

Lit Up Festival

Brewery Arts Centre, Kendal

20-22 September 2006

Evaluation Report

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Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

124 delegates attended the Lit Up Festival. The sample included representatives from the key target groups – programmers, venue managers and performers. Their views were predominantly positive.

The overall satisfaction rating was around 95%.

The programme was received positively. However, ensuring that all acts are of the highest quality will be crucial, if the aim for artists to receive firm bookings from their participation in the festival is to be achieved better next time.

The event was rated as well organized by all respondents and specifically described as a positive experience by 71%.

The Brewery Arts Centre was rated as a good location for its facilities and its catering (94%) and for the local accommodation (63% said it was good value for money).

The marketing of the event was rated as effective by 76% but the overall level of media coverage was seen to be less so, as 47% gave this a low rating. Those who did not attend also commented that marketing could be better and that media coverage of Live Literature was critical to raising the overall profile of the sector and developing understanding of Live Literature work.

The status of the sector is not yet high with comments about the network indicating that it could be stronger.

The Live Literature Consortium is in an ideal position to take on a key role in providing advice on programming, presentation of work and advocating for further funding for the sector. The latter relates to the production, presentation and promotion of the work, with both attendees and non-attendees proposing that the sector needs more agents working on behalf of performers in obtaining work.

All of these could be included in a second year of activity in the form of debates, panel discussions and workshops.

Whilst there is strong interest in the consortium continuing its work the mix of activities may not be compatible with a single event. The consortium may well be advised to consider how to deliver a development programme separate from the festival itself. A touring roadshow would have the advantage of enabling the consortium to carry its message into discrete parts of the country as well as running the higher profile festival.

The networking element of the festival was not as successful as the consortium would have liked. This can be addressed by instituting formal opportunities for performers and programmers to meet and talk about work/commissions and dates. This may require some development training for performers, who may not have the appropriate skills. Such a forum may also be a stimulus for agents to attend in order to find artists that they can represent and venues to which they can offer existing clients.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Live Literature Consortium for the opportunity to evaluate the Lit Up Festival. Special thanks to Matthew Linley who has offered advice at all stages of the work. Thanks also to Linda Graham, administrator for the festival, whose sterling work contributed so much to the positive atmosphere in Kendal and which I hope is reflected in this report. Thanks to my colleague, Franco Bianchini, for his comments on an earlier draft of this report. Finally, thanks to all those who spent the time filling out the questionnaires or talking with me on the phone. I hope I have made appropriate reference to the many insights and observations you offered.

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Introduction

This report aims to evaluate the Lit Up Festival held at Brewery Arts Centre, Kendal from Wednesday 20 to Friday 22 September, 2006. It was commissioned by the Live Literature Consortium a network of seven venues¹ that was formed in 2003 to

- support venues presenting live literature
- provide a network for venue programmers
- help venue programmers understand what is 'out there' in terms of events available
- develop a better understanding of how to sell literature events, and who the audiences are
- establish a touring circuit (this was recognised as being a longer term aim)

Context

From 2003 to late 2004, the Live Literature Consortium explored the concept of live literature from a venue perspective. Members were encouraged to develop their literature programme and audiences, share their experiences and discuss how the artform could move forward.

A frustration that it identified was the lack of professionally produced live literature work. With the exception of Apples & Snakes, renaissance one and occasional funded tours of UK and/or international writers, there was little well developed, quality work available for venues to book. Whilst some venues produced their own one-off events, it was agreed this was not always the best use of resources for an event performed only once and others don't have the in-house skills and resources to do this.

Having gained additional experience of programming live literature events via membership of the Consortium, the seven venues involved decided to each co-produce a new piece of work to

- increase the amount, quality and diversity of live literature work available
- use their experience of other artforms to ensure live literature is produced to the same professional standards, e.g. theatre
- support venues through the process of co-producing new literature work



¹ Brewery Arts Centre, Kendal; Contact Theatre, Manchester; Exeter Phoenix, Exeter; Gulbenkian Theatre, Canterbury; Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham; Norden Farm Centre for the Arts, Maidenhead; Phoenix, Leicester.

