

UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK

Technical Annex 10: Process Evaluation

March 2023

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Glossary of organisations

The following terms are used throughout the Process Evaluation report to indicate which stakeholder groups or organisations insights have been drawn from:

Creative teams	The organisations and individuals from across science, technology, engineering, arts and maths that designed and delivered each of the ten commissions.
Festival 2022 Limited (“Festival Company”)	<p>Festival 2022 Limited is the special purpose vehicle (not-for-profit company limited by guarantee) that was established to curate, manage and promote UNBOXED at arm’s-length of the four Governments. It was incorporated in May 2020 to curate, manage and promote UNBOXED, in partnership with Belfast City Council, EventScotland and Creative Wales. The Festival Company is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Birmingham Organising Committee for the 2022 Commonwealth Games (the “OC”), and arm’s-length body of UK Government.</p> <p>References to the Festival Company throughout the process evaluation incorporate the interviews with the UNBOXED Board, Festival Company Executive Management Team “EMT”, Senior Leadership Team, Heads of Departments, Senior Producers and/or comments from employees within the business.</p>
Strategic Delivery Bodies	Belfast City Council, EventScotland (part of VisitScotland) and Creative Wales appointed to commission and deliver UNBOXED in partnership with the Festival Company.
UNBOXED Board	The independent board of Non-Executive Directors for the Festival Company drawn from the science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) sectors which governs the Festival Company and provided strategic direction and assurance for UNBOXED with the strategic partners.
UNBOXED Funders	The Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) on behalf of UK Government, the Northern Ireland Executive, the Scottish Government, and the Welsh Government.
UNBOXED Partners	Organisations engaged with the Festival Company on behalf of the strategic partner to enhance areas of the programme, such as the British Council, Creative UK, and the RSA.
Stakeholders	Term used in the report to refer to stakeholders from multiple organisations.

1 UNBOXED process evaluation

1.1 Approach for the process evaluation

1.1.1 Context for the UNBOXED Evaluation

'UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK' ("UNBOXED") was a programme of public activity celebrating the creativity and interconnectivity between science, technology, maths, engineering, and the arts ("STEAM"), delivered through ten large-scale projects ("commissions"), which took place across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and online in 2022. Details of the programme are in Section 1 of the UNBOXED Impact and Economic Evaluation Report, including an overview of the commissions. This process evaluation should be read in context of the full evaluation report.

As agreed in the Concordat for UNBOXED, entered into by the four Governments of the UK, UNBOXED had two strategic objectives:

1. "To bring people together to celebrate our strengths, values and identities, and boost pride throughout communities."
2. "To celebrate our offer to the world, supporting our brand and helping attract new inward business and investment."

Alongside its strategic objectives, seven core expected benefits of UNBOXED ("Core Expected Benefits") were identified by Festival 2022 Ltd (the "Festival Company") in conjunction with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on behalf of UK Government (UKG), the Northern Ireland Executive (NIE), Scottish Government (SG) and Welsh Government (WG), as the UNBOXED Funders and Belfast City Council, Creative Wales and EventScotland as the Strategic Delivery Bodies for UNBOXED.

To deliver these strategic objectives and the Core Expected Benefits, total funding of £120 million (in cash terms) was allocated and co-funded jointly by the four Governments¹. Final costs and monetised benefits for the UNBOXED programme are set out in the economic evaluation report. The creative programme was curated, managed, and promoted by the Festival Company and was commissioned and delivered in partnership with the three Strategic Delivery Bodies.

1.1.2 Overview of the scope

In line with requirements for public spending set out in the HM Treasury Magenta Book, the Festival Company commissioned an independent evaluation of UNBOXED on behalf of itself and the four Government funders and the three Strategic Delivery Bodies. This was overseen by an Evaluation & Monitoring Working Group² made up of representatives from the Festival Company, the four UNBOXED Funders, and the three Strategic Delivery Bodies.

The independent evaluation of UNBOXED comprises an impact and economic evaluation as well as a process evaluation. The details and findings of the impact and economic evaluations are set out separately in the main report.³ This Technical Annex relates to the process evaluation only. The process evaluation of UNBOXED examines the development and delivery of UNBOXED, how this contributed to achieving the outcomes and impacts of UNBOXED, and the lessons that can be learned for future major projects with similar characteristics.

¹ UNBOXED was funded by all four Governments of the UK: the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), the Northern Ireland Executive, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government ('the UNBOXED Funders')

² This was the central governance forum for evaluation decisions across the UNBOXED programme, with representatives of the Festival Company, the four Governments as the UNBOXED Funders and the three Strategic Delivery Bodies

³ Festival 2022 Ltd. 2023. UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK, Evaluation Report

The scope of and approach to this process evaluation is in line with Government guidance on process evaluation set out in the Magenta Book.⁴

The process evaluation considers UNBOXED as a whole. It draws on evidence collected at both the programme-level and commission-level and considers the ways of working across the four nations of the UK. Findings reflect the holistic programme and not an analysis of individual commissions. The report provides a focus on the entity Festival Company (Festival 2022 Ltd), a special purpose vehicle established to curate, manage, and promote UNBOXED across the four nations. The Festival Company worked in partnership with three Strategic Delivery Bodies: Belfast City Council, EventScotland, and Creative Wales. The scope of the process evaluation does not look at the processes or approaches of each individual organisation involved in delivery across the UNBOXED Funders, Strategic Delivery Bodies or creative teams leading the 10 commissions.

It covers the processes and approaches used to deliver the UNBOXED programme from its announcement in October 2018 through to December 2022. The majority of stakeholders interviewed began their involvement in UNBOXED during 2020 as the delivery model was determined. The report does not therefore look in-depth at the early announcement and associated initial processes.

It is noted that within the initial announcement for the programme in 2018, both innovation and creativity were a prerequisite.⁵ The commissioning model for UNBOXED brought together cross-sector creative teams in a research and development programme; a design approach which differs from a traditional 'festival' format. The full depth of underlying creative and artistic practice involved in the creation of this commissioning model has not been fully explored within the scope of this process evaluation but was noted by stakeholders interviewed as one of the defining features of the UNBOXED programme. This Process Evaluation has been created to document the process learnings of the Festival Company and to provide the four UNBOXED Funders (as well as the three Strategic Delivery Bodies) with an evidence base and internal reference document to inform the design of future programmes. Where evidence collected allows, it identifies lessons learned that may be of benefit to programmes or projects with similar characteristics and to inform future delivery models.

1.1.3 Process evaluation research questions

It seeks to answer the evaluation research questions set out in Figure 1. These questions were agreed by the Evaluation and Monitoring Working Group representatives as part of the development of the UNBOXED Evaluation and Monitoring Plan (see Annex 2).

Figure 1: Process evaluation research questions

Process evaluation research questions
<p>How has the UNBOXED programme, and the processes used to deliver it, evolved over the life of the project?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- What opportunities, issues and external factors, impacted the delivery of the programme?- How did the processes and approaches adopted to deliver UNBOXED impact who the programme reached and whether it reached all the people it was intended to?- How were resources used, and were they sufficient?
<p>How have the processes and approaches used to deliver UNBOXED affected delivery of the project, with particular reference to the following key elements of UNBOXED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Coordination and collaboration across the four nations of the UKii. Design and development of the programme through an R&D process and ongoing innovation and experimentationiii. Development of the programme through STEAM sector collaborationiv. Programme funded by four Governments, with public funding as the single income source

⁴ HM Treasury. 2020. 'The Magenta Book (2020)'.
⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-festival-of-creativity-and-innovation-to-be-held-in-2022>

- v. Delivery of the creative programme through 10 creative teams, each working in multi-partner groups

What worked well and what did not?

What can be learned from the delivery of UNBOXED – both in terms of what should be replicated, and what could be improved, for other similar programmes (i.e. multi-partner, geographically dispersed collaborative programmes) in the future?

1.1.4 Sources of information

The process evaluation draws on the following sources of data and information:

- Key programme documentation, including UNBOXED planning and guidance documents.
- Qualitative evidence and insights obtained through 16 semi-structured interviews / focus groups conducted over the period from July to November 2022 to provide insight on:
 - delivery approaches and reasons for any changes to planned delivery, including external factors or unexpected issues;
 - how the processes and approaches adopted to deliver UNBOXED affected its impact, including what worked well and what worked less well; and
 - lessons that can be learned for future events or similar programmes.

A mapping exercise was undertaken with the Festival Company to identify and agree the stakeholder groups to be included as part of the process evaluation. Based on this, relevant individuals within each stakeholder group of UNBOXED were invited to participate in one of the focus group/ interview sessions. Further to this, a member of the evaluation team observed an all-staff reflections workshop organised by the Festival Company and attended by Festival Company staff, facilitated by a third-party facilitator to gather insights to aid the process evaluation.

Details of the stakeholders participating in the interviews / focus groups are set out in **Error! Reference source not found.** below.

Figure 2: Process evaluation stakeholders

Stakeholder group	Details of organisations/ individuals consulted	Number of individuals invited	Number of individuals attending	Consultation method
UNBOXED Funders and Strategic Delivery Bodies	UK Government (DCMS); Northern Ireland Executive, Scottish Government; Welsh Government; The Festival Company; EventScotland (part of VisitScotland); Creative Wales; Belfast City Council.	12	7	1 x focus group
Festival Company	UNBOXED Board	15	8	1 x focus group
	UNBOXED Board Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and ARAC Chair	3	3	3 x interviews
	Festival Company Chief Creative Officer and Executive Director	2	2	1 x interview
	Festival Company (Senior Leadership Team)	8	8	1 x focus group
	Festival Company Senior Producers (Creative Programme) and wider Heads of Departments	15	9	2 x focus groups

Creative Teams	59 Productions; The Poetry Society, The Stemettes; Tour de Moon Ltd; Royal Holloway and Bedford New College; the British Film Institute;, Iso Design; Nexus Studios; The Reading Agency; Produce UK; Upland TV; Nerve Centre; Oliver Jeffers; Microsoft; Dandelion 2022 Ltd; Collective Act; Collective Cymru; Walk the Plank; Nerve Centre; Trigger Stuff; News substance Ltd; National Parks; plus other independent partners.	80	24	6 x focus groups
UNBOXED Partners	International, Learning and Participation and MarComms partners including the British Council and Everfi.	19	9	1 x focus group
Festival Company (All-staff Workshop)	The Festival Company	75	50-75	Workshop observed by the evaluation team

In total, 67 representatives from the Festival Company senior teams, the UNBOXED Board, the ten creative teams and partners, UNBOXED Funders and Strategic Delivery Bodies and wider UNBOXED partners participated in one of the 16 interviews/ focus groups conducted. In addition, between 50-75 Festival Company employees took part in the all-staff workshop organised by the Festival Company to provide a reflections space towards the end of the delivery phase.

1.1.5 Approach to interviews/focus groups

The interviews and focus groups were conducted online via Microsoft Teams. All focus groups and two of the four interviews lasted 90 minutes, whilst the remaining two interviews were limited to 60 minutes to accommodate the availability of the interviewees.

