looking, and feel it is critical that Unlimited continues reaching out to new communities:

'I think the conversation has moved forward but not as much as it could. We still need to bring in the people we need to convert, and the newly converted people have to bring people who aren't converted yet.'



This is particularly important for Unlimited Impact specifically, because challenging perceptions of disabled people is at the heart of Spirit of 2012's Theory of Change. Unlimited Impact could do more to understand perceptions, and the process and conditions for shifting perceptions.

As with the main commissions programme, Unlimited Impact may find it valuable to develop public speaking and writing skills in more members of the team, and the broader Unlimited community, to mobilise more conversations in more forums. With an estimated 110,000 people employed in arts and culture in the UK, it will take sustained effort via multiple channels to continue extending its reach and influence. Artsadmin's Gill Lloyd adds, 'There aren't enough "Jo Verrents" out there so it's worth us really thinking about getting people into management and political power, because that's where change happens.'

Some of the programme's success factors are repeat exposure, use of high quality imagery and video, and offering personal contact points for people. The programme could promote case studies in more forums and networks, capture more discussion events and exploring live streaming to involve even more people in key forums.

### Looking ahead – profile

In summary, the key opportunities for Unlimited Impact to enhance its profile moving forward are to:

- **Keep** creating fantastic content to share online and consider even more ambitious dissemination opportunities (such as a feature-length documentary)
- **Keep** speaking in culture sector forums and participating in discussion events and **tackle** how to inspire new voices at different levels
- **Tweak** website content in the short term to more clearly describe what Unlimited Impact does, and the scope of its work
- **Tackle** a website redesign in the medium term to improve the user experience and surface the highest quality and most relevant content for stakeholder needs
- **Tackle** the issue of brand confusion and the costs/benefits of maintaining a separate brand for stakeholders and beneficiaries.

### Ambassadors

Unlimited Impact's work with ambassadors is creating unique opportunities for young disabled people, by leveraging the profile of the Unlimited brand and partnerships to give young people visibility. Administratively, this strand has been contracted by Artsadmin and supported approximately 9-10 projects per year. The Unlimited team have seen the Impact programme make a huge difference to the lives of young people by nurturing them as artists and creating pathways that did not exist previously.

Oliver Williams from Spirit of 2012 confirmed that the Impact programme is 'reaching disabled people who wouldn't otherwise have the chance to really develop art... We've been really happy about the diversity of artists coming forward, and diversity in every sense really, artform, impairment, even geographic region, different backgrounds as well.'





Across multiple stakeholder groups, this is seen as critical work ‘because of the distinct lack of training opportunities for disabled dancers (and other artists) and the Conservatoires and higher education institutions to an extent aren't doing enough yet.’

## Mentorships

One of the key drivers of impact in the Ambassadors strand is mentoring. While initially taking longer than other programme components to establish, due to the care taken to match the right mentees with the right mentors, the artist evaluation reports indicate important benefits for both the mentees and mentors. The mentoring programme has been described as ‘doing a tremendous job by just supporting these younger artists who maybe never had the concept that they could.... Artists arrive by all sorts of means, not only through conventional training.’

Mentor Janice Parker explains she learnt about the importance of taking time and paying attention to detail. The projects she was involved in took over a year to put together but the rewards were valuable. ‘Having the time to pay attention and express things in Craig's (her mentee) language and find time for him to respond to that, and vice versa...in many ways we do make decisions for learning disabled people and we need to find ways for their voices to be heard and also valued.’ She expands by explaining that having the ‘time to work in detail and depth has made me commit to a really important piece of work that needs to be done, so I may go on to chart that journey in some way and make it available...we should be doing this for all learning disabled dancers and artists.’

Interestingly, one interviewee assumed that the reason they hadn't heard much about the Impact programme was this could quite exposing for the artists themselves. She says ‘my assumption is that anything about young people is about experimentation... I haven't heard much about impact but I always assumed that's because it's too soon to expose anybody.’ This is something that may need to be considered in the communications strategy for the Impact programme, particularly for those who may still be on the journey of confirming how they identify themselves in relation to disability.

