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A holistic approach for quality in participatory arts: Impacts on practice experienced by artists in Scotland, Wales and Portugal

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A holistic approach for quality in participatory arts: Impacts on practice experienced by artists in Scotland, Wales and Portugal

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What's in this paper

# 1	# Introduction

This working paper presents interim findings from a study of how participatory arts practitioners have applied a new holistic model, developed by Rachel Blanche of Queen Margaret University to support quality, that has been implemented in the form of the *Is This The Best It Can Be?* toolkit and framework in Scotland and the *Quality Principles* for Wales.

Evidence gathering for this study is ongoing across three countries where the model has been implemented: Scotland, Wales and Portugal. In due course a full analysis and discussion of the findings will be presented in an academic journal publication.

The purpose of this paper

This paper has been crafted to inform sector stakeholders in participatory arts of the results of this research. It collates feedback about the quality approach and tools from organisations and freelance participatory arts practitioners in Scotland, Wales and Portugal for the purpose of sharing among international practitioners in this field the experiences of peers in generating quality outcomes.

For those already using the toolkits or coming to them for the first time this paper shares insights into how others engaged in similar work have applied this quality approach and where and how they find value in it for their practice.

Respondents in this study have highlighted a desire for more information on how the tools can be used in different contexts (see section 5). In capturing key impacts for best practice and presenting detailed testimonies from many practitioners, it is intended that this paper contributes towards that.

How data was gathered

The material presented in this paper was gathered via:

> • Online surveys conducted during January-November 2020. These were circulated among users of the toolkits in Scotland, Wales and Portugal.

> • Interviews with participatory artists and arts managers using Scotland's *Is This The Best It Can Be?* toolkit to produce five illustrative filmed case studies. The filmed interviews took place during March - November 2020. The case study films may be viewed on Creative Scotland's webpages from early 2021.

Is This The Best It Can Be?

Is This The Best It Can Be? is a toolkit intended for use by anyone delivering arts and creative learning through collaborative or participatory projects and programmes.

The ideas and approaches build from a research report into quality by Rachel Blanche commissioned by Creative Scotland to inform understanding about quality.[1] Creative Scotland subsequently developed the toolkit in consultation with the sector in Scotland with pilot partnerships of artists, partners and participants using the tools and sharing learning.

The toolkit provides a set of resources to assist in project development, delivery and evaluation centred around a clear vision of what is important in a project or programme of work and what quality looks and feels like for the people engaged with the work.[2]

Launched in 2016 the toolkit presently consists of a guidance document and a set of downloadable template sheets, reflective tools and case studies.

The framework seeks to avoid prescribing what quality is, encouraging users instead to define the qualities in their own work. The tools are intended to be adapted as needed for each partnership and context.[3] The toolkit promotes shared responsibility for quality across a partnership, encouraging a culture of dialogue and reflection for continuous improvement.

At the core of the toolkit is a set of prompt questions to assist in the creation of a unique **project compass** by which a creative partnership can navigate quality in their specific context and purpose.

The compass creates a visual reminder and tool for communicating what is important in the project.

Reflective questions are presented under five main headings reflecting core characteristics of quality in participation:

1. Artistic intention and integrity
2. Developing skills and capacities
3. Authenticity and social relevance
4. Facilitation, participant focus and engagement
5. Purpose, planning and professionalism

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[1] Blanche, R (2014) *Developing a Foundation for Quality Guidance,* September 2014, Edinburgh: Creative Scotland
[2] *Is This The Best It Can Be? toolkit* [webpage] Creative Scotland [accessed 2 December 2020], https://www.creativescotland.com/what-we-do/major-projects/creative-learning-and-young-people/artworks-scotland/is-this-the-best-it-can-be
[3] Creative Scotland (2016) *Is this the best it can be? A reflective toolkit for artists, arts organisations, partners and participants: Guidance Notes*, Edinburgh: Creative Scotland

🗺️ *Artworks Cymru Quality Principles* and toolkit

The Quality Principles are an online resource created in 2016 by Artworks Cymru on behalf of Arts Council of Wales to provide a framework for discussing and articulating quality in participatory arts contexts. The framework and toolkit was informed by Rachel Blanche's research for Creative Scotland, and was created with the support of a steering committee representing the sector in Wales and a series of practitioner focus groups.[4]

It is designed for use by artists and arts organisations with other main stakeholders including partners to ensure that participants 'get the best experiences possible'.

Key questions at the heart of the framework include: What does quality mean when you are creating work with people? How do we know when we see/feel/hear quality? What do we need to do to ensure quality?

The tools revolve around nine key principles grouped under 3 main headings concerning the **Intention** for the work, the planned **Activity** and the needs of the **People** involved.[5]

Using worksheets and a range of reflective tools, users are guided to articulate where quality lies in their work or proposed projects, and to create their own bespoke set of key indicators for identifying it in action. The framework and exercises are presented as a map that users fill in themselves.

> **Artworks Cymru Quality Principles**
>
> **Intention**
> • Artistic and professional
> • Relevant and inclusive
> • Inspiring, engaging & challenging
>
> **Activity**
> • Purposeful, active, hands-on & reflective
> • Suitably situated and resourced
> • Collaboratively planned, evaluated & safe
>
> **People**
> • Participant centred
> • Focus on participant progression
> • Shared ownership & responsibility

Quality tools used by Portugal's participatory arts sector

Since 2017 projects funded through editions I-III of the PARTIS participatory arts programme of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation have been encouraged to use tools from *Is This The Best It Can Be?* toolkit, translated into Portuguese under the title *Será isto o melhor possível?*

This national programme represents the primary source of support for participatory arts in Portugal and aims to stimulate inclusion and social change through the arts.

As of the end of its first two editions in 2018 it had generated 15,000 activities involving 800 artists and reaching 10,000 direct participants.[6] The third edition runs from 2019-2021.

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[4] *Artworks Cymru Quality Principles: Credits* [webpage] Artworks Cymru [accessed 2 December 2020] https://artworks.cymru/en/quality-principles/credits
[5] Artworks Cymru (2016) Artworks Cymru Quality Principles Booklet, Cardiff: Artworks Cymru
[6] *PARTIS – Artistic Practices for Social Inclusion* [webpage] at: https://gulbenkian.pt/en/project/partis/ [accessed 4 December 2020]

What is the holistic quality approach being applied?

The toolkits in Scotland and Wales share the same roots in the same holistic quality model emerging from research undertaken by this author, outlined in her research report *Developing a Foundation for Quality Guidance.*[7] The research took in more than 100 sources on quality including earlier frameworks for the arts and education, as well as evidence from the sector generated by the UK Artworks Initiative[8] bringing unprecedented insights into artists' experiences with quality.

