

Case Study

Theatre Royal & Royal Concert Hall

55+ courses (Creative Writing, Dance, Drama, Song Writing)



Age-Friendly

The Creative Learning Team run weekly sessions in the Royal Concert Hall in Nottingham, specifically for those aged 55+. These take place during term time and each term is usually 10 weeks long. These sessions have been running for several years and originated as 'one off' workshops with various companies e.g. Northern Ballet. There are 2 Creative Writing classes, 2 Dance classes, 1 Drama class and 1 Song writing class.

Participants work with professional tutors to explore the above disciplines to create new, original work. We, as a venue, offer opportunities where possible for the participants to showcase their work. For example, the Creative Writing participants perform in a Live at Lunch performance every year, for paying audience members and have also produced a book. The courses challenge the participants to produce high quality work as well as providing a supportive and friendly environment.

How did it aim to reach or have relevance to older audiences? What impact did you want it to have on the size or profile of your visitor base?

The courses were made specifically for those aged 55+, as both we and previous participants of the 'one off' workshops felt there was a definite need for this. We wanted the older generation to have the opportunity to improve their creative skills and create work they could have true ownership of. We wanted the general public to see the Theatre Royal and Royal Concert Hall as accessible and inviting venues for the community.



What tools did you use to measure this impact? What key indicator did you use to measure this impact?

As Creative Learning Co-ordinator, I make sure I have a presence within these sessions, even though I do not facilitate them. This means I am there first hand for any feedback relevant to that particular session. This helps to maintain an open channel of communication for participants and a relationship between them and the venue. This is important if you want an accurate measure of the impact, as people generally tend to be more open when talking directly to you. I do also create feedback forms for the end of each term, as these provided an overview of the impact of the entire term, not just individual sessions. One of the biggest indicators of impact has been the course bookings, e.g. we have 2 Dance and Creative Writing sessions as they have been in such high demand.

What other objectives were you hoping to achieve?

We hoped to create a sense of a community. Loneliness in the older generation is a very real problem and we wanted to help combat this in the participants, by creating a supportive and friendly environment. We also wanted to provide sessions that would benefit the participant's health and wellbeing. Keeping both brain and body active as one grows older has been proven to have so many positive effects.

What worked well?

- The frequency of the sessions
Having weekly sessions has meant that real progress in the art forms can be made. The sessions become part of people's routines which has been incredibly important to many of our participants.
- The location
The participants take great pride in coming to the Theatre Royal and Concert Hall each week.
- Professional tutors
Each tutor is a professional artiste and have been selected because of this. Their extensive knowledge and expertise in their arts field means the participants are getting a great standard of workshop.
- Course content
The tutors facilitate sessions that are both accessible and fun, but also challenging. For example, Caroline Burn, the dance tutor who used to work with Northern Ballet, uses the same standard of warmups and routines that she would do with professional dancers, with amendments and alternatives for those who need them.

What challenges did you face?

As with any creative arts venue, consistent space can be an issue. Different show requirements can sometimes mean we have to relocate the classes to different spaces within the venue. The spaces we have in the venue can sometimes prove to be ineffective. For example, the largest spaces we have (other than the stages) are the foyers, and the dance classes take place in a foyer space. Though the space is large enough, it is carpeted and interrupted by two large pillars, which can sometimes affect the sessions. Communication at times has been challenging. When relaying important information about the courses, face to face communication is not always effective, for example, some participants may have missed sessions. Most written communication today is done through email, but for some participants on the courses this is not possible as they do not have access to the internet. Some participants do not like letters, as they can get lost. Finding the right balance of communication has been challenging.

What have been the most important things you have learned?

This format of work really does create a community. The participants often organise and meet up outside of the classes and some members have been coming to the classes since they have started.

What will you do differently next time?

We are constantly evolving the courses to respond to the participants needs. For example we have now set up a new format of booking onto the courses. Previously, participants would have to queue on the day of sale and were not guaranteed a space. We have now created our continuation booking system, in which participants are automatically enrolled onto the next term of classes, providing the pay for their ticket before the designated date. This has greatly reduced stress on both the participants and venue. In the future, I would like to provide even more opportunities for the participants to showcase their work, in the form of public events.

Top Tips for engaging older audiences:

- Be adaptable. As with all groups of people, everyone has different needs and abilities and it's important you can provide some flexibility to support these.
- Be open. Keep the dialogue between the participants and venue constant, as this helped to sustain a relationship that benefits both participants and venue.

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