

11111Hydroponic.... Grown in Reading



Year 1 Report

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1. Original Plan and what actually happened

This section sets out what we intended when we began the project. serves as a bench mark against which to reflect on what actually happened and articulates what we have learnt going forward into HYDROPONIC 2

- Project Description
- Primary Aims
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Original Plan	What actually happened	What we learnt
Project Description		
<p>HYDROPONIC – is a new performing arts project aimed at unearthing and developing the very best in new writing and theatre practice from the culturally diverse community and artists in Reading and its surrounding region.</p>	<p>In order to put Reading more prominently on the cultural map, it was decided to expand the programme nationally. Hydroponic would become about the growth, in Reading, of culturally diverse talent.</p>	<p>National element is essential and will be built upon for HYDROPONIC 2</p>
<p>A partnership project co funded by the Arts Council England – South East and Reading Borough Council, Hydroponic will enable Reading based arts organisation <i>Culturemix Arts</i> to collaborate with <i>writernet</i> in the search for talent and its professional development towards production.</p>	<p>Culturemix provided initial advice and guidance on accessing locally based culturally diverse talent, but perhaps because the project was just beginning or perhaps owing to previous issues relating to South Street, this talent did not materialise and Culturemix dropped out of the project</p>	<p>Reading Borough Council’s Arts team will oversee the local offer for HYDROPONIC 2, in house engaging with community based constituencies to work out how to grow appropriately from grass roots. writernet will then respond to this process to help shape and deliver the offer.</p>
<p>The project will work with some of the country’s leading culturally diverse writers and theatre practitioners, and artists drawn from the communities across the region to:</p>	<p>Masterclasses were delivered by Gabriel Gbadamosi, Peter Badejo, Annabel Arden, Eleanor Margolies & Ramon Abad, Alex from cartoon da Dalvo</p> <p>Visiting Speakers included Tom Morris, Tanika Gupta, Ben Jancovitch, Debbie</p>	<p>Master classes will form a clear part of HYDROPONIC 2’s regional offer and will be widely advertised and encouraged through out the region, through companies, network, e-groups</p>

	Seymour	
1. Provide 5 culturally diverse writers with a three-term dramaturgical and professional development programme, at the same time as them writing a First Draft commission	We began with 5, but 1 dropped out when he was unexpectedly made redundant from his arts management job.	HYDROPONIC 2 will make offers to 3 national writers (one of whom is working in the South East region) who are already connected to producing companies who will benefit from the dramaturgical and co-production resources on offer. HYDROPONIC 2 is now about making good work even better – and getting it on. So the emphasis will shift from writer development per se, to writer development through script development
2. Create a Performance Laboratory of actors and directors, which will feed into and be fed by the work of these 5 writers.	This idea was predicated on ready and available local talent on which to draw. This was only very partially realised	South Street will continue to develop relationships already formed and will focus on the local offer as well as upping its regional profile
3. Culminate in showcase readings presented at South Street Arts Centre and possibly elsewhere	Readings were presented both at South Street and Soho Theatre	The context of each of the three writers will depend on their existing production company relationship. This in turn will influence scheduling of any

<p>4. Include an additional option to create up to 6 professional development offers for culturally diverse writers from the region with more experienced counterparts</p>	<p>This began with 6, but following extended illness dropped down to 5. We partnered with literature training to deliver action plans with and for 5 writers. We then set out to deliver what we could from these action plans</p>	<p>showcasing Running the regional group alongside the national one falsely raised the regional writers' expectations and for half the group this was counter-productive. Instead we will retain a professional development budget which we will invite regional companies to bid into in tandem with writers they are working with or whom they might want to work with.</p>
<p>The project will be situated at South Street Arts Centre in Reading.</p>		<p>Where appropriate the project will take place in South Street. Locally, it may need to move outside the building into the community. Regionally we want to place South Street more prominently on the cultural map, but we will also manifest a Hydroponic presence at Farnham Maltings, with New Writing South and seek synergies across the region. Nationally we will negotiate with each writer and each producing company as to what aspects of</p>

		development get delivered where
It will also link into other initiatives such as Eclipse, BRIT, Decibel and others.	In practice this was more difficult than anticipated, as each theatre either had its own initiative running (Eclipse) or the showcase timing was inopportune (Decibel) or practical partnerships were not yet ready to be developed (BRIT: South Hill Park). Writernet incorporated Linda Brogan into their transnational network, The Fence	By developing specific partnerships, such as West Yorkshire Playhouse, Farnham Maltings & Pursued By a Bear, Tamasha etc. HYDROPONIC 2 will better embed into the cultural landscape.
It is recognised that there is an element of artistic risk in this project and therefore it is not possible at the outset to know the nature and scale of any performance work generated. However it is clear that the project aims to produce the best possible standard of work from the creative and financial resources available. Above all else the project aims to achieve excellence. Any production outcome will be part of a SECOND PHASE	The quality and standard of the work produced by all 4 writers for the readings was felt by audiences and artists alike to be high.	Production is the goal of any writer and now a more targeted focus of HYDROPONIC 2. The risk has been spread across 3 partnerships
Primary Aims		
The primary goals of the project are to:		

Inspire		
Identify artistic talent from culturally diverse communities interested in developing a career in the cultural industries. This will focus on writing for performance, but will also extend to actors and directors.	The project focused on playwrights, but in the assembling of showcase teams we put together a company of 5 directors and 25 actors of the highest quality	It was important for Hydroponic to push at the boundaries of thinking, language and definition around "cultural diversity" towards an inclusive rather than exclusive model. This also connects to writernet's wider work
Support creative people from culturally diverse communities in achieving their potential in theatrical practice.	See writers' evaluation	
Develop that potential through workplace based training in a professional context.	See writers' evaluation	We will be very clear about the different offers we are able to make to writers in different contexts and at different levels of their professional life.
Seek out examples of good practice as role models and mentors for participants.	In addition to Project Dramaturg Gabriel Gbadamosi, we also worked with Sita Ramamurthy to mentor 3 of the regional writers in response to their	Working with a Project Dramaturg allows for continuity and and a coalescing of knowledge, on the other hand

	professional development requests.	one person cannot be all things to all people, so where additional support is appropriate it will be sourced
Strive to achieve artistic excellence within a developmental process	See writers and project partners' evaluation	
Identify exit routes and progression for participants beyond the life of this project.	At the conclusion of the project, the four main writers were in different stages of their own career trajectory; one was moving to another country; one had to return to the obligations of a full time job; one was producing his own work through his own company and one was produced by Contact and The Royal Court. The further showcase at Soho Theatre provided an opportunity for the writers to build their industry profile.	
The Steering Panel		
The Steering Panel should be drawn from the Partnership		
Culture Mix	Mary Genis	
ACE South East	Judith Hibberd	