These seven pieces² it was decided would provide the core of a festival that alongside a number of literature events from existing promoters/producers³ would aim to:

- Raise the profile of live literature work, encouraging more programmers to consider booking live literature work
- Consider the key issues affecting the development, production, performance and touring of live literature through the sharing of work as well as discussion
- Develop and foster new live literature work, which may well have a life beyond the showcase

These aims provide the focus for the evaluation, the aims of which are set out in Appendix 1.

In short the evaluation will provide the Live Literature Consortium with an insight into the following:

- a) How well the consortium/festival met its stated objectives (as set out in the evaluation paper and the Grants for the Arts application)
- b) The success of the event related to the above

And on the basis of the evaluation provide the consortium with comments / recommendations about the future of the event.

² Due to changes in personnel the Exeter Phoenix was unable to complete its commission so only six pieces were presented at the Lit Up Festival

³ Nine other pieces were invited to appear at the festival: *Poetry Boyband*, Aisle 16; *Being Alive*, Book Communications; *Four Fathers*, Route; *The Brighter Side*, Rob Gee; *Apples & Snakes Scratch*, Apples & Snakes; *When to Run*, renaissance one; *Tell Tales*, Tell Tales; *Mark Gwynne Jones and the Psychicbread*, Route; *World Poets*, Poetry Translation Centre

Research Methodology

The evaluation has been carried out using the following methods:

1. Questionnaire for delegates (appendix 2)
2. Questionnaire for performers (appendix 3)
3. Questionnaire for all attendees to obtain comments on shows seen (appendix 4)
4. Questionnaire to non attenders who requested information about the festival (appendix 5)
5. Telephone conversations with a small sample of people who did not attend but whose views were considered important to reflect in this report (questions attached as appendix 6)

The questionnaires were agreed with members of the consortium and e-mailed to the Brewery Arts Centre so that they could be photocopied and inserted into the packs of those attending the festival. The organisers made frequent requests for the evaluation forms to be completed and to be left at the venue or returned by post to the evaluator. The evaluator assisted in this process by distributing forms during the festival. 46 completed forms were returned at the venue and a further five by post.

A list of names were provided by the consortium and over a period of two weeks calls were made to suit the respondents.

It was anticipated that follow-up phone calls would also be made to participants who indicated their willingness to participate further in the research. The aim of this was to develop issues raised through the research but on the basis of the written feedback it was decided that this was unnecessary.

51 of the delegates completed forms (41%), this is a large enough sample to give the consortium confidence in the results obtained. The data has been processed using a statistical package (Statistical Package for Social Scientists - SPSS) and histograms produced from the analysis using Excel (see appendices 12 to 15).

Eight of the performers completed forms which is a small sample and consequently has not been treated in the same way as that obtained from delegates. SPSS has been used but only raw numbers discussed, no percentages or histograms have been produced owing to the small numbers who completed forms.

The questionnaire to non attenders (96) did not produce a good return rate (4) but nonetheless the results obtained are valid as a check on the data obtained from those who attended/performed at the festival itself.

Results

The following sections provide a critical overview of the results obtained from an analysis of the delegates' list and from the questionnaire data. The data is shown in full in appendices

A thematic analysis of the written comments from all 109 completed reveals the following positive feedback to the organisers.

Festival feature	Positive comments	
	Number	Percentage
Positive experience	36	71
Good organisation	25	49
Good programme	22	43
Good networking opportunity	18	35
Good venue	13	25
Good for debates/discussion	5	10
Should be an annual event	3	6
Should be a biannual event	3	6
Reviews were a good idea	2	4
Total	127	



Taken together with the feedback from the Likert scale questions it is clear that participants were satisfied with how the event was administered and with its overall structure. Linda Graham, who administered the event and Sam Mason, Director of the Brewery Arts Centre, are to be congratulated on the quality of the work and event that they produced.

