

SKIMSTONE
ARTS



Skimstone Arts

Evaluation of Grant for the arts funded
development activity

**Project title: *Investing in quality, opening up
opportunity***

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Final Report, June 2015

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Introduction/context

In December 2014 Skimstone Arts was awarded £33,350 through Arts Council England's *Grants for the arts* funding scheme. With an explicit focus on Skimstone Arts' Artist Ensemble, the funded activity comprises:

1. *MENTORING, for our Artistic Director.*
2. *INVESTMENT in time for us to work together.*
3. *DEVELOPMENT and TOURING of two new shows.*
4. *BUILDING CAPACITY - marketing and tour booking.*
5. *Structured processes of REFLECTION and LEARNING.*

The original application states the following aims:

Through this combination of activity, we want to:

- *Develop and produce collaborative, socially engaging artworks, performances and exhibitions, regionally, nationally and internationally, that are considered to be of increasingly high artistic quality.*
- *Achieve a significant national tour of our two most recent pieces of work 'Jack and Jill & The Red Postbox' and 'Sejour', during 2014/15.*
- *Respond to, and stimulate, a growth in opportunities for the conception, development, presentation and touring of our work, generally.*
- *Capture, explore, and present our individual and collective experience of this development process, in order to embed learning for the future.*

In order to translate these aims into a clear understanding of expected project outcomes (the things that are expected to change as a result of the project) a simple Theory of Change was produced (See Appendix 1).

This mapping of expected outcomes enabled a focusing in on three core areas of evaluation inquiry:

1. The impact of mentoring on the artistic practice of the Artistic Director, Claire Webster Saaremets.
2. The impact of increased time spent together on the artistic practice of Skimstone Arts' Ensemble.
3. The impact of the new producer role, particularly in relation to achieving a growing national profile for the company and its work.

See Appendix 2.

The Theory of Change model also assisted in understanding the connection between these changes, that could be achieved through this project, and longer term impact on the company – artistically and in terms of audience development - plus, at a strategic level, the extent to which these changes contribute to Arts Council England's strategic goals.

This report follows the Interim Report produced in February 2015.

Summary of findings and recommendations

The impact of mentoring on the artistic practice of the Artistic Director, Claire Webster Saaremets.

The mentoring aspect of the project has had a very significant positive impact on the Artistic Director, the work produced and performed by the Ensemble, and the company as a whole.

These structured processes have led to the creation of a renewed vision, mission, method and practice statement, providing much greater clarity of purpose within the organisation. This has directly informed strategic planning at board level.

Mentoring input has directly influenced the development and performance of the work itself, perhaps most notably in relation to set design for *Jack and Jill & The Red Postbox*. During this time the company has further developed the concept of an 'external eye'; recognising the importance of periodic critical input from artist peers.

Working with mentors has enabled the Artistic Director to reflect on and consider the development of her role within the Ensemble and the company as a whole. This has built confidence and provided greater clarity.

Mentoring discussions have also reignited the Artistic Director's interest in the working methods and practices of other artists and companies, stimulating research and the beginnings of her own critical writing.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Complete work on method / practice statement engaging other artist peers in the process. As well as providing firm (artistic / planning) foundations for the company going forward, if successfully undertaken in collaboration with other artists and companies this could also be influential within the arts sector, informing multi-disciplinary theatre practice.
2. Embed 'external eye' approach to critical appraisal in all work generated by the Ensemble.
3. Continue to debate, refine, define and communicate Artistic Director role, internally and, ultimately, externally.
4. Consider making a commitment to regular critical writing as an aspect of the Artistic Director role. This could be, initially, online, as part of the company's web site.

The impact of increased time spent together on the artistic practice of Skimstone Arts' Ensemble.

Having increased time to work together has had a demonstrably beneficial impact on the artistic practice of the Ensemble.

Overall, the project has consolidated and strengthened the concept of the Ensemble within the company.

Individual Ensemble members have significantly developed their artistic practices, including opening up entirely new ways of working, for example, acting for the first time and acquiring new physical theatre understanding and capabilities.

The project has enabled the Ensemble to develop more effective ways of working together devising new work within a variety of contexts and timescales. This has generated a real confidence within the group.

This time spent together has also strengthened bonds within the group based on high levels of mutual respect and trust enabling more risk taking and greater ambition in the work.

In parallel with the mentoring aspect of the project, more time together as an Ensemble has also raised the confidence of the Artistic Director in relation to her leadership role.

There is now a greater understanding about how the process of making work interacts with promotion and tour booking, particularly in relation to making late changes to the work. Issues around time and capacity have also been brought into sharper focus.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

5. Generate more opportunities for cross working between the Ensemble and Young Artist Collective.
6. Continue to consolidate the Ensemble – strive to make longer-term commitment to Ensemble members and improve issues highlighted related to capacity. Consider organisational structure and funding options for this.
7. Ensure process of devising new work align with needs of Producer / Promoter.
8. Continue to debate, explore, refine and define Artistic Director role within Ensemble.

The impact of the new producer role, particularly in relation to achieving a growing national profile for the company and its work.

This new role has been hugely successful leading already to twenty performances of *Jack and Jill* & *The Red Postbox* and *Doorbells* including ten outside of the North East region and with new touring opportunities now emerging regularly (most recently with Theatre by the Lake in Keswick).

A new and growing network of relationships with venues and producers spanning Yorkshire, North West and West Midlands has been built, currently with over twenty-five individual contacts.

The role has also contributed significantly to strategic thinking, planning and developments across the company.

The opportunity to 'test' this role has helped achieve clearer understanding about organisational needs in relation also to publicity and marketing, operational and office management and processes of budgeting for touring shows.

