

A&HP_NT1_Interview_17_Nov_2017

Date: transcribed 5th February 2018
Comments: anonymised March 2021
Duration: 1:20:15

KEY:

Cannot decipher = (unclear + time code)

Sounds like = [s.l + time code]

I: = Interviewer

R: = Respondent

NT1, NT2, NT3 = National Trust Staff

NTO = National Trust Other

ACE1, ACE2 = Arts Council England Staff

R: It's not too bad, no.

I: Right, I've got that recorder on, I'm going to put another one on, just to make sure [laughter]. There we are. So, your time is very valuable so I am going to record it as many times as I can. Alright, well that all looks okay, good. Did you get the list of questions I sent?

R: I did, yeah, and I am all poised and ready to answer them.

I: Fantastic, alright, well, let's just go straight in then with that first one, if you think that the order is, kind of, right.

R: Okay, it looks great.

I: First of all, can you give me sort of a brief history of how Trust New Art came about?

R: Absolutely. I am going to take you right back to 1986, and National Trust recognised that they hold a lot of collections ranging from, you know, the very historic, several hundred-year-old paintings, to what we probably know as modern art works. So, art works going right up to the top 50s and 60s, and modernist in style, so, fairly contemporary works. It was also recognised that a lot of the owners of our properties were collecting art to, sort of, contemporary artists, right until the point where they handed over their properties to the National Trust.

It was recognised that we should acknowledge, and perhaps continue and develop this legacy, whilst these places are in our tenure. And, in 1986 the Foundation for Art was set up, and it was set up in a way to collect and commission work by living artists.

I: And, that was a National Trust thing.

R: It was a National Trust initiative.

I: Okay.

R: It had a very specific remit, which was to record the houses and gardens of the National Trust, and the people associated with them.

I: Mm-hum.

R: So, they tended to be fairly straightforward paintings of our places, and a fairly sizeable collection was created, it's said over 270 works. And that was commissioned between 1986 and 1999.

I: Okay.

R: This ceased in 2000, partly I think because it was recognised that we were acquiring lots of works, but we didn't actually have further space to exhibit them.

I: So, were you just exhibiting them in the houses that they were about?

R: Yeah.

I: Okay.

R: There was a, sort of, slight hiatus for a few years. However, during which time, there were a number of temporary, commissioned, programmes, that were placed in National Trust places. They tended to be commissioned from outside, so, organisations like Meadow Arts were commissioning works for our places, yeah, kind of curator initiated, you know, external curator initiated.

I: And that was what? From 2000, is that what you are saying?

R: Yeah, 2000, sort of, onwards, really. But, then it was recognised that something more formal could be set up, and conversations began with Arts Council, who were very interested in our reach, and the reach of our places, recognised that there was a bit of a shared ambition there. With the Visual Arts review turning point, if you recall that?

I: I do, yeah.

R: It came together, and it was recommended that we develop a partnership of some sort. Plus, there was still some funds left over from the Foundation for Art, so that was also put into the pot to, kind of, kick-start a programme. There was a report

commissioned by Arts Council, and it was written by someone called Graham Devlin, and I can send you that report.

I: Yes please, yeah.

R: I would just exercise a note of caution to say that it is not a public document.

I: Yeah.

R: So, please feel free to use it for research purposes, and don't, sort of, lift great sections out of it.

I: Yeah, that's alright, okay.

R: If you want to quote it, just let me know, so I can check that.

I: Alright.

R: But, you know, it's absolutely fine for you to see as part of the research. In fact, it's quite an interesting read, and it will be incredibly useful for your purposes.

I: Right, brilliant. What date was that report?

R: It was in 2008.

I: Okay.

R: It took a bit of time to come together, but this was commissioned, and then Trust New Art began in 2009. So, [NT1] was appointed in 2009 to run the contemporary arts programme.

I: Yes. [Were they] a consultant, or [were they] a National Trust staff member?

R: [They were] a National Trust ... yeah, [they were] appointed as an employee.

I: Okay.

R: Solely for the purpose of running this programme, getting it off the ground. And, it was recommended that we start off with ten to twelve properties, and work something responsibly.

I: Yeah. What was the package of funding that was put together to support that?

R: I think we were asked for to apply for ... no, I'm not sure if it was strategic funds, it might have been strategic funds, actually, that it was initiated with. I am not sure exactly how much that was.

I: Okay.

R: But, certainly, a sizeable chunk, I would probably say, £100k plus, I don't know.

I: From Arts Council?

R: From Arts Council.

I: And, then, did ... what about National Trust, did you...?

R: We had £200k left over from –

I: From the other one?

R: – the other grant.

I: £200,000?

R: That was put into the mix.

I: Okay.

R: The programme had a number of aims, and I am sure [NT1] had to sell quite hard to properties who hadn't perhaps thought of commissioning contemporary art before, of what it might include. I think it was about teaching enriching experience, bringing in the audiences, but also, the fact that we had some money to tempt people with, was probably a bit of an incentive for getting properties involved.

I: You had a pot that you gave ... well, so, [NT1] worked individually with the properties to commission something?

R: Yeah.

I: Yeah, okay. So, you think there were about ten or twelve properties in that first ... and what was that, sort of, because I have a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding...?

R: Yes.

I: But, I think that might be the initial one, because it talks about a pilot project.

R: Right.

I: I guess that was from about 2009, that first MOU, is that right? Or, something like that, 2008?

R: Yes, but that would have been, I think, 2009 to 2012?

I: Okay, yeah, yeah. You mean there is a new one, is there, or...?

R: There is another one that was 2014 to 2018.

I: Okay.

R: I think there was a slight hiatus, not for any particular reason, probably other than it took a while to pull it all together. Have you got that 2014 to 2018...?

I: **No, I've only got the first one.**

R: Ah, right, I'll send you that.

I: **Okay, brilliant.**

R: And, I will send you this report.

I: **Lovely.**

R: In fact, I'll do that now.

I: **Fantastic.**

R: I'll send it to [s.l Bea 0:08:49.8] as well.