All the interviews and focus groups facilitated by the evaluation team followed a similar approach. They were semi-structured, centred around a discussion of the key areas covered by each of the process evaluation research questions. A discussion guide was developed for use in all the interviews and focus groups. The stakeholders participating were also provided with a short pre-read document to allow them to prepare for the session. This provided information on the purpose of the process evaluation, the evaluation research questions that it sought to answer, and the key topics to be discussed as part of the focus group. Both the pre-read and discussion guide were agreed with the Evaluation and Monitoring Working Group.

Following the structure of the discussion guide, stakeholders participating in the interviews / focus groups were invited to provide their insights and views in relation to each discussion guide topic area. This input was provided by stakeholders verbally, and for the focus groups with creative teams and the Festival Company Senior Leadership Team, Senior Producers and Heads of Departments (which were expected to be involve larger numbers of attendees) the online collaboration tool was used through which written input could be provided.

The Festival Company all-staff reflections workshop was organised separately by the Festival Company and took a different format, focusing on broader themes of what worked well, what worked less well, what could have been different, and where staff felt they did and didn't have agency. Where insights and themes raised aligned to the process evaluation research questions, these were drawn upon and collated alongside the insights from the process evaluation focus groups and interviews.

All findings have been anonymised and attributed by the evaluator to the relevant organisational group (as defined in the Glossary of Organisations).

The findings reported in Section 2 of this report bring together these insights from across the interviews and focus groups.

1.1.6 Key process evaluation parameters and limitations

When reading the findings of the process evaluation the following areas relating to the agreed parameters of the process evaluation and associated limitations should be considered:

- **Breadth of activities and creative approach:** This process evaluation was undertaken at a fixed point in time in UNBOXED's lifecycle (the second half of the delivery phase). The process evaluation relates to the overarching processes and approaches adopted to deliver UNBOXED as a whole, and not delivery approaches adopted by individual creative teams for specific commissions. The process evaluation does include insights as to the impact of the overall programme's processes and approaches on the strategic delivery of projects. Given the breadth of activities associated with the UNBOXED programme and its complexity, the interviews and focus groups concentrated on obtaining evidence in relation to some specific aspects of delivery (as set out in Research Question 2) rather than the Programme delivery approach in its entirety.
- **Representativeness of evidence obtained from stakeholders:** Participants in the process evaluation were drawn from across a range of stakeholder groups involved in the delivery of UNBOXED. The individual stakeholders were selected to cover the breadth of stakeholder groups involved in the delivery of UNBOXED. However, views and insights gathered from individuals may not be representative of the views of all UNBOXED delivery stakeholders or all those involved in delivery at the Festival Company. This is a particular limitation of the study given the complexity of the programme and the large number of stakeholders involved in its delivery.
- **Constitutional parameters of four nation working:** UNBOXED was delivered across sectors that are included in the Devolution settlements for Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales; notably culture. As such the approach to working across four nations was governed by a Concordat entered in the spirit of cooperation between the four Governments to co-fund the UNBOXED programme and collaborate on the delivery of UNBOXED through the Festival Company and three Strategic Delivery Bodies to remain within constitutional parameters. The Process Evaluation does not comment on the decision to adopt this strategic delivery model as this was a requirement of the joint funding arrangements between all four Governments for this programme.
- **Reporting of process evaluation findings:** The findings reported are based directly on the input provided by stakeholders through the interviews and focus groups conducted. While the views given were tested in the individual interview and focus group sessions with others in attendance (to understand if others agreed or disagreed with the opinions stated), they were not tested beyond this, with other stakeholders not included in the process evaluation research or through detailed review against documentation or other external assurance reports. Given the multi-partner delivery arrangements of UNBOXED, it is likely that not all stakeholders interviewed would have had access to detailed strategy, planning or operational documents relating to the delivery of the UNBOXED programme. As such, some comments may reflect a lack of awareness of activities policies and/or processes rather their absence as part of the UNBOXED delivery.

Due to the breadth of insights and views shared during the interviews and focus groups, the findings reported capture the key themes that emerged, rather than each individual point raised.

- **Coverage of the process evaluation:** The topics covered in the process evaluation were agreed based on the areas of focus identified within the process evaluation research questions. The detailed scope for the process evaluation research questions and sampling approach were planned in early 2022 and the process evaluation interviews were conducted over the period July to November 2022.

- Subsequent to the process evaluation research being undertaken, the National Audit Office (NAO) completed a report on UNBOXED (published on 1 December 2022)⁶, in which the following areas were identified by the NAO for inclusion in the evaluation:
 - lessons for the future from the experience of how projects have performed against their targets, including on cost and attendance, and the split between physical and digital/broadcast audiences; and
 - lessons for the future about the importance of agreeing clear objectives and then setting performance targets early enough in any similar future programme’s lifecycle.

In the context of these suggested areas for inclusion, this report provides some helpful evidence that will enable the UNBOXED Funders (the four Governments) to undertake a lessons learned review and document this for future programmes, including to address the NAO recommendations. As the structure for the process evaluation had already been agreed by the Evaluation and Monitoring Working Group at the scoping stage of the evaluation, and all primary research with interviewees had been completed prior to the NAO publication date, not all of the detail within the areas highlighted by the NAO are included in full. As a result, there are some limitations on the insights included in the process evaluation for these areas.

The impact evaluation provides detailed findings in relation to the overall cost of the programme, updated engagement figures (split by engagement type) with an additional Appendix 2 of the Impact and Economic Evaluation Report to show the updates since the publication of data within the NAO report, and the overall economic benefits of the programme to present a net present social value (NPSV). The impact evaluation covers the benefits across the programme with a comprehensive Annex that sets out outcomes by commission (the commission-level impact evaluations).

1.2 Structure of this report

Section 2 reports on the findings of the process evaluation, structured by each evaluation research questions that is answered as follows:

- Section 2.1 provides a short introduction to the findings of the process evaluation;
- Section 2.2 reports findings relating to: How has the UNBOXED programme, and the processes used to deliver it, evolved over the life of the project?
- Section 2.3 reports findings relating to: What issues, opportunities and external factors, impacted the delivery of the programme?
- Section 2.4 reports findings relating to: How did the processes and approaches adopted to deliver UNBOXED impact who the programme reached and whether it reached all the people it was intended to?
- Section 2.5 reports findings relating to: How were resources used, and were they sufficient?
- Section 2.6 reports findings relating to: How have the processes and approaches used to deliver UNBOXED affected delivery of the project, with reference to the key elements of UNBOXED? What worked well and what did not?
- Section 2.7 reports findings relating to: What can be learned from the delivery of UNBOXED – both in terms of what should be replicated, and what could be improved, for other similar

⁶ National Audit Office, 2022. [Investigation into the UNBOXED festival \(nao.org.uk\)](https://nao.org.uk/publications/investigation-into-the-unboxed-festival)

programmes (i.e., multi-partner, geographically dispersed collaborative programmes) in the future?

This report should be read as part of the overall evaluation of UNBOXED, specifically the Impact and Economic Evaluation Report and in conjunction with:

- Annex 1: Commission-level impact evaluations
- Annex 2: Evaluation and monitoring plan
- Annex 3: Evaluation technical methodology

2 Findings of the process evaluation

2.1 Introduction to the findings

The findings set out in the following sections seek to answer each of the process evaluation research questions in turn, based on evidence gathered through interviews and focus groups with the UNBOXED stakeholders detailed in Figure 2 in Section 1.1.4.

2.2 Findings: How has the UNBOXED programme, and the processes used to deliver it, evolved over the life of the project?

Below is an overview of the findings relating to the delivery of UNBOXED and how the processes used to deliver it, evolved through the life of the project up to December 2022.

'UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK' ('UNBOXED' or the 'Festival') was a programme of public activity funded by the four Governments of the UK⁷ celebrating the creativity and interconnectivity between science, technology, maths, engineering and the arts ("STEAM") delivered through 10 large-scale projects ("commissions") which took place across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and online in 2022.

Announcement and programme set-up

It was originally announced in September 2018 by the then Prime Minister and reference to it was made in the Conservative Party's manifesto for the December 2019 UK general election.⁸ At that stage it was referred to as the Festival of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in 2022. The Festival was part of one full "year of celebrations"; and was planned to go live in 2022, the same year of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games (CWG) and Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.⁹

Following the announcement in September 2018, and a subsequent internal Government process, a preferred delivery model was agreed to deliver the programme at arm's-length of Government through a special purpose vehicle. In May 2020, Festival 2022 Ltd ('the Festival Company') was incorporated as a not-for-profit organisation and as a wholly owned subsidiary company of the Birmingham Organising Committee for the 2022 Commonwealth Games Ltd (the "OC").¹⁰

Strategic delivery partnerships were formed with Belfast City Council, EventScotland and Creative Wales ('the Strategic Delivery Bodies') as the agencies appointed by the respective Devolved Administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales who were in turn responsible for working with the Festival Company to commission and deliver the creative programme.

Business structure of Festival 2022 Ltd

The Festival Company was appointed on behalf of the Governments to curate, manage, and promote UNBOXED, governed by an independent Board with a wide range of expertise across science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM).¹¹

As a wholly owned subsidiary of the OC, the Festival Company had the same Accounting Officer as the OC, an accountable role in an arm's-length body or agency. In addition, the two organisations

⁷ UNBOXED was funded by all four Governments of the UK: the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), the Northern Ireland Executive, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government ('the UNBOXED Funders')

⁸ Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2019. See: [Conservative Party Manifesto 2019 \(conservatives.com\)](https://www.conservatives.com)

⁹ See: [Celebrate 2022: Commonwealth Games, Platinum Jubilee, UNBOXED - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

¹⁰ For more information: [Festival signed ARA 31 March 2021.pdf \(UNBOXED2022.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

¹¹ For more information: [2022 Festival update - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk); [2022 Festival update - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

shared a Chief Financial Officer and Chief Legal Officer as part of the executive management team. The Chief Creative Officer and Executive Director of UNBOXED were also joint roles across the two programmes. The time allocation between the projects was formally set out in an agreement between the OC and the Festival Company¹².

The independent Board of Non-Executive Directors was chaired by Dame Vikki Heywood DBE. It was responsible for overseeing the delivery of UNBOXED.

In September 2020, the Festival Company launched a call for expressions of interest from creative teams to be involved in the creative programme. This open call had an emphasis on multi-disciplinary cross-sector collaboration and innovation, with a requirement for the teams that applied to “*develop new partnerships, bringing together established organisations with individuals and emerging talent from across science, technology, engineering, arts and maths*”.¹³

Following the review of 299 applications from almost 3,000 organisations, 30 teams, involving over 500 organisations, were allocated budget for the Research and Development (R&D) phase, which took place from November 2020 to February 2021. Through this process, teams were required to design a commission concept that responded to the following brief:

*“Imagine a large-scale public engagement project that is open, original and optimistic and will exist in places and spaces across the UK (real, virtual or both); seeking to reach millions of people globally.”*¹⁴

Following this R&D process, each of the 30 teams submitted a detailed Feasibility Report and delivered a presentation to a panel. All submissions were assessed for the responses to fixed detailed criteria, covering:

1. Creative approach to the Festival concept
2. Delivering the Festival’s aims
3. Where, when and what form the Festival concept might take
4. Audiences
5. Access, inclusion, and audience development
6. Widening public participation
7. Resourcing and project management
8. Production and technical
9. Financial viability
10. Sustainability

The creative brief and the guidance provided to teams set expectations that the form of the projects should include both physical (i.e. live events and participation) and non-physical activities (i.e. digital and broadcast) to set out the spectrum of ways in which audiences can experience or interact with the project. The feasibility studies submitted by the 30 creative teams also considered the locations projects would be delivered in, alongside key demographics and priority areas in order to achieve a programme that provided a variety of benefits across the UK in each of these aspects. Within the core criteria, projects were required to set out how they would ensure inclusion for a wide range of individuals and communities, delivering an approach that is highly accessible and removes barriers to access for audiences whilst ensuring audiences with diverse points of view and different lived experiences come to together to enjoy and celebrate.

