



DARE Festival 2019

Evaluation Report



Andrea Spisto and Danni Spooner in Tylor and Vincent (photo: Ali Wright)



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



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Summary

DARE Festival 2019 was Upstart Theatre's 4th annual festival of new and in development theatre. We commissioned and presented **13 new creative projects** on the theme of **money**. The shows were taken through a development, mentoring and peer support process spanning four months, before being presented at Shoreditch Town Hall (our venue partner and also commissioners and supporters of the festival). The festival took place across two evenings and one day from Thursday 24th to Saturday 26th October 2019, where we presented **24 performances, 1 discussion event** (which was recorded and will be released on our podcast), **1 installation**, and worked with a total of **42 artists**.

Along with presenting the work, we ran a **4-month programme of artist development**, with the lead artists and their collaborators being invited to attend three day-long sessions to meet other commissioned artists, share extracts of their work and get feedback and support in the process. Our team (Artistic Director Tom Mansfield, Executive Producer Emma Sampson, and Producer Hannah Tookey) provided regular support with artistic guidance, fundraising applications and logistics throughout this period.

Total audience attendance for DARE Festival was **189**, from a capacity of 360 (53%). This figure doesn't include the artists and their teams who also watched many of the shows but were not ticketed.

Upstart Theatre Team

Artistic Director	Tom Mansfield
Executive Producer	Emma Sampson
Producer	Hannah Tookey
Stage Manager	Lucy Adams
Stage Manager	Yanik Dijkstra
Front of House Manager	Emma Clarke

Commissioned Shows

The projects created for DARE Festival 2019 were as follows:

A VERY HAPPY SCRAPPY SACKLER FAMILY THANKSGIVING by Outside Edge Theatre Company

Performed exclusively by people who are in recovery from substance misuse and addiction, this show is inspired by the civil lawsuits against individual members of the billionaire family who own Purdue Pharma, the manufacturer of the opioid prescription painkiller OxyContin. All dialogue is drawn from statements made by the Sackler family members named as defendants in the lawsuits. The production imagines a Thanksgiving in which generations of a fictional philanthropic family sit down over dinner to give thanks with the knowledge that everyday 130 people in America die from opioid-related overdoses.



Outside Edge Theatre Company in A Very Happy Scrappy Sackler Family Thanksgiving (photo: Lidia Crisafulli)

BUSK by Deborah Vogt and Connor Roff

A 30-minute solo performance that follows the unravelling of a busker on the Southbank of London. Featuring both covers and original songs, this is a dark and funny folk musical that explores how closely people's identities as artists are tied to their financial success. What do they have to sacrifice in order to live? What's the difference between an artist asking for strangers for money and a CEO asking people to invest in their company?



Connor Roff in Busk (photo: Ali Wright)

CLUMSY BOD(Y DOUBLES) by Clumsy Bodies (Jess Rahman-González and Oli Isaac Smith)

A critic told Jess and Oli that they enjoyed their autobiographical stories about being trans, but didn't like them as the performers of these stories. So (obviously) they hired cis body doubles of themselves to take over their lives. Their devised show explores what happened when their body doubles started meeting their families and picking up their post.

From Boys Don't Cry to Danish Girl to Dallas Buyers Club, the majority of commercially successful stories about trans lives go to those with cis actors attached. Inspired by the traditional horror of the doppelgänger, Clumsy Bodies explores the current debate around identity, authenticity and gender. Are trans people only profitable when their stories come from cis mouths? Who legitimises trans stories, and do trans people ever get to author them?



*Oli Isaac Smith and Jess Rahman-González in Clumsy Bod(y Doubles)
(photo: Ali Wright)*

CUTE by Luca Rutherford

A solo show with music, clowning and storytelling about quiet power, and about not being silenced, especially when you're scared to make noise. Theatre maker and performer Luca Rutherford tells a very personal story of sexual assault.



*Luca Rutherford in Cute
(photo: Lidia Crisafulli)*

ENCORE by Segen Yosef, Nathan Ihedioha, Duramane Kamara, and Joel Osei

Featuring original music and new writing, this play by a new Black theatre collective tells the story of Thomas and Trent, two up and coming rappers going through the hardships of the music industry and the struggles that come along with it. They are about to be signed by a record label when Trent is arrested for selling drugs.



