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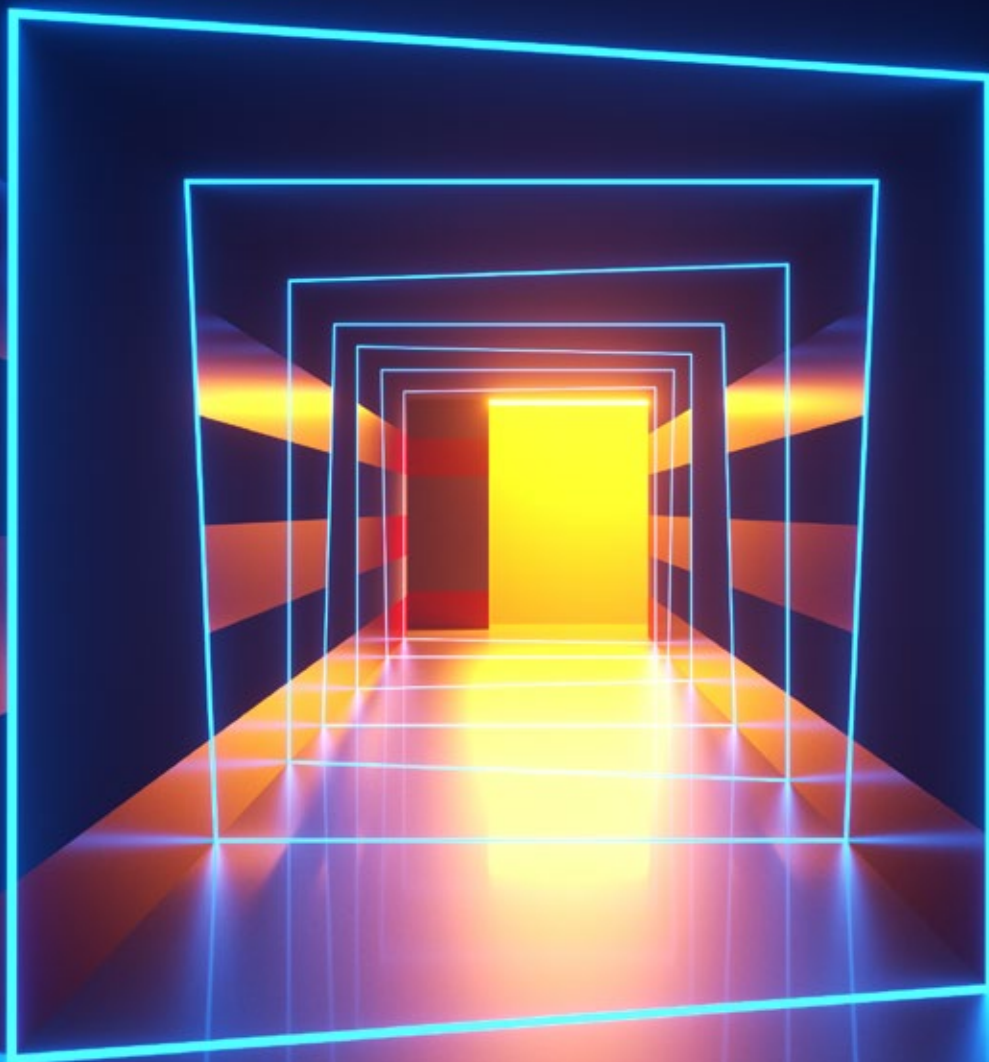
Phoenix Digital Blueprint: A Consultation Review

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January 2019

CAMEo



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INTRODUCTION

Phoenix is the only cinema and digital art gallery in Leicester, unique in its synthesis of independent film and digital art. The aim of this report is to propose a 'digital blueprint' for Phoenix - an outline strategy for helping the organisation to better showcase and grow its digital arts and business activity, as well as take a wider role in brokering and facilitating growth in Leicester's digital culture and digital economy. The report is made up of four parts:

Part 1: An overview of the role of digital in UK arts policy and practice;

Part 2: An outline of current digital activity at Phoenix;

Part 3: An overview of digital activity at arts organisations comparable to Phoenix;

Part 4: A set of proposals for developing Phoenix's 'digital maturity'.

What do we mean by 'digital'? Recent policy documents have provided a definition of the digital that is well suited to the arts and cultural sector. NESTA's *Digital Culture Survey* considers the digital in an organisational and applied sense, as any technologies that enable information to be created, stored or shared in digital form (Gorton 2016: 5). The 2018 UK Digital Code of Practice determines the digital as the means of "applying the culture, practices, processes and technologies of the internet era to respond to people's raised expectations."

Policy has come to imagine the digital as a vast and interlinked set of processes through which people navigate their lives; a set of processes to which arts organisations must acclimatise and respond. In what follows, this understanding of the digital will be considered specifically in relation to the way it plays out at Phoenix.

