



CULTURAL SNAPSHOT
NUMBER SIXTEEN

Cultivating Research

**articulating value in arts and
academic collaborations**

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Foreword

Innovation does not happen on its own. It needs the types of collaboration that are highlighted in this report. These long-term partnerships between arts organisations and Higher Education Institutions are extremely important in diversifying and strengthening the research base. And can also offer new and vibrant possibilities for artistic practice. This is not, however, an easy path to take. It requires time and effort for the networks needed for these collaborations to thrive. Potential partners may speak with different languages, have different missions, operate in different structures and work to different timescales. But, as this report shows, the trust and understanding that comes through repeat engagement can overcome these potential difficulties.

Recent work undertaken by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) on its support for knowledge transfer found that trust was a pre-requisite for meaningful collaboration. Only through getting to know a partner's ideas and goals, and having an awareness of their resources and constraints, can a strong partnership be formed. Projects that lead to closer links between partners are particularly important in developing the relationships that can build to even greater things.

The AHRC has a commitment to developing case studies of good practice in relation to knowledge exchange. They can show the benefits of undertaking collaborative work, as well as the hazards that may need to be addressed, while also helping to develop a broader culture of interaction in the arts and humanities and related sectors. The rich examples included in this current report add to a growing body of evidence on the advantages of active participation.

Independent Research Organisation (IRO) status is a particularly valuable way of supporting research-intensive organisations outside of the university sector that are able to extend and enhance the research base. To gain IRO status requires a significant commitment towards research, and it is high-status acknowledgment of quality in this area. The AHRC's IRO recognition of, for example, The British Museum and Tate has greatly expanded their opportunities for research funding. And this has had a tremendous impact on their growing capabilities. It is a great challenge to gain IRO status, but the benefits can be immense.

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Executive Summary

The research outputs of long term collaborations between arts organisations such as Blast Theory and Proboscis and their Higher Education Institution partners such as the Mixed Reality Lab at University of Nottingham or the Pervasive Computing Lab at Birkbeck College are well documented both in terms of research papers and artistic outputs. Organisations such as SCAN and Futuresonic are choosing to locate themselves within an HEI setting in order to support both the organisations ongoing development and increase the impact of their work beyond an arts context.

What are the benefits of these arts & research collaborations and what models do they offer to other arts organisations whose research based approach could be well supported through HEI partnerships and access to Research Council funding? What benefits does Independent Research Organisation status confer on an arts organisation and how is it achieved?

This Cultural Snapshot seeks to answer these questions through a set of three case studies of arts organisations who have actively nurtured research focussed relationships with HEI's and other research units (e.g. the research arms of various corporates) over a five to ten year period.

- Proboscis has built its artistic practice around a research approach and in so doing has collaborated with a number of HEIs over the years including the Royal College of Art, London School of Economics, Birkbeck College, Queen Mary (University of London) and the Institute of Child Health.
- Blast Theory have developed a long term collaboration with the Mixed Reality Lab at University of Nottingham.
- SCAN have worked with a number of HEIs including University of Wales Institute Cardiff, Southampton University, University of Portsmouth, Arts Institute Bournemouth and most recently have relocated to Bournemouth University to forge deeper connections across a number of departments

These case studies are based on an analysis of conversations with key actors in each organisation. Such analysis indicates that there are a number of recurring themes in terms of the reasons why these relationships have been so successful and long lasting. They are all built on personal relationships between one member of an arts organisation and one member of staff in the HEI. Whilst over time this extends into a much wider network of relationships between the organisations it is this trusted personal connection which grounds the professional relationships, which sees both sides through the rough and the smooth of any project and which transcends the differences of opinion which will occur in any project. This trust forms the basis upon which all parties in a project build a transdisciplinary research approach. The process by which such approaches are negotiated is often built into the project timeline and milestones and is iterative. This allows researchers from very different backgrounds e.g. engineering and fine art to sort through the layers of understanding and meaning which they bring to the work and come to not only a common understanding but an exchange of ideas which builds a richness and depth into the project in a way which would be hard to achieve in a project which only enabled an activity to be undertaken once and not learnt from and refined.

Whilst the relationships between the arts organisations and HEIs are long term and may span several three to four year programmes of activity there are nonetheless lulls in activity. This requires an arts organisation to be flexible – scaling up its team during busy periods and reducing it between projects. This issue is less relevant to HEI based research units where some degree of interim funding may be accessed to keep key staff in the team. An arts organisation must therefore either be large enough to be running several multi-year projects or small enough to scale back its overhead base. In reality only the former is genuinely sustainable though the latter is a reasonable approach in the mid-term whilst an organisation grows its research reputation.

The ability to achieve IRO status represents a significant opportunity for arts organisations whose approach is centred around a research based practice. IRO status is recognition by the research community for the quality of work undertaken by the organisation. It should be expected to take several years and multiple projects to demonstrate that an organisation merits IRO status. As more arts organisations seek this status questions around the transferability of methods and practices are bound to be asked but as a cluster of organisations with common working practices and goals forms in the arts the answers can be negotiated.

