



# A clearer picture:

A guide for arts and cultural organisations  
engaging with universities



**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



**University  
Alliance**

Making the difference

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## Foreword

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Higher education institutions are playing an increasingly vital role as custodians and champions of arts and culture in towns and cities across the country.

They support the development of young talent. They lead on research of national and international significance. And their investment in arts and culture helps to build a sense of place.

Universities, colleges and conservatoires have come to be powerful investors in their local areas, in the knowledge that a strong cultural offer makes our towns and cities great places to live, work and study.

As you will see from this guide, many arts and cultural organisations are already working hand-in-hand with the higher education sector to drive forward their local creative economy.

But we want to do more. We want to build and grow on the partnerships that already exist between cultural organisations and higher education institutions. We also want to understand how we can embrace innovation to ensure that our sectors continue to have a meaningful two-way dialogue.

This guide sets out some of the opportunities for collaboration. We hope it provides food for thought. Together, we can become partners for the future.

**Darren Henley OBE**

Chief Executive, Arts Council England

The creative arts are integral to Alliance universities – many of which trace their heritage back to the Institutes of Art and Design created to meet the needs of the first industrial revolution. Today, the creative industries remain an important industrial sector – through which the UK can increase both exports and soft power.

The central place we give to the creative arts means we are well placed to work with arts and cultural organisations to make our towns, cities and regions vibrant and exciting places to live. It's in our interest to do this as students are more likely to choose to study, and staff to work, in places with a strong arts and cultural offering.

More than this, Alliance universities take pride in being part of the cultural leadership of our places. We hope this guide helps to explain the benefits of partnership working and gives some helpful, practical tips for how this can be achieved.

**Maddalaine Ansell**

Chief Executive, University Alliance





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## Introduction: Why engage?



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This guide is aimed at arts and cultural organisations who are considering, or would benefit from, working with a university partner. It outlines the opportunities – some of which are more obvious than others, and will be determined by the size and mission of the organisation. Throughout, we give real examples of the impact of such partnerships: and offer advice to overcome some of the perceived difficulties of working together.

The arts and culture industry contributes over £12bn of income to the UK economy and employs over 400,000 people. It is hugely beneficial to the UK and is one of our great national success stories.

Collaborations between universities and arts organisations not only bring numerous benefits to the organisations involved, but also contribute to improvements within the local and national cultural landscape. This booklet will help to explain what these benefits are as well as provide practical details on how to begin and develop collaborative activities.

### Why engage with a university?

The UK higher education sector is world leading. It is the largest educator of arts professionals and employs many of the UK's leading artist and creative innovators. Universities also conduct extensive research into arts and culture.

Although many of these activities are perceived to be carried out behind closed doors, universities are increasingly looking towards their place within their local environment and economy.

They are looking to get their students real-world industry experience, and ensure their research has impact beyond the academic community. To facilitate this, universities are making themselves open to engagements and partnerships with businesses, charities and other organisations within their locality, including arts and cultural organisations. They also seek to contribute to placemaking and are committed to encouraging programmes that help their locality flourish.

The UK higher education sector educates over 2.2 million students a year, with over 166,000 on specialist creative arts courses. Making this provision more industry-relevant has the potential to improve drastically the work-readiness of graduates in all disciplines. Recent surveys by the CBI have found that over two thirds of businesses had developed links with universities and nearly half of these were planning on expanding and developing this relationship. It is also known that when arts and new technologies are combined, they provide a strong platform for the innovative and creative thinking that is driving the high performing, high growth industries that stand behind growth in the UK creative industries.

But as it currently stands, cultural organisations are less likely to engage than other industries. This is primarily due to their lean nature and the constraints in resources this entails as well as the perceived opaqueness of universities. To ensure the sector continues to grow and develop, this needs to change.

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## Improving the talent pipeline

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People are fundamental to the success of any creative organisations, be it an art consultancy business or a theatre company. Having the right people, with the right skills and talents allows businesses to expand, become prosperous and explore new ideas. But too many businesses, including in the creative industries, are finding it difficult to attract the right people. They are reportedly finding students do not have the necessary skills when they first start work.