PART 1: DIGITAL ARTS POLICY AND PRACTICE

This section will address why digital has been accorded such strategic importance in the arts and cultural sector and assess the specific areas of focus in current policy. It will provide an overview of how arts organisations have responded to rallying calls from policy makers for their digital transformation. Pertinent to Phoenix, this section considers the overlapping priorities of Arts Council England (ACE) and British Film Institute (BFI) in terms of digital, two of the organisation's key partners. Finally, the concept of 'digital maturity' will be introduced, thus setting the scene for an exploration of Phoenix's current digital strategy and offer.

1.1 Why has digital gained such prominence in cultural policy?

There is a general acknowledgement in cultural policy that technology is the 'new reality' (Dodd, 2015) and that the intrinsic role of the digital in the production and consumption of art and culture is unavoidable:

Audiences are no longer simply passive receivers of cultural content. They are selecting on-demand content, controlling interactive experiences, instantly sharing and distributing content and co-creating artwork itself (DCMS 2018: 27).

Changes in how we mediate and experience the world mean that digital can be understood as "a need, rather than a luxury" (Gorton 2016: 12) in the way that cultural organisations must relate to their public.

That being said, **current policy thinking remains aspirational and visionary rather than pragmatic and solution-focused**. While DCMS and NESTA provide statistics and suggestions based on research, there is a lack of developed formulas for leading digital transformation in arts organisations. *Culture is Digital* is pitched precisely as "a call to action to practitioners and organisations across the cultural and tech sectors" (DCMS 2018: 17) to develop their "digital thinking" (2018: 9). ACE are similarly calling for new approaches in a sector seen as slow to evolve the kinds of infrastructure and business models necessary for digital transformation. During this research, a former Relationship Manager in Creative Media at Arts Council England, helpfully related this policy outlook to Phoenix through a series of questions:

What does it mean to be a leader in creative digital media? What does it mean for the programme and partnerships, as well as for the organisation? Where does Phoenix stand in terms of its peers? In terms of digital engagement and creative media? What is it that they can do differently to make the most of Capital funding? How can they use the new Capital project as a way of generating [digital] impact?

1.2 How have arts organisations responded to the challenge of digital?

Policy oriented research has found that arts organisations tend to feel "held back" by a lack of infrastructure, resources, digital skills and leadership training, which results in "a fragmented approach" to technology (DCMS 2018: 5). Case studies are few of organisations which have smoothly achieved an integrated approach to digital. On the whole, there is much mystification with regards to adopting new technologies and correlative processes in

arts organisations, accompanied by reluctance, scepticism and – most commonly – a lack of resource for implementing change. Such hesitation veils a deeper concern: *what might the impact of the increased role of digital be on the future of arts organisations?* **What is clear is that organisations need to shape their own context-specific approach to the digital.**

Julie Dodd's study *The New Reality* (2015) offered a framework, examples and guidance on how charitable organisations might initiate digital change, based on interviews with senior leaders from over 50 non-profit organisations. Dodd outlines some key factors that have inhibited the sector's capacity to innovate:

- **Leadership** – A barrier facing organisations has been a lack of senior leadership capacity and expertise in digital. Not only have leaders failed to demonstrate vision or bravery in digital transformation, but responsibility for introducing digital processes has been delegated away from senior leader levels, including at board level (Dodd 2015: 7).
- **Culture** – Organisational structures that have historically siloed different departments (such as Management, Marketing, Fundraising and Programming) are seen as another reason for why “the sector's vision of digital has been blinkered” (Dodd 2015: 63). Digital change has tended to be accommodated in isolation within discrete departments and has focused on immediate delivery rather than overall strategy. *The New Reality* report further maintains the importance of Human Resources departments in identifying employees and new starters who have skills in digital technology and processes.
- **Infrastructure** – As a result of traditional work hierarchies, technology infrastructure conversations have been commonly separate from conversations about core organisational strategy (Dodd 2015: 29). Collaboration across departments is recognised as one of the most fundamental attributes of a strong digital strategy where “IT must be seen and led as a strategic function that can improve productivity and service delivery across departments” (2015: 39).
- **Innovation** – Unsurprisingly, charitable organisations such as Phoenix which face difficult financial challenges and capacity concerns may be wary of risk-taking in their strategy and activities. However, as Dodd maintains, organisations which proclaim digital success have tended to pursue one of three innovation models: establishing an internal R&D lab programme, developing an innovation partnership and creating an independent start-up.
- **Funding** – Dodd's report warns that if more funding is not made available to support building a digital skill and talent base within organisations (either through hiring new staff and/or training existing staff), then digital transformation programmes will stall, having a knock-on effect for acquiring future funding. As Dodd argues, those organisations that “still hope to survive on grants alone will find the work required to do so increasingly tough” (2015: 62). Priority must be accorded to seeking funds to support digital transformation programmes and for growing digital service offers.