Features of the core approach fostered by both countries' frameworks are:

- Understanding of core **conditions* needed** to enable quality, recognising **shared responsibility** by partners beyond the artist in enabling these conditions

(*for details of what artists report these conditions to be, see chapter 5 of the quality research report)

A holistic approach acknowledging:
- **different stakeholder lenses** onto what quality looks and feels like in a piece of work
- the importance for quality of **all stages** from conception through commissioning and contracting, preparing, delivering and completing - not just the creative/participatory phase

- The recognition that what constitutes quality varies from project to project and can't be prescribed, allowing **artists to define quality** in their own practice

- A philosophy for **continuous quality improvement** through monitoring and evaluation enriched with reflection, constantly checking if conditions are right for each kind of project or context and how to enhance participant experiences and outcomes

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[7] Blanche (2014) *Developing a Foundation for Quality: Guidance for arts organisations and artists in Scotland working in participatory settings: a report commissioned by Creative Scotland*, September 2014, Edinburgh: Creative Scotland
[8] Artworks UK was a consultation and research initiative to support development of the participatory arts sector. It ran during 2009-2014 and was funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation with support from Arts Council England, Arts Council of Wales and Creative Scotland.

A foundational set of quality principles sits at the heart of the model, representing consensus from sector evidence.

Quality participatory arts are:

- **Inspiring and engaging**
- **Participant-centred**
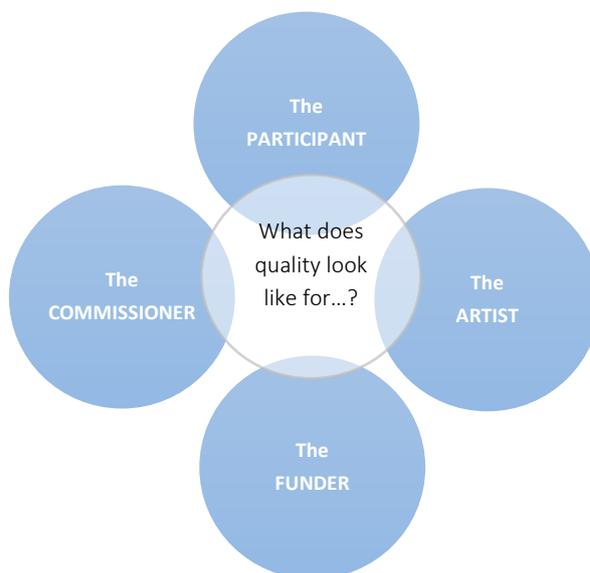- **Purposeful, hands-on**

There is:

- **Progression for participants**
- **Ownership for participants**

The work is:

- **Suitably situated & resourced**
- **Properly planned & safe**

Each party will experience a piece of work differently and what represents their 'ideal' may vary

The toolkits facilitate dialogue between key partners to clarify roles for enabling core quality conditions. Establishing shared vision and mutual intention is central to that process.

Who influences what happens 'in the room' on the day with participants? The quality model incorporates evidence showing how quality is affected by decisions made by stakeholders outside or far from the room.[9] Participatory arts often involve multiple decisionmakers controlling the setting, recruiting participants, setting objectives and determining budgets. Dialogue between such partners is vital and quality planning should include those with influence over key conditions.
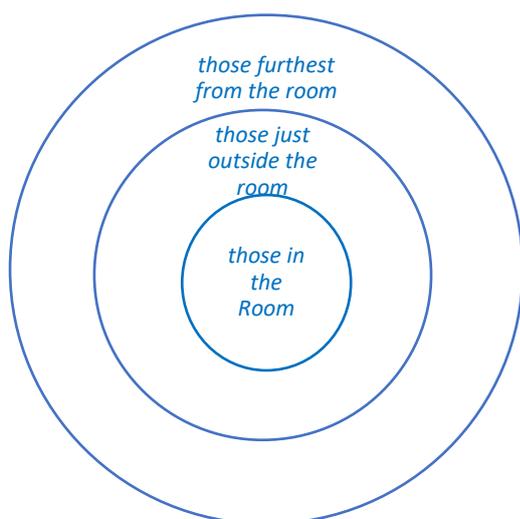
- *Organizational* or *programmatic decisions* are often made by FUNDERS, COMMISSIONERS and LEGISLATORS who rarely, if ever, enter the room

- *Instructional design and recruiting decisions* are often made by SITE LIAISONS, COORDINATORS, MANAGERS outside the room

- ARTISTS are often only able to make *critical delivery decisions* in the room on the day in interaction with participants

Find out more about this holistic quality model and the insights that shaped it in the report *Developing a Foundation for Quality* via the Quality Webpages of Creative Scotland and Artworks Cymru.

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[9] Seidel, S., Tishman, S., Winner, E., Hetland, L. and Palmer, P. (2010) *The Qualities of Quality: Understanding Excellence in Arts Education*. Massachusetts: Harvard Graduate School of Education.

| 2 | Whose experiences are being reported here? |

Online surveys and filmed case study interviews were conducted during 2020 in three countries where the holistic quality approach has been applied.

The surveys were disseminated with the support of respective funders of the participatory arts in those territories (Creative Scotland in Scotland, Arts Council Wales/Artworks Cymru in Wales and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Portugal).

The surveys were designed to capture the variety of ways that practitioners are applying this approach in their work with colleagues, external partners and project participants using the specific tools created in Scotland and Wales.

Detailed questionnaire responses were returned by a total of 42 respondents across Scotland, Wales and Portugal who are working professionally as freelance practitioners or in arts organisations involved with participation and creative learning.

The sample includes: 15 practitioners who responded to the survey about the Scottish *Is This The Best It Can Be?* toolkit, as well as testimony from two artists interviewed for case study films; 18 practitioners who responded from Wales about the *Quality Principles* framework; and 9 organisations in Portugal carrying out participatory arts projects in the current edition (PARTIS III) of the flagship participatory arts programme funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. The respondents in PARTIS have made use of a Portuguese translation of the Scottish toolkit facilitated for them by their funder.

A full list of the 44 individuals and organisations represented in this study can be viewed at the end of this paper.

Wales
18
respondents

Scotland
17
respondents

Portugal
9
respondents

How the artists in this study define their own practice

Practitioners in Scotland and Wales[10] were asked how they personally describe the nature of their practice. Between them the 33 respondents registered 116 overlapping ways of defining their own practice, the most prevalent being Creative Learning, Participatory Practice and Socially Engaged Practice.