Based on the feasibility studies submitted, in March 2021 ten projects (‘commissions’) were selected and co-commissioned by the Festival Company and the Strategic Delivery Bodies – one commissioned by each of the Strategic Delivery Bodies (including the Festival Company) to represent

¹² Intercompany Services Agreement between Birmingham Organising Committee for the 2022 Commonwealth Games Ltd and Festival 2022 Limited, agreed April 2021

¹³ UNBOXED Project Parameters

¹⁴ UNBOXED Project Parameters

their respective nation, and six that had UK-wide representation and were commissioned by the Festival Company.¹⁵

The ten commissions were selected by the Festival Company, and where appropriate the Strategic Delivery Body, on a portfolio basis, taking account of a range of factors and criteria to determine the potential of each project to deliver against the strategic objectives and core benefits.

Business case planning and benefits realisation

To deliver the strategic objectives and the Core Expected Benefits of UNBOXED, total funding of £120 million (in cash terms) was allocated and co-funded jointly by the four Governments¹⁶. In terms of the total costs of delivering UNBOXED, the economic evaluation reports the final cost outturn for UNBOXED in cash terms is £116.8 million, which is within the initial overall funding allocation. An assessment of costs and benefits is set out in the Impact and Economic Evaluation.

These strategic objectives as well as the seven core intended benefits included in the Full Business Case remained in place through the delivery of the programme.

The Evaluation and Monitoring Working Group was consulted on the development of a Theory of Change and the associated Logic Model. These are set out in the Evaluation and Monitoring Plan and in Section 1.3 of the Impact and Economic Evaluation Report.

As the programme for UNBOXED developed, it was a requirement of HM Treasury that a full business case¹⁷ be produced for UNBOXED based on the strategic objectives and aims of UNBOXED to deliver social, cultural and economic benefits through the programme. Seven core intended benefits were set out, alongside reference to regional and socioeconomic distributional impacts.

Form, locations, and delivery of the creative programme

The names of the winning teams, and details of the programme were formally announced in October 2021, along with the brand for the programme: “UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK”.¹⁸

The Festival Company and Strategic Delivery Bodies representatives stated that when making the decisions on commissions, UNBOXED prioritised the delivery of commissions in places that do not as often benefit from major cultural investment. The programme monitoring data shows, for example, in England, commissions were delivered in 11 locations which are also included in Arts Council England’s Levelling Up for Culture¹⁹ areas, whilst activity across Scotland was distributed across 27 of the 32 local authorities. More broadly across the four nations, a significant proportion of the physical events within the creative programme took place in smaller towns, cities, and rural communities outside of the UK’s major urban city centres and around half were delivered in areas of higher deprivation (deciles 1-5) based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation²⁰ (IMD).

Furthermore, the inclusion from the outset of digital cultural programming and creative content commissioned specifically for broadcast as part of the UNBOXED programme, was intended to enable UNBOXED to engage with a wider audience with the aim of increasing the opportunities for

¹⁵ [UNBOXED-The-Journey-So-Far-.pdf \(unboxed2022.uk\)](#)

¹⁶ UNBOXED was funded by all four Governments of the UK: the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), the Northern Ireland Executive, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government (‘the UNBOXED Funders’)

¹⁷ DCMS, 2021, UNBOXED Full Business Case

¹⁸ For more information: [The country invited to a major celebration of creativity across the UK in 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁹ Arts Council England, 2023. ‘[Priority Places and Levelling Up for Culture Places](#)’.

²⁰ The Indices of Deprivation are a unique measure of relative deprivation at a small local area level (Lower-layer Super Output Areas). The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) deciles for each nation are calculated by ranking every small area in that nation from most deprived area to least deprived area and dividing them into 10 equal groups. LSOAs in decile 1 fall within the most deprived 10% of LSOAs nationally and LSOAs in decile 10 fall within the least deprived 10% of LSOAs nationally.

audience to engage with UNBOXED and extending the impact of the programme.²¹

UNBOXED's programme went live on 1 March 2022 and involved a series of events and activities delivered through the ten commissions, combining live events, digital engagement, broadcast content and learning and participation opportunities.

The commission-level activity was also supported by UNBOXED programme level Marketing and Communications ('MarComms') activity and a Learning and Participation workstream, which included delivery of its own content and activities including the UNBOXED roadshow events.²² There was also an international programme which involved work with domestic and international partners, such as the RSA²³ and the British Council with the aim of enhancing the global reach of UNBOXED.

A standardised reporting and contract management process was put in place across the ten creative teams, which included a requirement to have monthly management meetings and report on delivery, including the creative programme, risks, marketing and communications, learning and participation, timeline and budget. From this management information, a monthly portfolio report was produced, including an Executive Summary. These were shared with key UNBOXED stakeholders and were reviewed regularly by the UNBOXED Board and its subcommittee in a combination of formats.²⁴

2.3 Findings: What opportunities, issues and external factors, impacted the delivery of the programme?

2.3.1 Opportunities

Stakeholders, particularly creative teams, that participated in the interviews and focus groups noted a number of opportunities that UNBOXED offered, alongside a number of challenges, in the form of issues and external factors. The most cited opportunities included opportunities for innovation, new partnerships and reaching new audiences through the UK-wide reach of the programme. Key opportunities identified in these areas are highlighted below and built on in other sections of this report.

Innovation

Representatives from creative teams identified that participating in the delivery of UNBOXED created the unique opportunity to receive funding for research and development (R&D) at a time when most sectors, and especially the creative industries, suffered due to the pandemic. Creative teams reported being excited by the scale of the funding for R&D and encouragement to create ambitious projects in terms of innovation. This is discussed further in Section 2.6.

Creativity and innovation were key elements within the planning and shaping of the Festival as detailed in the parameters and guidance provided to creative teams participating in the R&D process.²⁵ Creative teams reported being excited by the scale of the funding for R&D and encouragement to create ambitious projects in terms of innovation. This is discussed further in Section 2.6.

Reaching new audiences

Another key opportunity which was identified by stakeholders was the possibility for the commissions to connect with a broad and diverse audience across the UK. UNBOXED organisers encouraged the creative teams to develop projects reaching a wide range of local communities in all four nations. Stakeholders reported that this requirement enabled the opportunity (as well as the challenge) for the ten creative teams to connect with new audiences and establish partnerships with organisations and

²¹ Festival UK* 2022 Research & Development Project Guidance for Lead Organisation

²² <https://unboxed2022.uk/learning-roadshow>

²³ The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA)

²⁴ Information provided by the Festival Company

²⁵ Festival UK* 2022 Research & Development Project Guidance for Lead Organisation

professionals operating in more remote locations which would have otherwise been more unlikely to attain or form.²⁶ This aspect of the delivery of UNBOXED aligns with the work of all four Governments to empower and invest in local communities across the full breadth of the UK by creating new opportunities and jobs and boosting productivity, pay and living standards in those places in the UK which are lagging behind.²⁷ Views and lessons in relation to this are considered further in Sections 2.4 and 2.6.

New partnerships

The final key opportunity identified related to the requirement for commissions to include experts across all STEAM's disciplines. All stakeholder groups said that establishing new partnerships and working with professionals across all these disciplines gave them the chance to develop creative ideas further and differently, even though the perception on the extent to which commissions managed to effectively establish cross-sectoral collaboration and create collaborative projects was varied across stakeholders. This is considered further in Section 2.6.

2.3.2 Issues and external factors

As well as the opportunities identified, there were also a number of issues and external factors identified that impacted the programme. Across the majority of stakeholders consulted, the most significant factors identified were the COVID-19 pandemic, the project timescales; and the perception and narrative in the media of UNBOXED as the 'Festival of Brexit,' which was not the case, nor a name ever given to the programme by the organisers. Key insights and findings obtained from the interviews and focus groups in relation to these areas are detailed below.

The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic was identified across the majority of stakeholders interviewed as a key factor which impacted the delivery of UNBOXED.

At the critical stages of the delivery planning for the UNBOXED programme in 2020 into 2021, there was considerable uncertainty over the short and longer-term impact of COVID-19, including the path the pandemic would take, the economic fallout and its longevity. As was the case across the economy as a whole, this had impacts on both individuals and organisations involved in UNBOXED, as well as on the central planning teams within the Festival Company and Strategic Delivery Bodies.

Stakeholders identified that there were a number of different routes through which the nature of the delivery of UNBOXED was impacted by COVID-19, including the capacity of the creative teams and Festival Company (due to the negative impacts on recruitment, procurement and supply chain), pandemic recovery measures appropriately taking priority for HMT, and the uncertainty COVID-19 created in the planning process for all stakeholders.

The outline business case for UNBOXED was approved by DCMS in March 2020²⁸ just as the pandemic hit, with the Festival Company being incorporated two months later. The approval of the final business case by HM Treasury was in November 2021. As reported by the NAO, the intention of DCMS had been to obtain the approval in summer 2020 but this was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and HM Treasury's prioritisation of business cases for schemes to aid recovery from the pandemic.²⁹

There was general consensus among the Festival Company, Strategic Delivery Bodies and the UNBOXED Funders that the pandemic created increased pressure within the already accelerated timescales for delivery and factors, such as recruitment and supply chain, reduced the capacity within the Festival Company and creative teams at points during the delivery phase. This was also noted to

²⁶ Festival UK* 2022 Research & Development Project Guidance for Lead Organisation

²⁷ For more information of the Levelling Up vision of the UK Government, please visit: [Levelling Up – Levelling up means boosting living standards, investing in education and restoring local pride and opportunities where you are in the UK.](#)

²⁸ National Audit Office, 2022. [Investigation into the UNBOXED festival \(nao.org.uk\)](#)

²⁹ National Audit Office, 2022. [Investigation into the UNBOXED festival \(nao.org.uk\)](#)

have been the case for the capacity of UNBOXED Funders themselves, with their senior representatives and ministers focused on the pandemic itself. This was a common theme in engagement with other Government departments, as it was not always possible to obtain wider Government input into UNBOXED collaboration opportunities beyond the teams within DCMS whose specific role it was to deliver UNBOXED on behalf of Governments. This factor was considered to have limited any additional benefits that might have been realised through further amplification of the UNBOXED programme. Despite these pressures, stakeholders felt that factors associated with COVID-19 did not directly impact the overall delivery of the UNBOXED programme with all projects taking place in 2022 and the workforce recruited delivering a significant workload in these circumstances.

