

darts MAYA PRODUCTIONS

Research Report

Artist Traineeships

Exploring the Experiences of Global Majority Artists in Participatory Arts

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UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

YPIP Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership

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1. About the project

In 2025/2026 darts and Maya Productions were funded by the Communities Innovating Yorkshire Fund - to deliver a traineeship programme for nine emerging participatory artists in South Yorkshire.

The aims of the programme were: 1) to strengthen South Yorkshire's pool of Global Majority freelance artists, expanding skills and creating new paid opportunities and pathways into cultural and creative industries; and 2) to support South Yorkshire organisations to build anti-racist practices.

In partnership, we delivered three-month traineeships for nine South Yorkshire creatives, based at darts (Doncaster's Centre of Excellence for Creative Health & Learning) and delivered in partnership with global majority led Maya Productions (Maya).

We built on darts' past Traineeship programmes and Maya's recent artist development work for Global Majority artists delivering in mental health settings in South Yorkshire. The training programme included observation and shadowing, workshop delivery, reflection, learning sessions, coaching, and mentoring from other Global Majority participatory artists. Learning from the programme fed into Maya Productions' bespoke Race and Allyship training for darts to address the particular challenges around allyship that darts face.

We worked with Thahmina Begum, a researcher whose work focuses on Creative Health, Global Majority Communities and Health inequalities in South Yorkshire, to evaluate the programme through an artist focussed lens.

We are sharing the learning from this project with other participatory organisations in the region, and more broadly though the South Yorkshire Creative Health Board, the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority Innovation Team, the Culture Health & Wellbeing Alliance, and the Strategic and Mayoral Authorities Creative Health Network.

Researcher

Thahmina Begum

Thahmina is an Artist-Researcher and qualified Art Psychotherapist, and her clinical practice experience is in NHS Psychiatric Wards, schools, online as well as Community Art therapy groups across Yorkshire. Thahmina's work as an Artist has been exhibited Internationally, nationally, and hyper locally. Thahmina's commissions/exhibitions include British Library/Yorkshire Sculpture Park/British Council/Yorkshire Sculpture International, and the Tetley Gallery. Her creative practice explores many social, political, and global issues of our time including a clinical research interest in racial/intergenerational trauma.

Thahmina has worked for over 25 years in the voluntary sector as Youth and Community Development, founding and managing several grassroots community projects.

Thahmina has worked on research projects that have been through funded through Leverhulme/BA, UKRI, University of Leeds and sits on the Creative Health Boards Team project, funded by AHRC

thahminabegum.com

Partner organisations

darts

darts is Doncaster's award-winning creative health and learning charity.

We are the largest participatory arts organisation in the UK and a Centre of Excellence for creative health and learning.

We make high-quality, inclusive, creative experiences across the borough of Doncaster and collaborate with partners worldwide. Our programmes are open to everyone, particularly those who have the least access to the arts.

Our Purpose

Our purpose is for anyone in Doncaster to learn and connect by taking part in the arts.

Our Mission

Our mission is for everyone to feel an accepted and valued part of the community, creating a healthier and more connected society.

wearedarts.org.uk

Maya Productions

Maya Productions is a global majority-led theatre company with over 30 year's experience in producing diverse theatre, and arts and heritage, to enable racial justice and social change. Our vision is of a world where everyone, regardless of age, ability, culture or class has access to enriching theatre, arts and heritage experiences.

Our work crosses 3 interconnected strands:

PRODUCTIONS
Making work led by Global Majority Artists (South Asian, African, Latin American diaspora) we present authentic stories of contemporary relevance and establish partnerships to amplify these voices
to larger audiences and advocate for wider societal change.

PARTICIPATION
Engaging with young people and underrepresented communities across the UK we unlock creative potential, demystify arts processes, develop artistic and transferable skills of participants
and inspire a diverse pool of artists and industry professionals for the future.

SECTOR DEVELOPMENT
Promoting workforce inclusion across the arts we raise awareness of barriers to progression and offer practical steps to make change through research projects, training and mentoring.

mayaproductions.co.uk



2. Executive Summary

This report presents findings and recommendations that have emerged from the evaluation of the darts and Maya Productions Artist Traineeship Programme. The traineeship programme was established to support emerging and early-career global majority artists in South Yorkshire to develop their skills, confidence and opportunities within participatory arts practice.

