



**WE  
DEMAND  
A BETTER  
FUTURE**



UPSTART

**DARE Festival 5  
Evaluation Report**



LOTTERY FUNDED

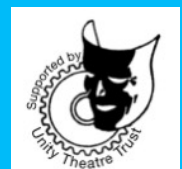


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**SHOREDITCH  
TOWN HALL**  
OLD STREET, LONDON, EC1



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## Summary

DARE Festival 5 was the 2021 edition of Upstart Theatre's annual festival of new and in development Playable Theatre. We commissioned **6 new theatre shows** on the theme of '**we demand a better future**'. The shows were taken through a development, mentoring and peer support process, before being presented live online via Shoreditch Town Hall (our venue partner and also commissioners and supporters of the festival). Additional funding was also gratefully received from Arts Council England and Unity Theatre Trust.

The festival took place across two evenings and one day from Thursday 25th to Saturday 27th February 2021, where we presented **15 performances, 1 installation** along with **1 discussion event with the creators, 1 workshop** on Making Playable Theatre, and worked with a total of **27 artists**. Captioning was provided for all performances and discussions, with audio description provided for the installation. .

Along with presenting the work, we ran a **2-month programme of artist development**, with the lead artists and their collaborators being invited to attend three sessions to meet other commissioned artists, share extracts of their work and get feedback and support in the process. Each commissioned company was assigned a dedicated mentor with expertise in making interactive and playable work. The Upstart Theatre team provided regular support with artistic guidance, producing and fundraising advice and logistics throughout this period.

Total audience attendance for DARE Festival 5 was 352. This figure doesn't include the artists and a number of invited guests who watched many of the shows at dress rehearsal stage.

This project has been evaluated against our core goals through a combination of: post-programme Zoom discussions between the Upstart Theatre team and each commissioned artist/company (some recorded with quotes transcribed); an anonymous end of programme evaluation surveys measuring artists' experience of the programme (one completed per commissioned artist/company) [which you can view here](#); audience and industry feedback via Shoreditch Town Hall's email survey; social media analytics; audience numbers; Equality Diversity and Monitoring forms (completed individually by artists involved in making shows for DARE) [which you can view here](#); internal evaluation meetings and an ongoing 'Lessons Learned' document that was continually added to by the Upstart team throughout the project to keep track of any issues encountered and ideas for improvement.

### Upstart Theatre Team

<b>Artistic Director</b>	Tom Mansfield
<b>Executive Producer</b>	Emma Sampson
<b>Producer</b>	Hannah Tookey
<b>Artist Mentors</b>	James Blakey, Rachel Briscoe, Simon Carroll-Jones and Dawn King
<b>Playtest Mentor</b>	Jenni Jackson
<b>Stage Manager</b>	Maggie Slaboň
<b>Audio Describer</b>	Joe Boylan
<b>Access Support Worker</b>	Hannah Woods

## Commissioned Shows

From a total of 167 applications, the 6 artists and shows commissioned for DARE Festival 5 were as follows:



### ***The Fourteenth Stop* by Speaks of Rivers**

Join 10 year-old Taaliyah on an interactive adventure as she rides London's longest Night Bus route, transforming the sleepy streets into a wonderland with her vibrant imagination. It's a long journey, full of unexpected and exciting challenges, but she's determined not to fall asleep - because Taaliyah knows that with a little help and a lot of courage she can overcome anything the world throws at her. Featuring puppetry, poetry and physical theatre *The Fourteenth Stop* is an uplifting experience for all the family.

### **ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

Speaks of Rivers are a Black female-led physical theatre company who create original work for Young Audiences. United by their passion for storytelling through movement, Speaks of Rivers believe that theatre is a brilliant way to bring people together and inspire positive change. Founded in October 2020, Speaks of Rivers' creative practice has been characterised by the shift to digital theatre-making in response to the pandemic. Their aim is to develop work that welcomes members of the neurodiverse community and they integrate BSL, captions, and audio-description into the shows they create. Using puppetry, spoken word, music, dance and more, Speaks of Rivers hope to share original stories with audiences across the UK.

### **CREATIVE TEAM CREDITS**

Devised by the company:

Aimee Louise Bevan

Cassiopeia Berkeley-Agyepong

Delvene Pitt

Jessica Manu

Roberta Livingston

Yasmin Keita



**The Isthmus Project by Abby + Alice x Solidaritree**

Isthmus is an interactive game, played between the performers and the audience that demystifies and reimagines England's land system. Unequal access to land is particularly stark in England, where land ownership is often inherited - less than 1% of the population own half of England. The system favours the privileged and actively upholds race and class inequality, from the affordability of homes to the quality of the land and infrastructure. However, the injustices pervading England's land system are often overlooked because they're complex. Through play, discussion and debate, audiences will navigate and reimagine the system: to work for you and your community.

**ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

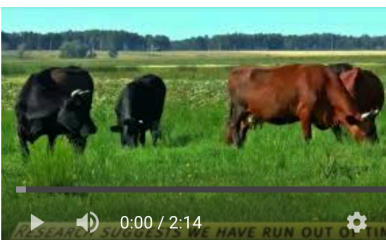
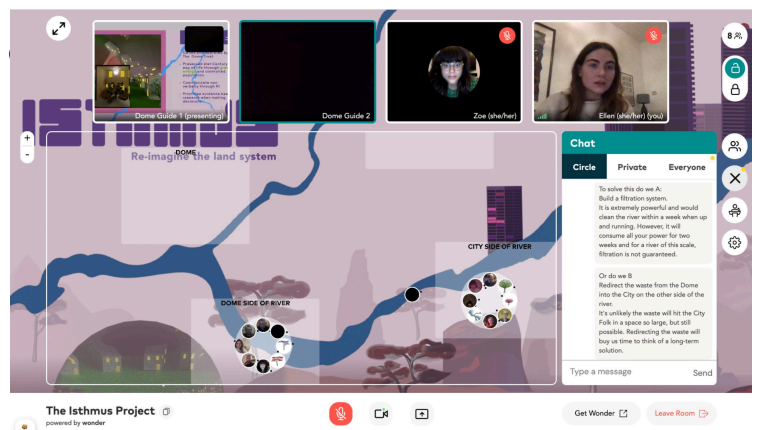
This project is a collaboration between two collectives: Abby + Alice (A+A) are set and experience designers specialising in interactive work. They've made a giant tap for Glastonbury Festival, a speakeasy in an old leather factory and more recently a game about parks in lockdown. Their work has been exhibited in the V&A and presented at ADC\*E Europe.

Solidaritree is a creative environmental collective and inclusive community for underrepresented people in the environmental movement, who aim to change the assumptions around environmentalism. The team are three women of colour with backgrounds in environmental and conservation science, public policy, media, fine art and graphic design.

**CREATIVE TEAM**

- Alice Davies
- Lois Donegal
- Charise Johnson
- Abby Sumrie
- Nazia Tamanna

A mid-performance image of The Isthmus Project on the wonder.me platform



Watch the teaser for The Isthmus Project here



### **Cart Noodle Show by ShumGhostJohn**

What's better than a storytelling night? What about a game show with 8 stories about food?

The hilarious ShumGhostJohn are bringing their brand new game show *Cart Noodle Show* to your home. Get ready to sit on the edge of your seat, fight for the highest score, and have a taste of the delicious Hong Kong street food, Cart Noodle 車仔麵!

Warning: The myths in this show may not be authentic. The food may not be nice and kind. The host may not want you to win. Hot. Handle with Care.

### **ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

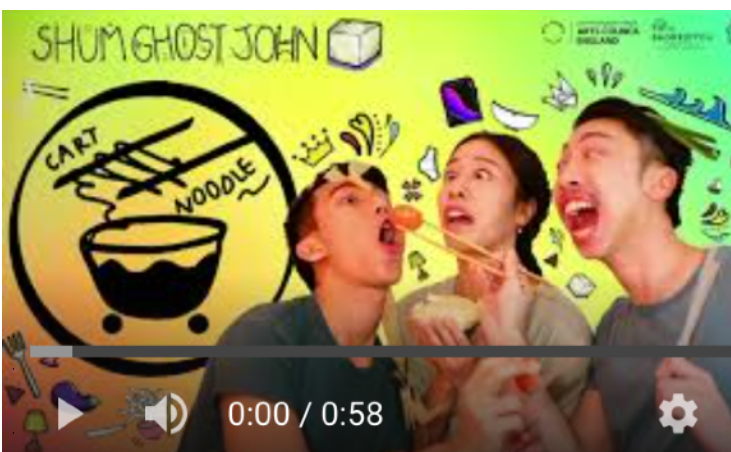
Fluid in their artistic expression, ShumGhostJohn is a Hong Kongese trio making performance works across disciplines, previously trained in language, ballet, computer science and biology. Formed in 2017, they devise storytelling works that recognise Hongkongese identity, power of being a collective and the nature of interdependence.