- **Service delivery** – As established above, audiences are no longer passive receivers of cultural content. For Dodd, organisations need to shift towards the notion of ‘self-service’ provision for audiences, whether that lies in providing accessible online information services or in expanding socially motivated web based digital offers (2015: 5). It has been claimed a chronic “lack of skills in data analysis” are “preventing cultural organisations from collecting data and using it to develop their business models” (DCMS 2018: 10), leaving many unsure of exactly what kind of ‘self-service’ provision is most required to develop their current remit.

1.3 ACE and BFI – digital as a strategic priority

“...one of the biggest challenges is where BFI are and where ACE are in terms of digital. They’re both in slightly different places, so the language they speak in is different and we have to find a way of amending our approach to those two separately.” – Chief Executive, regional cinema/arts centre

While there is no formalised strategy uniting ACE and BFI, the two main revenue stakeholders at Phoenix, there are convergences to which the organisation might creatively respond. Both ACE (2018) and BFI (2017) place emphasis on the digital in their most recent strategy reports and have created specific funding strands to reflect this. While the BFI’s focus is on how digital might engage new and diverse audiences, ACE’s attention lies in how digital can help enable more resilient business models and build more supportive partnerships across the cultural sector.

The BFI acknowledge that now there are “fewer distinctions between film, television and other digital media (such as games, online video, virtual reality)” and define film in their latest strategy report as anything which involves “the grammar of filmmaking” (2017: 4). They have announced two new funding streams focused on nurturing digital innovation – the £10m Enterprise Fund and the £2m National Cluster Growth Fund. BFI’s demand for digital stems from a conviction that it is the best medium for attracting 16 – 30 year olds, who are “the future of film culture” (2017: 13) and key “to the continued economic growth of the screen industries” (2017: 13). The “need to encourage cultural curiosity and risk-taking among this group” (2017: 13) is paramount to their ethos on digital.

Similarly, digital is a key element within ACE’s plans for future strategy – technological and digital activity lies at the very core of their proposed outcomes. By 2030 they envision that creative R&D and talent development will be flourishing across the sector, hoping that “cultural organisations are dynamic, focused on the future and relevant” (2018: 5). ACE’s ongoing concern has been that publicly funded arts organisations are demonstrating “a retreat from innovation, risk-taking and sustained talent development” (2018: 2) and contend that more could be done “to support a sustainable independent sector, through a more structured approach to research and development, nurturing talent and risk-taking” (2018: 8).

ACE further call for cultural organisations to “be more collaborative and enterprising,” recognising also its own “need to change” and become “a more dynamic organisation focused on the future, more skilled at utilising data and new technology” (2018: 11). This

admission has manifested itself in the launch of The Digital Culture Network and the recruitment of expert ‘tech champions’ in the nine ACE regional offices across the country. ‘Tech champions’ will work across three core areas to provide arts organisations with advice, support and strategic thinking on digital such as data and analytics, CRM and e-commerce, signpost training, development and funding opportunities as well as brokering partnerships and opportunities with tech companies (ACE 2018).

While the BFI and ACE share a commitment to encouraging digital development, arts organisations can sometimes be unsure of the discrete policy priorities of each body, and occasionally their agendas can appear to be at odds (particularly in their differing approaches to data collection). However, both funding bodies stress the importance of digital art and film provision for younger audiences who are not only linked to the economic future of the sector but are suffering from the decline in the cultural education offer in England’s schools (NESTA 2018: 2). **This combination of priorities affords an opportunity for Phoenix to cultivate its own structured and pioneering approach to digital audience development, organisational innovation and partnership building.**

1.4 Introducing ‘Digital Maturity’

Fiona Romeo, former Director of Digital Content and Strategy for Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), maintains that “in digital maturity...you have everyone doing digital as part of their role” (Gorton 2016: 17). DCMS (now DDCMS) recognise that “organisations are more likely to experience benefits from digital technologies if they are digitally mature,” defining ‘digital maturity’ as:

...where digital activity is embedded across an organisation as part of the strategic vision and throughout every part of the business, from its creative output and audience outreach through to e-commerce (2018: 33).

The DCMS report promises to support ACE in developing a Digital Maturity Matrix tool for art organisations, comprising of a series of statements to allow organisations to set targets and assess their digital capability (2018: 33).

Key signs of a ‘digitally mature’ organisation include:

- A more holistic approach to digital where it is incorporated in both creative and distributive processes;
- Where ‘digital’ has become normalised into “everyday thinking and decision making” (Gorton 2016: 29);
- Leaders and trustees are proactively driving this understanding of the all-encompassing role of digital in the business;
- An awareness of and strategy for the current deficit of digital skills in the cultural sector;
- A clear strategy for interpreting digital audience data based on the specific needs of the organisation.