*Nathan Ihedioha and Duramane Kamara in Encore
(photo: Lidia Crisafulli)*

ENDURANCE by Jenni Jackson

Inspired by the story of Bolivian warrior Bartolina Sisa and modern-day women who are out-performing men at endurance sports. *Endurance* looks at how we endure, why we endure, and how women can make their innate propensity for endurance work in their favour to tip the balance of power. This devised show features storytelling, movement and music.



*Simon Carroll-Jones and Jenni Jackson in Endurance
(photo: Lidia Crisafulli)*

MONEY FUNNY SUNNY by Cheeky Chin

Money Funny Sunny is a devised theatre piece exploring the financial struggles of theatre companies, especially international artists working in the UK in the post-Brexit era. With the help of an audience, the show attempts to unpack what money means to the artists investing resources (financial and time-based) into their work without enough income to

pay their bills. Created by a London-based collective of theatre makers of East Asian descent, led by Yuyu Wang.



*Cheeky Chin in Money Funny Sunny
(photo: Lidia Crisafulli)*

OUTGROWN by Beth Timson

Outgrown is an interactive play by 19-year-old Beth about people's differing experiences of Hackney and the ways it is changing. It is a collaboration between a long-term resident of Hackney and a self-proclaimed gentrifier. Interweaving interviews with people from Hackney, the show follows Beth's journey as she returns to the place she grew up and tries to find home in somewhere that feels unfamiliar. This show was ambitious in format, working with audience participation and an unprepared non-professional performer.



*Beth Timson with an unprepared performer in Outgrown
(photo: Lidia Crisafulli)*

TAKE CARE by ÉCOUTE THEATRE COMPANY

This show by verbatim company Écoute follows the story of Pam, a woman struggling to move her mother out of a care home. Along the way we meet around 25 other characters, all involved in the care industry - from politicians, to personal carers, and all taken from real interviews. It is a darkly humorous piece of documentary theatre that shines a light on the hidden voices of generations of carers and exposes the workings of a care system in need of repair.



*Sam McLaughlin in Take Care
(photo: Ali Wright)*

THE HOUSE NEVER WINS by Kill the Cat

Plummeting insect numbers. A sixth mass extinction. Thinning of ice sheets. Sea level rise. The Amazon is burning. Yet we keep going; drinking and partying like never before. In the casino we roll the dice as the planet collapses. Emerging theatre makers, Kill the Cat, have created a unique game-based experience tackling eco-anxiety and humanity's inaction. Using blackjack and audience interaction as a tool to test what we value most: the planet or money.



*Madeleine Allardice and Dylan
Frankland in The House Never Wins
(photo: Ali Wright)*

THE LOCAL by Simon Carroll-Jones

This is an interactive and participatory show about skateparks. It's about the people there. It's about hanging out and drinking cheap coke and chatting shit and landing tricks. It's about being kicked out and finding someplace new, someplace where the normal social codes don't exist anymore, where you've got to fall, get up and go again. Somewhere in the edgelands where money doesn't matter, time doesn't matter, where it's alright to fail and be amazing at the same time. Simon's show took place in an open room where audiences were free to move about, talk to each other, and even try their hand at skating.



*Simon Carroll-Jones in The Local
(photo: Lidia Crisafulli)*

TYLOR AND VINCENT'S PUSSY AND MONEY by Tylor and Vincent

Where is the pussy and where is the money? Danni Spooner and Andrea Spisto play with gender, suggestive satire and being very serious artists. They use movement, projection and film in their hilarious performance art show about whether we gender money.



*Andrea Spisto and Danni Spooner in
Tylor and Vincent's Pussy and Money
(photo: Ali Wright)*

NASTY by Voxie Productions and Change of Art

We also supported the development of a new audio and creative installation focussed on women's experiences in politics. Separately funded by Arts Council England but looking for a home to showcase to the public, this installation featured audio interviews with real women working in politics, as well as songs and spoken word.