The research adopted a participatory, qualitative approach through facilitated conversations with artist trainees from a variety of disciplines (musician, performance, theatre design) across three cohorts. The purpose was to understand the opportunities and challenges experienced by artists from global majority backgrounds, identify barriers to entering and sustaining freelance participatory arts careers, and develop practical recommendations for organisations seeking to build more inclusive and anti-racist practices.

Through the illustrative analysis emerged six interconnected themes that shaped participants' experiences:

- Access to opportunities and professional networks
- Confidence, identity and belonging
- Representation and visibility
- Experiences of racism, bias and tokenism
- Mentorship, peer learning and professional development
- Organisational allyship and systemic change

Rather than viewing these as individual challenges, the report highlights the structural nature of many of the barriers faced by artists. It argues that organisations have an important role in creating equitable recruitment practices, culturally safe working environments and sustainable career pathways for global majority artists. The recommendations encourage participatory organisations to move beyond diversity statements and work towards embedding anti-racist practice throughout leadership, recruitment, commissioning, mentoring and organisational culture.

3. Introduction

The Communities Innovating Yorkshire Fund Artist Traineeship Programme represents an important investment in developing South Yorkshire's participatory arts workforce. The programme recognises that artists from global majority backgrounds continue to experience barriers to entering and progressing within cultural and creative industries despite increasing commitments to diversity and inclusion.

Participatory arts practice requires artists to work closely with communities in settings including schools, healthcare, community organisations and public spaces. These settings demand artistic excellence alongside facilitation skills, emotional intelligence, adaptability and cultural awareness.
This research seeks to understand how artists experience this journey and what organisations can learn to create more equitable opportunities.

4. Research Approach

The research adopts a Participatory Action Research approach. Rather than positioning trainees solely as research participants, the methodology recognises them as contributors whose lived experiences generate knowledge capable of informing organisational learning.

Facilitated group conversations encourage dialogue, reflection and collaborative problem-solving. Artists were invited to discuss their professional journeys, aspirations, challenges and experiences within participatory arts practice.
Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring ideas across the conversations, enabling practical recommendations to emerge directly from participants' reflections.



5. Emerging Themes

Theme One: Access to Opportunities
Illustratively, artists described freelance participatory arts as a sector in which opportunities are often secured through informal networks and existing relationships. While networking can strengthen collaboration, it may unintentionally exclude artists who have had fewer opportunities to establish professional connections. Many of the trainees spoke of not directly knowing about the traineeship, rather being informed by a friend/colleague. One trainee described how they had never seen an opportunity like this before for Brown and Black people in South Yorkshire.

Artists described uncertainty about where opportunities are advertised, how organisations recruit freelancers, and what experience is expected before applying. Most Trainees spoke of how they applied due to fact Global Majority was in the recruitment title; they spoke of how they felt this gave them a better chance of securing the traineeship therefore the time spent on the recruitment (application/ interview) would be valuable. Most of the artists found the recruitment process smooth and easy, with many reflecting on the opportunity to speak about their practise.

Greater transparency around recruitment processes, commissioning and progression routes may therefore increase accessibility for emerging artists.

Theme Two: Confidence, Identity and Belonging
Confidence emerged as a significant and transformational aspect of this professional development opportunity in this traineeship. All the artists described the programme as highly organised, structured and gave opportunity for a variety of opportunities/ learning. Trainees spoke of how the programme gave them time and space not only to reflect on their own practise but to learn how participatory arts and Creative Health could be embedded into their own practises. Some trainees described the programme as a period of study/learning, commenting how the training gave them new rich ways of thinking and possibilities of delivery.

Artists described developing confidence through coaching mentoring, observation and practical facilitation and delivery experiences. Cohort 2 and 3 found the coaching very valuable, commenting of how emotionally safe they felt in this space. Many artists emphasised that belonging extends beyond being invited into a project. Genuine inclusion is experienced when artists feel respected, listened to and trusted as creative practitioners. A large part of this was belonging to a cohort where artists shared skills, experiences and knowledge.

Theme Three: Representation
Representation extends beyond numerical diversity. Participants discussed the importance of seeing global majority artists represented across leadership, commissioning panels, mentoring relationships and artistic programming. Visible representation can communicate that progression is possible while reducing feelings of isolation experienced by artists who are frequently the only person of colour within professional environments.