It is also worth noting that performances by the Ensemble during the project have attracted 37 pieces of written feedback, with 10 from artist peers and representatives of reputable arts organisations (see pages 17-19 for some recent examples). This feedback is overwhelmingly positive and demonstrative of the high artistic quality of the work.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

9. Embed the role of Producer within the company over the longer term considering carefully the extent to which this role can be successfully combined with marketing and publicity.
10. Analyse and consider other management capacity issues (project, office, general) and explore options to improve.
11. Seek to ensure processes of critical review and feedback are always embedded within the delivery of performances.

Basis of findings

In September 2014 an Evaluation Outline was produced and agreed detailing:

- *Summaries of the difference we expect the project to make (Project Outcomes);*
- *A more detailed description of the difference we expect the project to make (Detailed Definitions of Project Outcomes);*
- *The indicators (tangible things) we will look at to test the extent to which the change we expected to happen, as a result of the project, has happened (Outcome Indicators);*
- *The methods by which we will explore the extent to which the expected Project Outcomes have been achieved (Evaluation Methodologies).*

The following evaluation findings are therefore structured in this way.

Appendix 3 provides a full list of evidence gathered in support of these findings.

Expected Project Outcome 1

As a result of investment in mentoring we expect the project to make positive changes to the artistic practice of Skimstone Arts' Artistic Director.

What exactly do we mean?

At the end of the project our Artistic Director will be able to clearly articulate Skimstone Arts' practice, enabling her, and, by association, other key people in the organisation, to...

- *Clearly describe the working model, methods, roles and techniques.*
- *Speak authoritatively about the work of the company, including the genre of work produced, key influences and peers.*
- *Clearly articulate the range and type of spaces used to engage audiences, and the reasons why, including, for example, considerations relating to intimacy, scale and proximity.*

What are we looking at to test the extent to which this has been achieved?

- *Has the company produced and published a renewed practice statement, including:*
 - *Practice model, methods, roles and techniques.*
 - *Genre of work, key influences and peers.*
 - *Audience engagement through use of spaces.*
- *Has there been at least one public presentation of this new practice statement?*
- *Has the company received at least five short written peer reviews of this new practice statement, demonstrating artistic credibility?*

Progress at June 2015

Indicator	Progress	Evidence
<i>Has the company produced and published a renewed practice statement</i>	This has been produced and refined but, as yet, not published.	The evaluator has received a copy of the latest version.
<i>Has there been at least one public presentation of this renewed practice statement?</i>	No. The intention is to, instead, have a practice-sharing event later in the year with other artistic directors in order to achieve mutual feedback and artistic appraisal.	N/A
<i>Has the company received at least five short written peer reviews of this new practice statement, demonstrating artistic credibility?</i>	No. It is now understood that this process of peer review will be more successfully achieved through the approach described above. The company has received ten critical reviews of both theatre pieces (Jack and Jill & The Red Postbox and Doorbells) from recognised artist peers and representatives of reputable arts organisations, clearly demonstrating the high artistic quality of the work.	Document: <i>Audience Feedback Analysis</i> .

Analysis and interpretation of evidence

The positive impact of the mentoring aspect of the project has been much more than simply informing the creation of new method and practice statements, as described in the interim report (February 2015):

The development of this 'method' statement feels like an important breakthrough for the company. The mentoring aspect of this project, particularly in the early stages, has provided a key mechanism for these explorations and this renewed articulation: '...these conversations were 'critical' – shaping up vision, roles, responsibilities...' Also, the strategic planning session with board members and staff in September 2014 provided a platform for sharing and developing emerging refined definitions of artistic practice and method. The Artistic Director also cites the new Producer role as important: '...clarifying what we do, thought-provoking...'

Mentoring input from Garry Robson, Artistic Director of Fittings Multimedia company based in Liverpool, led to specific changes to aspects of set design for *Jack and Jill & The Red Postbox*; changes considered to have significantly strengthened the piece: '...small but revolutionary.' Claire Webster-Saaremets describing the impact of Garry's input in conversation with other Ensemble members.

Engaging with other Artistic Directors as Peer Mentors has highlighted the value, and challenge, of committing artistic method and practice to paper; leading to a commitment to convene a sharing event where this can be explored in more detail later in 2015/16.

The process of being mentored has also triggered a renewed interest in exploring approaches developed by other influential artists and companies, including Frantic Theatre, Alan Platell and Robert Lepage.

As well as providing detailed critical feedback on specific performances, the most recent mentoring conversation in June 2015 with Nazli Tabatabai-Khatambakhsh (Artistic Director / Chief Executive, ZendeH) demonstrates a more fundamental impact on thinking and planning in relation to whole company challenges, opportunities and development, for example, in relation to negotiating the interaction of theatre-practice based concerns with those of non-arts partners and collaborators. (From audio recording of mentoring conversation with Nazli Tabatabai-Khatambakhsh on 12th June 2015).

It is clear that mentoring has been instrumental in generating much greater clarity - across the organisation including at board level - about **method**: the way the work is made, **performance**: the way the work engages with audiences, and **practice**: where this fits with the whole company: '...really does feel like this is a practice that underpins all the work that we do ...and that excites me.' (From interview with Claire Webster Saaremets 11th May 2015).

Further evidence of this impact is provided in the audio recording of a group discussion involving Claire Webster Saaremets, Simon Tarrant and John Pope (Ensemble members) and Louise Taylor (Producer), including the following comments:

'Been aware of how important it has been for Claire, and also how helpful for both of us ...the feedback ...having someone theatrical to be an external eye ...constructive... moving you forward.'

