

London 2012 Cultural Olympiad: Showcasing the Work of Deaf and Disabled Artists

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This paper explores disability-focused projects within the Cultural Olympiad, focusing on their impacts on deaf and disabled artists and the wider arts sector. The findings are based on case studies of two large programmes: *Unlimited* and *Accentuate*, and nine smaller projects or commissions which sat within them.

The evaluation process involved:

- Telephone or Skype interviews with eight artists commissioned via the *Unlimited* programme.
- A further eight interviews with project producers, host venue staff and managers at LOCOG and Shape.
- Analysis of online content on project blogs.
- Analysis of evaluation reports, commissioned artists' final reports to ACE, and monthly progress reports.



Unlimited at the Southbank Centre,
photo by Beatriz Garcia

Note that, within this paper, the phrase 'Cultural Olympiad' refers both to the four-year lead up of cultural programming, starting in 2008, and its twelve-week culmination, the London 2012 Festival in 2012.

Projects overview

Key Findings

- The Cultural Olympiad led to a step-change in the quality and scale of work produced by both established and emerging disabled and deaf artists in the UK. For those artists already producing work of a very high calibre who received commissions through *Unlimited*, the opportunity has raised their profile within the sector, and

- increased wider public awareness of their work.
- The Cultural Olympiad has led to an improvement in skills across the disability arts sector, in project management, finance, marketing, administration and accessible interpretation.
 - Communications, networks and partnership working between deaf and disabled artists and the wider arts sector has strengthened as a result of the enabling opportunity provided by investment in programmes through the Cultural Olympiad.
 - While there is no definitive data on the issue, research indicates that levels of media coverage varied widely from project to project. For example the *Unlimited* programme as a whole did not attract significant coverage, but individual projects did, such as Sue Austin's *Creating the Spectacle*, which was featured extensively in the media and in LOCOG's own promotional material. There was no clear consensus amongst those interviewed about whether they believed that the Cultural Olympiad has led to improved media coverage of the work of deaf and disabled artists, in terms of the quantity or quality of editorial content. However there was a general feeling that the Paralympic Games had been positive in its representation of disabled people.
 - While there will be a positive legacy for many of the individual artists and companies involved, sustained legacy from the

Cultural Olympiad will be reliant on continued funding and strategic support for artists and their regional support networks. ACE have made a commitment to continuing the *Unlimited* programme, and the value and format of this support are currently under discussion.

Arts and disability programmes in the Cultural Olympiad

The London 2012 Cultural Olympiad contained a combination of large strategic programmes and individual projects which involved disabled and deaf people as artists, audiences and participants. The major strategic programmes were:

Unlimited

The flagship programme for disabled and deaf professional artists within the Cultural Olympiad was *Unlimited*, which was announced in 2008 as one of the original *Major Projects*, and later integrated in its entirety into the London 2012 Festival. Funded by ACE, the other national arts councils, Creative Scotland, LOCOG, the Olympic Lottery Distributor and the British Council, *Unlimited* aimed to celebrate deaf and disabled artists on an unprecedented scale, raise the profile of individual artists and offer them new opportunities.

The focus of the programme was on raising the profile of UK deaf and disabled artists, and exposing audiences to work by artists of the highest calibre. It was not intended to be a development or training opportunity for artists, as those chosen were by definition already reaching high standards of excellence. However, the emphasis placed on artists creating new work, on a bigger scale, and experimenting creatively, did enable artists to enhance their creative skills and confidence in project management. Through this funding stream, 29 artists were commissioned to create ambitious work which would be showcased all over the UK, ending with a season at the Southbank Centre during the Paralympic Games in 2012. They were also able to access additional funding for research, training and mentoring, as were their producing partners, through two additional funds: *Unlimited Talent*, and Producer Capacity Building Fund.

The commissions were chosen by a committee of experts, including at least 50% disabled representation, chaired by Ruth Mackenzie. The artists came from all over the UK, and worked across a wide range of artforms, with many taking the opportunity to experiment with new media or collaborate with artists from other disciplines. Five

projects were international partnerships, supported financially and with facilitation from the British Council.

Accentuate South East

Unlimited was not the only major cultural programme which was developed around disability. In the South East, the regional programme for the Cultural Olympiad was themed around disability as well, taking inspiration from the excitement generated by the Paralympic Games coming back to its original home of Stoke Mandeville. This was used as an opportunity to bring a wide range of strategic partners together, in a coalition much broader than the cultural sector, which included arts, sport, leisure and heritage. The programme aimed to create long term improvements in the regional infrastructure for deaf and disabled people, which in turn would raise the profile of disability equality.

Beyond these two programmes, a number of projects involved deaf and disabled artists across different strands of the Cultural Olympiad, including four events presented as the Paralympic Flame Festival which took place across the four UK nations as a Paralympic Torch Relay celebration.

Beyond the Cultural Olympiad, the most high profile and

watched events, with huge live and TV audiences, were the Paralympic opening and closing ceremonies. They involved a large number of professional disabled artists (many of which also contributed to *Unlimited* and other programmes) as well as volunteers, and involved young disabled people from the Olympic host boroughs.

Context

The commissioning and programming of work by deaf and disabled artists does not happen in a politically neutral context. There were several tensions in the development of this work, particularly in the later stages of the project and while the work was being showcased during 2012, which were discussed by the artists, venue programmers and producers interviewed.

Interviewees described the current situation for many disabled people as one of fear and uncertainty, as they will be heavily affected by changes to benefits entitlements, local authority cuts to social care and other service provision, and increased means testing of access to out-of-work benefits. The rise in levels of hate crime experienced by disabled people was also referenced as a factor, as was the negative stereotyping of disabled people as 'benefits scroungers' in the media.

Given these issues, the presence of a high profile, positive cultural programme focused on disability was seen by several interviewees as very important, because of its potential to change public perceptions and discourse, in addition to the impact such a programme could have on awareness of the contribution that deaf and disabled people make to the arts. Some felt that it was right that the programmes were representative of the diversity of work produced by deaf and disabled artists, embracing artists who produced work with the broadest range of themes. Other interviewees felt that this was an unmissable opportunity to put disability issues and disability culture on a national platform, and wanted to see the programming represent this.

Arts organisations which specialise in presenting disability arts or working with deaf and disabled people as audiences and participants are experiencing the same current funding constraints as the wider arts sector. As a result, specifically in relation to *Unlimited*, some interviewees questioned the way in which the programme was structured to channel funding to individual artists for one-off commissions, at a time when they perceived the infrastructure which supports emerging disabled artists to be under threat.

Many interviewees felt that coverage of the Paralympics and the opening and closing ceremonies in particular, had potential to shape a more positive view of disabled people and create pride and excitement in the disabled community. However, there was a concern that some of the coverage of disability would be patronising, focus too heavily on the details of the disabilities themselves, and on human interest stories, and in the case of the Paralympic media coverage, focus too extensively on stereotypical representations of disabled athletes as inspiring 'superhumans'. As a result, interviewees reported that some deaf and disabled artists and activists were reluctant to engage with the Cultural Olympiad. One interviewee stated that 'many people felt that the Paralympics would be bad for disabled people'. It was necessary to build trust and confidence before partnership working could be established within her project.

The programming of disability arts within the Cultural Olympiad represented an unprecedented amount of funding, development and presentation of work by deaf and disabled people in a concentrated period of time. This was generally seen as positive, especially by commissioned artists in the *Unlimited* programme. However interviewees also questioned whether the impact would be

limited by the amount of other cultural activity happening at the same time, and whether the media would choose to focus on more mainstream events.

Impacts on artists

The research team looked at emerging evaluation from the *Unlimited* and *Accentuate* programmes, and carried out interviews with sixteen people connected to the delivery of those programmes, including eight commissioned artists from the cohort of 29 artists or companies with *Unlimited* commissions, three members of staff at LOCOG and Shape, four project producers and a festival programmer. Based on this research, the impacts of the Cultural Olympiad on deaf and disabled artists can be summarised as follows:

- Artists pushed personal boundaries and developed much more ambitious work.
- Artists were able to showcase their work on bigger stages and in more prestigious venues. While many of the disabled artists and disability arts companies involved already had well established profiles, involvement in the Cultural Olympiad represented a significant moment in their career to date.
- Some artists, particularly those at an early stage in their career, felt that their work received more

attention and more national media coverage because it was part of the Cultural Olympiad.

- Artists were able to showcase their work to larger audiences.
- Artists reported that they enhanced their creative skills and experimented with new artforms and media.
- Confidence in their ability to manage projects was enhanced by the experience of leading larger projects, including budgeting, administration and leading teams.
- Artists were able to access high quality training and mentoring, which was bespoke to their own development needs (through *Unlimited*).
- Artists established relationships with cultural organisations or individuals which may lead to future collaboration.
- There is considerable potential for projects to continue in the future through touring opportunities for theatrical productions, offers of exhibition space, and fundraising for the roll out of community arts activities.

Impacts on audiences and participants

Interviewees suggested that the impacts of disability-related programming within the Cultural Olympiad for audiences and project participants were:

- The projects contributed to an improvement in the accessibility of cultural organisations and the quality of their welcome and visitor services.
- Venues were able to attract Deaf and disabled audiences through the programming of work by deaf and disabled artists.
- Productions, exhibitions and events became more accessible to disabled people as projects experimented with creative approaches to interpretation and integrated accessible content into their work.
- Deaf and disabled people were inspired by the quality and content of these programmes, with an impact on their own confidence and aspirations (*Accentuate*).

