



Flat Out Project  
Report

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‘Flat Out’ was inspired by the Family Arts Campaign to engage and encourage participation of families in arts and cultural activities. The Drum in partnership with Birmingham Royal Ballet, University of Birmingham and supported by Willmott Dixon and Shelforce, developed and delivered a project inspired by local families who are residents of Inkerman House, a tower block opposite the Drum.

On 25 October 2014 ‘Flat Out’ - a dance performance and documentary set against a beautifully designed set – was performed to an audience that included many for whom this was their first taste of live ballet performance. It was a truly amazing outcome of a series of community arts engagement workshops. Most if not all the families who took part in the workshops had never been to The Drum before or taken part in dance, especially ballet. Many people contributed to the success of this project but none more than the residents of Inkerman House who inspired the wonderful performance.

This special project brought together Birmingham Royal Ballet, The Drum and University of Birmingham all of whom work regularly in the community but had never worked together. Each organisation contributed their unique skills and qualities, learning from and with each other about the complexities of ‘true’ community engagement. The depth of community engagement and the beauty of the performance reminded us, as partners, that this is what we got involved in the arts, and in research, to do. The impact of this project on all involved is immeasurable, the learning from it will lead us forward, and the memories will inspire us as we develop ideas for the future.



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## 02 Introduction

“I’ve never seen a live performance of ballet before. Thank God I came and saw a wonderful and peaceful dance. Thank you so much!!! It was an awesome performance.” (audience member from the Flat Out performance)

Flat Out was a community arts project surrounding Inkerman House flats in the Newtown area of Birmingham.

The project brought a range of community members together with the Drum Intercultural Arts Centre (The Drum), Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB) and the University of Birmingham (UoB). Reflecting this collaboration, the project integrated creative dance workshops at the Drum (which is across the road from Inkerman House) with research, and used a range of innovative methods to draw in diverse families, individuals, and stakeholder organisations in the Newtown, Aston and Lozells area. The workshops contributed to the choreography and performance of an original ballet production, in a bespoke set (designed and donated by Wilmott Dixon, and built by Shelforce). The production attracted an audience of over 100 local people, for many of whom this was their first experience of live ballet performance. Just as importantly, the project has built on existing histories of community arts participation in the area, and has created an active legacy of professional collaboration between the three institutions for community arts participation in the area.





### 03 Context and Rational

The Newtown, Aston and Lozells areas of Birmingham, within which Inkerman House stands, have a long history of welcoming new migrants to the city and sheltering more established communities. As such, these are areas of the city with a wide range of transnational connections and a super-diverse cultural mix (e.g. established Birmingham residents, asylum seekers and recent migrants from countries around the world), and they also have a range of social and economic challenges to face, including housing, employment, and community cohesion (Birmingham City Council, 2012). These demographics mean that these are areas in which, although people often have a rich cultural life, there is likely to be lower formal participation in the arts, particularly in terms of attending performance events or arts workshops<sup>1</sup>.

The main motivation behind Flat Out was to increase the active participation of local people in the arts, and in particular in forms of dance that they have historically been less likely to access, with a focus on ballet. Key to this was integrating research on what members of the local community value and appreciate in the arts, with a view to encouraging more active community participation in excellent arts workshops and performances in the future. The project therefore had the following explicit aims:



<sup>1</sup>Government statistics show that, where 77% of people nationally have engaged with the arts between July 2013 and June 2014, arts participation is generally lower in the West Midlands as a whole, in urban areas, and amongst black and ethnic minority communities (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2014).

### Community participation and professional performance

To encourage community members who do not often access the arts, particularly families living in Inkerman House:

- to participate in the devising of a ballet production;
- to take part in a series of community arts workshops;
- to watch a dance performance with professionally-trained ballet dancers
- to attend similar events in the future.



### Research

To understand how to encourage greater participation in the future, by:

- Identifying barriers to participation;
- Providing evidence of the kinds and conditions of participation that are possible;
- Enabling new, appropriate initiatives that strategically respond to research;
- Establishing an ongoing collaboration between the Drum, BRB and UoB.





## 04 Aims

### Participation plan

In terms of space, the participation plan was to start at the area scale (Newtown, Lozells and Aston) and work down to the small scale of Inkerman House. So the consultation began at the area scale (consultation interviews with community members and stakeholders), went down to the medium scale (consultation workshops with established community groups in and around Inkerman House), and finally to the small scale (devising workshops with people living in Inkerman House itself).

In terms of relationships, the participation plan was to deepen over repeated encounters, in order to encourage a legacy for the future. So, as the project moved closer and closer in to Inkerman House, a crucial element was to establish relationships with people in the flats, so the project team spent several days in the foyer, personally inviting people to the workshops and talking with them about community arts. The devising workshops aimed to involve families in a series of six workshops, building dance awareness and deepening relationships over time. The project team built on the relationships they had formed in the foyer to remind volunteers that the workshops were happening, to meet volunteers in the foyer, and to walk with them over to the Drum. Similarly, the groups from the consultation workshops were revisited in the evaluation workshops. All workshop participants were personally invited to the production, and those present in the devising workshops were also invited to a behind-the-scenes tour of BRB, and were given DVDs of the documentary of the process.