ACE National Office	Isobel Hawson	
Reading Borough Council	Chris Smith	
South Street Arts Centre	John Luther	
writernet	Jonathan Meth / Gabriel Gbadamosi	
	ACE decided that after initial meetings they were happy to take a back seat, so once Culturemix had dropped out this left John, Chris, Jonathan and Gabriel	we want to create a small number of key relationships for each of the local, regional and national phases of the project – that are relevant. These will arise out of the companies and constituencies with which we work
Recruitment		
Writers will be sought for the scheme via an extensive open access process, stipulating specific criteria commensurate with the desired level of expertise, but designed in such a way as to be as inclusive as possible. At the same time the Steering Panel will brainstorm possible candidates. We are after the best writers....	80 applicants applied. 8 were interviewed. 5 selected	With so many theatres focusing on discovery we decided that to deliver on the HYDROPONIC 2 priority of production we had to work with writers already linked to existing companies
Working closely with <i>Culture Mix</i> and <i>Blue Sky</i> , this will be achieved through a range of techniques including existing links through work already carried out under the Next Stages banner,	A number of regional writers applied but were not the best writers available. It may be that the expectation created by this national offer was counterproductive to what we subsequently tried to achieve	Relations with external companies and agencies will play a higher yet more targeted role in HYDRPONIC 2. For example we have already begun to broker relationships

<p>the BBC Radio Berkshire Oxford Road initiative – and wide spread publicity, access to community links and networks through local organisations and partners.</p>	<p>regionally.</p>	<p>with the local university drama department</p>
<p>In addition we will use the ACE database of Black & Asian writers as well as writernet’s own database, specific connections across the South East region and the Playwrights Network covering all regions across the UK.</p>	<p>80 completed applications testifies to both the reach, but also the need....</p>	
<p>We will create a Performance Laboratory that will operate alongside the main writer-development focus. This will be a team of actors and directors, capacity built to engage with new writing processes, at the same time as providing a practical resource for writers to tap into when exploring their work on the floor. This team will also be brought together for specific new writing related master classes (such as how to approach staging a showcase) and this team of directors and actors will be drawn on specifically for the showcasing.</p>	<p>When it became clear that creating a locally based lab would prove impossible, as there simply wasn’t the critical mass, we decided instead to create a 10 week series of masterclasses and laboratories, open to both the 4 main national writers, the 5 regional writers and a few practitioners already on South Street’s radar.</p>	<p>HYDROPONIC 2 will be a more a divergent model, with three distinct strands.</p>

The dramaturg may also want to work with other artists, such as composers, musicians, etc during the developmental phase of the scripts / performance texts	A number of visiting industry specialists were brought to South Street to meet and work with the 4 main writers.	We will take forward the suggestion of having more industry programmers and producers meet the key 3 writers
Dramaturg		
The Dramaturg will need to be someone who has a balance of experience in their own work between professional production and pedagogy, coupled with a broad understanding and set of engagements with issues around diversities. The dramaturg will need to champion the writers on the programme to maximise opportunities	Full feedback from the writers and the dramaturg on the process is available later in this Report. The dramaturg was found to be extremely useful and uniquely skilled in terms of providing the main writers with an overall education in dramatic writing. When it came to the more personal process of individual script development; the writers' experience was perhaps inevitably more mixed.	The centrality of the Project Dramaturg to Hydroponic is one of its chief strengths. HYDROPONIC 2 will deploy dramaturgical processes in more defined contexts and focusing on writer development through script development
To establish clear boundaries, the dramaturg would expect to have responsibility for all matters relating to script development or practical aspects of writer development. Any other matters would be referred to the Project Director.	See evaluation from writers and project dramaturg	
Structure		
This will draw on the disPlay4 programme	The group met at South Street, interspersed with	

<p>model. This was designed to create a number of known beats throughout the writers' year enabling them to plan their workload accordingly. Where appropriate writers will meet as a group, but there will also be individual tailoring depending on interests and needs..</p>	<p>one-to-one sessions by phone, email or face to face with the project dramaturg</p>	
<p>The project will be careful not to overload writers, but to manage their year in such a way as to provide a rich experience.</p>	<p>See writers' evaluation</p>	
<p>This then suggests a structure of 3 x 7 week terms; 2 x 6 weeks writing and a final fortnight of rewrites before the concluding staged readings.</p>	<p>This structure was modified to accommodate masterclasses and the exigencies of 2 writers based in London and two based in Manchester</p>	
<p>Site Visits</p>		
<p>Visits to see other companies and artists in action both on stage and in rehearsal, linking with other venues such as South Hill Park and the Berkshire Venues Consortium (Norden Farm Centre for the Arts, South Hill Park, The Corn Exchange, South Street and Windsor Arts Centre)– as well as relevant activity further afield</p>	<p>As we had 2 writers from Manchester this proved impractical as a group. The project Dramaturg and project Director familiarised themselves with work at South Street</p>	

(see the wider landscape).		
Evaluation		
All participants are asked to contribute to an evaluation of the first phase of the project. Steering Panel will evaluate value of the work and the strategy and goals for any next phase.	please see evaluation feedback in next section	
Professional Development		
Each writer will have access to a range of developmental opportunities and connection to one other theatre company to further broaden experience and networks	This proved too much in terms of the schedule	HYDROPONIC 2 will deliver this from the get-go
Funding		
The project is funded by ACE and Reading Borough Council		
Further funding may be sought depending on how the project develops	It was agreed to allocate further funding to mounting second showcases at Soho Theatre	A budget for HYDROPONIC 2 has been agreed between writernet and Reading Borough Council
Documentation and Report		

<p>The project will be documented to uncover the learning and act as a model for others to draw on. All participants will be required to contribute to this process</p>	<p>This took time, inevitably. The decision to ask the action planner / coach Sita Ramamurthy to gather feedback from the <i>regional</i> writers, and just give bullet points was to provide a contrast to the much more discursive process adopted with the national writers</p>	
<p>Tracking</p>		
<p>To assess the impact of the project over time it is important to build in a period of post-project tracking so that the writers in particular can continue to receive a base level of support, while feeding back on their career development progress</p>	<p>Because we mounted the showcases again in October at Soho, this period was effectively taken up with the writers reworking drafts.</p>	<p>HYDROPONIC 2 will need to contract carefully with both the main 3 writers and their attached companies. This will determine the nature and focus of tracking</p>
<p>Production</p>		
<p>Following the completion of Phase 1 and the successful delivery of draft scripts, there is then a further option to proceed to production(s). Given the need for careful scheduling, clear partnership roles and responsibilities and additional funding – as well as potential producer identification - this will be negotiated as part of</p>	<p>Despite mounting second showcases in London for those who might have missed the Reading ones owing to the bombings = and attracting a range of industry professionals who showed interest in all the pieces, securing a co-production proved impossible. What we took from this was the need to develop relationships with</p>	

this first phase. Actual production – an aspirational goal - is not part of what the project can guarantee in its First Phase.	potential co-production partners from the very start of any HYDROPONIC 2.	
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2. Feedback

This section provides feedback directly from the key participants

2.1 Mid-way evaluation: national writers: Nirjay Mahindru, Linda Brogan, Anita Franklin, Dawn Garrigan

2.2 Final evaluation: regional writers – summarised bullet points from final action planning sessions with coach/mentor Sita Ramamurthy

2.3 Final evaluation from national writers: Nirjay Mahindru, Linda Brogan, Anita Franklin, Dawn Garrigan (post Soho Theatre showcase 28/10/05)

2.4 Final evaluation from Chris Smith, Head of Arts at Reading Borough Council, John Luther, Director South Street & Gabriel Gbadamosi, project Dramaturg.

