

## **Breathing New Life into Aberdeen's Cultural Scene: A Case Study on Digital Transformation and Sustainability at Aberdeen Performing Arts**

This case study illuminates the formidable challenge faced by Aberdeen Performing Arts (APA) to rejuvenate its offerings following an extended closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With a focus on ensuring a safe, successful, and sustainable return to the cultural life of the city, APA launched the Repair, Rebuild, Revitalise project. The project was supported through awarded funding of £164,680 from the Place Based Investment Programme, this initiative centred on the necessary digital transformation and physical equipment upgrades across APA's venues.

Operating three city centre venues - His Majesty's Theatre, The Lemon Tree and the Music Hall - along with three festivals, a production company, and a creative engagement programme, APA is a cultural hub crucial to Aberdeen's community and civic life. They also act as a ticket agency for more than 50 cultural venues, festivals, and events across the North East, amplifying their influence on the region's cultural landscape.

However, the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 severely impacted APA. With the closure of venues for 18 months and 96% of their 250+ strong workforce furloughed, 88% of APA's earned income vanished overnight. Despite this, their resilience and extensive fundraising efforts ensured their solvency, enabling them to plan for a return to the heart of cultural and community life. The Repair, Rebuild, Revitalise project was a critical component of this plan, designed to help APA encourage audiences back, reach target income levels, and continue to attract the best work to Aberdeen. It was also a crucial part of their commitment to fostering wider participation and attendance from all ages and marginalised groups.

APA's strategic approach centred on their Think Digital and Environmental Sustainability Plans, recognising the need for digital transformation and equipment upgrades. With much of their digital and production equipment nearing the end of its life and now defunct, unreliable, and energy inefficient, APA faced a significant challenge.

Through the Place Based Investment Programme, the Repair, Rebuild, Revitalise project aimed to replace and purchase essential equipment. This would help to secure a sustainable future for APA, a future informed by extensive consultation with audiences and communities throughout the pandemic. Due to the nature of their funding request, no planning permission was required, and APA possessed the technical experience and product knowledge to swiftly install the new equipment. 'Advertising Consent' had been granted for their digital screens, paving the way for the project's successful implementation.

The project's completion marked a significant milestone for APA and Aberdeen's cultural scene. The digital transformation and equipment upgrades helped revitalise the venues, fostering a more vibrant

cultural hub and reinforcing APA's commitment to their artists, audiences, communities, and city centre businesses. This rejuvenation project represents a commendable step forward for APA and serves as a beacon of progress for the community at large.