Having examined the reports received by mentorship participants to date, matching the right mentor at the right time is important. While other components of the Impact programme may move to a structured round format, there is value in maintaining a flexible and responsive approach to mentoring.

## Leadership skills

Linking closely with Spirit of 2012's outcomes pathways of empowering young people, the Impact programme is helping to foster the next generation of leaders. Oliver Williams expresses hope that ‘Unlimited Impact will help disabled artists take these first steps to develop leadership skills and develop an interest in becoming leaders in the sector... If we can get a diverse set of leaders, not just in the arts but every sphere then we won't have to have conversations about equality and diversity, everything will be inclusive.’



Stakeholders also suggest there is a case for further investment in developing producing and project management skills, particularly in disabled arts professionals. Gill Lloyd explains:

‘There’s a gap in the management and production side of work for disabled people... When we advertised for an Unlimited trainee, we had 15 to 20 applications, but for an Artsadmin trainee, which is non-specific, we had a couple of hundred applicants.’

The recent addition to the programme of an Impact Programme trainee and plans to train someone has an access auditor are steps in the right direction – and further expansions of artswoker opportunities are likely to be welcomed by stakeholders.

### Networking and other group activities

A key strength of the Impact programme has been the opportunities it has provided for people to come together and learn from each other. A recent forum for Impact programme participants, facilitated by Diverse City, provided two days of workshops, networking and performance for 20 emerging artists. Activities such as this where emerging artists can share learnings appear to be highly valued.

It should be noted not all the group activities offered through the Impact programme have achieved their desired reach. The September 2014 Social Media training and T-Shirt competition held at the Southbank Centre are two examples where the participant numbers were lower than anticipated. This highlights the importance of extending call-outs as far as possible. Now the Impact programme is more firmly established with stronger networks, this may be more easily achieved in the future.

### Young people versus emerging artists

Previously focusing on young people, the Unlimited Impact programme may shift its focus instead to provide opportunities for emerging artists at the early stage of their career, regardless of their age.

A current Impact programme mentor approves of this shift in focus: ‘you can also get young people who are absolutely stunning and some older people who might need that nurturing, that’s an interesting balance... it may be that it should about new or emerging artists rather than young artists.’

Establishing a clear definition of an emerging artist will be a key part of making this work – and it will be important to coordinate eligibility criteria with the main Commissions Programme and R&D stream.

### Links with main Commissions Programme

To date, there have been several artists funded through the main Commissions programme that have received Impact funding either to support emerging artists or to tour their work and expand their geographic reach. Other commissioned artists have



benefited from Impact programme work with festivals and venues - when Unlimited has brokered a new relationship or encouraged a booking of their work. The funding directly supported the venue or festival but indirectly supported the Unlimited artists. Some Impact projects have gone on to be supported through the main Commissions Programme, in a similar manner to the R&Ds.

Another opportunity for linkage is by articulation of a clearer pathway from an emerging artist receiving Impact funding, to then continue working with the team to apply to the main Commissions programme. Oliver Williams explains that Spirit of 2012 is interested in 'seeing opportunities for previous Impactees and mentees to take those next steps up...progression pathways into more mentoring roles and get them onto the fringes of taking careers to the next level.'

While linkages are desired, it may be important to guard Impact programme funds carefully however, to ensure they are not viewed as a 'Plan B' for those who don't receive a main commission. There may also be a need to shelter some emerging artists from a spotlight too soon. Jo Verrent explains that they 'deliberately want to blur those edges (between the two programmes) where it makes sense to do so, but to have that without a big expectation hanging over a young artist.'