Impacts on the cultural sector

It is clear that the Cultural Olympiad enabled a substantial increase in the funding available to deaf and disabled artists, and provided funding for some disability arts organisations to develop new work. This meant that artists have been able to demonstrate that they can achieve excellence on a par with the mainstream arts sector when given access to the same financial, technical and other resources. As a result they expected to find it easier to access the support and venues they needed to create similarly ambitious work in future.

The projects demonstrated the value of programming work outside the spaces in which art by deaf and disabled artists is usually seen, in reaching new audiences and developing creative partnerships. This happened both in large mainstream venues not traditionally known for programming the work of disabled artists, and in unusual spaces or public spaces, through site specific installations and events.

The projects have also contributed to an improvement in the skills base in the cultural sector. Firstly they have improved and expanded the creative skill sets of individual artists and performers through the provision of funding which has allowed them to spend time on research and experimentation as well as through take up of training and mentoring opportunities. Artists also described how they have learnt a lot about production, project management, funding and networking through their involvement in the Cultural Olympiad. Secondly, arts organisations and venues have developed skills around working with deaf and disabled artists, marketing their work to new audiences, and developing learning and participation programmes for deaf and disabled audiences.

The programmes demonstrated the value of partnership working and its benefits to the public: organisations and individuals within the disability arts sector formed supportive and mutually beneficial partnerships which enhanced the quality of the work; partnerships between the disability arts sector and others including arts, heritage and sport were explored, leading to benefits for audiences such as new accessibility initiatives; and the international links forged through some of the projects encouraged people with disabilities from very different social perspectives to communicate and share ideas and practice.

On the other hand, the unprecedented amount of programming, particularly in 2012, which involved deaf and disabled artists and performers, highlighted capacity issues within the sector. In particular these related to the availability of BSL interpreters and audio describers who can work to the standard required for onstage performance, and the inadequacy of mainstream casting agents' networks and contacts with disabled performers, leading to the best known names being heavily in demand. Producers developing theatre projects in the *Unlimited* programme described difficulties in casting performers, and in scheduling rehearsals and other meetings around their

performers' involvement in multiple projects.

Impact of the Cultural Olympiad and Paralympic Ceremonies

Interviewees described the benefits of their projects sitting within the Cultural Olympiad largely in relation to the role the Cultural Olympiad played in encouraging ambitious thinking, securing the involvement of strategic partners to work towards shared goals, and creating impetus through the imposition of a fixed timescale.

Artists described how they were freed up to think creatively about their projects because they were expected to be ambitious and provide high quality, and the budgets were there to support this. A programme manager described how she could 'be strict about quality' because the work was intended for an international showcase.

The Cultural Olympiad created a high profile platform for disability arts, especially the Paralympics Opening Ceremony. There was more varied coverage of disabled people and disability issues in the national media. Certainly, less established artists had seen a benefit in terms of their work being reviewed and promoted more than before. However, two programming partners felt that media coverage of their events was much less

than they had anticipated. For instance, the value of Dadafest's media coverage in Liverpool was around a third of its level in 2010. There was a sense of frustration that cultural programmes were unable to attract coverage because they were in competition with the Games for media attention.

Legacy

Most interviewees felt that it was too early to state with any certainty what the impact of the Cultural Olympiad would be for deaf and disabled artists.

Individual artists and project managers felt that there was a benefit to them from their participation, in terms of improved skills, having new and high quality work on their portfolios, and the extension of their professional networks. In some cases, the Cultural Olympiad had already led to further opportunities, or at least to interesting discussions about the future. *Accentuate* was looking at a range of options for continuing its most successful activities, while a range of the international projects from *Unlimited* are being confirmed to continue in the lead-up to the Rio 2016 Games

There was also specific reference to the potential of international work to continue, especially partnerships with Brazil in the

lead-in to 2016. For example following the development of a partnership with a samba school for people with disabilities in Rio for the Blue Touch Paper Carnival project, the New Carnival Company will be continuing to work with them on a project for 2016. British Council are leading on the arrangement of international tours for many of the Unlimited commissions in 2013, including the *Lapa Londres Festival*, which will showcase the work of UK deaf and disabled artists in Rio.

However, several interviewees acknowledged concern that without funding to continue to build on the successes of the Cultural Olympiad, and investment in a regional infrastructure to support disability arts, there would not be a legacy from these programmes. Since the interviews were completed, ACE have made a commitment to continuing funding to build on the success of the *Unlimited* commissions.

The *Unlimited* programme

***Unlimited* was a series of 29 commissions celebrating arts, culture and sport by deaf and disabled people, the largest ever celebration of arts and disability culture in the UK. Artists were invited to submit applications to create 'high quality ambitious work by deaf and disabled artists that can be experienced**

by a broad range of audiences in a wide range of spaces, to help celebrate the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Artists were encouraged to 'push past their personal best alongside Paralympic athletes, by creating work which opens doors, changes minds, and inspires new collaborations.

The objectives of the *Unlimited* programme were to:

- Stage a festival celebrating disability arts and culture
- Increase the participation of disabled people in the arts and cultural sector and creative industries as artists, audiences, participants and spectators
- Promote high quality work by disabled people nationally and internationally
- Increase the number of disabled people employed in the cultural sector as artists and practitioners
- To continue to promote disability equality, the social model, rights and inclusion
- To develop innovation and new ways of working through partnerships.

The *Unlimited* commissions were targeted at deaf and disabled artists, both established and early in career, working at a very high standard. This was an opportunity for excellent artists to develop new work and

improve their profile, and the programme was not designed to be a skills development or training programme, although funding for capacity building was available. The applications for commissions were judged on their own merits by a panel of experts chaired by Ruth McKenzie, and including representatives of all UK Arts Councils, London 2012, British Council, disabled artists advisors and potential showcase partners. There was at least 50% representation of deaf and disabled people on the panels for each round of commissions. Submissions were considered on the basis of their creativity and quality, and open to artists working in any artform. Projects ranged from those which took a clear political stance on disability issues, to others which were not themed on the subject of disability in any way. The range of art forms encompassed within the *Unlimited* programme included theatre, dance, visual arts, film and comedy. Methodologies chosen by the artists to develop the work were equally diverse, with some choosing to work with creative collaborators or to open up the process to participants, while others worked alone.

Evaluation Methodology

This case study paper contains an overview of the impacts of the *Unlimited* programme on

commissioned artists and the wider disability arts sector, and an exploration of some of the challenges and issues involved in the delivery of such an ambitious and complex programme. The paper also explores the programme's positioning in relation to the Cultural Olympiad and the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the potential legacy of *Unlimited*. The paper includes case studies of eight commissioned projects.

The findings are based on:

- Interviews with programme managers at LOCOG and Shape
- Interviews with eight artists featured in individual case studies
- Interviews with staff at host venues, and project producers
- Review of background documentation related to the project, including final evaluation reports submitted by all commissioned artists, and monthly progress reports and funding applications for case study projects.

Programme Description

The *Unlimited* programme was originally developed in 2008 with the first commissions beginning in 2010. The programme encompassed the following:

- ***Unlimited commissioned works*** – 29 commissioned original works by artists working across a wide range of media including visual arts, performance, music, film and comedy. There were two rounds of commissioning, and funding for development of the work followed by a second application for further funding to exhibit or present the work. ACE officers in the regions worked with their local networks to encourage artists to apply.
- ***Unlimited Talent*** – commissioned artists were invited to apply for up to £2000 for learning and professional development. They spent this in a range of ways, including mentoring, research visits and training.
- ***Producer Capacity Building Fund*** – producers working with commissioned artists were also invited to bid for up to £1,250 for training and development activity which would support them in producing the *Unlimited* commission. This was used in a variety of ways, including consultancy support to develop social marketing for *Unlimited* projects, and mentoring in negotiation and communication skills for producers of international projects.
- ***Unlimited International*** – five of the projects were developed in collaboration with disabled artists in Brazil and South Africa, with the support of the British Council, while other artists travelled overseas to research and develop their work. The British Council also arranged for 26 international delegates to see *Unlimited* work at the Southbank Centre, with the intention of developing international links which would benefit artists who wished to tour their work abroad.
- ***Shape project management support*** – Shape Arts, a development and training organisation working in disability arts, was commissioned to lead on the project management of a number of commissions on behalf of LOCOG and ACE.
- ***Unlimited at Southbank Centre*** – all of the commissions were presented at a ten-day festival at the Southbank Centre, London, scheduled to coincide with the opening of the Paralympic Games. This was seen as key to the programme, offering an opportunity to showcase the work to a mainstream audience and to attract attention from the national and international arts community and the media.

Context

As described in section 2 (Project Overview), like other Cultural Olympiad programmes, *Unlimited* commissions were not viewed by the disability arts community as politically neutral. Some interviewees described tensions around the Paralympic Games, and how the media portrays Paralympians in stereotypical ways which are not helpful to the wider community of disabled people. Others referenced the difficult climate

for disabled people due to benefits changes, cuts in social care provision, lack of access to employment, and cuts to disability arts organisations.