Thematic analysis of delegates' views on how the event might have been improved e.g. stronger panel discussions; better networking opportunities; more representative programme; timing of events;

Festival feature - Programme	Comments / Recommendations	
	Number	Percentage
Some work was weak	13	25
Timetable was very packed and tiring	8	16
Debates / discussions could be more informative and productive	7	14
Networking could be better organised e.g. speed networking to encourage contacts	7	14
Needed a broader mix e.g. more well-read poetry, storytelling, successful artists	7	14
Some confusion about what was Live Literature. Some work more theatre than Live Literature	5	10
Needs of libraries/librarians could be met better	5	10
Feedback: review system not good, comments board would be better	4	8
Needs to be more multicultural	1	2
Total	57	

In the context of the overall satisfaction expressed by participants the above identify the areas in which this successful event can be improved in the future. Comments on the balance of the programme are focused on including work that is of an appropriate standard (less perhaps of 'work in progress') and which includes some known names. The consortium is conscious of this and to some extent it is inevitable that with a sector as broad as Live Literature not everyone will be satisfied every time and views will be polarized. In addition this may also reflect the make-up of the consortium membership and this is being reviewed⁴ for artform and geographical representation⁵.

Two areas that do need to be developed are:

1. panel discussions and debates
2. networking

⁴ Matthew Linley, pers.comm. 5 December 2006

⁵ There is presently no representative from the North East of England, nor from Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales. An important consideration if the Live Literature Consortium aims to represent the needs of the whole sector in the UK and not just in England.

Workshops, panel discussions and debates

The session from Ros Fry on Marketing of Live Literature was enjoyed by many of those who replied/attended, two issues are prompted by her sessions; 1) the fact that it was run twice increased the opportunities for people to attend; and 2) it was based on her past work and carried an authority derived from that. By comparison, the debates suffered slightly 1) because smaller numbers attended them and 2) in the main the discussions were more of a spontaneous variety with no one person having, it appeared, to have prepared any materials in advance of sitting on the panel.

The panel discussions and debates should be seen as an opportunity for some personal/professional development and to be viewed as indispensable. For that to happen the benefits of attending need to be perceived as more valuable than time over coffee or other distractions. Timing may be a factor, though all the panel discussions and non performative events occurred at a time when no other events were happening. So, the key to making them more popular is to develop their content and to promote them as essential and as an opportunity for learning about issues of critical importance to the participants. Ensuring that speakers are briefed and well prepared in advance would help. This would allow the organizers to circulate an outline of what will be covered to delegates in advance. And, if numbers for some workshops could be limited and allocated on a 'first come, first served' basis this may also increase attention.

Networking

This was possibly the least developed feature of the event given the emphasis placed on this in the original bid. The consortium is aware of this. A table where publicity material was displayed – principally from venues, not from performers – did not become a focus for genuine networking which as a result happened on a more ad-hoc basis around the venue. The concept of the marketplace and creating formal opportunities for networking linked to artists having direct contact with potential bookers should be an important feature of the consortium's work in the following months/year.

If the consortium has not been able to look at how networking is achieved by other, similar events then this may be a valuable focus for someone in the next two or three months. Some observations are made about this in the conclusions and recommendations where recent experience of the Dutch Jazz Meeting in Amsterdam could offer a possible model.

Some of the participants commented on the density of the programme and feeling tired by 10pm and thus missing out on the three poetry slams. Similarly, attendance at events early in the day tended to be less than in the afternoon/evening. The scope therefore for offering a more complex programme (with more opportunities for debate/personal development, a marketplace and a programme of live work) may be limited, especially in the context of a 2.5 day event in Kendal. The consortium may therefore wish to consider separating these functions by, for example, offering a personal development programme to some extent independent of the marketplace and presentation of live work. If this has appeal then it may mean that the consortium can offer such a programme at different times of the year in different parts of the country – a roadshow for example.

Comments on the venue and location e.g. friendly welcome, staff, facilities – air conditioning, suitability of rooms, accommodation. These comments are in the context that 94% of comments about the Brewery Arts Centre were positive

Festival feature - Venue	Comments / Recommendations	
	Number	Percentage
Very hot in some parts – needs better air	2	4

conditioning		
Needs a cybercafé/Internet	2	4
Malt Room not a good space	1	2
Too spread out	1	2
Total	6	



The following table summarises the responses made by delegates to the Likert scale questions. The analysis is made using only the responses received to the Strongly Agree and Agree categories (=High) and to the Disagree and Strongly Disagree categories (= Low). Responses to 'Neither Agree nor Disagree' were ignored for the purposes of exaggerating the overall assessment of the following features:

Question	High		Low	
	No	%	No	%
The festival programme provided a good mix of work from the sector	38	75	4	8
Ros Fry's seminar presented interesting insights into how to market Live Literature	24	47	2	4
Panel discussion on 'Producing and Programming Live Literature' was valuable	24	47	0	0
The Artist led panel discussion was valuable	7	14	0	0
The panel discussion on 'What is Live Literature' was valuable	12	24	3	6
The festival was administered well	50	100	0	0
I received the information I needed in good time	49	98	1	2
The festival was marketed well	44	76	3	6
Media coverage encouraged attendance	3	6	19	47
The Brewery Arts Centre is an excellent location	48	94	0	0
The catering was good	48	94	0	0
My accommodation offered good value for money	32	63	1	1
The sector needs a showcase event like the Lit Up Festival	49	96	0	0
Opportunities for artists to obtain work are improving	21	41	2	4
I receive good information about work that is available for programming	17	33	14	28
There is a robust network supporting this sector	10	20	11	22

The most significant outcomes are the high rating given to the quality of administration, the venue, the catering, the need for an event like Lit Up and the programme of work presented. On the negative side the overall marketing in terms of media coverage was rated as poor. There were also reservations about the marketing by performers and whether the network is yet effective on behalf of the sector.



The following table summarises the responses to the general questionnaire about the shows seen. The same approach has been used as with the previous table so that High = Strongly Agree and Agree, whilst Low = Disagree and Strongly Disagree, other responses being discounted.

Event	High		Low		Précis of comments received
	No	%	No	%	
Aisle 16	21	41	9	18	Many found this show to be stronger on form than content but others found it hilarious and interesting
Being Alive	11	22	22	43	The content of this show was generally thought to be good but the production was too 'actory' for many
When to Run	15	29	1	2	Generally rated as a good, powerful production
The Journey	25	49	12	24	This show split the audience with some rating it highly for its performance qualities others suggesting it was too long and more a piece of theatre
Brighter Side	8	16	5	10	Enjoyed by a small audience
Speak Song	0	0	26	51	Not popular, most people did not understand the piece
Apples and Snakes	23	45	12	24	Received well for its energy and variety and as a piece of 'work in progress'
World's Poet Tour	7	14	2	4	Enjoyed for its reflective mood though only a few attended
The Wig	36	71	2	4	Good, a show that most closely matched what some thought Live Lit should be, great writing first, performance qualities second
Four Fathers	25	49	2	4	Good, only a small audience but they appreciated it for the quality of the writing
Spinning a Yarn	0	0	33	65	Not popular, most considered that it needed more work before being presented to the public
Tell Tales	4	8	21	41	Interesting but not entirely successful, some thought it was too long, the integration of text and music was not persuasive and the Malt Room was very hot and stuffy
I Hear Voices	27	53	1	2	Good, well received with the reservation that this was really a piece of theatre
Til Death Us Do Part	17	33	2	4	Good, well received with the same reservations as for 'I Hear Voices'
Psychicbread	18	35	3	6	Good, funny and with some good music
Poetry Slams	1	10	20	3	Popular, well run, gave a platform for new performers
	2	36	71	2	
	3	16	31	3	

The Wig, I Hear Voices and the second poetry slam stand out for the positive response from delegates. Two shows received unfavourable reviews.

About the delegates

Insights obtained that specifically address the aims set by the Live Literature Consortium in its evaluation brief (appendix 1)

1. Alter the way venue programmers perceive live literature and affect their behaviour and attitudes towards the art form.
2. Raise the profile of live literature work and in so doing encourage more venues and bookers to consider live literature for their programmes.
3. Through the sharing of work and discussion consider the key issues affecting the development, production, performance and touring of live literature work.
4. To develop and foster new 'live literature' works which may well have a life beyond the showcase.

Target audience

1. If the target audience is primarily programmers new to literature, decide what percentage of total delegates we want to attract and measure that.
2. At time of booking, ask delegates what their level of experience is in programming and specifically in programming literature/ spoken word.
3. Provide a networking/ info/ discussion service – ask them how valuable this side of the showcase has been.

Qualitative and Quantitative

1. Numbers – how many delegates? How many members of the general public?

Data was collected from attenders pre-registration and from the questionnaires. This shows that 124 attended, the numbers of members of the public is not included as show audience data was not collected in a manner that enabled a clear differentiation between delegates and the general public.