In parallel a series of other questions need to be answered. By what means do Arts Council England recognise the value of this practice-led research? How could the Technology Strategy Board and Knowledge Transfer Networks work more closely with IROs? What is the potential growth of this area of collaboration between arts & research? What steps do we need to take in the next couple of years to ensure that a cluster of arts organisations forms and is recognised?

Introduction

This paper is the output of the EPSRC funded Creator Cluster and forms one of the Troubadour studies. It may also be read as a follow on piece of work to *Capitalising Creativity*, a previous Cultural Snapshot (no. 14), which articulates a model for the development of earned income streams in non-profit arts organisations.

Approaches to grant funding in the Cultural Industries in the UK can be seen to reflect the economic climate, policy priorities and the varied methods of distributing public funds. For example since the late 1990s there has been a growth in use of investment based financial instruments in the public sector and Arts Council England is now exploring methods of recoupment. Equally there has been a growth in a research based approach both in terms of artist practice and in the development of research based fine art PhDs.

Arts organisations continue to seek funding and income routes beyond the traditional Arts Council England grants. The goal for Regularly Funded Organisations is now to achieve over fifty percent of their funding from non-ACE sources.

A growing number of arts organisations participate in research activities through collaborations with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In the main these relationships are focussed upon project funded opportunities. The funds are managed by the HEI and the arts organisation will be paid to undertake work as a sub-contractor. This offers an income stream but not the opportunity to direct the path the research takes.

For an organisation to be in a position to shape the research rather than simply undertake it they need to become a peer to the HEI(s) they work with. Independent Research Organisations (IRO) have this status. To date only two contemporary visual arts organisations have this IRO status – Tate and Proboscis.

This paper takes Proboscis and its relationships with HEIs as a case study in order to look at the opportunities and challenges for arts organisations who wish to grow the research strand of their activities. We also look at the potential implications for the arts of the development of the role of arts organisations as research vehicles.

The case studies in this paper are based on conversations with individuals in the arts organisations and the HEIs rather than any analysis of the stated aims and approaches of any of the organisations referenced. The conclusions therefore are based on the opinions and views expressed during the interviews and are not intended to reflect the wider practices and activities of the organisations.

Proboscis – a case study

Proboscis is an artist led organisation, established in 1994 by Giles Lane. It is a vehicle for the creative practice of Alice Angus and Giles Lane and as such has always had a strongly research based approach. In 2004 Proboscis was made an RFO of Arts Council England and coincidentally achieved IRO status with the Research Councils.

Context

RFOs negotiate an annual target for the percentage of income derived from ACE grant funds and that derived from other sources such as private foundations, sponsorship, sales etc. The current national goal for all RFOs is that ACE funds should represent less than 50% of total income. This represents a significant shift over the last 10 years as prior to this arts organisations might well be 90-100% ACE funded.

Proboscis has actively cultivated a diverse range of funders and clients in its 15 year history. Recently this has included the Ministry of Justice, Technology Strategy Board, Fondation Daniel Langlois and the Heritage Lottery Fund. However Proboscis has, from the outset, collaborated with HEIs from the Royal College of Art to the London School of Economics, Birkbeck College, University of Nottingham, Southampton University and the Institute of Child Health. It is at the core of the way Proboscis works.

As Proboscis has become more adept at choosing collaborators and developing working relationships with HEIs so it has sought to develop its own status as a research entity. Becoming an IRO is part of this process of increasing the visibility of its work within a research context.

History of development to IRO status

As an artist led organisation, created as a vehicle for the artistic practice of Giles Lane and Alice Angus it is unsurprising that the models for the organisations development are closely connected to Giles' and Alice's experience of other organisational models and in particular academic and research models. With wide networks of friends and colleagues based in academic institutions the research model was already familiar when Proboscis was established.

Early HEI collaborations:

Proboscis' first HE collaboration was with the Royal College of Art in 1998. Indeed the fact that Giles was running Proboscis was a key reason for his being hired by the RCA as a research fellow. From 1998-2002 the RCA brought its resources to the collaboration by providing space for events, and the use of staff time in projects. It took time to find the most appropriate bridge between Proboscis and RCA interests but Giles' move to establish a new research unit in the School of Communication formalised the partnership between the two organisations around the launch and delivery of SoMa (also in collaboration with the LSE).

This co-location of Proboscis' director in the overlapping orbits of Proboscis and the RCA meant that Proboscis developed an understanding of academic funding & research processes, participated in the early meetings of the AHRB around its constitution and role and met organisations such as Hewlett-Packard Research Labs via colleagues. From 2001 Proboscis also developed a close collaboration with the London School of Economics. All of this activity broadened Proboscis' network in the research community.

In early 2000 Proboscis took the strategic decision to move away from a traditional curatorial and commission based approach to one that was more research led. This enabled them to focus more on their artistic practice than on commissioning.