As a result, there was hope in the disability arts sector that these commissions would enable deaf and disabled people to tell their stories and enable debate and discussion of these issues on a high profile platform. One artist stated that the commissions 'needed to happen politically'. Another commented that given the current climate, she felt it was important to use the commission to 'make disability culture'. However other artists felt that the wide variety of artists, subject matter and media within the *Unlimited* programme may have challenged audience assumptions about deaf and disabled artists.

Impact on Artists

The *Unlimited* programme had a strongly positive impact on the participating artists. A number of themes emerged from the interviews and project reports relating to artist development.

Creativity and experimentation

The funding available through *Unlimited* commissions was considerably more than many artists had been used to, and this enabled them to be ambitious in their creative thinking. Artists

valued the opportunity to spend so much time on research, development and rehearsal, and to present work in progress to an audience as part of their development phase.

I have produced by far and away the best work of my entire career (Helen Petts)

This creative freedom and ambition manifested itself in a number of ways. Firstly, artists experimented in their own practice, working with new media or challenging themselves to do things differently. For example within the case study cohort, Paul Cummins learnt to cast bronze, Sophie Woolley wrote for children for the first time, and Rachel Gadsden developed her first international collaboration. For many artists, these creative experiments will have a lasting impact on their future work. Simon Allen describes the impact of *Unlimited* on his practice as a 'profound shift in what I want to achieve'.

Scaling up

It is clear that artists within the deaf and disabled community saw *Unlimited* as a huge opportunity to be much more ambitious about the scale and scope of their work, to show it on a high profile platform, and in some cases to reposition and rebrand themselves. Artists felt

that being part of a series of commissions which included very high profile and highly respected artists and performers alongside newly emerging talents had encouraged everyone to 'raise their game'.

This scaling up process was visible in the physical scale of the completed work. For example several artists were able to use larger casts of actors and dancers in their work or to incorporate more complex visuals (*Menage a Trois, Skewered Snails*). Paul Cummins committed himself to the design and making of six separate bespoke installations of ceramic flowers in his English Flower Garden project, when usually he would expect to deliver no more than two exhibitions annually.

As a result of this scaling up, 517 creatives were employed to work on *Unlimited* commissions, of which three-quarters were disabled.

Links between disabled artists and the wider arts sector

The projects enabled individual artists to develop their professional networks, and to form new relationships with arts companies and venues. They also offered opportunities for artists to create site-specific or touring work which was suitable for outdoor performances or could be staged outside traditional arts

venues. For example Jez Colbourne's *Irresistible* was designed for an outdoor space on Ilkley Moor, and has since been successfully performed in Mind the Gap's performance space and at St Helens Central Library.

Artistic collaboration

The commissions also offered opportunities for artists to work in collaboration with others on the staging and development of their work. In some cases these collaborators were more experienced and acted as advisors and mentors, supporting the creative development and presentation of work. In others, commissioned artists were able to create employment for freelance creative professionals including dancers, actors, costume and set designers and technicians.

International collaboration

A number of projects involved artists and companies in working internationally for the first time, and they described this experience as having a significant impact on their practice and on the quality of their work. All of the artists and companies who led international projects expressed an interest in maintaining the relationships they had developed and developing new international partnerships in the future.

Skills development, training and mentoring

For many of the commissioned artists, *Unlimited* represented their first opportunity to lead on the creative direction and production of a piece of work. As a result they had very much valued the opportunities provided via the *Unlimited* Talent and Producer Capacity Building funding streams. These were especially welcome because of the difficulty freelancers and those working in very small companies have in funding their own training, or identifying appropriate mentors. The mentoring support available had a strongly positive impact on the creative development of the projects, as it offered the opportunity for artists to identify their own mentors and specifically address their development needs as they related to the *Unlimited* commission. Six of the eight interviewed artists noted the improvement in their skills in financial and project management as a result of their *Unlimited* commission, and felt much more confident about taking on bigger projects in the future.

Accessibility and participation

The *Unlimited* commissions had provided funding and impetus for artists to experiment with building accessibility into their work in a way which enhanced

the experience of the whole audience. For example Sophie Woolley's play *Bee Detective* explored how to use choreography and movement, projected animation and captioning, alongside BSL interpretation, as a way of making her story clear to a young audience made up of children and families, whether or not they were deaf, disabled or had learning difficulties.

Other projects were developed as participatory projects. For example *Boomba Down The Tyne*, a carnival arts based project, offered participants with learning disabilities an opportunity to develop puppetry and dance skills. The Dean Rodney Singers project involved people from all over the world participating and creating content using social media to share and communicate. The concept for *In Water I'm Weightless* was based around the audience being an integral part of the work, not just spectators.

For artists, this experimentation has enhanced their skills and confidence in developing accessible work which engages and develops a dialogue with the audience, and this will impact on the presentation of their future projects.

Higher profile

There was some evidence that the *Unlimited* commissioned artists

took new steps to reach audiences and open up their development processes, communicating on dedicated project websites, Facebook pages and Twitter. This was an extension of their usual promotional activity on social media. However there was no clear consensus about the value of social media as a promotional tool for the *Unlimited* commissions.

Several artists, especially those who were early career, had benefited considerably from increased levels of media interest, compared to their previous work, driven both by the link between the projects and the Cultural Olympiad, and possibly by the fact that they were making work on a bigger scale. For example the striking visual imagery produced in Sue Austin's *Creating the Spectacle* was featured extensively in the national print media (Daily Mail, Independent, Guardian).

A commission for disabled artists

Artists referenced the positive benefits which came from the commissions being specifically for the deaf and disabled artists, which meant that the work could be structured around their needs. Training, for example in disability awareness and BSL, helped to develop communication across project teams.

An unexpected aspect of the project I really appreciated was not having to pretend to be able-bodied. It was fine to say I felt too ill to do something. It was fine to be in a meeting lying down on a couch. (Artist)

Concerns and negative impacts

While generally artists reported a highly positive experience of working on their *Unlimited* commissions, there were some issues and concerns raised about the impact of the programme. Firstly, the requirement both to make work on a bigger scale while experimenting creatively, on a high profile platform, within the timescales dictated by the Cultural Olympiad, was particularly stressful. Several artists experienced times during their development of the commissions when they felt they had taken on more than they could cope with. Some artists found they had to pace their work more carefully in order to avoid it taking a toll on their physical health. However as described above, artists also made reference to the benefits of working on a commission which was specific to disabled artists.

While the commissions were seen as a hugely beneficial opportunity to step up in the scale and complexity of their practice, there were some concerns expressed by early

career artists, in relation to the pressure to develop such high profile work with little previous experience, and for theatre projects in particular, about whether they had enough profile and reputation to be able to access the larger venues the work was designed for. Some artists expressed concern that they were being encouraged to make work which was too big and too expensive to be staged by the small theatres and festivals which were most likely to programme their work. As a result, they were uncertain about how to move their careers forward beyond the *Unlimited* commissions.

Finally, artists expressed frustration at the amount of development time which was taken up by administration. Providing reports to LOCOG, ACE and/or Shape, drawing down funding from the various funding streams within *Unlimited*, dealing with paperwork relating to Access to Work, and particularly the LOCOG approvals process for publicity materials, had a negative impact on the creative process.

Impacts on the sector

A high profile showcase for disability arts

Artists were convinced of the value of the *Unlimited* programme as a showcase for the

work of deaf and disabled artists, particularly the festival at the Southbank Centre. Most importantly, they felt that the programme presented very high quality work, and this work was presented as being valid in its own right, and not interesting because the artist who made it is disabled. There was some evidence that the *Unlimited* commissions had value not just because they showcased work to audiences, but also because they showcased work to the wider arts sector. Artists expressed the view that though it was too early to tell whether new opportunities would emerge from the *Unlimited* commissions, work had been seen by reviewers, producers, artistic and casting directors, and that this could improve their careers in the long term. For example, Kaite O'Reilly used her well established networks and contacts in the disability arts sector to introduce deaf and disabled performers to the casting director of a large mainstream theatre company.

Improved profile in local/national/international media

For most of the commissioned artists, their *Unlimited* commission did lead to positive media coverage. Some projects, including *In Water I'm Weightless*, *Boundless*, and *Unlimited Global Alchemy*, received extensive press coverage and the artists felt that

there had been a positive impact on their own profiles as a result.

Improved skills base

Unlimited has supported the development of individual artists' creative skills through training and mentoring. Several interviewees also referenced the wider benefits to the disabled arts sector resulting from artists and producers' development of production and project management skills.

Accessibility and audiences

The interviewees highlighted the progress made by venues in improving their communication with disabled audiences and the accessibility of events, exhibitions and performances. These impacts were varied, and across the *Unlimited* programme they included the following outcomes:

- Venues improved the quality of their marketing and communication of disability arts to both disabled and general audiences.
- Work reached non-traditional venues, and therefore wider audiences – for example work was shown at Alnwick Castle (*Bee Detective*) and the Houses of Parliament (*English Flower Garden*)
- Accessibility was creatively integrated into the work for the benefit of all members of the

audience, and the learning from this experimentation will be of value in future projects. In performance work, this often involved creative use of AV, whereas visual artists created tactile work and encouraged visitors to engage with it. Many *Unlimited* events incorporated touch tours, audio description and BSL interpretation.