To combat this many are forming partnerships with universities and other education providers to ensure graduates are leaving with the skills required for their chosen industry.

### *Curriculum design*

Employers can contribute to the curriculum either through providing informal advice on the design and content of courses or through providing real-industry case studies and problems for students to learn from. Some employers will also sit on Industry Advisory Boards at the school or department levels and will be more involved in the development of course content. This activity helps to ensure graduates leave with the skills and experiences needed to hit the ground running.

### *Programmes for pre-university students*

Universities can act as gateways and brokers for working with primary and secondary schools. Working with a university on their widening participation activity can put organisations in contact with a range of prospective students from non-traditional and under-represented groups. Working with them can encourage and facilitate these students in exploring creative subjects during their later education.

### *Work placements and internships*

Many organisations choose to offer work placements and internships for students, either as an integrated 'sandwich' period during term time, over the summer or for a set period after graduation. This has the double benefit that the organisation is able to work with motivated, inquisitive and dedicated individuals while also helping to develop their skills and experiences. Work placements have proven to be extremely effective. A third of all students who carry out work experience are employed by those organisations following graduation. Organisations are also often able to take on students for short term projects, something which fits well with how many creative companies plan, and work to project length.

The Arts Council has recently worked with Creative & Cultural Skills to publish a guide showcasing best practice in apprenticeships, internships and volunteering. It gives helpful, practical advice to help businesses create new opportunities.

### *Retaining talent through reskilling and upskilling*

Partnerships with universities can help creative organisations better utilise the talent they already have. In the modern economy employees will have multiple careers and will be required to reskill and upskill as new technologies and working cultures are introduced. Ensuring employees have access to continuing professional development will become increasingly important in the future. The majority of universities will have a wide variety of programmes, both bespoke and "off the shelf", short and long term, to develop skills. These allow employees, including those in the arts and cultural sectors, to make the most of new technology and ways of working.



## Case Study

### Graduate Scholarship Programme – University of Salford

In 2014 the University of Salford implemented a Graduate Scholarship Programme in partnership with independent studio and workshop providers. The scheme offers graduating students access to facilities alongside mentoring and production funds to continue their development in the first year following graduation, which is widely regarded as the most significant for art graduates as if they don't continue to practise in that year it is unlikely that they ever will.

Driven forward by the university's curator Lindsay Taylor, lecturer Sam Ingleson and the various partners around Salford, the project began in 2014 with each participating graduate receiving a budget of around £2,000 to spend on supporting their practice through equipment, production and mentoring. They were also provided with a variety of workshop and studio spaces from the partner organisations. The number of partners has since increased and now include Islington Mill, Art Work Atelier, Castlefield Gallery, Hot Bed Press and The International 3.

The success of the project can largely be attributed to the joint interest of all parties in supporting talent retention and development within the Salford region, alongside the flexibility of the art partners and their ability to donate time and resources, although as with most projects there are limits for these small organisations. The University reallocated funds from a student acquisitions budget to this project, which has been offset by adding a condition that participants gift a work of art to the university art collection at the end of the year. The scheme ensures that the University has an ongoing relationship with the graduates and the partners and that the University Art Collections tells an interesting story about the arts in Salford.

### *Co-supervision of doctoral students*

Some national funders and universities support collaborative doctoral awards, which fund PhD students who are co-supervised with arts organisations. These partnerships can result in bespoke and in-depth research on programmes run by the arts organisation, and the opportunity to co-create research, which can be very rewarding. They also bring professional development benefits for staff who co-supervise doctoral researchers.



East London Dance  
Image © Victor Frankowski



## Case Study

### TestBeds and the University of Bedfordshire

The University of Bedfordshire successfully applied to Arts Council England to deliver TestBeds, a programme designed to enable Luton-based artists to thrive creatively, economically and socially. In addition to a skills-development programme that will train artists to work entrepreneurially, the University will partner with the Royal Opera House Bridge to create outreach programmes which aim to engage young people in and around Luton town. Participants will design and deliver the outreach activity with an external education or youth-service provider, increasing access to high-quality arts experiences for young people and establishing a local workforce of skilled, engaged arts outreach facilitators.