In 2003 Urban Tapestries was funded as part of the DTI Next Wave Markets and Technologies programme. This brought together a wide range of research partners from the London School of Economics to HP Labs, Orange, France Telecom R&D UK and Ordnance Survey. Urban Tapestries (UT) is a key marker in Proboscis' development as the project was substantial enough to deliver outputs in the real world rather than in the confines of a pervasive computing lab and brought together researchers from design, visual arts, computer and social sciences. UT set the standard for Proboscis' collaborative research approach and exemplified a number of key factors which Proboscis have replicated and developed in subsequent research activities:

- **A transdisciplinary approach leveraged to enable peer learning** i.e. a social scientists approach to information structuring could inform a computing scientists database development
- **Regular working team meetings in the studio** to break the isolation of the lab and brainstorm key challenges as a group

UT continues to be cited in academic journals as well as in Creative Industries reports as a landmark project in the field of location based computing.

A growing research reputation

The factors that brought *Urban Tapestries* together were not stable however and the research groups moved on to other areas. Proboscis recognised the value of this research based approach as one which could not only enable them to make the work that interests them but also one which could bring a steady and sizable income to complement the Arts Council England RFO grants. They also realised the need for a set of stable collaborative relationships with a small number of key academic institutions.

The relationship with LSE had grown steadily through UT and was a pivotal relationship for both Proboscis and the late Professor Roger Silverstone. The LSE partnership added credibility to the DTI application, enabled the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation to fund Proboscis' early *Social Tapestries* research programme, and brought participants to events who would not have attended otherwise. In this sense it was crucial to the process of building Proboscis' reputation for delivering high quality research. In return for this lending of credibility Roger benefited from the breadth of people Proboscis brought into his orbit, people he would not have met otherwise. Sadly this rich relationship has tailed off since Roger's death in 2006.

Other relationships were emerging however. In 2004 the EPSRC announced a call for the Culture and Creativity Programme for fellowships and knowledge transfer networks. Proboscis bid and won a visiting fellowship for engineer/artist Natalie Jeremijenko to work with them. In the course of the project Proboscis brought in Birkbeck College to build the sensing capabilities into the remote controlled cars. This relationship with Birkbeck had been developing since 2003 but, until this point, had not had a concrete project to deliver.

This project was another key marker as it was the first EPSRC call to which arts

organisations were allowed to bid. Furthermore when the Office of Science & Technology evaluated the funding they determined that for an arts organisation to receive funds they must qualify as an Independent Research Organisation. IRO status requires that the organisation be 'tax exempt' – this is a specific status of an organisation which is awarded by HM Revenue & Customs. The details of this status relate to the way in which monies are re-invested into projects and this re-investment shown in the accounts. The EPSRC is not allowed to disburse funds directly to organisations which are taxable. Therefore, by bidding for and winning Culture & Creativity Programme funding, the IRO status was awarded to Proboscis. As an IRO Proboscis has access to the JES submission system, enabling them not just to make direct bids as Principal Investigators to EPSRC calls, but also to act as Co-Investigating partners on projects led by other HEIs to other Research Councils' calls.

The collaboration with Birkbeck College is with Dr George Roussos and his team in the Pervasive Computing Lab. The work undertaken in the project demonstrated the benefits of working in the real world as well as the lab so when the opportunity arose to develop these activities further through the Iniva commissioned *Snout* project George committed the resources of two of his team to the project. Whilst *Snout* was certainly a separate project it was also clear that the learnings from the fellowship were transferred into the iterations of both hardware and software developed in *Snout*.

Proboscis were subsequently invited to bid to the main EPSRC programme ("responsive mode") for funds, which they were keen to do, seeing benefits in doing so irrespective of the chances of success. Birkbeck on the other hand did not feel that the chance of success was high enough to merit application until the emergence of the Creative Industries and Digital Economy programme was announced. Even here the question remained as to whether the review process would open up sufficiently to enable organisations such as Proboscis to bid successfully? For Birkbeck this kind of delivery of research through work which tests prototypes in the real world is still a peripheral activity. It is not a capacity building approach, as it is at places like Nottingham University's Mixed Reality Lab, but instead is based on a personal interest held by a staff member. Whilst seeing practice-led and practice-based work as having a great deal to offer they have to recognise that this is not a mainstream view. The impact of this is that Birkbeck delivers substantial value with a fraction of the resources that such work would usually take and is slowly building an evidence base for this practice-based way of working with arts organisations. The papers and presentations help to justify the expenditure of resources on this work though it would undoubtedly help if practice-based work was better accepted as a valid research approach. From this perspective the Creator Research Cluster has been an important project itself not only in the contextualisation of this approach to research for artists and academics alike but also in the extending of the networks of collaboration which both artists and academics can draw upon.

