

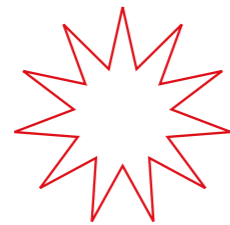
WHOSE CULTURE

Full Report

June 2021



Exploring the cultural engagement of young POC creatives in Bristol



We are Rising Arts Agency, a micro-agency based in Bristol that exists to support and advocate for the wants and needs of young people. Led by young creative thinkers, our agency's mission is to empower people to collectively aspire, provoke and mobilise towards radical cultural change.

Report compiled by Roseanna Dias, Fatima Murtala Safana, Asiya Sutton, Elinor Lower and Rosa ter Kuile

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CONTENTS

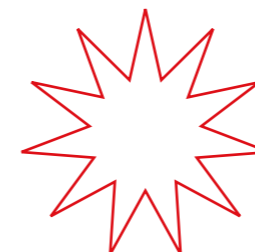
- Introduction – 1
- Project Overview – 3
- Why Change Is Needed – 5
- Our Process – 7
- Terminology – 9
- Nurturing A Network – 11
- Campaign: We Are Here – 25
- Generating Insight – 27
- Survey Data 31
- Survey Highlights – 43
- Expanding Opportunity – 45
- Malizah's Reflections – 49
- Learnings – 51
- Recommendations – 55
- Closing Thoughts – 57
- Thanks, And The Rest – 59

INTRODUCTION

This report documents our *Whose Culture* project (2018-2020), a co-produced action research pilot funded by Bristol City Council. It focused on mapping and understanding the cultural engagement and experiences of People of Colour (POC) aged 16-25 in Bristol who are underrepresented in the sector as audiences, employees and creatives.

Through this work, we wanted to understand how we can make the city's creative and cultural networks more inclusive and representative of young people of colour.

This report speaks to that vision, sets out our recommendations, and shares what we've learnt along the way. In the context of 2020's Black Lives Matter uprisings and the impact it is having on our team, community and conversations in the sector, as well as 2021's Sewell report denying institutional and structural racism, this work feels more important than ever.



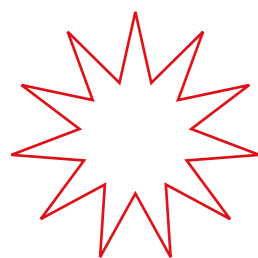
[Download the Report Highlights](#)

PROJECT OVERVIEW

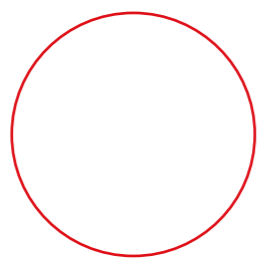
Working with young POC groups and individuals, Creative Producer Roseanna Dias, Social Media Manager Fatima Murtala Safana, and the wider Rising team developed a programme of online and offline activity to initiate conversation with young people.



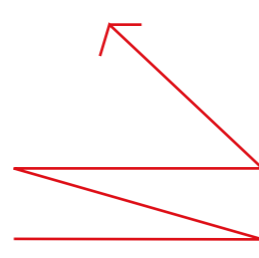
Through *Whose Culture* we aimed to:



Bring young people together to connect and have conversations about creativity, culture, identity and belonging – on their terms



Collect data and learnings about cultural experiences in Bristol, what young people want to change and how we could support them best



Create paid work opportunities and pathways into the creative sector

We explored various models of youth engagement, co-production, data collection and community building to deliver:

→ Eight community workshops featuring creative facilitation and guest speakers in four priority areas in Bristol (Whitchurch Park, Southmead, Barton Hill, St Pauls)

→ A celebration event including supported networking, performances and DJs

→ A lab exploring Human-Centred Design methodologies

→ Film and photography collaborations

→ Online support and events for two Rising exhibitions *Throwing Shade* and *Why Are We Not Here* centring POC experiences

→ Talks and events such as *Black Women 100*

→ Recruitment and outreach at events like Yo! Arts Fest

→ An online survey

→ Social media campaigns

→ A short film which screened online and on Millennium Square's big screen

→ Four steering group meetings

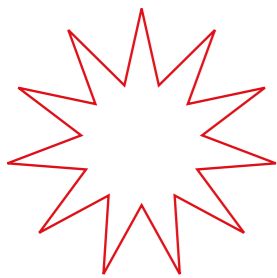
→ Models, approaches and opportunities for embedding *Whose Culture* learnings and principles into all of Rising's work

→ *Whose Culture* artists were part of a public and sector-facing campaign #WhoseFuture

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED



For local arts organisations, next-to-no data exists on people of colour's cultural engagement



Research from the Equality Trust shows a direct correlation between inequality and lower levels of engagement in publicly funded, institution-led cultural activity.

Despite Bristol's strong creative and cultural sector, audiences, staff and producers of colour remain disproportionately unrepresentative of the city's cultural makeup (which is 16% POC).

For young people of colour it can be difficult to be in and enjoy cultural spaces

where they don't see themselves reflected.

When this work began in 2018, for local arts organisations next-to-no data existed on people of colour's cultural engagement, meaning there was a lack of evidence to guide them in their engagement work.

We ran a pilot workshop in collaboration with the **Jean Golding Institute**, which illustrated the huge disparity between what cultural organisations were offering and what young people were engaging with.

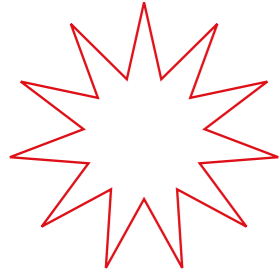
In order to deepen our understanding of this as an agency and a sector, we designed *Whose Culture* so we could open up a

conversation with young people, asking:

- What kind of cultural activities do young people of colour enjoy?
- What do they want to do more of and where?
- What do they think about the current cultural offer in Bristol provided by the city's institutions?
- What do they want to see done differently?
- What do they want to happen in the future?
- What creative support do they want more of?
- How can we amplify this conversation?



OUR PROCESS



The way we work is not linear – we create in dialogue with our community and invest time in relationship-building.

We support community members to have agency over engagement opportunities so that powerful new possibilities emerge. This approach is still not the norm but is at the heart of the work we are trying to do within Rising. These are some of the steps we took as part of our process for co-creating *Whose Culture* over the two years.



Nurture A Network

- We hosted small but mighty community workshops
- We collaborated with critical friends and got the Rising family together
- We got personal and political on social media
- We were led by our community



Do The Work

- We are constantly reflecting, learning and evolving, and as much as possible, sharing our journey along the way.



Generate Insight

- The *We Are Here* campaign was a way of taking up space and connecting with more young POC in Bristol.
- Our survey revealed insights into belonging, representation, space, resources, experiences and attitudes of young POC in Bristol creating and engaging with culture in the city.



Expand Opportunity

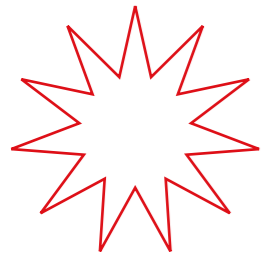
- *Whose Culture* has taught us a lot about what young POC creatives in our city want and need from us — and the wider sector. A big part of the work was identifying and opening up opportunities for them to get involved in collective artistic practice on their terms.
- Young POC creatives want opportunities to network, to feel relaxed in creative spaces, meet other POC creatives, and be given opportunities to lead.



Share Learning

- This report shares our process, learnings and the work of our community and forms the basis of ongoing conversations about how we do this work.

TERMINOLOGY



Terminology and language has shifted and changed throughout the course of this project - and it will continue to do so after this report has been published.

We have chosen to use the term People of Colour (POC). In Beatfrees x National Youth Trends report Time And Time Again (2021) they offer this explanation, which resonates with us: "We draw People of Colour into one collective group. This is actively not an effort to homogenize their experience, but is rather an attempt to collectively understand the methods through which People of Colour are similarly (and differently) minoritised in the UK, by the actions of a white dominated society. People of Colour is a phrase which flips the narrative from definitions that define this group by negation, or what they are not (ie. 'non-white') to actively centring what people are. Being 'of colour' inverts the power relationship by othering whiteness."

