

Building a Stronger Outdoor Arts

Development Ecology Briefing Document

This document is the Delivery Plan for
Objective 1: Sector Strategy, which is found
in the Outdoor Arts Sector Strategy.

This document covers 2026 to 2030.



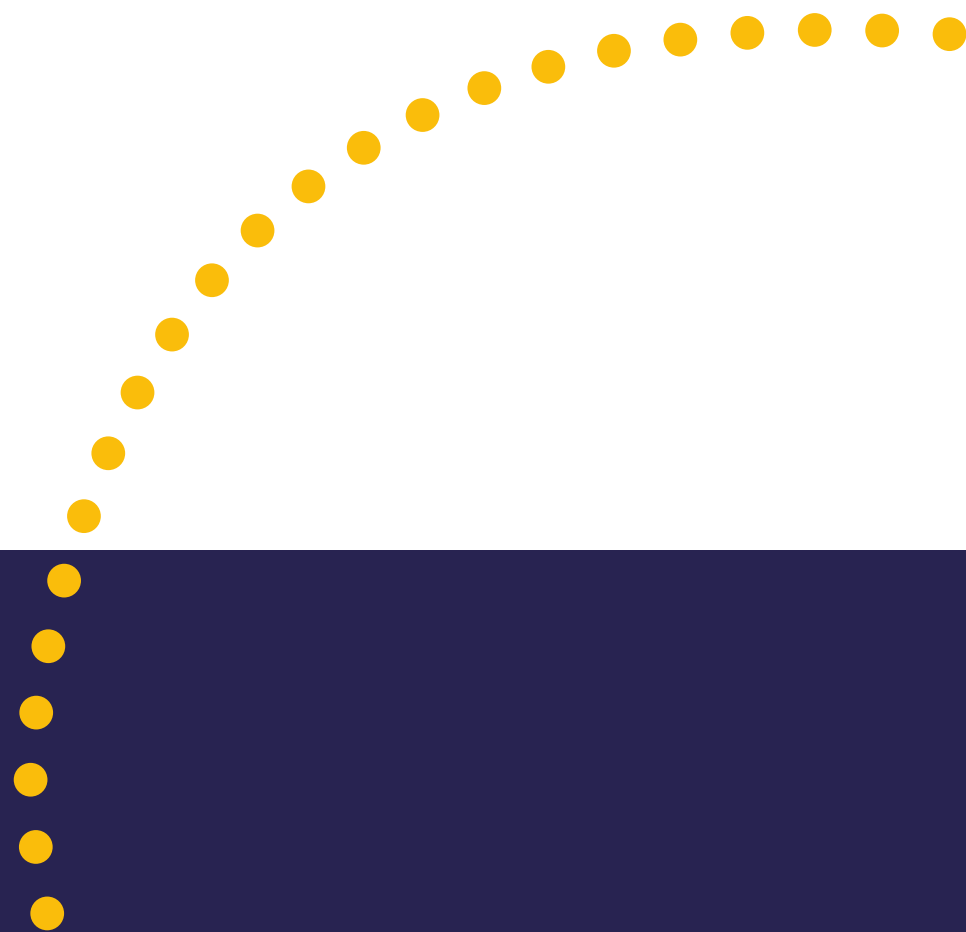
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Introduction

Outdoor arts develops work, people and organisations in distinctive ways. More than in most other artforms, artwork and workforce development are embedded within the processes of commissioning, creation, presentation and touring. Development happens where the art happens, making frontline organisations and practitioners the primary drivers of development across the sector.

Consultation through the Outdoor Arts Sector Strategy revealed that while development activity continues to take place across the country, much of it remains hidden, under-recognised and increasingly difficult to sustain. As a result, many of the activities that underpin artistic excellence and workforce development are vulnerable despite their importance to the sector's future.

This document sets out a shared vision for strengthening the outdoor arts development ecology. By making artwork and workforce development more visible, connected and properly resourced, the sector can create stronger conditions for artistic excellence, workforce development and long-term resilience. In doing so, it can further strengthen the sector's contribution to the country's cultural, civic and social life.