Network of collaborators

Proboscis have always developed and maintained a very wide and diverse collection of organisations and individuals they collaborate with. They purposefully bring together organisations as diverse as the Ministry of Justice, Science Museum & Ordnance Survey. This network is built around the delivery of projects but is by no means limited to the parameters and timescales of the projects themselves. It is common to see connections made in one project resurface some years later as what might appear to be a tangential connection to a new piece of work.

By developing an understanding of core motivations of their partners Proboscis are able to connect apparently very different organisations to a common theme.

The financial implications on project budgets

Organisations such as Proboscis tend to operate on a very low overhead base, especially when compared to the overhead structures of an HEI. Even if these overhead rates were to increase to give greater stability for the organisation between large projects they would still deliver high quality research at a fraction of the cost of their HEI equivalents. Whilst this is not an argument for the substitution of arts research for that conducted within the HEI community it very clearly demonstrates the ability of an arts organisation to use a higher proportion of any project funds for the research itself rather than for the upkeep of buildings and administrative resources.

Furthermore, skilled staff availability issues aside, arts sector hiring norms also mean that staff can be hired on a project basis rather than on long term tenure. This gives an arts organisation flexibility to downsize between large projects and thus maintain focus on the key areas of research rather than take on peripheral projects merely to keep bringing in the monies to pay the staff costs.

Based on conversations with Proboscis and a review of sample project budgets overheads are typically around 15% of turnover. As a rough guide this means that on any one project where the HEI partners have an overhead base of 30-40% of their allocated workload then an arts organisation could be delivering as much as one third of the work for only one quarter of the total project budget.

A developing opportunity for sustainability

A review of Proboscis' financial history uncovers a roughly four year cycle. It takes 2-3 years to develop major projects such as *Navigating History*, *Urban Tapestries* and *Mapping Perception* both in terms of the development of the goals and structure of the work and in terms of the funding relationships required to support these multi-layered art works. The fourth year in the cycle is often the delivery year where the resources of multiple funders are leveraged in concert to bring about the multiple outputs that these complex projects enable. When one views the longer term and understands the way in which Proboscis structures projects and finances, the trends can be seen. It is worth noting that Blast Theory exhibit a similar profile of several years of funding development followed by intensive delivery.

Whilst entrepreneurs involved in demand-led commercial activities understand the R&D pipeline which drives these stepped changes, supply-side funding-driven stakeholders prefer to see more 'steady state' predictability year to year amongst regularly funded client organisations. These step changes have the capacity to un-nerve funders and can lead to tension between funder and client. For these reasons alone it makes sense for organisations such as Proboscis to establish sustainability through the development of relationships with organisations who understand these funding cycles which lead to these steps up and down in capacity and delivery activities.

Furthermore the scale of activities funded through organisations such as the EPSRC is different by an order of magnitude. This makes the process of selling in what to arts organisations are 'large' multi-year projects (£300k-£1m) more straightforward as a 'large' project in EPSRC terms is £2-4m.

The goal for Proboscis therefore is to develop to a point where there are two to three multi-year projects at different stages of development and delivery at any one time. This will reduce the year to year variations in scale of the organisation by providing more work to a larger network of employees, collaborators and sub-contractors and therefore increase the overall intellectual asset base both internal to Proboscis and amongst the wider network. This increased sustainability of human resources is a crucial complement to the increased financial sustainability of Proboscis as an organisation. Staff turnover can be a destabilising factor in any organisation, but particularly risky if coupled with a situation where a significant proportion of the project relationships are with a network of specialist freelancers.

For these reasons Proboscis' sustainability requires a careful combination of growth in employees (already demonstrated in the last 2-3 years) with a steady flow of work parcelled out to regular freelancers.

A gathering momentum – other arts organisations taking this path

It would be easy to suggest that the current economic uncertainty is a driver for arts organisations to explore new income routes. This would underestimate the long term vision and innovative approaches of a growing number of arts organisations. Whilst not all have found a route appropriate to their goals several have already developed a significant research funding strand and others are exploring the possibilities that this route offers. Blast Theory have a ten year relationship with the Mixed Reality Lab (MRL) in Nottingham, SCAN have recently moved to Bournemouth University as part of their move to focus on a smaller number of key HEI relationships. These activities would enable such organisations to develop their research track record to a point where IRO status could be attained should they so wish.

Organisations with long term HEI relationships

Blast Theory

Blast Theory have worked with the Mixed Reality Lab (MRL) at the University of Nottingham on a variety of projects since 1997. These have ranged from two week R&D grants involving just Blast Theory and the MRL to participation in €10m three year programmes involving many organisations from both public and private sectors. The relationship built between Professor Steve Benford (MRL) and Matt Adams (Blast Theory) is clearly highly successful and enables both organisations to intertwine their methods to achieve mutually agreed goals which recognise both Steve's need for research outcomes and Matt's need for artistic outputs.