The TestBeds programme will bring together Luton-based early-career artists with a group of mid-career artists housed within the University as Visiting Fellows and Professors. Basing themselves within an academic department or research institute, these artists will explore the wider social impact of their work, investigating their practice within the framework of the artist as 'placemaker', 'global citizen' or 'catalyst for change'. These artists will also act as mentors for the outreach projects, ensuring that the legacy of this activity is felt on a social and community level.

Although the partnership between the university and the Royal Opera House Bridge is still relatively new, it has been strengthened and driven by a shared vision to develop an engaged, happy and healthy Luton community. The project is further supported by Luton Culture and will benefit from collaboration with both them and the other strategic partners in Luton. The University has an increased appetite and desire to create wide ranging partnerships with new organisations in the region establishing new effective collaborative relationships.

### *Extra-curricular involvement*

Universities often run competitions, workshops and classes outside of the curriculum. Being involved in these types of activities can help raise the profile of an organisation and help encourage graduates and students to work with them in the future. Sponsoring a prize, or competition, is often seen as a low cost way to encourage students towards particular skill areas or careers. It can also serve as a means for increasing an organisation's exposure to students, something which might encourage engagement in the future.



Artonik's *The Colour of Time*, performed in Luton. The project formed part of 'Revoluton', a collaborative project of which University of Bedfordshire is a partner. Image © Ben Hodson





## East London Dance

East London Dance (ELD) is a small organisation with a core team of eight staff. ELD and the University of East London (UEL) have had a long history of collaboration dating back to 2001 in a variety of projects including ELD staff seconding as guest lecturers, ELD producing dance projects for public spaces on UEL campuses and promoting creative projects with students.

In 2007 ELD was able to help the university by being part of a steering group for the launch of not only the university's first dance degree but the first type in the country, mixing an urban learning context with social, street and popular styles alongside contemporary techniques from across the world. The degree provided ELD with an important progression route for their young dancers and a valuable pipeline for the workforce they represent. For UEL, the connection with ELD ensured that the degree was relevant for the sector's needs and they were able to draw guest teaching staff from ELD's vast network of dancers and choreographers.

Recently UEL along with the University of Birkbeck opened a new building for performing arts opposite ELD's location in Stratford's Cultural Quarter opening a door to deeper connections between students and ELD, who in turn gain access to the excellent facilities in the new building. Developing a Memorandum of Understanding to guide a long term partnership with the university highlighted five areas of shared interest around professional links, joint programming and commissioning, opportunities for young people in the area, supporting post-graduation development and research opportunities. This has led to an evolution in the partnership. For example, ELD has regular access to the dance studios to provide space for local artists and large participatory projects.

In exchange, the artists deliver guest workshops for students or invite them into the studio to see their work. This exchange between local professional artists and students is a vital outcome of the partnership. The other big joint initiative was the launch of a new East London Youth Dance Company for 14-18 year olds. This auditioned company trains twice a week at UEL studios, giving the young people a first-hand experience of what a university is, hopefully helping them to raise their ambitions and encourage HE participation later in life. A UEL graduate is always appointed as the Assistant Artist as part of their professional development, and a student volunteers as the Apprentice, gaining valuable hands-on learning.



Image © Victor Frankowski



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## Innovation and research

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UK university research is world leading. The UK accounts for less than 3.2% of research and development (R&D) expenditure globally but produces 6.4% of all articles in academic journals and 16% of the world's most highly cited articles. Universities employ over 7,000 researchers in the creative art subjects alone.

Businesses that invest in R&D grow twice as fast as non-innovators, but investment in R&D is often risky and expensive, even for large multinational companies. By working with universities, companies are able to significantly reduce these costs and utilise the diversity of knowledge and skills available within the university sector. Arts organisations can also actively co-research with academic partners which can be greatly rewarding.

### Activities

#### *Contract research*

Also known as commissioned research, this is where an organisation will set the researchers a specific task or challenge. It is primarily a commercial relationship, although it often leads to additional partnership working through other activities. It allows organisations to address specific challenges for their business, with little risk of the research branching off.