Interactive installations allowed audiences to share their thoughts on women in politics through written and visual means, and to play interactive games to learn more about the realities for women working in politics.



You can see more images of DARE Festival 2019 on our website and social media.

Core Goals

The goals we set out when applying to Arts Council England and Cockayne Grants for the Arts and the London Community Foundation were as follows:

- 1) Promoting dialogue between artists and audiences on compelling contemporary questions;
- 2) Creating and developing a diverse community of artists, producers and makers associated with the Festival;
- 3) Offering pathways for the further development of outstanding new work.

Promoting dialogue between artists and audiences on compelling contemporary questions

Having found setting a theme for DARE Festival to be helpful in focussing conversations between artists and audiences, we continued in 2019, this time with the theme of 'money'. Our artists responded to this in a wide variety of ways.

Five of our projects looked at money in relation to **gender**: *Clumsy Bod(y Doubles)* explored trans rights; *Endurance* reminded us of the power of female bodies and how they have been manipulated by profitable corporations; *Cute* told us a personal story about sexual assault on women and the financial impact of seeking justice on the perpetrator; *Tylor and Vincent* asked us about the value and stigma of women in sex work; and *Nasty* shared true stories of women's experiences working in politics, and how financial barriers affect whether women can run for, or remain in office.

Two shows questioned the relationship between money, **making art and being artists**: *Money Funny Sunny* was a frank discussion of the costs of making work as international artists, whilst *Busk* shared the embarrassment and awkwardness of asking others to pay for the products of your talent.

Four of the shows explored the financial implications of the **actions of governments and corporations**: *A Very Happy Scrappy Sackler Family Thanksgiving* drew attention to the opioid crisis at the hands of a pharmaceutical company; *Take Care* shared true stories of the lives of carers and how austerity has affected them; *The Local* was an innovative show about how shifting spaces has impacted the skating community; and *Outgrown* was a playful look at the impact of gentrification and how it shapes people's relationships to locations.

Finally, one project, *The House Never Wins* looked at **the cost of our actions on the environment**, by asking us to make choices between money and the planet.

Alongside these projects, we presented **one discussion event on financial inequality and the arts** with Dave O'Brien, Professor at the University of Edinburgh, and one of the co-authors of [Panic! Social Class, Taste and Inequalities in the Creative Industries](#). This was a fascinating and hugely insightful discussion that highlighted the myriad of ways in which

the arts, and who can access them, are affected by money. This discussion was **recorded live for release via Upstart Theatre's podcast** (Chorus: An Arts and Democracy Podcast).

There were some changes between the plan in our initial grant application and what was delivered. There were fewer discussion events than planned (1 instead of 3). When finalising the festival programme, we found we were only able to fit in 2 discussion events rather than the 3 we had planned. As we wanted our priority to be the commissioned shows, we decided this was the best focus for our resources. Our second panel event, which we had planned to be a dialogue between artists and venues on how they support emerging creatives financially, had to be cancelled at a late stage due to a lack of availability of speakers.

Based on verbal feedback from artists and audiences, we feel that the overall aim of promoting artist-audience dialogue on compelling contemporary questions has been achieved very successfully. Please see our final section on 'Beneficiaries and Impact' for more on this.

Creating and developing a diverse community of artists, producers and makers associated with the Festival

As discussed above, we are intensely proud of the range of work presented in the festival. We had an even broader range of themes, styles and formats of work than in previous years.

New for 2019, and in response to the shifting challenges faced by minority artists to accessing opportunities within the industry, **we reserved 8 of our 12 commissions for minority groups**: 2 for LGBTQ+ artists, 2 for BAME artists, 2 for disabled artists, and 2 for working or under class artists. Many of the artists who were commissioned identified with more than one of these categories, and we could have filled our reserved commissions numerous times over.

Our [post-festival survey](#) with our artists revealed that we had a total of **35 artists** involved in creating the **12 commissioned works**. One artist did not complete the survey, however we know that there were 2 people involved in the making of these works. There were also an additional 5 artists involved in creating the installation for Nasty, although they were not asked to complete the survey.