Stakeholders also noted that the pandemic made it difficult to recruit employees to short time-limited roles due to the uncertainty in the wider job market. Due to the point in time at which the Festival Company was established, the Board and employees were recruited almost entirely through online recruitment processes, this was true also for the creative teams as they commenced their resourcing. This was considered to have been a particular challenge for the Festival Company and creative teams, as they were time-limited organisations and project teams, with a full workforce needing to be recruited from scratch, making this a key operational priority. This was compounded by the significant challenges with general recruitment and the job market faced by the wider sectors in 2021.³⁰ Overall, this made it more difficult to secure all the human resources required for the Festival Company and creative teams.

The Festival Company established a central base in Birmingham to create a space for employees to meet, work and collaborate in person. Festival Company representatives reported that remote engagement made working together for all UNBOXED stakeholders more challenging as many individuals working across the programme had never met in person until later in the delivery process. Due to the creative and highly collaborative nature of the UNBOXED programme, face-to-face interaction was noted as being particularly beneficial to productivity and developmental work.

Similarly, early collaboration during the R&D process was predominantly undertaken virtually. An online collaboration platform set up by UNBOXED, facilitated the R&D process across the 30 creative teams and provided a space for creative discussion and ideation. Creative teams praised the platform, noting that engaging online meant that a broad range of partners could collaborate without the requirement to be physically located in one place, which they noted could have been a limiting factor. Conversely some representatives from the creative teams noted challenges with partnership working and collaborating online in the early stages of the project, including during the R&D process. They indicated that pre-pandemic, ordinarily the development of ideas and partnership opportunities would be undertaken in person.

There was consensus across the creative teams and Festival Company that the ongoing series of lockdowns and restrictions created uncertainty for the planning of physical UNBOXED events and activities, whilst school closures and remote learning created challenges for the delivery of the learning and participation programme, with those involved reporting that the increased pressure on teachers impacted their capacity to engage in learning opportunities for the 2021/22 academic year. There was a view among stakeholders that in the absence of these uncertainties and limitations, additional activities may have been able to be delivered as part of the programme.

In terms of the live event phase of the UNBOXED programme, UNBOXED launched with the commission 'About Us' in Paisley at the start of March 2022, at a time when rules on the use of face coverings indoors were still in place in Scotland³¹ and the number of patients in hospital with COVID was at its highest level in 13 months.³² The restrictions in place varied across the four nations of the UK, which stakeholders noted made planning a consistent approach to a UK-wide physical programme more complex. For example, restrictions on full capacity live events in Scotland were only

³⁰ Recruitment and Employment Confederation, 2020. [Report on Jobs: COVID-19 pandemic leads to record falls in recruitment activity :: The REC](#)

³¹ For more information on the evolution of Covid-19 cases in Scotland, please visit: [Detailed analysis \(data.gov.scot\)](#). A timeline of UK government restrictions and lockdown period is available here: [Timeline of UK government coronavirus lockdowns and restrictions | The Institute for Government](#).

³² [Covid in Scotland: Hospital patient numbers highest in 13 months - BBC News](#)

lifted on the 17 January 2022 (just 6 weeks prior to the first event). It was noted by senior stakeholders that the programme benefited from all four Governments working in partnership on UNBOXED, and access to data and insight, to aid planning across the four nations.

Festival Company representatives interviewed reported that they felt that attendance at the early in-person events may have been negatively impacted by concerns about COVID community transmission which may have deterred people from attending, as explored further in the qualitative evidence in the Impact and Economic Evaluation in Section 1.1.4. This was a trend seen across the wider culture sector in 2022, for example in theatres, museums and galleries.³³ They also reported that the uncertainty around what COVID restrictions might be in place at the time of the live events created additional work in the planning of events as multiple scenarios had to be planned for.

It was also noted by some stakeholders that the UNBOXED programme provided an injection of funding and associated employment into the creative sector at a time when it had been negatively impacted by COVID. Specifically, the R&D process was designed to ensure all contributors were paid for the time in developing the creative programme.

Whilst, as noted above, there was a consensus view across stakeholders participating in the interviews and focus groups that COVID-19 created challenges for the programme, some stakeholders, stated that the timing of the UNBOXED live events and activities following the COVID-19 pandemic and predominantly after the lifting of COVID-related restrictions, and UNBOXED's emphasis on creativity may have in fact have amplified its impact by providing opportunities for people to come together after two years of lockdowns and restrictions on social gatherings.

Despite these challenges, the economic evaluation demonstrates how UNBOXED played its part in regenerating cultural activity after lockdowns and contraction of the cultural sector. Wider evidence in relation to these perceived impacts are reported in Section 2.3.2.2 and Section 2.3.5.4 of the Impact and Economic Evaluation.

The impact of the project timeline

Across all stakeholder groups, individuals consistently stated the timetable for delivery of UNBOXED as a challenging factor. It is important to note the fixed timetable of delivering the creative programme in 2022 was established as part of the original announced in 2018³⁴ and was known at the point the Festival Company was established and at the point that Strategic Delivery Bodies and creative teams were appointed to deliver the programme.

The timetable for delivery was considered by stakeholders to have been "ambitious" in the context of a new UK-wide programme going live three and a half years after its announcement in October 2018, and there only being a less than two years between the establishing the Festival Company as the delivery body and the first live event. During this initial 22-month period the Festival Company had to appoint the independent Board, define and gain agreement for the creative direction of travel, develop and commission the creative programme, build the brand for UNBOXED and the ten projects, implement operational delivery plans across the UK and launch the programme in advance of the first event in March 2022. In tandem, all ten creative teams had to establish their delivery resources.

Several stakeholders noted that programmes of the scale of UNBOXED would typically be delivered over four to five years and often based on an established delivery framework, such as UK City of Culture or a Commonwealth Games.

Festival Company representatives noted that a longer timeframe (more in line with a 'typical' five year period) would have provided additional time to further co-ordinate and integrate activity across commissions, build and develop audiences and take a strategic view in terms of maximising delivery. This is to be balanced with the views noted by representatives of the Festival Company that the condensed timelines contributed to an environment of "making things happen" and "quick decision

³³ DCMS, 2021. [DCMS-sponsored museums and galleries annual performance indicators 2020/21 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97848/dcms-sponsored-museums-and-galleries-annual-performance-indicators-2020-21.pdf)

³⁴ See: [Theresa May announces Festival of Great Britain and NI plan - BBC News](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-45824441)

making” that they considered aided the momentum of UNBOXED delivery, resulting in all projects being delivered within 2022 as originally intended.

In terms of specific examples of impacts of the project timelines, stakeholders from the Festival Company noted that recruitment challenges were heightened by the short timeframes for delivery meaning that roles remained unfilled, and the time spent trying to fill them diverted attention to recruitment rather than delivery.

Festival Company and creative team stakeholders were generally positive about how they delivered their aspects of the programme within the available time. It was identified by individuals and stakeholder groups that many individuals worked long hours, under stressful conditions to deliver the programme in 2022. The impact of this, combined with the external pressures created through media commentary and significant external scrutiny of the project, was reported to have contributed to negative impacts on wellbeing for some individuals working on UNBOXED.

Another specific example of the impact of the project timelines, cited by multiple representatives from creative teams and from the Festival Company, was in relation to the audience engagement within the local communities. As explained in Section 2.2, the ten commissions were selected by the Festival Company and Strategic Delivery Bodies on a portfolio basis, taking account of a range of factors. The Festival Company stated that when making the decisions on commissions, UNBOXED prioritised the delivery of commissions in places that do not as often benefit from major cultural investment and access to creative activities. As such, locations did not always have pre-existing established cultural engaged audiences for large-scale creative programming. Representatives from multiple creative teams and from the Festival Company reported that this meant that the community activities required to develop and engage audiences were more dispersed and required more work locally in advance of physical events to build these audiences.

According to stakeholders, a longer development and lead up to the live phase would have allowed the creative teams to build a stronger engagement with the local audience before hosting the events. It was noted that the benefits of this might have included increased audiences from groups who traditionally engage less with cultural content and greater local awareness, without compromising the budget.

Within the short schedule, each creative team had only a few months to promote their projects. All external communication partners involved in the delivery of UNBOXED mentioned that they felt that the project would have benefitted from additional time to gain fuller buy-in and deep engagement.

Though it should be noted that UNBOXED was delivered within the-determined timetable, the challenges and insights highlight the importance of establishing and communicating timescales early, and re-testing these at key project stages throughout a programme’s lifecycle, such that they are appropriate for the scale and complexity of delivery, or that delivery objectives are adjusted accordingly.

Perception and narrative in the media of UNBOXED as a ‘Festival of Brexit’

The original announcement of the project was made in October 2018³⁵ and was re-confirmed as a manifesto commitment as part of the December 2019 UK general election. At that stage it was referred to as the Festival of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in 2022.³⁶ As part of the original announcement, the following information was stated and published about the project:

“A major nationwide festival showcasing the UK’s unique strengths in creativity and innovation will be held in 2022. Backed by £120 million government investment, the Festival of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will be a moment of national celebration and help attract new inward business and investment. It will deliver an exciting programme of events on arts, culture, design and tech across the country.”

³⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-festival-of-creativity-and-innovation-to-be-held-in-2022>

³⁶ Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2019. See: [Conservative Party Manifesto 2019 \(conservatives.com\)](https://www.conservatives.com/2019/05/manifesto)

This announcement did not reference 'Brexit' or the 'Festival of Brexit,' however the perceived link between the UNBOXED programme and Brexit was established in 2018. Given this topic is widely considered divisive amongst the UK population, with multiple viewpoints, this did create a challenge in the context of a programme with the strategic objective of 'bringing people together.' In a number of media outlets, repeated references were made to the programme as 'the Festival of Brexit'³⁷ and this continued to be cited in coverage over the duration of the UNBOXED programme and as recently as March 2023.³⁸

The perception of UNBOXED as 'the Festival of Brexit' was raised in each of the interviews and focus groups conducted and there were consensus views across these stakeholders that as a factor it impacted the perception of the programme, creating associated operational challenges.

It is important to note, that despite these external challenges around the programme's narrative, UNBOXED was supported by all four Governments of the UK, and their respective administrations. Whilst UK Government invested the majority of the funding allocated, UNBOXED was co-funded by the Scottish Government, Northern Ireland Executive and Welsh Government, who were engaged positively throughout the programme and providing ongoing support.

The views provided by the stakeholders in relation to the perception and narrative challenges are detailed below:

- The issue most frequently cited by stakeholders was the impact on recruitment, retention and establishing new partnerships for the delivery of UNBOXED. Stakeholders reported that many technical experts and creators across the four nations were reluctant to take the "reputational risk" of being associated with ongoing negative media and online coverage that was occurring due to the association with the perception of the project as a 'Festival of Brexit'. Some individuals felt that should they become involved in UNBOXED they would be directly impacted by this coverage; and it was stated that a few withdrew their involvement with UNBOXED due to negative online sentiment around the project. This was despite the Festival Company's strategies to mitigate and to avoid such repercussions. It is also important to note the high volume of applications still being received for the R&D process in September 2020 from across the UK and creative teams for all 10 commissions being established and delivering their stated projects.
- Representatives from the Festival Company and creative teams reported that these challenges in terms of recruitment and establishing partnerships increased the workload of those already involved in delivery of UNBOXED. It was also reported, by individuals within the Festival Company, that the negative sentiment online and in the media surrounding UNBOXED affected their personal wellbeing, and there was a feeling that had there been more positive cut through of the core UNBOXED narrative in the media reporting and other forums to balance the negative, this would have positively benefitted the programme. PR strategy and ongoing media management plans sought to address this. It was noted that substantial efforts were made to counter any negative press, and with over 10,000 pieces of media coverage for the programme, media relations became a resource intensive aspect of the operational delivery of UNBOXED.