#### *Collaborative research*

This research is typically led by an academic researcher working in partnership with a business or other organisation. They typically involve an element of public funding, although partners commonly contribute monetary or in-kind support. The relationships can be complex, between multiple organisations internationally, or between a single university and a local SME (small and medium sized enterprise). These projects can also involve a sponsored doctorate which supports a PhD student while they are working on the collaborative research project and transferring their knowledge into industry. They can lead to joint funding opportunities from research councils or

other funding bodies, including the Arts Council. For more information on what is available visit the Arts Council website signposted at the end of this guide.

#### *Knowledge Transfer Partnerships*

Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) are strategic projects which have the potential to transform businesses and work through providing a "KTP associate", most often a recently qualified graduate who is recruited to work in the company for between 6 and 36 months on a strategic project, with academic support and guidance from the partner university. These are seen as good value, and can connect businesses to the wider knowledge, expertise and assets within the academic community beyond the associate themselves.



Create Studios – Digital journeys @ The Steam Museum. Image © Create Studios 2016



## Tate Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University

Liverpool John Moores University has worked with Tate Liverpool since it opened at the Albert Dock nearly 30 years ago. This early support has now grown into a fully-fledged and mutually-beneficial partnership. It provides the University with access to world-leading modern and contemporary art galleries and Tate with access to highly motivated students for various work experience and research opportunities.

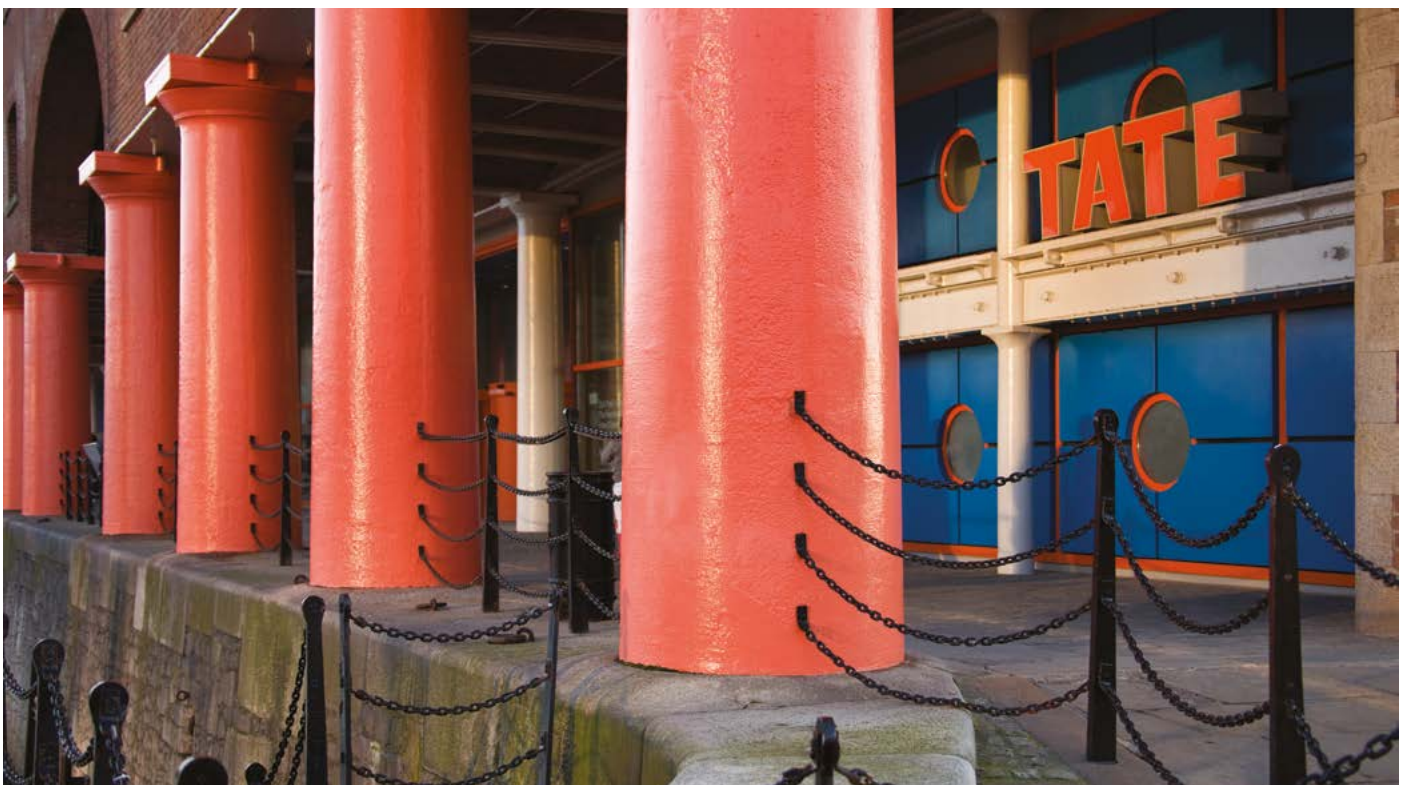
The partnership includes the co-curation of major exhibitions and an embedded academic post working from the School of Art and Design and contributing to the public education programme of Tate Liverpool.