One trainee commented on their observation of lack of ethnic minority users in the community venues they delivered, they felt this was a real shame as the delivery of sessions were such high quality. They felt having more visible diversity within the workforce could aim to tackle this issue.

Representation may therefore influence confidence, retention and long-term career aspirations.

Theme Four: Racism, Bias and Tokenism
Participants described experiences ranging from subtle microaggressions to more explicit forms of discrimination. These occurred within session times (though usually outside of actual delivery, from participants).

Illustrative examples included assumptions regarding artistic practice, cultural identity or language, as well as expectations that artists educate colleagues about race-related issues. These included;

> *Artist - "You know sometimes you hear words from participants you just pretend you don't hear!*
> *Researcher - What kind of words?*
> *Artist - There are some kind of words that are just not good, speaking to someone, that's just not good, let's just put it like that.*
> *Researcher - Can you be more explicit, if you feel comfortable?*
> *Artist - Yeah, so I thought everyone was the same, but some participants can be racist, so that's it!*
> *Researcher - What did you do?*
> *Artist - I pretended it didn't happen, I don't think about it, I wouldn't challenge it, not worth it! I'm concentrating on my growth. Where I come from we focus on growth, keep strong mind!" (C8)*
>
> *"I think it's a joke, but it's their love language, the way they speak to you, I don't think its racist, it's quite tough love language!" (C7)*
>
> *"So, the first workshop I was sat in between two participants and I think we had 10 minutes buffer time to speak before the workshop. The participant on my left and right were having a conversation about going on their holidays in the UK. They just kinda mentioned 'Oh I didn't like coz there were too many foreigners!' I was just sat there like! I didn't know what to do as my first workshop!" (C6)*
>
> *"I'm used to being asked identity-based questions, but I'm just not used to someone like just asked me 'are you a lesbian?' That's like an uncomfortable question to be asked". (C6)*
>
> *"The museum archive piece, I really struggled with as the theme was gift giving but all the objects were based around British or localised gifts, that I no relation to and wasn't really explained to me and that kinda made me feel alienated. This was like I don't know any of these cultural references, I don't know any of it! So yeah, it was quite hard to engage with, so yeah this*

workshop wasn't designed for someone from the global majority being able to engage with it, which is a shame! (C9)

"Challenge for me was coming into Doncaster with the flags and the pubs and feeling urghhh! And then coming here and everyone's super nice, and welcoming and open! And then you go back and see the flags again, kinda feel like whiplash! Kinda feel like going through town you just don't know whether people actually want you there!" (C9)

Some artists described initially feelings of tokenism around the traineeship, in which they were invited to contribute primarily because of their identity rather than their artistic expertise.

Some trainees were reluctant to talk about these issues as they wanted to focus on completing the traineeship in a successful manner. One trainee spoke of the how safe they felt in the centre with all staff however walking through the city centre with 'flags and pubs required a heightened sense of psychological safety in a new city'. These experiences create additional emotional labour and reduced confidence and professional wellbeing.



Theme Five: Mentorship, Coaching and Professional Development
One of the strongest areas of learning concerned the value of mentoring and coaching.

Artists described mentoring and coaching as providing reassurance, constructive feedback, industry knowledge and practical guidance that cannot always be obtained through formal training alone.

Peer learning also emerged as a valuable component of the programme. Conversations between trainees enable the sharing of strategies, experiences and encouragement while reducing feelings of professional isolation.
Mentorship therefore supports both technical development and emotional resilience.

Theme Six: Organisational Allyship
Participants also identified specific organisational practices that contribute to more equitable working relationships.