In terms of dance, the participation plan was to work from what people brought individually towards what they wanted to share collectively, and ultimately for people to see that this collective dance knowledge could be combined with the skills and precision of professional dance performance. So in the consultation workshops participants shared their own moves and knowledge of community arts; in the devising workshops participants taught each other and the facilitators dances and songs that they knew; and in the rehearsal and performance the choreographer and dancers incorporated these shared moves into an original production.

The following community members participated in the workshops:

Elnora Barzey, Esther Jeffers, Nessa McBean, Myrtle V. Atherley, Bernice Cornelius, Vila Jeffers, Surinder Kaur Plaha, Mark James, Mikayla James, Maxwell James, Cecelia Hamazaoui, Sumayyah Hamazaoui, Sandy Waugh, Sean Kelly Jr., Kiran Ahluwlia, Dillon Ahluwalia, Sharmaine Rilings, Kalea Robinson, Deja Gray, Flower Reti, Jazmin Reti, Tiborned Reti, Edina Kovacs, Daline Awte, Netsetteti Hagos, Rufate Awte, Adonyit Binyam, Rachel Tekiu, Qaali Abdi Mohammed, Osmian Mohammed Jibril, Onike Bukuru, and Oprisca Bizima, Harry Fearby, Dawn Shaw, Anita Brown, Terry Griffin, Adam Rutherford, Genevieve Say



### Project Partners

The three main partner organisations – the Drum, BRB and UoB – planned, delivered and evaluated the project together. This was therefore an authentically collaborative process, in which all three organisations were focused on the best outcomes from start to finish, and each contributed beyond their original commitments in order to overcome challenges and deepen community participation.

A producing artist – Becca Thomas – represented the Drum throughout, and was responsible for liaison, overview and joint facilitation of the workshops, as well as performing in the final production. Martin Cox inspired the project, passing to Ian Sergeant for oversight of the project on behalf of the Drum. Jenny McNamara represented BRB and was responsible for joint facilitation of the devising workshops, choreographing and directing the dance performance, with the support of Pearl Chesterman and Kasia Kraus, and with musical composition from Andrew Kristy. Laura Day and Oliver Till, two BRB dancers, also performed in the production. Pat Noxolo represented UoB and was responsible for research and evaluation throughout, including joint facilitation and observation of the workshops, with the support of Arshad Isakjee.

Iain Ziaidi-Bere and Jhen Nel-Swanston of Wilmott Dixon generously donated and designed a bespoke set, which was built by Shelforce. Paul Telfer was responsible for internal set design. JA Digital Media created the film documentary of the process.

The project was funded by Arts Connect and the Family Arts Festival, with contributions in-kind from the Drum, BRB, UoB and Wilmott Dixon.





## 05 Process



Planning to  
integrate arts and  
research



Consultation  
interviews:  
community  
members and  
stakeholder  
organisations



Consultation  
workshops



Creative  
workshops



Devising and  
rehearsal days



Performance



Evaluation  
workshops



### Collaborative planning

Right at the beginning of the project, when Martin Cox was first developing the concept of having a community arts event based around families in Inkerman House, he met with Pearl Chesterman and Kasia Kraus of BRB and with Pat Noxolo of UoB, so community, research, performance and collaboration were at the heart of the project from the outset. The project's scope and timetable were planned in several preliminary meetings, and the artistic directors (Jenny McNamara, Becca Thomas and Andrew Kristy) were recruited at a relatively early stage, so were also instrumental in shaping it. The research element went through processes of ethical approval at the University of Birmingham, and participants were given information sheets about the research element. JA Digital Media were recruited to document the process on film, from the consultation workshops onwards.

### Consultation interviews

Arshad Isakjee, a postdoctoral researcher at UoB, completed the first phase of research in July 2014, carrying out semi-structured interviews with local stakeholder organisations (in order for the interview data to remain anonymised, the organisations are not listed here, but included leisure, housing and community organisations), and with a range of families and visitors at the Simmer Down Festival, organised by the Drum, on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2014. This research aimed to give a baseline assessment of the kinds of community arts that people in the area had been engaging with, and of the wider issues that could potentially shape or limit engagement.

### Consultation workshops

In September, Becca Thomas and Pat Noxolo then held three consultation workshops, with an aim to engage with diverse groups in the wider community. These workshops explored people's existing participation in and understandings of community arts, as well as what they would like to engage with in the future. They were designed to combine dance and research. Both the dance and the spoken research elements were designed to fit with the mobility and energy needs of each group. So a group of parents and schoolchildren had a lively dance session that drew on the different physical capacities and the relationships between the children and the adults, and question responses were recorded on video and on 'post-it sticker' posters, with the adults and children writing down their answers together on post-it stickers and the children running to post them up on wall posters; a group of elderly women danced mainly in their chairs and sat more quietly together for group discussion, with responses recorded by the researcher on flipchart paper on the floor; and a session at the Thinkcorner in Birmingham City Centre drew in passers-by to briefly share their dance moves, which were videoed, and to talk about community arts, with their responses recorded by the researcher on large posters around the room.