Of the 12 commissioned companies:

- 6 (50%) identified as LGBTQ+ or LGBTQ+ led, with 1 of those (8%) identifying as trans and non-binary led
- 3 (25%) identified as disabled or disability-led
- 3 (25%) identified as working-class, or working-class led
- 2 (17%) identified as BAME or BAME-led
- 8 (67%) identified as female-led (including 1 who did not complete the survey)
- 5 (46%) said that their day to day activities were limited either a lot (2, 18.2%) or a little (3, 27.3%) because of long-term health problems or disabilities

With this analysis, we feel that the diversity of DARE Festival is in a fairly good place. We have increased the representation of minority groups from DARE Festival 2018, although this comparison is based on unofficial reporting from last year, whereas this year we implemented a thorough survey of DARE participants. With these figures, it is also worth noting the intersectionality of our artists, with one company identifying as being both LGBTQ+ led, working-class led and disability-led, for example.

For DARE Festival 2020, we will continue to reserve commissions for the groups we have identified. In feedback to our 2019 call out, it was suggested by one person that we should consider reserving commissions for migrant artists in future years.

In addition to this, we surveyed our artists for their **geographical location**, and found that only 1 of our respondents was not London based, with 1 other company being split between London and Bristol. However, we do know that 2 of our lead artists live in Manchester, yet this has not been reflected in the answers given in our survey. From what we know of the sector, including the limitations that artists in the regions can face, and the financial barriers to traveling to and staying in London, we can perhaps conclude that this opportunity being based in London *may* be a barrier to *some* artists taking part. Presenting work in London is a brilliant opportunity for artists to showcase their projects and to build their reputations, however, we know that it can be significantly more expensive to do so in the capital than elsewhere in the country.

In future years of DARE Festival, we will look at ways that we can remove this barrier, and therefore make the commissioning opportunity more accessible. This will also go hand in hand with increasing access to this opportunity for minority artists outside of London. Future considerations could include offering travel and accommodation bursaries to artists or reserving commissions for artists based outside of London. We are also continuing to explore plans to expand DARE Festival outside of London, thereby offering more local opportunities to regional artists, and making the time and financial commitment of the festival easier to manage.

Further to this, we asked our artists whether they have **faced any barriers that have prevented them from entering or progressing their career in the arts**. We allowed them to define what determined a 'barrier', but suggested this could be things such as discrimination, financial barriers, geographical limitations, or physical or mental health limitations.

5 artists (46%) said that they had faced a lot of barriers, whilst 3 artists (27%) said that they had faced some barriers. Many barriers cited were financial, including:

*"Mainly **financial and time-based** barriers. **Affording to live in London** while working multiple jobs in order to pursue a career in the arts, although I suppose that goes the same for most places in the world. Grant money can help, but again that's limited and extremely competitive."*

*"**Geographic barriers** largely in terms of making the shift to transitioning to also being based in London as well as the South West. **Financial barriers** are always present given the*

nature of the industry and freelance work and occasionally **having to work for free** or put in more time than is covered by funding”

“Financial barriers as international artists working in the UK”

*“In terms of barriers in working in the arts - there are **financial barriers** - a lot of scratch or fringe festivals put a lot of **financial risk on the artist**, it is difficult to bare that burden it reduces how often we can apply for fringe festivals. It means we are doing other jobs alongside making work it means tight rehearsal periods, tired and overworked artist and not as good a creative environment to work in. Other issues is due to **Dyspraxia** - I require using a laptop to write things down and luckily in our company one of us could take notes but if i were working on my own - or when I was writing for the project - i had to have a laptop and more time it cost more and slowed down the process. I also have **anxiety** which I manage but this meant increased anxiety around the show and some of the time constraints and pressures made things harder.”*

At Upstart Theatre, we are well aware of the financial difficulties of being an emerging artist or small company within the UK theatre industry. In 2020, we will consider whether we can further support our artists financially, including through higher commissions, additional fees for attendance at our Artist Development Days, or assistance with travel and accommodation costs, alongside additional support in kind such as more rehearsal space or fundraising assistance.