Postscript – Mary Took regional writer

Hydroponic,

2.1 mid-way evaluation

Nirjay Mahindru

1. You, the writer

- What have you learned about yourself as a writer working: to a deadline; alone; with a dramaturg/tutor; in a group/small community of other writers?

I'm used to working alone thus having a dramaturg/tutor on board has been very useful. I have enjoyed being with a fellow group of writers and sharing both experiences and opinions and various discussions that have occurred.

- Where are you now as a writer?

Ironically, although I have thoroughly enjoyed the Hydroponic programme, from a confidence point of view I feel I have moved backwards. Prior to Hydroponic, I was absolutely certain of my creative talent, now for the first time in my brief writing career, I am unsure of my writing talent, and unsure if I really have anything of interest to offer.

- Has the process armed you with more skills/ experiences/ knowledge/ contacts?

The process has taught me to at least explore theatrical territory that is not posited within the default position of a televisual style of theatre and I have thoroughly enjoyed exploring that.

The course had definitely widened my knowledge, this has stemmed from the fantastic resource material provided by the dramaturge during his workshop sessions.

Regarding contacts, I have made an attempt to contact some of the guest speakers that have come to talk to the group. As yet, none have bothered to reply to me, so I don't call them contacts of any actual use to me.

2. The Hydroponic project

- Things you'd like more of?

Maybe liaison with those venues that are interested in culturally diverse work such as those theatres that are members of Eclipse. Programmers

from such venues could be invited to talk? As stated earlier, part of the game is networking, rubbing shoulders and laughing at the bad jokes of those in power. Thus, let's meet these programmers,...I wonder if they could have been brought into the process earlier, rather than coming cold to showcases.

- Things you found useful or instructive?

The dramaturgical support was very useful. I think Writernet have struck gold with Gabriel Gbadamosi, he is a fantastic teacher and I have thoroughly enjoyed a journey of exploration led by him.

- Things you would have liked to add or subtract from the program/experience?

I think Writernet should consider possibly not isolating the course solely to theatre, but possibly look at other mediums such as Radio, Television and even film, and I feel that even though this was nominally a theatre centred programme, we could still have had practitioners and key players from other mediums come and discuss their work and their organisations since most of them get their writing talents from theatre dramatists in the first place.

I think South Street have shown a great commitment to the project and I wonder if London venues could also show a similar commitment.

- What advice would you give writernet/South Street if they were about to embark on a similar project again?

Firstly, carry on building on the excellent foundations both Writernet and South Street have created but also try to ensure that the venue itself picks up a play or two from the writers it has nurtured. Otherwise, in the future, the venue would become merely a conduit, leaving other venues and producing houses to benefit.

- What would you change, develop, cut, keep?

I would not mix Hydroponic 1 members with Hydroponic 2. People in groups should be on the same level..

- How did the face to face sessions work for you: visiting speakers/ group with the dramaturg/ one-to-one with the dramaturg?

I have enjoyed them immensely and feel I have learnt a lot from some excellent and highly experienced practitioners so far.

- How did you feel about the involvement in the project of the partners? (writernet, South Street). Has it been clear? What would you have liked that didn't happen; or preferred not to have happened?

Writernet and South Street have been fantastic. John Luther at South St has been very encouraging to the project and has had a hands on approach to the workshops. Ditto for Jonathan Meth. If there were more people like John Luther and Jonathan Meth in British theatre, it would be a better place. I think it was not made clear to the writers on Hydroponic 1, just how many sessions we were/are expected to participate in. I honestly thought the group would meet about 10 times maximum, although I have enjoyed the meetings, I wonder whether I would have been able to attend as much, were it not for the fact that I have no other work at present.

- Looking forward what do you see as the main challenges for the remainder of the project?

The logistics of ensuring that all the writers have their required compliment of performers and adequate rehearsal space for their work. Indeed, where are four groups going to rehearse, will they all be at South Street. I feel that since it has been the programme that has encouraged writers to look at things such as dance and the use of choruses, then it is incumbent on the project leaders to ensure that enough cast members are brought in to realize the showcase rehearsals.

The other challenge is to get the movers and shakers of the theatre world to Reading for a series of evenings in July.

Linda Brogan

Sorry I'm late.

I went through the list and answered. Here we go

As a writer I feel I can achieve a lot in a short amount of time. Learnt this on the train journeys. Where as previous I would have to be holed up in my study for days on end, I've had to make the most of time.

Writing is easier when I have an outline to follow. My pitch sentence is the heart of my play. Because I was equipped with these I could work on small sections on the train instead of vast ideas.

That dramaturgy has been invaluable. It's helped me to access my mind.

It's like a trampoline. A good bit of light exercise that is fun shared with someone else.

Responding and listening in the group as a professional writer as opposed to someone in a workshop without an end product has also been beneficial. We get to discuss things that rattle round in our own brain.

Both things we fear and good ideas that we think too far fetched to use in our writing. Once aired and not laughed at we've been able to use them. Getting to learn about other people's process giving you stuff you can incorporate into your process. Getting to say what you think is bollox and have someone argue the point. The group also gives me a reflection of my own mind in a kaleidoscope way as opposed to seeing it reflected in a straight mirror way by Gabriel's dramaturgy.

I'm much further ahead in my knowledge of theatre practises around the world and through the centuries. Therefore I'm better equipped with technique. And also happier because I'm not expected to reinvent the wheel but reference, poach, develop, be inspired by what has gone before. It's fascinating how some have specialised for example Grotowski and invaluable that Hydroponics has paid for the literature so I can study these phenomenal practitioners. I feel like Turner, Whistler, Monet. As if I'm going from the traditional into impressionism which seems a truer emotional representation of my view of the world. I feel in transition as a writer because of all the artists I've been exposed to. And I'm grateful for all the books you've allowed me to buy.

The Hydro process has armed me with a vast range of new skills from something as little as the triangular perspective on stage through to the notion of stage as landscape, close up, long shot. It's made me aware of the stage as a space that can be both internal as well as external.

Gabriel's vast knowledge and library, his in depth dramaturgy, group discussion, visiting artists, and Jonathan's relaxed direction of the project have given me a safe haven in which to let my imagination fly. Have made me feel entitled to be an artist and not a jobbing writer.