## 05 Process



### Creative workshops

For several afternoons over a two-week period Becca Thomas, supported by other team members, set up a stall in Inkerman House foyer, and recruited families to the creative workshops. Once the workshops started, Becca met the families in the Inkerman House foyer and walked across the road with them.

These workshops were held on six evenings in October and November, once a week, and were designed to engage families in dance and music. The focus was on pleasure, but also on cultural exchange: Jenny McNamara and Becca Thomas taught the participants some dance moves, but participants were also encouraged to share their own moves, songs and stories. Pat Noxolo took the role of participant observer, and engaged the participants in informal conversation during the process, to get a sense of the experiences and backgrounds they were bringing to the dance, and the kinds of enjoyment and experience they were getting from it, without interrupting the dance.



### Devising/rehearsal days

Four intensive rehearsal days allowed Jenny McNamara, Becca Thomas, and two BRB dancers (Laura Day and Oliver Till), to draw on the cultural exchange in the creative workshops and choreograph an original dance production. The researcher observed the process.

Wilmott Dixon had met with the project team several times in the early stages of the project, and had consulted with them about the design of the set, which mirrored a typical flat in Inkerman House. They instructed Shelforce, who built the set, and members of the project team visited the organisation during the building process. The set was ready, transported to the Drum and set up, with the support of a set designer, for a dress rehearsal the day before the performance.



### Performance

In the weeks running up to the performance, Becca Thomas contacted all the organisations and families who had taken part in the workshops to invite them personally. The Drum, BRB and UoB also used their own advertising networks (social media, email lists, leafletting etc) to advertise the event. There were three live dance performances on one day at the Drum, each one prefaced by a screening of the documentary created by JADigital Media. The first two performances also had a 'curtain raiser' by a community dance group (a hip hop group and an Indian dance group).

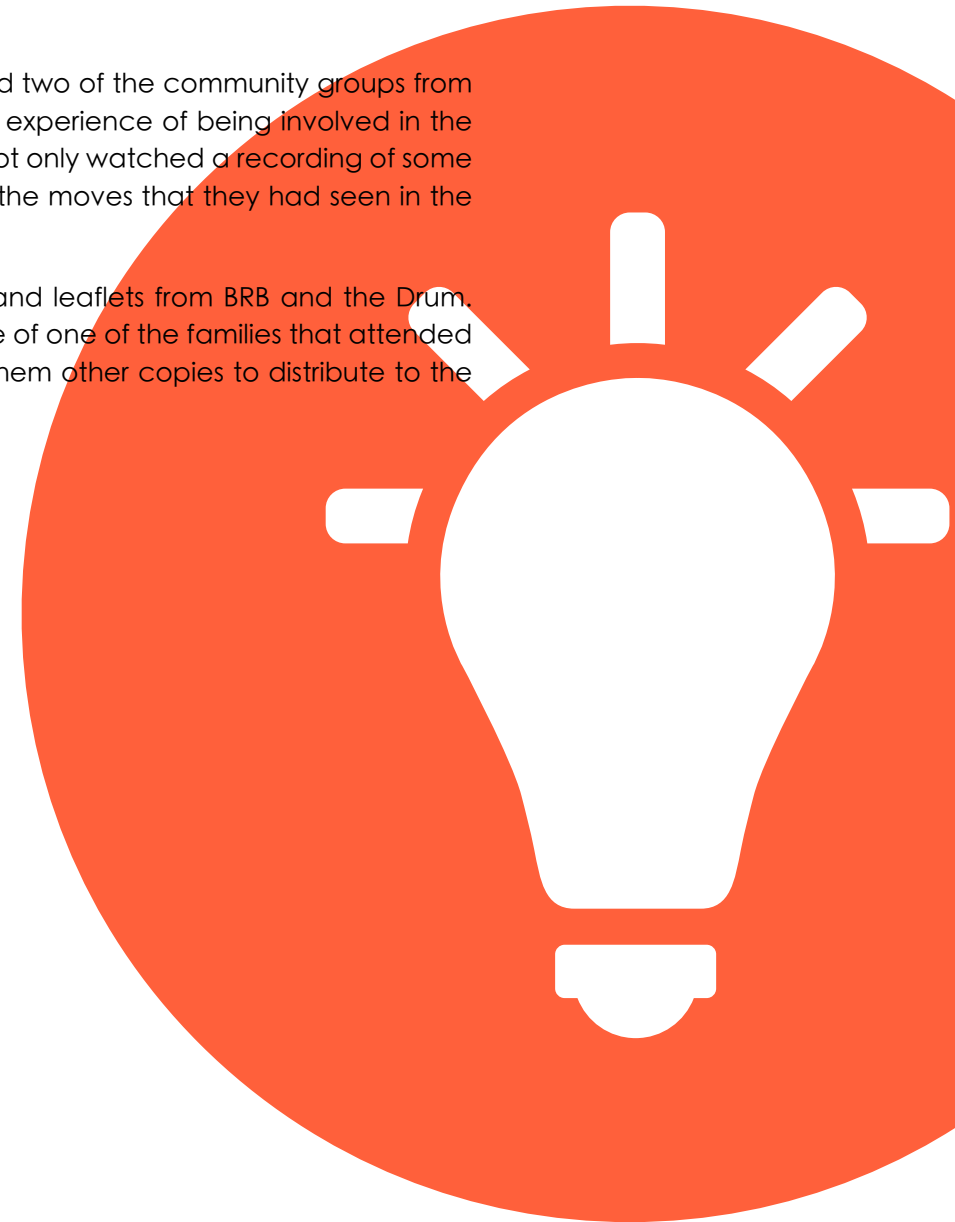
Each performance was evaluated through tickbox forms with space for comments, and also through 'voxpath' audio recordings, which took place whilst the audience stayed for refreshments after the performance.