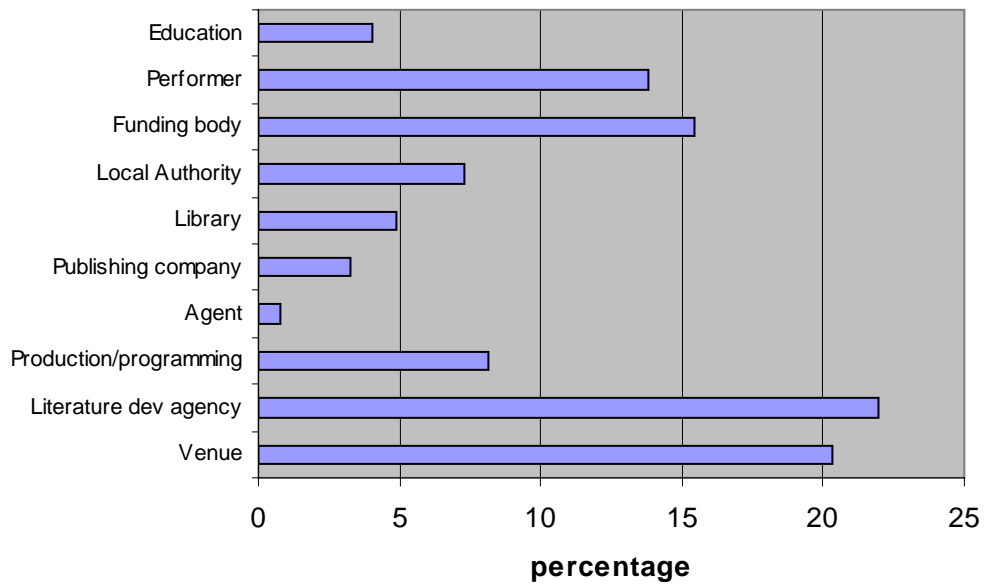
The analysis shown below was prepared using information from the questionnaire and from the list of attenders. From this it is evident that the festival was attended by people with a broad range of perspectives ranging from those who work for Literature Development Agencies (22%), venues (21%), in production/programming (8%), local authorities (7% over and above those who work in literature development or libraries), libraries (5%). In addition to those who work in a programming/production capacity there was also a good representation from those who work in a funding capacity with Arts Council England and the British Council for example (15%), or who are performers (14%).

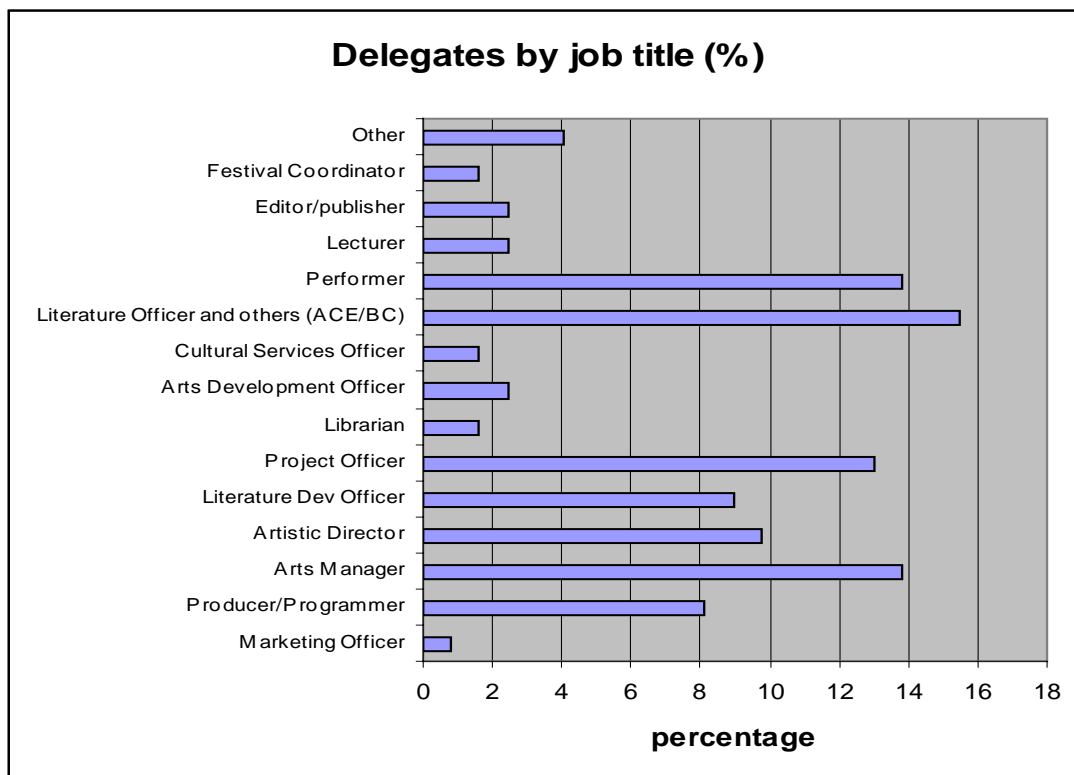
As the consortium wished to attract particularly those who had a role in programming Live Literature then the fact that 62% of attenders have a role/job title as arts manager, producer, artistic direction, arts/literature development, or librarian is also evidence that the marketing attracted the right audience. (see appendix 22 for a full analysis).