My only complaint was unavoidable in this case. Travel. what a drag. 3 and a half hours each way. Maybe in the future you can do something regional. Something specific to the north.

To sum up. I can't believe how fortunate I've been to have been exposed to this process with Hydro and believe me I have been on a lot of writing courses. But in this one every care has been taken. It's professional yet informal. Warm. Accommodating. Educationally supportive. Vastly educational. Interesting. Exciting. Belgrade was a fantastic bonus.

Gabriel a devoted man. Jonathan with the perfect personality to make it all seem possible and warmly directed. Gabriel and Jonathan make a great team and it's a great layer of security for us. Like watching a mam and dad who have a good relationship and like each other. I feel like I'm on a new rung in my career. Loads more confidence because I feel totally backed up in my choice of subject and how I will deliver. And having been exposed to all these artists including Gabriel and Jonathan, both on the page and in reality I feel like a floodgate has opened and I'm allowed to let my own madness out.

Linda X

Hydroponic, mid-way evaluation – **Dawn Garrigan**

You, the writer

Some of the most useful aspects of the process, for me, have been a) having the opportunity to explore and review practice b) examining my intention(s) as a writer, c) trying new approaches, and d) having the opportunity to take greater risks in my writing.

Talks from industry professionals have been useful and thought-provoking. My overall knowledge/understanding of the industry hasn't changed significantly, although it has been useful, from the point of view of practice, to gain some deeper insights into other related disciplines and the practice/experience of specific practitioners.

In terms of commissioning/working to deadlines, there haven't been surprises yet, although the emphasis on involving the writers quite actively marketing and promoting their work is a new experience for me.

The Hydroponic project

The project has struck a very good balance between the seminars (focussed on practice / craft) and the one-to-ones (focussed on the play itself). It's been very useful to talk about practice in a small group of peers and the seminar environment has consistently been one of respect and support. Seminars have covered a broad and stimulating range of materials/ideas and dramaturgical support has been very good

Striking a balance between the taught part of the project, my job, and time to just write has been difficult, especially during the first couple of months of the project. Having only limited time to devote to the project, it has sometimes been difficult to balance the demands of the seminars/taught elements, with the need to concentrate on the play itself. By and large, the preparation of a pitch, skeleton, outline and publicity copy has been a useful and productive exercise. However, within a compressed timescale, this has also brought a number of additional deadlines into the process which, for me, have created a split focus at a time when my real interest was in focussing solely on researching and writing the play. Next time round, a longer timescale would, I think, allow participants to engage with all aspects of the project equally, i.e both the taught elements of the project and the research/writing itself

A positive and valuable experience so far

Hydroponic mid-way evaluation **Anita Franklin**

1. As a writer I like working to a series of deadlines. The set of deadlines that we are working to really helps me to concentrate on one aspect of the journey at a time, rather than trying to get everything right all at once.

I also like working with a dramaturg at least in these initial stages because you know that there is someone in your corner who is invested in you trying to tell the story you want to tell. The dramaturg is someone who is in your 'corner', so to speak and is on the side of the story being born alive and healthy

Writing in a small community of writers is on the whole, good. As much as you do the stupid stuff like 'compare' yourself to the others there you are also learning and stretching your abilities, learning how to articulate and analyse your practice, and building a community that will keep you in good stead for the dark and light days to come.

I feel more like a writer these days. Not a baby writer or a new writer or an apology for a writer but someone whose main calling is to tell stories that might help what ails us. I do not know how long this feeling will last; it is highly contingent on being recognised by 'the industry' as a writer and that does not happen often!

The industry is scary. Even scarier than I thought. I have been lucky so far in working with nice people, but some of the folks we have been privileged to meet are really fascinating characters. The array of class assumptions, arrogance, the insensitivity of a couple of them was mind-boggling. And then some of them were very nice and I look forward to getting to know them in a professional capacity. So that is all a tremendous learning! 'Do not put your heart and soul on a plate in front of people you do not know and trust (at least as much as you can...) So the whole process of me finding out who might be interested in the kind of work I do is a MAJOR part of my job as a writer.

2. The Hydroponic Project

The two main things I'd change-

I'd like masterclasses and labs to be on Saturdays so I and other Northern folk could get to them more.

I'd develop more writing exercises, initially, maybe connected with the individual's idea.

I wouldn't change anything else.

I work .5 at Sheffield Uni and I co-run a business with my partner, this is how I make ends meet and none of this slows down for the writing- I just try to make the writing first...I left full time academia in order to make this come about.

Gabriel is great-he is supportive and wise in his handling of us. He's also so damned learned about theatre, all kinds of theatre that the industry pros coming to visit this project should hang their heads in shame. Gabriel should be at the National, probably running it!!!

I do not have enough insight into the relationship between South St and Writernet for it to directly affect my writing, hey I'm grateful!!

I am looking forward to sessions on how to build, manage, look after our careers as writers (not just a playwrights?) Does it make sense to have a 5 year plan??? Or do you just lurch from opportunity to opportunity, praying?

2.2 Hydroponic Evaluation Notes (summary of responses from 5 regional writers, drawn up by Sita Ramamurthy)

Clarity of Direction

- Lack of clarity about the direction of the whole project
- Would have liked the desires on the action planning sheets to be fulfilled
- Not enough communication between workshops
- Not kept informed well
- Rehearsed readings

Masterclasses

- Varied Response, useful for those with little or no theatre experience but less useful for others.
- Very positive response to Gabriel and Ramon's work
- Dramaturgy session, bit wordy and difficult to apply
- Would like more group work
- Lack of really practical applications
- Would like them to be more writer and less actor focused

Networking

- Would have liked more support for this
- More interaction with the other writers

Coaching and Mentoring

- Would have liked to be assigned mentor at the beginning
- Scheduled sessions with mentor at the beginning
- 1:1 support very beneficial

Achievements

- Different and varied
- All produced work
- Some networked
- Enjoyable workshops
- Found action planning sheet useful

For the future

- Information sessions
- Networking session
- Increased communication on the project being bespoke process
- Contract between Hydroponic and writers
- Fundraising advice
- Reading list
- Times of meetings difficult for some
- Greater opportunity for script development
- 1:1 support

2.3 Final Evaluation

Nirjay Mahindru

1. General overview

a) Things you'd like more of?

Talks from established writers with a good pedigree and not necessarily from culturally diverse backgrounds.

b) Things you found useful or instructive.

Exploring other alternatives modes of theatrical exploration, ie songs, choruses, movement etc.

c) Things you would have liked to add or subtract from the program/experience?

I would liked to have added a longer showcased rehearsal time for those plays that needed it. I accept that budget constraints were a major factor. I believe that once the plays had been cast, and a director chosen, the dramaturg should not have been involved at all. For me, the dramaturg represents one area of development, once the work goes into rehearsal mode, another developmental area is now in place.

d) Things you'd like to do now.

Sell my play, or develop it for another medium such as television.