Other terms provided by the practitioners in Scotland and Wales include: Arts for Health Practitioner, Arts/Music Therapist, Community artist, Youth artist and Lecturer.

Creative learning — 22
Participatory practice — 21
Socially-Engaged Practice — 20
Collaborative Practice — 15
Arts Management — 9
Teaching Artistry — 7
Something else — 6

■ Selected by PERCENTAGE of responding artists

## How long respondents in this study have been practicing

Feedback on this quality approach has come from practitioners at all stages in their careers as participatory artists.

The majority of responding practitioners are experienced in participatory practice, with two thirds having done this work 6 years or more. More than half of the users feeding back about the quality tools have been practicing for more than 10 years.

The survey also reports findings from a significant proportion of practitioners who are new to participatory work, with 1 in 6 of the respondents having worked in the sector for less than 2 years.

Responding artists have been doing this work for...

(data from 33 respondents in Scotland and Wales)

more than 10 years 52%
6-10 years 15%
2-5 years 18%
less than 2 years 15%

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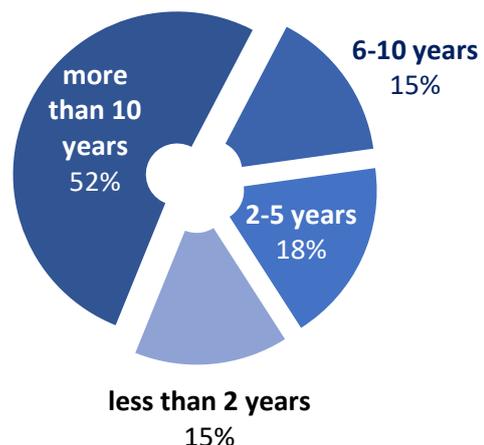
[10] 33 practitioners in Scotland and Wales answered this question. The respondents in Portugal defined their organisation within broad categories used by the PARTIS programme. The categories relate to the core mission of the organisations and are: artistic/cultural, social or municipal.
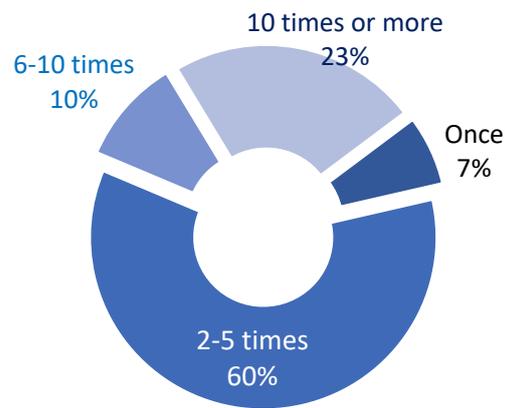
3	How the tools have been used by Practitioners

The vast majority of the practitioners in the surveys from Scotland and Wales have used the respective tools multiple times,[11] with 1 in 4 having used them *ten times or more*. Only two respondents provided feedback on the basis of a single use.

Practitioners feeding back on the model have applied the tools ...

(data from 30 respondents who answered this question)

6-10 times
10%

10 times or more
23%

Once
7%

2-5 times
60%

How the tools have been useful for practitioners Internally

All but two of the responding practitioners[12] in all three countries have applied this quality approach *internally* in their own organisation or for their own individual practice. Specifically:

7 in 10 *have used it for* discussions about quality
*(22 out of 31 respondents who have used it in Scotland and Wales[13])

Two thirds *have used it for* project planning & design
*(25 out of 39 respondents in Scotland, Wales and Portugal)

7 in 10 *have used it for* reflective learning
*(27 out of 39 respondents in Scotland, Wales and Portugal)

Three quarters *have used it for* help with evaluation
*(29 out of 39 respondents in Scotland, Wales and Portugal)

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[11] 31 out of 33 respondents in Scotland and Wales have used their respective toolkits more than once. Respondents in Portugal weren't asked this question.
[12] All but 2 respondents: 40 out of 42 respondents in total
[13] Artists in Portugal weren't asked this direct question

Three people *also reported using the toolkit internally for* something else

• helping delivery partners *(school teachers) develop projects;*

• training emerging practitioners *through higher education teaching and university projects;*

• explaining 'what we do' *to new staff*

How the tools have been used Externally by practitioners

Two thirds of the responding practitioners in Scotland and Wales[14] have also used the tools *externally with other stakeholders in their work* to broaden perspectives onto quality in the work and to enhance co-design and delivery of projects.

Of those who have engaged external stakeholders in discussions about quality:

Two thirds *have used the quality approach with their* project partners

Half *have used it with their* project participants

3 in 10 *have used it with* project commissioners

The scale of impact has been classified by practitioners using the quality approach as:

• **EARLY or INITIAL impact** (for 42%)
• **NOTICEABLE and IMPORTANT impact** (for 48% of respondents)
… and, in some cases
• **TRANSFORMATIONAL impact** (6%) [15]

All of the practitioners who have engaged with the tools in Scotland, Wales and Portugal report a positive impact on their work so far.[16]

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[14] 21 out of 33 respondents in Scotland and Wales (66%). Artists in Portugal weren't asked this specific question.

[15] Respondents in Scotland and Wales were asked to categorise the extent of impact. The choices were NO DISCERNIBLE IMPACT (one respondent), EARLY OR INITIAL IMPACT (14 respondents), NOTICEABLE AND IMPORTANT IMPACT (16 respondents) and A LARGE AND TRANSFORMING IMPACT (2 respondents)

[16] Explanatory Note: the one respondent who stated 'No discernible Impact' said that using the toolkit had 'changed the way the organisation reflects Internally, and agreed that it had 'aided the quality of their process or practice'; this has been counted as a positive impact.

4	Enhancements reported for Practice

The practitioners in Scotland and Wales who responded to the surveys say that engaging with their respective toolkits has demonstrably changed core elements of their practice.

Specifically, they report changes in the way they:

- reflect internally, reported by three quarters of all the respondents in Scotland and Wales
- evaluate the quality of their work, for three quarters of respondents
- understand the quality of their own work, for 2 in 3 respondents
- engage with partners, for 2 in 3 respondents
- report externally on the quality of their work, just under half of respondents
- engage with participants, for 1 in 3 of respondents

(presented in descending order of impact for respondents) [17]

Other ways that using the toolkit has changed how individual respondents practice included being used "as a guide to best practice" and "to advocate for the quality of work".