One aspect of DARE Festival 2019 which we have continued from the previous year and which we are particularly proud of, is our **partnership with Streetwise Opera**, through which we recruit our **volunteer ushers**. We had a total of 8 volunteers across 4 shifts. All of these people are, or have been, homeless, and were looking for opportunities to volunteer with an arts organisation. Their energy and positivity was commented on for the second year running by many of our artists and audience. We were thrilled to have **many of the same people as 2018 returning** to volunteer this year and hope that we can continue this partnership in future years.

Offering pathways for the further development of outstanding new work

In follow-up meetings and phone calls with DARE Festival artists, several artists have identified opportunities that have arisen following of their participation in DARE Festival:

- *Take Care* has secured a one-week run at VAULT Festival 2020, as well as a community tour to local carer groups.
- *Money Funny Sunny* has been selected for Camden People’s Theatre’s Sprint Festival, alongside 2018 DARE commission *Surge* which is still touring.
- Luca Rutherford has received Arts Council England funding, and is being supported by ARC Stockton keep developing *Cute*. She has also performed a further scratch of *Cute* at Battersea Arts Centre.

- *The House Never Wins* has been programmed at Camden People's Theatre as part of its Spring season.

We will keep in touch with all of our lead artists through 2020 onwards and explore further opportunities to work together. We know that all of them are looking for development and programming opportunities.

Beneficiaries and Impact

In total, **430** people have benefitted from DARE.

These include:

- 42 artists
- 189 live audience
- 199 participants

You can [watch a video of our artists from DARE 2019 \(and a few from 2018\) sharing their experiences of being part of the festival here:](#)



For Upstart Theatre, DARE Festival has once again helped to **build our reputation** as a company which seeks to engage with the most exciting and unusual artists. It has **cemented our relationship** with Shoreditch Town Hall, who have already programmed and commissioned us to produce DARE Festival 2020, and with whom we're looking forward to continuing to build the future of the festival.

This programme has **broadened our awareness of the emerging artists** in the UK, introducing us to 8 new companies who we didn't know, and as such this has helped us to extend our community of DARE artists even further. Many DARE 2018 artists came to this the 2019 festival and as a result have been introduced to our most recent artists.

We evaluated a number of elements of the DARE Festival programme in our [end of festival survey](#) for artists. We will evaluate the benefit of the festival in relation to these.

Quality of the Programme

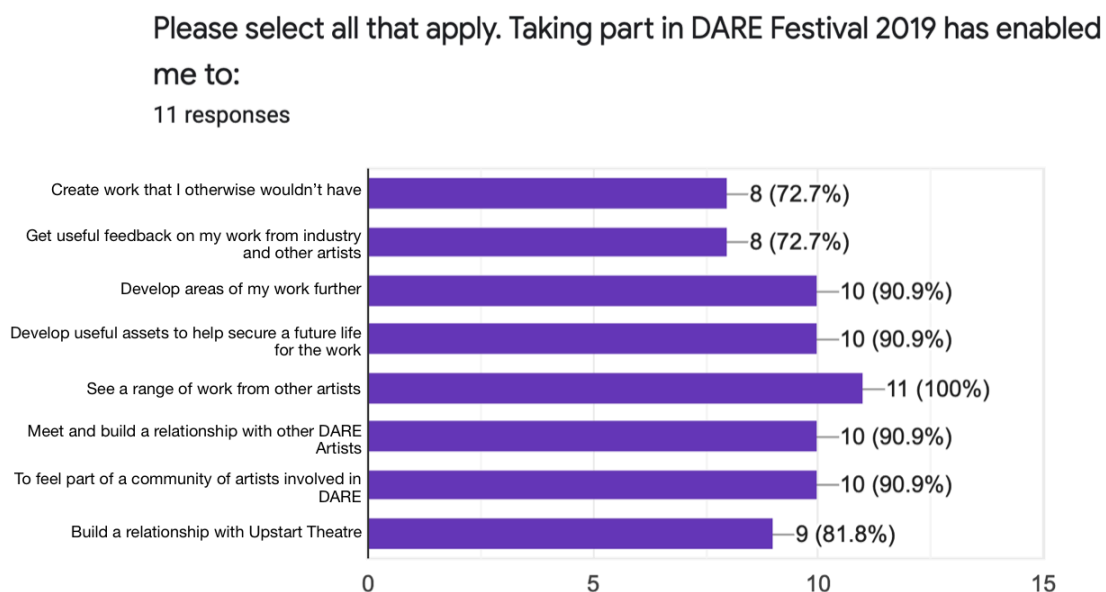
8 (73%) of artists rated their overall experience of DARE as excellent, 2 (18%) as very good, and 1 (9%) as good.

