



Project Starfish
Final Evaluation Report – December 2025

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Contents

Executive Summary.....	4
Key achievements	4
Recommendations.....	5
Purpose	6
Method	6
Context.....	7
Progress against outcomes	8
Children and young people are able to experience and learn about their local heritage	8
There is greater awareness of the traditional skills and knowledge associated with sailing on the Broads	11
There are long-term relationships with schools and community groups in Norfolk	13
There is sustainable funding for the Schools, Youth and Community Project Coordinator	15
Relationships with other local funders are strengthened	15
The business model for the Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust is sustainable	15
People who can't visit Hunter's Yard learn about the heritage of the Broads and benefit from an enhanced sense of place ..	16
Progress against quantitative targets	17
Change and progression from 2024 to 2025	18
Challenges.....	18
Personnel.....	19
Funding	19

Pitching the offer	19
Uptake	20
Health and Safety	20
Inclusivity and access	21
Impact statement.....	22
Conclusions.....	23
Recommendations.....	24
Appendix.....	26

Executive Summary

Between 2024 and 2025, Project Starfish has significantly expanded access to heritage sailing and maritime learning for children and young people across Norfolk. Delivered by the Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust (NHFT) and supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the project set out to connect participants with the heritage of the Broads through practical, fully funded sailing experiences.

The project successfully reached schools and youth organisations from areas of social and economic disadvantage, with teachers reporting that between 35–45% of participants were eligible for pupil premium funding. Over the two-year period, more than **1,000 children and young people** took part.

Evaluation evidence demonstrates strong outcomes across learning, confidence, and wellbeing. Participants showed high engagement, curiosity, and recall, while teachers and youth leaders highlighted the inclusivity, professionalism, and enthusiasm of NHFT staff. The introduction of new elements in 2025, including pupil logbooks, information about further sailing opportunities, a visual story, and introductory Royal Yachting Association qualifications, further enhanced learning impact and sustainability.

The project has strengthened NHFT's partnerships with schools, youth groups, and funders, increased its regional profile, and generated advocacy materials to support future fundraising. It has also built internal capacity, by developing the whole team at the Yard and clarifying the essential role of the Schools, Youth and Community Project Coordinator in sustaining this work.

Project Starfish has exceeded its quantitative targets and achieved clear qualitative impact. It provides a replicable model for heritage-based engagement that combines cultural learning, wellbeing, and environmental connection, leaving a strong foundation for continued delivery beyond the current funding period.

Key achievements

1. Access to Heritage

Over 1,000 children and young people have taken part in funded sailing experiences at Hunter's Yard. Participants explored the cultural and environmental heritage of the Broads through practical sailing, boat yard activities, and visits to the Wherry Albion, gaining first-hand insight into local maritime traditions.

2. Awareness of Traditional Skills

Participants developed a basic understanding of traditional sailing and boatbuilding through hands-on experiences and interpretation by skippers and staff. Post-visit reflections showed strong recall of technical terms and historical details, evidencing genuine learning and curiosity about local maritime skills.

3. Inclusivity and Impact

The project effectively reached children and young people from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds, targeting schools with above-average pupil premium rates. Teachers and youth workers reported marked improvements in pupils' confidence, communication, and sense of belonging. Activities were successfully adapted to meet a range of physical, emotional, and learning needs.

4. Community Relationships

The project has established strong relationships with schools and youth organisations, many of which expressed a wish to return. This is also borne out by the number of repeat bookings across the lifetime of the project, indicating a growing network of long-term partners, though continued external funding remains essential to maintain access.

5. Funding, Sustainability and Resilience

NHFT strengthened its profile with local funders, securing support beyond the original National Lottery Heritage Fund grant. NHFT staff and Trustees are particularly skilled in cultivating relationships with funders. Additionally, a new advocacy film has enhanced visibility, helping to position NHFT as a trusted and impactful educational provider. The project has also amplified the positive organisational culture and helped the whole team to develop.

Recommendations

The Trust should continue to reflect and adjust the offer and experience - The Trust should maintain its agile, reflective approach to continuously refine its offer and respond effectively to new opportunities and challenges.

The Trust should build on the legacy of the project to look for opportunities to help young people develop skills – Project Starfish was focused on delivering sailing experiences and raising awareness of heritage boat building skills as well as the Broads heritage and environment. Developing programmes that support young people to gain skills in at-risk heritage professions is a worthy next step in addressing sector-wide shortages.