I: **Yeah.**

R: We are currently developing a further MOU.

I: **Okay, with Arts Council England?**

R: With Arts Council England, yeah.

I: **Because, I notice on your, I think, on your web pages, you say there is a relationship also with Arts Council Wales.**

R: Yes. It's not actually an MOU.

I: **Okay. Sorry, I might be jumping around a bit.**

R: Yeah, well, we have certainly worked with them, must have had some sort of partnership agreement. We have worked with them through a particular project which is at Penrhyn Castle.

I: **Oh, yeah.**

R: But there is an ambition to continue and develop that, so...

I: **That's the Neil Bromwich, Zoe Walker...?**

R: Yeah.

I: **Okay. So, that's the first one in Wales?**

R: Yes.

I: Okay.

R: But, what we have found, well, what I'm discovering and realising is that, actually, lots of properties have done contemporary art commissioning, but it might have been outside the framework of Trust New Art.

I: Yes, I was going to ask about that, yeah.

R: So, for example, certainly pre-2009, there was a lot of stuff going on. But, I think one of the ambitions with the 2009 programme, was to, kind of, raise the level of quality and aspiration in commissioning contemporary art. Because, it was ranging from very, sort of, domestic scale, watercolour painting shows. Slightly, dodgy, kind of, sculptural trails to slightly dubious intervention. I mean, I think even now, we find that occasionally we buy things that crop up, that aren't really that great. So, it is quite hard to control, particularly with our delegated framework, I'm not sure if you are aware of that?

I: No, tell me about that.

R: Essentially, we are not a 'top down' organisation. Although I'm Contemporary Arts Programme Manager, I don't tell properties what to do, I need to work with them to support them, and advocate advice. But, the General Manager of those properties is the person that makes the decision about what they do, how much money they put into it, and, you know, ultimately who they commission, and things like that.

I: So, you sort of invite the cohort idea, you approach friendly properties, or ones that you think would be interested, and you sell the idea to them, and they come into it if they want to, is that how it works?

R: Yeah...

I: Or, are they coming to you saying, "Can we be part of this?"

R: Um, I mean, it works in different ways. Sometimes, properties will just come to us, especially now, you know, the programme is very well known across the organisation. We have a conference every year, called the Move, Teach and Inspire Conference, which really shines the spotlight on great projects. It might be contemporary art, or it might be another kind of programme. But, a lot of them recently have been contemporary art programmes. They will be highlighted at these conferences, which is for staff, and properties are very, very excited about being involved.

I: Okay.

R: Quite often, they come to us, but sometimes, we have a great project that we think, "That would be fantastic for that property," and we try and encourage them to work with it. What we are tending to find now, is that ... I think the way it was sold originally was really perhaps a little bit instrumental, it was around looking at how this might do things for them.

So, it's about telling [s.I richer 0:12:54.9) stories about, perhaps moving audiences to different parts of their estate where they might not go otherwise. It might be about revealing different aspects to their stories of their place. It might be about continuing the legacy of that place. But, fundamentally, most of these programmes will have what I would probably call an instrumental, kind of, aim. Quite a lot of it is about building audiences, and bringing new people in, and offer for certain audience segments, or bringing repeat visitors back, that kind of thing.

I: Mm-hum.

R: It is quite hard to say, "This is the project, let's just do it because it will be brilliant."

I: But, you seem to be implying that there might be that aspect of it, as well, are you?

R: Yes, I mean, you can certainly throw it into the mix, but a lot of our staff on properties, you know, they are not coming from an arts background. They have got their bottom line to think about, so they will want to know what it's going to do for them. Actually, the organisation is fairly commercially minded, I would say, and thinks about ... I mean, within that mix, it's about serving the needs of the members. But also, making budgets meet. I think, because there is a delegated framework, also means that each property has its own operating budget.

I: Okay.

R: And, there is ... I mean, it's a system that I don't know inside out, but basically, for every visit, properties get something like £2.75 for every member that visits from the central membership income budget. So, they obviously want to drive member visits, they are getting money, but also any 'pay for entry' visits that they get is theirs. But, what they do is, they still have to put forward their financial forecast, and business plan for the forthcoming year, or three years. Then, that will go to central budget board that will approve, or not approve it, so, they will put things into their budget. They may put in, kind of, £20k for an arts project, but they will want to see that that somehow finds its way back into the budget for the following year.

I: Okay.

R: Or, that it is doing something ... I mean, because we don't get any ... obviously, apart from Arts Council, but that's not a statutory payment, that's very much a grant for the arts basis, and we apply specifically, rather than something that we just get.

I: So, what's this at the moment? What's the overall budget for the Trust New Art programme?

R: That's a good question [laughter]. We previously, before I arrived actually, [NT1] held a central budget, which was applied for, and then distributed across properties. So, properties put all their project plans into [NT1], it was collated into an application, and then all the money was distributed across the projects. That was, 2014 to 2016, that was £300k.

I: Okay.

R: However, since then, Arts Council are very keen to not distribute large sums of money from central funds, because they want to push money out to the region, so, they asked us to apply regionally.

I: Oh, right, okay.

R: So, we have different relationships with different regional Arts Council members, Arts staff members.

I: Oh, yes, okay. So, you have to put in multiple ... I can't remember how many regions there are, seven, or something, isn't it?

R: Well, there are five actually.

I: Five regions, so you put in separate...?

R: They have reduced the number of regions.

I: You put in separate grants with the Arts into each region?

R: Yes.

I: Wow.

R: So, each region has asked us to do it slightly differently, as well, which complicates matters even further. The North region has been fairly enthusiastic about the programme, and have said, "Yes, apply for up to £250k over two years, to fulfil your project." And so, we did that in 2016, and I think we gained £197k or something like that, and that goes across nine projects over two years.

I: Okay, and your contact there is [ACE1], is that right?

R: [ACE1], and [ACE2].

I: Okay.

R: In the Midlands, it's a similar kind of thing, they gave us slightly less money, so £150k there. In the South East and East, which now covers the East as well, they said, "Well, we don't have big pots of money like that, can you apply property by property, or small clusters?" So, that's what we are doing there, which has its advantages and disadvantages. I will go into that a bit more in a minute.