100% of artists rated the technical support provided as either excellent (10 artists, 91%) or very good (1 artist, 9%).

8 (73%) of artists rated the creative support provided as excellent, 1 (9%) as very good and 2 (18%) as fair.

100% of artists would recommend the programme to other people. 9 (82%) of our artists said yes, they would consider applying again, and 2 (18%) answered maybe.

We also wanted to find out **what DARE had enabled our artists to achieve** through the programme. We received positive responses across the board, with artist indicating that the programme had been beneficial both in the creation of their work and in building their networks:



We also know that all of the shows in our festival were new pieces of work, both because this was a requirement of participation, and because 100% of artists answered yes to this question. Taking into consideration the above responses also, this means that **8 new pieces of theatre were created** as a result of being selected for DARE Festival, **which otherwise would not have been made.**

Artist Development Days

We held 3 full Artist Development Days across the programme, and we wanted to find out whether the length and structure of these were a good fit, and useful for, our artists. 10 (91%) of our artists said that these days were useful to:

- meet other DARE Artists
- see and explore the festival venues in advance of DARE
- share an extract of [their] work and get feedback on it in an early stage.

Only 1 artist said that the programme was not useful for all three of these elements. However, from answers to our other questions, this same respondent was the only person to say that the offer of the DARE programme was not clear at the time of applying. They

also expanded on this feedback later to say that the effort and expense of taking these days off of work to attend them was stressful and that they would have preferred to spend this time rehearsing. Whilst we will take these comments on board, as they are the only artist to give this feedback about the development days, it does appear to us that the stress they felt may perhaps be due to a lack of understanding of the aims of the programme and what was required by being part of the festival. We did state this clearly in our call out, at the workshop selection day, and again when offering artists their commission, so we are unsure as to how this confusion arose, especially as this feedback was only given at the end of the programme. However, we will look at how we can be even clearer in the future.

Our artists also indicated that the number of Artist Development Days were just right with 8 artists (73%) selecting this option. 2 artists (18%) said that there were too few, and 1 artist (9% - same person as explained above) said there were too many.

As we want our programme to be as useful as possible to our artists, and good value for their time, we asked them to tell us their preferred number and structure of Artist Development Days, which had similar answers, with a focus on expanding the length of time that they are spread over:

"Half a day unless they offered rehearsal time"

"3 days spread over 3 months"

"Fine as it was!"

"3 days spread over 3 months is a good structure we think for DARE. It gives enough time for ideas to develop in-between sessions but is frequent enough to provide a structure to work towards."

"Structure was good, though would have preferred to have the last development day further from the performance date (to better implement feedback)."

"3 days over 6 months would be best if that's possible. The last two felt very close together."

"4"

"3 over 5 months"

Following this feedback, we will aim to continue offering 3 Artist Development Days in future years, perhaps over a longer period of time if this is possible logistically.

Finances

Feedback on the financial support of £500 per commission, along with other support-in-kind was mixed, with 7 (64%) artists saying it was too little, 3 (27%) saying it was just right, and 1 (9%) saying it was more than enough. This reinforces what we have already explored

earlier on in this evaluation: that we need to look at ways to increase financial or in-kind support for our artists.

Improvements to the programme

We asked our artists: "How can we improve the DARE Festival programme? Is there anything you'd like to see us add to it in the future?" Their responses were as follows:

*"**More time** to create/develop our show on those days, using other artists disciplines to work out kinks/ideas for your own show. A more practical approach to the development days"*

*"**Longer run times** of the shows 😊"*

"Development days were not useful and caused a lot of stress. The life of an artist in London is so expensive and booking days off work and travelling to spend a day not rehearsing was a waste of time. Most stressful part of the whole experience. Felt like Dare had no trust on the artists work which artists spent time and energy and a vigorous application progress getting into it."