### **CREATIVE TEAM CREDITS**

**Concept, Direction and Performance:** ShumGhostJohn

**Sound and Music:** Angela Wai Nok Hui

**Prop and Set Design:** Jeffrey Choy



Watch the teaser for  
*Cart Noodle Show* here





### **The Learning Lottery by Katurah Morrish**

*The Learning Lottery* puts audiences in the black lace-ups of some UK teenagers and gives them one simple goal: do well at school. The teens are eager and the education system professes “to provide world-class education for everyone, whatever their background” (DfE, 2020), so what could possibly go wrong?

Created from research, *The Learning Lottery* scrutinises the narrative that the UK is a functioning meritocracy. It asks audiences to confront our relationship with a system that insists on its investment in equality, and yet strangely, somehow, always recreates uncannily similar stories of winners and losers.

Which numbers will you draw?

### **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Katurah Morrish is a theatre-maker, actor and youth arts practitioner with a background in educational research. She is particularly interested in work that investigates the mechanisms and commonly held beliefs that prop up harmful and destructive systems and practices. Katurah is committed to making work that argues for a better future for young people and often finds herself impatiently asking why not change now?

Katurah trained at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and studied Education at the University of Cambridge. She is Assistant Youth Director at Group 64 Theatre for Young People and a member of the performance art collective thewonderful.



Watch the teaser for  
*The Learning Lottery*  
here



### ***The Think Tank* by Sean Hollands and Gavin Maxwell**

Children have had enough of adults messing up the planet, and they can't be trusted any more. The children have risen up and are taking matters into their own hands! *The Think Tank* is a re-education initiative to get adults thinking more creatively! The world's biggest problems aren't improving, in fact they are getting worse. Now more than ever we need creative ideas to help solve the problems that adults can't seem to fix! Filled with games and tasks to spark creative problem solving, join *The Think Tank* and help re-imagine the world.

#### **ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

Fable Workshop, led by Sean Hollands, is a collaborative and experimental theatre company that creates new work with innovative artists. The company hosts regular workshops called Collider Sessions.

Gavin is a neurodiverse theatre-maker and movement director. Gavin co-runs GymJam, a socially driven physical theatre company that aims to amplify under-repped community voices. GymJam's next project *Anthropocene* is a playable, interactive piece of digital theatre exploring climate change.

*The Think Tank* was performed by a cast of children.

#### **CREATIVE TEAM CREDITS**

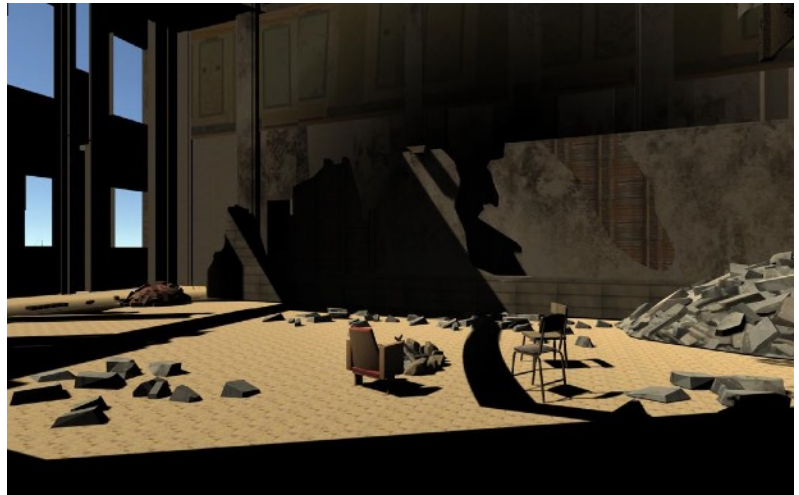
**Co-Director:** Gavin Maxwell

**Co-Director:** Sean Hollands (Fable Workshop)

**Cast:** Arabella, Roddy, Neil, Ronnie, Corrina, Ollie

**Youth Consultant:** Michelle Edwards





***& then everything just-* by ThisEgg + Camilla Clarke**

*& then everything just-* is an interactive digital experience that invites the audience to explore and reimagine a place that we knew, using a blend of art installation and video game.

Available as an online installation throughout the festival, audiences are invited both to explore and add their own thoughts to this reflection on where we are, how we got here, where we're going and what we want to change.

**ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

ThisEgg is Josie Dale-Jones who self-produces, co-creates and performs shows with a variety of artistic collaborators. Camilla Clarke is a theatre maker and designer.

ThisEgg's most recent show *dressed.* premiered at the 2018 Edinburgh Festival Fringe to critical acclaim, receiving a Scotsman Fringe First Award 2018 as well as a nomination for ThisEgg for Total Theatre Awards' Emerging Company 2018. During the 2019 national tour, *dressed.* was nominated for a 2020 Offie Award for IDEA (innovative/ devised/ experiential/ atypical).

In 2015 Camilla was a winner of the Linbury Prize for Stage Design. Camilla was the recipient of the Prince of Wales Arts Scholarship 2013, The Paul Klimpton prize for innovation in Design and The Lord Williams memorial prize for Design in 2014.

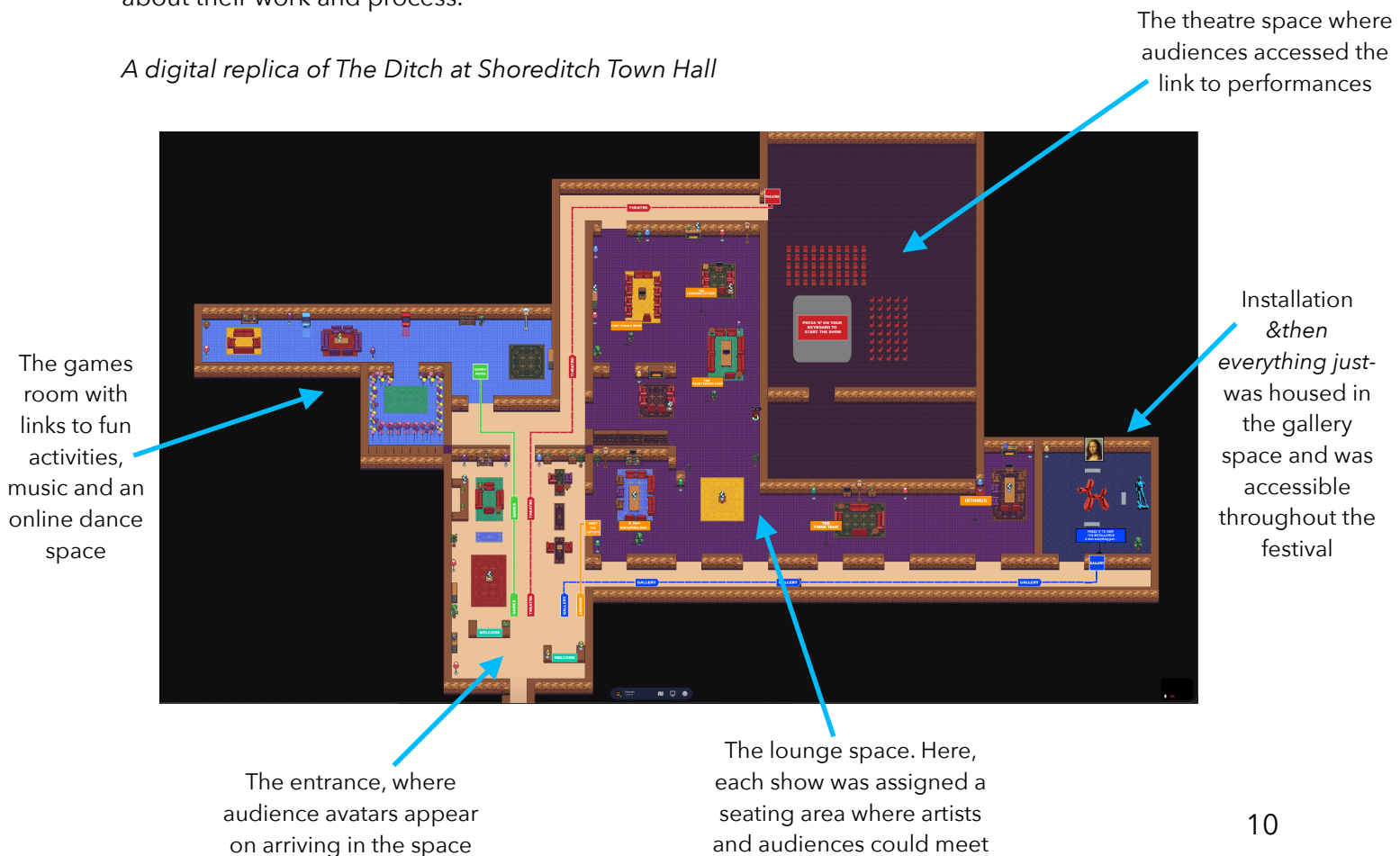
# Digital DARE

Due to the ongoing pandemic, we had numerous contingency plans in place to deliver DARE Festival 5 online if need be, as opposed to our usual live setting at Shoreditch Town Hall.