### Evaluation workshops

In the weeks after the performance (late November) Becca Thomas and Pat Noxolo revisited two of the community groups from the consultation period. This time the workshops reflected on the performance and on the experience of being involved in the process. This reflection was through discussion and also through dance, as the participants not only watched a recording of some of the performance and talked about what they had got from it, but also learned some of the moves that they had seen in the performance.

Becca and Pat also revisited Inkerman House foyer and gave out some free mementoes and leaflets from BRB and the Drum. They engaged several residents in informal conversation, and were also invited into the home of one of the families that attended the creative workshop, and were able to give them a DVD of the documentary and give them other copies to distribute to the other families.





### Community participation and professional performance

- Encouraging community members who do not often access the arts, particularly families living in Inkerman House, to participate in the devising of a ballet production

The vast majority of workshop participants had not been to watch a ballet performance in a theatre, though some said that they had been to see other types of dance. However, a few people had been involved with ballet or dance before, either professionally, taking classes or in amateur performance, at school, or by taking their children to ballet classes. However most people said that they did regularly participate in activities that they saw as creative expression: for example drawing, dancing and music (at home and for their own enjoyment, or in classes, and with many different styles of dance including contemporary, Hungarian folk dancing, carnival and pole aerobics), crotchet, knitting, fashion design, making model soldiers, cooking and sports. Some of our older participants became extremely enlivened by memories of dance in the community in the Caribbean, forgetting their aches and pains to jump up and demonstrate well-remembered moves, vividly describing how troupes of dancers and musicians would travel from house to house during public holidays.

So the notion that community members do not access the arts had to be nuanced from the outset: most people have and do engage in some form of creative self-expression. In fact, many people said that creative expression is about

“all aspects of your lifestyle” (woman in a consultation workshop)

People did not see art as something separate to their lives. However many do not participate through formal audiencing in arts venues. This tension seems to align with the observation from one of the early consultation interviews with local stakeholders:

“Art is hidden away. There is talent and creativity here, but a lack of opportunities to create.”

Workshop participants and the residents that talked to the project team in Inkerman House foyer were generally excited by the idea of being involved in devising a ballet production: they saw this as a new experience, and were surprised and interested in the idea. This was reflected in comments about the process as it was shown in the documentary:

“...it was really nice to see how you were using a creative form to engage with people and get them moving and expressing themselves through music; it was nice to see the kids leading it and the dancers following them, the kids creating the choreography. It was brilliant...” (audience member)



## 06 Outcomes

The workshop participants contributed a range of dance moves, and both adults and children were excited when the dancers were clearly learning the moves that they were teaching in order to incorporate them into the piece. A Hungarian family, for example, were eager to teach the project team some traditional dances, and used their mobile phones to show us the dances online. In a particularly poignant moment, an Eritrean mother and daughter shared a ring game with the group, which then inspired a Hungarian family to share one, which in turn inspired a Zimbabwean mother and daughter to share one. The ring games, as well as other dance moves, overcame some significant language barriers and allowed people to share cultural knowledges and to value cultural differences in ways that people said they often could not when they saw each other in the lifts in Inkerman House. The choreographer deliberately incorporated some of the ways in which people had been using movements and signs to make themselves understood, as well as some of their traditional and their improvised dance moves, into the devised piece, and brought the piece together around the elements that had been most strongly shared in the group, the themes of family and of temporary residence.

It is worth noting that, when the project team mentioned in the foyer that ballet dancers might actually come into Inkerman House (originally the performances were to take place in one of the flats, and some of the documentary filmed the dancers doing moves from the performance in the flat's corridors and stairwells), one woman expressed embarrassment about the state of the flats: she said for example that there was sick on the back stairs that had been there for four days. She also worried that a dance performance would be noisy, and would disturb those who were working unsociable hours. Her anxieties encapsulated some of the tensions in the project: between Inkerman House as a place in which there are sometimes pressing challenges that seem to leave little time or space for dancing, and Inkerman House as a site for the inspiration and devising of a beautiful ballet performance.