Detailed responses and examples from the feedback provided by practitioners have been correlated under five main headings, enabling us to see specific ways that the quality approach has benefitted participatory arts practice. Respondents report that it:

- Enriches Quality of Process and practice
- Brings in more stakeholder perspectives on quality
- Enhances the quality of what participants experience
- Deepens understanding among project partners
- Enables more meaningful evaluation

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[17] A total of 33 respondents in Scotland and Wales (all of the respondents in both surveys) answered this question in which they were asked to tick what outcomes were applicable to them having used the toolkits. Practitioners in Portugal weren't asked this question in the same format.

How the approach enriches quality of Process & Practice

4 out of 5 practitioners[18] *agree* that using the toolkit has materially aided the quality of their process or practice.

📌 **Core values in participatory practice are used as guiding principles for work:**

I feel like I have new tools for placing what I value most highly at the centre of a project (Drew, Sanctuary Queer Arts, Scotland)

As an artist one of the main benefits is a reassurance that these values are embedded in the project and that's what we're being asked to evaluate it by (Pete, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

[It has] good values and encourages an open process (Donald, Scottish Storytelling Centre)

[It helped] us to establish a robust vision, define ourselves, goals and what quality means to us as a company and establish mechanisms to hold ourselves to account (Annabel, Sanctuary Queer Arts, Scotland)

Time is always a pressure that everyone is up against and I think it is really easy sometimes for some of the quieter values to trickle away, so I find it quite handy to also make myself accountable and go, 'that IS important, and you're not wasting time by taking time to make sure this person feels totally comfortable'

(Emma-Jane, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

📌 **The toolkits provide a welcome structure for holistic planning throughout all stages of a project:**

The toolkit has changed the way we plan projects delivered by EIF team
(Amy, Edinburgh International Festival, Scotland)

The toolkit helped to breakdown the aims, objectives and learning outcomes of the project (Lisa, Aberdeen Performing Arts, Scotland)

What works well is the process of inquiry that the Principles take you through (Bryony, Arts Active Trust, Wales)

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[18] Among the 31 respondents in Scotland and Wales who marked this as an applicable question for them, 25 (81%) agreed with the statement and the remaining 6 (19%) were not sure yet. Portuguese users of the toolkit weren't asked this specific question.

My practice is mainly process driven and not product based. Before the toolkit I had no real way to measure and pin down and evaluate my work. I was also attracted to the fact that the toolkit is not just a way to evaluate at the end of a project. It is with you from the beginning and you can adapt it to suit any learners and environments

(Ruth, freelance artist, Scotland)

This has become a system of monitoring our core ambitions and expectations, a way to identify key milestones and apply learning as it happens. It is a constant tool that enables us to implement feedback in real time

(Fraser, Sanctuary Queer Arts, Scotland)

The quality principles and the compass really resonated with me as a way to align practice in diverse teams and allow people to interpret and translate guidelines into their own approaches (Laura, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

This set of tools has benefited the project in that it has been placed as a starting point in the methodology, in the problems, in the conditions and situations that should be looked at more rigorously and systematically (anonymous respondent, Portugal)

What is different for our planning process as a result of using the toolkit is higher awareness of sharing practice and outcomes, more input from project outsets and more feedback at the project end (Karen, National Theatre of Scotland).

The openness of the tools and methodologies allows it to be used at any stage of the project to: promote continuous discussion of topics; introduce new aspects; and promote the critical sense of the various stakeholders (Catarina, Filarmónica Enarmonia, Portugal)

📌 The process validates time needed by practitioners for considered quality planning:

Being able to give space and time to these vital discussions
and explorations at the start of our work together,
and having a frame for that, was invaluable
(Annabel, Sanctuary Queer Arts, Scotland)

**It gives value to [the planning] phase of the process
which can otherwise be de-prioritised**
(Beth, freelance practitioner, Wales)

It has emphasized and given importance to the amount
of preparation and planning needed before putting a project
in place (even if that project is just a couple of workshops).
**It has also given me the confidence to ask to be paid
for prep time in my contracts** (Bethan, freelance artist, Wales)

The toolkit has been of huge value in encouraging us to
take more time to analyse the decisions we make about
project set up, development and feedback taken
(Lisa, Aberdeen Performing Arts, Scotland)

Quite often you get caught up in having to deliver your projects
and just getting on and doing the work you need to do.
But being able to have the time to work together establishing
a really strong basis has been really, really valuable
(Annabel, Sanctuary Queer Arts, Scotland)

Three quarters of toolkit users in all three countries[19] say that the approach has ENCOURAGED REFLECTION in their discussions

What's different for our planning process as a result of using the toolkit is deeper reflection and wider staff involvement in planning (Donald, Scottish Storytelling Centre)

The toolkit aids the quality of process by encouraging collective reflection and a record of the learning developed (Isabel, arts manager and evaluator, Portugal)

I have started to better understand my practice and more importantly the parts of it that I have inherited from my experiences and being part of other arts organisations - in particular those parts of my practice that I don't really agree with or want to be part of how I deliver

(Laura, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

What's different for our planning process as a result of using the toolkit is that I reflect on and understand the quality of my work (anonymous freelance curator, Scotland)

✦ The tools are valued as a resource for new practitioners

The principles are extremely useful for new participatory artists to act as a template for successful project planning
(Louise, Literature Wales)

A greater understanding of all the principles and elements required for successful workshops has led to a more rounded approach to planning (Megan, student artist, Wales)

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[19] This statement was ticked by 9 respondents in Scotland, 16 in Wales and 7 in Portugal, representing 76% of all respondents in all three countries (n42).

More than half of respondents in Scotland, Wales and Portugal[20] feel that using the toolkit has helped support CURIOSITY, QUESTIONNING and POSITIVE CRITICISM in their quality process.

It's so easy to slip into doing things the same way as we always / usually do them, particularly when working with regular partners.
[This] keeps us on our toes!
(Kate, Head4Arts, Wales)

56% of respondents in Scotland and Wales *AGREE* [21] that using the toolkit has helped challenge or disrupt our normal thinking or practice

The toolkit helps challenge our normal thinking and practice by offering a different model that enables all voices to be heard (Isabel, arts manager and evaluator, Portugal)

I was able to use the toolkit to question my normal approach to delivery, I've been looking deeper at what quality looks and feels like in my practice... to re-evaluate the properties that I think are present in my work, but perhaps haven't been upheld to the best quality when I have felt pulled in different directions (Laura, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

It's encouraged us to think differently
(Amy, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

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[20] This statement was ticked by 8 respondents in Scotland, 10 in Wales and 6 in Portugal, representing 57% of the whole dataset (n42)
[21] For the 32 respondents for whom this statement was applicable, 18 (56%) agreed and 13 (41%) were not sure yet. One respondent selected 'disagree'.