A strong case study of how an arts organisation has developed its digital maturity is Art Fund, the national fundraising charity for art which provides grants to museums and galleries to acquire works of art as well as supporting a range of regional tours and exhibitions.

Art Fund decided to hold a digital maturity exercise which involved “all employees to think about mature digital best practices” including areas as far ranging as clarity of vision, analytics, creative operations, customer relationship management and data and system security (2018: 2). An action plan was put together which addressed “the digital gaps” such as the need to build a content strategy for the specific “archetypal personas” that made up their customer base and to create a “Digital Stewardship Committee” to ensure digital projects align with overall strategic objectives (2018: 2). As a result, digital was used as a *process* in building a more holistic approach to fusing the agendas of different departments across the organisation, resulting in an ambition to ensure that “all content across all channels targets specific persona(s) and business objective(s)” and the cultivation of a “technology roadmap” for future strategy (2018: 2).

It is useful to bear in mind this concept of ‘digital maturity’ in the following section – in the ways that it pertains to Phoenix’s current and future digital activity.

PART 2: CURRENT DIGITAL ACTIVITY AT PHOENIX

This section assesses the current digital activity at Phoenix, drawing on information gathered during interviews and engagements with Phoenix staff, board members, other Leicester-based arts organisations and additional stakeholders. Between January and September 2018, 20 conversations, 12 formal interviews and 3 ‘digital open-house’ workshops with Phoenix staff members were undertaken. For the purposes of this report, the names of participants have been anonymised.

2.1 Digital activity: what Phoenix does well

“[Phoenix] is a social hub where people meet and see each other...a place where filmmakers and people involved in film come as well as film viewers. Not only that, you’ve got graphic designers and artists and all manner of different people in here now that use the space.”

Phoenix is widely regarded as a unique community provision in Leicester – valued for being forward-thinking, friendly and “a second home” to all who use it. There are a number of areas in which Phoenix has successfully developed core digital activity:

- **A Creative Hub:** Phoenix was lauded as a significant creative hub and cultural intermediary in Leicester’s art ecosystem. It brings together a wide variety of different digital communities and interests, formally and informally. Participants who rent offices on site spoke of how unexpected collaborations regularly occur, while others spoke of how the café space provides opportunity for all sorts of interactions – some social, some commercial and artistic.
- **Digital Art Offer:** Phoenix has an innovative and progressive digital art programme with six exhibitions a year featuring a variety of mixed media artists. It commissions a range of artists who use technology in the broadest and most inclusive sense to drive their creative practice.
- **Independent Film Programme:** Phoenix’s independent film programme is considered second to none in Leicester: “their niche is quite good...they will show films that other people won’t show, or they’ll show films that the Showcase will put on for one night and then they disappear.”
- **Education and Outreach:** Many of those interviewed appreciated the value of Phoenix’s expanding digital education and outreach offer – both in-house and extending into the local area. These activities include events with families and young people; ‘teach yourself’ workshops for under-10s that combine craft with technology as well as other hands-on activities that make technology accessible for young people. In February, Phoenix began a programme of learning events with local libraries in the Belgrave and St Matthews’ areas of the city, in an attempt to further engage with diverse audiences and more disadvantaged communities.

- **Partnerships:** There are a number of partnerships that the Phoenix is acclaimed for and which highlight its civic role in the city, notably:
 - University partnerships were seen as very important by members of the City Council as well as other stakeholders. Phoenix’s ongoing collaboration with DMU in the teaching and facilitation of the Film Studies BA was described by one participant as creating “a flow forwards and backwards between creative agency and the digital.” Wilderness Film Festival is programmed and run by film students every year while Leicester Art Week, now in its third year, is a successful collaboration between Attenborough Arts Centre, New Walk Museum and other local art organisations in the city. Phoenix’s partnership with University of Leicester’s CAMEo research institute, of which this Fellowship is a product, has occasioned new screenings and public events at Phoenix, helping to cultivate new audiences.
 - Community partnerships were also positively mentioned. The Digital Playground, run as part of Spark children’s festival each year, and the work of Seven/Five filmmakers’ network are strong examples. The annually-run Digital Playground involves interactive art installations, drop-in workshops and short films curated around the theme of technology. Seven/Five, “an open group, regardless of experience,” benefit in many ways from their collaboration with Phoenix: they use the café for their weekly meetings, have a room onsite, undertake film projects in the venue and their members receive cinema tickets at a reduced rate. Such a partnership highlights Phoenix’s promotion of skills sharing, enabling local film production and exhibition.
 - Artist partnerships, for example with artists resident in the Interact Labs such as the Microbit Foundation as well as Alex Rule and Ben Federicks, who both use Virtual Reality, were highlighted by participants. While some of these partnerships were not perceived to be as publicly visible as they might be, there was a perception that Phoenix is supporting artists through a small-scale mentoring programme.