'How valuable, refreshing and eye opening having an external eye is ...helps you not get bogged down by it ...refreshes you guys ...for the next steps.'

Claire also describes how mentoring input has led to a much clearer sense of her role as Artistic Director (from interview on 11th May 2015).

Exploring some of the qualities underpinning the success of these mentoring relationships the following were cited most often (from interview with Artistic Director and group discussion with Ensemble members and Producer 11th May 2015):

- Professionalism
- Knowledge and understanding of practice
- Honesty
- Encouragement
- Being practical
- Incisiveness

Expected Project Outcome 2

As a result of having more time for Ensemble artists to work together we expect the project to make positive changes to the artistic practice of Skimstone Arts' Ensemble.

What exactly do we mean?

Unlike Outcomes 1 and 2, this aspect of the 'change we expect the project to make' is much less prescriptive, as it relates to how the artists involved with Skimstone Arts interact with each other; to devise, develop and perform work.

There are, of course, a lot of small, intangible, nuanced things going on here.

Therefore, rather than assert a rigid 'success criteria', the Artistic Director and project evaluator are much more interested in creating space for conversation, exploration and discovery, through which, no doubt, the impact of the additional time available, provided by the project for these artists to work together, to develop existing work and realise new, will be revealed.

What impact do we feel this is having?

The interim report (February 2015) described the following:

Impact	Evidence
<p>In discussion with Claire its clear there have been significant positive developments, artistically, within the company's Ensemble structure. In her interview she talks in detail about the impact of the new practice method on the work of the Ensemble, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Her understanding that having a clearer sense of her role as Artistic Director (developed, in particular, during her mentoring conversations) is having a beneficial effect on the work of the Ensemble: '...clarity of responsibility... working less chaotically... clearer way of Simon and I working...' • Citing feedback from audiences of recent work as being very positive '...seventy per cent positive, twenty per cent not sure and ten per cent didn't like it. And I was quite thrilled with that...' • Describing new audition processes for Ensemble members '...opening up more opportunities...' • And, generally, how the new method '...opens up a much wider way of working...' 	<p>Interview with Artistic Director, 12th January 2015</p>
<p>In discussion, Ensemble member John Pope described Skimstone Arts studio as a vibrant, busy environment, and recognised the artistic and organisational growth that had taken place over the last year. John is clearly very positive about the future of the company and very keen to continue to be part of its on going success.</p>	<p>Notes from meeting with John Pope, 24th February 2015</p>
<p>Following the experience of presenting the new version of Jack and Jill & The Red Postbox for the first time, at Theatre by the Lake in Keswick, Claire (Artistic Director) wrote a short reflective piece about the experience which further demonstrates individual and collective artistic and organisational development (see below).</p>	<p>Short Case Story provided by Artistic Director, 9th March 2015</p>

What was special about last week was witnessing a fellow performer rise in confidence and commitment to fulfill a challenging role in a complex multimedia piece outside of his normal performance parameters. Also, as a small company and therefore a tiny team of 4 - 2 x travelling performers and a technician who spend valuable time disassembling, packing and transporting a heavy set, driving two hours to a venue, unloading and then rebuilding the set, rehearsing lines and music in a B&B room until 11pm then back the next day to meet with our producer who has driven over, despite severe weather warnings... to be front of house, marketing and additional roadie, meant a great deal. This alongside a hardworking, flexible tech team at Theatre by the Lake and a beautiful venue with like-minded arts organisations such as Prism Arts who produce events to support those with dementia - as carers, sufferers or health professionals, was a pleasure to be part of.

This was our first performance of the new version which flowed with our new set, script and developed characters. We could hear audience members crying... and yet laughing at the fragments of humour that we wanted to give as light and shade. Then post performance we were able to engage directly with our audience who were keen to ask questions about how we made the performance and share stories and responses. We are continuing to receive emails directly from some members of the audience days later.

Claire Webster Sarremets reflecting on the experience of presenting the new version of Jack and Jill & The Red Postbox at Theatre by the Lake on 4th March 2015

In her most recent interview (11th May 2015) Claire describes a process of 'stabilising' the Ensemble, including working closely with technician Andy Playford.

In group discussion with the Artistic Director, Ensemble members and the Producer, five main points emerged:

1. Being part of Skimstone Arts Ensemble was 'stretching' for the artists involved, mostly in a very positive way: '...felt quite able to take on a role ...felt quite good.' 'Really nice that ...this open space ...you can fill this ...a creative talent that I can do ...that gets seen, brought forward ...really really good.'
2. The articulation, development and application of *method* has significantly improved processes of devising new work: '...getting quicker to important stuff ...more efficient ...much swifter ...now I can say "this line isn't right" ...and that decision is much shorter ...very quickly make a decision ...with good reasons to keep, not keep things.'
3. The importance of honesty, trust and respect: '...can work quite critically ...some work emotional ...quite deep ...respected where that can be dark spaces to work in ...respect to journey to that level ...emotional nature ...playing lead characters ...truthful ...respect in knowing we can do that ...haven't always agreed ...sort it out quickly ...and not being precious about stuff ...we all want it to work.'
4. Recognising the need to finalise a piece in order to successfully promote and secure bookings; being aware of the limitations and impact of changes to work at late stages: '...can't sell a show until its developed ...clarity of where it's going ... something to be aware of ...knowing at what point any further refinements and tweaks need to be limited ...awareness that tweaks and changes need to bear in mind external commitments ...will further changes affect that?'
5. Growth in confidence of Artistic Director: '...a lot more confident now about direction of piece ...confidence in initial concept and cast that make it work.'