Why Outdoor Arts and its Development is Unique

Development Happens Where the Art Happens

Outdoor arts is distinctive despite its multi-disciplinary nature because the sector routinely works with:

- Public space rather than dedicated cultural spaces
- Broad demographics rather than self-selecting, ticket-buying audiences
- Diverse and sometimes conflicting viewpoints, experiences and communities

Through these conditions, the sector has developed expertise in public-space literacy, audience awareness and artistic responsiveness, which underpins our ability to generate impact.

Works of outdoor arts are born out of the relationship between the artist, public place, and the diversity of audiences who encounter them, and there is common understanding amongst our colleagues that we cannot easily recreate this condition in indoor studio space.

Our excellent artwork needs to be created, tested and refined through real-world public presentation, where:

- Events provide public space for presentation, experimentation and learning
- Practitioners involved in the creation and presentation of artwork develop skills through interaction with diverse audiences in public space
- Artworks evolve through the workforce learning that these opportunities generate

Artwork development and workforce development of artists, producers and programmers are embedded within the sector's project delivery.

This means that:

Sector development cannot be separated from the activity in our sector, and our frontline organisations and practitioners collectively form the infrastructure for sector development.

Why Action is Needed Now

Sector colleagues consistently identified concerns that development activities are becoming increasingly difficult to sustain, and the research has identified key issues.

Because artwork and workforce development are intricately interwoven, much of the sector's development activity has been hidden within commissioning, programming, creation processes and presentation and touring of work. This makes it difficult to fully recognise, articulate and resource its value, making it prone to erosion. Output-focused funding, combined with increasing financial pressures, has encouraged short-term and fragmented approaches to development, reducing the time, space and resources available for experimentation, innovation and skills and knowledge development.

The sector needs to take action to reverse this decline and a stronger development ecology would support the long-term health of the outdoor arts sector. The proposals outlined in this Delivery Plan will enable us to consolidate artistic excellence, workforce development and resilience, and achieving these through better partnership working would further enhance the sector's ability to make a positive impact on places, people and the wider society.

Our Mission for 2030

To establish a visible, valued and connected development ecology

By 2030, we want outdoor arts to benefit from a development ecology that is:

- **Visible**
Development activity is identified and recognised
- **Valued**
Artwork and workforce development are more explicitly planned and budgeted for
- **Connected**
Collaborative sector working more intentionally to sustain and grow its development infrastructure

Action 1: Articulating Outdoor Arts Practice

Improving Understanding of What Outdoor Arts Is and Does

A stronger future requires a stronger understanding of what makes outdoor arts distinctive, and the value we bring to the wider cultural sector and society. This is currently under-articulated and insufficiently understood.

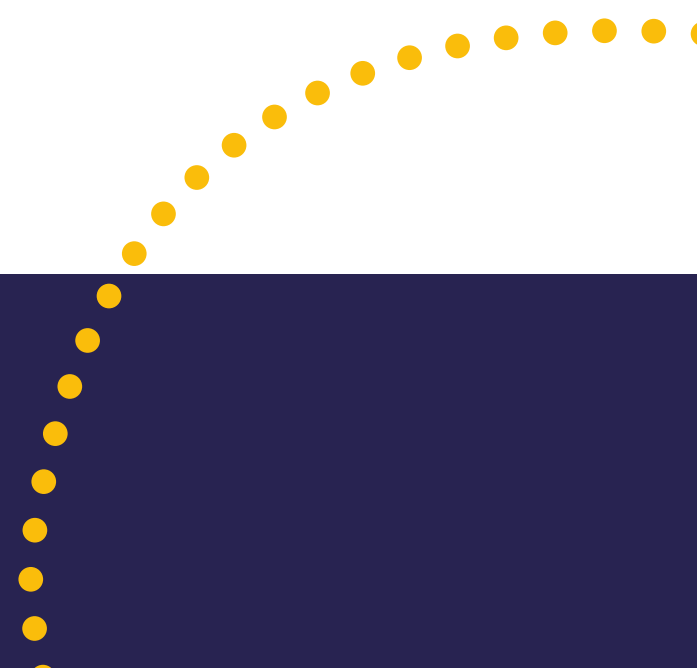
The sector will therefore create a report that articulates the distinctive expertise and methodologies of outdoor arts.

