



*Bluecoat (Liverpool) was one of 40 arts centres to take part in Here & Now, a national project where arts centres worked with artists and their local communities, as part of the National Lottery's 25th anniversary in 2020. Artists Simon and Tom Bloor worked with local school children to design and build 'Platform' a new structure which acted as a temporary event space for Bluecoat's courtyard.*

Looking back on Here and Now, it brought about three fundamental changes at Bluecoat. It made us more confident in outdoor commissioning, it reaffirmed our trajectory in co-commissioning with children and young people, and it increased our ambition for how we can change the public realm of the whole city.

The most exciting change was for our capacity to commission work outdoors, but that came hand-in-hand with a quantum leap forwards for co-creating with children – it gave us new insight and skills that just keep strengthening.

We're an imposing historic building with a large courtyard that sets us back from the street, so our work can appear distant or be completely hidden. But Here & Now enabled us to take our work outside: it became immediate, colourful and accessible to the passer-by.

There are lots of restrictions to what we can do with our building, and we'd become cautious. We've long held ambitions to commission outdoor work but find it difficult to marshal the time and resources because the challenge often seems insuperable. Here & Now helped to clarify what we wanted to do. The openness of the brief allowed us to experiment and the focus on artists made the scope of the commission exciting and artistically ambitious.

We also had space and time. Because of Covid interruptions, we actually had a much longer gestation period which, for us and the artists, proved vital to allow good ideas to grow.

Crucially, we were at an important stage in our co-commissioning journey with children and young people. With Here & Now, we were able to refine our process and also to set out clearly what we wanted as outcomes. It was a success. The experience of 'Platform', our Here and Now project, worked in different ways for the artists, the children and the wider public who used and enjoyed the piece. This has enhanced our ability to make other work that does that, too. (The process for our current exhibition, Let Your Ideas Come Back as Children by Paddy Gould and Roxy Topia has evolved from that experience.)

Buoyed by the huge, immediate public impact of Here and Now's Platform, we've undertaken several outdoor projects – it's like we've gained more spaces to programme. We learnt a lot – not least about the technical and logistical aspects of working outside!

This has also meant the start of a new relationship with stakeholders in the city – now we're working more closely with BID in the city centre and Liverpool City Council, who've identified us as a venue for city-wide festivals. We have been successful in bidding to host events as part of Eurovision and Taylor Swift – the numbers of people coming in from those events have been really amazing. There's also a new 'Cultural Threads' initiative, an artistic pedestrian route through the city which has Bluecoat at its centre. Here and Now has shown what Bluecoat can offer to the city and we are now a central part of dialogue about the future.

Here and Now has really changed Bluecoat. We wouldn't have known that immediately after the project but, looking back, it's increased our public impact, relationships with stakeholders and our ambition to influence this city in ways we didn't see at the time.

*This Most Significant Change story was shared by Mary Cloake, CEO of Bluecoat in August 2024. Find out more about [Platform](#) and [Most Significant Change](#).*