We also use the term "inclusion" in the report, which has been used in the creative sector to mean the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded. This term is helpful for speaking to sector audiences, but we see it as increasingly problematic. We want an equitable sector - this means 'including' POC in a broken system is not enough - we want the whole system to be redesigned from the roots up.



Artwork by Jasmine Thompson (top) and Nick Oгри (second from top), Photos from a Whose Culture gathering (middle), Interactive Artwork by Donnell Asare (bottom two) all for Rising's Why Are We Not Here? Exhibition (May 2019)

NURTURING A NETWORK



At Rising, we recognise the power of community.



The workshop was very inspiring and made me think deeper into what art and culture means. It was a comfortable space that was open to opinion and truth

– Jordan, participant



Throughout the project, we brought young people together to connect and have meaningful conversations with each other, with other emerging and established Bristol creatives of colour, and with allies in the cultural sector.

Using physical and digital means, we nurtured a strong *Whose Culture* community and, over the course of the project, ensured these young people and their needs and desires could be embedded into all of Rising's activity and spaces. This was reflected in the agency's demographic shift: the proportion of 18-30 year olds signed-up shifted from 40% POC in 2018, to 50% in 2019, to 60% in 2020.

Here are some of the highlights, challenges and learnings we found when nurturing new networks.

→ We Hosted Small But Mighty Community Workshops

In October and November 2018, Rising hosted eight workshops, in partnership with community-based organisations, across four priority areas: Whitchurch Park, Southmead, Barton Hill and St Pauls. These small events aimed to connect with young people who were not already in the arts sector—to start a collective conversation about where we were at, and where we wanted to get to, through the *Whose Culture* project.

Designed exclusively with and for artists of colour, we worked with experienced facilitators Ngaio Anyia (Artspace Lifespace, Booty Bass, Community Resolve) and Mohamed Hassan (Acta Community Theatre), alongside four young artists who co-led delivery and data collection. At each workshop, we also hosted a mid-career guest artist (from dancers to filmmakers) to share

their story and be a part of the conversation.

Although participant numbers were lower than hoped for (we connected with 20 people across the 4 areas), the intimate setting facilitated some deep and personal explorations around the themes of creativity, culture, identity and belonging. This allowed for us to build meaningful relationships with young people who generally sat outside publicly-funded cultural networks, and our facilitators carefully held space for young people to really tell us how they were feeling.

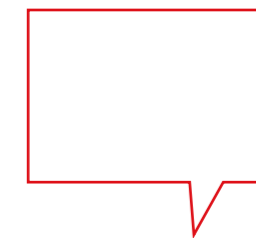
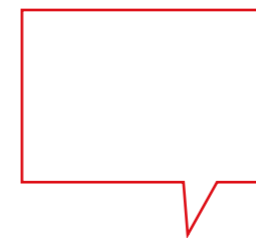
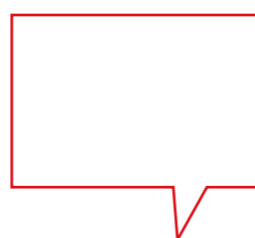
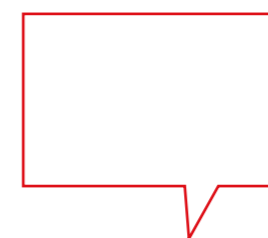
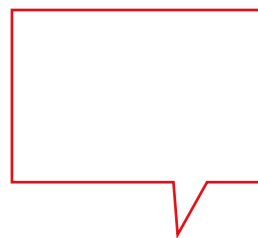
These initial, intimate workshops in the community helped us to build trust and ownership into the project from the start, and to understand how to host these kinds of conversations meaningfully, which has enabled us all to grow in many ways.

NURTURING A NETWORK

Young people from the workshops said:



A Word Cloud which expands our ideas of what 'culture' looks like, from the perspective of our workshop participants.



→ **When Bristol's flagship arts spaces are overwhelmingly white and middle-class, young people feel defined by their 'otherness' and struggle to belong in spaces which are not welcoming.**

We discussed how we connect with art and culture in Bristol. Key points of contact included creative public spaces and hubs across Bristol such as Watershed—but these were not without their issues.

→ **These young creatives questioned the lack of representation in Bristol's creative spaces and its online communities.**

They called for increased diversity of artwork and cultural artefacts, with greater scope for artwork from different cultures in public spaces like museums and galleries. Young people want to feel confident navigating white spaces without feeling like their voices or culture are being compromised through tokenism or appropriation.

→ **Young creatives of colour were drawn to those who shared their feelings and experiences of being young and/or a POC in a white-dominated cultural sector.**

They valued being able to relate to others' journeys and identities through physical and/or digital spaces which facilitated POC networking and representation. Artwork and the stories which get platformed were highlighted as important for feeling connected to the sector and each other.

→ **Young people talked about culture in terms of music, food, fashion, family, faith.**

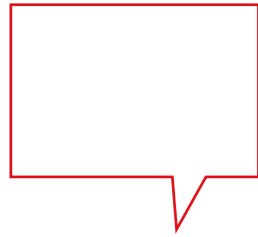
When we explored the diverse meanings behind what it means to belong and what culture means to them, the more traditional and establishment-based art forms like theatre (which are allocated the majority of public funding) were not seen as priorities.

→ **We discussed the attendees' hopes and fears in relation to their creative lives.**

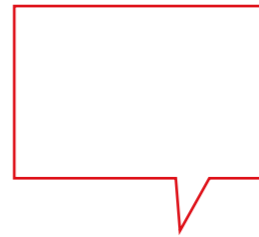
They hoped they'd leave a legacy and create a lasting difference, continue to pursue their creative endeavours without giving up, ensure representation remained essential to their work, and put Bristol arts and culture on the map—on their terms. However, these hopes weren't without doubts that reflected how these young creatives felt/feel about their creative endeavours.

NURTURING A NETWORK

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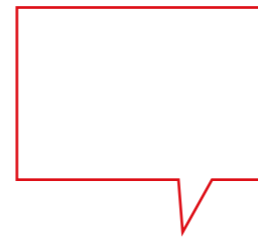


→ **They named others' points of view as something they feared;** questioning whether work is good enough, self-doubt, comparison to others, or personal identities feeling restricted. We also spoke about how these issues relate to cultural institutions' trust issues with young POC, fed by unconscious bias and institutional racism.



→ **Attendees saw social media as an important way of connecting with, consuming, and sharing arts and culture.**

However, they also spoke about perceived online social pressure: the pressure to be ever-present and productive online, and the impacts of this on mental health and confidence.

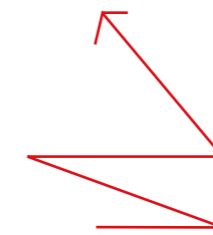


→ **The workshop attendees named self-belief, a lack of connections or networks, fear of rejection, and their perception of traditional paths through the arts as key obstacles they faced in the creative sector.**

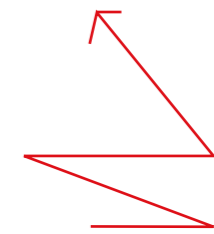
They discussed the ways in which formal education has limited creative opportunities or engagement, and how, at home, it could be difficult to make the case about creative careers to families who did not see the value or opportunities out there.



These conversations gave us a clear mandate for what to explore next:



→ **How to support connectivity and conversation between young POC in the city,** and to provide spaces to be seen and share experiences and advice with practitioners at different stages of their careers—ensuring this was a POC-led space highlighting positivity and potential.



→ **How to frame and document qualitative data as equally important as quantitative data** in order to honour the richness, nuances and complexity of the conversations we were having with young creatives.