### Post-involvement with Impact programme

In terms of what happens to Impact programme participants post-funding, exit interviews could aid reflection and development of next steps. Some may find it valuable to receive targeted information provided about other avenues for support such as the main Commissions Programme, Arts Council England and Creative Scotland.

An Ambassadors Alumni programme could be established (using LinkedIn or Facebook), with a regular newsletter of new funding opportunities, to encourage the continuation of the Unlimited relationship beyond the funding period.

### Looking ahead: Ambassadors

In summary, the key opportunities for Unlimited Impact's Ambassadors strand moving forward are to:

- **Keep** offering flexible mentorships that benefit all parties and fill the gaps in training opportunities for young disabled artists
- **Keep** creating opportunities for Impact artists to come together to share learning
- **Keep** expanding on the Ambassador concept to include disabled arts professional opportunities alongside artistic career development
- **Tweak** the programme terminology around young versus emerging artists and adopt clear and consistent definitions
- **Tweak** the communications strategy to consider where and when to highlight the work of young (or emerging) artists still developing their identities and artistic practice
- **Tackle** how to support further career progression of Ambassadors post-funding and map the potential links between Impact programme support and other funding programmes.



## Allies

Allies made up the second major component of Unlimited Impact 2013-2015, and has led to important impacts across the culture sector.

### Presentation opportunities

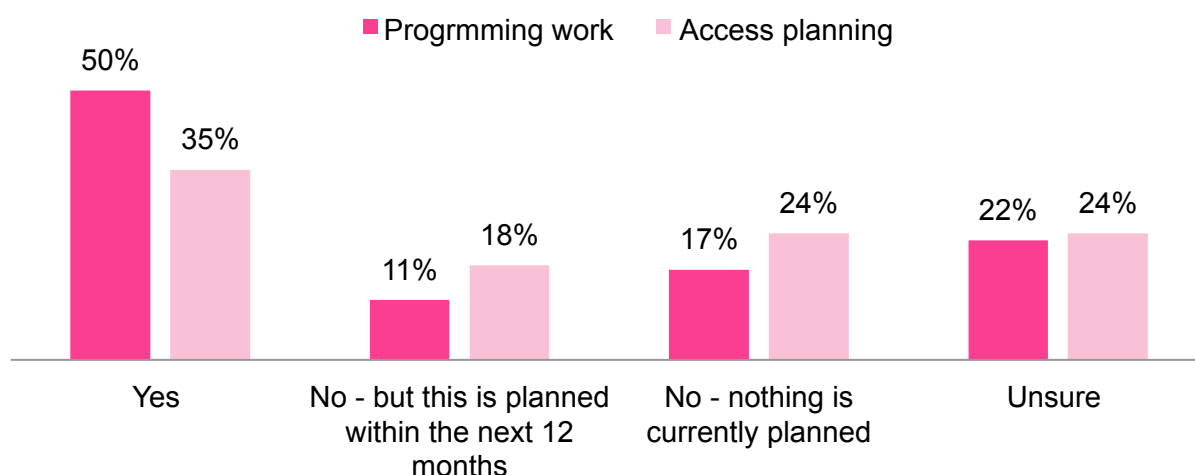
Many stakeholders agreed that with plenty of high quality work coming out of the main Commissions programme, the challenge is to ensure demand grows to match the change in supply. Stakeholders would like to see presentation of work in more places, stronger audience and venue demand and enhanced appreciation of work.

As shown in Figure 3 below, half of the presenters responding to the survey had programmed an Unlimited artist and a further 10% said they planned to in the next 12 months. Although this activity should be celebrated, some presenters say that they do not have plans in place to present any Unlimited artists, despite many having good knowledge of the programme and supported artists.

The data suggests that a range of financial, operational and attitudinal challenges persist around programming of disabled artists, and stakeholders see an opportunity for Unlimited and Unlimited Impact to help tackle these.

While the next iteration of the Unlimited Impact programme may not include funding for Allies, relationships with festivals and venues will be critical to achievement of the programme's ultimate objectives.