I: Okay.

R: A similar scheme was applied to the South West. And, then, London, we haven't actually had – London is its own region – we haven't had a conversation with the London team, really, yet. We don't have many London properties, it hasn't really been appropriate, yet, but it is something that we feel there is potential there. So...

I: Sorry, can I just ask, National Trust Scotland is an entirely different organisation, is that right?

R: That's absolutely right, yeah.

I: And, as far as you know, is there any similar activity happening there? What's the relationship between National Trust England, and National Trust Scotland?

R: I mean, I think there are things that we, kind of, convene on, but I don't have any contact with them. I think that's because they don't actually have a contemporary arts person in post. They have done contemporary arts stuff before, but I don't think it has been on a formal basis.

I: Okay, I can follow that up separately.

R: Yeah.

I: I just wanted to clarify. Okay, that's good, go on. Go on where you were ... you were talking about London.

R: Yeah, I don't know how interesting the funding thing is for you, and I realise that I have sort of jumped slightly, in terms of the MOU and the history of TNA, I have put together, so that's seems a natural thing. I don't know how interesting the funding stuff is, or how much a part of the mix that is?

I: Yeah, I mean it is interesting to have that as the background in terms of looking at scale, I suppose, of other organisational ... if we were to look at other organisations, what their sort of scale of projects are, or scale of ... it's interesting the way the negotiations went. You are saying that this was a national pot, and then it goes to these regional things, and it gets more fragmented, that's quite interesting, perhaps.

R: I think one of the challenges, in terms of the MOU with the Arts Council, particularly as we are in the renewal process at the moment, is that Arts Council have a very strong focus on diversity, and they are trying to reach much broader audiences than the traditional arts audiences. However, up until quite recently, that hasn't at all been a priority for National Trust, we have been all about just getting membership, where they come from actually. Why try and reach to the hardest places when there is plenty of low-hanging fruit wanting to become members.

I: Yeah.

R: Because we are not a government subsidised organisation, or anything like that, there is no, sort of, responsibility. So, people that pay are our responsibility, they are our members, we need to look after them, but we don't need to, you know. In a sense, we haven't got a social responsibility.

I: Yeah, you are a membership organisation, and therefore ... yeah.

R: However, that is definitely changing, and there is much more of an aspiration from the senior leadership team to become a much more socially responsible organisation, and to really make us for everyone. The mission is 'forever for everyone', and, actually, the focus is much more now on the 'for everyone'. So, I think, we are moving towards that. You know, we still have a financial imperative that we need to fulfil, so, we know that reaching out to more diverse audiences, doesn't necessarily have the financial returns.

I: **Yes.**

R: But, you know, it's just sort of navigating in a way, and I really feel that through Arts Council support, we can really achieve some of those aims around diversity, but it's a harder sell to our properties.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Okay, if we go back to the question, I'm thinking about the aims and objectives of Trust New Art.

I: **Yes.**

R: There are a number of aims and objectives, and again, I have alluded slightly to it. I think the over-arching aims and objectives are outlined in the MOU. You know, create great art for broad audiences. I think in terms of the organisational aims and objectives of Trust New Art, I think they differ from project to project.

I: **Okay.**

R: You know, some properties might say, "Well, we want this project to tell a different story." I think it is definitely part of our strategy of experiences that move, teach and inspire. So, it is very much at the heart of all of the programme, that's very much where we sit within the strategy.

I: **Okay, that looks like a National Trust...?**

R: That's a National Trust strategy. So, that's 2015, it was written, and it's a ten-year strategy.

I: **Okay, and is that a public document? Can I find that, or could you send me this document?**

R: I can send it to you. Again, please do treat it as a research document only.

I: **Yeah, yeah.**

R: I am pretty sure it is probably publicly available somewhere.

I: **Yeah. If I dug around on the National Trust website, I might find it, maybe?**

R: Yeah.

I: But, if you could send it, that would be brilliant.

R: Yeah, sure. I will just need to double-check before I send it, but –

I: Of course.

R: – if it is available, then I can definitely send it.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: 2015 to 2025. Yes, it's called 'Playing our Part' and it's definitely available, so I will send you that.

I: Great.

R: Absolutely, this is probably more of a summary version, but...

I: That's fine. I was just looking at the ... the MOU I've got in front of me is the older one, it talks about three strands. This is the initial one, so it is talking about lead properties, which you have talked about, and the pilot programme, but it also talks about 'organisational learning'. There are two questions that I was going to ask you which were, how is the shape of the programme changed since it started in 2009? Or, the types of works it might be commissioning? But, also, it would be interesting to find out about the organisational learning that has occurred across that – whatever it is – seven or eight years now?

R: Yeah, okay. Well, I think one of the key learnings is that we are now an organisation that commissions contemporary art, and are okay with that. I think it has taken quite a long time to embed that thinking within the organisation.

I: But, you feel that is now embedded?

R: Yes, I mean, the other thing is, in terms of organisational development, I think it's always an evolving picture. It is never a static, "Right, we have done that now, we are okay with it." Because, I think as people leave, and new people come in, you know, invariably, there will be dissenting voices, enthusiastic voices, and actually, one of the key challenges in terms of our organisational development programme, is that there is quite a high turnover of staff, particularly at property level.

So, whilst our current Director General, Helen Ghosh, is absolutely supportive of it, and really champions it, and loves it, actually sometimes persuading a General Manager of a particular property that this is a great idea, when they have just moved in, and they have come from a, kind of – I don't know – retail background, or something, so persuading them that it's a good idea is quite hard, quite frankly.

I: Yes.

R: I think that's definitely one of the challenges of the organisational development programme. The way it is run since 2009 has been that we have regional cohorts

of properties that are taking part in Trust New Art, that have had workshop sessions, often run by professional contemporary art curators, led by [NT1] in the past, now led by me. I'm running the programme across all five regions, anyone that has got any aspiration to be involved, or actual involvement with Trust New Art, can take part in it.