## 06 Outcomes

- Encouraging community members who do not often access the arts, particularly families living in Inkerman House, to take part in a series of community arts workshops

The consultation interviews at the start of the project revealed that:

a diverse range of arts-based projects had taken place in recent years, albeit within limited time-periods and with little facility for continued engagement. Examples include story-telling projects with Asian women, art-based therapy for residents with mental-health-related needs, music sessions with both African drummers and Indian singers, construction of 'mural maps' of local areas, local dance classes, funded trips to galleries, drawing classes with older residents and painting projects with young people. (Isakjee, 2014)

Many workshop participants, when asked to define community arts, identified it as a workshop facilitated by an artist, outside of a theatre or in a community setting:

Expression of your artistic ability, in your location

Community art is when a group of people or a certain area comes together to do different workshops or arts to show off their skills

Drawing and painting – it's about lots of people doing like painting and drawing, and dancing and activities. It's skills – making something good and something making you famous. (participants from consultation workshops)

However, many saw community arts as much broader than this, from art that expresses what the community wants to express (for example around issues like drugs and violence, or around political rights), to any artwork expressed by the community or bringing the community together, with or without an artist:

I help my mum and we do paper mache and we do art

Community arts is people in the community pulling together, spending time together, getting to know each other, just celebrating being neighbours. (participants from consultation workshops)

It is clear from these comments that many people had been involved in community arts workshops, so this project had a local history of community arts to build on. However, the challenge for the creative workshops would be in encouraging participation in a series of workshops leading to a performance:

"Residents should be going on a journey with [the artists] – not just taking information from them" (stakeholder interview)



## 06 Outcomes

Several families came to four or five out of six workshops, and the project team felt they got to know them well and they were deeply engaged. A couple of families also drew in other family members and brought them along to one of the workshops – an older sister or a partner or a friend. These families expressed repeatedly and enthusiastically how much they were enjoying the workshops – one of the mothers talked about the fact that she and her daughter now dance together at home, and several said that their children now bounce up and down whenever they see the Drum, shouting:

“That’ s where we go to our dance workshops” (creative workshop participant)

But none of the families came to all six of the workshops, and none of the families from the creative workshops actually attended the live performance (the team later discovered that there had been some very particular reasons to do with other more pressing community responsibilities in a couple of cases). Most upsetting for the project team was that one of the families came to four out of the first five workshops and seemed to be really enjoying them. This family engaged very warmly with the dancers and with the researcher, generously sharing dances and experiences with the project team. Then they suddenly seemed to disappear completely: they did not respond to telephone calls and did not come to the performance. Again, this raised some issues about the tensions between the challenges in people’ s lives (in this case, perhaps, the insecurity and temporariness of their situations) and the project team’ s desire to engage people in a creative ‘journey’ .

- Encouraging community members who do not often access the arts, particularly families living in Inkerman House, to watch a dance performance with professionally-trained ballet dancers

Although the families from the creative workshops did not attend the performances, some of the families and individuals that the project team had met in the foyer of Inkerman House before the creative workshops did go to the performance, and were keen to tell the team that they had, when they came across them in the foyer again for evaluation. They were all very positive about the experience.

Members of the community groups who were involved in the consultation workshops were well-represented at the performance, and were very impressed by the skilled performance:

“[I]t was a really practiced art. Everything in order, precision like” (a member of the Dorcas Group, after the performance).

“I didn’ t think I would be interested, I didn’ t think I would enjoy it, but I want to see more” (FAST group member, during evaluation workshop)

## 06 Outcomes

Some said that it was because of the process of devising the ballet based on the workshops, and the way that the ballet therefore related to the experiences they had shared, that drove them to attend and to feel that they understood it:

“I could really understand what was happening, it had a message... It dealt with everyday issues, like the father worrying about the bills and the teenager on her iphone or ipad. But she [the teenager] came around in the end and was more mature.” “I thought it was more to help you understand that children need peace – she just wanted to be left alone” (father and daughter members of the FAST group, during evaluation workshop)

“I wanted to see what we’ d been working towards” (FAST group member)

Vox pop data (audio recordings of people’ s comments after the performance) were very positive about the performance, focusing not only on the professionalism of the performance but also on its emotional power:

I really enjoyed the performance, very nice. Well-directed, and the dancers we had before, they were really good” (audience member)

“The performance we’ ve just witnessed was very creative, well-balanced, captured the very essence of life. This is wonderful, very focused, a narrative on life itself, and how we can think about it” (audience member)

“It was really good – like some of the lifts were really good and the feelings that they put into it” (audience member)

The comments on the evaluation forms confirm this positive message; for example:

The best part of the performance was when all of them were dancing – I never wanted the performance to end. Especially when I haven't come before. It was great! And I liked how their faces were serious!

Wow. Wow! The whole thing Wow! This area, this city needs more please!!

This performance was great and has made me want to start doing my own performances.

The documentary was very good and informative. The dancing was excellent.