Figure 3 - Activity by presenters and exhibitors (2015)



### Public perceptions

Hand-in-hand with presentation opportunities is the need to build audiences for this work. Debbie Lye, CEO of Spirit of 2012, said of one disability arts festival she attended, 'There's a real lack of audiences. So artists might be doing their thing, but not to anyone. I think that's really important; we want to impact on perceptions of disability. You can impact on self-perceptions I suppose, but you need an audience.'



Audience development is seen as the ultimate challenge – with a number of different facets. Many stakeholders feel that there could be greater outcomes in mainstream contexts, for example:

‘Politically and culturally, disability artists are still stuck in the ghetto, with 'special' festivals and not year-round programming and commissions. This is not Unlimited and their partners fault - things take time. I think we need more cultural presence.’

The survey results also suggest that meaningful changes in public perception may require sustained commitment. Whilst 83% of stakeholder respondents say that Unlimited is ‘often’ or ‘always’ changing perceptions about disability in the cultural sector, fewer (64%) think it’s shifting public perceptions to the same degree.

Debbie Lye explains that Spirit of 2012 is interested in information about the impact this work has on audiences: ‘in terms of their wellbeing and perceptions of themselves – and not just disabled audience members. It’s disabled and non-disabled audience members, changing their perceptions about what’s possible.’

Amongst the programme partners, stakeholders and funder, Unlimited Impact may benefit from a further discussion about what ‘reach’ means – is it a ticket sold, a hit on the website, or something more qualitative?

## Recruitment of Allies

Unlimited’s strategic recruitment of ‘Allies’ in the broader cultural sector is seen as a savvy move, helping more organisations improve accessibility in their venues and festivals. Unlimited Impact is helping Allies engage with disabled artists, develop strong links with disabled communities in their regions and develop new audiences. As one Ally, Fierce Festival, suggests, ‘It was a learning curve and we have that network now... There's no way back...we feel like we can only progress.’

Unlimited Impact had around 70 Allies when this evaluation was first commissioned in June 2015 and now has over 100. However as interest grows among more organisations, limited capacity in the Unlimited Impact team means that prioritisation of activity, and magnification of outcomes, will become more important.

Working towards a self-sustaining network could be way to ensure the outcomes are sustained – and growing – over time. Specific opportunities include:

- Continue **promoting the Ally system** through conferences, social media or advertising to grow interest, reputation and understanding
- **Clarifying expectations of what being an Ally means**, particularly around things like access and advocating for change



- **Designing a tiered system** to allow for the different levels of engagement that organisations can have and aim for, and/or opening it to more individuals and organisations
- **Prioritising effort** in relation to likely impact, but also greatest need
- **Publishing a list or network of Allies**, and developing a communications strategy to help improve knowledge sharing
- **Profiling case studies** of Ally activities to highlight achievements and share examples of good practice – and linking these to the Ally page on the website
- **Targeting new Allies in ‘cold spots’ or strategic priority areas** such as specific artform, geographic or demographic areas.

## Access advice

Over one third of the presenters and exhibitors responding to the survey said that they undergone access planning with Unlimited (35%) and a further 18% said they were planning to in the next 12 months. As with artists, this evaluation found several presenters were ‘transformed’ by the Impact programme’s work, as one respondent comments:

‘I’ve been on a huge learning curve, both personally and professionally, and have gained so much from conversations and challenging debate with many deaf and disabled artists... It may sound naive but working with Unlimited has revolutionised my own understanding of what equality of opportunity really means and the richness that can be gained when it is genuinely supported by the conditions we create.’

The programme should continue to broker relationships and help people help themselves, though promoting step-by-step guides, toolkits/resources, suggested reading, events on offer and lists of contacts. There is also a case for expanding the ‘how-to’ practical resources available publicly, such as Luminare’s Access Guide, based on user feedback. There could also be opportunities to clarify how non-disabled people in different roles (including junior positions) can play a role in accessibility and where they can go for guidance.