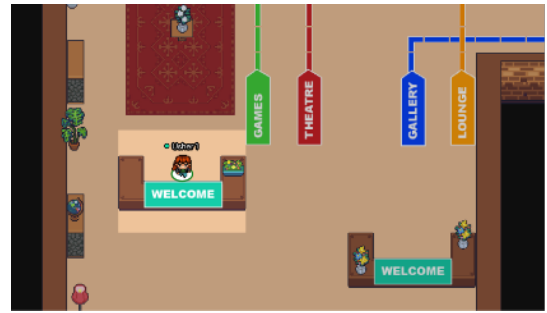
With the news of a new lockdown from Boxing Day, we had to quickly pivot DARE Festival 5 from a live theatre and performance festival, to an online one. In doing so, it was really important to us that the vibe and atmosphere of the festival, which is so distinctive in The Ditch at Shoreditch Town Hall, was replicated in an online format. It was also crucial that we maintained an opportunity for the cross-pollination of ideas, audiences and artists throughout the week, allowing people to interact in a similar way to how they would in a live space. And as a Playable Theatre festival, we were very keen to ensure that all of our commissioned works were delivered live online to an audience, and still maintained playability.

When needing to pivot to an online model, we held conversations with all of our commissioned companies to outline how they might respond to this new setting. It was agreed that ensuring that DARE was still a useful development process for all artists was the priority, and we remained flexible to allow artists to present their works in progress in the way that felt most helpful for them, including delivering workshops and insights into their processes as opposed to a live show. 5 of our artists decided to present an in development version of their show live online to an audience, with four companies choosing to do so over Zoom and one over a platform called Wonder. A final company created an interactive version of their show in video game software Unity, and this was presented online as an installation that all audiences could access and contribute to throughout the festival. This same company also held an 'in conversation with' event during the festival for audiences to find out more about their work and process.

*A digital replica of The Ditch at Shoreditch Town Hall*

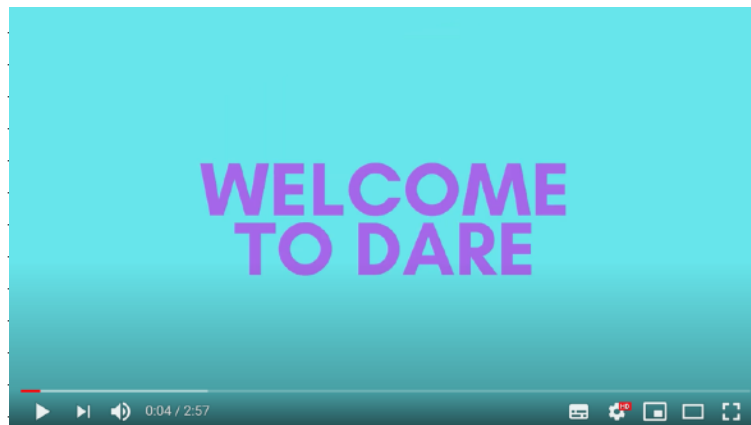


We were also eager to recreate the festival experience of our usual audiences, including a central hub from which all works could be accessed, and in which audiences could interact with each other, and our artists. We explored a number of options for this, and eventually settled on building a replica of The Ditch via an online platform called Gather ([check it out here using the password: tratspu](#)). This was our festival hub, where audiences and artists could meet and chat to one another.



The venue was complete with **virtual ushers**, real people who were physically present at the venue, but whose avatars took the form of snowmen and sat at the online welcome desks, ready and waiting to support audience members via the platform's video conferencing software and text chat. Audience could also follow an usher around the digital space if they need to be shown to a location.

We replicated the familiar **tannoy announcements** of a theatre using a spotlight function in Gather which broadcast video and audio to all people in the space to tell them: *"the show is about to begin, please make your way to the theatre and press X on your keyboard"*. You can also watch our short intro video to understand more about how the platform worked [here](#):



We were thrilled to see audience members make their way back to the online space after performances where they joined artists in the lounge to discuss their show and had very fruitful conversations.

## Core Goals

The primary goals for DARE Festival 5 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.

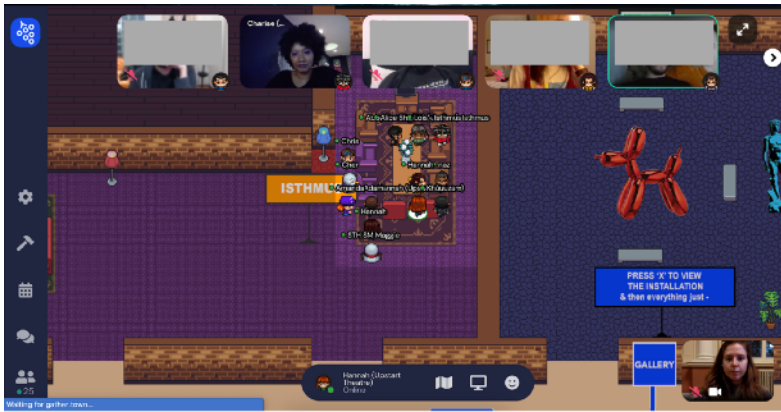
### Promoting dialogue between artists and audiences on compelling contemporary questions

As in previous years, DARE Festival 5 was centred around a theme, to which all of our commissioned artists responded. For this edition, that theme was **'we demand a better future'**, a broad topic which we felt would serve a dual purpose in both highlighting important issues that commissioned artists wanted to respond to, and offering a positive and hopeful vision for what the world could look like in the future.

Two of our shows focussed on environmental issues with *The Isthmus Project* tackling land rights and environmental justice and *The Think Tank* focusing on climate change. Adjacent to that, *&then everything just-* looked at the use of public space. *The Fourteenth Stop* was a children's show that used puppetry and storytelling to explore child homelessness, whilst *The Learning Lottery* extrapolated comprehensive research on inequalities within the education system through a theatre game format. And *Cart Noodle Show* challenged the audience to complete near-impossible tasks as a metaphor for the erosion of voting rights and democracy.

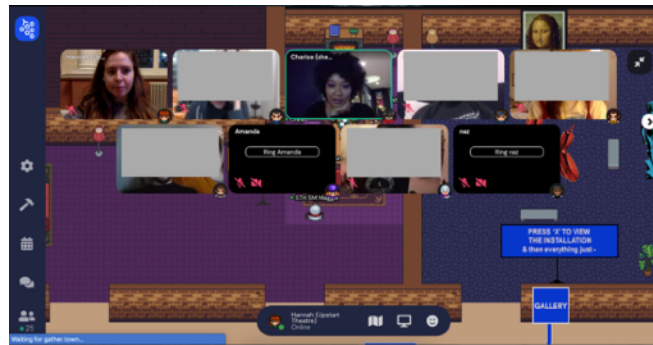
The digital Ditch was a key means for audiences and artists to meet. Each show was given a 'seating' area in the Lounge space where they could gather with their audience post-show and throughout the festival. Once people 'stepped' inside this space (defined by the rug on the ground), their audio and video would be visible to others. These spaces appeared to be utilised quite a lot by audiences, both to chat with artists and each other. An example of this can be seen in the screenshots below (audience images redacted for privacy). This was taken directly after a performance of *The Isthmus Project*, at the end of which the artists told audiences they would be available in the Gather lounge afterwards.





Once you step into the area, others people's video and audio appear

Users can expand the view to see more up to 9 people at a time, and they can use the white arrow on the right to scroll through if there are more than 9 people in the conversation



However, one artist/company said that the online space wasn't useful to them for meeting audience: *"I also said the Gather wasn't that useful for meeting audience, because I went to the space after each show, but I only met 1 audience member total. Don't know if the "Meet the artists" bit was actually scheduled, it may have gathered some more people. But often I'm aware audience were leaving our show and going straight in to another, so not sure if they would of had chance anyway."* This comment correctly points out that as there was a short break between shows, those audience members who had booked for more than one show would have been less likely to have had time to speak with others in the Gather space. We'll take this into account when scheduling future digital DARE Festivals to ensure that shows performing directly before others have just as much of an opportunity to meet audiences in the space afterwards. We'll also look at formally programming these sessions into the schedule so that there is greater awareness of them amongst audiences.