I: Okay.

R: It tends to be quarterly workshops, that look at different elements of the commissioning process from engaging audiences, to how to select artists, how to evaluate, to ... so, quite nuts and bolts things. We will often have inspiration sessions, so that we look at different projects, different arts projects, getting them familiar with what contemporary art can be. We might often bring external speakers in to talk to them about a project that they've run, or an artist to talk about their work in residency, or something like that. It is really useful for those participants to get a real sense of what is possible, really. Yeah, so that's that strand which is continuing and evolving and developing.

Audience development is certainly at the heart of what we do, again, it is an evolving picture. I think one thing we do really, really well, is to have a huge quantity of visitors. We have high visiting numbers compared to lots of traditional galleries.

We are also working with audience agencies, as I mentioned, capturing some of that data. I'll send you the report that we had from our (over-speaking 0:31:19.2), our initial...

I: Yes, and you said that there was a survey that they were doing at every Trust New Art property site?

R: Yes, should I send you that as well?

I: Yes, if you could send me that, that would be good. I think I did pick up something when I was at – where was it – Acorn Bank, the one in the Lake District?

R: Yes.

I: I think I picked up something that looked like a questionnaire of that nature, I've only got a hard copy of it, if you could send me a...

R: Yes, sure.

I: That would be great.

R: I'll send you that now. So, yeah, that's definitely really important. I can't find it now, don't know what I have done with it. Yes, so, that's a really important part, that's obviously one of the strands, as well.

I: And, in terms of the way that the artist that you have been working with, or the types of commissions, or the art forms, or the quality of the work, the

scope of it, has that changed since the beginning the Trust New Art programme?

- R: Oh, the scope of the work? Yes, a little bit yes. So, for example, there was a programme, when Trust New Art first started, which was an Arts Council collection, touring pieces to go in various properties. That was one of the things that we were part of. Sorry, I'm trying to find you this report.
- I: **I know [laughter]. I can tell that you are doing two things at once.**
- R: I should never try and do that, should I?
- I: **No, we all do that, it's just, if I don't do it now, otherwise I'll forget to do it later.**
- R: Yeah, yeah, exactly. It's hard to say whether it's changed, really, and it is so, kind of, how that is. I think, we have always tried to work with interesting artists that are at the critical end of practice, physically engaged end of practice, but that are also a little bit experienced at working in non-art settings.
- I: **Yeah. So, working in kind of...?**
- R: That hasn't changed. I think there is probably more of an ambition from properties to commission, it's very much about their places, whereas there might have been, perhaps, more touring shows, I suppose, I can't say. I think the ambitions remained largely the same, and certainly the types of artists that we were working with.
- I: **And the variety of art forms, is that important, do you think?**
- R: Wherever you go, you emphasise that it's a cross art form thing, it's not specific to visual arts. However, I would say our programme has incorporated performance, dance, writing. I think, there is definitely quite a big chunk of visual arts practice.
- I: **Yes, it comes across when you look at the website, the update pages, it does come across as quite strongly visual arts. I mean, there are some things, obviously, like writing stuff, and things that come through that, but...**
- R: But, I think that is for good reason, it is not because we don't want to do other things. I mean, we did a really great project with WildWorks – a theatre company – called Wolf's Child at Fellbrigg, which was an incredible, immersive, theatre production. But, it was also just incredibly expensive, something like £90k, or more, that might have been just when we put in, a partial contribution.
- You know, we have to be mindful that that was delivered to, sort of, 200 people per sitting, and there were only three or four sittings. Well, it wasn't quite sittings, they were moving around, but, that's not many people, not as many. And, to do a performance well, I think, you need to invest in it, it does have very limited audience ... you know, touch a limited number of people.

- I: Because, I was noticing that some of your visual arts, kind of, installation type commissions, quite a lot of them are on for, like, six months. Or, they seem to be extended. Some of the things seem to be in situ for up to two years, or something, even though they are temporary projects. Is that right?**
- R: Yeah. Certainly, things that are slightly more, sort of, building-y type, structure-y type, like pavilions. Or, you know, we've got a bothy, we have got a pavilion, we have got various, kind of, more ephemeral architecture, they tend to be up for a bit longer. But, they are not cheap either, obviously.
- I: No [laughter].**
- R: You know, it's about getting the value from that.
- I: Yeah.**
- R: So, recognising that the demographic of the visitor is occasional visits, more than regular visits. A city art gallery might have people that drop in, probably, every couple of weeks, whereas, we tend to be a place that people go to perhaps twice a year, or less, even. And, a lot of tourists as well, so, we are not getting that continual turnover. There are people that come and walk their dogs on the estate every day, but they not necessarily there to experience art.
- I: No. So, that's the idea of having these things on for longer, that you can capture a...?**
- R: Yeah, so it's capturing more people, and maximising the cost of it, I suppose, as well. I think there are challenges with performative work, and the types of [s.l media 0:38:59.3). And, with writing, it is quite hard to, I suppose, kind of engage visitors in a way that might ... obviously it is not as visual, so it is harder for them to perhaps gain from it. That might be more of a vicarious encounter, it might be through an on-line. you know, poetry on-line that's been made in response to property. But, it's hard to track the impact of that.
- I: Yes, and the impact is not happening on site.**
- R: It's not happening on site, that's right.
- I: In terms of this tradition, you started off by saying that, initially in 1986, it started because there was a recognition of National Trust properties, or owners being art collectors. I presume you meant visual art collectors, and commissioners of arts and crafts and good architecture. But, some of the houses are houses which are or were the residences of writers –**
- R: Yes.
- I: – major established writer figures, aren't they, some of them?**
- R: Yes, absolutely. So, where those were where writers lived, we have set up writing programmes, particularly in the South West, at the cross-property programme, called Writing Places, which is delivered in partnership with Literature Works,

which is a national writing development agency. That's properties like Hardy's house, Coleridge Cottage, Greenway, which was Agatha Christie's house. So, yeah, very obvious links there.

I: Is that part of the Trust New Art programme as well?

R: Yes.

I: Okay.