✦ The process reinforces practitioners' confidence about their own quality:

For three quarters of the users in Scotland, Wales and Portugal,[22] this approach *helps them to recognise where good practice exists* and to celebrate it

I have found it particularly useful in prompting reflection on practice. It has also reassured me that my practice is well-considered, participant-centred and responsive. This is really helpful when working independently on long-term initiatives
(Heidi, freelance practitioner, Wales)

It gives a reassurance and context to creative practice that may seem challenging or not in line with traditional preconceptions about making creative work… The [Principles] are open and promote reflection and conversation not conformity to a system

David, Borough Theatre Abergavenny, Wales)

✦ Having a framework and language for quality also makes respondents feel more professionally equipped

It has professionalised my freelance practice, especially my planning for evaluation
(Heloise, freelance practitioner, Wales)

I think it makes participatory practice more tangible and professional - we have a framework that we use to help shape our work. The more people that use it, the more recognised it will become
(Rhian, Operasonic, Wales)

I feel that it empowers us a bit more to feel that our work has importance outside of a set of statistics or categories that you might be asked to report on
(Pete, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

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[22] This outcome was reported by 10 respondents in Scotland, 15 in Wales and 6 in Portugal, representing 74% of the full dataset (n42)

How the approach brings in more Stakeholder Perspectives on quality

Almost half the respondents[23] *agree* that using the toolkit has increased their awareness of different stakeholders' PERSPECTIVES onto their work.

A similar proportion (50%) of the respondents in Scotland and Wales [24] feel that the tools have enabled them to increase the number of different voices involved in the design and delivery of their projects.

It amplifies the participant voice in the planning phase (Beth, freelance artist, Wales)

Allowing the artists we are engaging with to shape the toolkit relevant to the aspect they are engaging with us, allows us to have open and honest conversations and identify what is important to them and their experience (Fraser, Sanctuary Queer Arts, Scotland)

The wider stakeholders who may be indirectly involved are consulted [and] their opinions and expectations considered.   Delivery partners and artists are more directly involved in developing projects (Bryony, Arts Active Trust, Wales)

I feel the participants are part of the design now. I let them take the workshops into their own direction and have ownership over what they create (Ella, student artist, Wales)

Using the toolkit encourages, validates and reinforces the involvement of the whole range of stakeholders included in the projects that I am evaluating. It has proved helpful in engaging partners not directly involved in the creative process and in securing ways for collecting feedback from the participants.

(Isabel, arts manager and evaluator, Portugal)

The toolkit helped us to stay focused on the need to include the regular and active participation of partners and project members, as well as indirect beneficiaries (in our case, other inmates from the same prison)

(Catarina, Corpoemcadeia, Portugal)

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[23] Among the 24 respondents in Scotland and Wales who marked this as an applicable question for them, 11 (46%) agreed with the statement and 12 (50%) were not sure yet. One respondent in Wales said they disagreed with this statement. Practitioners in Portugal weren't asked this specific question.

[24] Based on 32 respondents in Scotland and Wales who answered this question.

Using the tools has deepened communication about quality between internal and external stakeholders

It encourages and requires open and honest dialogue
and takes into account feelings and experiences
in a much more interesting way (Fraser, Queer Sanctuary Arts, Scotland)

The Quality Principles have been important in raising awareness
amongst all staff of the requirements of good project planning,
especially those who are not generally involved in project planning
(Louise, Literature Wales)

This tool led the project team to reflect and debate ideas. The result was very positive, particularly because the team is made up of professionals from both the arts and the social sectors. This enabled greater convergence between the prevailing ideas from each of the two areas and to envisage how the individual parts can come together and create a whole that is more cohesive, organized and, above all, shares the same artistic, social and inclusion objectives
(Ana Maria, Portuguese Chamber Orchestra)

The tools and methodologies of "Is this the best it can be?" had an impact on the definition of the points of reflection that made sense to the project … taking into account the various levels of participation existing in the project (management, coordination, artistic, social, community, academic), **ensuring, above all, that it developed in a transparent and horizontal manner**
(anonymous respondent, Portugal)

How the approach enhances quality of participant experience

3 in 5 respondents[25] *agree* that using the toolkit has enhanced the quality of what their participants experience.

Focusing on participant progression sounds obvious and simple, but during the planning of an activity, the idea of 'making a fun activity' can be easy to focus on over this. Using the quality principles can being this back into my practice, allowing for better focus (anonymous student practitioner, Wales)

Planning for workshops is more thorough when using quality principles for guidance and for alternative points of view. It helps to better mould workshops to participant's needs (anonymous student practitioner, Wales)

I used the principles when planning primary school music workshops. Unlike previous [times] I wasn't just thinking of one plan for a workshop and what personally I thought would be the best way forward. I was able to transform it into something better by critically assessing my ideas; considering what would make my workshop engaging and inclusive. I believe this was only truly made possible by using the principles

(Ella, student practitioner, Wales)

It's a really clear and participant-focused set of indicators to remind ourselves what these things look like when we're working in the room with pupils
(Pete, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

We are in the early staging of working with the Toolkit but … our engagement with current participants has been strengthened and we are already learning more about their needs and desires, feeding directly into future planning (Fraser, Queer Sanctuary Arts, Scotland)

This collaborative process has meant that young people's voices are embedded within our evaluation process, ensuring all projects are directly responding to the needs and wants of the [participants]

(Amy, Edinburgh International Festival, Scotland)

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[25] Among the 31 respondents in Scotland and Wales who marked this as an applicable question for them, 25 (81%) agreed with the statement and the remaining 6 (19%) were not sure yet.