*The Think Tank* artists Gavin and Sean commented that they were **really happy with the demographic of audiences** that came to their show, which covered a broad range of adult audiences.

Katurah Morrish, creator of *The Learning Lottery* commented that **making a playable show allowed direct feedback within the performance itself**, as audiences had conversations throughout about which choices to make for their student (which were heard by facilitators) which in turn led to discussions about inequalities within the education system. Katurah stated that this was *"exactly what [she] wanted to happen times ten"*.

Further feedback from audiences that was collected via email by Shoreditch Town Hall broadly demonstrated that audiences also felt that they had engaged with the themes of the shows. Of the 7 audience responses to this survey, when audiences were asked **"How much do you agree or disagree with the following comments about the event? [It was inspiring]"** 3 (43%) people said strongly agree, 3 (43%) said agree, 1 (14%) answered disagree and 1 (14%)

strongly disagree. In addition, when asked ***"How much do you agree or disagree with the following comments about the event? [I learned something from it]"***, 3 (43%) people said strongly agree, 2 (29%) said agree, 1 (14%) answered neither agree nor disagree and 1 (14%) strongly disagree.

There are two caveats to this audience feedback however. Firstly, it's a very small sample compared to our total audience of 352, and secondly, some audiences were providing feedback to specific shows, and some to the festival as a whole, and the form doesn't require respondents to state if they are answering each question in relation to a show or the festival.

Based on the above, we feel that the overall aim of promoting artist-audience dialogue on compelling contemporary questions has been achieved at DARE Festival 5, however there is definitely room to improve and strengthen this aspect in future editions.

As we were operating on a reduced budget this year due to the pandemic creating financial uncertainty for our commissioning venue, Shoreditch Town Hall, we did not plan to host panel discussions and talks on the festival and show themes, as we have in previous years. This has historically added to the richness and depth of understanding that audiences get from the festival, and helps to promote ongoing dialogue between artists and audiences. However, this is an aspect that we intend to include again for DARE Festival 6 and beyond.

Based on discussions with artists from previous DAREs, we had also hoped to create a feedback wall at Shoreditch Town Hall that audiences could add comments and suggestions to throughout the festival. This wasn't possible due to moving the festival online. In addition, to include a digital version of this in the online space would have required an increased budget to add in extra links to a Google Jamboard, for example, which we didn't have available this year, but hope to next time.

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

We received **167 applications** for DARE Festival 5, a **350% increase on application numbers from DARE 4**, for just 6 commission opportunities. We believe this increase in numbers is due to a few key factors:

- the increased commission fee available (£1000 compared to the previous £500) as well as additional fees for attendance at the artist development sessions (£50 per session compared to no fee);
- being able to confirm the full commissioning and artistic support offer to artists in advance of the commission call out, such as the access provision and stage management support. This was only possible because, for the first time, we received all of our funding for DARE before we launched the application process;
- increased awareness and reputation of DARE Festival;
- providing access support to potential applicants. (Only 1 applicant requested this support and was provided with an access support worker, paid for by Upstart, to help complete their application. This applicant reached the shortlisting stage but wasn't commissioned);
- an increased artist need at the time of commissioning due to reduced opportunities for funding and support because of the ongoing pandemic;
- committing to offering all applicants feedback on their application if requested, regardless of whether they were shortlisted or not. (This process took a number of weeks but all requests for feedback were fulfilled).
- providing comprehensive guidance at the time of the application call out, including detailing what we were and were not looking for and specifying how and who would assess applications.

Following on from the success of our reserved commissions initiative which we introduced for DARE Festival 4, and which saw a growth in the diversity of applications received, we again reserved two thirds (4 out of 6) of our commissions for artists from underrepresented backgrounds, with each of those 4 specifically reserved for those who identify as: LGBTQ+ artists; as artists of colour or from a minority ethnic background; as D/deaf, disabled, neurodiverse or with a long term health condition; and as working, under or benefits class. Some 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.

### Application Process

It is also worth noting that we received specific feedback from some of our commissioned artists about the application process. One artist said that they really appreciated the

accessibility of the process, and that they often haven't applied to opportunities because they've required very long applications and provided no feedback. The application for DARE "felt like something I could write quickly on my lunch break, and not need to edit later". Others also said that the process felt nice and easy, and that the interview was very accessible with one artists saying that "***I left feeling like I gave a really good representation of the work I wanted to make because I'd been able to prepare***". This preparation would have included developing answers to our interview questions which we sent to all shortlisted applicants in advance.

An unsuccessful applicant wrote to us to say "***Also I just wanted to thank you and the team for the inclusive and thoughtful application process. It's unusual for [an] organisation to be as considerate of the artists applying for small/seed commissions, the flexibility on the word count and getting back to us about the shortlist were particularly useful***".

However, we also received some constructive feedback. One company of disabled artists got in touch to let us know that they wouldn't be able to apply as the turnaround between commissioning and presenting the work was too short and therefore not accessible to them. The timeline for DARE was truncated this year due to the pandemic which necessitated moving our festival dates. In addition, we had to wait until Arts Council England's project grants reopened to apply for funding. In future years, we will revert back to our previous timeline which was 4-5 months long, to ensure the process is more accessible.

When asked in a post-DARE evaluation if the offer for the DARE Artist Development programme was clear when applying to the festival, 5 artists said yes, with just 1 company choosing no. We feel that our [guidance documentation](#), live introduction/Q&A over Zoom, and email support offered to applicants should have ensured that the offer was very clearly outlined to artists, but as with every year, we will review this guidance again before our next call out to ensure this is the case.

## Commissioned Artists

There were a total of **27 artists** involved in creating the **6 commissioned works**. At the end of the programme, we asked each artist involved to complete our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion monitoring form. We received only 7 responses to this form, so the results are therefore not particularly useful when reflecting on the diversity of the artists involved.

However, we do have some more concrete data on EDI from artists' applications and information that they shared with us across the life of the project. This indicates that of the 19 lead artists involved in DARE Festival 5:

- 1 (5%) identified as LGBTQ+
- 1 (5%) identified as neurodiverse
- 6 (32%) identified as working-class
- 12 (63%) identified as artists of colour, with 6 of these artists describing themselves as Black and 3 as HongKongers.

As in every year, it's worth noting the intersectionality of the commissioned artists. Six artists, for example identified as both Black and working class.



In order to increase responses to our EDI form, for DARE Festival 6 and beyond, we will send this to all artists at an earlier point in the programme, perhaps at the time of commissioning, rather than at the end. We believe this is likely to generate a greater response rate, as artists will still be focussed on the DARE programme as opposed to this year when artists had moved onto other projects by the time the EDI form was shared with them.

### **Additional Barriers Faced by Artists**

In our evaluation, we always ask artists whether they have faced any barriers that have prevented them from entering or progressing their career in the arts. This allows us to identify other ways in which we could support artists in the future. We allowed artists to define what determines a 'barrier', but suggested this could be things such as discrimination, financial barriers, geographical limitations, or physical or mental health limitations.

**4 artists (67%) said that they had faced some barriers**, whilst 2 artists (33%) said that they had not faced any barriers. The barriers cited were all financial, including:

*"It is **very difficult to find funding** to future develop and/or expand the scale of the work. At the same time, it is very hard to make a living only by creating artwork. Much time is spent in freelancing which is not very related to art."*

At Upstart Theatre, we are well aware of the financial difficulties of being an emerging artist or small company within the UK theatre industry. We already have plans to increase the financial offer for DARE Festival 6, as well as to reduce the financial burden on artists in making the work via increased support-in-kind offers. These aims are explained in more detail later in this evaluation.

### **Additional Partnerships**

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic we were unable to continue our partnership with Streetwise Opera, which involves offer volunteer ushering roles to their members. We had to minimise numbers of staff who were physically present at the venue, which meant we operated with just 1-2 ushers at any one time and weren't able to provide volunteering opportunities. This was previously a very successful relationship, with the same people returning each year to be part of DARE, and we fully intend to continue this when we next present live work for DARE Festival.

## Offering pathways for the further development of outstanding new work

This year's festival was attended by producers and programmers from a number of reputable venues including **New Diorama** and **Oxford Playhouse**. In addition, the link to the digital space was shared post-festival with a number of industry who weren't able to attend, but who were able to explore our online hub and the *&then everything just-* installation in their own time.