Further positive comments were made about the experience of working within Skimstone Arts Ensemble during one-to-one conversations with the evaluator, including:

- Descriptions of the experience being generous, collaborative and rewarding, leading to '...growth in my practice';
- Building confidence as an artist a 'strong sense of value, belonging';
- '...contributing to a growing sense of purpose, sense of being an artist.'
- Being nurtured, supported.

One Ensemble member described the experience of participating in an event hosted by Hull Truck Theatre as a specific example of the impact on his practice:

'...wouldn't have done that ...really nice to go in ...different way of working ...built to empower ...realise you can do physical theatre ...things you don't normally do ...methods for devising ...coming away ...speaks a lot about how I work with Skimstone ...ways to be a useful, all purpose, on stage performer ...two days of physical theatre ...brutal! ...very active stuff ...still sore! ...interesting... challenging ...big element of trust with clowning ...very odd ...very strange ...interesting stuff ...a couple of years ago ...before I worked with Skimstone, wouldn't have thought I could do this. Now I think I can do this.'

Some interesting reflections on the work of the company were also offered:

'...a real sense of ...elements in a lot of the work. A lot of stuff about real stories ...big important element, real experience ...a playful surrealness ...larger than life. Almost cartoonish, situational presentation ...both micro scoped real, and extravagant out there, strange abstractions of ideas. Feels natural as it's the way the company works. That juxtaposition of real human tenderness – joy, sadness, emotion, with very explored finely crafted surrealness and playfulness. ...clear vision from Claire ...very easy to have them sit next to each other.'

When asked: *If you could change one thing about the way the company works what would it be and why?* the main points were as follows:

- It was felt there was often a lack of sufficient time to devise and rehearse new work. The possibility of planning time differently was mentioned; with perhaps shorter more concentrated periods rather than multiple projects running alongside each other:

'We could do with more time. All of the iterations have been... haven't suffered... but have been in a timescale that is quite short. Been able to work out how to work quite quickly in short timeframe ...would like to have sense of long stretch of time to focus on something specific. Always a bit of a reset. Do sometimes wonder whether or not... so many projects... always something in the pipeline... might be a savvier use of time to completely bracket things rather than overlap ...don't think to detriment. Sometimes could be something that would let method *be* bit more.'

- This time pressure also, sometimes, spilled over into the build up to performances generating a sense of pressure and, at times, anxiety. Whilst recognising that, to some extent, these timescale pressures are common, perhaps even the norm for companies of this scale, there should also be recognition of the potential impact of this on the work and its quality.
- Whilst overall it was felt Claire delivered the role of Artistic Director extremely successfully there was some recognition of occasional tensions related to the exercising of leadership.
- There was a feeling that Claire deserved and would benefit from more support to share some of her many responsibilities.

Looking to the future

In her interview Claire described a focus on consolidating a core team of up to four Ensemble artists including Simon Tarrant, John Pope, Andy Playford and one new member. Her vision is for these artists to work both within the Ensemble and in collaboration with the company's Young Artist Collective.

During the group discussion involving Claire, Simon Tarrant, John Pope and Louise Taylor (Producer) this vision appeared to align well with the interests and motivations of current Ensemble members.

During this conversation John Pope shared the following thoughts:

'...excited about taking Doorbells to fringe. Outside of that – don't really know. Don't have insight into grander plans. Trust that it will be more work of that type ...multidisciplinary engaged with big issues. More music, more blurring of roles ...grows skill base of Ensemble. Wouldn't be surprised if anything popped up! That's how I see what I do. Couldn't speak for other areas. More of a melding of the various facets. More crossover work with Ensemble, Young Artist Collective, more feedback between various shows ...stronger and more diverse. Working method enables that. Interesting to see how that grows ...would love to get involved with Young Artist Collective more ...really feels like belonging. Feels like a really good place to belong ... bringing something to this ...respected ...more than a hired gun. Feels like I'm coming to work, create, offer, rather than be functionary. Don't get to do quite so often in my other day job.'

Simon Tarrant talked about...

'...hoping to push development of them (Young Artist Collective) ...new approach – dalcrose ...the way they see and engage with music ...act better ...work on other ideas ...relationship wise, hard at times. Gives us strength to go forward ...we are really looked after ...great respect.'

These interests and motivations were mirrored in the one-to-one discussions.

'I'm continually glad its staying interesting. As long as it stays interesting and I can be useful, I'm glad that it gets to go on in the way that it does ...excited that I'm still excited.'

Expected Project Outcome 3

As a result of providing funding for a new Producer role at Skimstone Arts we expect the project to enable the Successful tour of Jack and Jill & The Red Postbox and other work by Skimstone Arts' Ensemble.

What exactly do we mean?

*During the lifetime of the project – January 2014 to May 2015 – investment in **our new Producer role** will enable us to...*

- *Present our work more often, with a particular focus on performances outside of the North East region.*
- *Secure tour bookings for the future, with a particular focus on venues and events outside of the North East region.*
- *Initiate and develop new, long term relationships with venues and producers, with a particular focus on opportunities for performances outside of the North East region.*

During the lifetime of this project, we expect to tour the following work:

- *Jack & Jill and The Red Postbox.*
- *Doorbells.*
- *Sojourn.*

*It is recognised, by the evaluator, that key to achieving this will be the production and dissemination of **promotional packs**. Whilst this, in of itself, is not an 'outcome', it is clearly a key 'output' towards achieving future touring aspirations.*

What are we looking at to test the extent to which this has been achieved?