These include:

- **Transparent communication** – the traineeship was very well organised; the recommendation would be clearer communication at all stages of the traineeships especially at the end. As many trainees did not know how it would end and the level of support that could be provided for continued development. This area also relates to theme 4: communications with participants and whole team in terms of expectations of respect, tolerance and understanding.
- **Fair payment** – this was a real positive with many artists commenting on the fact that without the payment aspect, it would not have been possible to participate in the traineeship.
- **Culturally responsive leadership** – good practice at darts/Maya, very responsive and caring. However, leadership and growth need to be visibly seen for the artists to aspire to go into senior/leadership roles.
- **Flexibility** – good practice within the traineeship - many artists commented on the flexibility to work and complete the traineeship. This was a real positive.
- **Opportunities for reflection** – good practice within the traineeship. All artists highlighted the importance of the safe spaces created in both coaching and mentoring sessions. A recommendation is to build in Reflective Practice sessions for whole group to discuss sector issues.
- **Clear reporting procedures** – this relates to theme 4. The recommendation is for clearer open discussions at beginning of traineeship in terms of reporting procedures for incidents.
- **Inclusive recruitment** – good practice within the traineeship. The success of the traineeship was the commonality of the Global Majority Artist call out. The recommendation is for there to be more opportunities like these traineeships.

- **Long-term professional relationships** – the recommendation is to include time at the end of traineeship to do some work around building networks, professional relationships and pathways co-ordinating the work done with mentors and coaches to provide a bespoke package for each artist's needs.

Participants also emphasised that allyship requires ongoing organisational commitment rather than isolated training events.

6. Discussion

The illustrative findings suggest that many challenges experienced by global majority artists are structural rather than individual.

Artists demonstrated significant creativity, resilience and commitment to community practice. However, organisational systems often continue to privilege existing professional networks, established career pathways and dominant cultural norms. Consequently, responsibility for change should not rest solely with individual artists. Organisations must examine how recruitment, commissioning, mentoring and leadership either reduce or reinforce barriers.

The traineeship programme provides an important model by combining paid employment, mentoring, coaching and reflective practice. This integrated approach recognises that career development requires both practical experience and supportive professional relationships.

Furthermore, the iterative design of the programme allows learning from each cohort to influence future delivery, demonstrating an ongoing commitment to reflective organisational practice.



7. Recommendations

Recruitment
Further develop transparent recruitment processes that clearly communicate expectations, selection criteria and progression opportunities.

Advertise opportunities through a broader range of community and cultural networks to reach artists who may not already be connected to established organisations.: This traineeship was advertised widely by Maya and darts, including directly to Maya's contacts who are global majority artists (individuals and organisations) this breadth was necessary to reach enough applicants.

Mentoring and Coaching
Provide further paid coaching and mentoring opportunities with experienced practitioners who understand the realities of participatory arts practice and the experiences of global majority artists.

Encourage peer mentoring across cohorts to strengthen professional networks beyond the duration of the traineeship.

Organisational Culture
Embed anti-racist practice throughout organisational policies, leadership and everyday decision-making.

Ensure artists have access to clear and safe mechanisms for reporting discrimination and challenging behaviour without fear of professional consequences.

Professional Development
Continue investing in reflective practice through journals, facilitated discussions and coaching.

Recognise reflective practice as an essential component of professional learning rather than an additional administrative task.

Other Conferences/Fellowships/Toolkits recommended;
Global South Arts and Medicine Fellowship
https://artsinmedicinefellowship.org/
Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance 'Common Ground' Conference.
https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/chwa-conference-2026
Bradford 2025; Practitioner Wellbeing Toolkit for Artist and Creative Practitioners

Leadership
Increase representation of global majority practitioners within governance, programming, commissioning panels and senior leadership.

Representation at decision-making levels signals long-term organisational commitment to equity.

Sector Development
Strengthen collaboration between participatory arts organisations across South Yorkshire to share resources, mentoring opportunities and examples of effective anti-racist practice.

Support continued dialogue between artists and organisations to ensure learning remains responsive to changing needs.

8. Conclusion

This illustrative report demonstrates how qualitative research can contribute to understanding the experiences of global majority artists entering participatory arts practice.

While the themes presented require validation through participant conversations, they reflect issues widely recognised across the cultural sector and provide a framework for meaningful discussion.

The Artist Traineeship Programme represents an opportunity not only to develop individual artists but also to influence organisational practice across South Yorkshire. By listening to artists lived experiences and embedding their insights into future policy, recruitment and professional development, the programme has the potential to contribute to a more equitable, representative and sustainable participatory arts sector.

Ultimately, meaningful allyship requires more than intention. It requires organisations to reflect critically on their structures, redistribute opportunity, and create environments in which global majority artists can flourish as creative leaders, facilitators and changemakers.