In follow-up meetings, several artists identified opportunities that have arisen following their participation in DARE Festival, and all have plans for the further development of their shows. **All 6 artists/companies** said in the final evaluation survey that they **intend to keep their show in a hybrid format in the future with both live and digital offerings for audiences**. In addition:

- *The Learning Lottery* has secured a one-week residency at The Albany in November 2021, along with a £500 grant. Going forward, this show will be co-created with, and produced by, Upstart Theatre. We are working with Katurah to build a longer R&D around The Albany dates and will be applying for funding to support this. We'll also be building partners in the education sector, and developing both live and online versions of the show.
- *&then everything just-* was showcased at a panel discussion led by Season for Change, which Upstart also took part in. The team will be looking to work with a Unity software expert for the next iteration, and will be developing relationships with non-arts partners such as architects and policy makers.
- *The Fourteenth Stop* has already been booked by schools to present digitally to years 3 and 4, with follow up workshops afterwards. The show has also been programmed live at Camden People's Theatre's Sprint Festival in October 2021.
- The team behind *Cart Noodle Show* are eager to explore how they can bring more of their personal experiences and stories into the show to make it more memorable for an audience. Upstart are currently planning a panel event with ShumGhostJohn that will discuss the themes of their show, and explore similar artistic approaches to them.
- *The Isthmus Project* are seeking funding for the next stage of their development. The team view this as an iterative, multi-year project that they will keep building on over time.
- *The Think Tank* team have long-term ambitions for their show to be a blueprint that can be used by other schools and youth groups. They're planning to create a resource for teachers and youth leaders that will help them to lead creative responses from children about the issues that affect them. They're now looking for partners for this community research project and are aiming to test their process and material with a range of different demographics including areas with low arts provision. They are also hoping to collaborate with another DARE 5 artist on this who has specific skills and experience within the arts education sector.

- Upstart Theatre were invited to be part of a panel discussion on digital theatre as part of the STAMP Connects event run by Camden People's Theatre called "Adapt, Explore, Create: What is the role of digital in theatre's future?". The panel included Kevin Jamieson, Head of Programming for HOME Manchester, Javaad Alipoor, artist, activist and writer, Paula Varjack, theatre-maker and video-artist, and Tom Mansfield, Artistic Director of Upstart Theatre. Here, we discussed our experiences of making digital theatre, including our recent digital DARE Festival 5.

We will continue to keep in touch with all DARE 5 artists via **The Upstart Network (The UN)**, a new year-round hub and network supporting Playable Theatre makers across the UK, developed and produced by Upstart Theatre. All of this year's artists said that they'd like to be part of the network, which will come with access to training, development and mentoring opportunities.

We're also developing a '**where are they now**' resource on our website so that we can continue to highlight and promote the many artists and shows that make up the DARE alumni, and the future successes that they have had. We hope that this page will provide a contact point of inspiration for industry, and contribute to helping our artists build their reputation and relationships with industry.

“

*Being part of DARE Festival is the best artistic development experience we've ever had.*

*The team was not only about providing a brave space for creative work to form, but also excellent at listening to our needs, concerns and wild thoughts. From mentoring to marketing communication, they are kind, friendly and supportive. It is indeed the ultimate playground in an emerging artist's dream..* ”

ShumGhostJohn, Hong Kong Art Trio, Cart Noodle Show

## Beneficiaries and Impact

In total, **401** people have benefitted from the DARE Festival 5 programme.

These include:

- 27 artists
- 11 freelance staff
- 352 live audience
- 11 participants

For Upstart Theatre, DARE Festival has once again helped to **build our industry reputation**, and this time, specifically as a company supporting the next generation of Playable Theatre makers. More so than in any other year, DARE 5 has significantly broadened our awareness of artists in the UK who are interested in making playable work, as demonstrated by the huge increase in applications. This demand has fed directly into our plans for The UN.

### Quality of the Programme

Feedback, both through evaluation meetings with the DARE 5 artists and the survey has been overwhelming positive, with many artists highlighting the level of support they received whilst on the programme as being above and beyond what they expected.

In particular, one company said DARE was ***“the best artist development programme we’ve ever been in”*** and went on to say that they had never been part of a festival where the organisers were as responsive and able to take care of every artists’ need as much as Upstart were. Another artist cited the creative support they received from Artistic Director Tom Mansfield as being ***“really crucial to the project”*** and that it ***“went above and beyond what we were expecting him to do”***. An artist who is neurodiverse said that ***“the artist support was first class and I felt totally held and valued throughout this brilliant process”***. And another artist said that they felt that they had loads of creative freedom throughout DARE and that they didn’t feel steered or led in any one direction in particular, as can be the case with commissions. As a result, they said they ***“feel really proud of what we made. We love that it has so much possibility as an idea”***. And another artist said that Upstart ***“are really good at making the space feel supportive”***.

This was reiterated in the evaluation surveys where one artist said ***“I found the whole process incredibly accessible, useful and enjoyable. I felt really artistically nurtured and like the team really invested in me and my ideas. DARE festival was a fantastic opportunity for me. Thank you all so much!”*** Another commented ***“great work”***, and another said ***“We had a fantastic time taking part in the project”***.

It is worth noting at this stage though, that in the survey one artist/company rated the quality of the programme, including a number of aspects within it, as poor. However, this was also the same, and only, artist who said that the offer for the DARE programme was not clear when applying to the festival. It’s therefore possible that their experience may have been affected by a misalignment between their expectations and what the programme is designed for. In addition, we feel that this may be the case because, although the surveys are anonymous, there was only one artist in our evaluation meetings whose verbal feedback aligned somewhat

with the ratings in this survey, and that artist also compared us to a brilliant, although much larger and significantly more resourced, theatre company. This is an organisation with core funding and a full-time staff team, whereas Upstart is a project-by-project funded organisation made up of 3 freelance staff who work on DARE on a part time basis. This naturally means that we can't always offer the same level of availability as an organisation such as this, but we always strive to deliver the same level of quality and care for our artists.

Our evaluation survey showed that:

- 3 (50%) artists rated their **overall experience of being part of DARE Festival** as excellent, 2 (3%) as very good, and 1 (17%) as poor.
- 4 (67%) artists rated the **quality of creative support they received from Upstart Theatre** during the DARE programme as excellent, 1 (17%) as very good, and 1 (17%) as fair.
- 100% of artists rated the **number of creative and technical sessions** they had with the Upstart team as just right.
- 3 (50%) artists rated the **technical support provided** as excellent, 1 (17%) as very good, 1 (17%) as good and 1 (17%) as poor.
- 4 (67%) artists rated the **quality of support received in transferring their show to a digital format** as excellent, 1 (17%) as good and 1 (17%) as poor.
- 5 (83%) of artists would **recommend the programme to other people**, and 1 (17%) said they would not. 3 (50%) of our artists said **yes, they would consider applying again**, 2 (33%) answered maybe, and 1 (17%) said no.
- 5 (83%) artists rated the **communication from Upstart Theatre** through the DARE programme as excellent, 1 (17%) as poor.
- 5 (83%) artists said that the **number of three public performances** was just right whereas 1 (17%) artist said this number was too few.

Further to the above, a solo artist in particular told us that they really appreciated the amount of contact time they had with our team, as this was a "*great resource*" to tap into whilst making their show alone. One company said that the level of communication they received from Upstart was really useful, and that particularly as a neurodiverse artist, they found the amount of information, even if things changed later due to the pandemic, really helpful in allowing them to develop their project. Another company thanked us for always being available whenever they needed, and said that there was lots of "***consistent and good communication, all in advance which was great***".

Unfortunately, one company said that whilst the programme was "*well put together at the start*" this didn't continue throughout and they felt it was disorganised, specifically closer to the festival itself when they received lots of late notice requests from the Upstart team. There were definitely a number of requests sent to artists in the final few weeks, which we agree it would have been more convenient to have made earlier. Due to the changing nature of the festival,

presenting it online for the first time, and working with a venue partner who have other shows to look after, some of these late requests were unavoidable. For example, we requested additional, and optional, marketing materials from artists shortly before the festival such as blog posts, as it was suggested by our venue at that time that this would be useful content to promote DARE. In future years, we'll aim to make all requests such as these much earlier on in the programme, and will work with our venue and other partners to ensure that we are aware of these up front.

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 artists indicating that the programme had been beneficial both in the creation of their work and challenging them artistically.

**5 (83%) artists said that they would not have made their show by March 2021 if they had not been commissioned for DARE Festival 5.** In addition, 2 (33%) said they wouldn't have made it as a playable show, and 2 (33%) maybe wouldn't have made it as a playable show if we hadn't commissioned them. Furthermore, 4 (67%) artists intend their show to remain as a playable show in future, with 2 (33%) answering maybe to this question. We're really pleased to hear that this opportunity has been instrumental in the creation of 5 new works, and that at least 2 shows that hadn't originally been envisioned as playable will remain so in the future.