NURTURING A NETWORK

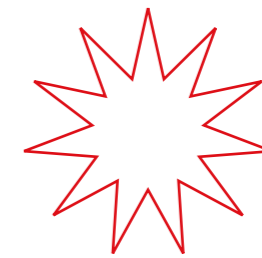
Rising demands strategic change in the sector, whilst being connected to and serving its creative communities. We do this by providing opportunities to connect those with established cultural, institutional power to those in our grassroots creative networks.

For *Whose Culture*, our communities wanted us to support the nurturing of a network of creatives of colour and allies of many ages, backgrounds and disciplines, who were committed to fighting for change. This came to being through a series of meetings, collaborations, celebrations, events and publications.



→ **We Collaborated With Critical Friends**

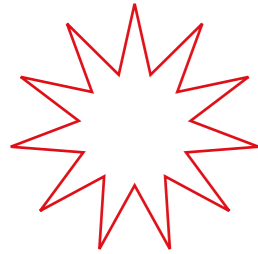
In Summer 2018, we invited ten creatives and cultural sector representatives to form a Steering Group (see their names at the end of the report). They met with us four times over the course of the project. These individuals brought expertise from data, technology, management, co- design, and youth, creative and community work. They were our critical friends, guiding and challenging the team and providing entry points to the sector for our community, ideas and influence.



→ **We Got The Family Together**

In December 2018, we hosted our *Whose Culture Celebration* at Trinity Community Arts Centre, which sits between Barton Hill and St Pauls, in St Judes. It was our first big meet-up featuring news from the project so far, inspirational creatives from the 2018 *BME Power List*, networking opportunities with peers and industry leaders—plus, artwork and music by young creatives of colour. The event was principally aimed at creative POC aged 16-25 who wanted to influence Bristol arts and culture, but all were welcome—it was an opportunity for us all to celebrate what we'd got up to in 2018, and to have our say about where we should be going in 2019. The event was a great success: around sixty people came—joined by ten young project ambassadors— and we displayed the work of seventeen young artists.

NURTURING A NETWORK



→ We Got Personal and Political On Social Media

The *Whose Culture* Instagram page (@whose_culture) has been an integral part of building a community of supporters, both locally and further afield. Led by Fatima Safana, our social media strategy aimed to:

→ **Build an online community** of young POC creatives, providing a platform and creating and curating relatable content featuring passionate, positive activist messages

→ **Learn more about existing and new members** of our community through listening, developing relatable content and generating new leads

→ **Create awareness** about *Whose Culture* and Rising's work to encourage wider participation

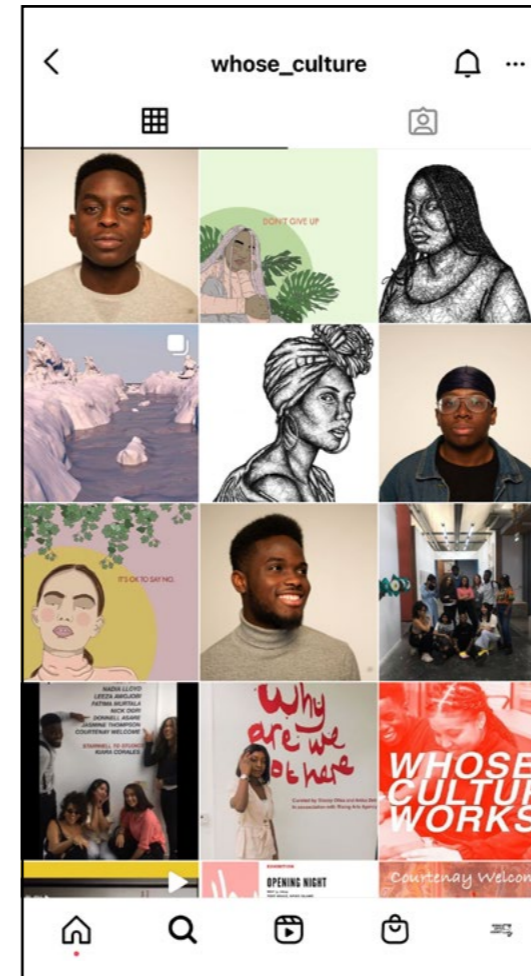
→ **Create a buzz** around the project, in such a way that industry leaders and media start conversations about it

Over the last two years, *Whose Culture* has grown into a digital space that fosters a sense of identity, collective understanding and support. We are regularly approached by creatives and networks to cross-promote their content, and we have a big following amongst London-based POC creatives, demonstrating the breadth of our appeal.

It was really important to create a page that POC creatives could relate to and engage with freely. Part of that included mapping and responding to young POC 'pain points' (the sort of issues which were being brought up through engaging with our target audience), letting them know that 'we are here and we understand'.

We also showcased artists' work through our 'Feature Fridays' and shared creative events and recommendations from across Bristol. We did all this whilst ensuring activism, social change and creative diversity remained at the forefront of the conversation.

We found that people engaged the most with the deeper and more personal stories. This was reflected in the vibe of so much of our activity: when we could provide a space for people to feel happy to share, to be vulnerable and to be seen, our followers wanted to deeply engage.



Instagram posts featured on the @Whose_Culture account.

What do we know about our followers?

→ Our followers are predominantly 18-24 years old (42%) and 25-34 years old (37%)

→ They are mostly from Bristol (47%) but lots of young creatives from London also follow us (19%)

→ More women follow us than men (69% vs 31%)

Our stats over two years of @whose_culture:

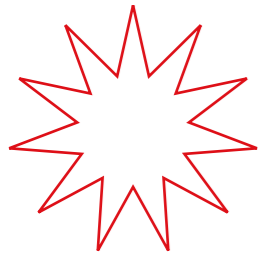
→ Total # of posts: 216

→ Total # followers: 1,330

→ Average monthly engagement: 1230

→ Average reach per month: 453 unique accounts

NURTURING A NETWORK



→ We Asked Questions But Most Importantly, We Listened

It was evident that people wanted more opportunities to get together to talk about their experiences of being POC in Bristol's creative sector, and we wanted to further explore the themes that had started to emerge in our community workshops and online. We also wanted to begin a conversation about how we might use creative technology to explore some of these issues and offer solutions.

In February 2019, workshop participants from the four areas were invited to take part in the *Whose Culture Lab* to explore two offers: a twelve-week talent development programme, and a data

collection platform mapping cultural engagement. Seven young people from the community workshops attended and were joined by a further three from Rising's bespoke mentoring programme for young POC: *Elevate*. Young people were paid for their time and the feel of the day was relaxed and informal.

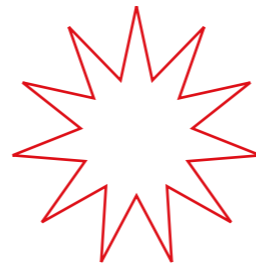
Questions we hoped to explore through participatory activities included:

→ How might young POC begin to feel they belong in Bristol's arts institutions?

→ How might we use creative technology to connect POC cross Bristol?

→ How might we use creative technology to understand their engagement with 'culture'?

→ How might we support young POC to professionalise their practice / set up their own creative businesses in Bristol?



→ We Were Led By Our Community

The discussions that came out of the Lab were complex and fruitful—and didn't always go in the direction we were expecting. It was necessary within that space to ensure there was time for people to fully express their experiences (often negative) with Bristol's cultural sector and build from there. It taught us a lot about getting in step with your community and not assuming too much about how people will want to engage with the space you are creating.

In the space, we unpicked the role and purpose of creative technology, looking at different examples and case studies for inspiration, including a short talk from Lily Green, founder of *No Bindings* (a publishing project mixing print and digital).

We also wanted to explore different ways of approaching creative technology development. Prior to the workshop, Tom Metcalfe, a critical friend of the *Whose Culture* project who runs a creative design studio in Bristol, shared the idea of employing the methodology behind 'human-centred design'. So, we explored aspects of the Human Centred Design approach, using 'How Might We' phrases as a starting point. The young people responded very positively to this way of working as it provided a structure with plenty of scope to explore the issues important to them and rewarded imagination.