## Evidence of impact

The concept of the ‘business case’ came up several times, with suggestions that it would be valuable to have more venue and festival case studies with hard data on economic benefits. In particular, there is a need to build an evidence base of audience impacts, encompassing:

- **Overall audience levels** – does improved access lead to higher attendances?
- **Reaching new audiences** – does it help venues attract newcomers?
- **Diversity of audiences** – does it help improve the diversity of audiences?
- **Audience experiences** – can it lead to more captivating/impactful experiences?
- **Sales revenue** – can it help generate more income?



There is an exciting opportunity for Unlimited Impact to go beyond the anecdotal and conduct robust research in this area; analysing the costs and benefits of access improvements for different stakeholders and sharing this information more widely. Over the longer term, it will also be important for Unlimited Impact to build a stronger understanding of how perceptions change on an individual and societal level.

## Looking ahead: Allies

In summary, the key opportunities for Unlimited Impact's Allies strand moving forward are to:

- **Keep** working with Allies to maximise the impact from access advice, and follow up to monitor longer term outcomes and disability arts programming changes
- **Keep** strengthening relationships with individuals and organisations with influence, and capitalise on 'hot spots' like the Hull City of Culture
- **Keep** providing resources such as the Access Guide and consider expanding based on user feedback and gaps identified
- **Keep** working with delegates at Southbank Centre Unlimited Festival to capitalise on potential accessibility learning opportunities and Ally networking
- **Tweak** the Impact programme's definition of reach and build understanding about what the true aims of the programme are
- **Tweak** the Ally strategy to build lasting relationships, foster knowledge sharing and become a self-sustaining network
- **Tackle** the evidence needed to demonstrate the business case for access, and measure changes in perceptions of disabled people.

## Delivery and evaluation

### Overall delivery

As a time-limited programme with a mission to embed the work of disabled artists, the way Unlimited is being delivered is as important as its outputs. The partnership between Shape and Artsadmin is seen as powerful and productive by funders and other stakeholders. The experience of delivering Unlimited is leading to valuable outcomes in each organisation and within funding bodies.

Working with Unlimited has also had a positive effect on funders themselves. For instance Oliver Williams from Spirit of 2012 says, 'they have very helpfully changed our thinking and definitions of disability. Working with them has moved us over to adopt the 'social model' definition and also to favour inclusive activities over ones targeted to a specific impairment or group.'

With a highly functioning team, Unlimited Impact is seen as a 'lean' programme that aims to maximise support offered to the sector. It is conscious of building sector capacity rather than 'doing it for them', acting as brokers rather than deliverers.

Unlimited's ability to raise awareness and change attitudes is seen as remarkable. The skills and networks of team members and delivery partner organisations play important connector roles and the ability to broker relationships will continue to drive outcomes





for artists and presenters. Ensuring the right skills are developed internally as the programme continues to mature will be key to maintaining its influence, along with 'succession planning' for the next generation of thought leaders and influencers.

### Funding processes

Since its inception, Unlimited Impact has focused on filling geographic and artform gaps, building strategic partnerships and relationships, supporting the work of young people, presenters and deepening understanding of issues through discussion and debate. It has been described as the 'background behind Unlimited', helping to make the most of the commissions, and ensure there is a real cultural shift and sustainable legacy for the programmes.

Though not always well known, Impact activities are highly regarded and are delivering valuable outcomes. For instance, one R&D recipient, Extant, was able to employ a young disabled trainee, delivering tangible benefits for both parties. The trainee subsequently was able to secure a position in a high profile mainstream arts organisation.

To date, the Unlimited Impact programme has not been widely promoted as a funding opportunity due to the risk of being overwhelmed by requests for support that can't be accommodated. This has meant that useful case studies and good news stories may currently be getting the profile they deserve.