*"Price and scheduling was an issue - charging £14 limited the number of people we knew who could attend. I think doing a £7 **half day ticket** + £14 day ticket would help attendees from lower income backgrounds particularly come and still enable them to see a number of shows. I think **collaborations between DARE artists** in some small way could be really interesting to offer during the time."*

*"Maybe **more panel talks and networking** sessions."*

*"I think just **more time getting to know other artists** and potentially having a space for us to share in the lead up to Dare like - a three week on free rehearsal space that us dare artists can then use to develop our work and build a community of artists."*

*"I didn't find the feedback at the development days particularly useful, because there wasn't enough time to dive into feedback. I wonder if the group could be divided into smaller companies, and each team given **more time to show and talk about their work**. The tiny groups felt a bit weird, because we weren't showing work in that context - just talking. If the group was divided in half (after an intro with everyone) maybe we could have more time to show work and get feedback."*

*"I was **so impressed with the diverse mix of forms and topics** programmed this year. If anything could be improved I would say more thought could be given to **how the audience can give feedback to shows**. Can Upstart help support artists to collect audience feedback in some form that they can take away with them and look back on? How can artists physically collect feedback from their artists?"*

*"An **extra performance** might have been helpful."*

*"I think it would be **great to not have performances on at the same time**."*

"Honestly I can't actually think of anything to improve the DARE programme- though everything you've already mentioned about taking DARE on the road next year I think is very exciting and would offer good opportunities to forge networks with venues outside of London as well which would be really helpful."

When asked about additional feedback, or other comments, artists said:

"The commission fee received was great as it stood for, a commission. Obviously though it doesn't cover all of our costs involved with creating and producing the show corresponding to the amount of time we put into it. This was expected."

*"The festival **needs to have a broader marketing** to a wider public and it's uncomfortable to see 'buddies' of the organisers in the development days. Makes it feel nepotistic."*

*"It felt as if **the event wasn't that well marketed** - I didn't find myself seeing DARE promoted beyond the Upstart socials and a lot of people I knew weren't aware of the event either. I think inviting bloggers to comment on the run up or invite them to the development days could've helped as one example."*

*"You are all **amazing** :)"*

*"The **commission money was right, and generous**, but I didn't feel like that ALSO was enough to cover producing the plays."*

*"**Dare has been a real game changer for us** and has given our company progression a real sense of momentum that we can now take forward, **the support throughout the festival was brilliant**. Thank you!"*

*"This is a great idea for the festival but it needs to be improved in how much you are asking from the artist when you already know **£500 is not enough to create new work** please don't force us to come 3 extra days which could be spent working/ rehearsing. If we were all rehearsing in the space we might build relationships but not if we feel we are being forced to be there. Not everyone can afford that life."*

*"**Endlessly grateful for Tom's dramaturgical help**. Lucy was a brilliant stage manager. We really enjoyed doing DARE and are very grateful to have been a part of it."*

*"It was a **really wonderful experience**, and I'm so grateful to have been part of such a **supportive, generous, and daring community**."*

*"The one on one time with Tom was **totally invaluable** to our process. Thanks for being so **open and generous!!**"*

Final Thoughts

Taking all of the above comments into consideration, there are a few things that we will be looking to improve for future festivals:

Brand awareness, marketing and audience reach. We are a small festival with a capacity of just 360. With 12 commissioned shows each year, 35 artists between them, and a 12-year history as a company, we should be selling out this event. Having not sold out in the last two years and taking on board some of the feedback from our artists, both about awareness of the commissioning call out and the festival itself, we know that we need to improve our marketing strategy for 2020 onwards. We will look at hiring a dedicated PR specialist for 2020, perhaps alongside a Marketing Assistant to support the producing team. Whilst the number of tickets we are trying to sell isn't huge, it is important for our artist's development that there is strong industry and audience awareness of DARE. Increasing this will enable their projects to go further, faster after their participation, and help encourage more artists who are unknown to us to attend and apply to the festival.