The principles definitely helped me to enhance the quality of what our participants experienced. This is because I used them to think carefully about the different roles both the workshop leaders and participants would have (Ella, student practitioner, Wales)

What is different in our practice now is greater reflection on the work with participants as it is in process (Bryony, Arts Active Trust, Wales)

The toolkit has changed the way we remain transparent with students about the aims of the Residency and ensure we are accountable to them

(Amy, Edinburgh International Festival, Scotland)

The toolkit enhances the quality of what our participants experience by making them feel involved at a deeper level (Isabel, arts manager and evaluator, Portugal)

Through considering the workshop as a multi-faceted entity, I am ensuring my activity is suitable for a range of participants and will challenge and engage them. I have considered inclusivity more and am now more reflective of my whole creative practice thanks to using the principles worksheets

(Ella, student practitioner, Wales)

I'm really enjoying using this as an approach to designing creative activities with young people - in particular we did a session about what good services look and feel like vs bad services and this was really insightful (Laura, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

This tool benefited our project in the creation of a detailed characterization of artistic objectives which, being built by the whole team (musicians and therapists), enabled reflection and the inclusion of different points of view. **This factor offered more cohesion to the team, making weekly work smoother and richer** (Ana Maria, Portuguese Chamber Orchestra)

2 in 5 respondents in Scotland, Wales and Portugal[26] report that using the thinking tools has enabled them to IDENTIFY AND FIX POTENTIAL GLITCHES in projects before they undermined quality for participants

It has allowed us, in a timely manner, to correct a proposed activity and replace it with another, having identified the positive and negative aspects of the change made
(Helena, Orquestra de Afectos, Portugal)

This concept allows us to go beyond the constraints of the original project, allowing necessary changes to adapt to new circumstances that may fall outside the scope of the original project but become necessary for the beneficiaries' well-being and their personal and artistic development.

(Catarina, Filarmónica Enarmonia, Portugal)

Having Quality Principles has had a positive impact on our work to clarify what is intended and, as a consequence, to improve the quality of the work … as well as to identify, readjust and develop the missions and purposes of the project (Catarina, Filarmónica Enarmonia, Portugal)

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[26] This particular outcome was reported by 3 respondents in Scotland, 11 in Wales and 3 in Portugal, representing 40% of the whole dataset (n42)

Several Practitioners have commented on being able to recalibrate their practice and understanding of quality during the Covid-19 crisis

What's incredible about the toolkit in the Covid context for us is it's allowed us to grab onto something tangible in the midst of the intangible

(Drew, Sanctuary Queer Arts, Scotland)

I am currently using it to generate questions surrounding the translation of some work onto Zoom, as such, it is a helpful tool with which to consider what quality might look like for my work on this platform …This is very useful as a framework around which to reflect on issues such as equality of access, how the medium challenges the practice etc with a focus on quality. This is on-going as so much is changing at the moment

(Heidi, freelance practitioner, Wales)

These circumstances that we're under at the moment with the coronavirus Pandemic puts everything under the spotlight a bit more: building relationships and trust in digital spaces is a lot more difficult than it is in physical spaces. I think having a toolkit like this and always reminding ourselves of what it is that we're trying to achieve will allow us to move and adapt and to change as new situations unfold
(Laura, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

Due to Covid 19 all of my projects are on hold … However, I know that once my freelance work starts back up the way I plan and constantly evaluate throughout a project will change. I believe that the partnership of working together with participants will be strengthened, and the use of the compass tool on display will allow self-evaluation and focus

(Ruth, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

How the approach deepens understanding among Project Partners

3 in 5 respondents[27] *agree* that using the tools for this quality approach has deepened their working relationships with project partners

1 in 3 practitioners who have used the tools[28] report that they helped them to EXPLORE AND AGREE THE NATURE OF A NEW COLLABORATION

Many of our partners are organisations that are nothing to do with the arts. I think the Quality Principles help them understand better what we do and what we could be doing. It also supports a context where we can nurture trust (Kate, Head4Arts, Wales)

What is different in our practice now is a greater level of engagement with partners and delivery teams at the planning stage of a project
(Bryony, Arts Active Trust, Wales)

[This approach] deepens the relationship with project partners by elevating the importance of collaborative planning and shared ownership
(Beth, freelance practitioner, Wales)

2 in 5 say an important impact of the toolkit for them[29] is the creation of a valuable new structure for discussing quality with PROJECT COMMISSIONERS or FUNDING PARTNERS

Using the Quality Principles with external partners and commissioners helps to map projects and makes sure everything gets discussed. It also helps to see the bigger picture of the project journey (Rhian, Operasonic, Wales)

It has helped us guide project partners into a more participant-focussed approach and enabled us to change plans for the better. **Having the resources assist amicable discussion and helps them understand that we are striving to make it the best possible experience for all** (Kate, Head4Arts, Wales)

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[27] Among the 26 respondents in Scotland and Wales who marked this as an applicable question for them, 16 (61%) agreed with the statement and 6 (31%) were not sure yet of this outcome. Two respondents disagreed with the statement.
[28] 12 out of 33 (36%) respondents in Scotland and Wales ticked this statement as one of their outcomes. The practitioners in Portugal weren't asked this specific question.
[29] This was confirmed by 13 out of 33 respondents in Scotland and Wales (39% of all respondents in those two countries).

1 in 3 toolkit users in Scotland and Wales *agree* that applying this quality approach has *strengthened their funding applications.*[30]

I think that this has helped with funding applications to Arts Council Wales because it provides them with a yardstick evidencing that we know what we should be doing, and we are striving to do it! (Kate, Head4Arts, Wales)

Arts Council applications always ask about quality and how you will ensure it. Now I have a framework that I can refer back to and talk about the kind of qualities I'll expect to see in the project and what I might need to put in place to ensure them. The Quality Principles give me the language to make this much more tangible

(Rhian, Operasonic, Wales)

For a third of the practitioners across the surveys in Scotland, Wales and Portugal,[31] having the toolkit MADE THEM FEEL EMPOWERED to address quality with their partners, commissioners or funders.

The tools provide a welcome structure for including quality in commissioning discussions

I normally bring copies of the paperwork to the early meetings with new project partners, it helps set the context of what we are aiming to do (Kate, Head4Arts, Wales)

The principles are fresh in my mind when being offered work, like a check list of things that need to be in place and questions to ask before starting

(Bethan, freelance practitioner, Wales)

Having a document on the table or sent in advance has framed discussion with schools and host organisations to consider projects beyond "a great final event". It has helped explain why we as a visiting team we are approaching things in a certain way. In one school, some of the staff had a very fixed notion of what the project would be and would be anxious that the approach to creative work was perhaps unfamiliar and seemed vague. **The framework gave us a language and reference point as to why sessions were planned to unfold as they were**

(David, Borough Theatre Abergavenny, Wales)

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[30] Of 22 respondents in Scotland and Wales who marked this as applicable, 8 (36%) agree to this statement and a further 11 (50%) are not yet sure. Two respondents ticked that they disagree.
[31] This outcome was highlighted by 6 respondents in Scotland, 6 in Wales and one in Portugal, comprising 31% of the whole dataset (n42)

All of the practitioners in all three countries [32] work in some way with external partners. Their main partners are shown opposite.