The areas from which representation was low were education (4%), publishing companies (3%) and artist agencies (1%). All of these are target markets for future events. Artist agencies are particularly important given the comments from venue programmers concerning the quality of information that they receive from performers, 28% indicated that this information could be better and also its timing. From telephone interviews it was noted that programmers/bookers preferred dealing with agents because the latter understood their needs better.



Delegates by organisation/employment sector (%)





2. How did they rate the event? Look at the whole package.

Overall, the event was considered to have been good value for money by 98% the same proportion who indicated that they would attend again.

Benefit	No	%
Learnt something about the presentation of work	41	80
Learnt something about the production of work	37	73
Discovered innovative or new work/artists	25	49
Other benefits	17	33
Spoke with performers about their availability in 2007	14	27
Learnt about opps for working in local schools/community	13	25
Learnt something important about how to commission new work	10	20
Networking	8	16
Made firm bookings with artists	2	4

From this it is evident that delegates found their attendance to have been of particular benefit in respect of understanding how to present/produce work and for identifying new work/artists that they could programme. However as a forum for making bookings for 2007 it was less beneficial. Many respondents identified networking as a benefit (35% of written comments) but there is scope in a future event for this to be developed with the inclusion in the programme of more formal opportunities for networking (17%). One respondent proposed that this could be in the form of speed networking, an interesting proposal.

Only two disbenefits were registered, insufficient to merit any transformation into bar charts or other statistical analysis. These were: made no new contacts; work was uninspiring. The latter was a minority view as 43% of written comments were positive about the programme however there is clearly scope for broadening the range of work in a future festival as 59% of written comments indicated areas in which the programme could be improved. In addition 14% proposed that the panel discussions and debates could be stronger (as opposed to 10% who thought they were good).

Performers

How was it for them? Have they gained any new commissions/ bookings/ ideas/ collaborations? Are they better informed about how to get bookings/ commissions, etc?

The data from the performers reflected similar judgements to those of the delegates but the sample was much smaller, hence the lack of any statistical treatment. Nonetheless it is possible to say that the performers appreciated the event, its ambition and what it delivered in terms of the overall programme, the management and location. Only one performer indicated that they had reservations about the festival and this was in reference to it being disruptive to normal work.

The number of enquiries:bookings was 4:1. This is less than the consortium would have wished and underlines the need to ensure more opportunities for networking if Lit Up happens again in 2007/8.

Conclusions

It will be a challenge for the consortium to improve on the overall satisfaction recorded by both delegates and performers with over 95% indicating that they thought it was a good event (good for the overall programme, good for its administration and value for money), which should happen again and if it did that they would attend. Those who did not attend also indicated that they would try to attend the festival if it occurred again. No one who completed a questionnaire or who gave a telephone interview was hesitant about the need for Lit Up and most argued for it being run again in 2007, rather than leaving it until 2008. Leaving it a year, it is argued, would lose the momentum that has been generated by this first event.

The satisfaction with the overall programme was qualified in some respects with a small number of delegates believing that the programme:

Lacked star names

Contained some work that was weak

Contained some work which was more theatre than Live Literature

Could be more representative of the sector e.g. storytelling, formal poetry

Some also thought that a second festival should:

Offer better/formal opportunities for networking – e.g. speed networking sessions

Through this it may be possible to encourage more booking of artists (27% of delegates spoke with artists about their availability for 2007 but only two made firm bookings) as this is an important aspiration for the consortium.