The relationship with partners, and in particular, the Wherry Albion, is important and should be further nurtured - The Trust should nurture its partnership with the Wherry Albion and similar collaborators, as these relationships significantly enrich young people's engagement with local sailing heritage. In doing so the Trust will also be able to use its influence to help develop and strengthen heritage partners' offers.

The Trust should continue to develop their inclusive approach to equity, diversity and inclusion - The Trust should celebrate its inclusive culture, through increasing diverse representation but also through continuing to use inclusive language and behaviours, and through visible role modelling, to ensure everyone feels welcome and represented.

Purpose

This report summarises the findings of the independent evaluation into the progress of Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust (NHFT) in delivering the approved purposes of their project, Project Starfish. This report considers progress from the project start in January 2024 through to the end of the project in early 2026.

Method

As per the requirements of the brief a logic model was developed to guide evaluation. Through this process the project outcomes were distilled and refined, and these have been used to measure the project's progress. An evaluation framework was also developed to focus data capture on the project's outcomes. Evaluation has drawn upon quantitative and qualitative data. Bookings data has provided information on the number of schools and youth organisation visits.

A feedback survey was sent out to schools. However, the total number of schools visiting is relatively low, and so although a high number of schools returned the feedback, the number of responses is too small to be statistically robust. Given that data sets are relatively small, the evaluation has largely been guided by a qualitative approach and within this framework the survey data provides useful indications. Qualitative data has also been drawn from diary responses provided by some schools following visits, analysed using the Inspiring Learning for All system of Generic Learning Outcomes. The evaluator also observed a visit and carried out a number of interviews and structured conversations with Trust staff, school teachers, youth organisation staff and other stakeholders. Details of the staff and organisations interviewed have been provided in an appendix to this report. Selected Trust staff were also asked to keep reflective diaries. However, quantitative data drawn from bookings information was also considered.

The evaluator also reviewed contextual material such as pre-visit materials sent to schools.

Context

Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust operates out of Hunter's Yard, in Ludham, Norfolk. The Yard was originally founded in the 1930s by the Hunter family. In 1968 the Hunter Family sold the business to Norfolk County Council, who took over the operation with the aim of encouraging young people to sail, renaming it the Norfolk County Sailing Base. The council sold the site in the mid-1990s, and the Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust was established to maintain the operation.

Hunter's Yard is located within the heart of the Broads National Park. The Broads Authority highlights the important role that Hunter's Yard plays in preserving the culture and heritage of traditional sailing, alongside the Norfolk Wherry Trust (located adjacent) and the Wherry Yacht Charter. The Trust supports the traditions of sailing on the Broads by maintaining and operating a fleet of vintage cabin yachts and half deckers (open sailing boats), offering commercial sailing experiences and continuing to promote youth sailing.

On 1 February 2024 NHFT commenced Project Starfish, following an award from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and funding from other local charities (Alan Boswell, Anguish Foundation, and Norwich Freemans). The project recognises the Trust's mission to provide heritage sailing experiences for children and young people and builds on challenges the Trust had recently faced, including the impact of the Covid pandemic.

The sailing experiences offered for children and young people are fully funded through the grant and provide a day-long experience. This includes the opportunity to sail in one of the half decker yachts, visit the Wherry Albion or explore the landscape of the Broads, and take part in related boat-shed activities such as knot tying. The funding also covers a £200 bursary towards transport costs. Broadly, the Lottery funding covers the salary of the Schools, Youth and Community Project Coordinator, skipper costs, and materials, while the hire of boats and transport bursaries are supported by the local charitable contributions.

At the end of the first sailing season, the Schools, Youth and Community Project Coordinator resigned. This gave the Trust the opportunity to pause and reflect. Over the winter they recruited a new project officer ahead of the 2025 season and commissioned an independent filmmaker to create a short film documenting the project and advocating for the Trust's work with children and young people. The new coordinator had particular skills in sailing and in outdoor leadership programmes with young people. Building on the work done by the first coordinator she was able to quickly settle in and move the project forward quite significantly.

Progress against outcomes

The outcomes for the project were distilled through the process of creating a logic model. An assessment of progress has been made by the evaluator drawing upon the evidence gathered. Progress against outcomes has largely been drawn from qualitative data, with the progress against quantitative targets drawing on quantitative data.