This alignment of goals is more than a live and let live approach to tolerating the other party's needs. It is a recognition that by adding another layer to each others goals they both benefit from the richness. For example the MRL research benefits from the deadline driven approach of Blast Theory which pushes the MRL team to iterate their work more swiftly than research deadlines would usually demand and therefore maintains a momentum and achieves a depth of enquiry which is otherwise hard to facilitate. Blast Theory benefit from having a long term relationship with Steve Benford which offers a depth of discussion and debate which would be almost impossible to achieve

with art world professionals with whom they work on a single project. It is this ongoing intellectual engagement which adds the real value over the long term. It is also worth noting that these contributions are not limited to the specific areas where each is expert. Blast Theory sees MRL's contribution as one which strengthens the work directly through the provision of a critical ear and voice, the questions discussed are not only the practical and the scientific but are also artistically rich debates on the work itself.

The layers of knowledge of each others processes allow Matt and Steve to cover both breadth and depth of ideas and approaches in the course of their conversations whilst delegating key activities to members of their respective teams. Now that this collaboration has achieved a maturity built over the last decade the majority of projects are built to run over several years. Periodically shorter pieces of work are delivered which utilise short term capacity, resources or opportunities but these would not sustain the relationship and can only be seen as the bonus of a relationship where the high level of trust allows them to occur.

Through the delivery of several multi-partner large projects it has become clear that it takes a good 6-9 months for all the partners to fully understand the multiple and varied agendas that each partner brings to a large project. This reason alone is sufficient to demand long term projects. Equally it is the trust between partners who are familiar with each other which allows others to be added into the mix for the purposes of a project or a bid to a set of funds. These known quantities act as the constant which makes the clarification of the unknown criteria of the new additions. It is also worth noting that both MRL and Blast Theory broker introductions across the networks in which they operate with the effect that they convene working groups with a far higher diversity of experience and expertise than usually occurs in either an HE research or arts based project.

In the course of working together over the last 10 years it has also become clear that it is critical that members of collaborating organisations spend time in each others physical spaces. The additional learnings that this enables vary from simply seeing a different working style on a day to day basis to participating in unexpected conversations both during the work and in the interstices between work.

The relationship between MRL and Blast Theory has now reached a stage where the projects can be built in such a way as to combine MRL's leadership of the project (key for funders such as EPSRC) with a clarity of the skills that Blast Theory brings into a research project which in turn allows Blast Theory to steer some key elements of the work. This suits both parties well. Blast Theory are clear that there will always be a lifecycle to the projects and that this will leave quieter patches between large projects. This is reason enough to ensure that core costs of the organisation are funded through arts grants. However as research projects deliver between 5% and 40% of turnover (depending on project lifecycle stage) then they are a key route to delivering projects and a potential route to delivering commercial work as an extension of research projects into the commercial world.

At the time of writing this means that goal for the income ratio between arts funding and research projects is approximately 50:50. The long term goal is to stabilise the research income and then develop a commercial strand which leverages the intellectual property built up over the last 15 years of work. A situation could be foreseen, ten years from now where the income split could be 20% arts funding: 20% research projects:

60% commercial income. This shift would mean that growth of Blast Theory is no longer limited to the size of funding pools they are able to access but driven by demand for their work on a global level.

SCAN

SCAN is run by Helen Sloan and is a Regularly Funded Organisation in the SW Region. Their focus is the curation of new media commissions and the development of curatorial and commissioning practice in new media and digital arts.

SCAN has always had a collaborative approach to the development and delivery of projects and for the last few years has worked with academic as well as arts organisations. They have explored two main ways of working with HE institutions. Initially SCAN cherry picked institutions with whom she already had a connection – perhaps through an artist, perhaps through a common research topic. SCAN leveraged academic funds in relatively small chunks (under £20,000 at a time) to co-deliver conferences and publications alongside artist commissions. The delivery of *Wearable Futures* with University of Wales is an example of this cherry picking approach. As SCAN's core costs are covered by the RFO grant the use of the HE funds was typically a 10% management fee for SCAN and the rest spent directly on the project.

This cherry picking approach meant that SCAN had the freedom to work with a wide variety of organisations. The challenge however was that it was often necessary to spend considerable amounts of time aligning goals and expectations. This meant learning the political landscape of each HE institution and it was common that these structures would be very different from one HE to another. This lack of transferable learning again added to the time cost in establishing these relationships.

In 2008 SCAN moved into Bournemouth University premises. One key reason for this alignment to a single institution is the desire to move from a cherry picking approach to one where SCAN and Bournemouth can collaborate regularly on bids for funds. SCAN can provide a point of focus for work with several departments in the University as well as a conduit for collaborative bids between departments. Over time this exploration of possibilities within a single HE could be expected to develop into the setting up of a centre of excellence in media practice. It is reasonable to expect that locating SCAN within an HE institution should open a series of doors to groups of academics who would otherwise be hard to reach. SCAN brings not only a wealth of curatorial experience but, crucially, the ability to take work out of a hypothetical research situation into an implementation in the real world and in varied social contexts. This perspective is consistent with the reasons the departments such as the MRL in Nottingham work with creative lead organisations.