Throughout our conversations, we spoke at length about the tensions that exist within a 'one size fits all' approach to issues of race and culture. We explored how we might collect data around such diverse experiences; the impact of forces and inequalities felt by all in the room, but each in different ways. Through collaborative working, we grouped our questions into three main areas:

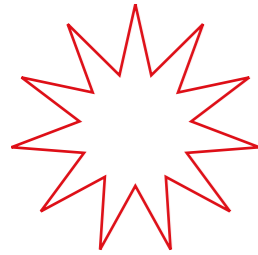
→ **Confidence and belonging:** How might we foster confidence and belonging for young POC creatives in the cultural sector?

→ **Marketing, language, tools:** How might we influence and change narratives and language? How might we use social media? What are the obstacles young creatives face?

→ **Supporting cultural diversity:** How might we embrace the multicultural aspects of British identity? How do we create safer spaces in which young POC creatives can create?

During the course of the workshop, Rising friend, collaborator and documenter Sham Ahmed offered his input as a young creative embedded in the sector. He spoke about never having had the opportunity to speak freely about these things in a POC space and that it brought up a lot of things for him. It was a powerful convening of people and it was clear that holding this kind of space was important not just for the participants, but for the facilitators too.

NURTURING A NETWORK



→ We Embraced Complexity

It was becoming clear that *Whose Culture* could be seen as a movement, one that was politically motivated, and that young people wanted to be actively involved in shaping. We could see the importance of holding space for our community to explore the topic of *Whose Culture* in many different ways, and how these conversations themselves were as important as the wider data we wanted to collect.

We knew we wanted to build a campaign around the conversations we were having, and open up this conversation to young people across the whole of Bristol.

Our focus expanded to consider:

1

The observation of behaviour and dialogue in these spaces offers richer insight into people, but how do we reach a critical mass of data? Might we need to shift our expectations and timescales to achieve this?

3

What kind of data do we need to collect and why is it of value to us, the sector and our communities?

2

How can we create value for these young people as part of collecting data, so we are not 'extracting' data from them as so many cultural institutions/programmes seem to do?

4

To what degree is this community of young people ready to 'co-create' vs 'converse' about creative technology and their data in relation to issues of race and cultural practice in Bristol?

“

As a team, we had to have the confidence to be led by the people we were working with and for—understanding that their needs were at the heart of this journey. Whilst we wanted to explore aspects of creative technology during the Lab, it became clear that this vision (which had come from Rising and the funders) was somewhat restrictive.

We needed to keep actively listening, keep adapting, and keep acting from that place of openness. Holding a space for tensions and frustrations as well as imagination was key—and not pushing a model or ideas which people were not yet wanting to engage with took courage because you're always thinking about the things you promised to do, the timelines you're supposed to keep to.

Being responsive is what Rising is all about, so I felt confident that even if we might be going in a different direction, I could trust our community to lead us where we most needed to go.

– Roseanna Dias, *Whose Culture Producer*

CAMPAIGN: WE ARE HERE

Through the discussions we were having as part of *Whose Culture*, we connected with dozens of young people of colour who felt similarly about the way arts and culture happens in the city. So, we created the film, photography and online campaign *We Are Here*, which became a way to amplify the voices of these young creatives on their own terms and in their own words:

"We are tired of feeling like an 'add-on' to fill a diversity quota, tired of feeling like the only contribution we can make to an event or exhibition centres around our difference.

The lack of stats on our cultural engagement does nothing but erase us further from the narrative of arts and culture in Bristol. Despite us being here in the dozens and hundreds, we are made to feel disconnected from the city's cultural offer.

But we are here.

Being an artist of colour shouldn't feel like a revolutionary act.

That's why we started this campaign— We ARE Here — celebrating the young POC who are here, making waves and changing the arts narrative.

We want to shine a light on the brilliant talent coming from Bristol. We want to empower other young creatives of colour who may feel alone.

We want to redefine what it means to consume and create culture in this city."

"My message to you is whatever you love and enjoy and what you're good at, do it. Do it to your best abilities and don't let nobody put you down" – Reece

"I want Bristol to know that there are plenty of us, that we're talented and we've got a unique flair - that you probably need." – Olu

We worked with young artists Olamiposi Ayorinde and Stacey Olike to create a short film and photography collection highlighting the hopes and dreams of these young people and their messages for other young creatives and the sector itself.

[More info](#)



GENERATING INSIGHT



The We Are Here campaign was a way of taking up space and connecting with more young POC in Bristol.

Through it, we promoted our *Whose Culture* survey to an increasing number of young POC creatives aged 16-25 in Bristol. Below, we document some of the challenges and highlights from designing and launching the survey.

→ Aspirations

We wanted the survey to be visuals-led and to foster dialogue. We had dreams about a parallax-style site with embedded images and audio for each question, including imagery from the campaign. We imagined respondents being able to send in images, audio and video as well as typed answers for each question in a smooth, scrolling mobile experience.

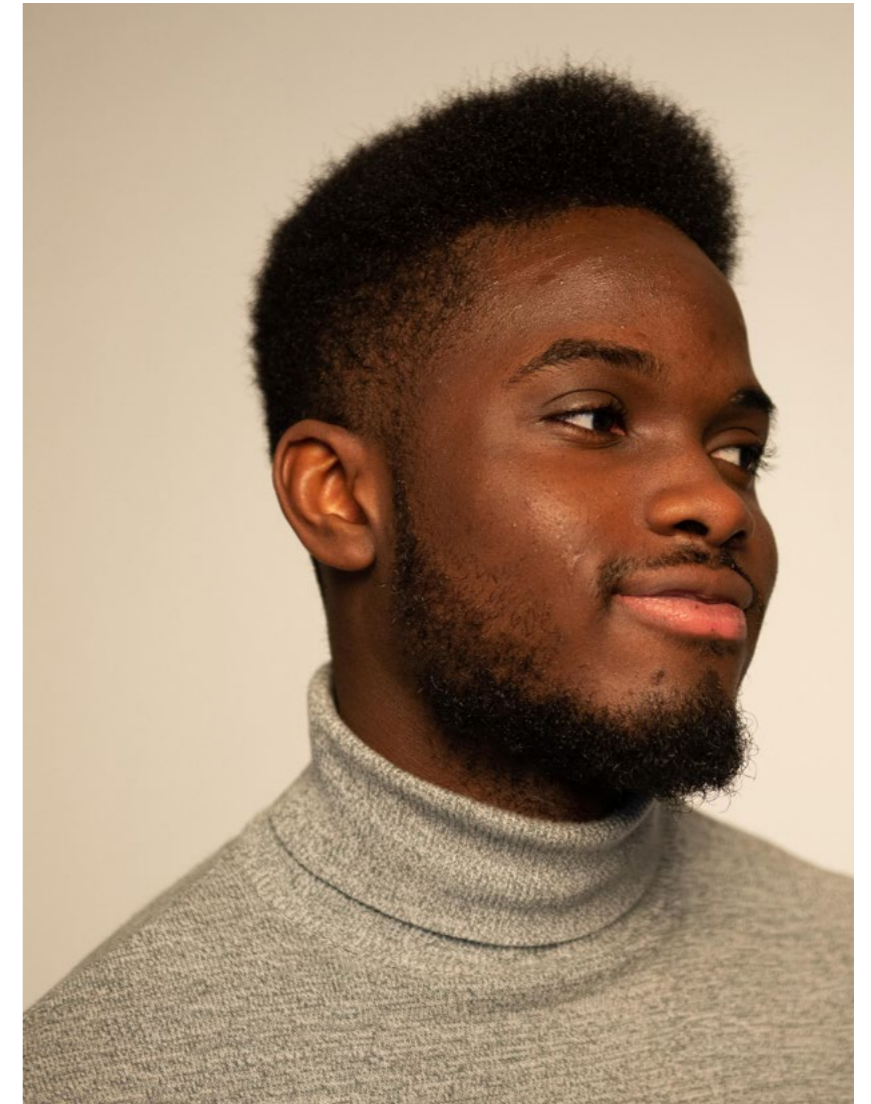
We envisaged the survey being a vehicle for gathering data and conveying underrepresented narratives about young POC involvement, engagement and success in the creative industries; a kind of participatory digital rallying cry and audio/visual archive for the city.