- *Performances achieved during project lifetime (including 'Scratch Nights'):*
 - *Within region: 6*
 - *Outside of North East region: 6*
- *Workshops (associated with performances) achieved during project lifetime: 5.*
- *Tour bookings secured for period after 31 May 2015:*
 - *Within region*
 - *Outside of North East region*
- *New relationships developed with venues and producers during project lifetime:*
 - *Within region*
 - *Outside of North East region*
- *A minimum of 3 positive pieces of feedback from each performance, with a minimum of 1 (for each performance) from a recognised artist peer or representative of a reputable arts organisation.*

Progress at June 2015

Indicator	Progress	Evidence
Performances achieved during project lifetime (including 'Scratch Nights'). Within region: 6	8 performances of 'Doorbells' and 'Jack and Jill & The Red Postbox' Above target	Document: <i>Skimstone Arts National Touring Update – May 2015</i>
Performances achieved during project lifetime (including 'Scratch Nights') Outside of North East region: 6	2 performances of 'Doorbells' and 'Jack and Jill & The Red Postbox' Below target	Document: <i>Skimstone Arts National Touring Update – May 2015</i>
Workshops (associated with performances) achieved during project lifetime: 5.	It is the evaluators understanding that each of the above performances has been accompanied by a 30 minute Q&A session with audiences.	Document: <i>Skimstone Arts National Touring Update – May 2015</i>
Tour bookings secured for period after 31 May 2015 Within region: No target set	2 performance of 'Jack and 'Jill & The Red Postbox' No target set	Document: <i>Skimstone Arts National Touring Update – May 2015</i>
Tour bookings secured for period after 31 May 2015 Outside of North East region: No target set	3 performance of 'Jack and 'Jill & The Red Postbox' 7 performances of 'Doorbells' No target set	Document: <i>Skimstone Arts National Touring Update – May 2015</i>
New relationships developed with venues and producers during project lifetime: Within region: No target set	Unknown No target set	N/A
New relationships developed with venues and producers during project lifetime: Outside of North East region: No target set	26 No target set	Document: <i>Touring Venues Database – May 2015</i>
A minimum of 3 positive pieces of feedback from each performance, with a minimum of 1 (for each performance) from a recognised artist peer or representative of a reputable arts organisation.	At time of writing (18 th June 2015) the evaluator has seen a total of 37 pieces of positive written feedback from 10 performances. Of these: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27 are from general audiences. • 10 are from artist peers or representatives of reputable arts organisations. Only one performance has not received written feedback ('Doorbells' 5 th March 2015). The minimum target for positive feedback has been met by 3 of the 10 performances. 5 of the 10 performances exceeded the target for feedback from general audiences. 2 of the 10 performances exceeded the target for feedback from artist peers or representatives of reputable arts organisations.	Document: <i>Audience Feedback Analysis – May 2015</i>

Analysis and interpretation of evidence

The interim report (February 2015) described the following:

The positive impact of the new Producer role has clearly been huge. In addition to being instrumental in achieving regional and national tour bookings outlined above alongside growing a substantial network of contacts with venues and producers nationally, this new role has also had a significant impact across the company, including, as described by the Artistic Director:

- Raising questions about roles and responsibilities, allowing the Artistic Director to 'let go' of some non-artistic tasks.
- Thinking strategically about audiences and audience development.
- Helping with social media and marketing.
- Contributing to 'critical conversations' around '...what we are doing...'
- '...honing the impact of what we are creating... more strategic... clarifying what we do... thought-provoking... practical... freeing up time tremendously (so Artistic Director can focus on her responsibility)'
- Improving budgeting process, particularly for performances and touring.

In discussion with Louise Taylor (Producer) it was generally felt this new role was delivered as planned and expected:

'Definitely in line with job description ...worked well, working at home and working in studio ...found balance towards end ...doing stuff, and catching up with Claire, contributing to creative stuff.'

Building relationships with venues and programmers was felt to have been a particular success:

'...getting word out there ...venues and programmers ...understanding where venues are, which like to see work before booking, etc ...gone really well.'

Some challenges were expressed in relation delivering the role within one-day per week:

'Feel like one day a week can make things feel rushed. Perhaps going forward group days, say 1.5-2 days, to keep on top of things, get through more a week ...very busy organisation ...may offer more flexibility to respond ...always more to do.'

And in relation to combining the tour promotion and booking with marketing and publicity:

'Conscious of limitations relating to press ...can write really strong press release ...have contacts but not relationships. Wonder with touring outside of region, national agenda stuff, having someone who has all arts press contacts ...PR consultant ...can be key to coverage, press opps, photo opps. Maybe needs more of a specialism ...don't have relationships with press, don't have time to develop them. Developing relationships with venues took priority. Also just knowing how the press work more ...all about connections, contacts, relationships ...comes with specialist PR consultant ...and ideas ...knowing what press like.'

Budgeting was also highlighted as an area where closer working with the Producer would be beneficial:

'Need to be systems so producer can be closer to budget. Didn't feel part of process. Going forward, for future productions, if no supporting funding, need to do much more detailed work on costing out the show, covering costs. Never given a budget. More input towards the end.'

It was also recognised that the term 'Producer' meant different things to different people. There may, therefore, be value in reviewing the role title going forward.

Finally, reflecting on aspects of the role that, perhaps, sat outside of the tour promotion, booking, PR and marketing, Louise commented:

'Enjoyed ...been helpful ...really enjoyed it, part of a wider team ...Being at board away day useful.'

Notes from the interview with Claire clearly demonstrate the overall success and positive impact of the Producer role:

'Without doubt successful ...time and skills to network and build relationships with other venues. That role enables us to do that ... Very good communicator, very organised ...really good having conversations around strategy, strategic touring, really exciting seeing her have confidence. And to see excitement, joyful to see ...worked very very well together ...open communication ...learning about being strategic, being focused, what's achievable, what's going well and why, what else do we need to look at ...been incredible ... more strategic network now.'