- Many of the projects had participatory elements which enhanced access to the work for a wider audience, and involved disabled people as active creators. For *Boundless*, the artists mentored a dance company in their delivery of workshops for a school in South Africa. *Mad Gyms and Kitchens* incorporated workshops for young disabled people. However in other projects, education elements had to be scaled down, as a result of budget and timing difficulties.
- Some commissions were designed specifically for children (*Bee Detective*, *Macropolis*), and many others were family friendly, partly as a result of the efforts made to improve accessibility.
- Venues including the Southbank Centre improved their accessibility to disabled audiences in relation to signage, visitor welcome and facilities.
- There was lots of shared learning around how to improve approaches to web and print design in order to create accessible marketing materials.

Partnership working

The delivery of the *Unlimited* commissions was characterised by extensive partnership working between a range of individuals and organisations. All of the projects were the result of a network of partners taking on various roles in delivery. The wider *Unlimited* programme was also managed as a partnership between LOCOG, ACE and Shape Arts, who were commissioned to provide project management support to some artists.

Artists were required to work with arts organisations that could draw down and manage their funding. In many individual projects these partnerships worked very well and there was a mutual benefit in the arrangement, especially where the arts organisations were also involved in the development of the work, or where the arrangement was a starting point for the development of a mentoring relationship with the artist. In some projects however, there were inevitable tensions.

These partnerships enabled *Unlimited* to increase its impact as a programme.

International partnership development

Unlimited included five commissions which developed

art through collaborative working with international artists in Brazil and South Africa. Other artists made international research trips, including Jez Colbourne, who travelled to China. The Dean Rodney Singers project made extensive use of the internet to find performers from around the world who each contributed to the development of the final work.

A great deal of learning emerged from these projects in relation to the development of international disability focused arts projects. Most significantly, artists made reference to the powerful experience of working with disabled artists in countries where disability rights agendas are not prominent, and there has not been adoption of a social model of disability. There was a value for deaf and disabled people abroad in meeting and working with deaf and disabled British people who are working as professional artists and performers.

There was also a steep learning curve for artists and producers in dealing with challenges around communication and negotiations. On a practical level, *Boomba Down the Tyne's* producers found that they struggled to communicate with Brazil via Skype, and needed additional translator support during their visit. The Dean Rodney Singers project made extensive use of the

internet very successfully in running their global project – and people have been as interested in the digital practice as they were in the fact that the project was created by a learning disabled artist.

All of the international projects have led to relationships which both sides want to continue.

Challenges and issues for the disability arts sector

A number of issues and challenges did emerge for the disability arts sector as the projects developed. Most of these related to capacity within the sector, as this was the largest ever programme of disability arts events, happening alongside the Paralympic Opening and Closing Ceremonies and a number of other projects, including artists commissions for Stoke Mandeville Hospital and projects associated with the Paralympic Torch Relay.

Capacity

Interviewees highlighted a number of areas where there were capacity issues, specifically:

- High demand for experienced deaf and disabled performers, especially during summer 2012, which were exacerbated by mainstream casting agencies having limited awareness of deaf

and disabled performers. One artist described the casting process as ‘a rugby scrum’.

- BSL interpreters experienced enough to work with professional artists and to sign for an audience, with availability to participate in meetings, workshops and rehearsals.
- Fully accessible rehearsal spaces and accommodation.

Venues

Some artists found it difficult to identify suitable venues to show their work. This problem was a complex one, with a range of complicating factors depending on the project. Artists had been encouraged to scale up their work and be more ambitious, leading them to create work for big spaces with high production values. However when they sought to tour the work, they found either that it was not considered mainstream enough for the venues large enough to cope with the technical specification, or that it was too expensive to stage. This was frustrating for artists and venues alike. *Dadafest*, a well-established deaf and disabled arts festival based in Liverpool, entered into negotiations with many of the *Unlimited* artists about showing commissioned work, but was only able to secure a small number of the events for their festival. This was because of the

high costs of staging the work, and also because of timetabling issues.

Timetabling

Timetabling issues affected many of the commissioned artists in 2012. Several of the commissioned artists were involved as collaborators in other commissions, or in separate projects, some related to the Cultural Olympiad. In turn, their performers and technical support staff were also involved in other projects.

Dadafest moved their festival from its customary Autumn slot to August in order to capitalise on the increased focus on disability issues and the Cultural Olympiad in the run up to the Paralympic Opening Ceremony. However this led to scheduling clashes with the Southbank Centre's *Unlimited* programme, and did not have any benefits in terms of increased media coverage.

Artists had to make compromises in order to comply with LOCOG and ACE's timetable for the whole programme. For example, in the case of Claire Cunningham's *Menage a Trois* production, this resulted in her having to host a press night in Glasgow while the Edinburgh Fringe Festival was running, and

as a result it was very difficult to persuade journalists to attend.

Marketing to deaf and disabled audiences

A number of artists raised issues around the marketing of their work, particularly around reaching deaf and disabled audiences. Marketing was often the responsibility of venues which had little experience of marketing work via local networks of deaf and disabled people. PR companies hired to promote work often similarly had little experience of reaching deaf and disabled audiences, or targeting the disability press, and were reliant in some cases on contact lists provided to them by artists. Artists pointed out the difficulty of marketing touring work, as marketing relied on local networks and contacts in each location and was difficult to run centrally. Marketing was an area where artists felt they would have benefited from more centrally co-ordinated support.

Relationship with the broader Cultural Olympiad

Artists described several benefits which emerged from the project's position within the Cultural Olympiad, and the London 2012 Festival.

Firstly, they saw the Cultural Olympiad as a catalyst without which this scale of programming

by disabled artists would never have been commissioned. While some artists put forward projects they had already started to develop, all agreed that they would have taken much longer to develop and would have happened on a smaller scale where it not for the Cultural Olympiad.

Further, the siting of the projects within the Cultural Olympiad gave them a status and weight which they would not otherwise have had, which was particularly valuable for early career artists when approaching potential partners, especially in international projects. Their inclusion within the Cultural Olympiad necessitated ambitious and creative thinking as the projects would receive a lot of attention.

The creation of an *Unlimited* 'brand' and in particular the joint showcase for all of the commissions at the Southbank Centre was overwhelmingly seen as a very positive experience, and artists felt that the presentation of this series of works by deaf and disabled artists, within a major London venue, would not have happened without the impetus provided by the Games. The artists had gained a great deal from showing their work at the Southbank Centre, including opportunities to make contact with arts professionals, casting directors and venue managers,

and the chance to network and see each other's work. They had reached a new audience. They were very impressed by the Southbank Centre's management of the showcase, and by the effectiveness of their marketing campaign, which resulted in over 90% of tickets being sold.

For some artists, the inclusion of their projects within the Cultural Olympiad had led to increased coverage in the media for themselves and their projects, or the profiling of individual performers. However two artists felt that the level of coverage their work received was perhaps slightly less than they would expect, because of the amount of cultural and sports programming happening at the same time. They questioned whether the timing of the Southbank Centre showcase so closely with the Paralympic opening ceremony actually had a negative impact, as press interest in disability issues was focused on the Games.

Artists and producers also reported a series of difficulties in meeting LOCOG's requirements in relation to branding. The process of getting approval for marketing material was complex, time consuming and frustrating, and in some cases had created problems when artists missed venues' print deadlines. There was no central website which brought together information about the *Unlimited* commissions,

and some artists felt that the programme had become lost in the wider Cultural Olympiad, and might have benefited from more strategic support.

Being part of the Cultural Olympiad had a mixed effect on project management. Most artists valued the support they had received from LOCOG and Shape to develop and manage their commissions. While some found the reporting requirements to be an unnecessary burden, and possibly an indication that LOCOG 'did not trust artists' to be able to deliver, others felt that they helped them to keep on track. Shape staff, in particular, were praised for being accessible and easy to deal with, especially in supporting artists with Access to Work processes, although some artists felt that the team could have been more proactive in helping them to resolve issues quickly.

Many of the artists had received a lot of support and encouragement from their regional ACE officers, who had championed and facilitated their projects from the start of their application process through to their completion. Some artists felt that more could have been done by the partnership of ACE, LOCOG and Shape to broker opportunities to show their work, and artists found it difficult to respond to opportunities because of LOCOG 'wanting to retain

control', particularly over the timing of previews.

Legacy

For artists

Artists described *Unlimited* as having left a significant legacy in terms of their own improved skills, confidence and connections to other artists and organisations. Many were actively seeking opportunities to further develop and show their commissioned work, for example looking at international touring (for example to Brazil, Hong Kong and Turkey), or building the work into their company's repertoire. Each of the case studied artists had either moved on to delivery of another project, or had work in the pipeline which they were waiting to start. Two were working towards postgraduate qualifications, and two were working on international residencies.

All of the artists interviewed felt that *Unlimited* would have a positive longer term impact on their profile and career, although at the time of the interviews, most could not specifically point to any new opportunities which had emerged directly from the *Unlimited* programme. They felt this was something which would emerge over time and the impact of *Unlimited* on their own career development was not quantifiable at this stage.

For early career artists, there was a challenge in managing the next phase of their career. *Unlimited* had provided them with an opportunity to scale up their work and show it on high profile national stages. However they were concerned that the funding would not be available to support them to continue to work in this way.

