## Project Title
Championing local voices: Evaluating the impact of creative, place-based projects on adult literacy engagement

### LEAD INSTITUTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of HEI institution</th>
<th>University of Birmingham</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lead regional city</td>
<td>Birmingham ✔, Coventry ☐, Leicester ☐, Nottingham ☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PARTNER ORGANISATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of organisation</th>
<th>National Literacy Trust</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>URL for organisation website</td>
<td><a href="https://literacytrust.org.uk">https://literacytrust.org.uk</a></td>
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### THE RESEARCH PROJECT

#### Overview
Working with an interdisciplinary team of researchers from the University of Birmingham (Creative Writing; Education) and the National Literacy Trust (NLT), this project will interrogate the benefits of arts interventions to adult learners, particularly within a place-based context.

#### Research Context
Recent research into adult literacy has revealed the impact on learners and educators of policies that have ‘reshaped lifelong learning for ... economistic ends’; this has led to a narrow focus on functional and vocational skills rather than on social or individual development (Bowl, 2017).

By contrast, this project will examine more creative interventions and their impact on adult learners’ confidence, motivation and engagement. It will apply to the adult learning community the NLT’s extensive research on the benefits of reading for pleasure (Clark, 2021; Clark and Rumbold, 2006) and build on the identified impact of arts and cultural participation to shape ‘reflective individuals’ (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016).

Crucially, the project will consider the impact of such arts-centric interventions within the context of the NLT’s place-based approach, which the organisation has pioneered since 2013. This approach was developed in response both to the acknowledged impact of people’s local environment on their literacy, and to the increased localism and devolution of government funding. The NLT has now established 16 regional ‘Hubs’ across the country, with each Hub taking coordinated action alongside local partners to promote literacy engagement. In 2019, the University of Birmingham became the first ever HEI to partner with the NLT to found the ‘Birmingham Stories’ Hub, which draws on the University’s research expertise to enhance existing programmes and to develop new ways of tackling the region’s particular literacy needs.

This research project will thus build on the work of ‘Birmingham Stories’, and benefit from immediate access to its programmes and partners, as well as to the NLT’s wider Hub network. The student will participate in the Hub’s research committee and in meetings with the Hub’s partner organisations, which
will nuance their understanding of the local-area landscape; they will also have access to a wealth of local UoB contacts that will facilitate effective evidence-gathering from training providers and partners.

**Research Questions**
1) How can creative interventions bolster self-confidence and engagement in adult learners, particularly within a place-based context?
2) What benefits can cultural, educational and other partners bring to such localised arts initiatives?
3) How can partnership-working ensure that place-based projects accurately represent the diverse communities they seek to serve?
4) How might this kind of work in Birmingham inform the NLT’s national Adult Literacy Strategy?

**Methodology**
The project will be grounded in qualitative and quantitative methods including literature reviews, policy analysis, reviews of existing evaluations of other organisations, questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. The researcher will also have access to tools specifically developed by the NLT to evaluate place-based projects.

The NLT’s literature reviews and evidence about effective place-based working will help to establish a critical framework against which the ‘Birmingham Stories’ initiative can be assessed. This will be supported by engagement with comparable place-based arts projects in Birmingham such as Creative Civic Change, Sampad, Dance Track, Big Local, Birmingham Music Service and Young REP. The student will identify key variables against which to consider the delivery and impact of such projects (e.g. local content vs national only; single-provider programmes vs those with a range of partners; a comparison of the level of investment [financial, in-kind etc.]). They will devise questions for learners, training providers and partners about their perceptions of the inclusiveness of various arts-based activities, and finally consider the wider applicability of the findings of this Birmingham-based project for national policy and practice.

**Provisional Timetable**
**Y1**: Developing critical framework through literature and policy reviews; identifying and making contact with comparable arts initiatives; devising questions based on key variables.
**Y2**: Gathering evidence from learners, training providers and partners; analysing key variables.
**Y3**: Continued analysis of data and early conclusions.
**Y4**: Writing up, including formulating policy and practitioner recommendations.

**Supervisory Team**
Professor Ruth Gilligan is an award-winning novelist and Professor in Creative Writing who has worked with various international arts charities to develop narrative and storytelling methodologies. Dr Helen Breadmore is an Associate Professor of Psychology in Education whose research aims to reduce inequalities that result from low literacy. Dr Christina Clark is the NLT’s Research Director who has conducted numerous research projects into the literacy of children, while Dr Alasdair Flint is currently the organisation’s evaluation lead for placed-based programmes and campaigns.

**HOW TO FIND OUT MORE**
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**Lead HEI Supervisor Email:** r.gilligan@bham.ac.uk