2. The showcasing process

a) The process with your director outside the rehearsal room. Any questions or comments

Outside the rehearsal room should never have any bearing on the creative process. It's what goes inside that counts for me. That said, I enjoyed the company of Che Walker and the actors.

b) The process with the director and performers inside the rehearsal room.

I enjoyed this immensely, it was a shame time was lost due to the Underground Bombings, and in many ways, it affected people the following week, a sense of anxiety was with us all, coupled with the fact that people were not prepared to come to Reading from London. The actors chosen first time around were very good, some were better than others as is the case in any company.

c) The process with the dramaturg prior, during and after the showcase

Largely a waste of time for me. Really had big problems with the Dramaturg chose.... Mr Gbadamosi was a nice enough person, but he wasn't helpful at all from a dramaturgical point of view, and he seemed not to understand actors in the slightest... I stress however, that on a personal level, I liked him, but on a professional level he seemed either unwilling or unable to understand where I was coming from. Although, to be fair to Mr Gbadamosi, he's not alone on that score.

d) What became clear about your script which you weren't conscious of, before in rehearsal

That some of it was unclear and slightly repetitive leading to surgical cuts.

e) What became clear about your script which you weren't conscious of, before in performance before an audience

That audiences enjoyed the humour in the play which is difficult to gauge when in rehearsal. That some of the acting left a lot to be desired and that key elements of the play that were not in the Reading readings were needed for the plot to make dramatic sense. That the serious element of the piece was slightly lost in the one hour reading.

f) What would you do different, if anything?

Have a longer rehearsal time with the actors to incorporate the joviality and musicality of the songs that are in the script.

3. You, the writer

d) as a writer working with a dramaturg/tutor

I didn't like this at all, this was the worst element for me personally as I did not feel the dramaturg was supportive of the writer, he seemed to want to impose his own vision on pieces rather than help the writer achieve theirs.

e) as a writer working in a group/small community of other writers?

I enjoyed working with, discussing and being with my fellow writers whom I felt were all very talented and whom I learnt a lot from.

4. The Hydroponic project

a) What advice would you give writernet if they were about to embark on a similar project again?

Don't kick off the programme by telling writers that they shouldn't constrain their imaginations in terms of style, amount of characters etc. This was told to us at the outset, when writers clearly asked if there was a limit to the amount of characters in the play. I was also unaware at the beginning that the showcase would only last an hour per play. That wasn't made clear at all. I think if one of the postulations presented to me is an argument that says that too many writers have a default position of televisual style drama, and I accept that and embrace songs, choruses etc, then it was incumbent on the programme to embrace the work I created which took that argument on board. It was only later that we were told the showcase would be an hour, and later still that we found out that each group would only have six performers maximum. This left my play in a difficult position being the "biggest" piece (I mean in relation to characters, songs, choruses etc) with a problem, forcing me to cut songs that were integral to the work.

b) What would you change, develop, cut, keep?

Change the dramaturg, keep South Street and Soho, get rid of Hydroponic One having sessions with Hydroponic Two, a group of strange individuals whom we had no relation to at all.

c) How did the project's attempt to balance learning and working operate for you?

I found it a good split and thought that aspect had been factored in very well.

d) How did you manage to make ends meet during the project?

I had no money at the time and found it hard. I was unaware at just how many meetings we were supposed to have, indeed so were the other writers....

Dawn Garrigan

1. General overview

Things you'd like more of?

More time between the start of writing the script and getting to the first draft

More talks from practitioners & producers

Things you found useful or instructive.

Going through the process with other writers

Working with the actors and the directors.

A full week to prepare for reading

Things you would have liked to add or subtract from the program/experience?

I would have preferred fewer seminars focused on extant plays & play-craft in general, or rather for these to be differently scheduled allowing more time to be spent on work in progress.

I was a bit confused about the function of the writer labs and the relationship was between the phase I & II groups. I did find some of the labs interesting, but again would have got more from them had they been scheduled differently, and had there been more of a sense of cohesion within the group.

Things you'd like to do now

I don't have any specific plans

2. The showcasing process

The process with your director outside the rehearsal room and the process with the director and performers inside the rehearsal room.

I had a good relationship with the director both inside and outside the rehearsal room. I felt she fully understood and shared my expectations of the developmental purpose of the rehearsal week, and that she was very supportive. This also goes for the cast whose overall commitment to the developmental aspects of the process was invaluable.

The process with the dramaturg prior, during and after the showcase

I thought that the Dramaturg had some excellent insights, several of which helped move the piece on in tangible ways. I also valued his commitment and engagement with the piece. Once the script was submitted, there was quite a detailed focus on editing, which was useful and has given me some good insights into how to better edit my own work. Notwithstanding this, there were a few aspects to the Dramaturgical process, which in retrospect, I would work to do differently.

- a) I would have found it helpful if there had been more open-ended discussions about the emerging themes and ideas in the play, as a balance to the editing process - as this was a developmental process, rather than a honing for final production. Without this kind of ongoing investigation of the play, the dramaturgy sometimes felt rather too directed.
- b) I would have valued more of a balance between supporting/nurturing the work and critiquing it. This was very much an early draft and I felt some of the feedback would have been more appropriate for a more finished piece, and that some judgements were being made about the writing somewhat prematurely - i.e. before the play had really fully emerged. At times I found this approach rather difficult, and not always helpful.
- c) I like to write quite intuitively and there were times when I was uncomfortable with being asked to describe the play in terms which I felt over-rationalised it before the piece was ready for this - although I appreciate that in some circumstances this can be a useful exercise for a writer.

These issues seem to come down to a difference of approach, but raise an interesting question about who leads the script development process - the writer or the Dramaturg - about how to make this relationship a true and sustainable partnership, about what kind of interventions are useful and when, and about whether the same approach can be expected to work for every writer.

In the July to October period, I felt the terms of reference for further dramaturgical work became confused - I wanted to focus on developing the first two acts, whereas the Dramaturg's view was that I should focus on the whole play. I also became unclear about the level of confidence the Dramaturg had in my piece. He'd given me some encouraging feedback in the lead up to the July showcase, but in our first discussion after July he proposed that my play needed a lot more work in order to be produced. While I agree it needed some further development, I could not agree with this view. I also didn't feel I could move the piece forward on the basis of this feedback as it wasn't qualified with specific comments on the text. My

feeling is that for the process to work at it's best the writer needs to experience a certain level of faith in the work on the part of the Dramaturg and I felt, at this point in the process, that our perspectives on the play (or at least our way of talking about the play) had for some reason diverged too much for continued dramaturgical support to be particularly helpful.

These issues point to the complexities and potential difficulties inherent in the writer/dramaturg relationship, but the dramaturg also brought some great literary skills to the project which encouraged me to think much more closely about the specifically literary aspects of play-craft. This, I think, was one of the most valuable lessons of the process.