Challenges cited match those expressed by Louise:

'...in ideal world two separate roles: marketing and communication ...was expecting a lot ...marketing and promotion one element, other spotting opportunities ...Louise was particularly strong at this ...it's a wide role ...who is able to step in ...interesting set of skills ...think carefully about who is best placed ...what support will be needed.'

Looking to the future

Louise felt that investment in strengthening and streamlining office systems was also a priority:

'Could be some streamlining of overall office processes ...maybe more of a general manager role ...remit to look at office systems ...make suggestions ...move things forward.'

She also raised a number of questions about the various aspects of the role and how these might fit together over the longer term:

'Touring? Where does that fit? Other organisations ...general manager running office, setting up systems, but also things like bookings. That could potentially streamline things, take more of general management stuff from Claire ...would require role to be larger ...could someone deliver both ...touring/national profile ...management ...know of other organisations ...depends on personality. Maybe just need a damn good administrator ...someone really hot on that, maybe short term, reviewing systems, overhauling ...someone different for tour bookings, scheduling, etc. ...need to put systems in place, then could be one person once systems are in place.'

Claire's thoughts and reflections on this resonate closely:

'Need to keep producer role ...have to have someone in that role ...fundamental. Goes beyond project managing ...whole understanding of production critical ...what are the essential skills we need, which ones are desirable ...how important is face to face. What about press and marketing, are they transferrable? ...personality ...someone willing to learn ...confident, but understand theatre making picture across UK at moment ... My responsibility to say where are we ...how do we take that forward.'

Examples of recent general audience feedback

I was at your performance last Wednesday at our lovely "Theatre by the Lake". My wife is in a fairly advanced stage of dementia, your performance made me think hard about all the stages we have been through, and what we face. Of course made me cry. If you are having another performance in the North West could you let me know please.

I was in the audience today and simply couldn't speak at the end. Catherine of Prism Arts and Rachel at the theatre, whom I have been working with recently, would tell you that was not at all like me! I was near to tears and although I had things to say I didn't dare open my mouth. ...My husband Bob had vascular and Lewy Body dementia and Parkinson's. He died 4 years ago having been in care for 4 years. He deteriorated over about 10 years at home and I was his carer. I think you captured us and our situation so well. I keep thinking it's getting easier to deal with and most days it is. But today was different. It was in a way a relief to see your work and to hear others in the audience. I used to think this was only happening in our house... Keep up your wonderful work. I wish you were performing more in Cumbria.

It was one of the most powerful pieces I've seen; it was fantastic.

I'm feeling quite emotionally wrung out, I thought it was excellent.

I thought it was really powerful. A lot of the emotions you evoked can be recognised by other people.

I think you got it so right.

I found this completely overwhelming; I thought it was incredible, I've learned a lot, it's really helped me.

Emotional, portrayed the complexity of need excellently handled.

It was absolutely wonderful.

Examples of recent feedback from artist peers or representatives of reputable arts organisations

I thought it was a very eloquent and moving performance. It highlighted the issues of living with dementia, but wasn't patronising at all about the character of Jill, who had the diagnosis. They created a real sense of her personality and her achievements through her life. The use of the video, both video diary and video footage, to create the sense of fractured vision was really good. I think that, because it was a very skillful piece of theatre, to an audience possibly of not usual theatre goers, it went way beyond holding their attention. It really made people re-engage with what it is to have dementia and to be in the caring role, and the effects that dementia has on family relationships. This was demonstrated in the post-show discussion – people seemed willing to have a conversation about it.

The uncluttered style of the production meant that you couldn't escape from what the actual issue was, which is good for an audience.

It's a perfect length for what we wanted to achieve. It's the perfect vehicle for training because it was an interesting and challenging piece of theatre; people have got drawn into the piece, so they're more open and excited for exploring new ideas through other means, like the Q&A.

The roles that the family played, and the fact that there were other pulls on the children – I thought that worked really well. Having something like this loosens people up, and opens them more to discussion. I thought it was excellent. It enabled people to speak freely.

It's a beautifully crafted piece of theatre, which captures the tensions of dementia really well.

Katie Hale, Creative Programme Administrator, Prism Arts, March 2015

The performances were beautifully pitched and natural, and the portrayal of Jill's deterioration due to her Alzheimer's was especially moving.

The visual performance – using the sheet – of the couples meeting in hospital, marriage, and subsequent family was beautifully done. It really captured their history in a short space of time in a creative and compelling way.

Something to think about: Onscreen you see the character of Lucy (played by Claire) first. Then Claire appears after this scene on stage (as the mother). The immediate assumption is it's the person you've just seen on screen. This means it takes a while before you tune in to the fact that it's actually a different character.

Throughout, I also wonder if you could re-enforce the character difference further by adding other visual signifiers such as: glasses, different clothing, colours, etc.

The movement throughout was really powerful and engaging – especially the scene in the street, combined with the visuals and the falling and catching played out by the two actors. It created a really strong impression of what the character felt and experienced at that moment.

The music blended perfectly with the on stage movement and added further nuance to the performances, and psychological experiences of the characters.

One weak point for me was the post office scene - I thought it was a really imaginative solution but would it be possible to re-film the footage with a more experienced actor? The delivery of the lines stood out as being unnatural and stilted performance-wise.

I think the length of the play is spot on. It doesn't linger and there are plenty of emotional highs and lows, and visual stagecraft to carry you forward on the journey.