Other partners specified by respondents include:

- Environmental organisations
- Charitable organisations and Trusts
- Sports organisations
- Funding bodies
- Amateur and Voluntary arts organisations

Partner	Count
Other Artists and Cultural organisations	34
Education partners	33
Community Learning or Development agencies	23
Local Government	18
OTHER partners	11
Social Services	11
Healthcare services	9
Housing Associations	7
Criminal Justice institutions	6

> It is comfortable to use with people who are nervous about working with arty people
>
> (Kate, Head4Arts, Wales)

> *The framework is* absolutely essential [as] a very suitable instrument that allows the project to implement reflection between partners
>
> (anonymous respondent, Portugal)

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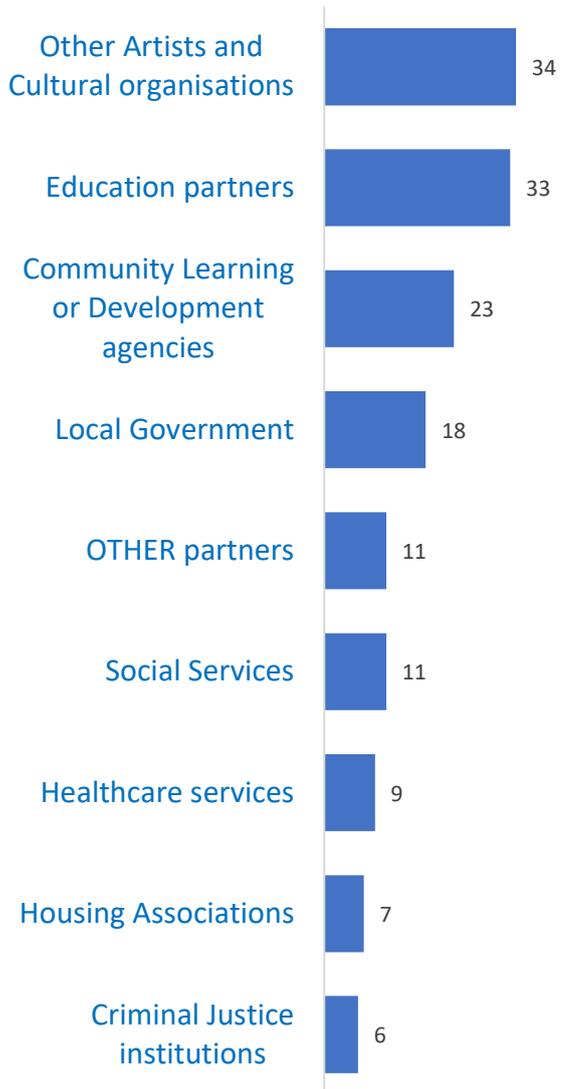
[32] Data on external partners was provided by all respondents in all countries (n42).

Enhanced communication between all stakeholders has been a clear benefit for practitioners

The toolkit increased positive communication between staff working on the project, which had a positive impact on the project (Lisa, Aberdeen Performing Arts, Scotland)

The toolkit has aided the quality of our practice by allow[ing] us to clarify and communicate the quality of our work (Amy, Edinburgh International Festival, Scotland)

What works well for us is the visual nature, the use of plain language and the forum it provided for deep and thoughtful discussion (Annabel, Sanctuary Queer Arts, Scotland)

A large and transforming impact has been a tangible framework to discuss quality with stakeholders with shared language. This enables me to advocate for the work more confidently and effectively

(Beth, freelance practitioner, Wales)

If on the one hand it helps the social team to understand more concretely the work of the artistic team, this set of tools also allows teachers to focus the social component on their working methods (Catarina, Filarmónica Enarmonia, Portugal)

📌 **Almost half of the respondents in all three countries**[33] **say that using the toolkit has helped get all project partners on the same page with SHARED LANGUAGE AND VISION**

The tool allowed us to organize ideas, structure objectives
and present them to the whole team in a concrete way
(Ana Maria, Portuguese Chamber Orchestra)

The toolkit has changed the way we communicate with partners the aims of our Residency project
(Amy, Edinburgh International Festival, Scotland)

I find quality to be a difficult thing to discuss but the *Quality Principles* give a framework and language to have that discussion within. I used them to create a practice ethos with a group of practitioners who were delivering a large-scale project together [which] meant we were all on the same page and understood what quality looked like in the project we were all delivering
(Rhian, Operasonic, Wales)

It helps to systematize and organise work, activities, results and indicators that can be easily shared and transmitted between the various teams, inspiring a fruitful reflection by the various members [including volunteers]
(Catarina, Filarmónica Enarmonia, Portugal)

For our project [the compass] has become a key communication and advocacy tool, which works well for young people and stakeholders alike. The fact it is visual and dynamic is beneficial in this (Amy, Edinburgh International Festival, Scotland)

The quality principles are a great framework for discussions and action points in projects - they are thematic enough for people to interpret them in their own approaches but still align with the goals of the project. That has been really useful (Laura, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

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[33] This was affirmed as a defined outcome for 6 respondents in Scotland, 9 in Wales and 4 of the Portuguese projects, together comprising 45% of all users responding to the surveys (n42).

How the approach enables more meaningful Evaluation

Using the toolkit has helped shape project evaluation approaches for 4 out of 5 respondents [34]

Two thirds of practitioners in all three countries[35] say the toolkits have HELPED GATHER INFORMATION FOR EVALUATION.

As a freelancer it is the evaluation tool that I have been looking for and never had. There is often a perception that art without an end product is difficult to fund as there is little concrete evidence to support it. This toolkit breaks down this barrier for community and participatory arts   (Ruth, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

Thinking 'evaluation' from the outset [makes] reflection at the end more considered, which then influences further projects
(anonymous freelance practitioner, Wales)

This does not feel like a 'tag-on' evaluation tool, rather one that can effect meaningful learning and change for everyone involved in using it
(Fraser, Sanctuary Queer Arts, Scotland)

As an artist sometimes you can do a project that has loads of benefits to everyone involved and feels really meaningful, and then you are asked to fill in an evaluation form that feels very disconnected from what the importance of the work is. This [framework] feels that it has been made with creative projects in mind
(Pete, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

 The Quality Principles serve a useful purpose in checking / reflecting on project planning and evaluation. I find myself folding them in to a Story of Change at the outset of a project. They are a way of keeping what's important in sight
(Amanda, Impelo, Wales)

It has given a structured way to evaluate … the quality of the work where previously we might have only discussed what went well and less well with regards to the participants and the project itself. We used the quality principles not only to find the highlights and improvements to the projects but also to prove the elements of quality in the work and where to take it next
(Joanne, Mess Up The Mess Theatre Company, Wales)