2.2 Digital activity: what Phoenix might do better

“Currently the digital strategy isn’t singing the right tune. They’ve been so focused on survival but now they need to be bolder with audience engagement and artistic development and their market positioning.”

The smaller size of the organisation means that by necessity the scoping and procurement of key information systems such as website, box office and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) involves all key managers. Nevertheless, it was felt by some that Phoenix continued to work as “a fairly traditional arts organisation” and that digital did not yet pervade across all departments. The need for the development of a digital strategy which might alter the culture of the organisation both through and in terms of digital, and which “is not locked down, but that is prepared for the contingencies of the future” was

emphasised. While there was praise for Phoenix's existing digital activities, there was consensus that in certain areas more could be done to raise the organisation's distinctive position as a creative digital leader in Leicester.

- **Visibility:** It is widely felt that Phoenix does not have as much reach or impact in the city as it might do – geographically, artistically and in terms of community engagement. The reasons given for this are varied – whilst some feel that there was not as clear a mission as there might be, many suggest that it is an issue of visibility, claiming that the organisation does not 'boast' about itself or its activities enough. Phoenix is frequently described as "Leicester's best kept secret" or "an unsung hero."
- **Marketing:** The issue of visibility was often linked to the multiple pressures placed upon Phoenix's marketing department. It is felt that the digital art programme is often usurped by the cinema programme in the organisation's communication strategy, further exacerbated by the fact that the gallery is physically tucked away in the venue. Many research participants who work elsewhere in the city said that they didn't see Phoenix as anything other than a cinema, claiming that "if the gallery and all the other work is equally important, it's [about] getting that out there." It has been acknowledged that years of financial hardship has created a certain amount of caution and that "a better communications plan" is needed to position the organisation as a creative hub.
- **Space:** In various ways, it was felt that Phoenix's current venue is unfit for the purpose of enabling more ambitious artistic and commercial digital activity. While the unfortunate placing of the gallery space has been mentioned, the poor quality of the film production suite was also frequently referred to, especially in terms of its out-of-date hardware and the presence of a noisy air conditioning unit. Likewise, the fact that the screens in the café area rarely function was also alluded to. There was a sense that some poorly equipped and inflexible spaces impacted upon Phoenix's positioning as a "destination" for digital activity in the city.
- **Business Partnerships:** Participants mentioned that more collaboration and partnership with local businesses is needed, which might engender further commercial and creative ventures. That said, there was repeated acknowledgement that this is a city-wide issue, with arts organisations and local businesses not working together enough to ask: "how do we grow the profile of the cultural industries in Leicester?" It was felt that an injection of entrepreneurial spirit, more networking events and open forums would position Phoenix as "a place to be for ideas, a place to bring energy," thus promoting increased business partnerships.
- **Data Capture and Digital Processes:** As with many regional cinema/art centres, the data capture process at Phoenix, while thorough – involving the collation, analysis and reporting of audience data quarterly and assessed regularly against businesses planning – is not integrated as efficiently as it could be. Annual customer surveys target solely existing customers, meaning that analysis of audiences who do not currently engage with the organisation demands a different approach. Audience

Finder analysis, whilst it supports the ‘macro-analysis’ of potential audiences, is applied only to the artistic programme to help understand audience segmentation. Meanwhile, ticket sales provide detail only on the audience demographics in film attendance. From this mixed assortment of captured data, what remains unknown is how well Phoenix provide for the general public of Leicester due to the difficulty of finding efficient tools to reach them (at present, this is compensated for by limited use of social media advertising or by working with audience partners who can reach people on Phoenix’s behalf). ‘Clunky’ digital processes were found elsewhere, such as in the schools’ booking system and the cinema screen availability system, again pointing to a lack of synergy in the organisation’s use of software to fulfil its needs.

All of these areas suggest that **Phoenix’s digital maturity rests upon developing an organisation-wide approach to digital which enables and integrates different ways of engaging with both existing and new audiences.**

2.3 Response to CEEF findings from Phoenix

“I recognise a number of areas where Phoenix can improve user experiences and organisation efficiency if it had better systems and skills. This is well understood. We have the same issue as many other small organisations – a limited capacity to invest and undertake significant change management, which means we have to prioritise carefully. It’s not possible to undertake many changes at once! This can be frustrating in some areas that are not prioritised – even if there are good strategic reasons for concentrating effort elsewhere.” (John Rance, CEO Phoenix)

“Digital communication means that more content than ever is being produced, and this is escalating. A successful organisation must become a publisher of creative, attractive and engaging content that goes beyond selling and traditional forms of product promotion. The implications are investment in infrastructure, talent, associations and partnerships.” (Patrick Welsh, Marketing Manager)

PART 3: DIGITAL ACTIVITY IN COMPARABLE ARTS ORGANISATIONS

How are other, comparable, arts organisations seeking to obtain digital maturity? Four other regional venues were consulted during the research in order to explore their different capacities and approaches to digital transformation. While these venues somewhat differ in terms of their constitution, size and scope, they are closely comparable to Phoenix in that they exist as cross art-form organisations that offer specialised cinema programming at their core. A brief outline of digital activity in each venue is offered here as a point of comparison and as a catalyst to help Phoenix further imagine its own digital future.