We wanted to collect in-depth data about people's experiences and creative aspirations. We also wanted to use the survey as an engagement tool in and of itself; a way for us to get to know more POC creatives in the city and profile their work through our platforms. It was also a way that Rising could communicate our offer more widely.

→ Questions

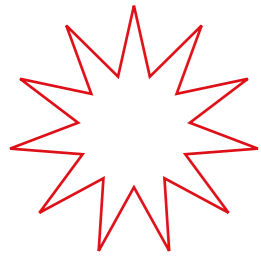
Following the workshops and creative Lab, we streamlined our research questions to reflect the three areas that young people were most interested in exploring: belonging in Bristol's creative spaces; supporting cultural diversity; and which tools, marketing techniques and language can help us make positive change. We also wanted to gain greater insight into what barriers they felt/feel they face in the creative sector and how we (Rising and the young POC we are connecting with) can address them.

Data Researcher Asiya Sutton (on placement from the University of Bristol) helped us to develop the sorts of questions that would directly ask respondents their opinions, feelings and experiences in relation to the above themes, whilst remaining open for new themes to arise. We also asked some emotive questions, like 'what message do you have for other POC creatives?'



GENERATING INSIGHT

2/2



→ Survey Design

We used Typeform to build the survey and explored available plugins. As we came up against various technical and design challenges, we had to reshape our aspirations. We had to let go of having such an image- and video-led experience within the survey, as it increased the length of the survey considerably and we felt it put people off. In addition, the easiest way we found to facilitate audio/video responses was still clunky and meant respondents had to go in and out of the survey multiple times. As a result, initial take-up was low.

We also found that it was difficult to translate complex *Whose Culture* themes into a digital survey. Having developed so much of our work (and trust) through long term engagement, and embodied and dialogic methods, we had to rethink our approach. Someone coming fresh to the survey would not experience this long, slow approach to inclusion and

engagement and we needed to take a step back and make our questioning less deep.

We revised and relaunched the survey to ensure it was as accessible, easy to understand and fill out as possible, learning a lot from Rising's concurrent Re/Imagine Libraries project which used surveys to understand what young people wanted/needed from a Libraries Service.

We created more multiple choice questions, and we opted for easy-to-understand language and concepts so people felt more at ease filling in the survey and sharing their opinions.

Even only a year on from this survey, we know about new platforms being created in Bristol which could help us to facilitate data-gathering in dialogue with respondents, and in a more creative way.



→ Results

A team of young people helped us to share the survey and amplify our message online. Over the four weeks the redesigned survey was live, we continued to share survey responses back on our Instagram platform to encourage engagement.

Through the survey, we collected data on how around 50 young POC creatives feel about Bristol's arts and culture sector. They shared their opinions about ethical data collection, the use of language in defining identities, and they sent us their messages to other young creatives like them across Bristol.

In the next few pages you will find highlights from this survey, followed by a series of powerful comments made by POC creatives about Bristol's arts scene.

SURVEY DATA

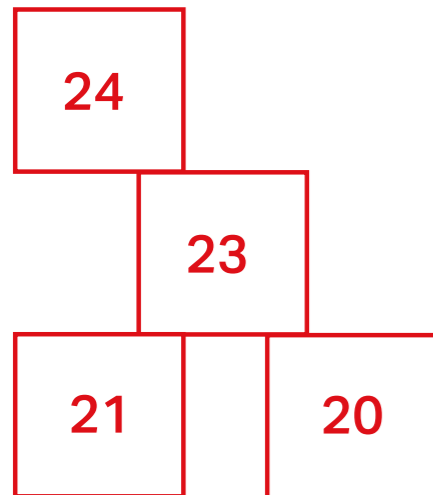
1/4

→ Demographics

Age

Respondents were aged 16–32, showing the demand for this conversation outside of the 16–25 age bracket. Rising now works with those aged 16–30.

Top four ages of respondents:



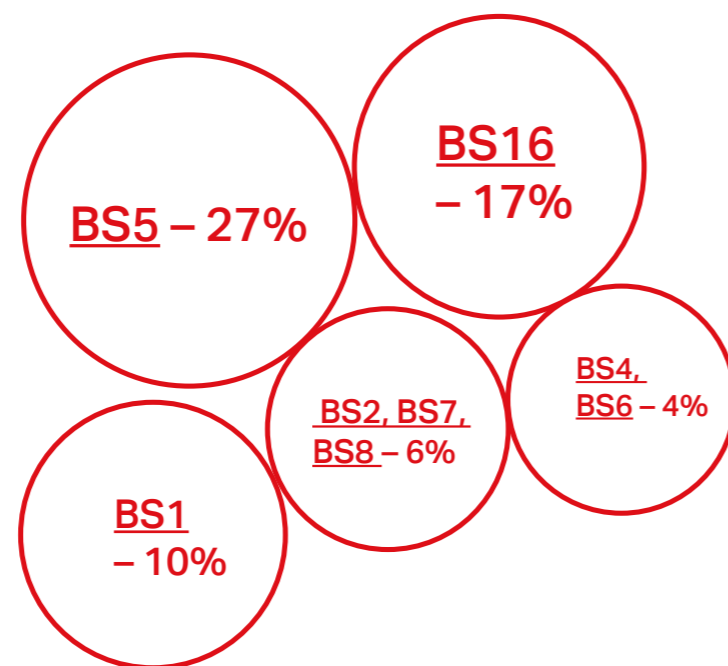
Disability

6% considered themselves disabled, 4% preferred not to say, and 90% said they did not identify as disabled.

Location

We had postcodes represented from across the local authority and beyond: BS1 through BS11, BS16, BS34, GU11 and TA21

The top five postcodes:



→ Ethnicity

We deliberately did away with tick-boxes for race and ethnicity throughout *Whose Culture*. Instead, we asked a straight-up question—‘**What is your ethnicity?**’—and allowed people to self-define.

Our survey respondents said:

White asian - Jamaican black - british Black African - African-british - Pakistani - African - mixed black - Mixed White & Black Caribbean - Somali - Asian - White Black African - Black African & white - Black British/ American. Born in America and raised in England - Mixed race, black and white - South East Asian - Black African/ Caribbean - Mixed Black African and White - Black-British Caribbean - Black British (African) - Filipino - Black British African - filipino - Black British (Caribbean) - Nigerian - Nepali - Black British (Ethiopian and Jamaican) - Mixed - Black African - Dual Heritage, British and Pakistani - Mixed - Mixed (black caribbean and white british) - Black British - Asian - British Caribbean - Black African and white british - Black Caribbean - Asian - Black Caribbean - Indian - African - I’m mixed (Indian, Pakistani, Persian & Scottish, English) - White British mixed with Peruvian - White & black Caribbean - Mixed white and black Caribbean - Asian, Pakistani - Black African

SURVEY DATA

3/4

→ Space & Place for Creatives

We asked, 'Where do you enjoy spending time?'

Respondents repeatedly mentioned domestic settings — like home, relatives' homes, bedrooms, friend's places — as well as cafes, restaurants and green spaces around the city and near to the Harbourside/town centre.

They also mentioned arts spaces in town where they might go to work, with an even split amongst those who felt comfortable in those spaces and those who went but did not feel comfortable there. Arnolfini's Front Room, a free working space with wifi where you could take your own food (which has since been turned back into a gallery space) was enjoyed by many people.