## 06 Outcomes

It is worth mentioning two salient points that shadowed the production even though they were basically resolved. The first is that the production was originally meant to take place in one of the flats, with one family at a time watching it, but in the end the size of the flats, particularly the low roofs, was judged too dangerous and restrictive an environment for the dancers. This was resolved by Wilmott Dixon's generous donation of a set, but the beautiful simplicity of bringing ballet dancers to perform in an actual council flat remained a ghost around the production. The second point is that, though the original idea has always been to have a professional production for the people of Inkerman House, it was repeatedly expressed by audience members and consultation interviewees that community members should be included in the actual production. The concept of the project had been to have a professional ballet performance about and in the council flat space, and in practice community members did perform as a curtain-raiser. But again the enticing idea of community members dancing alongside professional ballet dancers ghosted the process.

- Encouraging community members who do not often access the arts, particularly families living in Inkerman House, to attend similar events in the future.

The performance evaluation form (see appendix one) was deliberately simple, to avoid keeping people for too long after a short performance. However the data it generated (see appendix two) tell a very clear story of an audience of which only about one third had been people who regularly watched dance and ballet performances: all of the people who completed the survey enjoyed the performance, and the vast majority would like to know about future similar performances.

In the evaluation workshops, the project team asked people what kinds of similar events they would like to attend in the future. Some said that they would be very open to more ballet performances, but some were concerned that professional ballet performances would normally be very expensive. This was reflected in the comments on the performance evaluation forms:

I just think the story told was powerful and enchanting. I wanted more.

Lots more! Then more!

I haven't watched much ballet before. Maybe one piece years ago. I'd love to be exposed to more as I don't find it that accessible. I think it's quite expensive; but would be interested to find out where I can access it and very interesting piece.



## 06 Outcomes

Others said they would prefer to see drama rather than dance, and one woman mentioned combining drama with dance to create “flowetry”. Two points came out very particularly – accessibility and community. In terms of accessibility, people talked about money and about location. They said that it was often difficult to find additional funds to spend on arts workshops, and this process had been a rare opportunity to attend free workshops. Others said that a major bonus of this project had been that the workshops and performance took place in their usual venues (e.g. at Lozells Methodist Church or in Inkerman House foyer) or at the Drum, right in the heart of the community. Interestingly, a point that arose in one of the consultation workshops was that community arts workshops might take place at the Drum and at other local theatres, and they might even be free of charge, but that people often did not hear about these events. They did not know what took place in their communities. The fact that these groups, and the residents of Inkerman House, had been directly approached and introduced to these events had made it much more possible to access them.

In terms of community, many talked about the social aspect of community arts, that it is about the community coming together to talk to each other. They said that this meant that there needed to be regular arts workshops, not just one-off events, so that people could fit them into their regular schedule, and so that they could draw in friends and wider networks, knowing that there would be a workshop to invite them to. People needed to have the opportunity to go every week, so that they could “grow” (workshop participant) and gain in confidence together.

They also suggested that workshops could be linked with other regular activities and forums in the community, such as church attendance or sporting events. That way people could be introduced to the workshops as something they could be confident to approach and that would not disappear – one participant said that church attendance was, for him, the “one constant” in his life. The Dorcas Group at Lozells Methodist Church provided a memorable image of this, in that these are women who have been active in their communities for 20 to 30 years, changing their activities as they got older (from soup kitchens to handicrafts), but always working out of the same building, which is a landmark in the community, with many activities happening within it, from dance workshops to computing. The over-riding message that the project team brought away from the evaluation workshops was that if community arts are integrated into the community – if community arts become a constant in people’s lives - then the community is more willing and able to open itself up to the arts.



### Research

 To understand how to encourage greater participation in the future, by identifying barriers to participation

Most of the respondents for this project did not talk in terms of barriers to participation: in fact they were very positive about the roles and potential of the arts in their lives. In the consultation interviews, stakeholders and families talked about the therapeutic potential of community arts, and its capacity to build skills and to bring communities together in “happy accidents” of interaction between neighbours who otherwise would not talk to each other. At the consultation workshops, participants talked about art as a means of expressing our passions: “our enjoyment of life”. Older people said that getting involved in the arts can make them feel young again. Young parents said that the arts could give them a chance to spend “quality time”, either on their own or with their children, and that going to community arts workshops could bring back a sense of “normality” for young single parents who feel isolated from adult company. Children and young people said they could express their feelings through the arts, or express what they have learned and deepen their education. So the first finding around barriers is that people did not feel that their area, their age, their abilities or their identities were barriers to getting involved in the arts: there was a strong positive consensus that the arts, and community arts, are for the whole community

Several barriers were expressed however. In one of the consultation workshops people said that they often simply do not know that suitable events are taking place. They also admitted that sometimes, even if they do know, some community members do not necessarily give enough value to the activities that are taking place in their community. It is difficult to know what this stems from. It could be a problem of how and where events are advertised, but the comment of one of the stakeholders perhaps gives a clue to a deeper issue: they said that Newtown in particular can feel “disjointed by design”. This is not to say that anyone is keeping information deliberately from people of course. It points to the fact that this is a very diffuse area spatially, without any necessarily centralising focus, like a main street where everyone would go shopping, or a public square. This is made worse by the fact that many high-profile community facilities (The Hub, for example, and Lozells Youth Centre) have closed recently, as an effect of austerity measures, although the new Lighthouse facility is still in place, as is the Drum. Just as the space can seem ‘disjointed’, people’s living conditions can also be insecure and impermanent in this area. This is an area in which there are waves of migration and settlement, and recent migrants do not always have the desire or the opportunity to stay in accommodation that is often in need of maintenance and repair. This constant movement and temporariness means that people sometimes do not have the settled networks through which they could pass on information about arts events or encourage each other to participate based on past positive experiences.