For the arts sector

The sector has built its capacity, in that there is now a pool of disabled artists and performers who have further developed their skills, and have shown that they can create high quality work for mainstream venues and attract a large audience. Producers have had access to training and capacity building, and have hands-on experience of producing disability culture, which they could use to promote this work more widely. There is significantly increased knowledge in relation to disability arts specific international partnership working. Participating venues have developed their knowledge and understanding of disability arts and disabled audiences, for example around enhancing the accessibility of venues, and communicating more effectively. There is also a body of work which could be toured or restaged and has the potential to reach a larger audience. There is a strong feeling of confidence and pride in the way deaf and

disabled artists showcased their work on a national platform to critical acclaim.

However several interviewees identified the need for sustained investment if *Unlimited* is not to be a one-off event. They pointed out that *Unlimited* funding went to 29 artists, a very small proportion of the deaf and disabled artists making work in the UK. They identified a need for future funding streams to offer opportunities to emerging disabled artists, and to support the regional infrastructure which enables them to build their careers to the point where they can apply for such opportunities. They also pointed out the high cost of staging work at a time when the sector as a whole is facing extensive funding cuts.

Unlimited commissions: Selected Case Study Analysis

Unlimited Global Alchemy

Artist: Rachel Gadsden

Rachel Gadsden is a contemporary visual artist whose previous work includes residencies at Hampton Court Palace and the UK Parliament. Her work crosses the mainstream and disability arts sectors. *Unlimited Global Alchemy* was a collaboration

between Rachel, working with producers Arts Admin, and members of the Bambanani Group, an artist/activist group for people living with HIV/AIDS in Capetown, South Africa. The resulting work, including paintings, short films and live performance, explores what it means to experience a disabling illness and fight for life, opening up debate around the role of the arts in healthcare, and the global challenge of HIV, as well as the disability and human rights agendas. *Unlimited Global Alchemy* was Rachel's first international project, and first experience of collaborating with an artist based overseas. The commission has encouraged her to continue to make and present work internationally, and to address human rights issues through her practice. It has also provided members of the Bambanani Group with opportunities including the chance to travel and present their work in the UK, and to develop their practice through paid work.

Unlimited Global Alchemy came about when Rachel Gadsden encountered a bodymap at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, made by the South African artist and activist Nondumiso Hlwele. She felt a powerful sense of connection to the work, and tracked down the artist to find out more. Nondumiso was one of a group in Capetown who had had early

access to anti retro viral medication to treat HIV, and as a result had been kept alive with medical intervention for a long time. Rachel found parallels with her own experiences of disability and reliance on medication to stay alive.

Nondumiso is a member of the Bambanani Group, which works to support people living with HIV through creative activities, for example making bodymaps and memory boxes. Rachel proposed to work with the group through a six week residency in Kayelitsha Township, Capetown, to create work which could be exhibited in South Africa and in the UK. The group has found it difficult in the past to maintain regular activities, and not all of the members would consider themselves to be practising artists. Rachel took on a workshop leader role in the project and sought to build their confidence and capacity as a group.

The administration of the project was onerous and time-consuming, given the amount of international travel and communication required. This was a logistically complex project, with a range of different elements all coming together within a tight timeframe. In addition, the process of building relationships and negotiating the project with the Bambanani Group was very challenging. Artistic practice is prioritised

very differently within communities in South Africa, and the education system and infrastructure which supports artists in the UK is not in place. Arts for health practice is still emerging in South Africa, and the disability agenda, especially as it relates to HIV/AIDS, sits within a very different historical and social context in comparison to the UK, as the social model has been more recently embedded in legislation in South Africa. Given the levels of stigma surrounding people with HIV/AIDS, the subject matter of the work was inevitably highly sensitive, at a personal and political level.

The approach taken to these various challenges was to use *Unlimited* development funds to support the staff and participants to work through the process of negotiating the project. Rachel used *Unlimited* Talent funding to access mentoring from Gill Lloyd, who has extensive experience of developing international arts projects, and of South Africa in particular. Two Arts Admin staff members used a Producer Capacity Building grant to commission bespoke training in mediation, brokering and conflict resolution. The Bambanani artists were paid fees for their contribution to the project, and agreements about the creative leadership of the project and crediting of the work were very carefully negotiated at the start,

with the support of Jean September at the British Council. Elements of the work were exhibited in several places:

- A two-month exhibition at Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge
- Presentation of the paintings, films and performance at the Southbank Centre, London
- Presentation of the project at dedicated disability arts festivals such as *Freedom to Create*, Capetown and at *Dadafest*, Liverpool
- Creation of an accompanying website and exhibition catalogue.

The project could not have created these outcomes without *Unlimited* funding. Although Rachel Gadsden was determined to collaborate with Nondumiso Hlwele, it would have been difficult to find enough funding to pay fees to the South African artists, and this was vital to the group dynamic and the success of the residencies. A smaller scale project may have been possible. However participation in the Cultural Olympiad enabled *Unlimited Global Alchemy* to reach a much wider audience, and enabled the Bambanani Group to participate in a much larger scale project than would otherwise have been possible for them.

Rachel is now exploring opportunities to return to South Africa, possibly to take part in a museum based residency and to travel with the Bambanani Group to the Eastern Cape. In the meantime, she has been invited by the British Council to produce a major solo exhibition in Qatar as part of the UK – Qatar Year of Culture 2013. The ‘*extraordinary experience*’ of delivering this commission as both an artist and producer, has brought her work to a global audience, strengthened her skills in arts management, and empowered her to think differently about her role as a disabled artist.

In Water I'm Weightless

Artist: Kaite O'Reilly

***In Water I'm Weightless* is a series of monologues, written by Kaite O'Reilly, which were inspired by the imagination, experiences and attitudes of disabled people across the UK. *Unlimited* enabled Kaite to create work which showcased some of the country's best actors from the disabled community, on a national stage. The production was highly praised by critics, and also provided rare development opportunities for a number of disabled actors, through a series of workshops and an extensive casting process, which was efficiently project-managed in order to ensure that**

performers could also make the most of opportunities to take part in other activities linked to the Cultural Olympiad.

Kaite O'Reilly is an established writer and dramaturge, whose work has been performed internationally. Some, but not all, of her work directly addresses what it is like to live with the ‘atypical body’, and she has advocated for disabled actors over many years, challenging the common practice of ‘cripping up’, in which able bodied actors play disabled characters.

The *Unlimited* commission presented Kaite with an opportunity to further develop *The D Monologues*, a collection of writing she had started as a result of a Creative Wales Major Award. This grant had provided Kaite with the opportunity to research and experiment with the monologue form for the first time, and to see and research relevant international work. Kaite received two *Unlimited* commissions. The first enabled her to spend time developing *The D Monologues* through a further process of research, writing, and sharing through readings and workshops with disability arts groups around the UK. The second commission provided some of the funding required for National Theatre Wales to stage the work as a fully developed, choreographed and designed

production, retitled *In Water I'm Weightless*, firstly at the Millennium Centre in Cardiff, and later at the Southbank Centre in London.

Kaite was clear that as an established and successful artist with a national and international profile, she would use this commission to engage with the disabled community and present disability culture on a national platform.

The point of the original grant application was that I would go around the country talking to people, create monologues, and then at a grassroots level, share the work with my community, disabled people....I saw it as an opportunity for me and a community that I was going to be part of with an ensemble company, making disability culture...on a national platform.

The project was well structured in order to maximise development opportunities for deaf and disabled actors. There have been deaf and disabled actors cast in productions in national theatre companies, but not all disabled casts performing on these high profile stages. After

the casting director initially struggled to pull together a list of appropriate actors to approach, Kaite used her own network and contacts to put together a much more extensive list. Some of them have since been put forward for other roles as a result of this process.

The casting process was designed as a development opportunity for actors, who were auditioned through participation in workshops in Cardiff and London, and sought to address the lack of experience of many disabled performers in auditioning for large mainstream theatre companies. The casting process took place a year ahead of rehearsals, with dates confirmed well in advance. This has enabled actors to schedule other work around their commitments to *In Water I'm Weightless*, especially in the opening and closing ceremonies for the Paralympic Games.

The ensemble cast consisted of young actors working alongside highly experienced performers, something which Kaite feels offered them a unique opportunity to learn and improve:

'if you're going to perform on a national stage with David Toole, you're going to raise your game'.

Creating the Spectacle

Artist: Sue Austin

***Creating the Spectacle* was developed by artist Sue Austin. She creates art which focuses on the wheelchair as an empowering and enabling, rather than restrictive, object. Working with a technical and support team headed by co-producer Trish Wheatley, with additional production mentoring provided through *Unlimited Talent and Producer Capacity* building funds, Austin created films and live performances in which she 'swam' in the world's first self-propelled underwater wheelchair. The project has had a significant impact in two ways, attracting extensive media coverage, and developing Austin's understanding of how to produce and stage live events. The profile of this project has been very high, leading to an exciting range of new opportunities for the artist.**

Sue Austin is a multimedia, performance and installation artist, whose work focuses on the wheelchair as a metaphor to raise questions about the value of diversity in society. She uses her work to explore the power of self-representation and self-narration in challenging society's creation of the disabled as 'other'. Working with Trish Wheatley, Sue has developed Freewheeling, an initiative which aims to develop artistic ideas and

concepts and promote academic research which aims to reposition disability arts and the status of disabled artists. *Creating the Spectacle* is Freewheeling's first major project.