→ Bristol for Creatives

We wanted to know about their perceptions of and relationship to Bristol as a city of culture, so we asked:

How often do you do things that you consider 'cultural activities' in Bristol?

→ Every week 40%, Every month 29%, A few times a year 17%, Daily 8%, Never 6%, Less than once a year 0%

How much do you agree with the following statement: 'Bristol arts and culture has a positive impact on my life'?

→ 35% of respondents said they strongly agreed, agreed or somewhat agreed
→ 15% neither agreed nor disagreed
→ 41% somewhat disagreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement
→ 19% did not answer

That was a tricky question. Be honest with us... how does Bristol arts and culture make you feel?
(multiple choice)

- Empowered 27%
- Involved 36%
- Positive 36%
- Happy 24%
- Excited 25%
- Connected 33%
- Represented 20%
- Powerless 4%
- Excluded 5%
- Negative 4%
- Sad 5%
- Bored 5%
- Disconnected 13%
- Not represented 11%

Other:

- Dont feel nothing
- Inspired
- I'm very involved because of the work I do, but I think it does very little to engage me on a day to day. There doesn't seem to be much effort and it still doesn't feel like how I feel when I'm with my people, supporting their work. I don't know, outside work, I am pretty disconnected to Bristol's Arts and Culture Scene
- Annoyed
- Not too sure
- Mixed tbh

SURVEY DATA

4/4

We then used three simple words... TELL US MORE. We were saddened but not surprised by what we were told.

"I am mixed white British and Peruvian. In Bristol I don't see a lot of Latino culture. When I first moved here I looked for Latino societies at university and Peruvian communities I could become a part of, but I didn't find these. I do worry about going to cultural and BAME events in Bristol sometimes because I know I am white passing and that some people may not think I belong there, but I do just want to meet other creatives and feel connected to the BAME community."

"It's elitist. It's to drive honeypots for funding for arts organizations masquerading as diversity drives. And the majority of the diversity drives heavily favour white, upper class women."

"I'm not sure if this is along the lines of what you mean, but, as someone who's mixed, I feel like a bit of an imposter claiming a 'BAME' title/ getting involved in collectives etc. similar to this. I guess I just feel I don't have as big a right to be there and am a little worried I won't feel fully accepted etc."

"Basketball"

"Sometimes be weary of well intentioned people, sometimes they making things worse... unintentionally! Also sometimes I feel constant moaning/complaining can become a self fulfilling prophecy... I said it!"

"There is a great arts and cultural vibe in Bristol but not necessarily for people of colour."

"I don't believe that Bristol represents people of colour as much as they should"

"I think you guys are doing a great job! I would love to see more panel discussion events comprising a range of perspectives. For example,

if there would be one on cultural appropriation, I'd love to see a panel with both white and BAME people on it, and also people with conflicting views- this helps with not creating an echo chamber! x"

"The illustration scene is so divided in the city"

"I love Bristol, but I feel like compared to the amount of creative, artistic, intelligent, musical people in the city, it doesn't have enough creative or cultural spaces. Bristol is a very segregated city and I think this contributes to the lack of diversity and availability of culture to consume. I wish there were more creative spaces where young people (or anyone at all) can come to work, create, rent studio space, hold talks/ discussions, eat, share, listen to music etc. Not just for students but for the community, a place where everyone feels they belong."

"I just wish I saw more South Asian creatives in the media. I know about Rupi Kaur and that's about it. It's hard to have role models when you don't see any figures that actually represent you and what you wanna become"

"It's a new thing to me so don't have strong opinions at this point, but coming from London I feel it's hard to find things that are going on (maybe I'm just not part of the right networks) and also feel like all the 'creatives' I see are late twenties/ early thirties middle class white people. I don't feel like I see people like me doing the stuff I want to do"

"There's so much potential... it feels like a little bit of a waste tbh."

"One of the worst things is that there is an underlying assumption that we need to be 'grateful' for the little we get. "Oh look, it's BHM, let's give you

a tiny platform" / "Oh we're doing a panel on diversity, let's get you involved". It's getting a little old. There are young people waaay more talented than I am in this city, who do not get the proper access or support that they deserve and what this owes them. That's not right. How do we change that?"

"Museums are my jam. Doesn't have to be specifically black but anything to do with contemporary culture catches my attention. Volunteering at exhibitions is one of my favourite pastimes"

"I love everything you stand for and I love seeing minority's thrive and flex their talent because we are amazing!"

"I really admire all the work you do for the BAME community in Bristol, specially for BAME creative people and for the diversification of art."

"I love the huge range and variety of works and people that are part of the Bristol arts and culture scene. All the positive emotions I feel stem from amazing groups of people that are doing fabulous work to increase diversity and inclusivity, like Kiota and Rising Arts Agency. Particularly empowered and inspired by the work done by POC or BAME creatives/people in the city.

And the negative feelings come from how unrepresented and disconnected I still feel. I'm often still the only 1/2 POC in a room/ space. I can count with 1 hand, fellow creatives I know who share my culture and heritage."

"Check out a documentary called "Hidden Colors" reveals hidden history about Africa"

“

The instances of cultural connection are usually felt from other individuals in the same boat as myself in the creative sector. The actual cultural sector does the opposite. I like it because I get real work opportunities I wouldn't get outside of these spaces but I see it all as just work mainly, not actual connection with real people. Real artistic and cultural connection is felt with my friends, family and people, not a disconnected sector that pushes 'diversity' and 'inclusion' (hate those buzz words btw) as a trend so as not to receive backlash from a growingly conscious and loud audience. That was a rant and I could say a lot more on the subject but it tires me if I'm honest

“

There is a great arts and cultural vibe in Bristol but not necessarily for people of colour

“

The negative feelings come from how unrepresented and disconnected I still feel. I'm often still the only 1/2 POC in a room/space. I can count with 1 hand, fellow creatives I know who share my culture and heritage

continued:

"I love the Community art and positive influences. However I don't feel like it is promoted enough."

"Often feel like I don't belong in Bristol and going to creative events help."

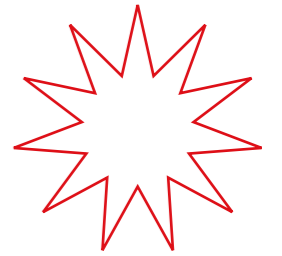
"Wish there was a way to connect more creatives of Southeast Asian descent from around Bristol and get them involved with organisations like Rising cause I'd love to be able to organise a short film screening of some kind that celebrates southeast asian creatives"

"I love the way that art is the heart of the city and you learn so much from being surrounded by it daily. Makes it feel like a community not just a city!"

"One thing that worries me about Bristol is gentrification and how that will affect culture in Bristol. I worry that people will become so concerned of this perceived aesthetic that the core values of Bristol become forgotten such as things I believe to be inclusivity, a community attitude, friendliness, experimentation and diversity concerning people, art and styles (among many other things) . I also don't wish for people to feel like they don't belong anymore in the place they've lived in for a long time. But all of those things I've just mentioned is what I love about Bristol and I'm very proud to be a Bristolian especially because of projects like this one!"

"I think it's amazing that there are so many venues/platforms which are extremely inclusive which I love being part of, but I am also wary of the fact that by doing that I don't want to exclude myself."

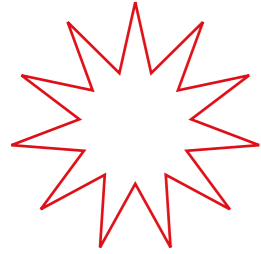
"I have been loving the various events that are taking place across Bristol, that allow you to connect with fellow young creative people without it being an intense networking moment. But there is also opportunity for networking in a not so formal networky kind of way if that makes any sense... There are events that bring forward medias like spoken word and poetry which is something I have never attended before and also they're accessible, welcoming and encouraging."