Make better use of the debates as a development opportunity for both delegates and performers. There is clearly a gap between what performers want in terms of access to appropriate venues and programmes and what some programmers feel they could sell. This could be addressed through debates and workshops.

In terms of location there was popular support for Brewery Arts Centre as the venue but against this it should be noted that some of those who did not attend indicated that they thought that the rural location was problematic (travel costs was a factor in their comments) and that thought should be given to using a more urban venue in 2007 e.g. Manchester Festival of Literature.

Not surprisingly those who attended in September were positive about that as the best month for the festival, with few people suggesting alternatives. Amongst those who did not attend were some who found September a difficult month due to their own programme of work.

The challenge for the consortium is to mobilise the positive energy which this first event has produced in order to:

1. further raise the profile of Live Literature
2. build on the emerging network of existing and potential performers and programmers
3. consolidate the role that the consortium is playing in respect of the above

The consortium will have learnt a lot from this first event in particular that it is meeting a need across the sector which must be addressed again in 2007.



Recommendations

1. Annual or biannual event. It may be a challenge to raise financial support for an event in 2007 and produce a strong programme all in six or seven months. However the consortium does not wish to let the momentum achieved by this first event to drop. An alternative strategy would be to develop a 'development and debate' roadshow which would help:
 - i) To promote the concept of Live Literature at a more local level thus enabling the consortium to target cities/parts of the country where activity is presently low
 - ii) To allow participants in this aspect of the consortium's work to develop a more personal angle on their own personal and professional development needs.

If this programme is drawn together in early 2007 then it may be possible for the 'tour' to begin in late Spring/early Summer but again the timing of any future application for funding would influence this schedule but a late decision would be less inconvenient for this work than for a second festival. If successful then the consortium could begin work on a second festival for 2008 in the knowledge that part of its agenda for developing the sustainable future for Live Literature is being delivered through the roadshow.

2. The range of work offered within the festival needs to be stronger (well known names) and to fully reflect the scope of the sector. This may be addressed by ensuring that the membership of the consortium is broadened to include different perspectives about the sector and from different parts of the UK.
3. The participants at Lit Up were predominantly white, the work presented was more multi-cultural but even here there is perhaps more scope for incorporating work and performers from a broad mix of groups – and abilities. But the priority should be the audience/participants in order to extend the realm of contacts from the small core of venues/programmers who have some interest in the sector to try and incorporate venues which at present have very limited contact with Live Literature either because they lack the expertise on the staff or do not think they have an audience for the work or it is not a requirement asked of them by their funding body.
4. Marketing: as the formal campaign was of limited impact the recommendation is that this is developed and implemented for the consortium and sector as a whole not just for the festival. The website should be developed to offer visitors with an experience, words, action, impressions, a discussion board and a good listings page.
5. The Marketplace: this is a vital element of the development of a dialogue between performers and programmers/venues. It is recommended that at the second festival at least two hours is devoted to a market in which performers/agents can offer materials about their work and discuss them face to face with potential bookers.

This may initially prove a challenge but if the experience of the Dutch Jazz Meeting is an indicator then it is not insurmountable. At the recent DJM over 102 artists, agents and some small record labels participated in a marketplace of 4 hours and this attracted a lot of interest from potential bookers from around the world. The DJM has been running now for ten years but a more modest outcome is achievable for Live Literature in the UK. In most respects the aims of the DJM and the Lit Up Festival are comparable, the greater experience and profile of DJM means that they are having the effects that the Lit Up Festival aspires to in terms of raising the profile of the artform, in their case Dutch jazz, and enabling their artists to obtain more work, at home and abroad.

6. Debates/panel discussions/workshops: the key to making these indispensable is that all who participate should do something in advance. This therefore requires that the consortium brief its

speakers well in advance, who in turn should submit their work in advance for appropriate preparation/dissemination to participants. The importance of this aspect of the consortium's work for the growth of the sector should not be underestimated. The constraints of the festival format may add further support to the idea that the focus in the festival should be on presentation of work and a marketplace with less emphasis on 'learning' through workshops etc which are offered in the manner of a roadshow.