Wider issues / external factors affecting delivery

Stakeholders reflected that the challenges noted above were added to by other national and global geo-political events, which changed the economic climate, political landscape and societal context in which UNBOXED was delivered and were understandably the focus of some media attention.

In September 2022, Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth II died with her funeral taking place later that month. Stakeholders noted that, as is required by national mourning guidelines, the delivery of

³⁷ For examples see: [Government pushes ahead with plans for 'festival of Brexit' | Brexit | The Guardian](#); ['Festival of Brexit' can play 'powerful role' in healing UK, organiser says - BBC News](#); [FUK 2022: the cathartic festival Brexit Britain needs | Financial Times \(ft.com\)](#)

³⁸ <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/sunday-life/news/executive-spent-at-least-35m-on-brexit-festival/1393255228.html>

some UNBOXED commissions' activities were required to be cancelled or postponed and there was a need to change the emphasis of others during this period. For example, a number of PoliNations events were cancelled and the 'super garden'³⁹ became a place for reflection and contemplation, some sessions of Dreamachine were cancelled, and the community harvests as part of Dandelion were in some locations impacted.

The cost of living crisis was also noted by UNBOXED Funders and the Festival Company as a wider contextual factor during the delivery of UNBOXED. It was noted that events were free-to-access, reducing financial pressure on households and ensuring individuals, groups and families could access the UNBOXED programme. It was commented that this external environment impacted perceptions of the appropriateness of the allocation of public funding to the UNBOXED programme.

2.4 Findings: How did the processes and approaches adopted to deliver UNBOXED impact who the programme reached and whether it reached all the people it was intended to?

Key themes identified by stakeholders in relation to the internal processes and approaches are covered in turn below. The engagement data for UNBOXED, which outlines the audience of 20.5 million that engaged through physical, non-physical and learning activities are included within the Impact Evaluation Report (in Section 2.2.2.2), alongside wider evidence on demographics and the location of activities across the UK.

Dispersed delivery of UNBOXED events and activities across the four nations

Among the UNBOXED Funders, Strategic Delivery bodies and Festival Company there was broad agreement that they considered UNBOXED had achieved positive cooperation and buy-in from each of the three devolved administrations in addition to the UK Government. There was consensus that this positively impacted the opportunities to deliver a creative programme across all four nations with a wide and dispersed geographic reach. Stakeholders reported that the support in each of the four nations and that the approach taken to delivering the programme, working in partnership with Strategic Delivery Bodies from each of the nations, enabled the delivery of a UK-wide project.

Representatives from the four nations (including from the UNBOXED Funders and Strategic Delivery Bodies) agreed that the relationships created were expected to be leveraged going forward as a successful blueprint for cross-Government / four nation collaboration.

Stakeholders also felt that through the Strategic Delivery Bodies, UNBOXED was enabled to reach audiences across all four nations. Stakeholders specifically praised the role of the Strategic Delivery Bodies in helping manage relationships with local stakeholders involved in delivery, for example local councils, tourism networks and community groups.

Creative teams, the Strategic Delivery Bodies and the Festival Company also noted that the dispersed nature of the UNBOXED physical events and activities across the UK provided opportunities to engage with a wider range of local communities and stakeholders. As shown in the map below, UNBOXED events and activities from across the ten commissions took place in 107 locations⁴⁰, spread across the UK. In addition, the locations of schools taking part in the learning programme and additional community activities are not included in the map below and would represent further expansion of the geographic reach of UNBOXED.

³⁹ The PoliNations garden was a large city-centre garden in Birmingham's Victoria Square, created by the programme, with giant architectural trees and thousands of plants which aimed to transform Victoria Square into an urban oasis.

⁴⁰ UNBOXED used a broad geography to articulate the total of 107 locations across the programme. Several commissions undertook activity in close proximity to one another and numerous activities taking place across a single location or postcode area (including surrounding suburbs, villages and towns) have been represented as one of the 107 locations. In addition, the locations of schools taking part in the learning programme and additional community activities are not included in this representation figure. The total number of unique locations may vary from this representation, for example when including all schools or community event locations, or in reporting per commissioned project.

Figure 2.1: Location of UNBOXED live events across the UK⁴¹



Source: UNBOXED. 2022. Board Report – The Journey So Far

The interactive map can be viewed online here:

https://app.mapline.com/map/map_52490aee/Pz8UP3oUUmSUPz8eP29UPz9PP2QUPwYURwkUPz8UP2czE3doPz

Stakeholders noted that this geographic distribution resulted in relationships being established with local organisations and artists that were new collaborators for the creative teams and might otherwise have been unlikely to form had delivery of the UNBOXED programme been more centralised and focused on larger cities. Stakeholders reported that this is likely to have helped to “leave a legacy” in these locations, through relationships created between organisations and through the experience of individuals and organisations working together, many of whom plan to continue to collaborate in the future. Evidence of outcomes relating to the development of relationships and the potential for future collaboration is reported on in Section 2.3.5 of the Impact Evaluation.

It was noted by Festival Company stakeholders that whilst they considered that the prioritisation of commissions in areas and localities of the UK which have historically had lower levels of cultural investment and access to creative activities had been worthwhile, that this had impacted the volume of engagement that could have been achieved had the programme had a greater focus on key urban cities that are densely populated. Reasons given for this included availability of physical space in town centres, population size, existing cultural infrastructure and the audience development required to build first-time engagement for creative programmes.

⁴¹ The map shows the locations of events, with the numbers in each marker noting the number of individual locations with the area.

As a learning it was noted that with the resource available within each project for delivery there was a limit to the extent to which the programme could have achieved both a focus on major events in large cities and full coverage of the UK throughout a geographically dispersed programme.

Establishing success measures including key performance indicators (KPIs)

Early in the project, including as part of the documentation to inform the R&D process⁴², the Chief Creative Officer used the creative provocation of reaching 66 million people, intended to inspire the creative teams to think ambitiously about their engagement with audiences through physical and non-physical activities and the wider reach generated through the promotion of the programme.⁴³

Festival Company stakeholders confirmed that achieving an audience engagement figure of 66 million was never a formal requirement or target of the programme, rather it was a creative device to focus creative teams on engagement across the UK. This is also stated as a finding in the NAO report⁴⁴.

Stakeholders felt that there could have been a more “strategic and technical communication” of what this number was meant to represent before it was shared more widely, and particularly when referenced publicly. Creative teams and the Festival Company recognised that the 66 million audience figure was symbolic of the UK population used as ‘*a way of encouraging teams to think as big as possible.*’ It was intended to have ‘*just been a tool to challenge rather than part of public messaging.*’ At the point it was repeated externally as a “stretch target” it became a challenging narrative to counter.⁴⁵ There is no evidence that this impacted the final audience engagement figures.

The strategic objectives of UNBOXED were set at the outset of the programme, and further developed into core expected benefits in 2021 and formalised within a Theory of Change and logic model, approved by the Festival Company, UNBOXED Funders, and the Strategic Delivery Bodies

Following the selection of the 10 successful commissions in March 2021, the Festival Company worked closely with each creative team to agree delivery plans, undertake options appraisals and locations and to co-develop audience engagement and learning plans for each project.⁴⁶

A review by the NAO⁴⁷ stated that ‘success factors’ were identified by DCMS in April 2022 to measure the performance of UNBOXED, building on the monitoring arrangements set out in the Grant Agreement between DCMS and the Festival Company.

Following the creative development and operational planning of each of the ten projects in 2021, the Festival Company set detailed audience KPIs during 2022⁴⁸ for each of the commissions. With commissions opening to the public in different months between March and September 2022, these KPIs were set iteratively at commission-level as the creative programme developed.

The NAO report identifies that these KPIs, in aggregate across the 10 commissions, were for an audience of 9.2 million across live attendance and participation, digital and broadcast audiences, and learning. These KPIs were shared by the Festival Company with UNBOXED Funders on an ongoing basis prior to each project going live, and in aggregate in Summer 2022.⁴⁹

Programme monitoring data shows that the final outturn of audiences for the UNBOXED programme was 20.5 million, which exceeds the formal KPI of 9.2 million and within the range set out and agreed with DCMS in the full business case.

⁴² Festival UK* 2022 Research & Development Project Guidance for Lead Organisation

⁴³ National Audit Office, 2022. [Investigation into the UNBOXED festival \(nao.org.uk\)](https://www.nao.org.uk/publications/2022/unboxed-festival/)

⁴⁴ National Audit Office, 2022. [Investigation into the UNBOXED festival \(nao.org.uk\)](https://www.nao.org.uk/publications/2022/unboxed-festival/)

⁴⁵ National Audit Office, 2022. [Investigation into the UNBOXED festival \(nao.org.uk\)](https://www.nao.org.uk/publications/2022/unboxed-festival/)

⁴⁶ Festival Company and commission documentation

⁴⁷ National Audit Office, 2022. [Investigation into the UNBOXED festival \(nao.org.uk\)](https://www.nao.org.uk/publications/2022/unboxed-festival/)

⁴⁸ National Audit Office, 2022. [Investigation into the UNBOXED festival \(nao.org.uk\)](https://www.nao.org.uk/publications/2022/unboxed-festival/)

⁴⁹ UNBOXED Data Dashboards

Due to the iterative nature of the creative development of the ten commissions and the timescales in which UNBOXED was being delivered, it was noted by Festival Company representatives that there would have been benefit in reviewing the KPIs in aggregate on a portfolio basis towards the end of 2021. This would have given greater clarity and achieve agreement across the Festival Company, Strategic Delivery Bodies and UNBOXED Funders on the exact audience targets across UNBOXED by project in advance of the programme of events commencing in 2022.

In late 2021, this could have included further details of where projects were due to be delivered geographically and supporting local population data (alongside the impact of these location decisions on the volume of physical audiences) and the balance of physical and non-physical engagement.

As a lesson for future programmes, publishing online the Theory of Change and logic model in 2021 would have provided an externally available reference document setting out the objectives, activities, intended benefits, outputs and outcomes. Whilst this document was utilised by the Festival Company, UNBOXED Funders and Strategic Delivery Bodies, making this available to the public would have aided communicating the intended impacts of UNBOXED more widely.

Marketing and communications

In October 2021, UNBOXED launched its full programme to the public and a new brand was released.⁵⁰ The campaign activity in this period sought to drive engagement with the programme, and was the start of public-facing marketing, communications, and digital activity to build audiences for the ten projects taking place in 2022. Up to this point, the project had been referenced as Festival UK* 2022.

Programme monitoring data shows that the programme generated total audience engagement of 20.5 million and approximately 10,000 pieces of media coverage.⁵¹ In terms of wider awareness of UNBOXED, based on the national panel survey conducted over the period 31 October – 1 November 2022, it is estimated that approximately 33% of the UK population⁵² was aware of UNBOXED and/or one of the commissioned projects⁵³.