The report will evidence:

- The relationship between practitioners, public space and diverse public involved in the creation of excellent artwork
- The expertise, skills, and conditions this relationship creates
- The artistic, social and civic value that outdoor arts practice generates

The report will be commissioned by OutdoorArtsUK and published in February 2028, providing a shared evidence base to support future sector development and investment.

[A more detailed proposal of Action 1 is available to view here.](#)



Action 2: Strengthening the Development Ecology

Building the Conditions that Create Excellent Work

Achieving artistic excellence requires the right conditions for artwork and workforce development. As outlined in Figure 1, consultation demonstrated that many of these activities already exist within outdoor arts but have become increasingly compressed by financial pressures, output-focused funding and fragmented opportunities. Action 2 proposes how the sector can work together to strengthen and reconnect this development ecology.

Step 1: Strengthen Artwork Development Framework

The sector should work together to articulate and support the stages through which artwork develops. As ambitious outdoor artwork can take at least a year or two to develop from concept to maturity, no single or practitioner can provide every stage of that journey. Sector colleagues should therefore collectively create connected development pathways that draw on their different strengths and capacities.

A connected artwork development framework might include opportunities for:

- Desk research, go-and-see and peer learning opportunities
- Early-stage testing, prototyping and work-in-progress presentation
- Constructive audience and peer feedback
- Premiere presentation and touring, where touring is the ambition of the project
- Further refinement and second stage touring where appropriate

While festivals and commissioning bodies often provide these opportunities, the artist-led and DIY traditions of outdoor arts mean that artists, festivals and commissioners should be recognised as equal contributors to a shared development ecology.

Step 2: Recognise Workforce Development

The outdoor arts workforce develops through participation in practice, and these activities need to be recognised and more intentionally built into artwork development activities.

Activities to establish:

- mentoring
- shadowing
- work placements
- apprenticeships
- assistant and trainee roles

Career entry, progression, leadership and succession planning :

Outdoor arts is well placed to broaden entry into the cultural workforce because [we reach much broader cross-section of the population than other artforms](#). The audience data shows we are particularly good at reaching audiences with family including children and young people. Through partnerships with schools, colleges and training providers, our development opportunities can therefore engage a wider and more diverse range of participants, including young people and groups currently underrepresented within the cultural workforce.

Workforce development opportunities should also be structured with a long-term vision to support consideration of career progression, leadership development and succession planning across the sector. These approaches can help strengthen future talent pipelines while supporting greater workforce and leadership diversity.

Learning generated through artistic practice should be captured and shared through case studies, resources, workshops and peer exchange.

Step 3: Building Development Partnerships

No single organisation or practitioner can provide every aspect of artwork and workforce development. Strong development pathways will require organisations and practitioners to work collaboratively and build on their complementary strengths.

There is no single model for how this could happen. The examples below are intended as illustrative starting points rather than prescribed structures.

- **Regional partnerships**

Sector colleagues working within a locality or region may choose to develop shared approaches to artwork and workforce development that respond to local opportunities, audiences and priorities.

Together, partners can provide broader development opportunities and clearer progression routes than any single organisation or practitioner could offer alone.

- **Large-Scale Development Partnerships**

Large-scale outdoor work has historically acted as a significant driver of artistic and workforce development across the sector. The sector may therefore choose to collaborate around particular challenges associated with commissioning, creating, presenting and touring large-scale work.

By pooling expertise and resources and collectively fundraising, these partnerships can strengthen large-scale artwork development while creating opportunities for artists, producers, technicians and future leaders to develop skills through participation in complex projects. Large-scale work has been identified as a particular gap within the sector.