Michelle Fox, Director of Duffell Films, May 2015

The white set allowed for audiences to imprint their own narratives as an additional layer to the production from a semiotics and dramaturgical point of view - setting an unspoken tone that the production had made space for audiences to be active in the over experience of the production.

There was a tonal familiarity to the production, in terms of being part of a group of plays I was reminded of: Ben Power's A Tender Thing for the RSC.

I got to thinking about the context of the production, there was moments when the production felt at times it was in conflict in terms of form - that it wanted to emerge as a theatre production programmed by venues, and at others as a drama production programmed by conferences.

The work of the cast is really engaging, moving and memorable - vocally strengthening the characters is an area where there is space to develop this work, as well as the development of the physicality of the characters.

I would be interested in learning more about the characters through the montages via a curated soundtrack to their lives - thus enabling further detail and structure strengthening in terms of: Timeline and time passing.

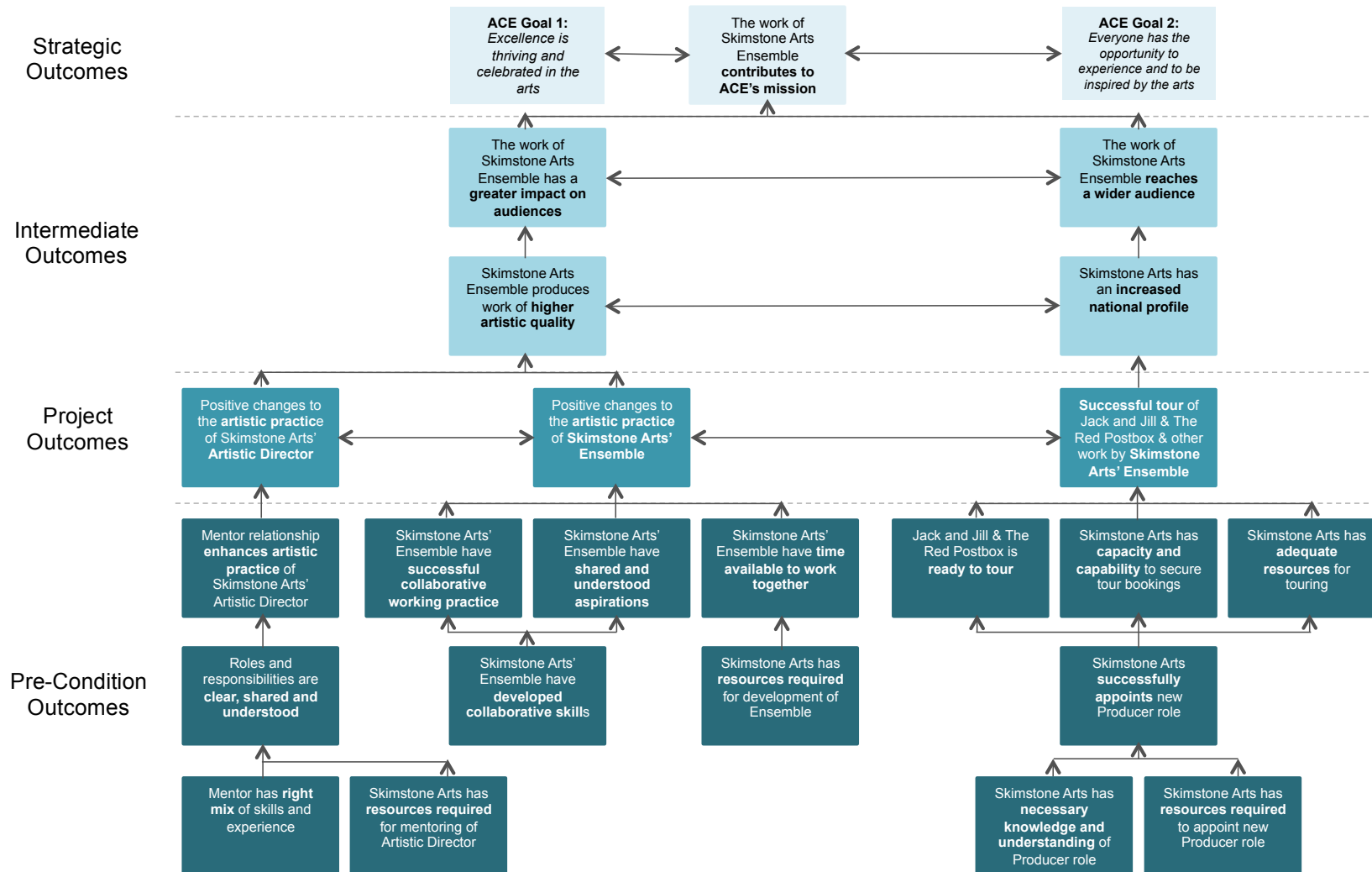
The choices on the whole made in terms of the script are clear and dramaturgically I would be interested in the tonal shifts between the following: Character differences and conventions in term of video and two hander; Proximity scale intimacy; Whose memories the relationship between the Autobiographical and Verbatim base.

In terms of the Collaborative method shared at the post show discussion which I found informative and welcomed by the Audience and Expert involvement - there is an opportunity to address the ambitions of the company for the future of this work in terms of partnership practice.