3.1 HOME, Manchester: working with digital to attract new audiences

HOME is a centre for international contemporary art, theatre and film in Manchester with five cinema screens, a gallery, a 500-seat theatre, a flexible studio space, a café/bar and a restaurant. It opened in 2015, merging together two former arts organisations – Cornerhouse and the Library Theatre Company.

As part of their digital plan, HOME have established an online digital channel which offers extra content to existing visitors and members, whilst operating as an amplification point for diverse audiences who are either unable or less likely to attend the centre in person. The digital channel profiles a range of media resources, including monthly film podcasts (which reach up to 12,000 people), artist and BSL tours of new exhibitions, trailers for upcoming films, Q&As with filmmakers and theatre directors as well as audience reactions.

Jason Wood, HOME's Artistic Director of Film, describes the channel as "a genuine way of attracting new people," particularly young people who are encouraged to blog or carry out radio interviews which are then given a platform on the site. In this way, increased digital activity inspires new forms of participation, whilst cultivating an audience base for the future. Wood maintains that the possibilities are endless with a digital channel and it has been used to expand the artistic vision of HOME, focused on developing and enabling independent artist filmmaking, beyond the physical walls of the building.

3.2 Broadway, Nottingham: working with digital to develop artists

Broadway is an independent cinema in Nottingham with 4 screens, a café/bar and Near Now, a digital artist studio and yearly fellowship programme for digital artists. With a history dating back to the 1960s, the organisation became known as Broadway Cinema in 1990 and underwent substantial redevelopment in 2006 following an ACE Capital grant.

According to Chief Executive Steve Mapp, their *Near Now* initiative first launched in 2014 after the organisation identified "a lack of provision for artists to work with technology". *Near Now* describes itself as "a creative community to support new ideas and collaborations" and offers artists from across England the opportunity to take part in an intensive year-long fellowship whilst also providing exhibition and studio space for local artists working with technology to research new work and develop their artistic practice. It relaunched earlier this year with a stronger focus on public engagement and is part of the

organisation's broader commitment to cultural excellence. Complementing a wider talent support and education programme, *Near Now* helps artists to undertake experimental digital projects with external partners, thus contributing to the placemaking agenda of Broadway.

3.3 Watershed, Bristol: working with digital to build strategic partnerships

Watershed is a film, culture and digital media centre with three screens, a café/bar, events space and the Pervasive Media Studio, which hosts a community of over 100 artists, creative companies and academics to explore 'experience design and creative technology,' in collaboration with the University of Bristol and UWE Bristol.

Of all of the venues, Watershed has the longest history of digital engagement, having opened in 1982 as the UK's first arts centre dedicated to media. By 1999, the organisation was partnering with local universities to consider digital and the internet and set out to be a connector of new technological partnerships, further enabled by an emerging culture of digital start-ups in Bristol. The Pervasive Media Studio therefore is not necessarily replicable, having grown out of a pre-existing creative community and being context-specific to Bristol's cultural ecosystem. This year, the creative enterprises that it has incubated have had a reported turnover of £13.2 million. Projects such as REACT (Research and Enterprise in Arts and Creative Technology) which took place between 2012 – 2016, have emphasised the opportunities that can emerge for innovation and productivity in the creative economy when strong partnerships are built between arts organisations and universities.

For former Director Dick Penny, the key to Watershed's success lies in their confidence to set their own agenda in exploring where cultural value lies. He claims that they "had stopped saying 'digital' at about the same time as ACE said digital" as the focus of Watershed developed to be "an enabler, an encourager and a meeting place" by consistently asking "what's the experience, *not* what's the technology?"

3.4 QUAD, Derby: working with digital to enhance skillsets and grow financial resilience

QUAD is an arts centre with a gallery, 3 cinema screens, artist studios and a café bar, first opened in 2008. Chief Executive Adam Buss describes QUAD as "a digital first organisation" and emphasises how "whenever we've got a challenge or an opportunity, we ask ourselves the question: where does digital fit within this?" At QUAD, Buss asserts that "we never do digital for digital's sake." Instead, the exhibition programme is about "trying to contextualise digital in the lives of our audience...rather than it just being an interesting bit of screen-based material that a digital artist has made."