Children and young people are able to experience and learn about their local heritage

The timetable for school visits and youth organisations provides opportunities for children and young people to sail in traditional boats, but also to undertake activities onshore, in the sheds and with the nearby Norfolk Wherry Trust (who look after the Wherry Albion). Therefore, the visit is more than just an opportunity to sail and is grounded in the heritage of sailing on the Broads. This programme is further supported by other activities and information about the heritage of the local area.

The sheds have largely been unchanged since the 1930s and are still devoted to boat building and maintenance, providing a window into the heritage of these local traditions. These activities are also explained by display material around the tables where school and youth groups sit when they visit. The environment provided by a visit to the Wherry Albion provides a similarly immersive heritage experience. In 2025, the Trust delivered visits for older school children (aged 13-14 years old) and used this opportunity to provide information about maritime heritage trades, further highlighting this important aspect of local heritage.

The skippers also take time to point out features in the local environment, such as the windmills which were used to pump water. This was particularly commented on by one teacher. Other teachers commented on how well the visit was managed, so that the children were well occupied in engaging activities when not sailing. In 2024 several teachers had prepared materials for their classes to occupy the children who were waiting to sail but mentioned that they did not need to use these activities as the class was fully occupied in the tasks and activities provided by staff at Hunter's Yard. In 2025 the Schools, Youth and Community Project Coordinator prepared a 'logbook' activity book for the children and young people to complete and keep, giving further information about heritage sailing.



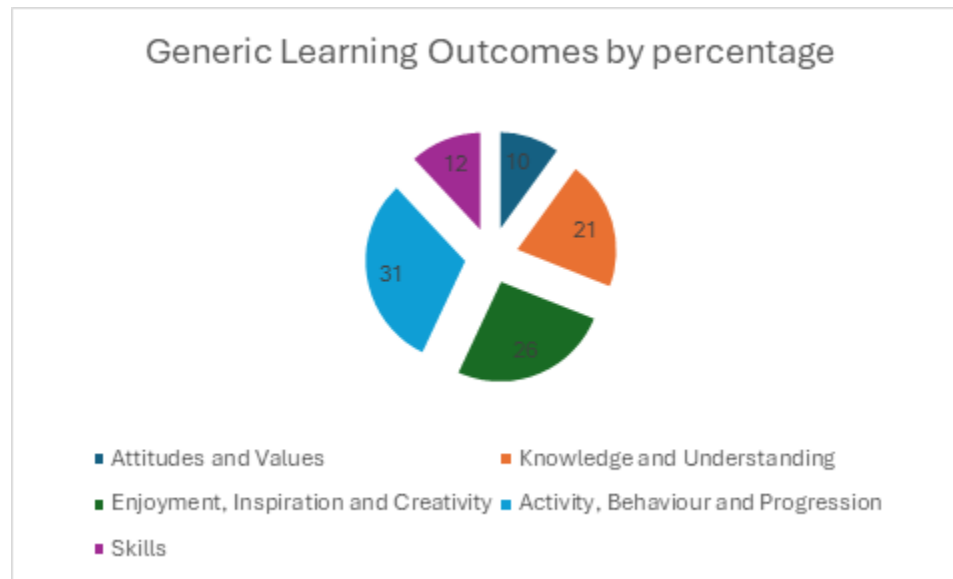
Images showing the classroom and display area of and a view of boats undergoing maintenance

It is clear that children and young people are impacted by this experience and take on board information they learn as part of the experience. Evidence for this was provided by a number of post-visit diaries that some children completed. This detailed level of recall was repeated across all of the children's accounts as demonstrated by the following quotations:

“While group A was sailing we went to see the ships, not any ordinary ships, they were called the Wherry Albion, they were the only 2 types of ships left in the whole world. They carried coal, sugar, grain and other stuff at the time of World War 2. We went inside where they slept. . .”

“When we got to the destination we got out of the bus and walked into the boat shed. There was a man painting and building another sailing boat it was quite impressive to watch.”

The qualitative data provided by the school pupils in 2024 was coded against the generic learning outcomes. A pie chart (set out below) shows the breakdown of generic learning outcomes by percentage. Knowledge and Understanding are represented by 21% of the generic learning outcomes observed, with the greatest proportion being linked to activity, behaviour and progression which relates to the very immersive and physical nature of the experience. Although this data derives from the first year of the project, the feedback from the teachers and observation of a visit also reinforced this finding in 2025 as well.