R: I mean, actually, those links are very important, you know that we have Spirit of Place statement. So, the commissions do need to be incredibly connected to Spirit of Place. Where, perhaps, theatrical performances took place, I mean I am thinking of places like Smallhythe, where Ellen Terry lived, that would naturally be a part of the programme. But, not in all places, so, yeah, we tend to try and connect them.

Also, there are the practical constraints of what we can achieve, what we can actually deliver. I think the other thing about performance works that is very difficult, is sites where spaces are difficult. It has to be outside and therefore it is very risky, you know, there are lots of practical considerations for those types of one-off moments.

However, I do think one-off moments can be incredibly inspirational, and can be a catalyst for thought, and thinking about that place can change perceptions. You know, you can coalesce a lot of press and media around it, to really make it sing, and they can be very powerful, as well, for those people that do attend. So, it can be a curtain-raising opportunity basis, rather than an ongoing experience that visitors can actually engage with on a day-to-day basis.

I: Yes, okay. Can I ask you, just going on through my questions here?

R: Yes.

I: One of the questions about half-way down the first list, are there some stand-out projects that you would identify as being particularly influential in the programme? That might be things that are part of Trust New Art, but also things that maybe are outside Trust New Art.

R: Um.

I: Is it hard for you to say as a manager of the whole, sort of, programme?

R: [Laughter]. Yeah, I mean ...

I: Or things that have influenced ... I don't know?

R: Yeah. I think there have been a few projects that have been influential, it is hard for me to say beyond, sort of, a couple of years, because I have only been in post for eighteen months. But, looking back at some of the previous projects I could probably think of some. Ones that tend to be quite influential are ones that have

made a particularly prominent, visual, impact. It tends to be more visual ones that have perhaps captured internal imagination. So, the Berrington Pavilion, made by Heather and Ivan Morison, is one that people are really talking about. That has raised ambition a lot. Fountains Abbey have had a programme ongoing that's been very influential, I think.

I: Is that the one ... because Arts&Heritage are involved in that one?

R: Yeah.

I: Yeah, so, you are running the, kind of, overall programme, and co-ordinating those –

R: Yeah.

I: – applications, and working on the advocacy side, but in terms of the individual ... are you the curator of these projects, or are you working with other curators, bringing other curators in, or...?

R: We are working with other curators, so we have worked with Arts&Heritage for the Fountains Abbey project, well, we have worked with Arts&Heritage quite a lot actually. Also, working with [NTO] in the Midlands, who supports and advises properties in the Midlands.

I mean, it's hard to say who is the curator, because it is very much a joint effort really. I certainly advise, steer, but I feel they don't always listen to me [laughter]. Well, some of the programmes I am fairly arms-length, really, some of them I am a bit closer to, depending on where I think the need is. Where regions have got someone like [NTO], or Arts&Heritage, I tend to step back a little bit. Or, a project that might be ... we do work with external curators like [s.I Local 0:45:49.5] Plus, so, projects like that, I step back from a bit.

But, where projects don't have someone like that, I then support them as much as possible. I mean, actually, I think experience has told us that, really, you can give properties all the training opportunities, and development workshops as you like, but still, because of the turnover, you are not working with experts. So, that expert support is very valuable, and it's really quite important, I think, for the success of a project.

I think, like an artist who might deviate from their proposal, properties tend to be afraid of that, and go, "Well, this is what you said in your proposal, why are you changing from it?" But, an experienced curator will know that that's part of the natural process of working with artists, and that they may change, and it's about a conversation, it's about developing it together. You steering them, and they are putting their ideas forward, and coming to a natural conclusion together. But, I think that confidence of property staff to have that conversation, and navigate their way through it that way, is not there really. For that reason, I'm always quite keen to at least have someone regionally placed that we can work with.

I: Yes. So, like [NT2], you have got regional people as well, haven't you?

R: Yes.

I: How does that work?

R: We do have an increasing number of experienced contemporary arts people actually being employed by the organisation. Sometimes, I feel like I am all alone, but we've got [NT2], we are just appointing a new contemporary arts programme manager to replace [NT3]. [NT3]? You met [NT3]?

I: Yes.

R: Yeah. So, there are people in the organisation, which is fantastic, and actually, a real testament to the success of the programme that those people have been appointed. That's really how you can tell that it's evolved.

I: Yeah, and is that a person per Arts Council region? Sort of, match person?

R: I would love that, but at the moment we don't have that.

I: You, [NT2] and the new [NT3]?

R: Yeah, that's what there is at the moment. [NTO], [they are] not actually employed, but we do work with [them] on a freelance project basis in the Midlands, for over two years, which is almost employed, I think.

I: And, Arts&Heritage are a similar sort of...?

R: Yeah. There is an aspiration, certainly I have an aspiration, to have one in every region, but again, it's making that financial case for it, which is really hard. Because, there is not always a return on it, you know, personally, I think it's much more than that, but...

I: What proportion of National Trust properties do you think have taken part in Trust New Art so far?

R: Oh, proportion, um...

I: That idea has just jumped into my head. Is that not really relevant? How many properties does National Trust have?

R: Probably quite a small proportion, something like 10%, probably about 50 places, and we look after 500.

I: Yeah.

R: But, I think, perhaps more over the years, yeah, perhaps a bit more than that. But, a lot of those places are really small places that wouldn't have any budget to ... and art is not really a priority, there is no real reason to do it. It certainly is very present within the National Trust programme, you know, it's got a good prominent programme.

I: And, where is it going next? Like, it's next five, ten-year plan, can you think that far ahead?

R: I would like to see properties upping their ambitions in terms of the artists that they are commissioning, the budgets they are able to put towards it. But, really, thinking about how they would really make the most of those projects, as well, and really put everything into it around marketing and publicity. Also, really pushing ourselves to reach out, bring people in to be part of that, and to work in a way that, you know, perhaps more inclusive.

I: In what way? In terms of...?

R: Ah, perhaps working more with socially engaged practice, practitioners, really thinking of ourselves much more as a socially responsible organisation.