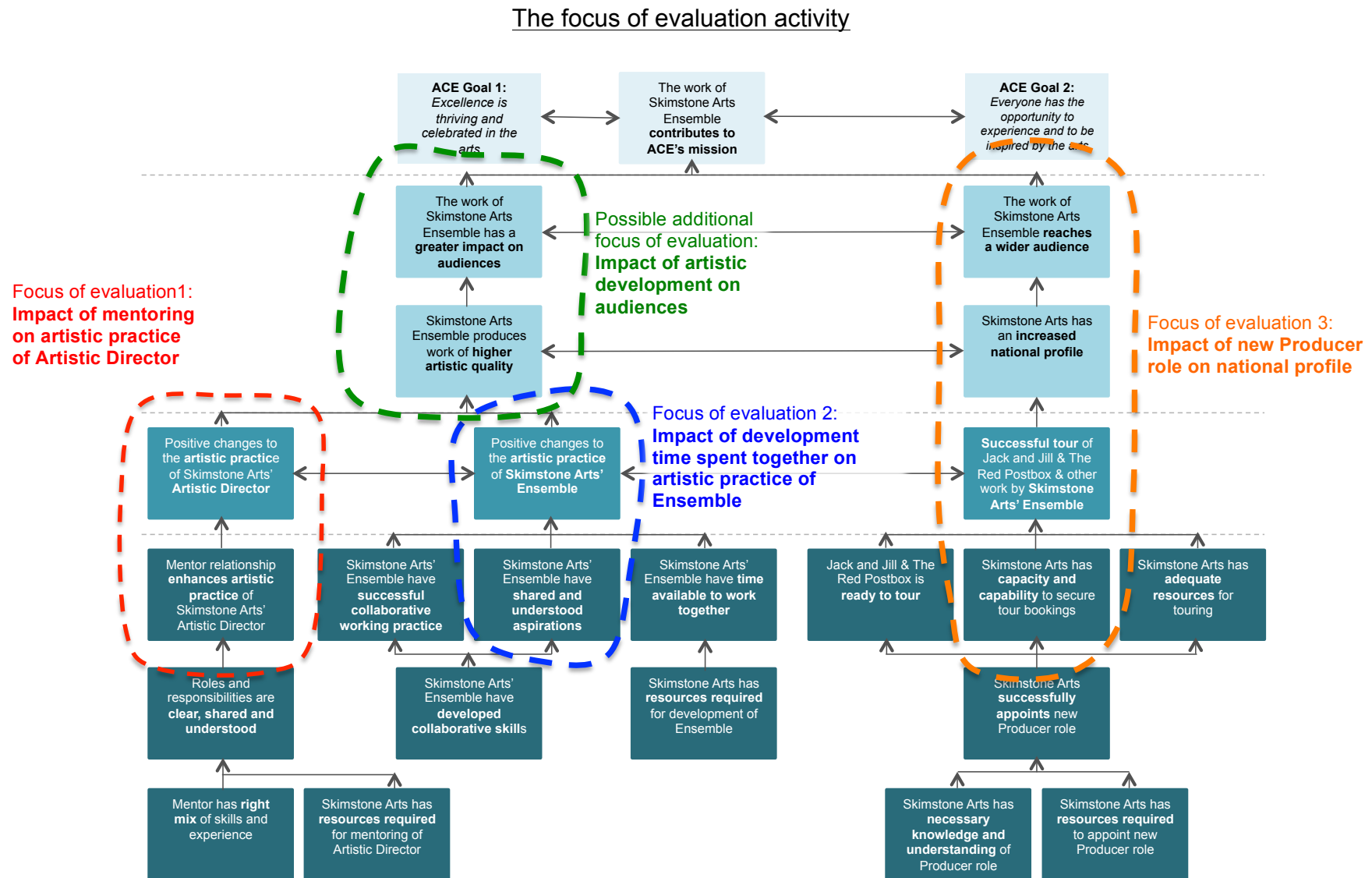
Nazli Tabatabai-Khatambakhsh, Artistic Director/Chief Executive ZENDEH, May 2015

Appendix 1: A simple Theory of Change

A simple Theory of Change



Appendix 2: The focus of evaluation activity



Appendix 3: List of evaluation material

Title / content	Format	Number of pages / duration
Interview 1 with Claire Webster Saaremets, 12 January 2015	Video	57 minutes
Notes to Interview 1 with Claire Webster Saaremets, 12 January 2015	Word document	4 pages
Notes to conversation with John Pope, 24 February 2015	Word document	1 page
<i>Skimstone Arts National Touring Update – May 2015</i>	Word document	3
<i>Audience Feedback Analysis – May 2015</i>	Word document	13
<i>Touring Venues Database – May 2015</i>	Excel spread sheet	N/A
Notes to Skype conversation with Louise Taylor, Producer, 7 May 2015	Word document	2
Interview 2 with Claire Webster Saaremets, 11 May 2015	Video	45 minutes
Notes to Interview 2 with Claire Webster Saaremets, 11 May 2015	Word document	3 pages
Group discussion with Claire Webster Saaremets, Simon Tarrant, John Pope (Ensemble members) and Louise Taylor (Producer), 11 May 2015	Audio recording	50 minutes
Notes to Group discussion with Claire Webster Saaremets, Simon Tarrant, John Pope (Ensemble members) and Louise Taylor (Producer), 11 May 2015	Word document	4 pages
Notes to Skype conversation with Simon Tarrant, 11 June 2015	Word document	2 pages
Notes to telephone conversation with John Pope, 11 June 2015	Word document	3 pages
Mentoring conversation between Claire Webster Saaremets (Artistic Director) and Nazli Tabatabai-Khatambakhsh (Artistic Director / Chief Executive, Zendeh), 12 June 2015	Audio recording	43 minutes
Notes to Mentoring conversation between Claire Webster Saaremets (Artistic Director) and Nazli Tabatabai-Khatambakhsh (Artistic Director / Chief Executive, Zendeh), 12 June 2015	Word document	2 pages