Pie chart showing generic learning outcomes by percentage

The schools and youth organisations visiting have been particularly targeted as being in areas of deprivation or need and tend to be located in quite urban areas, which contrasts with the rural setting of Hunter’s Yard. This means that despite being in the same county, and at distances of no more than an hour away from the site it is not clear that the pupils and young people would consider the Broads to be part of their local area. In fact, when the teachers and youth workers were asked how the children and young people would characterise their local area, they reported that the children and young people tended to have a very local sense of place, centring on their immediate locality. Teachers variously reported that car ownership was low amongst families and that holidays away from home were relatively rare.

However, although the children and young people had not previously considered the Broads to be part of their local area, teachers did say that the visit ‘opened their eyes’ to their wider locality and helped to expand the children’s horizons. The teacher from at least one school reported that at least three children had taken up sailing as a result of the visit.

Therefore, the evidence supports the conclusion that the visits have helped children and young people in learning about and experiencing sailing on the Broads. In 2024, it was unclear as to whether or not the children and young people consider this to be part of their own local area and its heritage. However, in 2025 teachers and youth workers felt that many of the children and young people had a greater sense of place and ownership following the visit. In many cases older children and staff who had already visited talked about the experience, leading the children in some of the schools asking about the visit in advance. This may have been a factor that influenced the children in 2025 to develop a greater sense of ownership of the Broads as part of their own identity.



A view of one of the wind driven pumping stations



A child looking at a swan from the boat

There is greater awareness of the traditional skills and knowledge associated with sailing on the Broads

The evidence for this outcome is very similar to the evidence for the previous outcome. The responses of the children and young people and their teachers illustrate a greater awareness of skills and knowledge. However, the clear focus of the visits is on the experience itself. In 2024 a

number of the skippers and boat yard staff commented that the children targeted as part of the project are in fact too young to sail on the boats provided by Hunter's Yard and that a short trip is not sufficient to teach sailing skills. The evaluator asked the Chair of the Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust why children of this age were targeted and he commented that the visits were about a fun experience, which can be supportive of children's wellbeing, rather than delivering training in sailing. Therefore, it is important to bear this nuance in mind when evaluating the success of this outcome.

Having said that in 2025 three key developments have served to create a greater awareness of sailing and traditional skills.

1. Young people from one of the youth organisations were given the opportunity to undertake Royal Yachting Association (RYA) qualifications, helping them to learn the skill of sailing.
2. Several classes of secondary-aged students were given the opportunity to visit, with the onshore activities being closely tied to raising an awareness of maritime trades. Staff at the Trust did reflect on the fact that it was more difficult to engage these students in the onshore activities, but this may be more related to the method of delivery than the content: due to health and safety concerns, this information was conveyed through talking rather than through hands-on activities. For future visits it might be useful to trial some alternative hands-on onshore activities for older students. It should also be noted that Hunter's Yard will be attending the school's maritime careers fair, further enhancing knowledge of these traditional skills.
3. During the 2025 season the Schools, Youth and Community Project Coordinator also prepared a handout providing details of how children and young people could access sailing opportunities following the visit, both in terms of other organisations offering sailing and funding for this. Children and parents seemed very keen to take leaflets, but it is unknown how many children and young people availed themselves of these opportunities.

Overall, it is clear that knowledge of traditional sailing methods was delivered through the visits. The children and young people are given opportunities to help with the sailing, pulling ropes and steering the boat. The skippers also explain specific terms. The children clearly retained this information and illustrated by the following quotation:

“. . .my job was to pull the jib rope. That moved the main sail and the other jib rope pulled the other flag called burgee and that did the same job.”

Additionally, the visit to Wherry Albion was also critical in understanding the traditional skills of sailing on the Broads. Here the children and young people are able to understand how the wherries were sailed (by just two people, sometimes children) and relate this back to their experience of sailing the yachts. As noted for the previous outcome the children's recall of their visit to the Wherry Albion is very strong. The Schools, Youth and Community Project Coordinator indicated that there is some interest in looking for funding to support

sailing the Wherry. Given the interest in the Wherry from those visiting and the alternative sailing experience this provides, this would be a worthwhile avenue to pursue.

Based on these findings, it is reasonable to conclude that the visits have been effective in delivering a greater awareness associated with sailing on the Broads.