## 06 Outcomes

Three other barriers identified in the consultation and evaluation workshops were more clearly and immediately practical. The first and perhaps most obvious is finance. Employment in the area is often insecure (Birmingham City Council, 2012) and although people do value the arts, they are concerned about spending a large portion of their budget on activities that seem to be relatively expensive luxuries, such as tickets to the ballet. Transport is also an issue, particularly for elders or those with disabilities – austerity measures have meant cuts in the budgets of many community groups and services in Birmingham, and older residents in the area often felt that they simply could not get to arts events, particularly in the evenings. The third issue is linked to transport, and that is the issue of security. Parents in particular expressed fears about letting their children travel to workshops on their own in the area, fearing both crime and traffic, and even some adults said they did not like to walk around the area after dark.



## 06 Outcomes

- To understand how to encourage greater participation in the future, by providing evidence of the kinds and conditions of participation that are possible

Three elements of this project can be identified as positively encouraging participation. The first is its emphasis on arts workshops and events for the family, not just for particular age groups, and not just for children with accompanying parents. In the evaluation workshops this was emphasised as an approach that worked practically, because it meant that the family could go out and come home together, without having to coordinate dropping off and picking up different family members, as they often had to do with separate children, youth and adult events.

The emphasis on the family was also highlighted as an approach that builds on and explores family relationships. Dance activities were designed to build on trust in family groups, working through activities involving forms of contact or lifts that could be explored more readily and intimately with people whose relationships were established. Conversely, the workshops also allowed people to express and to some extent work through some of the more difficult aspects of their relationships – small conflicts and differences for example – in creative ways, adding a depth and warmth to the insights that came through the performance for example.

The second element that came through was the crossing of boundaries in both directions. The project team went into Inkerman House to encourage people to come into the Drum: the artists had to cross the boundaries first, into a space that was more familiar to the residents. In this case the project team then accompanied the residents across the road and into the Drum for the workshops: the team accompanied the residents across all the boundaries between them and the arts event. This may seem a small point, but workshop participants repeatedly said that they had never been to the Drum before (even though it was just across the road), and audience members said that they had never been to a ballet performance before. To do new things is hard – people need a friend to accompany them.

The third element that was frequently mentioned is that people want to participate in long-term and regular events, not just one-offs. Community arts should become part of their routine, and they need to be able to grow into them and invest in them. This also means that the arts events need to occupy a space that fits with people's routine: they need to be at the right time (for example just after school) and in the right place (somewhere easily accessible). This insight may seem to clash with the fact that Flat Out had six creative workshops and none of the families went to all six. But in fact it is obvious that occasionally a family will have to miss a workshop: someone will be ill or they will be called away by their wider network of responsibilities (this was the case with the families who came back). In this area this is even more likely to be the case: new families will arrive and other families will move on. But if arts workshops are ongoing, a reliable presence, families would know that they could miss a week or two, because life happens, and come back to join in with the arts again, and new families could be introduced to community arts as a reliable constant in the community.

## 06 Outcomes

- 🕒 To understand how to encourage greater participation in the future, by enabling new, appropriate initiatives that strategically respond to research

It is not clear yet exactly which initiatives will follow Flat Out, but there are some formal elements of participation in this project that have been shown to be successful and that could be repeated. First, working with community members to devise a performance works very well – it is a strong motivator for audience membership, and it produces high-quality performances with excellent depth and insight, which people enjoy.

Second, building on community stories and experiences holds up a mirror to people's own lives, and drives home the relevance of art in their lives. It is important to note here that what came out of the community consultation was not a performance about gritty 'issues', as artists might have imagined when looking at Inkerman House and its surrounding area (few artists, particularly ballet dancers, actually live or grow up in these areas). What came out of a sustained consultation with people, in which they participated in the process of translating their own perspectives and experiences into movement, were much more universal stories, with a nonetheless specific sense of some of the major issues facing the area (e.g. impermanence, insecurity, and financial concerns).

Third, people want to learn dance skills and they want to share their own cultural knowledge. As one stakeholder said:

“Even if residents learned one minute of dance, it would be good”

- many workshop participants expressed repeatedly how much they were enjoying learning new dance moves. But at the same time people appreciated the opportunity to share what they know. As one participant put it, for many people community arts projects are about:

“learning, teaching and showing” (consultation workshop participant)





## 06 Outcomes

- 🎧 To understand how to encourage greater participation in the future, by establishing an ongoing collaboration between the Drum, BRB and UoB

The project team enjoyed working together on this successful project, and found that each was able to contribute insights and add value to the process, from the outset right through to the production. Since the production and evaluation sessions, the project team have continued to communicate with each other and have met several times to plan ways to bring the production to other publics, and to bring the process to other communities.