I: Yeah, and when you say about, sort of, upping the ambition with the kinds of artists that properties are able to work with, what do you mean by that?

R: I suppose I mean thinking about ... well, I certainly don't have an ambition to make the programme generic, I don't think it's all about working with the big-name artists all the way across. But, some places could be real, contemporary arts hubs, you know, properties that are really ambitious around contemporary art, working with the most high-profile artists.

I: Yes.

R: Or, most cutting-edge artists. But, then I think we should allow space for artists development, and giving opportunities to more emerging artists.

I: Yeah, because that came up at our meeting, didn't it?

R: Yeah.

I: And, you said earlier that you need artists who have got some experience of working outside the gallery environment, outside the studio.

R: Yeah.

I: That kind of thing, but then that's a whole other level of support, isn't it, to bring artists on who haven't done that, perhaps?

R: It is, it is, and I think sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. I think I probably – it sounds a bit counter-intuitive – but probably I would like to do slightly less projects, really, to get a tighter, sort of, reins on the projects that we do do. Really, maximise the profile of the projects that we do do. Because, I think sometimes they just sort of slip in, really, and, you know, it's like any other part of their programme, it's part of what they do, it's not really got a massive external presence. I think, sometimes, things get a little bit lost in National Trust priorities, rather than thinking outside, externally.

I: Yes.

R: The organisation is ... it's very easy to think internally a lot, I think that's one of the problems.

I: **Yes, okay.**

R: And, I think the other aspiration for me is to really think about partnerships much more, and think about how partnerships could help us to deliver on that ambition.

I: **Do you see partnerships with different organisations, or do you think the partnerships...?**

R: I see that, yes. I think it would open up thinking a little bit around what this is all for. And, you know, help us to engage with other members of the community, or whatever it might be, but different audience groups. Lots of benefits.

I: **So, is it about different partnerships, sort of, on the ground for the properties, or the regions, or for Trust New Art? You know, MOU with some other type of organisation?**

R: Um.

I: **At what level do you...?**

R: Well, I think there could be all three. There could be national, regional and local partnerships. I think, ultimately, we have to have something to coalesce around a project. It would tend to be a project, so, we will need to get that local buy-in. We have had lots of partnerships, you know, we have worked with organisations like Bluecoat, there have been lots of partnerships. Some of them with a quite light touch, some of them could be a bit more inclusive, a bit more involved, I think.

I: **Yeah.**

R: We've got a touring programme with Film and Video Umbrella at the moment, I think that's an interesting model that we could perhaps explore further.

I: **Yes, I was going to ask you about that kind of ... because we have talked about ... just looking at the mix so far, obviously, the central part of it is the commissions responding to the sites, and the Sense of Place, sort of, agenda. Like you say, the touring programmes, and there have been some residency type works, haven't there, as well?**

R: Yeah, yeah. We have the other layer of our organisation which is national public programming, and that provides the opportunity to have a bit of a wider dialogue across programming, across National Trust sites. So, the LGBTQ theme, for example, this year has enabled different kind of conversations across properties, and across other organisations. And, also, this year has been the start of a period of research around Indian independence, which is when Changing Places touring exhibition came in. So, it's 70 years since the Indian independence.

I: **Then you've got the suffrage...**

- R: And, next year it's suffrage, yeah. Our programme is broadly called Women and Power, so that will unlock suffrage stories, but also will redress the balance, as far as just telling female stories that perhaps haven't been told before, that have been shadowed by male stories. It is quite a broad programme, it will highlight achievements of women that lived at our places that haven't previously been told, that will also have a creative element within that as well.
- I: **Yes, I think some of that appears on the Trust New Art web page, but it's not Trust New Art, there is a, sort of, overlap between the two things, the national themes, if you like.**
- R: Yeah, I mean, where there are creative programmes that are telling that story, that overlaps there, definitely. So, I think that's a great opportunity to have a wider story that crosses properties, and kind of...
- I: **And, is that just from the promotional perspective, or is that a visitor sort of thing? I mean, how mobile ... will visitors travel to National Trust properties to go and see a series of things on the theme of Women and Power? Will people do that, or is this more a promotional thing?**
- R: I think, hopefully, it's a bit of both. I think we are going to have people that perhaps might be non-members, will hear about this programme because it will have some media attention. I think the only reason it will have media attention is because it is not local, it's a national story. And, that's why the Prejudice and Pride got national coverage, I mean, for better or worse, because it's a wider story. You know, addressing themes that were ... hello?
- I: **Yeah, hi.**
- R: Oh, you are still there.
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: I am just checking because my clock at the time on my phone has stopped, it just stops at an hour.
- I: **No, I can still hear you. [Laughter]. It just cuts you off.**
- R: That's fine. So, I think that it can be a useful tool, perception changing, to have a programme that has a national...
- I: **Perception changing of the National Trust?**
- R: Of the National Trust. And, of what we do, and about our relevance, really.
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: That's really important. And, I think, as part of that mix, working with artists is a [buzzing noise 1:00:06.1] part of that mix. But, there might also be people who say, "Okay, I've heard about this, I've seen there are going be things at a number

of different places, I'll have a look and see what my local property is doing, and go out and see that." I don't know, I'm not sure that it is necessarily an offer that will expect people to go from one place to another in order to, kind of –

I: Collect them?

R: – see everything. I am not sure that it works like that.

I: No, probably more regional [buzzing noise 1:00:43.8] I suppose.

R: Similarly, I don't think it would necessarily work that way for Trust New Art. I think people are interested to see what we are doing on the website, they like to know about it [buzzing noise 1:00:54.2- 1:00:57.6] give information about it. But, that doesn't mean necessarily that that's going to translate into a visit.

I: How do you know those things, the things that you have just said? How do you know that your visitors want to see more of the stuff on the website? How do you know that?

R: Well, I can only say that from people that I have spoken to.

I: Yeah, so there is no research in terms of your Google analytics, or your, I don't know, all the stuff the audience agency is doing? Have you picked up on that?