The joint academic post enables senior academics to contribute and advise on the research strategies of both the University and

the Tate, including generating collaborative research income and enhancing the educational provision across both institutions.

The iconic waterfront building occupied by Tate Liverpool has also provided the platform for joint public presentations, lectures and masterclasses aimed at helping to further promote and stimulate the artistic community around Liverpool. A collaboration between Tate Liverpool and English National Ballet provided a unique opportunity for students to participate in a day-long drawing workshop capturing imagery of the company's rehearsals alongside Dance Practice students who performed at the press view. Music and project animation was created and produced by Screen School and Journalism students.

The key to the partnership success is collaboration and open dialogue at all levels.





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### *Consultancy work*

Universities will often offer academic experts as consultants, to provide advice, guidance and expertise in exchange for a fee or other services in kind. These experts are able to draw upon not only their own knowledge and experience, but also on the latest research, publications and expertise of other colleagues. This will often be on an ad-hoc, short term basis but may also be for a specific long-term project involving regular consultancy advice or support. It may involve multiple university staff, equipment and facilities or it may be a single meeting for a single member of staff.

### *Hiring of research facilities and equipment*

Universities have a wealth of high-cost, specialist equipment or facilities which could be used by arts organisations. These facilities and equipment can range from product design suites to fashion studios. It can be very cost-effective, if the organisation only requires these facilities or equipment on an occasional basis, to hire these as and when they are required. In order to facilitate this practice, many universities have begun to produce public records of what equipment and services are available.



mima (Director Alistair Hudson)



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## Further opportunities

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### Case Study

It is well known that students and research are important priorities for universities. But they also take seriously their third mission – to enhance and bring value to their community through knowledge exchange and leadership. They often act as coordinators, or as a gateway to other organisations and institutions. Universities also hugely value the impact that culture brings to their cities and regions. A strong cultural scene, with flourishing galleries, theatres and other offerings, helps make an area attractive to investors and helps to stimulate indirect growth. It also helps the university, making it easier to attract and retain students and staff members. This diverse activity can create opportunities for partner organisations.

#### *Festivals and curation of spaces*

Some universities are involved in the organisation and delivery of festivals and celebrations, whilst others are taking on cultural venues such as theatres or galleries. These links and relationships are frequently difficult to quantify, and as such will likely require enquiries and exploration. For the university, curating these events and spaces provides unique learning opportunities for students while also helping to develop a sense of place for their locality. They also create network and spatial opportunities for creative partners to utilise and exploit.



#### **mima and Teesside University**

mima (the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art) was opened in 2007 by Middlesbrough Borough Council as a flagship attraction, bringing together a number of different art collections and designed to highlight Middlesbrough's role as a cultural city. With pressure on council funding, it became apparent that new support for the Institute was necessary. Driven forward from senior staff from both the university, council and the institute, and with support from the Arts Council England, Teesside University took over the Institute in September 2014.

The relationship between mima and the university is unique. There is a great deal of emphasis on mima retaining independence from the university and ensuring that it is not viewed as part of the university campus, but as a separate public space where learning and education can be offered for the widest range of people. That said, the university is able to use it as a teaching environment, conducting a variety of projects and enhancing courses ranging from social sciences to engineering within the building. Apart from management support and funding from the university, the Institute gains access to a host of student volunteers and interns who assist in operations and research fellows who collaborate on the artistic programme.

mima has also sought to expand its civic agenda since the takeover. The museum has made its outreach work more connected with the town by working in tandem with the university; for example it recently launched a project to help encourage educational, social and cultural support for refugee and asylum seeker communities.