Structure of performances. Numerous artists said that longer runs and more performances of their shows would be helpful. Whilst we won't be able to increase the number of shows that take place at Shoreditch Town Hall for 2020, this is something we may be able to discuss for 2021 onwards. Similarly, as has been mentioned above, we are looking at ways of expanding the DARE model regionally, and if we do so this will allow more performances to take place.

Feedback from audiences. The DARE Festival model has relied on informal conversations with audiences to gather feedback about their performances. Our programme is about creating a supportive and safe community where performers and audiences can come together to talk and share knowledge, and thus formal evaluations by audiences such as feedback forms have not been a part of the festival. However, we do recognise that this information may be helpful for our artists, as well as for Upstart Theatre's own evaluation of the works in the festival. We will look at ways that we can implement this next year, perhaps in more visual and engaging ways than feedback forms, which might make audiences more likely to take part.

Accessibility. This year, we had planned, and budgeted, to incorporate a range of accessibility features into DARE Festival, including audio description, BSL interpretation and captioning. These elements would have made both our shows, and our commissioning offer more accessible to audiences and artists. We had also planned to work with our commissioned artists to show them how they could make their own shows more accessible, by working with our access providers from the earliest stage possible to seamlessly incorporate these features into them.

Before we could confirm our access providers, we needed to know that we had received all of our festival funding. We received our funding in early September 2019, less than two months before the festival, after submitting an application in mid-July. As there are a limited number of providers of these services and the equipment, this was, unfortunately, too short notice for us to be able to book access providers for DARE 2019, despite contacting a wide number of independent providers and companies.

We didn't receive our funding until this point because Arts Council England require us to have commissioned all of our artists before applying to them for financial support, to demonstrate the quality of the shows that we have selected. This process of putting our call out, shortlisting, holding selection workshops and offering commissions takes a minimum of 10 weeks. In 2019, we didn't confirm our festival dates with Shoreditch Town Hall until early April, meaning that there was little opportunity to apply for funding any earlier. Further to this, as a charity that is funded on a project by project basis, we always have to balance multiple applications to Arts Council England, meaning that we sometimes have to wait on the outcome of one project before applying for another, as was the case with DARE Festival 2019.

We are eager to change this. Not knowing what funding we have for the festival until we have commissioned our artists is an unsustainable position to be in. It puts the entire project at risk as we don't have the reserves to cover it without funding. It also makes it very difficult to achieve all of our goals, particularly our access goals, and therefore this makes it much harder for us to expand the diversity of artists and audiences involved in DARE Festival. As a festival that offers exciting emerging artists, mostly with a limited industry profile, support to develop ideas from the earliest stage, this is sometimes one of the first opportunities that our artists are given to develop work: sometimes it's their first ever commission, and sometimes the first project they've been a creative lead on. It's therefore imperative that we find ways to mitigate this issue in future years, and to allow us to make DARE Festival more accessible, both for our audiences and our artists.

We have a few action points that we hope will allow us to do this.

For 2020, we already have dates confirmed to present work at Shoreditch Town Hall. This means it is possible that we may be able to submit an application to Arts Council England at an earlier stage than in previous years, and we will aim to do so.

We will request a development meeting with Arts Council England to discuss our situation in relation to funding and access. We will discuss whether it would be possible, given the strength and success of four previous DARE Festivals, and our demonstrable impact and benefit to artists, to submit an application in advance of commissioning. This would allow us a much longer lead in period within which to confirm our access providers.

We will also look for additional means of funding that we could apply to at an earlier stage, both for the full festival and specifically for access costs.

Skills-based Artist Development. Following informal discussions with our artists, and in response to some of our survey comments, we will look at incorporating more skills-based development opportunities into our programme. This will likely mean that the focus of our 3 Artist Development Days becomes split between both feedback and show development, and skills building workshops. These may be themed around accessibility, impact producing, or interactive theatre, as just a few examples. We will include a question on our application form that ask our artists what skills they would like to develop during the programme so that we can tailor our support to them.