What became clear about your script which you weren't conscious of, before in rehearsal

I had greater clarity on character motivations and on how some of the plot choices did/didn't work.

What became clear about your script which you weren't conscious of, before in performance before an audience

The possibilities for variations in tone/ atmosphere depending on what the actors & audience bring.

What would you do different, if anything?

I might leave rehearsals earlier in the week as I would have been interested to see how the actors and director interpreted the work without me there.

We started writing the actual drafts around Jan/Feb because before this we were asked to prepare pitches, treatments etc by way of preparatory work. In retrospect I would have gone ahead and started my draft earlier as I didn't feel I had enough time once I did start writing.

I would write a piece that was as only as long as the slot we were given (i.e. in this case, a 60 minute play)

3. You, the writer

What have you learned about yourself ...

Has the process armed you with more skills/ experiences/knowledge/contacts?

A few more contacts – mainly the people I worked closely with throughout the project, such as the other writers, the director and the actors.

Some of the methods used during the rehearsal week were new and I found these useful.

How do you perceive 'the industry'?

No significant changes from how I perceived the industry before I took part in Hydroponic – a business in which it's possible to see / make exciting work, but in which it's extremely difficult to sustain yourself in as a writer - especially if you're from any minority group, if you're a woman or if you have no alternative means of income.

Do you feel you understand more how certain processes may run such as Working to deadlines in commissions

I've worked to deadlines in commissions before. Each time, there are similarities but also variations, depending on the context and terms of reference.

4. The Hydroponic project**What advice would you give writernet if they were about to embark on a similar project again?**

Allow writers to present full readings of their play if they want to. I know this time round the idea was to give the audience a flavour of the work, but having now been through the process I think that having to cut the piece to fit a 60 min slot undermined it's integrity. It's a shame that those with pieces longer than 60 mins have missed the opportunity to see how the whole play runs. This would have been really useful in terms of getting to grips with the narrative shape, and informing any further rewrites. Admittedly, the first draft of a play is likely to be over-written, but presumably any industry audience coming to a reading like this would be aware of that. It would have been good to be free to edit on the basis of what the script demanded, without the added difficulty of abridging or otherwise compressing the play.

Notwithstanding the Dramaturg's commitment and work, the ratio of 1 Dramaturg to 4 writers placed pressures on the process. Several of my script sessions had to be cut short as the Dramaturg needed to speak with other writers at particular times, and with the exception of one short face-to-face meeting all work was done on the phone as scheduling pressures prevailed against face-to-face meetings. I'd recommend having a higher ratio of Dramaturgs to writers and if possible, creating a clearer structure for how the writer and Dramaturg can negotiate how they will work together – e.g. perhaps a preliminary discussion/agreement between writer and Dramaturg enabling them to share how they both like to work, their expectations and also to establish a shared approach to script development. In addition to the other methods, the Dramaturg could also consider giving feedback in the form of written notes and/or email correspondence, e.g. where there are proposed editing changes - annotated drafts sent back to the writer electronically would do. This

would allow the writer to get on with some work even if he/she has to wait for face-to-face meetings/discussions

What would you change, develop, cut, keep?

Cut the writer labs or schedule them differently so they don't take place during the most intensive writing period.

Keep the 'taught' seminars but make them optional.

Bring the first draft deadline forward to allow for more development work between the first draft and showcase draft.

Keep the intro as part of the showcase event, but profile the writers more as part of it. I had feedback from a few audience members that their impression was that we were all very much newcomers to playwriting. Maybe it would have been useful to be clearer that while this project was a development opportunity, the writers had some track record. Not everyone will read the biogs in the programme in advance, and it also sets a different tone to the evening to profile the writer as part of the process of introducing his/her work. I think this is particularly important as it counters the not an uncommon notion that black/Asian writers are commonly only defined as 'new', 'developing', (and by implication, in constant need of development) - rather than as bringing real skills, strong stories and credible & relevant track-records / prior experience the table.

It's great that Hydroponic is continuing to promote our plays even after the showcase and this should be kept as part of the project next time round. It would perhaps be useful to also have some formal system of feeding back to individual writers as to whether there has been any specific interest in their script from industry. I'm not clear whether there has been any interest in my play specifically, whether any feedback has been given to the Hydroponic team about the piece, who came to the reading(s) or who, if anyone, might be interested in reading the script. I've interpreted the absence of any specific information as a lack of interest, which is okay, but a formal debrief re. responses to the work would mark an end to this stage of the process and give more clarity on what to do next with the script.

Keep the group of writers small.

Keep the industry speakers/visits

Keep the rehearsal period at a full week

Keep it at least 6 months long, possibly providing some kind of support for a further 6-12 months.

Anita Franklin

1. General overview

b) Things you found useful or instructive.

Oddly enough it was useful having two different directors-highlighted for me the importance of making sure there is a good fit between director and the play.

d) Things you'd like to do now. *I want to continue writing/improving the play and to find a theatre that's committed to producing it...*

2. The showcasing process

a) The process with your director outside the rehearsal room. Any questions or comments

The situation in Reading was fine; likewise the situation in London. Both directors were great to work with, and Sola in particular had a real sympathy and understanding for the play.

b) The process with the director and performers inside the rehearsal room. *Again both directors were quality professionals and the process in the rehearsal room was terrific.*

c) The process with the dramaturg prior, during and after the showcase *The dramaturgical process was good. I am looking forward to receiving written feedback from Gabriel.*

d) What became clear about your script which you weren't conscious of, before in rehearsal

That the Roscoe character still needs quite a bit more work.

e) What became clear about your script which you weren't conscious of, before in performance before an audience

That Roscoe succumbs too easily to Frank.

f) What would you do different, if anything?

Nothing.

Hydroponic Final Evaluation – Linda Brogan

General Overview.

a] I can't think of anything practical I would have liked more of. I would have liked however a workshop before rehearsals for the reading in Reading to help me work out what I already had and what was needed.

b] I found everything useful and instructive.

c] I enjoyed making the most of what was given to me and can't think of anything I wished for that wasn't there.

d] If anyone is interested in producing the play.

Showcase process

a] Sarah was perfect for my needs. She gave the piece a logic I wasn't sure was there by dredging her own experiences which I will be eternally grateful for.

b] Sarah led a tight ship which was necessary to get it into shape for a reading but in hind sight I wish I had treated it more like a workshop to explore the text with input from the actors which I could then take away for finishing the play instead of being caught up in what the audience would see in Reading, especially as the audience was so small.

c] Gabriel did me nothing but great service before, during and after the showcase. He enabled me to go this far from my usual style and constantly entered my dream even sometimes taking it a step further. He was excellent.

d] The clarity of my script was astounding through Sarah's eyes. And feedback from the actors showed that even though I had chosen something so personal and apparently out of the ordinary it was a universal experience of building a relationship.

e] How enjoyable and funny it was. Because it is so extreme I didn't think they would get it at all - but they did.

f] Nothing. Because of the nature of the script being attached to my present life I had to wait for \it to present itself to me. That was an interesting process in itself and much harder than I thought it would be. Gabriel helped me untangle it. Whether I would be able to do it without him I don't know. But like Jackson Pollock I don't believe in accidents. I believe in the moment. All the moments and the process where perfect. I will work the same way to the completion of this play.