In particular, the team behind *The Think Tank* said that **it was our provocation** to artists to respond to the theme of 'we demand a better future' **that led to their project** taking on its format.

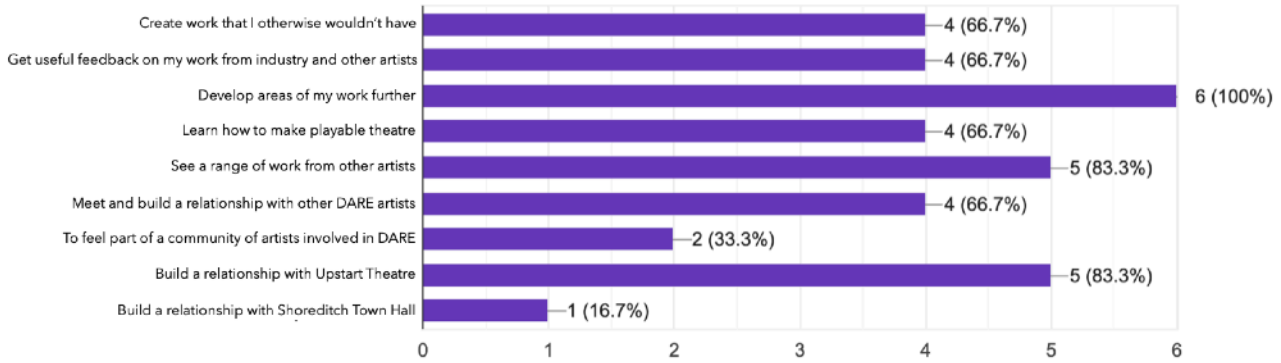
The creators behind *&then everything just-* said that the DARE opportunity **"felt like a provocation to be brave"** and that this was the first time, aside from funding from Arts Council England, that they had ever been given funding purely to develop an idea before. In addition, they said that they were **"really pleased"** with the digital installation they'd made, and that they **"never would have done anything like this"** if it weren't for this specific opportunity. The switch to a digital festival forced them to try an unfamiliar medium, experimenting with video game software and an installation format, but it **"feels really exciting that the form is inseparable from the project now"** and this team have found a form that they'd love to keep developing their idea in. This whole process made them **"think differently about what narrative is"** and was a **"really wicked test"** of themselves as artists.

Speaks of Rivers, the team behind *The Fourteenth Stop* also told us that because DARE was a programme about Playable Theatre, this added a different and new challenge to their work to what they'd encountered before.

We also asked artists to tell us what they felt DARE had enabled them to achieve:

Please select all that apply. Taking part in DARE Festival 5 has enabled me to:

6 responses

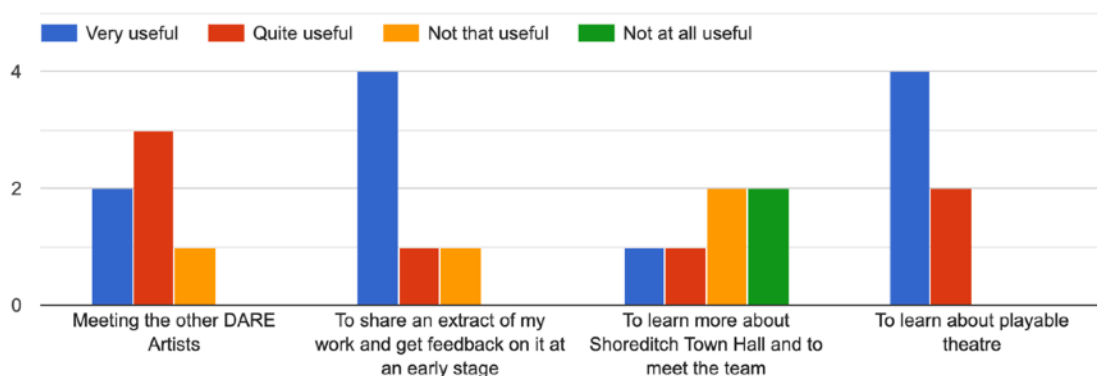


The above chart largely reflects the comments we've received throughout the evaluation process. However we would have expected the answers to 'meet and build a relationship with other DARE artists' and 'to feel part of a community of artists involved in DARE' to have similar responses. This may be due to the nature of the programme being online that meant that DARE artists could reach out directly to each other to build relationships, but didn't quite manage to feel part of a community as perhaps they would have if we had been able to meet in person.

In addition, as the festival took place entirely online, there were fewer opportunities for artists to interact with Shoreditch Town Hall than usual, so it's to be expected that just 1 artist felt they were able to build this relationship. One artists commented: *"Would also have loved more of an opportunity to get to know the team at Shoreditch. I don't feel like I could contact them and they would know who I was. If they were present in one of the check in sessions we had with Tom, it would have been great to really share the project with them."* In future years, we'll look at how we can involve our venue partners more in the process to facilitate this relationship.

### Artist Development Sessions

We held three Artist Development Sessions, all online via Zoom, and we wanted to find out whether the length, structure and content of these were a good fit, and useful for, our artists.



Generally, our artists indicated that these sessions were useful, with a number in particular commenting that the use of Google JamBoard to gather feedback from others was very helpful. All artists said that the sessions contributed towards the development of their show, with some describing the opportunity to test their work as *"so useful and really vital"* to be



able to receive feedback. Though it was also suggested by a couple of artists that the format meant that they didn't provide as much critical feedback as they wanted to as there was a tendency to "be nice".

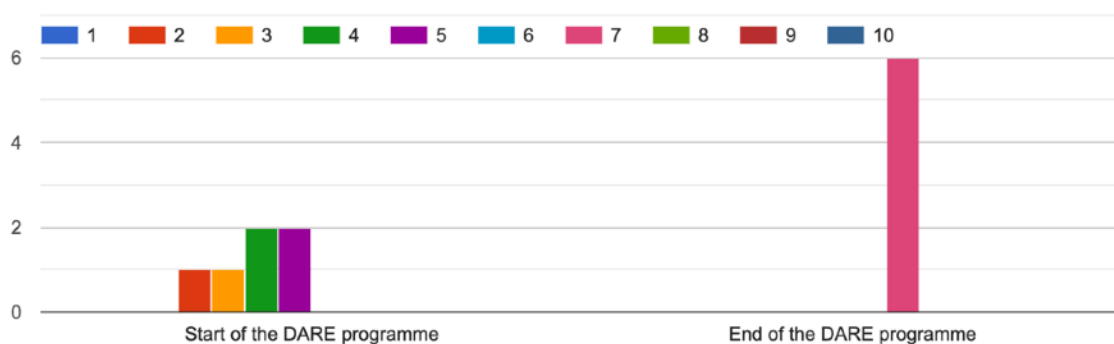
Artists told us how the sessions helped them to connect with other artists. One artist said that realising **"I'm on a bill with these guys makes me really excited about my work"**. Whilst another said that building a network of support that extended to cross-promoting each other on social media was great and that **"having other people cheering you on is awesome"**. It was also said that these sessions helped artists to find the crossovers in their work and gave them access to other makers that they wouldn't have normally. This also came with **"an amazing amount of generosity amongst all of the artists which was really lovely"**. One artist also said that having just six companies on the programme meant that they felt much more connected to the other artists than they would normally. This is something that the Upstart team have also felt, as reducing the number commissions this year from 12 to 6 meant that we were able to dedicate much more time to supporting each company.

Our artists all said that the number of Artist Development Sessions was just right with all 6 artists selecting this option. In addition, all artists are keen for future versions of the programme to have a combination of online and in person sessions, and as this will also contribute to greater accessibility of the programme, this is something we're also keen to continue. Sessions have always previously been scheduled at the weekends, but 4 (67%) artists said they'd prefer for them to be on weekdays during the day, with 2 (33%) preferring weekends. This is likely down to each artists' working pattern, with some artists being full time freelance, and others having full time jobs. There was a general consensus that spreading the 3 sessions over 2-3 months is the right timeline. One artist also commented that it would be helpful for sessions to be shorter if they are all taking place online, and others noted that the online format made it more difficult to achieve the 'water cooler' conversations that you'd usually have in person.

There is unlikely to ever be a format that is perfect for all artists involved, but we'll look at adapting our schedule for DARE Festival 6 in response to this feedback.

### Playable Theatre support and skills development

We asked artists to rate their knowledge and skill in playable theatre making on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 10 is the highest level of knowledge and 1 is where you know nothing) at the start of the programme, and at the end.



This showed us that there was a **definite improvement in Playable Theatre skills and knowledge for all artists** throughout the programme. This question was asked in the end of programme evaluation, and in future years we will ensure that we ask artists to complete a quantitative assessment of their skills before the programme begins, so that we can measure this more effectively at the end. The rating of 7 by all artists shows that there is definitely still room for further training, and we hope they'll continue to develop these skills as part of The UN.