### *Dissemination*

One of the key metrics used in the allocation of research funding is a measure looking at the impact that research has beyond the academic community. For this reason, universities are now more than ever looking at creative ways of sharing and utilising their research findings, and in some instances have worked with creative organisations to commission dissemination activity.

### *Funding*

Higher Education institutions have an in-depth, working knowledge of different funding streams available from UK and international bodies. These schemes, often poorly known within the private and third sector or difficult to access because of their sheer complexity, will often be beneficial to arts organisations. Universities are well practiced in working with businesses to leverage these funds to promote economic and cultural growth and regeneration within their locality.

### **UK Young Artists**

UK Young Artists is a registered charity that champions the next generation of creativity to ensure a vibrant, high quality and diverse creative future for the UK. It does this through supporting young people (18-30) to develop and expand their practice by providing creative, artistic and professional development support for those working across all art forms. Selected young artists are supported to showcase nationally and internationally.

The charity is supported by Arts Council England, De Montfort University, Loughborough University, Nottingham Trent University and University of Derby both through financial aid and through representation on the charity's board.

UK Young Artists has:

- Enabled 110,000 people to see new work,
- Supported over 1000 artists,
- Showcased 53 UK artists at five international festivals, and
- Invested a total of £2m in developing young artists' talent.



### *Boards and governance*

One way that arts organisations can collaborate with universities is to invite a representative from the local university to sit on boards of governance. This allows them to share their expertise and networks to the benefit of the company, creating synergies and joined-up thinking.

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## How to get involved

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The first stages of engaging with a university are often the most tricky and daunting. Universities are often, incorrectly, seen as monolithic and unapproachable institutions. Finding a single point of contact at the university can be very useful in helping navigate the organisation. Below are some of the preparatory steps required ahead of engaging in a partnership:

1. Identify the issue that needs solving
2. Find a flexible, willing partner university to work with
3. Find a point of contact within the university – either a business engagement officer, external relations or partnership manager, or faculty member within a suitable department.

The key to developing a successful partnership is to first identify the issue to be addressed; this could be a strategic challenge or a skills shortage within the organisation or local labour market, or a research and development need, shared resources, or some other connection. Knowing what gains are possible and desirable, and having these well-defined from the outset, will allow the university to respond in the most useful way and create clear objectives. It will also allow evaluation and tracking during the partnership. Although the best way to approach the issue may not yet be clear, being able to explain the issue to both experts and non-experts will greatly enhance and speed up the process and create meaningful, successful engagement.

The next stage is to choose a suitable university to engage with. Suitability may relate to research strengths or an individual academic's experience, depending on the issue, but in either case you should look for evidence of flexibility and responsiveness. Universities, even those within the same cities, act very differently and it is important to choose one which is willing and able to meet your organisation's business needs. To find provisional information about expertise, the easiest and simplest method is to explore the publicly published materials available, either through a course prospective or on a university's student-facing website. Some universities will

conduct public events for business engagements. Attending these events, as well as signing up to the mailing lists which advertise them, will help organisations to gauge which universities are best suited to meet their needs. Finding testimonials from similar organisations who have previously worked with a university is also a useful gauge for identifying willing partners.

The next stage to initiating a relationship is to find a point of contact within the university. Many universities will be happy to have exploratory conversations. Each university has a slightly different structure, something which is often seen as a barrier towards creating strong, meaningful relationships with partners. That said, universities often have well maintained departmental websites, which lists faculty staff members and their contact details. If there is no obvious candidate, business engagement staff or departmental or school secretaries are well positioned to find the correct point of contact. Attending public events or workshops run by the university is also a good route into making contact. The Arts Council may also be able to provide you with a list of friendly faces in local universities.