The risk of focussing the research relationship on and in a single HE institution is that it might reduce the willingness of other HE institutions to work with SCAN or it might reduce the speed with which SCAN can work as it becomes more embroiled in the processes and politics of Bournemouth's structures. Flexibility and agility against consistency and sustainability – a trade-off to be negotiated.

The ownership of Intellectual Property has always been a grey area to be negotiated but this is particularly so when dealing with HE institutions. It is less of an issue when establishing projects with other creative organisations who would usually expect IP to rest with the artist. HE institutions are far more likely to argue that the IP rests

with them as the default position when they bring funds to a project. This becomes a particularly challenging negotiation when HE institutions can leverage significant legal expertise to press home their demands and when the other parties may not be aware of the governmental recommendations from the Lambert review and similar initiatives. SCAN have therefore been careful to negotiate a default position whereby Bournemouth recognises that SCAN and the artists will own their own IP but the details of any shared IP will be negotiated on a project to project basis.

Clearly this relationship between Bournemouth and SCAN needs to deliver tangible benefits to both sides. Bournemouth have been very clear about their success criteria. These can be summed up as:

- RAE points within 5 years
- Access to funding within 2 years
- Increase in profile within 1 year

Bournemouth are investing approximately £30,000 per annum of in-kind support, mostly in the form of provision of physical space. To aid the development of relationships between SCAN and departments within the university Helen Sloan has been made a visiting fellow. This academic profile is expected to be key in helping academics recognise the expertise and experience that Helen brings.

The location of the boundaries between SCAN and Bournemouth is particularly interesting. SCAN need to be seen as being a part of the university in order to establish close working relationships; they also need to retain the autonomy required to continue their pioneering work and protect the intellectual asset base developed to date. The funding structures are a key part of this boundary setting. By funding Helen's salary through ACE RFO grants autonomy is maintained, by delivering successful funding bids the integration into the universities development priorities is assured. These two strands need to be maintained until such time as a separate centre for media practice can be justified. SCAN will also need to demonstrate the additional benefits of the social and artistic context which SCAN brings to collaborative R&D with Bournemouth based academics. This will have to be demonstrated not only to Bournemouth but also to the Research Councils. It is reasonable to expect that project bids will be split so that the overhead goes to Bournemouth University and the project and management fees are managed by SCAN. In this way SCAN will retain control over the direction of collaborative projects whilst developing the practice of HE based staff. In this sense SCAN's work with Bournemouth is part of the universities retention policy and are part of a drive to encourage staff to undertake their research through and with the university rather than go it alone in their own time.

If SCAN could achieve IRO status this would increase the robustness of the boundary between SCAN and Bournemouth and would go some way to rebalancing the relationship between the small SCAN and the large Bournemouth. IRO status would allow SCAN to lead on projects rather than be a subcontractor, it would make them a full academic partner and enable budget control to be held by SCAN.

As ACE are indicating that they wish to see collaboration between arts organisations and HE institutions and they would wish funds (not just in-kind) to be run through the bank accounts of the arts organisations then IRO status would help make this more commonplace. With the likelihood of a size imbalance between HE and arts organisation IRO status would also help increase the arts organisations bargaining position.

Key Learnings & Success Factors in these approaches

When we look at Proboscis, Blast Theory and SCAN's relationships with HEIs we see a number of commonalities in the learnings and success factors.

Long term relationships

Whilst it is possible to leverage short term opportunities on the whole longer term relationships are both more efficient and effective. There are a number of reasons for this:

- **Language** – academics and artists tend to speak quite different languages, it takes a while to bridge this gap and create a common understanding
- **Timescales** – artists tend to be quite driven by short term deadlines & opportunities, academics tend to work in longer cycles which are quite hard to fast track. It therefore takes a while to bring these in sync so that both long and short term goals can be achieved to the benefit of all parties
- **Output types** – it is not uncommon for artists and academics to have different expectations of what may appear to be similar outputs e.g. artists tend to want to test prototypes in the real world, not all academics would see the need to get beyond the lab based simulation

These factors also mean that if academic and creative organisations are establishing a collaboration of this type for the first time it is likely that they will be less aware of these differences. Therefore the first few months are likely to be fraught with miscommunications, the need to clarify intent and meaning and a degree of uncertainty of direction and intent of the other party. This is the norm rather than the exception and something that seasoned collaborators build into their project structures.

Trans-disciplinary approaches and personal synergies

However once these initial hurdles have been overcome the richness of these trans-disciplinary working relationships has the capacity to lead to a depth of discussion and quality of work which is hard to find in either arts or academic monocultures. The benefits can be seen in the multi-layered outputs of projects and in the ways that teams talk about their experiences of participation in projects. Comments such as Matt Adams' "our collaborative projects with the MRL are more ambitious, sophisticated and complex than they would otherwise be" would seem to be the norm rather than the exception as responses.