- **Discipline-Based Development Partnerships**

Organisations and practitioners working within disciplines such as circus, street theatre and other disciplines, may choose to collaborate around shared artistic interests, methodologies or development needs.

These networks can support artistic excellence, peer learning, specialist knowledge exchange and the development of discipline-specific pathways that may not be achievable through geographically or scale-based partnerships.

Strategic Focus Areas

Organisations and practitioners may participate in regional, large-scale and discipline-based partnerships simultaneously. Some of these partnerships already exist, while others are beginning to emerge. The aim is not necessarily to create new systems, but to strengthen development opportunities and create clearer pathways through the outdoor arts ecology. When considering future partnership opportunities, colleagues may wish to explore how these partnerships can build on the sector's strengths in [Cultural Priority Places](#) and through the leadership of diverse-led organisations, both of which are likely to remain areas of strategic interest for cultural investment.

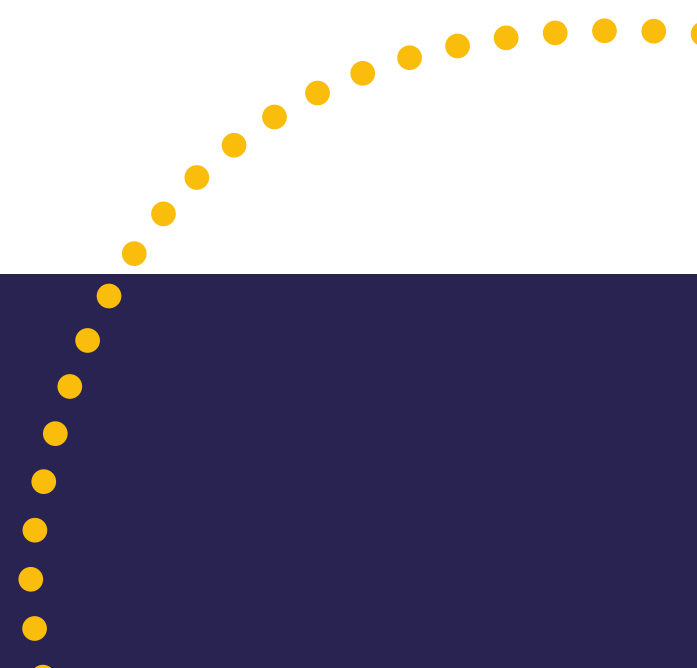
Improving National Connectivity and Coherence

While different development structures may emerge across the sector, their effectiveness will depend on the extent to which they are connected to one another.

Strengthening the development ecology is not simply about creating more activity. It is about ensuring that development opportunities and progression routes are visible, connected and accessible across the sector, so that the ecology and the sector become more resilient as a result.

National organisations, sector support bodies and strategic partners have an important role to play in strengthening this connectivity by:

- Convening organisations and practitioners around shared opportunities and challenges
- Mapping existing development activity and identifying gaps in provision
- Supporting knowledge exchange and dissemination
- Connecting plural development activities into a national ecology
- Identifying emerging needs and areas requiring strategic investment



How We Can Make This Happen

Recognising, Planning and Resourcing Development for a Better Future

Strengthening the outdoor arts development ecology will require greater investment, capacity and coordination across the sector. To help make this possible, colleagues should:

- **Identify** the artwork and workforce development activity they currently provide and how this may need to evolve or expand to sustain artistic excellence and innovation in the future
- **Plan and cost** this activity realistically, recognising development as a core part of the sector's infrastructure rather than an optional addition to project delivery. Ambitious outdoor work often requires sustained investment in both artwork and workforce development over multiple years before reaching its full potential
- **Evidence and articulate** the resources, capacity and investment required to deliver this work effectively, seeking additional investment or reducing levels of output where necessary
- **Collaborate** with other organisations and practitioners where opportunities exist to create more connected artwork and workforce development pathways
- **Share** development ambitions, learning and evidence to help build a stronger collective case for investment

Colleagues will be at different stages of readiness. Some may already have established partnerships and shared development ambitions, while others may be at an earlier stage of building relationships and understanding their own artwork and workforce development needs. All stages are valid. OutdoorArtsUK and other sector support organisations can help connect respective activity into wider development partnerships.