As the programme grows, there may be increasing need to strengthen it with more structured offers and greater transparency – though there is clearly a balance to be struck between running open rounds and discretionary, strategic decision-making.

Regardless of the methods chosen, using simple, straightforward funding processes and ensuring clear public information is available, will help improve programme transparency.

### Long-term visioning

Ahead of a potential new funding agreement, it is good time for the Impact programme to document a clear vision for future. It would be useful to be specific about what the programme is aiming for, and what outcomes it hopes will have been achieved by end of the next funding period.

It may also be useful to start developing a long-term plan for Unlimited Impact – considering what the programme will need to look like after 2020. Drafting a hypothetical exit strategy might help the team identify more sustainable ways of working – that could continue beyond the lifespan of the programme. For instance:

- Could **other funders** support young or emerging disabled artists? What changes are needed in the funding community for this to happen and what can Unlimited Impact do today to work towards this?
- Could **Allies** support new allies? How could Unlimited Impact develop its Ally network to support more peer-to-peer knowledge sharing?





- Who are the **thought leaders** of tomorrow – How could Unlimited Impact develop a generation of leaders with the skills and stories to influence others?

## Spirit of 2012 evaluation

Unlimited is achieving significant outcomes related to ‘Outcome Pathways’ identified in the Spirit of 2012 Theory of Change, including:

- Empowering young people
- Empowering disabled people
- Challenging the perceptions of disability

Another area that Unlimited could focus on is ‘Connecting communities’ (described as ‘organisations connect to or make people aware of activities’). Oliver Williams of Spirit of 2012 explains ‘we’re really keen on connecting communities, not just regionally but different artistic communities, different communities of practice...I think Unlimited has got real potential to do that in a really exciting way.’

In future, there may also be scope for Unlimited to explore the outcomes pathways of:

- ‘Inspiring events’ (events provide ‘spark’ to connect groups, engage the media, show that involvement can be fun and provide role models) – Unlimited could focus on their presentation work, demonstrating how the Impact programme connects groups, engages the media to inform people and empowers them to give more to their communities
- ‘Inclusive participation’ (increased collaboration amongst organisations leads to greater cohesion and alignment, resulting in them doing better and more) – Unlimited could focus on their Ambassadors and mentoring work, demonstrating how through the Impact programme people learn from each other, increase understanding and get inspired
- ‘Partnerships’ (increased collaboration amongst organisations leads to greater cohesion and alignment, resulting in them doing better and more) – Unlimited could focus on their Allies work, demonstrating how the Impact programme increases collaboration amongst organisations, resulting in them doing better and more.

## Evaluation framework

Although Unlimited Impact was established before the Theory of Change was in place, a Spirit of 2012 inFocus Evaluation (released in November 2015) confirmed that Unlimited is delivering on its original funded outcomes and milestones and addressing several outcomes in the thematic pathways. It also recommended a more robust evidence base to support this (e.g. data monitoring and self-evaluation), which the Unlimited Impact team are working to put in place.

Unlimited Impact is now conducting a wide range of evaluation activities, collecting data regularly from partners, applicants, funded artists, Ambassadors and Allies. This includes work by at least three groups of consultants, and evaluative work managed internally. Some of this work is also incorporating longitudinal elements, which will enable rich analysis of change over time.



However, it is not clear what the core evaluation questions are – and how the data being collected will answer the most important questions. It may be useful to define some SMART objectives for the programme (potentially building on the outcomes identified in the inFocus evaluation report) that can be tracked over time.

One area that deserves particular thought is how the programme is challenging perceptions – and whether the current framework is capable of evidencing this with sufficient rigor. As discussed above, there is also an opportunity to consolidate the evidence base around accessibility to help further cement the case for change.

## Evaluation administration

With almost one dozen different strands to Unlimited evaluation work, resourcing should not be underestimated. The team is already thinking about ways to embed evaluation into day-to-day processes (e.g. ensuring artists complete questionnaires as a condition of funding), which will help in this regard.