Unlike partnerships and joint ventures between corporations where it is the common business goals that drive collaboration between teams in this area of work it is more common to see a relationship pivot upon an individual connection between an artist and an academic. With time this key relationship is not only maintained and deepened but also provides the basis upon which additional relationships can be built between other members of each organisation. Over a decade this can result in a series of interconnected relationships which work both on a strategic level and to achieve very practical project oriented deadlines.

Iteration of Projects

It is clear from all three case studies that longer term projects are preferable. One of the key reasons for this is that it allows for iteration of designs. Feedback loops from testing prototypes and better understanding the goals of other collaborators both enable

improvements to be made from one iteration to the next.

Whilst the time required to make adjustments between iterations will vary a well functioning collaboration may well seek to iterate quite fast as it maintains project momentum and builds a fast, responsive iteration process throughout the project.

This management of ongoing change is a skill in itself, particularly when several project partners are involved. Standard linear project management tools are unlikely to be able to cope with this level of changeable variables and interconnected factors. Online project management tools which act as the hub for the project are a key tool for geographically dispersed teams however they are rarely a total solution. Proboscis establish monthly day long project meetings where the conversation time over lunch is as much a part of the working day as the more structured meetings. Blast Theory regularly accommodate MRL researchers onsite for 2-3 weeks in order for these researchers to immerse themselves in Blast Theory's working style. This has been seen to dramatically improve the design & build processes when the researchers return to MRL. Proboscis also expand the studio team during larger projects and rather than work with remote-based freelancers they will insist on time being spent in the studio. Whilst these collaboration processes are very similar to those found in corporate R&D teams, the point to note is that artists and researchers alike recognise that these working processes are a critical success factor and short cuts here would affect the overall outcome. Budget constraints are often cited as a source of compromise in the non-profit arts and virtual communication tools are often seen as an inexpensive alternative to face to face time without due consideration of their effect. This is one area where they are not capable of being a full substitute.

Capacity & Resources

The ability to adjust the size of the team according to the demands of projects is often a critical skill in small arts organisations as funds tend to be associated with individual projects and as core funding rarely covers more than the core team there is very little in the way of 'risk capital' that an arts organisation can invest in projects which have not yet been funded. Whilst the ability to fund new activities can be found in both for profit and non-profit entities it is particularly acute in these non-profit entities which whose monies are derived from supply-side economics rather than the demand-led economics of the for-profit sector.

Furthermore, unlike the HE sector where research units and institutions can access bridge funding between major projects and unlike major institutions where the embarrassment caused by financial failure can be leveraged to achieve bridge funding in extreme circumstances small arts organisations, especially those who are not building based (and therefore don't have the overhead base that comes with this), do not have access to these sorts of interim funding.

This makes the development of large, multi-year projects a risky activity to be fitted around current projects. Collaboration with HEIs immediately increases the capacity to develop such projects as HEIs recognise the need to fund staff time to bid for project monies.

Whilst the pre-funding stage of a project presents challenges in terms of keeping the team small but finding time to build and bid for monies the opposite challenge exists once a project is funded – the need to rapidly expand the team to encompass additional

skills and add sufficient resources to deliver to the deadlines set. Arts organisations can and do add staff on project specific contracts. However these are often quite short term (less than 12 months) which means that there is rarely enough time or sufficient incentive for project based employees to add value to the organisation above and beyond the immediate project goals. This not only limits their remit but also the residual intellectual assets which can be accumulated in the arts organisation as they have little incentive to engage beyond the project. If however the arts organisation is partnering with an HEI there is a strong chance that the HE will be able to bring personnel to the project. The working relationships that this brings are quite different. Typical staff contracts are for 1-3 years and therefore the commitment of staff to their employer is generally higher and thus allows for greater leveraging of these resources into the project. This need not be the number of hours worked but simply the levels of intellectual engagement are higher when employees have a longer term relationship with their employer.

This leveraging of HE resources into collaborative projects can be seen in the relationship between Blast Theory and MRL and in the relationship between Proboscis and Birkbeck. It is a regular part of the projects.

The challenges & responsibilities of IRO status for arts organisations

The possibility of achieving IRO status represents a significant opportunity for arts organisations whose approach is centred around a research based practice. IRO status is a recognition of the quality of research undertaken by the organisation; indeed it confers the status of an equal to the HEI partners such organisations work with. The process of peer review of project applications to the Research Councils is likely to ensure that the number of IROs remains small and that it will continue to take a track record spanning a substantial period of time and number of projects for this quality to be seen to be consistent. These elements all protect the value of IRO status within the research community.

If IRO status organisations are to leverage their status fully they will seek to lead bids to the Research Councils. This has a series of practical implications in that not only will the organisation need the skills to prepare a bid in the language with which the funders are familiar but they will also need to demonstrate that they have appropriate administration resources as again administration of research council monies is typically different to administration of ACE funding. Neither of these need be insurmountable hurdles but they do require a commitment in terms of personnel and skills and it should not be expected that arts administrators can make a straight switch into research funds administrators.