In 2012, QUAD began to apply some of the digital capacities of its staff to helping external companies with their digital needs, from 3D printing to event delivery. Subsequently they launched TECH:SQUAD, a commercial arm which specialises in the technical design and delivery of emerging technologies such as augmented and virtual reality for corporate clients. TECH:SQUAD generates income by making explicit use of existing assets at QUAD: technology that they already own, skillsets of the team that have been developed through working on gallery exhibitions and pre-existing event delivery and project management

experience. Buss points out that not only do big contracts such as Aston Martin provide the opportunity for staff to develop more skills, but also to purchase more digital equipment as part of the contract. He describes this as a “360-degree learning loop” in both skills development and continuing the financial resilience of the organisation in light of diminishing public funds.

PART 4: PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPING PHOENIX'S DIGITAL MATURITY

“Phoenix need a more assertive statement of intent around what they are trying to achieve. Not being just blinkered around cutting-edge digital art but other things – their commercial networks, their communities. They to need to be relevant to their community and to identify who they are. They should be a beacon and an enabling catalyst for the city using digital technology.”

“...theirs is a role to convene...certainly [to] be a pinnacle or a focus for our digital sector.”

The following proposals offer a blueprint for digital maturity at Phoenix. All of the research participants shared the view that Phoenix's 2020 development presents a huge opportunity for the organisation to be a trailblazer in further driving Leicester's digital agenda; a much-needed catalyst for positioning the city as a destination for digital excellence in the arts. This is only possible, however, if Phoenix are able to forge a distinctive and context-based approach to digital, developed through a digital maturity framework that focuses on how technology can help deliver Phoenix's specific vision and mission.

4.1 What Phoenix might do next

Ideally the following proposals would take place concurrently, both during the lead up to and beyond the 2020 redevelopment. All of the suggestions below are intended to meet SMART criteria – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-based – in the context of Phoenix.

1. **Digital Market Research:** more in-depth market research into the wants and needs of local community and business stakeholders in terms of digital provision – both artistic and commercial – in Leicester is needed. Furthermore, asking questions outwith Phoenix itself would raise its visibility in the city.

Proposal 1: to promote the importance of digital engagement at Phoenix amongst the board of trustees (the promotion of a Digital Trustee was particularly successful for Heritage Lottery Fund who earlier this year appointed a digital specialist with a background in digital transformation initiatives).

2. **Partnership Building:** as NESTA's recent *Experimental Culture* report established, central to arts organisations being able to reach wider audiences is “fostering a sophisticated array of partnerships, “whether with universities, technology companies or with other institutions open to sharing resources and expertise” (2018: 6). The following two groups are of particular strategic importance given Phoenix's context:
 - a. **Business partnerships:** improving and maximising partnerships with local arts and culture-friendly businesses (such as PRS) is a substantial opportunity for growth at Phoenix. Burgeoning numbers of creative industry businesses, for example technology companies, have a lot to offer Phoenix in terms of specialist knowledge and tools as well as commercial opportunities.

Proposal 2: relaunch the Digital Forum as a networking opportunity, inviting new businesses to visit Phoenix. Present a showcase of what Phoenix has to offer in terms of space, knowledge and collaboration.

- b. **University partnerships:** while Phoenix's current partnerships with DMU and UoL are to be celebrated (there are typically 4 – 6 projects a year taking place between Phoenix and DMU), more could still be done to nurture these relationships to help build digital maturity. Phoenix could play a stronger role in helping skilled arts and digital graduates by providing career development opportunities. Furthermore, students provide a rich resource in terms of time, energy and research capacity – where fresh eyes could unleash new artistic and commercial outcomes. Not only are there substantial amounts of digital research in local universities, and funding for digital-led research, but university partnerships in the digital realm would provide a lot of positive exposure (as seen in Watershed's 2016 REACT project).

Proposal 2.2: Given external support and funding from digital-led research initiatives, Phoenix could offer more opportunities for students to be involved in the digital arts programme, perhaps offering student curatorships or apprenticeships for the brightest and most ambitious local and regional students.

Proposal 2.3: Identify and build stronger links to university digital researchers and centres of digital research excellence. Notable examples at DMU include the Interactive and Media Technologies research group and the Centre for Computational Intelligence, while at University of Leicester there may be scope for further collaboration with Colleges such as CSSAH and CSE and the University's wider 'digital campus' strategy.

3. **Space:** in various ways Phoenix are well placed to further develop the ways that they conceive of their physical and virtual space as a leading cinema and digital arts centre.
 - a. **More flexible space.** As the planning committee has acknowledged, the redevelopment will include the cultivation of better equipped mixed purpose spaces for learning, making and working in all formats.
 - b. **An open and inclusive café space.** The café space performs a vital function as a space for networking and capacity building. To help build Phoenix's profile as a 'creative hub,' the café might continue to promote diverse and imaginative uses of the space in order to attract and accommodate different audiences and communities.
 - c. **A more autonomous digital art gallery.** Everyone is clear that the gallery space at Phoenix needs relocating to a larger and more prominent area of the building. However, having more autonomy as an institution within Phoenix

would further help to build awareness of its offer by new and diverse audiences, as well as put it on the map for national and international audiences.