R: Well, the stuff that the audience agency is doing is very much about people that are visiting, which is slightly different. Then, you know, a lot of the people that I speak to are really aware of the programme. They haven't actually been to visit, maybe not anything.

I: No, no.

R: So, that tends to be [buzzing noise 1:01:51.9] professionals, or artists, or ... well, things that you can see, is that people ... we get loads of re-Tweets and, you know – what do they call it – hits on our opportunities. We do get lots of visits on our website, as well.

I: Just looking at your website...

R: And, we get a longer hold than most National Trust ... you know, like (unclear 1:02:26.4) time on our website than other National Trust pages.

I: Oh, so people explore, okay. And, is there something on your Trust New Art website about opportunities, about getting in touch? Have you got an idea? Have I made that up?

R: No, there is, yeah.

I: What's the response to that? Do artists and curators approach you, how does it work?

R: Yes, they do. We do get quite a lot of artists' enquiries. They tend to...

I: How do you deal with that?

R: They tend to ... I've got a standard response which says, "Look out for opportunities". It talks a bit about what we are looking for, and how we work with artists. But, occasionally, we will get something that's extremely interesting, and I might pass it on to colleagues, and say, "I think this could be a really interesting project for you." So, I might directly go to a property with it.

I: Okay.

R: And, particularly, partnership organisations, you know, I'll try and connect them up to a property.

I: I was going to ... because it ties in with our slightly different tack from our projects, as well, which is looking at what the benefit, or the interest is from an artist's perspective. That was one of the questions on the second set –

R: Yeah.

I: – of what you see as the value or benefit of the activity for the participating artists? Or, perhaps you don't...?

R: I think there are a number of benefits. Artists really want to work in these very inspirational places, I think they find the contexts really exciting. Any feedback that we have had has endorsed that.

I: And that's feedback from artists about the commissions?

R: Yeah.

I: Okay.

R: The other thing, of course, is just the opportunity to make new work.

I: Yeah, and be paid for it?

R: Yeah, and be paid for it, there are so few opportunities. I think there is the national brand of the National Trust which is probably quite appealing, certainly for CVs.

I: Yeah.

R: I think that having the opportunity at something that is not in a White Cube feeling. But, it is also becoming a good challenge for artists to perhaps work in a slightly different way.

I: Yes, or to have involvement with volunteers, and a different, kind of, audience.

R: Yes, and a different type of person to work with, as well.

I: Yeah, and is your feedback from the artists, is that just, sort of, knowing them, and talking to them, and anecdotal, or do you have a formal process for...?

R: We do have a formal process, we have a feedback questionnaire for artists which we send after the residency, and we get that back, and try and work out what that process has been like. Yeah, it's definitely important to us to work out how they ... I mean, it's quite hard to bring it all together.

I: Yeah, is that something that you would be willing to share with us as researchers, or...?

R: Yes, I'll send you the feedback form, if I can dig it out.

I: Okay, and can you share the findings from the feedback?

R: I don't have a report, but I can send you some examples of it.

I: Okay, that would be interesting, yeah.

R: Yeah, okay. That's that. So, in terms of visitors, based on the comments from that, okay? I think, it is of course mixed, you know, I would say it is a mixed response. Some visitors say, "What on earth's this load of old rubbish?" And, that's absolutely fine, you are going to get that. But, you know, we tend to have quite a traditional demographic, probably, of quite traditional people that come to our places that really want to immerse themselves in quite a nostalgic experience, say.

I: Yes.

R: But, for some people, they are really thirsty for something that's a bit more relevant, a bit more imaginative, and a bit more inspirational. You know, we really try and feed that, and also recognising that there is a new generation of people that want ... you know, we can't constantly feed the older generation, although they make up a big proportion of our demographic. But, yeah, we need to continue to provide relevant experiences for people.

I: Yes.

R: So, some people say, "You know, it really helped me understand the site better." We have quotes from people who have said, "This is a magical experience, I'll come back to see it again and again. I never thought of National Trust in that way, but it's really changed the way I think about it." It is definitely fair to say that we have had quite a mixed response, but it's continuing to be, kind of, warmer and warmer, I think, as we go on.

I: And, the same with the volunteers?

R: Yes, I mean, I think there has been a much more concerted effort to engage volunteers at a much earlier stage, to really work with them as ambassadors for

those programmes. We still have challenges, you know, absolutely, it's not solved the problem, but some volunteers just don't feel able to talk about certain works, that's fine. But, we have to work with people who are quite positive, really. It is not without challenge, but we are just finding techniques to do that better, engaging them at earlier stages, kind of involving, creating opportunities for them to talk to the artists, you know. Be involved much more closely, because you find that the closer they are to it, the much more likely they are to be ambassadors for it.

I: There is nothing like meeting the artists, I was finding that it makes a huge difference to work that you don't think you like, and meeting the artist suddenly. Somebody like Matt Stokes, you know, he is so good at talking about his work, it can change the way you think about it.

R: Yeah.

I: And, do they have any training, you know, in terms of talking...? Obviously, they know the properties, and they can talk very knowledgeably about the paintings, and furniture, and things that are in the house, but...

R: No, they do have training. We now have a programme of contemporary arts ambassadors. We will recruit specifically for people who want to be ambassadors for a project, and then they will go on to train their other fellow peers.

I: Okay, and are they ... the sites we are working at, Cherry[burn], and Gibside, would they have members...? Are they sort of...?

R: They are quite emerging properties in that they have not done loads of contemporary art stuff before, so I am not sure how far along they are with those kinds of programmes.

I: Okay.

R: But, certainly, it is something that I would be talking to them about, and I am sure [NT3] was talking to Cherry[burn] about that when [they were] in post. And, [NT2] will be talking to them about that, as well.

I: Okay, so that's to be developed?

R: Yeah.

I: Okay. I realise we have been talking for quite a while –

R: Yeah.

I: – and, probably – obviously, we are in touch – so we can always come back to some things, there might be other questions I need ask, and stuff, so...

R: I'm going to send you also – again, for your research only – I'll send you our most recent Arts Council report, which gives some numbers and data, as well.