There are also questions to be addressed in terms of equivalence of practice between arts organisations and HEIs. For example within an HE setting there are ethics committees who oversee the research processes utilised. In particular, in a social sciences setting, they apply to research which includes members of the public. Arts organisations tend to have their own code of practice if they are engaged in a research based approach. Is it relevant to review these codes of practice or demonstrate their

equivalence and appropriateness? Unlike an HEI research based arts organisations tend to be small and with a high degree of transparency in their approach, it is unlikely that the appropriateness of their approach would not be questioned internally on a project by project basis.

If arts organisations are to leverage their recognition within the research community across into the arts there needs to be a greater understanding of what IRO status represents. If the Arts Council is going to continue to be supportive of process based artistic practices and is going to continue to push for diversification of income streams then it follows that it should recognise and commend IRO status and find some means of taking such status into account when considering the RFO status of organisations with a clearly articulated research approach. Equally it would make sense for the Technology Strategy Board, the Knowledge Transfer Networks (CITIN in the Creative Industries) to establish a mode of working with IRO status organisations.

In order to raise the profile of research based organisations perhaps the first step is to establish a clearly recognisable cluster of arts organisations working in this way. The visibility of the cluster will depend in part on the cluster undertaking activities together be they funding bids, production of publications or merely cross-referencing one another when writing about their own work.

Conclusion

As the funding environment of the Cultural Industries in the UK continues to evolve we are seeing a greater focus on the connection between cultural and commercial value of both tangible and intangible outputs of creativity. This is in part a short term response to the need to increase the sustainability of arts organisations through the diversification of income streams and a sense that the grass seems financially greener on the commercial side of the fence. Sometimes this exploration of the fiscal value of the arts is through the instrumentalisation of creativity, other times through the direct commercialisation of creative outputs.

As outlined in *Capitalising Creativity* it is possible to embed this commercial leveraging of the intellectual assets of an arts organisation at the core rather than on the periphery. It is nonetheless a tricky balance particularly for those arts organisations run as vehicles for the creative endeavours of their founders.

However there is often a richness of ideas to be found at the confluence of different approaches – where funding meets finance, where the arts meet the Creative Industries and where arts meets research. The bringing together of different models requires those involved to work out from first principles the approach they wish to take together as there is no established model to adopt. In developing a new model to operate at this intersection of arts and research other related questions arise around the language used, the project processes and the definitions of success. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that, in the early collaborations at least, these activities are held together by synergies between individuals rather than by any clearly articulated mission mapped out over the long term. Instead the desire to continue working together, to see what emerges and to leverage as many opportunities to the benefit of the collaborative commitment drive a long term conversation interspersed by regular or irregular

projects. This use of the emergent properties of a working relationship uses an iterative process and leverages the available resources of all parties in the collaboration. Now that we can see how a variety of arts organisations are approaching these collaboration opportunities with research units we can start to articulate the immediate benefits & short term gains more easily. This clearly has currency in the debate around the sustainability of arts organisations. It also fuels discussions with the finance & investment community.

Three other questions require immediate attention however:

- Can this area of arts & research collaboration be grown and if so what's the potential for growth?
- What steps do we need to take in the next couple of years to increase the visibility of arts organisations working in this way so that a cluster can be recognised, learnings be shared and value be articulated?
- How many arts organisations might reasonably be expected to achieve IRO status and how do we support this?

There is a growing cluster of small arts organisations who are committed to a research based approach. They have established relationships with Higher Education Institutions and through these and other routes publish the outcomes of their work. Whilst their reputation within the academic and research communities is growing and being recognised through the achievement of IRO status there is, as yet, little to no recognition within the arts community of the value they contribute beyond the arts. This is despite a growing connection between the arts and the Creative Industries where processes of research to spin-out are becoming better understood.

Organisations such as Proboscis, SCAN and Blast Theory are very adept at working as peers with partners who wield larger budgets, more staff and greater geographic coverage. This says a great deal about the quality of their work, their communications skills and their ability to negotiate complex relationships. Where Creative Industries spin-outs from arts colleges is still very much finding its feet research delivered through arts organisations such as that delivered by Proboscis, SCAN, Blast Theory, Furtherfield, Futuresonic and Snug & Outdoor is already well established. These organisations not only have established relationships with HEI's but also with industry partners who bring their own R&D budgets to bear on projects. Proboscis and Blast Theory have delivered research in conjunction with large commercial organisations such as Nokia, Orange, BT and Sony. It is reasonable to suggest that there are lessons which could be transferred from this arts research approach into the Creative Industries plans to support and expand spin-out and knowledge transfer activities.

The next challenge for these arts organisations is to identify others with similar interests and working practices in order to grow the cluster and increase the profile of this way of working within the arts. One of the final activities of the Creator Cluster was a Sandpit event held in April 2009 by Proboscis and Sarah Thelwall to explore how to generate wider recognition for this research-based way of working in the arts and to lay the ground for a cluster of arts organisations interested in IRO status.

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