Photography by Olu Osinoiki for our Re/Imagine Libraries project (2019)



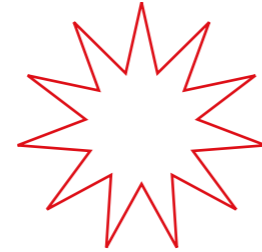
SURVEY : HIGHLIGHTS



Belonging in Bristol's Institutional Cultural Scene as Creatives of Colour

Young POC recognise that there is a lot of potential in Bristol's cultural scene but there is also a lack of authentic opportunities. Whilst this inspiring city is filled with inspiring people and projects, there is a deep-rooted distrust of institutions based on previous experiences. Respondents talked about Bristol institutions not recognising the talent in their city. They talked about the barriers they face in an industry that does not consider their needs or especially care about them and their longer-term careers.

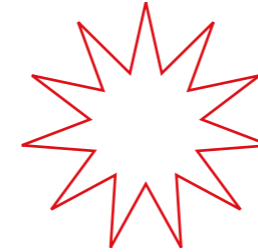
They spoke about the lack of connection and respect they frequently experience in predominantly white spaces. They also talked about how they were concerned about their work and identity being tokenised or appropriated.



You Cannot Be What You Cannot See

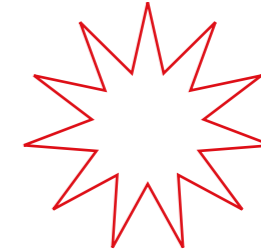
Young POC spelled out the frustrations of being pigeonholed into entry-level development and internship programmes in the sector. Many of them are ready to lead or already have their own creative businesses. As a result of these schemes and other exclusionary factors in the industry, they do not see institutional spaces as a place for their talents. Instead, they are creating their own spaces which support POC communities in Bristol.

If Bristol's sector wants to thrive, it must make space for young POC creatives to lead (and be listened to and respected) within institutional spaces.



Creating Our Own Spaces Which Celebrate Cultural Difference

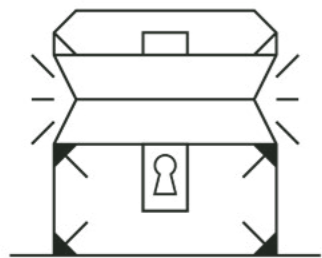
Respondents talked about the importance of being able to have their own young and/or POC spaces for creativity. They want spaces in which they can connect, share experiences and feel safe. These spaces for POC should welcome those from all ethnicities and backgrounds, as well as people with mixed heritage, who sometimes feel like POC spaces are not for them. Respondents also talked about wanting to see more art for and by South Asian, East Asian and Latinx creatives.



We Need Physical and Digital Spaces in which to Connect and Inspire Each Other

The importance of creating both physical and digital spaces in which young POC creatives can feel seen and see others—and be the source of their inspiration and empowerment—is crucial for supporting their growth. In the survey we asked respondents if they had a message for Bristol's young POC creatives, and their comments demonstrate the important role Rising and the city have in amplifying the messages of inspiration, encouragement and motivation, and encouraging opportunities for connection.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY



Whose Culture has taught us a lot about what young POC creatives in our city want and need from us—and the wider sector.

A big part of the work was identifying and opening up opportunities for them to get involved in collective artistic practice on their terms. They wanted opportunities to network, to feel relaxed in creative spaces, meet other POC creatives, and be given opportunities to lead. In this section you can see some of the paid opportunities and pathways into the creative sector Whose Culture created or contributed to.

Most importantly, Whose Culture's aims (to represent and connect young POC creatives) have become embedded in all our work, and its participants are now active members of the Rising community.



Some of the crew from Under My Skin, a collaboration between Spike Island, Rising Arts Agency and Integrate UK in response to Imran Perretta's exhibition the destructors (Autumn 2019). Eleven young adults from Bristol took part in a series of conversations and film-focused workshops.



I've never been proud of Bristol until today. Because now I see there is stuff going on, and maybe I can have a creative career here. People say you have to go to London, but I don't want to - this is my home, my life is here. I want to stay here. I feel like I could do that now.

– Whose Culture Lab Participant



**BRISTOL IS
THE MOST
RACIALLY
SEGREGATED
CITY IN THE UK**

#WhoseFuture

From top left, clockwise:

1. The Rising team in Liverpool, after being nominated for a Diversity Award.

2. In August 2020 we ran the #WhoseFuture billboard campaign featuring the work of 37 artists. Pictured: Josephine Gyasi with her work.

3. A post from our Instagram (July 2020). We use our platforms to build awareness and challenge the status quo because we want Bristol to be better for all of us.

MALIZAH: REFLECTIONS

Malizah shared her reflections on her journey with us so far:

"Whose Culture and Rising was something I stumbled across through my brother knowing someone involved as an artist with Rising. I was going through a very challenging time in my life and my brother said there was a string of workshops being held and if I would like to go with him. The rest is history.

I cannot explain how helpful Rising and the *Whose Culture* project have been as I was not heavily connected with artistic networks in a professional way at all before connecting with what they do.

From allowing me to perform at Junction 3 Library—which was my first performance after a long time not performing, it really meant a lot, they were the first people that paid me for a performance and I was so geeked, I went and told my mum they were paying me to do poetry—to allowing me to feel part of my community and give back through East Bristol Cinema. They professionally linked me with the Bristol Old Vic and local theatre companies too, which was so helpful.

This opportunity really helped bridge the gap I had in experience in the area I wanted to get into more and helped me discover new talents I had beyond writing, in digital production and marketing. Now I am on the BE IT leadership programme. I am very grateful. Thank you.

Find Malizah and her work over on Instagram: [@malizahofficial](#)

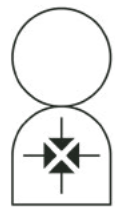
"They were the first people that paid me for a performance — I was so geeked, I went and told my mum they were paying me to do poetry...."



LEARNINGS

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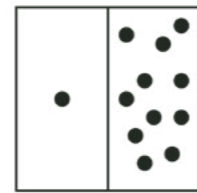
We learnt a lot from this project and we want to share it with you:



Prioritise Depth

We created intimate settings to have some very deep and personal conversations around the themes of creativity, culture, identity and belonging. Sometimes we felt that we had 'failed' because our numbers were low. In these moments we had to understand that our metrics needed to shift to align with what our community needed.

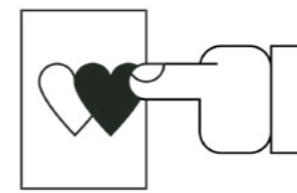
As American writer, women's rights activist and black feminist adrienne maree brown says, "We need each other. I love the idea of shifting from 'mile wide inch deep' movements to 'inch wide mile deep' movements that schism the existing paradigm." We prioritised depth of engagement and connection to build strong bonds with individuals. In doing so, we went against traditional arts sector forms of engagement which position young POC creatives as human resources to be used or numbers to bolster reporting.



Less is More

We were very ambitious. To begin with, we spread ourselves across four areas of the city; three of which were totally new to Rising. This impacted our ability to engage with partners across all the areas.

We should have given ourselves a longer lead time for community engagement work. Spending more time going to groups and making ourselves known would have helped with recruitment, but this was outside the scope of the project timeline and the team's capacity. Throughout the project we also tended to over-programme workshops and didn't get through all the activities. We learnt how important it was to protect space for people to be late, talk, connect, and have a rest.



Culture of Care

Taking our time to build relationships and a sense of trust was integral to the work. This was not directly addressed in the bid, but it was a common theme throughout each stage of the project. This approach helped to break down the cultural block between many young POC and the sector. We became a caring ally for them in those spaces: they invite their friends, they have good experiences, they get paid for their involvement. They have agency in developing their own opportunities, they see the changes they wanted taking shape, they lead the way. All of this helps build the case for choosing creative pathways to those who might not see the sector as a viable career option.