Creating the Spectacle was made up of two main elements: films and live performance. Sue filmed two pieces underwater in the Red Sea, working with director of photography Norman Lomax alongside a wider team who provided creative and technical support for the dives. One of these films was a separate commission from LOCOG in which Sue took the Paralympic Torch under the sea. The second element of the project was live performances, the first of which took place in Fleet Harbour, close to the Olympic and Paralympic sailing venue.

Prior to the *Unlimited* commission, Sue had accessed funding from ACE's Impact scheme to develop a prototype underwater wheelchair, with the intention of applying for *Unlimited* funding to develop the project further. Without this seed funding, there would not have been sufficient development time for the project within the timetable necessitated by the Cultural Olympiad. The Impact funding also helped to confirm that the project was viable, and built Sue's confidence in her ability to deliver it.

This was a huge technical challenge, requiring much technical innovation in the development of the wheelchair, the underwater filming and the staging of the live events. Funding from *Unlimited* enabled Sue to fund the technical team required to assist her with the project, including dive specialists, camera crew, and an event production team. The team running *Maritime Mix*, the Cultural Olympiad programme in Dorset and the Jurassic Coast, provided logistical support, particularly around the management and risk assessment of large scale public events. The project benefited considerably from the mentoring Sue was able to access through *Unlimited Talent*: time from Adam Benjamin at Candoco Dance Theatre to support the development of the live performances, focusing on choreography and the quality of the audience experience, and from Norman Lomax, who supported the filming and editing process.

‘The project would have been a fraction of what it was without the production mentoring. I wouldn’t have known about things like tech rehearsals. Adam was passing on skills, networks and encouragement, and he understood the implications of the work.’

Creating the Spectacle captured the imagination of the mainstream

media, and the images and films which were made during the project have been circulated widely. The project was featured on BBC News, ITV News and Channel 4 News, and the Independent ran a portfolio feature which used a number of Norman Lomax’s images. The project was also covered in the Daily Mail. Images from the project were featured prominently in the promotional literature of the London 2012 Festival and have also become iconic within broader Olympic and Paralympic Games documentation. As a result, there has been widespread international interest in Sue Austin’s work. Her film has had over 400,000 hits on You Tube, she has given a talk at the TED Women conference which has had a further 218,000 online hits, and is now exploring a range of further options for the development of *Creating the Spectacle*, including international collaborations and speaking engagements, and further performances and exhibitions in the South West.

Ménage a Trois

Artist: Claire Cunningham

Claire Cunningham is a choreographer and performer. She uses crutches, and her work is informed by this experience. *Ménage a Trois* is a piece of dance theatre, exploring Claire’s

relationship with her crutches, and the possibility of finding love 'when there are already three of you in the relationship'. *Unlimited* enabled Claire to make a huge creative leap, developing a technologically ambitious show which was designed to be staged in a large venue. There were significant benefits to the commission: being able to collaborate with a large team, realise ambitions to showcase work on a bigger stage, and develop further her relationship with project partner National Theatre of Scotland.

Claire Cunningham is an emerging artist, with a growing reputation for creating ground-breaking contemporary dance. She has previously toured an acclaimed solo show, *ME (Mobile/Evolution)*, for which she won a Herald Angel Award at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. She is part of National Theatre of Scotland's Auteur Development Programme.

Claire was involved in two *Unlimited* commissions. She was the commissioned artist on *Menage a Trois*, leading the creative team in partnership with National Theatre of Scotland, who produced the work, managing finance, contracting and supporting the process of applying for funding. Claire was also one of two choreographers commissioned by Candoco Dance Theatre to create '12', a new work

performed by twelve international dancers.

Being involved in two high profile projects in 2012 has had a significant impact on Claire's career development. She has had access to ongoing mentoring through collaboration with Gail Sneddon, who was her mentor and assistant director on '12' and her co-collaborator on *Menage a Trois*.

'Gail has widened my understanding, knowledge and perceptions of performance and prompted me to question my intentions at every turn – in a way that I feel has led to a greater integrity, standard and potential not only in this work but in all work that I make in the future.'

Unlimited funding enabled Claire to work with assistant director Janice Parker, who also managed much of the day to day administration and reporting requirements for the project.

The commission offered considerable creative freedom, offering enough funding for a full technical development period. It provided Claire and Gail with the means to experiment creatively with video and sound design, as they were able to access resources at National Theatre of Scotland

and the necessary funding and support was available from the start of the research process. Claire was able to develop her skills in leading a creative team, exploring how to move on from working as a solo artist to having a team involved in the realisation of her ideas, and becoming more comfortable with sharing creative control.

The development of *Menage a Trois* was funded by *Unlimited*, and the costs of presenting the work in 2012 were provided through a match funding arrangement between Creative Scotland and *Unlimited*. This meant that Claire was committed to staging the show in a number of Scottish cities, something that became problematic because of timetabling clashes with both the Paralympics, the *Unlimited* Festival at South Bank and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The show was eventually staged in London, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness and Belfast, with a very positive audience response, although the scheduling clashes did have a negative impact on press coverage.

Claire is confident that the reputation and profile of the *Unlimited* commissions and the receiving venues where *Menage a Trois* was staged could potentially lead to new opportunities, and she is currently following up a number of approaches from other companies, as well as exploring

how to progress her relationship with National Theatre of Scotland.

Macropolis

Artist: Joel Simon

***Macropolis* is an animated short film for children which tells the story of a toy cat and dog, rejected from the factory as defective toys, who journey into the city and eventually find acceptance and a home. It was made by Joel Simon, Creative Director of Flickerpix Animation Studios in Belfast. The making of the film enabled Joel to experiment with a range of new animation techniques, offering a rare opportunity to have full creative control over a project. In addition mentoring provided through *Unlimited* enabled Joel to build skills in social marketing and push the film out to the widest possible audience. The project has demonstrated the value of offering arts commissioning opportunities to practitioners working in the creative industries.**

Joel Simon is the Creative Director of Flickerpix Animation Studios, a small commercial film production company based in Belfast. Flickerpix make animations for a diverse range of clients including CBBC. The *Unlimited* commission represented a significant opportunity for Joel, as it is rare

for a film-maker working in a commercial studio to have full creative control of a project, or to find the time and resources to fund creative experiments. However, working on *Macropolis* allowed Joel and his team the time and space to develop new animation techniques, and to develop in-house skills in character design and modelling which would usually be outsourced.

Macropolis was devised in response to the opportunity to apply for an *Unlimited* commission. Joel was passionate about the potential of the film to reach a broad family audience with a positive message about disabled people. The film was written for children and aimed to be accessible in content while offering the highest quality in writing, animation and production.

The funding available enabled Joel to experiment creatively with new approaches to animation – the film blended stop frame animation with time lapse photography. The project also filmed the stop frame sequences outdoors at busy locations around Belfast, allowing members of the public to see the process. Joel describes this process of experimentation as ‘freeing because there was no client...it’s very unusual to get to do a project exactly the way you want to do it’.

Macropolis was the only *Unlimited* commission awarded to an artist working within a commercial company. All of the financial structures necessary to manage the project and contract freelance practitioners were available within Flickerpix, and the company added a significant in-kind contribution to the project, particularly in providing marketing and PR support to the film. The marketing of the project was also boosted by training in the use of social media to maximise the reach of the films, funded via *Unlimited* Talent. This mentoring resulted in the development of a distinctive online presence for the film, including a website and blog, as well as using Facebook and Twitter to encourage people to share content and information about the project.

The film has had a positive response across both the disability arts sectors and in the mainstream film community. It was premiered at the BBC Big Screen in Belfast, and was the subject of an exhibition at W5, Belfast’s interactive science and discovery centre, which featured storyboards and models alongside repeated daily screenings. In addition, *Macropolis* was shown before every feature length film at Queen’s Film Theatre in Belfast during their Animation Week, with an accompanying programme of animation workshops and artist Q and A

sessions. The film was screened as part of *Dadafest* in Liverpool, and was projected onto the external wall of the Royal Festival Hall during the *Unlimited* showcase at the South Bank. It is estimated that the film has so far been seen by around 10,000 people, and it will now go on to further screenings at a number of international film festivals.

In February 2013 *Macropolis* won the Irish Film and Television Award for best animated film.

While the commission has not directly led to any further opportunities for Joel or Flickerpix, this innovative film is now part of the company's filmography and portfolio, with considerable potential to attract new work and clients.

Irresistible

Artist: Jez Colborne

Musician and performer Jez Colbourne is fascinated by the sound of warning sirens. Working with theatre company Mind the Gap in Bradford, Jez created a theatrical production, at the heart of which was nine new songs played on traditional and non-traditional instruments. The piece was designed for outdoor performance at the Cow and Calf rock formation on Ilkley Moor, and was previewed there in 2011, as well as being performed in Manchester,

Bradford and London in 2012. The commission enabled Jez to make a leap forward in the quality of his work, by working closely with mentors - artists he respected and admired. This was his first experience of developing a project from an original idea through to a fully staged performance.

Jez Colborne is an actor, musician and performer. He has worked closely with Mind the Gap for a number of years. Jez has been involved in a number of Mind the Gap productions. During the development of the *Unlimited* commission he played the role of George in *Of Mice and Men*. Mind the Gap make and tour professional theatre with people with learning disabilities.