There was agreement among stakeholders that in terms of marketing and communications, the overarching messaging of how UNBOXED was to be communicated to the public and delivered across the four nations could have been strengthened as the programme developed to create a cohesive understanding amongst the public. In particular, stakeholders felt communicating further the STEAM collaborations that underpinned the creative programme, could have furthered the appeal on UNBOXED amongst audiences.

Some stakeholders noted that the scale and complexity of UNBOXED: delivered through a devolved four nation model and with 10 individual commissions each promoted by a different creative team, required a combination of local marketing and communications to drive local engagement, alongside a national brand. This made the integration of marketing and communications external messaging and positioning more challenging with a large and geographically dispersed UK-wide audience to communicate with.

It was noted by stakeholders that both at the programme-level and commission-level, decisions in relation to marketing and communications were also informed by the overall perceptions of UNBOXED (discussed in Section 2.3). Representatives from the creative teams and the Festival Company noted that some individual projects sought to create ownable space (in public communications) in addition to the programme brand (UNBOXED) by promoting an individual project name and identity, and focussing their efforts on the commission-level communications and marketing, at least at the local level.

Whilst it was raised that this may have partially impacted understanding and the connection between UNBOXED projects across the UK, and created a perception of a less joined-up overall programme,

⁵⁰ UNBOED, 2021. Press release. See: [PR - Oct2021 programme announcement - Final.pdf \(unboxed2022.uk\)](#)

⁵¹ Festival Company data

⁵² Based on a representative UK panel sample of 4128 UK adults in October – November 2022.

⁵³ Awareness of commissions was based on awareness of the commission name or a description of the project.

this approach was considered by stakeholders to have been largely successful in building audiences at the local level. Stakeholders reflected that additional time in the build-up to live events would have had the potential to deepen audience's engagement in the wider cultural programme, e.g., through cross-promotion of projects across the ten commissions as a body of creative work.

2.5 Findings: How were resources used, and were they sufficient?

In terms of how resources were used and whether the stakeholders considered these were sufficient. Interviews and focus groups provided stakeholders views in relation to the two key categories of resource identified under this research question - human resources and financial resources. The views of stakeholders on each are set out below.

2.5.1 Human resources

As noted in relation to Research Question 1 (see Sections 2.2 – 2.5), stakeholders identified that both the Festival Company and creative teams experienced challenges with recruitment. Additional factors were identified that stakeholders considered impacted recruitment and created challenges in terms of the availability of resource to deliver UNBOXED. These can be categorised into those that were driven by external/ macroeconomic factors, and those that were internal to UNBOXED:

External factors:

- **COVID-19 pandemic:** As noted in Section 2.3, recruitment was a challenge due to COVID as stakeholders considered that there was a lack of churn at the time among people in permanent jobs, making it difficult to recruit given the scale of recruitment involved, and thus leaving gaps in resourcing. It was noted by Festival Company representatives that this was flagged as a delivery risk for the programme and as requiring monitoring carefully throughout.
- **Timelines:** Two of the ten creative teams identified that the speed at which they had to recruit, particularly as newly set up organisations, meant that they felt there were some limitations to the candidate pools available to recruit from and in some cases the meant they were not always able to recruit as diverse a team as might have been possible with longer lead in times.

Internal factors:

- **Festival Company structure:** Representatives from the Festival Company felt that the organisational group structure did not always benefit the recruitment of Festival Company roles, explaining that in some instances roles were offered for interview to the same pool of candidates as for Commonwealth Games (with those applying for roles often expecting to be working for the OC on the Commonwealth Games and not UNBOXED). It was commented that this meant some of the individuals applying for roles often had experience relating to large sporting events, but lacked experience in cultural programme delivery, extending the recruitment timescales when roles were unfilled.
- **Fixed-term contracts and company location:** The relatively short-term nature of contracts was noted as a challenge for the programme and that people were in some cases unwilling to leave permanent jobs to work on UNBOXED, and that there needed to be more agile strategies in place to mitigate this. It was noted that the location of the Festival Company, in a single location (Birmingham), also limited the pool of candidates that could be recruited from for a UK-wide project.
- **Cross-sector collaboration:** It was identified that for some creative teams and the Festival Company, attracting specialist expertise to cover all technical aspects of STEM (in order to become a truly STEAM collaboration project), was tough. The challenge was in recruiting those with experience of delivering large-scale creative public engagement projects (like UNBOXED) and with expert knowledge of STEM disciplines. It was felt that, for some projects, the limited

specialist representation from across STEM meant that some projects were in the most part driven by the arts with the STEM elements incorporated primarily in the content presented. That said, where projects were designed with a need for specialist expertise, there was a view that this was generally held within the relevant creative teams' supply chain and production workforce which is where it was required, for example delivery teams included engineering specialists and technical directors.

As noted later, in Section 2.6, despite the noted limitations, cross-sector collaboration was generally seen as a key success across the programme.

The internal factors set out are not mutually exclusive to the external factors, and some of internal factors (such as those associated with integration with the OC and or recruitment challenges) arose as the result of decisions that stakeholders noted were implemented either as a direct result of, or in order to mitigate, the impact of timelines.

In addition to the recruitment challenges, an additional factor noted by stakeholders in relation to the level and effectiveness of human resources available for the delivery of UNBOXED was:

- **Resource allocation to the UNBOXED learning programme:** Festival Company representatives noted that the UNBOXED Learning programme was under-resourced centrally, noting that the overall engagement resulted in 1.7 million children, young people and families interacting with UNBOXED. Due to the different curricula in each nation, it was felt that ideally there should have been a learning team in place for each of the four nations to help navigate the education systems in each nation. There was also a central role in coordination across the 10 commissions required. Stakeholders noted how impressive the achievements of the learning programme were given the four nation context and the wider impact of COVID-19 on schools and timescales for early engagement with schools.

Broader points were also made by stakeholders about the impact of the structure of the Festival Company on available resource to deliver the festival – these are covered in Section 2.6.

2.5.2 Financial resources

Due to the early commitment of public funding for the project and these resources being secured ahead of projects being commissioned, all funding was available to be committed to the ten creative teams at the point they were selected.

The funding was drawn down from each of the four Governments directly by their respective Strategic Delivery Body and payments were made to creative teams in accordance with monthly contracted milestones set out in detailed Full Commissioning Agreements.

As noted in Section 2.3, representatives from three of the ten creative teams specifically noted that the sums of money available for delivery budgets were “unique” in the context of wider public funding and the scale of the allocated funding provided the opportunity to come up with ambitious idea and project. In particular, the funding available for the R&D process was welcomed by representatives from all commissions.

Representatives from four of the ten creative teams noted challenges in relation to the allocation of funding, including:

- changes to the amounts originally available for delivery (attributed to irrecoverable VAT⁵⁴ and the Barnett formula⁵⁵);
- the restrictions on commissions to increase budgets through third party income e.g. through sponsorship (though it was noted that having the funding up front saved time as raising additional revenue would have been challenging in the timescales available);
- the time taken to negotiate final funding allocations and contracts for each project detracted from time spent delivering (though bridging payments were made to all creative teams to enable work to continue during this period).

Representatives from the Festival Company stated that in some cases the distribution of marketing across all 10 creative teams and centrally resulted in similar work being contracted out multiple times (e.g. the creation of ten websites) which was considered to be less efficient than taking a centralised approach, but also identified benefits of a more targeted approach to audience engagement and the promotion of each of the individual commissions under their respective creative identities.

Representatives from two creative teams noted that no additional budget for the financial year 2023/24 onwards was allocated for the delivery of legacy activities, and that if there had been longer term funding and organisational resources in place for legacy activity they felt that this could have extended the benefits of the programme. Representatives from several creative teams stated that they had established plans for continuing project delivery beyond the timeframe of UNBOXED, with the Festival Company supporting the preparations for these activities in 2022/23.

2.6 Findings: How have the processes and approaches used to deliver UNBOXED affected delivery of the project, with reference to the key elements of the Festival? What worked well and what did not?

This process evaluation research question focuses on stakeholders' views in relation to the key processes and approaches used to deliver UNBOXED, specifically:

1. Coordination and collaboration across the four nations of the UK
2. Design and development of the programme through an R&D process and ongoing innovation and experimentation
3. Development of the programme through STEAM sector collaboration
4. Programme funded by four Governments, with public funding as the single income source
5. Delivery of the creative programme through ten creative teams, each working in multi-partner groups

These were identified by the Festival Company for specific consideration as part of the process evaluation and reflect what are considered to be the 'key conditions' of UNBOXED.

⁵⁴ Although £120 million had been allocated to the programme, not all VAT was recoverable due to a number of factors including the fact that the Festival Company was almost wholly funded by a government grant. See: [Investigation into the UNBOXED festival \(nao.org.uk\)](#). This meant that some allocations of funding to commission had to subsequently be revised.

⁵⁵ Total Exchequer funding of £120 million was allocated by HM Treasury to the programme in 2018. This £120 million was distributed across the UK, with £93.8m managed by UK Government and the balance managed directly by devolved Administrations: Northern Ireland Executive, Scottish Government and Welsh Government, calculated via the Barnett formula.

Details of the wider processes and approaches highlighted by stakeholders during the interviews and focus groups as affecting delivery of UNBOXED – namely the business structure of the Festival Company and the programme monitoring requirements – are also set out below.

Coordination and collaboration across the four nations of the UK

UNBOXED was funded by the four Governments of the UK and delivered by the Festival Company in partnership with the three Strategic Delivery Bodies, working in collaboration. The creative programme was coordinated by the Festival Company as the central UK-wide body and England Strategic Delivery Body. Belfast City Council were the Strategic Delivery Body for Northern Ireland, EventScotland for Scotland, and Creative Wales for Wales.

Stakeholders stated the collaboration of the four nations and their respective Governments on UNBOXED has set a precedent for future cooperation to host large-scale projects, and there was a view among members of the Strategic Delivery Bodies and UNBOXED Funders that the four nation working had been a success.

In relation to the four nations collaboration, representatives from the UNBOXED Funders commented that much of the inception phase⁵⁶ of UNBOXED was spent securing the buy-in of the four nations to participate and finding agreements around the project's funding and structure. It was recognised by the Festival Company, the four UNBOXED Funders and the three Strategic Delivery Bodies that securing this buy-in across the four nations was challenging and took up a significant amount of time.

In addition, the four nation relationship was complex in governance terms with each Government directly fundings its respective Strategic Delivery Body.⁵⁷ Festival Company representatives noted the detailed scrutiny of the delivery of the Festival Company by DCMS resulted in a significant time resources being allocated to assurance and navigating key decisions, a process overseen by the UNBOXED Board.

Despite the challenges, there was general consensus across all stakeholders that the achievement of securing buy-in and subsequent delivery of UNBOXED across the four nations had been, in their view, a significant positive attribute of the programme. It was felt by the individuals interviewed from the Funders and Strategic Delivery Bodies that having support and collaboration across the four nations, helped encourage creative teams from within the devolved nations to have confidence in the programme and apply to be involved.

In addition, as noted previously, the Strategic Delivery Bodies were considered by creative teams to have played a beneficial role in managing local relationships and supporting delivery, which a number of stakeholders said was all the more important given the geographically dispersed nature of delivery of the UNBOXED events and activities.