You, the writer.

a] Because the work was taken from my present life I could not always work to deadlines because I hadn't digested it yet. This was interesting because I am usually anal about deadlines. This more organic process taught me not to panic because when it is ready it will come out fully formed if I don't act constipated.

b] There are lots of small roots that take me to my goal. Again because it was coming from my present life I had to write inventories of what actually happened and then convert them into emotions. This process was invaluable and I will use it again to stimulate me on my own. It's

amazing what you forget about an experience until you log it in minute apparently boring detail but the wealth that is inside of that.

c] I'm good because I will keep my mouth shut and listen to what my text has actually said to them and not what I would like it to have said which adds layers. That honesty always finds a level.

d] That I was willing to learn. That I enjoyed learning. That teachers enjoy teaching if you listen. A Fantastic relationship. That I should hold to my own beliefs as much as I listen.

e] That I am incredibly competitive but that gives me the edge that lifts me to a gold star pupil. But also I am very giving and interested in other people's minds through their work and am willing to learn from them.

That I will say what others won't which opens interesting conversations.

That I can be quiet and soak up what is there to be had.

f] Expanded beyond belief. On a new platform. Ferocious.

g] infinitely more skills. Because of Gabriel's formal education into writers I would never have met on my own, into interesting practitioners skilled in drumming, puppetry etc, because of the amount of loving attention he showered on me.

h] It doesn't interest me in the slightest. I love my work and from that expect them to love me.

I] Tied in with the last answer I don't expect nothing except that I am astoundingly good and meet all professional requirements like deadlines, just like I would have in school.

j] Like I said earlier, I wish I hadn't cared about the audience so much and worked towards investigating the play in rehearsal room. But on the same hand no one would be interested if it didn't look good so it's six of one and half a dozen of the other.

k] Love plays and play righting, hate to think of it as an industry.

Doesn't interest me anymore than board meetings at school would have interested me.

The Hydroponic Process.

a] Keep doing what you are doing. Maybe put more money in to workshop the plays mid term so writers can see what is working and what isn't and lift them to a new height.

b] Keep Gabriel and yourself. Maybe expose each writer to the other's work earlier.

c] Maybe too much learning not enough working.

d] I had other commissions therefore other money I wouldn't have been able to manage otherwise.

e] I've never done so much work in all my life. I think this was far more than a first draft and time consuming. Therefore I think it should have been better paid. The development though from pitch proposal to rehearsed reading was invaluable.

F] perfect.

g] perfect.

h] perfect.

I] I didn't care about it. It felt like that was between you and them I just got on with my work. I did feel supported by South Street but just like I would by any theatre who had opened its doors to me.

The only other thing I would say is this evaluation is very long. Hope I've been of help.

Linda Brogan.

2.4 Hydroponic Steering Group

Year One Evaluation

Chris Smith
Head of Cultural Services
Reading Borough Council

As a key architect of this project, along with Jonathan Meth of Writernet and Judith Hibberd, I was very much looking forward to seeing this project take shape in Reading.

We had agreed a creative approach to the scheme that allowed for creativity to be the driver and a level of flexibility that allowed for both organic growth and the creative right to fail. This is a very refreshing approach, particularly in Reading where there is much invested in the presentation of the arts but much less on the creation of Art.

Inevitably the project changed as it went live but I believe the core principle of a new writing initiative that worked on a regional/national level to support and develop writer in the early stages of their careers was a success. Writers of a high quality, potential were drawn into the scheme and went through a process that, whilst I was not a witness of, clearly engaged the writer effectively and both retained their creative interest and improved them as writers. Aside from their overall contribution to the project this is further evidenced by the work they have gone onto do during and after Hydroponic.

The success of this element of the scheme was down to the expertise and commitment of the Writernet team who brought their considerable network of writers, tutors and awareness of the national new writing agenda to bear with great effect. Whilst RBC through South Street did the venue bit and made sure things happened as and when they should, I feel that staff were somewhere between overwhelmed and intimidated by involvement higher up the creative ladder and that this reduced the level of engagement and ownership experienced by staff of Hydroponic.

Where this became a problem was in how the scheme worked locally. Whilst there were strategies to develop the laboratory facet of the project and these were effective for those local people who took part there is a strong feeling that this element was not as effective as the main stream. I had no personal experience of this part of the process but am informed that staff did not feel that the two strands of Hydroponic ever effectively merged.

In addition local arts organisations paid to develop this part of the project did not deliver. One had their ACESE grant removed and effectively closed as a consequence, the other stepped back from the project for

reasons never fully explained or understood. The resulting void, which should have been filled by RBC Arts team staff, was not, and therefore this part of the project did not fully engage locally.

Going forward, there are lessons to be learned from the first phase but I feel more confident that Hydroponic can continue to deliver at a high standard regionally but also be improved locally as we have learnt from the shortfalls in this area in the first phase.

Hydroponic is already establishing itself as an effective brand and continued investment will inevitably strengthen this, and see the ultimate goal of writers nurtured through the scheme having their work produced by the scheme.

HYDROPONIC – YEAR ONE

DRAMATURG'S EVALUATION

“When I think of how you have helped me develop it makes me want to weep. What if I hadn't met you. You feel like my brother.”

Phase One Writers

Selection Process and Self Evaluation

A national advertising and selection process for 4 self-defined culturally diverse playwrights with at least one professional production resulted in 80 applications. The volume and quality of applications led to 5 being selected to take part in the programme, with one early departure for unspecified personal reasons.

The four writers selected were: Linda Brogan (Manchester), Anita Franklin (Manchester), Dawn Garrigan (London) and Nirjay Mahindru (London). They formed a cohesive group, able to interact and support each others learning. Journals were given to the writers to record their own learning and development through the course and to encourage critical reflection on the process.

First Draft Play Commissions

The writers were encouraged to apply with an idea for a play they wanted to develop to first draft during the course. This helped to structure and focus their engagement with Hydroponic towards an end result. Deadlines for delivery of key stages from short synopsis to broad outline were generally met. However, delivery of initial first draft should be set earlier than one month before so as to allow more time for one to one dramaturgical work on scripts before the floor-based explorations.

Group Dramaturgical Sessions

Structured as seminars on the history and theory of practice with close textual analysis of a range of key texts informing discussion of critical approaches to playwriting, these sessions worked extremely well. The writers were encouraged to raise areas of concern in their own practice which were then addressed in later sessions.