Terminology is Tricky

When we started this project, People of Colour (POC) was still a relatively unknown term outside of the creative industries and scholarship in the UK. We found that using BAME (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic) resonated more with people—but only when it is written out, unabbreviated. Terminology, how it is used and who uses it continues to change. So, we continue to monitor it and make informed decisions to adjust where necessary—ideally in dialogue with the people and communities it affects. After the huge societal changes and challenges of 2020, this feels even more important.

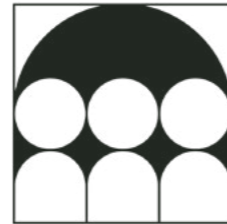
LEARNINGS

2/2



Think About Timing

It's hard to find the right timings for this kind of work. In October (Black History Month) a lot of our crew were already very busy with events (delivering or attending). In November, some young people are busy revising for mock exams. Autumn, too may not be the best time to start engagement work, because the sector is already saturated with events, offers and work opportunities, particularly for young Black artists.



Embrace Shifting Demographics

Over the course of the project it became clear that a lot of POC creatives over 25 wanted to engage in our work and were feeling frustrated that there was a lack of support for them in the city. Partly because of this project, Rising decided in 2020 to expand its remit to 18-30 year olds. We also found it difficult to connect with 13-17 year-olds in person without doing extensive work in schools and colleges. We had greater success connecting with younger young people online, but we learnt that they tended to consume our content but didn't want to participate. It is important not to undervalue these interactions, even though they didn't necessarily match what we 'wanted' or expected. Each person we connect with is important to us and is welcome to engage whichever way suits them best.



Spaces to Bring Our Authentic Selves

We learnt how important it was to provide multiple points of entry into and ways for people to engage with Whose Culture. Most importantly, we learnt what it means to hold spaces for people to come together, speak their truth and deeply listen to one another—both as creatives and as POC individuals.

During this project we learnt that we wanted more safeguarding and training to hold these kinds of spaces. Through our current work in this area supported by Resourcing Racial Justice, we are connecting with POC-focused mental health organisations.



Be you, you are more than a colour! You have so much more to share with the world. Don't get pigeon holed, particularly by those who may profit from it!

– Whose Culture Survey Respondent



Don't let your ethnicity dictate what you do. If you don't see yourself represented, go and be that representation.

– Whose Culture Survey Respondent

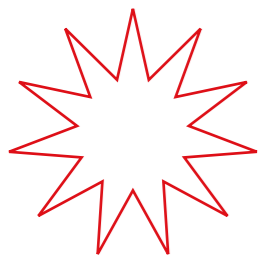
RECOMMENDATIONS

Prompts for reflection

This report has shared what we've learnt through *Whose Culture*. Rather than make recommendations that may or may not work for you (we're all doing this work so differently and in different contexts) - we wanted to offer some prompts for reflection, so that you can come to your own conclusions. You could spend some time doing this alone or with others - you could write, speak, draw - whatever will help you go a bit deeper. Make the time. **Do The Work**. And if you want to speak with us about what comes up for you, get in touch.

**BE PART OF
BUILDING THE
FUTURE WE NEED.**

Join the Rising Alliance:
Support us on the regular

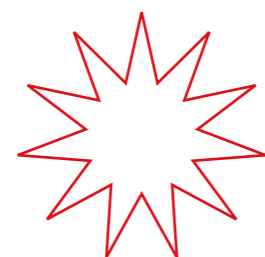


Leadership

Whose Culture showed young POC want opportunities to lead within cultural organisations - they hold the insight, experience and strategies we need to activate real change.

What are you doing to provide authentic opportunities for young POC creatives to lead, on their terms?

(and let's be real, we're talking about opportunities that don't tokenise, aren't short lived, and which young people have agency over)

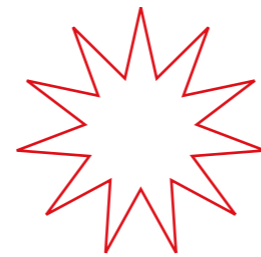


Resources

Young POC want access to free, flexible spaces where they can come and create as individuals and in groups.

What spaces and resources could you provide to young POC creatives to use, on their terms?

(and how could this offer be sustainable over time?)

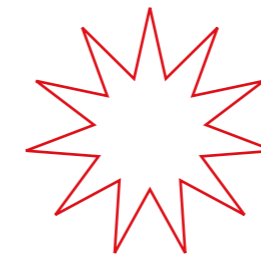


Culture

Whose Culture illustrated how institutional understanding of "culture" needs to change. Culture isn't created and experienced only within organisations or buildings. It's happening in bedrooms, online and in the streets. Covid-19 has fast tracked many people's understanding of this.

**How do you define "culture"?
What are your assumptions about what it is, where it happens and who it involves?**

(having read the report, does anything need to change?)

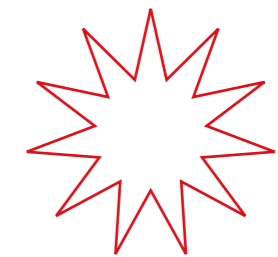


Collectives

Young POC are making their own networks, spaces and platforms for their creativity. They are also looking for opportunities to connect with each other. They might be making work about their lived experiences or definitely not be interested in doing that.

How do these things make you feel? What could you do to support these collectives?

(get honest about this - and in terms of support, it's good to think long-term and consider adequate resourcing, power dynamics and labour - is the 'opportunity' really an opportunity?)



Accountability

Whose Culture lifted the lid on how young POC creatives publicly funded culture in Bristol. It's time for the city to listen, learn and adapt. The "Tell me more" section of our survey in particular reveals the pervasive issues in our sector.

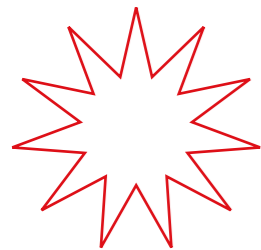
Do you think you've contributed to any of those issues?

What might you do differently now?

(and how will you hold yourself accountable?)

CLOSING THOUGHTS

As we write this, reflecting on the last two years, what stands out the most is how much things have changed, and how quickly it's happened.



The last year has been a ride. We've experienced intense pride as we've seen our incredibly talented and resilient community stand up again and again for each other, uplifting new work, celebrating successes and uniting against discrimination and abuse. We've created spaces for healing and calm in the aftermath of trauma and we've continued to stand together to fight against systemic oppression. It's what we're here for. The team has grown — from three people at the start of 2018 to seven in 2021. We're no longer a ragtag bunch of freelancers; now we're a ragtag bunch of PAYE employees! This has brought new opportunities to fully embed our project teams into the core of the agency, fully connecting all of the disparate strands into one complementary whole.

So we've grown professionally, but we've also grown in profile. From Whose Culture grew our immensely successful #WhoseFuture billboard campaign which catapulted us into a national spotlight - and we're about to launch our second #WhoseFuture campaign.

We've begun to push for change at a national, strategic level. And we're being recognised for our



work. In 2019 we were nominated for a SPARKies award, celebrating the best in tech and digital in the South West. Rising was also a finalist for the National Diversity Awards, and won Voscur's Young Community Leader Award.

So what's next?

Well, we were awarded a grant from the Resourcing Racial Justice fund towards our work challenging exclusive structures—and some inward-facing critical thinking too. We have been increasingly investing in our POC communities: commissioning, platforming and championing their creative work. We will continue creating specialist spaces and support for POC artists both on and offline. We will continue influencing strategic decision-making by equipping our community to take up space on boards and push

institutions to take anti-racist action. We are also continually inspired by the incredible people in the city who are pushing for change and creating new spaces and opportunities - like those over at CARGO, Bristol African Caribbean Culture Space, and many others.

Rising and our communities are playing an important part in radically shifting our city and creative industries towards true cooperation and inclusion. If culture is a reflection of our society, the toppling of Colston's statue was a powerful symbolic act. A year on and young people in Bristol are still committed to fighting racial injustice. We are seizing this momentum, galvanising our community, reflecting, and taking creative action to bring about meaningful, transformative social change.

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