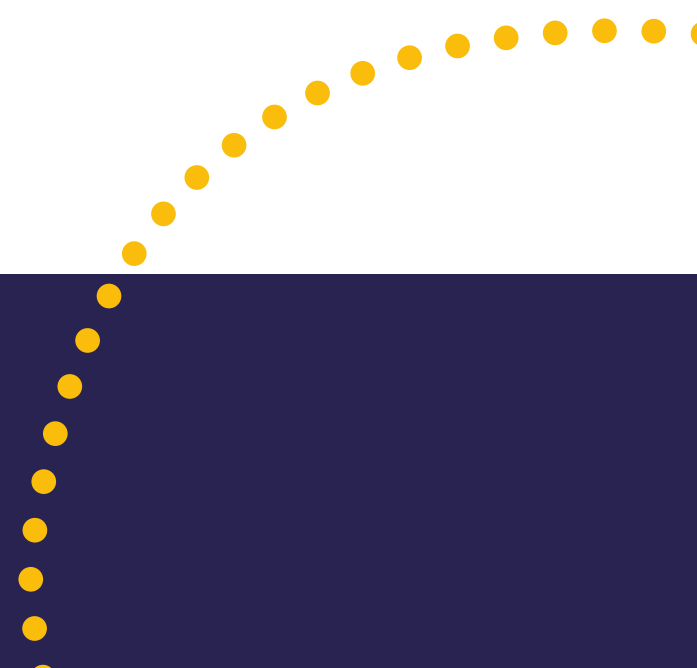
This Delivery Plan is not about creating new systems. It is about recognising, strengthening and connecting the developmental functions that already exist across the sector so they can operate more deliberately, coherently and effectively.

How Actions 1 and 2 Reinforce Each Other

Action 2 begins now through the building of partnerships that lead to stronger artwork and workforce development activity across the sector. Action 1 will run concurrently, culminating in a sector report in February 2028, giving funders and policymakers greater confidence in the value of outdoor arts and the development ecology that supports it. By April 2028, the ambition is for emerging development partnerships to be functioning as a more connected outdoor arts development ecology, better equipping the sector to make a positive impact on cultural, civic and social life.

A Note on Emerging Clusters and Creation Centres

As development partnerships evolve, clusters of activity and innovation are likely to emerge. These may help identify opportunities and locations for future Creation Centres. While outdoor arts develops primarily through live delivery, dedicated centres such as 101 Outdoor Arts play an important supporting role in experimentation, skills development and the sharing of practice. The sector should therefore take a long-term view of infrastructure and remain open to opportunities for new Creation Centres where clear need is identified.



What Success Looks Like

By 2036, the outdoor arts sector will be better positioned to:

- **Excellence**

Create stronger pathways for ambitious, high-quality artistic work in public spaces. Through its long-standing expertise in engaging diverse publics and responding to place, outdoor arts can lead the wider cultural sector in demonstrating how artistic excellence and broad public relevance reinforce one another.

- **Access**

Provide wider opportunities for cultural participation, alongside clearer entry and progression routes into the workforce. As one of the arts sectors with the broadest public reach, outdoor arts can play a leading role in diversifying the cultural workforce and opening up routes into creative careers.

- **Place**

Strengthen the role of outdoor arts within places and communities. By working directly within public space and everyday life, outdoor arts can lead the wider arts sector in demonstrating how culture contributes to thriving places, stronger communities and civic pride.

- **Resilience**

Support a more sustainable workforce, stronger organisations and healthier partnerships. By building on its strengths in collaboration, public engagement and diversity, outdoor arts can become a model for how the wider cultural sector develops talent, engages audiences and builds organisational resilience.

- **Wider Contribution**

Increase its contribution to cultural, civic and social life across the country. By evidencing the value generated through outdoor arts practice, the sector can lead the case for public investment in arts and culture, demonstrating how cultural activity delivers benefits for communities, places and society as a whole.