Design and development of the programme through an R&D process, ongoing innovation, and experimentation

UNBOXED's stated aim was to bring about creativity and innovation.⁵⁸ There was general consensus across stakeholders that the approach taken to the R&D process was innovative and was not typical of all publicly funded festivals or programmes of events.

Stakeholders within the Festival Company reported that the R&D process was designed to give the 30 creative teams the scope to be ambitious and boost innovation by leveraging expertise across the STEAM disciplines. Representatives from the ten creative teams and from the Festival Company expressed their support for the approach that had been taken with the R&D process and noted that

⁵⁶ The inception phase is defined as the period from the announcement of the Festival in 2018 through to the start of the R&D process in September 2020.

⁵⁷ National Audit Office, 2022. [Investigation into the UNBOXED festival \(nao.org.uk\)](https://www.nao.org.uk/publications/2022/unboxed-festival/)

⁵⁸ National Audit Office, 2022. [Investigation into the UNBOXED festival \(nao.org.uk\)](https://www.nao.org.uk/publications/2022/unboxed-festival/)

they considered it had resulted in greater risk-taking and more ambitious and innovative ideas being developed than they felt would otherwise have been the case.

The impacts of the programme identified in the Impact Evaluation, provide evidence that this process may have supported increased innovation, including the innovative uses of technology (see Section 2.3.6 of the Impact Evaluation), and opportunities for new creative projects, as evidenced by the partners surveyed as part of the impact evaluation agreeing that being part of UNBOXED had increased their ability to secure new investment and/ or deliver new creative projects. Whilst this cannot be directly linked to the R&D process specifically, the role it played in the development of new ideas and approaches is likely to have supported this outcome.

The Festival Company provided all 30 creative teams with a detailed guidance document setting out the requirements to be included in the feasibility submissions and creative presentations. Stakeholder representatives from creative teams noted that, although they appreciated the R&D process, a more specific steer on the required scale and scope of activities they were required to develop, than was provided in the guidance, could have been provided.

The R&D criteria emphasised the importance of creative teams forming diverse consortia of organisations.⁵⁹ Stakeholders noted that had there been no R&D process or fewer than 10 commissioned projects, the programme may have only appointed more established organisations, and that through the approach taken, teams were more likely to deliver something that was original and that the R&D process delivered a 'creative strike'.

There was general consensus that the approach to the R&D phase was considered by stakeholders to be a very successful element of UNBOXED, and one that should be replicated in future creative projects.

Development of the programme through STEAM collaboration

This open call for creative teams to apply for the R&D process required that teams "*develop new partnerships, bringing together established organisations with individuals and emerging talent from across science, technology, engineering, arts and maths*".⁶⁰

The opportunity created for cross-STEAM collaboration and innovation through the requirement for multi-disciplinary teams and the R&D process was another of the main strengths of UNBOXED identified by Festival Company, UNBOXED Funders, Strategic Delivery Bodies and creative teams.

Representatives from four of the ten creative teams stated that the opportunity for cross-STEAM sector collaboration was a valuable part of the programme, and no representative disagreed with this. Evidence in the impact evaluation (see Section 2.2.5 of the Impact Evaluation) supports this and found that partners would be likely to utilise the relationships developed through UNBOXED in the future and that as a result of being part of UNBOXED they have been inspired to do more cross-sector creative projects.

Specifically, it was noted by representatives from a couple of commissions that this characteristic of UNBOXED enabled the commissions to reach new audiences and different groups. In addition, members of the Festival Company also commented that they considered this requirement unique for the creative sector.

The view that STEAM collaboration was successful was not universal across all creative teams, and was also held by some Festival Company representatives who felt there was not sufficient technical expertise and specialist experience from across all the fields of STEM to enable end-to-end and in-depth cross-STEAM collaboration, in all cases. It was felt that many individuals working on the project came from the arts and creative industries. These representatives felt that science, technology, and engineering were mainly used by artists to deliver artistic works, rather than the projects being

⁵⁹ Festival UK* 2022 Research & Development Project Guidance for Lead Organisation

⁶⁰ UNBOXED Project Parameters

inherently cross-STEAM projects. That said, stakeholders did note that some creative teams were very successful at delivering projects which fully reflected fundamental cross-STEAM collaboration.

From a public-facing communications perspective, a number of representatives from the UNBOXED Funders, the Festival Company and creative teams noted that, as a focus area of UNBOXED, more could have been made of the consistent theme of STEAM across the commissions. Festival Company and creative team representatives also noted that they considered that the concept of STEAM was difficult to explain from a communications perspective, which was felt to have contributed to difficulties in communicating this as a theme of UNBOXED.

As a lesson for future programmes, STEAM collaboration was identified to have enabled a more diverse range of organisations and individuals to be involved in the delivery of the creative programme, and to have produced a more innovative and collaborative outcome. In addition, there are lessons that can be drawn in relation to going further to establish fundamental end-to-end collaboration across STEAM, for large public programmes that wish to embed STEAM with their programming.

Programme funded by four Governments, with public funding as the single income source

UNBOXED was fully funded by the four nations of the United Kingdom for a total of £120m. Based on application of the Barnett formula, funding was provided by DCMS to the Festival Company, and the remaining funding was awarded by the Northern Ireland Executive, the Scottish and the Welsh Governments to their respective Strategic Delivery Bodies.⁶¹

Representatives from the creative teams reported that they welcomed the upfront funding, and in particular the funding available for R&D.

A decision was made jointly by DCMS and the Festival Company in the development of the Full Business Case that sponsorship or ticket sales would not be pursued. Stakeholders from two creative teams noted that they felt that if they had been given the ability to raise additional funding, this would have enabled them to deliver more activity. Similarly, Festival Company representatives noted that building a more complex structure with a mixture of private and public sponsors would have helped to raise additional budget, allow a more flexible delivery of UNBOXED, and hire more people to support the planning and monitoring of the commission delivery. However, Festival Company representatives noted that fundraising of this kind would also have required additional time for overall programme delivery. The external funding landscape for the cultural sector and creative industries was challenging in 2021 due to the continued impact of the pandemic and incorporating income targets into the delivery of the programme would have created additional operational risk to delivery.^{62,63}

In some specific cases, third-party income was secured by the Festival Company, Strategic Delivery Bodies or creative teams, for example a contribution of £250,000 from the British Council towards international engagement, while two of the strategic delivery bodies met the costs of their own staff.⁶⁴

As stated in the NAO report, there was less funding to deliver UNBOXED than it had originally planned, due to irrecoverable VAT. By March 2019, HMT had made it clear that there would be no additional funding above the £120 million already allocated for the festival. At the outset of the programme it was not known whether VAT would be recoverable and it was assumed the entirety of £120 million would be available to spend on UNBOXED. By December 2020, it had become clear that not all VAT would be recoverable due to a number of factors, including the fact that Festival 2022 Ltd was almost wholly funded by government grant. As a result, in March 2021, DCMS made a provision within the budget for unrecoverable VAT, thereby reducing the funding it had available for frontline delivery.

⁶¹ National Audit Office, 2022. [Investigation into the UNBOXED festival \(nao.org.uk\)](https://www.nao.org.uk/publications/2022/03/unboxed-festival/)

⁶² HM Government Cultural Recovery Fund, see: [£1.57 billion investment to protect Britain's world-class cultural, arts and heritage institutions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/1-57-billion-investment-to-protect-britain-s-world-class-cultural-arts-and-heritage-institutions)

⁶³ E.g. <https://www.ft.com/content/49de1778-c0a3-4e6b-8e78-42d9a35c9dc5>

⁶⁴ National Audit Office, 2022. [Investigation into the UNBOXED festival \(nao.org.uk\)](https://www.nao.org.uk/publications/2022/03/unboxed-festival/)

Under Government accounting rules and in accordance with the profiling of the budget spend by financial year approved by HMT, creative teams had to up to 31 March 2023 to utilise financial resources.⁶⁵ As a result, there was no funding profiled for legacy activities from 2023/24 onwards.

Devolved delivery of the creative programme through ten creative teams, each working in multi-partner groups

As noted above in relation to the R&D process, the delivery through the ten commissions was considered to have been successful at supporting creativity and innovation, and helping reach locations across the UK with innovative and creative content. Stakeholders also commented that it was through the commission-led delivery of the project that the cross-sector collaborations and partnerships, and the resulting benefits of these, discussed in above were developed. There was a general view that a more centralised approach to delivery would have resulted in a more generic and tried and tested approach and would not have resulted in the breadth of creative content programmed as part of UNBOXED.

Whilst these benefits of devolving delivery to the ten creative teams were identified, and strongly supported, stakeholders also identified some challenges created by this approach. Stakeholders commented that they considered the devolved and distributed approach created additional risks due to the number of creative teams involved and the timescales for delivery, with a significant amount of detailed planning that had to be undertaken across each project. Despite these risks, ultimately stakeholders felt that the approach of delivering through third party commissioned organisations paid off through the creativity it enabled.

A detailed monitoring and accountability process was established for the programme in 2021 once projects were commissioned.⁶⁶ This set out that each creative team and the Festival Company internal team (Corporate Operations, Creative, Marketing, L&P, International, etc.) had to produce:

- A monthly report regarding all aspects of their projects. All internal and commission reports were then combined into a 60-page Monthly Portfolio Report, whose Executive Summary went to UNBOXED funders every month;⁶⁷
- A monthly dashboard of key developments across various areas, including creative, risk, marcomms, timeline, KPIs and budget;⁶⁸ and
- A 'Pandemic Mitigating Actions & Contingency Plan', outlining the health and safety measures for the audiences and staff.⁶⁹

There was consensus among members of the Festival Company that this reporting and the close monitoring of the programme helped contribute to the proper management of public resources, and it was commented that this provided assurance at Board level regarding how funding for commissions had been allocated and spent alongside wider statutory and managing public money requirements.

Creative teams commented that the administration involved to facilitate the level of assurance required for UNBOXED created a volume of additional work that had to be managed alongside other planning and operational delivery requirements, resulting in competing priorities. Specifically, representatives from four of the ten creative teams raised this as an issue, especially during the development and live phase of UNBOXED, when they said they were already working under pressure to deliver the events on time. It was commented by these stakeholders that they considered ideally

⁶⁵ National Audit Office, 2022. [Investigation into the UNBOXED festival \(nao.org.uk\)](https://nao.org.uk/publications/investigation-into-the-unboxed-festival)

⁶⁶ Based on information provided by the Festival Company

⁶⁷ The report was also discussed during the Quarterly Assurance Meeting (QAM), a meeting between the representative of UNBOXED and DCMS which – despite its name - occurred monthly.

⁶⁸ The assurance protocols also included a data hub which oversaw monitoring the engagements of the projects and higher-level meetings of the EMT, SLT and DCMS. In detail, monthly and quarterly management meetings (MMMs and QMMs) among UNBOXED lead teams and quarterly meetings between UNBOXED and the DCMS were set up to discuss various areas of each project, record key approvals across procurement, budget and any significant changes or developments.

⁶⁹ These contingency plans were then included in each project's risk register, and their updates were discussed monthly by the management teams.

there would have been dedicated resource to fulfil the reporting requirements, rather than relying on commission teams themselves allocating budget to reporting from within project budgets.