### *Key to success*

Once engaged, relationships require maintenance and resource to ensure they are successful and remain strong. Personal relationships underpin university engagement activities and, as ever, communication is key. Establishing regular catch ups, frequent updates and progress tracking will strengthen the relationship and make sure key objectives and outcomes are achieved on time. It will also help ensure that when difficulties or new angles arise, as often happens in the case of research activity, these are communicated clearly and effectively.

*“Know your partners well and be honest about what is working and what isn't. It is important to ensure that the participants are in an environment where they thrive: each partner has a different feel or ethos and what works for one person won't for another.”*

**Lindsay Taylor, Art Curator, University of Salford**





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Strong leadership from senior figures within both organisations helps strengthen the relationship. Leadership figures should help to reinforce the importance and significance of these relationships and ensure that this message is communicated throughout the organisations involved. Additionally, appointing “project champions” to ensure effective engagement throughout the project is important. Some sector bodies also propose the use of confidentiality agreements to help create a culture of trust and to ensure staff are able to work openly to the benefit of the partnership.

*“We find it really useful taking all our key staff to the University department’s full staff meeting at the start of each semester. This allows everyone to get on the same page and understand the breadth of what each organisation is delivering.”*

**Polly Risbridger, Director, East London Dance**

Formalising the agreement through a memorandum of understanding can help create stability while also allowing both parties to act flexibly (the signing can also be a great press opportunity for both parties to raise awareness). They are also helpful in acknowledging the overall mutual ambitions of the partnership and can be underpinned by more detailed collaboration agreements and co-created business plans, which clarify details and specifics to ensure both parties understand and agree on what they will be delivering. These can also be particularly helpful when there is staff turnover, as these agreements help bridge the gap when new staff take over areas of work and before personal professional relationships develop.

One reported frustration with collaborating with universities is that they can be slow and less agile compared with a small arts organisation. Even the smallest of universities employ hundreds or thousands of staff members. This often means decisions can happen relatively slowly and sometimes require multiple senior staff members to give input to or sign off workings. There can also be problems due to universities often working

around the academic calendar. Recognising this and discussing the implications can do much to ease issues before they occur.

There may be financial costs attached to working with a university. However, if both parties have a financial stake of some kind, this can result in a stronger partnership. Some material investment, no matter the size or scale, will help ensure that faculty and staff, who often have conflicting deadlines and responsibilities, prioritise the project in amongst competing workloads. This can be achieved through a variety of methods, including the joint purchase of equipment or a co-funded member of staff.

Another solution is the creation of neutral or shared spaces. These spaces help to balance any power dynamics and conducting activities in this “third space” reinforces the notion that both parties are receiving benefits from the partnership. Identifying early on what activities should be conducted where will also help prevent some future disagreements or issues arising.

A final piece of advice is not to curb ambitions. Organisations should not be afraid of expanding and developing their relationship. Many companies find that their partnerships with a university start off as transactional in nature – purchasing consultancy or renting equipment and space – before developing into something more fluid and flexible. They also find that this allows new ideas and projects to spring up organically. These should be explored, where appropriate, and will help strengthen and lengthen the benefits seen from the relationship.



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For more information on the case studies described please visit:



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[www.salford.ac.uk](http://www.salford.ac.uk)

[www.beds.ac.uk](http://www.beds.ac.uk)

[www.tate.org.uk/liverpool](http://www.tate.org.uk/liverpool)

[www.visitmima.com](http://www.visitmima.com)

[www.ukyoungartists.co.uk](http://www.ukyoungartists.co.uk)

[www.eastlondondance.org/](http://www.eastlondondance.org/)

*A best practice guide to apprenticeships, internships and volunteering*

[www.ccskills.org.uk/supporters/advice-research/article/a-best-practice-guide-to-apprenticeships-internships-and-volunteering1](http://www.ccskills.org.uk/supporters/advice-research/article/a-best-practice-guide-to-apprenticeships-internships-and-volunteering1)

*For information on the latest Arts Council Research Grants please visit:*

[www.artscouncil.org.uk/exploring-value-arts-and-culture/research-grants-programme-2015-2018](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/exploring-value-arts-and-culture/research-grants-programme-2015-2018)

*To learn more about University Alliance please visit our site:*

[www.unialliance.ac.uk](http://www.unialliance.ac.uk)



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