One-to-One Sessions

Developing a positive, open and constructive relation to each of the writers in support of their individual projects proved a valuable early resource in a process predicated on trust. Two of the writers in particular

felt able to respond to challenging material in the group sessions and experiment in developing new work. All the writers felt liberated by the writer-centred development process to focus on subjects and concerns important to them. In relation to both their scripts and their own development, the individual sessions proved the most valuable and focused intervention. One of the writers, at the very end of this process, chose to withdraw the work from further discussion and continue alone.

Guest Practitioners

A steady stream of industry contacts and engagement was an attractive and helpful aspect of the programme. The functions of agent, dramaturg, director, producer and so on were presented in informal, informative and constructive meetings. Some crossover was achieved by inviting back guest practitioners for the Theatre Labs, also Tom Morris as Associate Producer at the National facilitated the extension of Hydroponic showcase readings to London at the Soho Theatre. These sessions helped to publicise Hydroponic and actively network the writers, with expressions of interest in future collaboration with the writers from practitioners such as Annabelle Arden.

Theatre Laboratories

One drawback of the Theatre Labs was poor attendance from an imagined wider constituency of invited participants from Reading and the Region which never materialised. Otherwise, the Labs were a great success in terms of the quality of the invited practitioners in puppetry, directing, dance and so on, and in respect of moving the writers into practical engagement with theatre making and experiment with a range of theatre languages. The collaboration that emerged between Linda Brogan and the puppeteer Ramon Abad was particularly pleasing. One potential practitioner remarked the relatively short period time (a few hours) in which to develop work with the writers. Well worth pursuing as a pedagogical resource, the Theatre Labs might evolve to encompass work over two or three days but must be tightly aimed to meet a known level of demand and commitment from the participants.

Floor-Based Dramaturgy

One week of dedicated companies for each of the writers focused on exploring and presenting the material through floor-based dramaturgy sounds ideal, and is. However, with little time for the writers to respond to the impact of this work, I suggest an earlier intervention – of perhaps one day – to prepare the writers for the challenge and the opportunity presented to them. The responses of the actors were particularly informative and exciting for the writers, often opening up new areas of possibility in the draft plays. Only one director seemed to lack the time

and preparedness to follow through with the writer on delivering quality support for the showcase reading.

Showcase Readings

Preparations and some concentration for the showcase readings at South Street, Reading were interrupted by the bombings in London. Attendance at South Street was also down for that reason as well as the time of year (July) and lack of knowledge about South Street as an accessible venue. A second round of readings were then held at the Soho Theatre in London later in the year. The readings were opportunities to enhance industry engagement and to 'graduate' the scripts developed through the eight months of Hydroponic. Despite some expectations of finished work (these were very much first draft scripts), the range and quality of the plays delivered a final stage of learning for the writers, accurately reflected their journeys with intensely personal material and opened the way for further production and/or new departures in their work.

Phase Two (Regional) Writers

Selection Process

Five writers/playmakers at an earlier stage of their careers were selected by a process of public advertisement and recommendation at local and regional levels, together with careful reading/evaluation of their work, to take part in Phase Two of Hydroponic. A sixth participant was unable to join the programme due to illness.

One-to-One Sessions

With Sita Ramamurthy providing dedicated dramaturgical support, advice and guidance, my role was to connect them to the wider Hydroponic programme. Individual sessions on projects were divided between Sita and myself. I provided detailed critiques of work by Mary Took and Jannette Parris, as well as broader and more general feedback at the level of ideas for play projects to all five as and when approached.

Theatre Laboratories

The Theatre Labs (described above) were the main point of contact, providing practical and focused demonstrations and exercises for playmaking. The varying levels of capacity and experience were firmly engaged and consistent attendance by most of the writers (some exception for illness) bore this out. A number of locally invited practitioners joined the Labs but not on a regular basis, and I would discourage this as a distraction in future. I felt the quality of the Labs and

the joining with Phase One writers lifted expectations among the Phase Two participants of more input from Hydroponic than was on offer.

Follow Up

An observer of the floor-based dramaturgical work for Phase One writers, Jannette Parris has been introduced to Soho Theatre as a potential associate artist. Other Phase Two participants will be re-engaged in the forward programming of Hydroponic Year Two.

Gabriel Gbadamosi February 2006

Evaluation for **Hydroponic**- Phase 1 (2005)

*South Street's involvement in the **Hydroponic** process has been extremely exciting and has directly benefited as we begin to try and build closer and longer lasting relationships with visiting artists.*

The project was firmly based at South Street and all the projects participants became very familiar with the venue and our staff. This gave the sense of a vibrant artistic community within South Street, which had a positive impact on local practitioners who engaged with the process. This has resulted in additional interest in South Street from local aspiring artists.

We also benefited in many ways from the expertise that Writernet brought to the project, in particular:

- Their ability to bring excellent practitioners to Reading had the result of raising our profile within the artistic community (a lot of the practitioners had never been to South Street and were impressed with the space) and with our local practitioners (they had a high quality experience they associate with the venue).
- I personally was able to undergo professional development by being involved in the project at all levels under the guidance of the hugely experienced Writernet team.
- The writers experiences of South Street were largely positive and I have been able to build personal relationships with some of these talented new writers. This will hopefully reap dividends in the long term.

The showcases, although not well attended in the aftermath of the July 7th bombings, gave South Street a vibrant two weeks with artists (writers, directors, puppeteers, actors etc) rehearsing the showcases for performance in every nook and cranny. Our involvement with artists on this level is still developing and this gave us a great sense of the excitement and vibrancy that having work created within the venue brings.

The main disappointment of the programme was the lack of talent that came through from a local/ regional level. This meant that planned parts of the programme where master classes mixed the national, regional and local participants, left some frustrated with the pitch of the workshops (those who were operating at a higher level found it rudimentary and those at the bottom struggled to grasp the concepts). The workshops that worked the best were practical based ones that pushed the local practitioners to explore physically and not think/ talk too much. Whenever the workshops became talk shops they ground to a halt.

South Street's ability to work with artists in a more dynamic and confident way has been directly attributable to the **Hydroponic** experience. Now that the "brand" is filtering out to partners wishing to buy into the programme, South Street should see a shift in its profile within the region. This can only be good for the venue and its desire to move towards a greater engagement with the creative process and the artists involved in that process.

John Luther
Arts co-ordinator, South Street

Post script from Mary Took, regional writer

Hi guys,

In the spirit of keeping you up to date with how things are going for me and in case you might like to come along, I've attached an invite to my upcoming workshop at South Street.

Detailed activity plans have yet to be finalised with my director but we should be looking at themes of language, social displacement and 'fitting in' and building towards the exploration of/development of scenes for my play. It's my first real attempt at using workshops to develop a play and I'm really hopeful that goes well and is as constructive and useful as possible.

Thanks to you both for all the Hydroponic assistance which gave me the grounding to apply for the arts council grant supporting my work and helped me to build this relationship with South Street - who are lending me the space for free.

If you can forward the invite to anyone you know who might be interested, please do so. As ever with these events there's a desperate need for people to turn up!

*Thanks,
Mary.*