Irresistible was funded through two separate rounds of *Unlimited* commissioning, with the second providing funds to extend the original commission with three new songs. Mind the Gap were also able to draw down funds from the *Unlimited* Talent and Producer Capacity Building Funds, to support mentoring, both for Jez and for their own project managers.

Irresistible offered Jez the opportunity to change direction in his career, focusing on composing and directing, in addition to performance. Working with Mind the Gap, Jez recruited mentors, lyricist Mike Kenny and musician Si McGrath.

The development time he spent with Si and Mike encouraged him to write more complex and emotionally rich lyrics, and to push himself musically and incorporate new sounds into his work. Jez was also able to draw on the support of actress Jo Anne Haines, and musician Billy Hickling from Stomp, who helped him with ideas about the direction and staging of the work. As a result of this mentoring Jez says that:

I learnt not to be satisfied with the first thing I write. As an artist you have to push on through, think does this make sense?

In 2011, Jez and a support worker travelled to Beijing to research music, see performances including traditional opera, and to meet and make music with people from a range of different arts organisations. The trip was funded by a development grant from the British Council's *Connections Through Culture* programme, which supports collaboration between British and international artists and arts organisations. The experience had a direct impact on the development of *Irresistible*, providing Jez with rich inspiration.

For Mind the Gap, *Irresistible* was a huge administrative and technical challenge, bigger and

more complex than anything the company had been involved in before, which enabled them to develop and test their skills in project management. Twenty learning disabled performers from Mind the Gap's acting company and Making Theatre teams were involved, and the production was staged in larger venues than they were used to. The Ilkley Moor performances had to be cancelled in 2012 due to very poor weather, but contingency arrangements were mobilised and an alternative venue set up at very short notice. In order to support the team, Mind the Gap drew down funding from the Producer Capacity Building Fund to develop relationships with marketing and production staff at the Southbank Centre. This helped them to develop complementary audience strategies for *Irresistible*, and to develop their own project management skills. While the opportunities for mentoring and shadowing the Southbank team were reduced because of staff changes there, the experience did enable the Mind the Gap team to go into the London dates with confidence, and has encouraged them to be more ambitious in their planning of future productions.

Jez and Mind the Gap are keen to see *Irresistible* develop. They will be performing at three festivals in Switzerland in June 2013, on the invitation of a festival producer

who saw *Irresistible* at the Southbank, and are currently in discussions with potential partner organisations across Europe and in Australia.

Bee Detective

Artist: Tin Bath Theatre Company
(writer: Sophie Woolley)

***Bee Detective*, from London based theatre company Tin Bath, was one of the very few commissions for children in the *Unlimited* programme, and a highly ambitious undertaking, both creatively and technically. This was Tin Bath's first experience of creating work for children, their first toured production, and the first play they had delivered outside traditional theatre spaces. The company has emerged from the project with greatly enhanced skills and knowledge of the practicalities of touring to festivals and creating and marketing work for disabled and family audiences, a higher profile, and increased confidence. For audiences, the show provided an accessible and very high quality theatre experience which was accessible to families which include members with hearing impairment, something which is rarely on offer, especially outside central London.**

Tin Bath Theatre Company is a relatively new company based in

London, founded by writer Sophie Woolley and director Gemma Fairlie, who worked on this project with freelance producer Michelle Owoo. Tin Bath creates accessible theatre experiences, in which performances are imaginatively captioned through a mix of text, animation and graphics, adding a rich layer of content for the whole of the audience. *Bee Detective* used projected animation and graphics as well as signing and choreography to enhance the clarity of the story for the whole audience, and created a multi-sensory environment with a special 'buzzing' floor. The play, designed to take place outside in a marquee, was performed in Brighton, Cardiff and at Alnwick Castle as well as the Southbank Centre.

The *Unlimited* commission enabled Sophie to write for children for the first time. This created a steep learning curve, as Sophie experimented with how to pitch the script so that it was age appropriate, the jokes were accessible, the science was accurate and the scary bits hit the right note, while the production and marketing team developed the contacts and approaches which would attract the right audience for the show at each touring location – deaf and hearing children aged around six and above. Marketing the show proved to be a significant challenge, requiring a very proactive approach from both Tin

Bath and the host venues. The team found that it was much easier to attract schools than to reach individual families, and term time performances were easier to sell.

The creative team included deaf and hearing members, and *Unlimited* funding supported the production through provision of BSL and deaf awareness training where appropriate. This enabled Sophie to build her skills in signing on stage, something she hopes will have a positive long term impact on her versatility as an actress, and strengthened producer Michelle Owoo's confidence in communicating with the rest of the team. *Unlimited* Talent and Producer Capacity Building Fund grants were also used to provide Sophie and Michelle with mentors, helping them to work through the technical issues involved in touring such a challenging production, and ensure that the production was right for its target audience. Sophie and Michelle also attended a marketing seminar led by the disability specialist Graeae Theatre Company, which was of value in developing a marketing plan.

This project would not have happened without the funding and additional support provided by the *Unlimited* commission. The production costs, largely as a result of the technical requirements and expenses associated with moving, setting

up and providing overnight security for the marquee, would have been prohibitive without additional funding of some kind.

We were able to experiment in genre, scale and location in a way that would not have been possible a year ago' (Sophie Woolley)

Being part of *Unlimited* has proved to be a career high point for the artists involved, and they have strong confidence that this will create momentum in their careers, and those of other disabled artists:

Being part of the *Unlimited* Festival at the Southbank... was an incredibly proud moment for us as a company. We were surrounded by deaf and disabled artists of the highest calibre, and it was very exciting to be a part of that...The *Unlimited* commissions have proved that deaf and disabled led work can be quality, imaginative and mainstream and that audiences are not put off by access requirements but embrace it within the fabric of the piece as an artistic means of communication. (Sophie Woolley)

The English Flower Garden

Artist: Paul Cummins

Paul Cummins is a ceramicist. He graduated in 2009, and has since focused on developing his practice based in the East Midlands. For *English Flower Garden*, Paul created six bespoke installations of flowers, made up of many thousands of handmade ceramic blooms, which were shown at historic English locations. Each was designed to evoke aspects of the history of the place where it was exhibited. The project drew on the English love of gardens, the 'meanings' of flowers, and the international origins of many garden flowers. The project sought to explore the relationship between traditional English craft methods and fine art. It was a hugely ambitious physical and technical challenge, and the additional support available through the *Unlimited* programme has enabled Paul to test his capabilities to the limit and could potentially lead his work in new directions.

The English Flower Garden was developed in response to the opportunity to apply for an *Unlimited* commission. The project involved the creation of bespoke site-specific installations made of thousands of ceramic flowers, exhibited at six famous English locations: the Houses of Parliament, Chiswick House Gardens, Althorp, The Secret Gardens of Sandwich, Castle

Howard, and Blenheim Palace. Following the exhibition of these works during the summer of 2012, elements of the work were shown at the Southbank Centre alongside the other *Unlimited* commissions. Given the high numbers of tourists visiting these locations in the summertime, the audience for the commission was very high, and is estimated at over 211,000 people over the course of summer 2012. It is clear that the venues were able to take part in the project because they were funded through this commissioning process, and *English Flower Garden* could not have been developed on this scale, if at all, without the Cultural Olympiad.

The English Flower Garden commission represented a huge leap for Paul as the scale of the work was much greater than anything he had attempted before.

'Effectively the project was eight major exhibitions in one year. Usually I would do one or two' Paul Cummins

The nature of the commission meant that negotiations with the various venues about the design, choice of flowers and the underlying themes of the work were sometimes contentious and required careful diplomacy. For example, the Houses of Parliament required that the

colours used in their installation could not be interpreted as party political statements, and the design had to be scrutinised by committee.

The administrative and management elements of the project were complex and difficult. Paul experiences a rare form of dyslexia, and does not communicate by writing. This made communication with all of the various stakeholders in this project particularly challenging, and he worked with Filomena Rodriguez, an artist and freelance producer who mentored him through the process and managed the process of reporting to funders. A publicist also supported the project and dealt with the onerous task of copyediting the information panels and other signage for the venues, and signing off text with the multiple stakeholders.

The additional support offered through the *Unlimited* programme was of great benefit to Paul, who was able to access training in bronze casting, which he experimented with in these commissions, and can use in the future to make work on a greater scale. The Producer Capacity Building Fund was also accessed by Filomena Rodriguez, who used it for training in social media communications and web development while working on the administration of the commission.

The project has increased Paul's confidence in planning and managing larger projects, including financial management. He is seeking to take on larger scale commissions, and is considering how to use the knowledge and skills he has developed through the delivery of *English Flower Garden* to create large scale works of public art. As he notes,

[the making of the pieces was time-consuming and physically demanding], testing the limits of what I can physically do myself. With this project I took it up to the next level. Now I'm expected to take it up a level again, which means public sculpture, which is a lot more expensive.

Paul has made some new contacts and feels that the commission has made an impact on his own profile, and will in the longer term support the growth of his artistic practice. He indicates,

A lot more people know who I am around the world.

In the short term, Paul is considering a part time, self-funded PhD course, exploring options for the future display of the *English Flower Garden* ceramics.