4 (67%) artists rated the **quality of support received in making their show playable** as excellent, 1 (17%) as very good and 1 (17%) as fair.

4 (67%) artists rated the **quality of the Making Playable Theatre workshop** that was presented in the first Artist Development session as excellent, 1 (17%) as very good and 1 (17%) as good.

## **Mentors**

For the first time, we recruited and assigned each of our artists a mentor to support their development throughout DARE. All of our mentors were chosen because of their experience making Playable Theatre, and the high quality of their work in both this area and in the wider theatre industry.

5 (83%) artists rated the **quality of support received from their mentor** as excellent, and 1 (17%) as good.

4 (67%) artists said that the **time they were introduced to their mentor** was just right, and 2 (33%) as too late.

5 (83%) artists said the **number of sessions they had with their mentor** as just right, and 1 (17%) as too few.

Feedback on the mentoring aspect of the programme was incredibly positive, so it's definitely an element that we're eager to keep and build upon in future years. Artists told us how their mentors helped shaped their pieces, and in particular how it was useful to have someone who didn't commission their show to critique it.

*"They were very **friendly and inspirational**. The suggestions/advice were very helpful and constructive, and they suit what we need in our work. They **opened up many possibilities and directions**."*

*"My mentor was **fantastic and really helped shape and sharpen my thinking** going into the final stage."*

*"The mentor **made a huge impact** on the work and **we were incredibly grateful for them!** Would love to of had more time with them! **Was a huge factor for the success of the production**."*

*"Received some **good insights**, but felt rushed and a lot of allocated time was lost explaining the concept/idea. Would have been better for mentors to be allocated at the same time as*

*commissions were given out."*

Artists liked that mentors were present at the final playtest (the last Artist Development Session), and mostly found that the structure of mentor support worked well for them, with one company stating that having the number and rough timing of sessions set by Upstart was really helpful and gave them targets to work towards.

Two companies made suggestions to improve the mentor element: one would have liked to have had as much time with their mentor as they did in the Artist Development Sessions; and another wanted their mentor to be part of the process from the very beginning as by the time they were introduced they had already made some decisions about their show which couldn't be changed.

## **Finances**

Feedback on the financial support of £1000 per commission, along with other support-in-kind, was mixed with **4 (67%) of artists saying it was too little**, and **2 (33%) rating it as just right**. Similarly, feedback on attendance fees for the Artist Development Sessions (£50 per session per commission company) was mixed, with **3 (50%) artists saying it was too little**, and **3 (50%) saying it was just right**. It's important to note that this feedback will no doubt depend on the number of artists involved in the creation of each piece. Our smallest company consisted of 1 solo artist and our largest an ensemble of 6 artists, which will naturally affect how each company perceives the level of support.

We acknowledge that £50 as an attendance fee for a half day session is fine for a solo artist, but of course does not cover the time of 6 artists. The attendance fee was a new addition this year, and we set the fee at this level as in the past we have typically only had 1 or 2 artists from each company attend each Artist Development Session, and it is only a requirement for one artist to attend each time (although more are always welcome to attend if they choose to). However, this year all of the lead artists attended every session, which therefore meant that the £50 fee would not be covering all of their time, as it has been intended to.

One artist added that we should *"deliver on the commitments made to artists in the call out for proposals or be transparent about when it won't be possible to deliver these things. The commission fee is not enough if the other "in-kind" offers are not provided."* Whilst they didn't elaborate further, we believe these elements of the programme are videography and photography. When DARE is live, we cover the cost of a photographer and videographer to capture photos and video of all shows, and we pass this content onto artists to use to promote the future life of their work. With the UK in lockdown, and all artists performing from their homes, it unfortunately wasn't possible to provide this, but this is absolutely something that we intend to do again in future, and we will also explore ways to do so effectively digitally too. In addition, we weren't able to provide BSL interpretation due to a lack of available interpreters. This was also because we had to change our festival plans at late notice and by the time we had a clear plan of what each artist would be presenting, we couldn't find interpreters. Again, in future years we'll endeavour to provide this, and will aim to secure interpreters at a much earlier stage, even if we're not yet sure how the shows will come together.

One company also commented that they felt they didn't pay themselves enough for their time

creating their show, and that this was specifically because as a digital project, it was much easier to keep endlessly working on it at home, as the usual constraints such as availability of rehearsal space were not a factor.

This feedback reinforces what we have already explored earlier on in this evaluation: that **we need to increase the financial and in-kind support offered to DARE artists.**

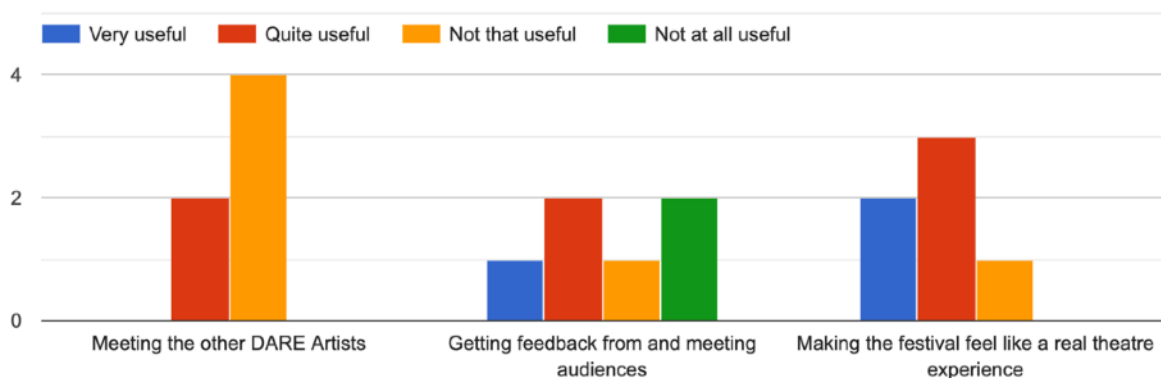
Three companies applied for funding from Arts Council England for their shows, however none of them were successful. The Upstart team supported one application very closely with feedback as this was requested. The companies applied in December 2020, just after being commissioned. The last year has been an incredibly competitive period for ACE Project Grants, with up to five times the usual number of applications in some areas, and with success rates for funding at an all time low. This further reinforces our need to increase the financial and support-in-kind offer for DARE artists, so that larger commissioned companies can be better remunerated for their time.

## Digital DARE

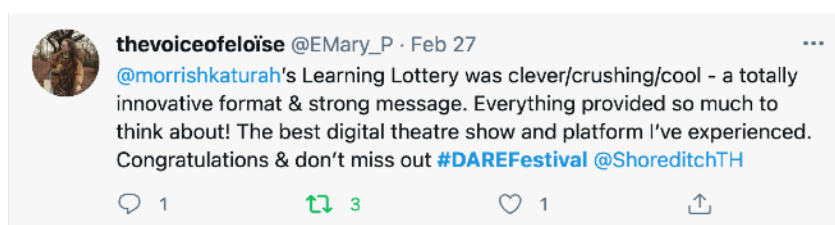
The trial of our first digital DARE Festival came with lots of areas for learning and further development, but was largely felt to be successful by artists and audiences.

**5 (83%) artists would like us to maintain a digital aspect to the festival** (such as Gather and sharing your work with online audiences), even if most of the festival and performances take place in a live setting. 1 (17%) artist would not like us to maintain a digital aspect. The platform was mostly found to be useful for replicating a festival experience online:

Please tell us how you found the Digital Ditch space on Gather for:



Artists also told us that the digital platform was **“awesome”** and that their friends agreed that **“it’s not the same [as an in person festival], but it’s the best thing I’ve been to”**. Audience also seemed to enjoy the platform, with a number taking to social media to share their experience:



**Laura Elliot** @laura\_annelliot · Feb 25

I'm a little avatar wandering around a virtual @ShoreditchTH ! Bravo @upstarttheatre #DAREFestival closest thing to going to an actual theatre in a long while. There virtual ushers and everything! Also LOVED #ThinkTank with the brilliant @GymJam5



**Ben Anderson** @\_ben\_anderson · Feb 26

I've never had a post-show discussion like it- and I love it. #DAREFestival 5 is such an inventive way to build a community around a show and a festival, even with us all having to move online. Thanks so much- and congratulations- @upstarttheatre!