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[34] Out of 32 respondents in Scotland and Wales who marked this as applicable to them, 26 (84%) AGREE to this statement and the remaining 5 (16%) are not sure yet of this outcome.
[35] This is reported as an outcome by 8 respondents in Scotland, 16 in Wales and 4 in Portugal (67% of all 42 respondents)

📌 Shared language (again) is a big benefit when it comes to evaluating

> It will help us evaluate in a way that supports the whole project, [which] comes back to using a language that is shared with everyone else who is participating in the project
>
> (Emma-Jane, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

> Working with artistic directors and youth arts workers and creative freelancers, when using the Quality Principles to evaluate it means we can all give our unique perspectives but using one common language
>
> (Bethan, freelance practitioner, Wales)

📌 The tools also bring coherence when evaluating a whole programme of work:

The toolkit provides a framework that makes it easier to read across a large number of projects which are extremely diverse in nature (Isabel, arts manager and evaluator, Portugal)

I believe the positives to the toolkit are its flexibility to suit different project complexities. It helped bring coherence across the diversity of projects we offer
(Amy, Edinburgh International Festival, Scotland)

It helped us to create a rigorous, structured, and flexible system for participating and evaluating activities with the participants. It enabled the creation of a more panoramic record which simultaneously allows us to zoom in on the detail (Catarina, Corpoemcadeia, Portugal)

📌 The tools create useful visual aids:

What works well are the short lists of the Principles to use as flash cards when evaluating (Bethan, freelance practitioner, Wales)

> I like the compass as a visual tool, I think that this can be used in planning but also when setting out workshop guidelines with participants, to evaluate and to maintain that we are keeping these things present in our practice and projects (Laura, freelance practitioner, Scotland)

> It's easy to follow and adaptable to a variety of projects. The results are visual, which gives a useful benchmark when delivering and evaluating the project. (Lisa, Aberdeen Performing Arts, Scotland)

5	Challenges and ideas for further development

Respondents were asked if they experienced any challenges using the toolkits and what else might help to implement the recommended quality approach. Operational feedback points and technical suggestions have been shared with Creative Scotland and Artworks Cymru privately. A handful of respondents raised points concerning environmental issues in the sector that could usefully be explored to further support the implementation of this quality approach.

Time availability comes up as an impediment to working through the tools and reflecting

> It is a very useful and valuable tool but it takes planning and time and sometimes time doesn't allow this
> (Karen, National Theatre of Scotland)

Embedding a holistic quality philosophy within organisational practice can take time

> The challenges are internal and related to achieving the capacity needed to ensure that this approach is embedded from the earliest days of a potential partnership. In our experience it is less effective when bolted on to an existing and established partnership
> (anonymous theatre organisation for young people, Scotland)

> *A challenge is* just remembering to use the tools, as it is new way of working... We agree as an organisation these principles are very useful but we would need more routine in using them.
> (Joanne, Mess Up The Mess Theatre Company, Wales)

Respondents express a desire to share insights from best practice

One anonymous respondent in Portugal commented that more guidance would be useful on "how to implement and facilitate these [best] practices and dialogue between 'worlds' - schools, social institutions, artists, cultural structures, evaluation, etc." She suggested that it would be useful to share more formally how different projects are putting these tools into practice and exemplifying good practice across the recognised dimensions of quality.

> More case studies and worked examples would be great
> (Beth, freelance practitioner, Wales)

> Examples of completed Project Planning and Evaluation using the Quality Principles *would help us adopt this quality approach*
> (Heidi, freelance practitioner, Wales)

There is appetite for more resources to help users find ways to adapt the tools for engaging participants in an appropriate way

> Something to help participants engage with it - that doesn't have so much arts speak!
>
> (Rhian, Operasonic, Wales)

> We found the tool [didn't] match up with the reality of delivering our work in informal community settings
>
> (anonymous community arts organisation, Scotland)

> *The toolkit* helped us to pose the questions in a more objective way, both with our partners and with the participants. During the evaluation with the participants there were focus problems which we will have to find a way to overcome and enrich the reflection process
>
> (Marisa, VELEDA Women and Single Parenthood, Portugal)

The Covid crisis creates a need for facilitated sessions for practitioners to reflect on how to adapt practice using the tools

One respondent asked for Covid-specific "training sessions for artists and organisations in the current climate reflecting the learning from the pandemic and adaptations Participatory artists and organisations have implemented to continue their work" (Louise, Literature Wales)

6 Full list of respondents in this study

Sincere thanks to all the arts practitioners and managers who have generously contributed detailed feedback on the quality tools for this study.

Survey respondents using Creative Scotland's *Is This The Best It Can Be?* toolkit	
	***also interviewed for Creative Scotland case study film**
Amy, Edinburgh International Festival**	Amy, freelance practitioner
Karen, National Theatre for Scotland	Ruth, freelance practitioner
Lisa, Aberdeen Performing Arts	Isabel Lucena, freelance arts evaluator in London and Portugal**
Donald, Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland and Scottish Storytelling Centre	Laura, freelance practitioner **
Fraser, Sanctuary Queer Arts**	Annabel, Sanctuary Queer Arts**
Kevin, Scottish Borders Council Creative Learning	Drew, Sanctuary Queer Arts**
A further three respondents requested anonymity in reporting	

Interviewed for Creative Scotland's *Is This The Best It Can Be?* toolkit films only	
Pete, freelance practitioner	Emma-Jane, freelance practitioner

Survey respondents using *Quality Principles* for Wales	
Alan, Wales Millennium Centre	Amanda, freelance practitioner
Louise, Literature Wales	Beth, freelance practitioner/lecturer
David, Borough Theatre Abergavenny	Bethan, freelance writer/theatre maker
Joanne, Mess Up The Mess Theatre Company	Heidi, freelance community dance practitioner/lecturer
Bryony, Arts Active Trust	Heloise, freelance practitioner/lecturer
Rhian, Operasonic	Ella, student practitioner at Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD)
Amanda, Impelo	Megan, student practitioner at RWCMD
Kate, Head4Arts	
A further three respondents requested anonymity in reporting	

Respondents from PARTIS programme in Portugal (using *Is This The Best It Can Be?* tools)	
Catarina, Filarmónica Enarmonia	Catarina, Corpoemcadeia / Body Chain
Marta, Sob o Mesmo Céu /Under the Same Sky	Ana Maria, Portuguese Chamber Orchestra
Helena, Orquestra de Afectos / Orchestra of Affections	Marisa, VELEDA - Women and Single Parenthood Project
A further three responding organisations requested anonymity in reporting	