Accentuate **Cultural Olympiad Regional Programme for the South East**

***Accentuate* was the South East's regional programme for the Cultural Olympiad, attracting 21,084 participants and an audience of over half a million people. The programme aimed to create a cultural shift in the way society views disability, and brought together a wide ranging strategic partnership to explore how to improve accessibility for deaf and disabled people across arts, sport, heritage and education. deaf and disabled people participated in the programme at every level, advising on the strategic development of *Accentuate*, working as advocates for disabled people in individual projects, participating in events and workshops, and contributing to projects as commissioned artists, employees and volunteers. The programme has considerably improved organisations' awareness of disability issues, and improved connections between deaf and disabled people and arts, sport and heritage services.**

Accentuate was the South East region's Cultural Olympiad programme, running from 2009 onwards. Agencies in the South East wanted to work on a unified theme, and chose to focus on

disability, inspired by the local Stoke Mandeville Hospital, which has such significance as the birthplace of the Paralympic movement. This was viewed as a unique opportunity to generate lasting change. The vision for *Accentuate* was 'to create a cultural shift in the way society views disability'. In order to achieve this, the partnership which emerged across the region encompassed a wide range of organisations, across the arts, heritage, sport, tourism and education sectors.

Accentuate was hosted by Screen South, who worked with English Heritage, MLA, ACE South East, Tourism South East and Sport England, alongside many other regional and local delivery partners including arts organisations, sports clubs, schools, museums and heritage venues, and health and social care providers. They delivered 15 strategic projects, many of which involved a number of smaller projects, commissions and activities¹. *Accentuate* used £1.9 million from Legacy Trust to lever £9.4 million in total funding over the course of the programme.

Accentuate aimed to place deaf and disabled people at the heart of the process, and built in

¹ *Accentuate* was evaluated in August 2012 by Janice Needham, and this case study draws extensively on her research findings.

disabled representation in each project, as well as within the management structure. The Our View group was a group of disabled people from a variety of disciplines, recruited to ensure that the priorities, views and needs of deaf and disabled people were considered at a strategic level in the management of the project, and they acted as an advisory group to the partnership. In addition, disabled people were recruited as representatives to support the development of individual projects and advise on access and other issues which may affect participants with disabilities. Funding of £1000 was available from *Accentuate* to support this, but many partners chose to supplement this funding and created part time project development roles for Our View representatives.

Accentuate created 356 job opportunities (defined as a contract over 12 months duration), of which 68 went to disabled people. Over half of the shorter term contracts created through *Accentuate* programming were given to disabled applicants (472 out of 879 employment opportunities). In addition, 270 disabled creative, working across a wide variety of artforms, participated in regional and national showcases as a result of *Accentuate's* programmes. These included an event in Parliament and commissions to celebrate the

Paralympic Torch Relay. Around 15% of volunteers across the *Accentuate* programme had a disability.

Deaf and disabled people were extensively involved as participants in *Accentuate* projects. While many projects were open to disabled and non-disabled participants, the emphasis in each was on accessibility and promotion of opportunities to deaf and disabled people. Several of the projects were focused on young audiences, others were broader in their reach. For example:

uScreen was led by Screen South and developed ground-breaking technology to create an accessible website which provided young people with opportunities in film-making. The website provided group editing and storyboarding software plus BSL, subtitles, visual captioning and audio description tools. A programme of training, mentoring and workshop opportunities both live and online sat alongside the website, and was designed to be highly accessible to disabled participants. 189 films have been uploaded to the site so far.

In *Gaming*, deaf and disabled young people created an online game for other young people. The game is based on wheelchair basketball and raises players' awareness of Paralympian's

physical and psychological strength and the barriers they face. The project aimed to raise awareness of Stoke Mandeville and the Paralympics.

Campaign! created opportunities for deaf and disabled young people to raise awareness of issues that concerned them, through live and online activity. This involved working with artists, and engaging with other young people in the UK and abroad. A number of young people involved in *Campaign!* went on to perform in the Paralympic Opening Ceremony.

Realise! supported and developed the entrepreneurial skills of deaf and disabled young people across the South East through workshops, competitions and placements. The programme made links to the creative industries based in the region, especially music promoters. As a result, young people have been able to access high quality work experience opportunities and have been connected to the national Ways into Work programme.

Playground to Podium is a national programme aimed at identifying talented young athletes and providing them with appropriate support. *Accentuate* supported a regional extension of the scheme for disabled young people, offering bursaries (53 athlete

bursaries were awarded in total), development grants for clubs, and development funding for coaching and officials including training in disability awareness. *Creative Landscapes* aimed to make heritage in the South East more accessible. A wide range of venues got involved, and an advisory panel of deaf and disabled people worked with them to audit the accessibility of the venues, also looking at the themes and stories they told to identify whether they could be more inclusive of disability history and heritage. In order to create a focus for this work, the annual Heritage Open Days programme across the South East was used to test the improved heritage offer, and was promoted extensively. As a result, 400 disabled visitors took part in Heritage Open Days in the South East in 2011.

Starting Line was an outdoor performance commissioned to celebrate the arrival of the Paralympic Flame. The project was led by artist Rachel Gadsden, who was received an *Unlimited* commission, and involved disabled and non-disabled young people from around the world, including young people with spinal injuries at Stoke Mandeville Hospital.

Blue Touch Paper Carnival was led by Horsham District Council, and created opportunities for people with physical and learning

disabilities to actively participate in carnival. The project was delivered across a number of day centres and local colleges. The groups, working with facilitators from Cusp Inc in West Sussex and the New Carnival Company on the Isle of Wight, alongside a range of commissioned artists and arts companies, were extensively involved in the design and development of their St George themed contribution to the Ryde Carnival. Through an exchange with Embaixadores da Alegria in Rio, the only samba school for disabled people in the world, three artists were able to visit Rio to learn about carnival traditions, and the Rio group visited Sussex and the Isle of Wight in April 2012, working on the design of the costumes and float. This was a valuable exchange. The UK artists were impressed with the size and scale of the Rio group, which involves hundreds of disabled people in their projects. The Rio group were interested in how the Blue Touch Paper Carnival emphasised active participation and decision making within the project by people with learning disabilities. Project manager Sarah Pickthall felt that they *'were wowed...they couldn't believe that learning disabled people had pulled together the party. They saw that and were very excited by it'*.

Disabled people who were part of the project designed costumes and t shirts, made a carnival float,

a samba flag, and composed an 'enredo' (theme song) which was performed by an integrated samba band of disabled and non-disabled performers. They subsequently performed at The One Hackney Festival, where they led the parade, and in the Olympic Park during the Paralympic Games. This was a huge opportunity for those involved.

Participants felt part of something bigger than themselves. Going to the Olympic Park for them was massive. (Sarah Pickthall)

A spin-off project, *Map Factor*, experimented with the creation of accessible maps for carnivals and other outdoor events. Cusp Inc are continuing to develop accessible mapping, using the approaches to working with learning disabled people which were developed through Blue Touch Paper Carnival. The New Carnival Company are exploring ways of continuing their partnership with Rio and creating new work for the 2016 World Cup finals.

In the South East, the hosting of the Paralympic Games in the UK had a strong thematic impact on the delivery of the regional programme. This enabled a partnership to come together and make a commitment to

investigating how to improve service provision, and by extension quality of life, for deaf and disabled people across the region. The work ranged from arts and sport projects as described above, to the improvement of transport hubs and a number of strategic interventions to support disabled artists. This joint working was unprecedented, and it is highly unlikely that there would have been a sustained strategic cross-sector initiative around disability issues without the inspiration and impetus provided by the Games.

As a result of sustained work alongside deaf and disabled people, at strategic and project levels, throughout the duration of *Accentuate*, the programme evaluation identified evidence of a shift in the culture of participating organisations, who are now more aware of disability issues and the steps they need to take to open up access to their offer. There was also some anecdotal evidence of a shift in the attitudes of some disabled people towards the Paralympics, as the programme raised awareness of the history of the Paralympic Games and engaged disabled people in dialogue and debate with Paralympic athletes.

There was an ongoing issue in relation to *Accentuate's* ability to promote its work through the media. The level of press

coverage was considered to be poor and less than expected given the extent of the programme and its links to the Games.

Interviewees attributed this to *Accentuate* being 'in competition' with the Games themselves and other Cultural Olympiad programming for media attention. There was also an acknowledgement that the complexity of the programme, delivering 15 different thematic projects across a range of sectors, made it difficult to explain and 'sell' as a coherent story. As a result, individual projects were able to secure press coverage of events, but the wider programme was not covered to the same extent.

Accentuate is continuing to operate as an incubator of accessible programmes. Having tested a range of approaches to the inclusion of disabled people within mainstream arts, sport, heritage and learning provision across the South East, *Accentuate* is in the process of identifying its most successful projects, and those most likely to be able to secure the necessary funding and support to go forward in some form. The uScreen project is continuing, rebranded as *Accentuate Young Voices*, and accessible heritage work will continue as *Accentuate Heritage*, looking at representation of deaf and disability history. There is a focus on sharing the learning from *Accentuate* for the benefit of

other regions, and a number of toolkits have been produced, including one on accessible carnival in partnership with Mencap. Other plans include a series of training days in partnership with English Heritage, and a symposium at University of Brighton to explore legacy one year on from the Paralympics.



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