I: Excellent, okay. Are there any other of these questions that are on here that you want to answer now, or do we need to do...? There was just something at the bottom, some practical things about the conference –

R: Yeah.

I: – we talked about. And, also the archive, or maybe I should just tell you about what I, in terms of the mapping side of our research?

R: Yeah.

I: And, I think I mentioned it at the meeting. What I am doing at the moment is just collating a database of projects, and at the moment, I do have a list that I have just, sort of, collected, of the Trust New Art ones, going back to 2010.

R: Oh, wow, okay.

I: I think I've got 56 projects, but there may be some missing, I don't know whether...? Do you have like a list, you know, is there something that you have on that that's not developed archive, but a list of all the projects and things that I could look at?

R: I have folders from properties.

I: But not a digital thing?

R: Yes, it is digital, and it is, sort of ... I'm going to just have a look, one of the slightly worrying challenges is that I am trying to find ... so, we've got a list of art projects, but they are all in like separate folders.

I: Right.

R: I don't think there is, kind of, a spreadsheet of all the projects that there have ever been, but, certainly there are lots of folders. So, I would be interested to see your...

I: Maybe I can ... when I have updated it slightly, because I have just looked at the Trust New Art web page, and I realise that there are a few things that I have missed off already.

R: Right.

I: So, maybe I could circulate that to you, and then you could see ... because it is just like an Excel spreadsheet type of thing, with dates, and things like that. So, if sent that to you when I've updated it?

R: Yeah.

I: There may be some things that you want to add to that.

R: Yeah, yeah.

I: Okay.

R: Yeah, that would be good.

I: I mean, in terms of the mapping work that we are doing, is that of use to you?

R: Yeah.

I: What would you want out of something like that?

R: Um.

I: Because, obviously, it goes beyond Trust New Art, I mean this has tried to capture all sorts of things.

R: Well, what I would like to do, [I], is – I think I might have mentioned it – I am quite keen to do a publication in 2019 –

I: Yes.

R: – which when the ten years is up.

I: That would be brilliant.

R: So, I think it would be brilliant, as part of that publication, it would be really important to reference other initiatives that have taken place over the years, in the last ten years. You know, I would like to think that I can use that for that purpose.

I: Okay, great.

R: The trouble is at the moment, it is really just me, and, you know...

I: Yeah, there's a lot to do.

R: It's such a big scope of the role, but I really, really do want to do this publication, I think it is really important, but I just need some more capacity, and anything that you are compiling is going to be a great help towards that.

I: Great.

R: But, actually, pulling it all together is quite a big job.

I: Yeah, well, I wonder whether there is anything that we can do in terms of the research project, and ... I don't know. I am sure we can talk about that further, let's come back to that.

R: Yes.

I: Archive, you've got, obviously, materials, but it is not formed in any way.

R: That's the trouble.

I: **Yeah. But, the conference, you did seem to have some (over-speaking 1:15:20.2).**

R: As you know, it is in partnership with...

I: **Forestry Commission, and Coleridge...**

R: Forestry Commission, Coleridge Trust, and Churches Conservation Trust. So, we are having a meeting on the seventh, and at the moment – I think I might have said – it is looking like it might be in the South West, which will be quite complimentary to then lead on to the next one in the North East.

I: **Yeah, but I think that will be great.**

R: Yeah, I think so. [Name] is hoping to work with us on it, and to pull together [their], kind of, conceptual framework for it, which will be really good. It's [their] placement for [their] PHD.

I: **Oh, okay. I'm actually meeting [them] for a coffee next week. I mean, we met briefly at the launch, but we are having a chat next week.**

R: Yeah.

I: **Okay, so [they are] doing the placement with you, and thinking about that conference.**

R: Well, we are just kind of finalising the agreements and everything, but yes.

I: **Okay, alright, great.**

R: That's what it is looking like at the moment.

I: **Okay.**

R: So, I am really excited because [they have] has got such a great experience of commissioning, and planning, and you know, [they are] a very experienced person, I am sure [they] will be very clever about it all. But, yeah, although, as I said to [them], and to the partners, I don't really want to over-think the conference too much, or whatever it is, symposium, seminar, event type thing. Because, I think the important thing is really creating a context for that dialogue to happen, rather than...

I: **And, you say you wanted it to be something that people go and visit projects and...?**

R: Yeah, possibly, we are going to try and make a, sort of, more experiential element to it, if we can, if the logistics aren't too difficult [laughter].

- I: I know. And, is it for – just to clarify – is it for staff of yourselves, and CCT, and ... or is it public?**
- R: There will be staff, but we also hope to bring in wider arts professional ... the arts professional network.
- I: Okay.**
- R: I am sure it will be quite of interest to university professionals, as well.
- I: Is it an open thing? Or is it...?**
- R: Yes
- I: Okay, alright.**
- R: We will, probably, have a charge to it, I imagine. We are not sure about things like capacity yet, but that depends on the venue.
- I: Okay, I mean, it will be really good to keep in touch with that, it will help us because are going to start ... we are not ready to do that yet, obviously, but to start thinking about what our conference in 2019 would be, and complimenting, obviously, with what you did, that would be really interesting, great.**
- R: Yeah.
- I: Let's stop there, I think, [R], shall we? There are probably more things to come back to, and stuff, but we can do that another time, and I can look through the documents that you are sending through, and then...**
- R: Exactly. I am sure you will have questions that arise out of that, but I think it is a fairly comprehensive set of information –
- I: Brilliant.**
- R: – overall, and, as I say, let's keep in touch and have these conversations, it's much better to do it on an ongoing, rather than leaving it too long, even if it is just a phone call.
- I: Yeah, that's good, really good.**
- R: Okay.
- I: Alright.**
- R: Well, great, good to speak to you, good luck.
- I: Thanks, I've scribbled some notes, but hopefully that's recorded everything.**
- R: You know, not too garbled.

I: No, no, very clear, I think it's great.

R: Yes, excellent, alright, take care.

I: Okay, enjoy your weekend.

R: Thanks, bye-bye.

I: Bye.

[End of Recording]