Proposal 3: further develop a branding strategy specific to the gallery space at Phoenix, emphasising its unique profile as part of but also distinctive to the cinema offer.

4. **Data gathering:** Developing a more integrated and rigorous approach to data capture and analysis would help optimise business processes, better understand existing audiences, reach new audiences as well as unlock the value of the cultural assets at Phoenix. Should Phoenix succeed in creating more synergy in their data capture, they would be well positioned to share and integrate data across the sector, and to set themselves up as a best practice model in what remains a challenging area of organisational resilience in the arts.

Proposal 4: prioritise review of existing data management systems and software; identify opportunities for upskilling of current employees in data collection and/or recruitment or deployment of a data analyst.

5. **Online platform to develop and profile digital art programme:** both HOME and Broadway have found success in building audiences by using technology to develop and expand their artistic programme. Phoenix, drawing on its resources from new partnerships, could similarly develop its existing website into a virtual gallery. As DCMS have noted, the most effective audience engagement “brings together digital communications with content or experiences which are compelling to a particular audience or community” (2018: 22), working “across dispersed geographies” whilst opening up new sources of revenue (2018: 13).

Proposal 5: develop an online gallery platform for Phoenix – a virtual gallery which could act as archive, incubator and showcase for Phoenix’s innovative and ground-breaking digital art programme.

6. **Developing employee digital skills:** there are an increasing number of cost-effective tools available for arts organisation to build capacity in their workforce’s digital skills. Digital learning opportunities provided by The Space and Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) are good examples of this. In addition, there is a need to get those who work closest to Phoenix’s audiences involved in this upskilling process as much as those who work in a more back-office capacity, particularly front of house and membership staff, for they are the ones most likely to understand audience’s digital requirements. According to ACE, 37% of the arts sector say that a lack of capability and knowledge is a major barrier to achieving digital aspirations (DCMS 2018). This is another opportunity for Phoenix to act as a leader in the sector through developing digital skills and confidence in its staff.

Proposal 6: implement a digital upskilling programme for all staff to benefit from, rolled out in stages over a given period of time so as not to disrupt day-to-day operations.

7. **Technology:** as noted above, rather than use technology merely for technology's sake, successful digital maturity involves first an analysis of specifically what technology is relevant depending on the organisational context. Most importantly, making existing technology and assets more "interoperable" – the basic ability of computerised systems to connect and communicate with one another readily, even if they are developed by different manufacturers in different industries – remains the most important thing.

Proposal 7: to undertake an assessment of all of the different operating software and hardware at Phoenix and develop an action plan for its interoperability.

8. **A Digital Manifesto:** As the first section of this report noted, policy bodies such as ACE, DCMS and NESTA are calling for arts organisations to pioneer their own approach to digital. A courageous vision and mission for Phoenix would include an organisation-wide approach to digital maturity. Sharing these aspirations with other cultural organisations locally and regionally would also highlight Phoenix's role as a digital leader.

Proposal 8: publish an ambitious but realistic Digital Manifesto – which places emphasis on the importance of digital for building new partnerships, an innovative artistic programme, rethinking the use of space, developing staff skills, synthesising data capture and engaging new and existing audiences – the consideration of which positions Phoenix as a digital and creative leader in Leicester and beyond.

APPENDIX: RESEARCH CONTEXT

Phoenix has applied (December 2018) for Stage 2 Arts Council England Capital Funding to develop its current premises and facilities. These funds would allow the Phoenix to provide a wider range of arts and cultural services, including some significant expansion of digital culture and business opportunities for local artists and entrepreneurs. In complement to this project, January 2018 saw the launch of a one-year Creative Economy Engagement Fellowship (CEEP) partnered with Phoenix, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and hosted by the CAMEo Research Institute for Cultural and Media Economies at the University of Leicester. The aim of the Fellowship was to produce baseline research to help inform development of the Phoenix bid with respect to issues of a) economic impact and b) digital impact.

Work undertaken as part of the Fellowship included:

- Consultation with key Phoenix staff and review of documents to establish current practices of capturing and articulating various forms of impact at the Phoenix;
- A general review of academic and policy literatures summarising existing methodologies, case studies and best practices for evaluating the economic, social and cultural impacts of multi-purpose arts centres, including digital economy impacts;
- Conducting 12 recorded interviews and 20 informal conversations with key local partners and stakeholders whose work is likely to be shaped and informed by the planned expansion of Phoenix and its digital economy activities;
- Identification of a framework and set of recommendations for building digital maturity at Phoenix.

The work was undertaken by Dr Sophie Frost (AHRC Creative Economy Engagement Fellow) under the supervision of Professor Mark Banks (Director of CAMEo) and supported by the key partner, John Rance (CEO, Phoenix).

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