1 3 11

**Michelle Edwards** @michelleedw1 · Feb 27

Ahead of their final performance of The Think Tank by @Fable\_Workshop & @gav\_inmaxwell with @upstarttheatre these little performers are exploring the very cool virtual theatre and chatting to lovely (patient) ushers 😊👍



0:06 137 views

2 2 6

**Grace O'Brien** @GraceOBrien\_x · Feb 26

Well wasn't that a unique theatre experience! Great adaptation of work to an online format #DAREFestival @upstarttheatre @ShoreditchTH Congrats @morrishkaturah ❤️



2 3 5

**Linda Bloomfield** @LindaBxx · Feb 26

Okay I was sceptical when @jamesblakey was telling me about Gather but I'm "at" DARE festival right now and it's like @ShoreditchTH meets Stardew Valley?! Big fan. Less zooms, more customisable avatars and tiny interactive arcade machines, please.



5 3 22

**The Bare Project** @TheBareProject · Feb 26

We had A LOT of fun taking part in The Isthmus Project at DARE festival tonight, an interactive game that demystifies and reimagines England's land system. Here we are hanging out by the fire at @ShoreditchTH waiting for the show to start...



Abby and Alice and Upstart Theatre

2 5 11

**Peyvand** پیوند @Peyvandofpersia · Feb 26

Fully recommend. It was so much fun to see what live, game based virtual experiences can be. Even the social anxiety of being in the virtual foyer and running away from avatars so I don't have to speak to them added value !

**STH Shoreditch Town Hall** @ShoreditchTH · Feb 26

#DAREFestival Day 2 is here! Join @upstarttheatre for 6 new pieces of theatre for the theme 'we demand a better future'. This year's festival takes place in a digital space that even gives you the chance to chat with the artists in the bar after the show 🍷 shoreditchtownhall.com/whats-on/dare-...

The online platform wasn't a completely smooth process though. From the festival side, the biggest issue we encountered was that **online audiences tended to be show up at the last minute**. Just before the show was about to start was often when audiences would start looking in their email for the link to join. However, some people found that the email with the link from Shoreditch Town Hall went to their spam folder, and finding this delayed them joining the show. As all audience were sent the link to the Gather platform, from which they could access the shows, this meant that an audience member who was already running 2-3 minutes late could end up being 5-6 minutes late by the time they have logged into Gather and made their way to the theatre.

This experience **taught us to allow buffer time in our schedule**, perhaps giving audience a 'doors open' time as the start time, so that latecomers don't miss large parts of the show. This is particularly important given the playability of the work, which sometimes required audiences to be given instructions at the start. One artist suggested that we could fill this buffer time with additional content that enriches the world of the show, or even with a 'training' level to let audiences practice the playable elements before a show begins.

Shoreditch Town Hall also sent a feedback survey to DARE audiences, however there were just 7 responses to this. It's worth noting first that the audience surveys were sometimes answered in the context of a person's experience of DARE Festival as a whole, and other times about the specific show that the audience member saw. We have attempted to extrapolate the data that seems most relevant to DARE Festival as a whole rather than the individual shows in this case.

When asked **"How much do you agree or disagree with the following comments about the event? [I enjoyed it]"**, 2 (29%) strongly agreed, 3 (43%) agreed, 1 (14%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 1 (14%) disagreed.

When asked **"How much do you agree or disagree with the following comments about the event? [I would like to see more events like this one]"**, 3 (43%) strongly agreed, 2 (29%) agreed, 1 (14%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 1 (14%) strongly disagreed.

When asked **"how do you rate your experience of accessing the event"**, 3 (43%) rated it good, 1 (14%) neither good nor poor; 1 (14%) poor; and 2 (29%) very poor.

When asked **"How do you rate your experience of the following? [Information about the event]"** 1 (14%) said very good, 3 (43%) said good, 1 (14%) said neither good nor poor, and 2 (29%) said poor. It was clear from some responses that the answer to this question was relating to information about the show itself such as expecting it to cover different themes or content than it did. It's in the nature of in-development work that it might differ from how it is described at the time of going on sale, so a disparity here is to be expected. However, rating the information received as poor also largely correlated with negative experience accessing the event too, and this was explained further in some of the written comments:

*"The virtual theatre foyer was the best part of this experience. It felt lovely to be waiting in the foyer, bumping into friends, asking ushers for help, finding my seat etc."*

*"Technically it was too complicated so we missed half of it. Not being told to leave Gather Town completely resulted in no sound and we were not visible to the actors. Slido was*

*impossible to access as well, all in all a disappointing evening."*

*"Connecting to the event was far **too complex and not intuitive**. Many people had issues. Too many technology layers and unnecessary connections."*

As explained much earlier in this evaluation, we created both written and video guides to demonstrate to audiences how the Gather platform works. However, this video only received 123 views, so we know that not all audience members watched it. Whilst this is to be expected, it might explain why it took some audience members a while to get used to the platform, and especially one that is relatively new software and therefore unfamiliar to most people. There is certainly a balance to be struck in finding the right amount of pre-show information to give audiences, and we'll continue to trial different methods of doing this and making it clearer and more accessible in the future, especially to those who aren't as comfortable using technology.

However, the experience of this audience member shows that virtual ushers were effective in supporting audiences through technical difficulties:

*"It might be good to give people a heads up about the virtual space & Gather; because I actually got a bit freaked out by it, I was worried the whole session would be through avatars and I would have found that really alienating and I might not have stayed. It was only because I **got scooped up by an actual human face on the screen** who helped me find the zoom link."*

The Think Tank team also conducted their own audience feedback survey after each show, and within this there were also a few comments noting that some audience members had audio issues. We soon worked out that this was because of a technical issue with how *The Think Tank* show specifically had been linked from Gather. This meant that clicking this link didn't automatically turn off audio and video on Gather, as it did for other shows, and therefore resulted in an audio feedback between Gather and Zoom. We know we can resolve this by using a direct link in future, and during the festival we used spotlight announcements to help audiences understand that closing their Gather browser window would stop the issue.

It's also important to note that whilst the Gather platform can be accessed via a phone or tablet, it doesn't provide the full functionality of the version that can be accessed via a laptop or desktop. There are workarounds for this such as using the chat function to provide audiences with links to access the shows, but this doesn't offer the intended experience. As this is a rapidly developing platform, we're hopeful that in future it will enable greater accessibility via different devices.

### **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:

*"It would be great if DARE can bring in more writers and industry leaders to watch the sketches as a potential work for their future programmes."* In particular, one company said that **inviting programmers and producers from bigger festivals would be helpful**.

*"I would love some in person time - but that wasn't an option due to the pandemic. I found my*

*post - show session where Hannah and Emma were present really useful to talk about the future producing of the show really helpful - maybe more time with them?"*

*"**Commission artists earlier and allocate mentors at the time of commissioning** or involve potential mentors in the commissioning process."*

*"It would have been great to have met the stage manager for the production earlier. As they often have questions that we hadn't considered. So would be great to think about them earlier."*

One artist said they would have liked to be physically present with other artists if possible, and that a speed networking event would be helpful to get to know others on the programme.



## Final Thoughts, Outcomes & Changes to Future DARE Festivals

As with all previous festivals, we have seriously considered and reflected on the feedback provided by our artists and will be making changes to the programme from DARE Festival 6 onwards that we hope will ensure we deliver an even more beneficial, enjoyable and worthwhile programme of support. As a result of this evaluation process, our key outcomes and actions going forward include the following:

- Dates for DARE Festival 6 are pencilled for the end of March 2022, live from Shoreditch Town Hall. In addition, for the first time, we will be partnering with The Lowry to deliver a digital version of the festival which will run simultaneously to the live one, aiming to reach a wider audience whilst helping connect artists to industry across the UK.
- We've increased the financial offer for artists to a £2000 commission fee, and have increased attendance fees for the Artist Development Sessions to £50 per company member per commissioned show.
- We've applied for funding from Arts Council England to support DARE Festival 6, and are in the process of preparing an application to The Space to support the digital aspect of our next festival.
- We'll revert to our former, longer timeline for DARE, making it a 4-5 month programme to increase its accessibility.
- We'll be offering performance fees to all DARE Festival 5 artists to return to DARE Festival 6 and present their work live to an in person audience.
- We'll add in two commissions for playable live art/installation pieces. We found that a number of exciting applications this year were for playable live art rather than theatre, which we didn't feel could sustain a 30 minute performance, but which we felt would be a great addition to the festival and could enrich the experience for audiences. These applications also showed us that there is demand for support for playable live art which we hope to be able to fulfil.
- The creation of The Upstart Network (The UN) to provide a year-round hub for training, development and networking in the Playable Theatre space. The steep increase in applications this year, and the number of artists who subsequently joined The UN mailing list, demonstrates that there is a much greater need for this support than DARE Festival alone can provide. We've applied for funding to run this programme, and are excited about the potential difference that we'll be able to make for artists who want to create playable work.