In addition, as noted in relation to the role of the Strategic Delivery Bodies, one of the biggest challenges identified by the stakeholder representatives related to the work to engage and develop audiences in locations across the UK, for those commissions delivering in multiple locations. Stakeholder representatives felt that creative teams did work with local partners, supported by the Strategic Delivery Bodies, but due to the timescales they were working towards there were limitations to this engagement and it was felt that the creative teams lacked sustained time to build a stronger relationship with the local audiences and partners across the volume of locations covered.

It was commented that this was made more challenging by the diverse nature of the projects being delivered. Representatives from creative teams noted that the ten individual projects, with their own identities, made it more difficult to communicate the concept of UNBOXED as a whole to audiences, and that clearer detail and guidance from the Festival Company in relation to how this could be achieved in a consistent way could have helped in this. Festival Company recognised this in their interviews, particularly in respect of simplifying the messaging about UNBOXED. This finding aligns to stakeholder views reported above in relation to the communication of the consistent theme of STEAM across the projects.

Overall, all ten creative teams successfully delivered their projects across the UK and through digital and broadcast channels. The UNBOXED learning programme brought together aspects of each project's schools, activities and learning resources into an integrated offer. The Festival Company and Strategic Delivery Bodies maintained strong working relationships with the creative teams throughout, underpinned by a programme monitoring framework, with the full programme being delivered in 2022 within the available project resources.

As well as the elements of the process and approach to delivering UNBOXED specifically mentioned within the research question, stakeholders raised the following lesson:

Business structure of Festival 2022 Ltd

As mentioned in Section **Error! Reference source not found.**, the Festival Company was set up as a subsidiary of the OC and was responsible for overseeing the curation, production, and communication of the Festival as a whole across the UK and for managing the delivery of the events and activities in England.⁷⁰

Stakeholders at the Festival Company felt that this organisational structure helped to drive efficiencies through the shared management of the OC and UNBOXED. For example, Board members noted that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) for UNBOXED could use the governance, risk management, internal control and financial frameworks already defined for the OC, instead of having to develop entirely new policies and procedures. Similarly, it was commented that internal management processes such as HR and procurement could adopt the policies already developed and used for the OC.

However, whilst Festival Company representatives noted that this delivered efficiencies and that there were benefits of this structure aligned to the pace of delivery, some Festival Company representatives felt that the group structure created restrictions in relation to the delivery of UNBOXED.

Some Festival Company representatives felt that the Executive Management Team (EMT) structure for UNBOXED – of the Chief Executive, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Legal Officer, Chief Creative Officer and Executive Director – was not optimal in terms of maximising dedicated bandwidth. It should be noted that this EMT structure was already established before the Festival Company was incorporated and the UNBOXED Board appointed.⁷¹ It was noted that, at points, this resulted in

⁷⁰ For more information on the business structure of the festival: [Festival UK organisational & funding structure. \(UNBOXED2022.uk\)](#).

⁷¹ National Audit Office, 2022. [Investigation into the UNBOXED festival \(nao.org.uk\)](#)

competing deadlines and time pressures across the Commonwealth Games and UNBOXED due to the dual role of the EMT, creating some additional internal time pressures for rapid decision-making. It is important to recognise that both the Commonwealth Games and UNBOXED were delivered to their respective planned timescales and budgets, so the organisational structure did not directly impact external delivery from these perspectives.

Another example noted by Festival Company representatives of the impact of the business structure on delivery was in relation to the procurement policies adopted. It was noted that these had been developed for the Commonwealth Games and then used for UNBOXED but the stakeholder felt that was not appropriate for the nature of contracting required for UNBOXED – typically with individuals or small organisations, or artistic commissioning – and that they felt that this led to prolonged processes when the focus of resource should instead have been on project development and delivery.

These challenges were considered by the stakeholders raising them to have been largely overcome through the delivery of UNBOXED, and Festival Company representatives were unable to identify the specific impacts on the delivery and outcomes of the programme.

2.7 Findings: What can be learned from the delivery of UNBOXED – both in terms of what should be replicated, and what could be improved, for other similar programmes (i.e., multi-partner, geographically dispersed collaborative programmes) in the future?

To bring together the information provided in relation to the research questions, stakeholders were asked to identify and share their key learnings from the delivery of UNBOXED, with the objective of providing learning for the planning and delivery of similar programmes in the future.

The main lessons identified by stakeholders during the interviews and focus groups are detailed below, drawing on the wider evidence set out in this document, and grouped under the broad themes identified.

An innovative research and development (R&D) process unlocked creativity

- Stakeholders felt that innovation, creativity and risk-taking had been enabled through the funded R&D process and by delivery through the ten commissions, and this was seen as highly valuable. This was a key element identified from across all stakeholder groups that could be replicated in future programmes and commissioning models. Festival Company representatives noted that in implementing the R&D process, a key learning was that the programme needed to not be afraid of an open (managed) risk appetite, as this unlocked new partnerships, ideas, and approaches to further the creativity of the programme. It was noted that in programmes that support innovation in STEM, funded ‘accelerator’ development processes were typical, and similar funding models could be more commonly extended to the creation of new artistic work within the cultural sector to build on existing development practices.

Collaboration across STEAM and across the four nations

- There was broad consensus that the requirement for collaboration across STEAM sectors and across the four nations was beneficial to the delivery of UNBOXED and the resultant outputs.
- Stakeholders noted the cross-sector collaboration enabled new creative relationships to be forged that informed the ten projects. It was felt that the use of skills, expertise, knowledge, and resources from across STEAM benefitted the creative programme and could support the creation of large-scale public engagement projects in the future. It was recommended that in future implementation, greater efforts should be made to achieve more representative coverage across the STEM sectors at all levels in all organisations. It was noted that UNBOXED benefited from STEAM representation at Board-level, and STEM technical specialists were required in the frontline delivery teams, but could have had greater STEM representation within the Festival Company’s core team and across

all the creative teams from the outset such that STEM was more fully embedded into the creative concepts across more of the projects. It was commented that this would have been more feasible to achieve with more time for delivery and early planning.

- There was consensus across stakeholders (including UNBOXED Funders, the Festival Company, and Strategic Delivery Bodies) that establishing effective cross-nation working was fundamental to the success of delivering a UK-wide programme. As UNBOXED was within an area of policy which is devolved, it can have upfront challenges in securing upfront buy-in, but the achievement of this cross-nation working for UNBOXED was identified as having significant benefits in terms of delivery. The successful funding and collaboration across Governments, underpinned by a Concordat to agree delivery and separate delivery bodies, is a model for how major cultural events can be effectively delivered across the whole UK. In respect of UNBOXED, the buy-in from stakeholders across the nations, the partnership between the Festival Company and Strategic Delivery Bodies, the UNBOXED Board and the relationships established between partner organisations were all noted as contributing factors to the success of the model.

Establishing timescales at the outset

- Stakeholders noted that in the initial scoping of large and complex programmes, careful consideration and consultation is needed with individuals with relevant experience to ensure that timescales set for the programme are proportionate to the nature, scale, and ambition of the programme. It was felt that UNBOXED provided an example of where this hadn't been the case, and of how not aligning these parameters can both constrain the impact of a programme and also negatively impact those individuals involved. Specifically for UNBOXED, it was noted that within the overall timescales allocated for delivery, sufficient time was required up front to establish the four nation governance model before the delivery phase commenced, a factor which overall benefitted the programme.

The arm's length delivery model

- The delivery structure, with support from delivery bodies in each of the four nations, was considered beneficial to the overall delivery of a major cultural programme. Stakeholders felt that through the Strategic Delivery Bodies and the Festival Company, UNBOXED was enabled to reach a wide range of audiences across all four nations and build relationships with local partners.
- Stakeholders noted that lessons could be learned from the decision to nest the Festival Company as a subsidiary of the OC, both positive and negative. The principle of using an existing arm's length body and an existing organisational structure was identified to have supported rapid mobilisation. This was especially important given the tight timescale for delivery. There were efficiencies identified in sharing back-office functions, as well as the synergies of both entities delivering two major events in the same year. There were also trade-offs, such as the impact on resourcing of a team delivering two overlapping events and limitations to the autonomy of the Festival Company in respect of operating as a public sector agency, notable in respect of organisational processes and procedures. These, and other factors, should be considered fully when determining the use of a shared organisational delivery model.

Funding models

- The merits of different funding structures were noted and should be considered when determining the appropriate approach for any future projects/programmes. Stakeholders commented that in the case of UNBOXED and the associated timescales, there were benefits of having a single source of predetermined funding, allocated across the four Governments.
- It was noted, that with more time and without the challenging external factors of COVID-19 and the associated impact on the sectors and the economy, using a combined public sector and private sector funding model, or inclusion of some paid-for ticketed events might have had the potential to enable additional activities to have been delivered in 2022 and/or might have provided a future revenue stream which could be utilised to fund legacy activity.

Communications and positioning

- Stakeholders noted the importance of communicating a clear and consistent vision and narrative to the public in relation to what the programme is (and is not).
- UNBOXED experienced challenges in respect of early perceptions of the programme established at the announcement stage, which required significant resources to challenge and mitigate against. Stakeholders considered that more time was needed to establish and communicate the purpose and build awareness of the objectives of the programme to ensure all stakeholders and the public understand what success looks like.
- With the large geographic distribution of UNBOXED activities, stakeholders noted that there was a balance required between the promotion of individual physical events to local communities living in close proximity to the activity, and the national positioning of UNBOXED as a creative programme of ten projects across four nations. Future programmes should consider up front the communications and marketing needs at local level, alongside national public relations, and strategic communications.
- Publishing the UNBOXED Theory of Change and Logic Model in 2021 could have aided the Festival Company, Strategic Delivery Bodies and UNBOXED Funders in communicating the intended benefits of the programme and how the activities commissioned were designed to deliver the outputs and outcomes agreed to fulfil the strategic objectives set by the programme. In addition, stakeholders noted that establishing and effectively communicating key performance indicators and/or success measures early is important, to enable all stakeholders involved in delivery to be aligned and ensure that resources are allocated appropriately. These actions would have had the added benefit of supporting dispelling misinformation about the programme and to support with communicating how different elements of the programme ladder to a shared vision.

Legacy

- The final area of learning from UNBOXED related to the need to give appropriate consideration and resource to legacy planning at the outset. Specifically, stakeholders noted the importance of defining legacy funding and organisational resource post-programme to deliver longer-term outcomes from a programme, as set out in the Theory of Change. A key lesson identified by stakeholders for future projects/programmes is to allocate adequate time to plan operational and financial aspects of legacy, specifically profiling budget into future financial years beyond the delivery year in 2022. It was felt this would have supported the direct delivery of additional activities in 2023 and beyond that could have extended the benefits of the programme.
- Stakeholders recognised that there are several legacy projects that are expected come from UNBOXED, many of which are in advance stages of design and delivery. These include the continuation of the commissioned and non-commissioned projects, and the development of new projects and collaborations through the relationship developed through UNBOXED⁷². These are being funded through alternative income models and are being self-organised by the creative teams involved in the R&D and the main delivery of UNBOXED, with support provided by the Festival Company and where relevant, the Strategic Delivery Bodies, in 2022/23. This illustrates the potential opportunities for legacy that have been embedded within the development of UNBOXED.

⁷² See Sections 2.3.5 and 2.3.8 of the UNBOXED impact evaluation report for more details of this planned legacy activity.