One important feature of the success of this collaboration has been an ongoing recognition of the need for each institution to give and to gain. Each institution has contributed in kind to this project – the Drum has given performance space, UoB has given researcher time, and BRB has given performer time and also free backstage tours to workshop participants. At the same time the project has also been linked with each organisation meeting their own strategic targets – community participation/outreach/public engagement is a point of convergence in the three organisations, but also BRB and the Drum were able to contribute to their core tasks of community arts and performance, whilst UoB will have academic and non-academic publications. A stable balance between what can be given to the community and what the organisations gain in order to maintain their strategic roles is key to the success of a longterm collaboration – in the short term this balance can privilege either give or gain, but in the longterm, for the survival of the organisations and of community arts collaborations, there has to be a balance.



### Summary and recommendations

Flat Out has been a highly successful community arts project, involving a range of community members, in innovative ways, to devise a professional ballet production around the residents of Inkerman House. Key recommendations for the future are:

- Continued collaboration in community arts between the three major partners – University of Birmingham, the Drum Intercultural Arts, and Birmingham Royal Ballet
- Continued community participation in the arts, so that arts workshops become a reliable constant in the community, despite financial and local insecurities
- Continued performance devised by the community, as a motivator for audience participation and, more importantly, as a fulfilling form of creative expression.



#### References

Birmingham City Council (2012) Aston, Newtown and Lozells: Area Action Plan. Birmingham: Development Directorate. Available online at: <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/astonagap>





Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2014) Taking Part 2013/4 Statistical Release. Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/taking-part-201314-quarter-4-statistical-release>

Isakjee, A. (2014) Flat Out Project: a Consultation with Stakeholders. Available online at: <http://www.the-drum.org.uk>




## 00 Appendix 1

Thanks for coming to the Flat Out Community Arts Performance today. We hope you' ve enjoyed it. It would be really helpful for us if you would fill out this very short evaluation and hand it to The Drum reception or to one of the organisers before you leave.

1. Did you enjoy the performance today? (tick one box)

<input type="checkbox"/> a. I really enjoyed it!	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> a. I quite enjoyed it.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> a. I didn' t enjoy it very much.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> a. I didn' t enjoy it at all.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Have you been to a live dance performance before? (tick one box)

<input type="checkbox"/> a. Yes – I often go to watch dance!	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> a. Yes – I' ve been once or twice.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> a. No – I' ve never been	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Would you like to be involved in other community arts events in the future? (tick one box)

<input type="checkbox"/> a. Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> a. No	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

4. On the back of this form, give us any other comments about the show, or any ideas for future performances. (If you want us to keep in touch with you about performances or activities that might interest you, please also leave your name and an email address or phone number).





**YES 88%** **NO 12%**

Would you like to be involved in other community arts events in the future?

### Comments

Wow. Wow! The whole thing Wow! This area this city needs more please!!

It showed how accessible ballet can be! More please!

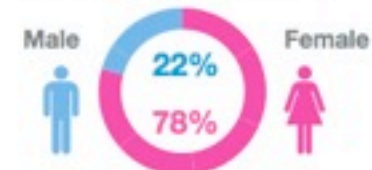
I've never seen a live performance of ballet before, thank God I came and saw a wonderful and peaceful dance.

It's great to have dance like this in and part of the community living. People may not go to the theatre but will come here. Well done and thank you!!

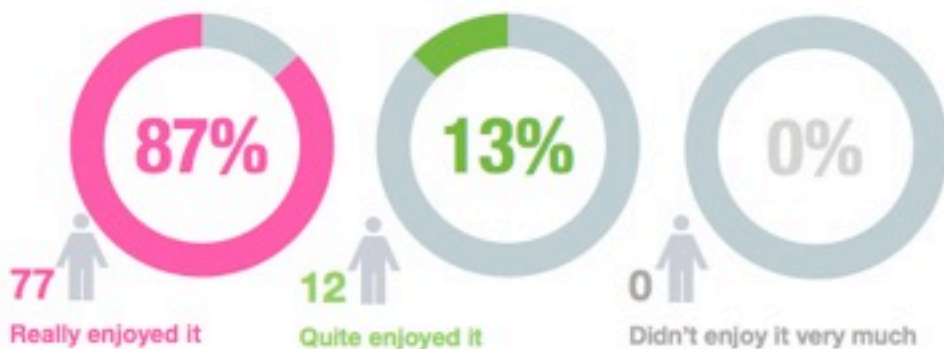
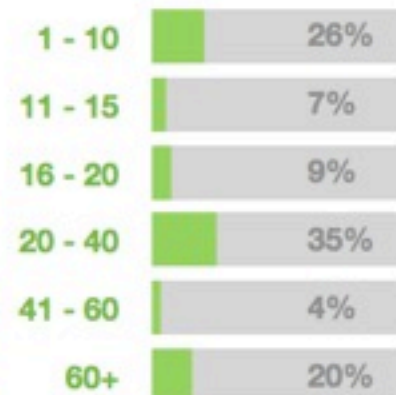
## Performance evaluation



### Participants Gender



### Participants Age



Did you enjoy the performance today?





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