It will be critical to ensure there is sufficient resourcing for the analysis, reporting and implementation of evaluation findings – and prioritisation may be needed.

There is a balance to be struck between collecting new data, and focusing on analysing data already available. Much can be gained from analysing existing datasets such as application databases, website analytics, social metrics, event attendance lists etc. – and these can help reduce the administration burden.

Unlimited Impact should also take care to distinguish genuine evaluation from PR/promotional case studies. Creating a safe space for honest reflection and constructive criticism is just as important as generating content for dissemination. It may be useful to map evaluation activities to different purposes.

## Looking ahead: delivery and evaluation

In summary, the key opportunities for Unlimited Impact in relation to delivery and evaluation moving forward are to:

- **Keep** using simple, straightforward processes for applicants and **tweak** public information about funding streams to improve the programme's transparency and accountability
- **Keep** tracking the experience and achievements of Allies and Ambassadors over time, using systematic processes and follow up milestones
- **Tweak** the way the programme works now to embed ways of working that can be sustained if funding for Unlimited was to end
- **Tackle** how best to use open rounds of funding, balancing the resourcing considerations with the potential to attract a wider pool of candidates
- **Tackle** the medium- and long-term vision for the programme and articulate SMART objectives for the next funding triennium
- **Tackle** how best to resource the analysis and reporting of evaluation data, with key milestones for when the results will be discussed among the team, and reported publicly.



## Conclusions

The Spirit of 2012 Trust, the key funder of Unlimited Impact, describes the programme as ‘an empowering arts project that focuses on developing and inspiring the next generation of young disabled people passionate about making change through art. The project also supports venues and festivals across the UK to show ambitious and high quality art by disabled people and reaches out to wider and more diverse audiences.’<sup>2</sup>

Across these two strands of work, the Unlimited Impact programme has supported a diverse range of projects, with impacts being felt on an individual and organisational level across a variety of different regions and artform areas. Spirit of 2012 states that:

‘Unlimited Impact has identified some really exciting young disabled artists with whom they can work and do skills and confidence development work with... They’ve worked with venues in not the usual places, in towns and rural communities, to address barriers in hosting and exhibiting work by disabled artists... That work has really started to pick up now and what we’re seeing more of now is increased willingness to host work by disabled artists.’

The Unlimited Impact programme co-exists with the Unlimited Commissions Programme effectively, extending and embedding the reach of this work much more broadly than would otherwise be possible. Its work with young disabled artists, mentors, venues, festivals and discussion platforms is helping to spread the Unlimited message far and wide and embed new ways of working in the cultural sector. Jo Verrent explains the difference Spirit of 2012’s funding has made:

‘It enables us to get behind the scenes of the cultural sector and to support young disabled artists and creatives to take their first steps into the industry, and to support venues and festivals who want to increase access but aren’t sure where to start. We can’t just create ‘art’ and hope that everything else will fall into place... Through Spirit’s funding of Unlimited Impact, we are able to play a role in developing a more equal infrastructure... so that the impact can spread.’<sup>3</sup>

Further refinements of Unlimited Impact, including clarifying it’s focus, improving public understanding, streamlining administration, and consolidating networks, will help further embed positive outcomes across the cultural sector and beyond.

The evidence indicates that the Unlimited programmes need to continue for a while yet before the work of disabled artists is truly embedded within the fabric of the cultural sector. However, it will be useful on a number of levels to consider the exit strategy for the programmes over the long term. Refining the evaluation framework and rigorously analysing programme impacts will likely deliver further benefits for programme delivery – and the international arts community.

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<sup>2</sup> The Spirit of 2012 Trust, ‘Funding in focus...Unlimited Impact’, accessed 9 May 2016 at [www.spiritof2012trust.org.uk/funding-focus-unlimited-impact](http://www.spiritof2012trust.org.uk/funding-focus-unlimited-impact)