A view of young people sailing



Learning about pulleys at the Wherry Albion

There are long-term relationships with schools and community groups in Norfolk

All of the representatives of the schools and youth organisations interviewed said they would like to book again in the future. In fact, they were unanimous in their enthusiasm for the activity and their desire to visit again, with some already having booked a future visit. Several organisations said they had told others about the visits and recommended them.

However, all the schools and organisations felt that a charge for the activities would be a barrier which would prevent them visiting again. Some of the schools had related the visit to the curriculum, but this was opportunistic with the main purpose of visiting being to enable the children to have an experience that they would not usually have access to which in turn supported their broader cultural education. Therefore, although the teachers spoke enthusiastically about the benefits of the visit, because they were not explicitly linking the visit to the curriculum, they felt this would be an issue if the trip incurred a charge. Others explained that rising costs for trips in general was a prohibitive factor and that they simply could not ask parents for further contributions, meaning that these sorts of experiences were becoming increasingly rare. Similarly, although the youth organisations saw huge value in the visit, in terms of supporting their objectives around supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing, their own funding situation would mean a charge would be a barrier to them visiting.

The Trust has been successful in securing additional funding to continue the offer beyond the end of the project for another year and a half. However, the short-term nature of funding does present a risk to the ability to maintain long term relationships with schools and community organisations. That said, all those interviewed understood the nature of the funding landscape and were keen to support the Trust in its mission to raise funding and to advocate for the work, showing how strong the relationships are.

One potential solution to the funding situation was to look at alternative, lower cost models, including outreach. Following the 2024 season teachers and youth workers were asked if they would be interested in outreach activities. They were ambivalent about these. Some said they would not use them, others said they would use them if available, but all felt the key value of interaction with Hunter's Yard was the ability to sail. One youth organisation representative did say that just the ability to visit Hunter's Yard, to see the boat building activities and speak to the staff would be valuable. All of those spoken to mentioned the enjoyment of the onshore activities, including visiting the Wherry Albion. Given that the costliest element of the visit is the sailing, in terms of the skipper and boat hire costs, there was a recommendation in 2024 to develop a non-sailing visit. However, in 2025, all of those interviewed and responding to the survey felt that the sailing was the most enjoyable aspect of the visit and a visit to the boat yard alone would not be as appealing.

The teacher from the secondary school was keen to emphasise the importance of the relationship between the school and Hunter's Yard, citing further activity, such as Hunter's Yard attending the school's forthcoming maritime careers fair. He spoke of the importance of broadening the students' horizons and that the relationship with Hunter's Yard has an important role in that. This illustrates the value of the relationships that have been built through this project, which was echoed frequently by teachers and youth workers.

There is sustainable funding for the Schools, Youth and Community Project Coordinator

The Trust was successful in securing matched funding for the project from six local charities. Further to this, staff and trustees have developed a fundraising campaign which has secured ongoing funding for at least another 18 months. The team are highly effective in finding funders and reaching out to them. In 2024 the evaluator met one potential funder that the Chair of the Trust was in conversation with and observed a hosted sail with the representative of another two Trusts in 2025. This personal and direct approach helps staff to demonstrate the impact of the programme to funders and has proved to be a persuasive way to show alignment to funders' requirements and to secure ongoing support.

Relationships with other local funders are strengthened

This outcome is related to the outcome above. It is very clear that NHFT has a good relationship with local funders. As part of the evaluation, the evaluator met the Chair of the Ranworth Trust, who expressed strong support of the work being done at Hunter's Yard. The evaluator also met the grant manager of Norwich Freemans, who experienced a sail and expressed a strong interest in the work of the Trust and support for its ambitions. The Chair of NHFT also described a number of positive conversations with other local funders. It is fair to conclude that the staff and trustees of the Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust are very active and successful in advocating for the Trust and its work.

The business model for the Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust is sustainable

This outcome was explored through work of Bryn Jones Associates who delivered a report in July 2024 containing a number of recommendations. From this Trustees committed to four key actions, which includes developing a five-year business plan, appointing new Trustees with key skills, improving communications between Trustees and staff and setting up a number of working groups. These actions have been completed, and the Trust seems to be working very well. There are cordial relationships between Trustees and staff and an effective can-do culture.

It is worth noting that there is a strong and positive organisational culture at Hunter's Yard, creating an inclusive family feel. This culture has not only helped children and young people feel welcome, but has also contributed to a cohesive team with a strong sense of identity. Through this project the team culture has been strengthened, enabling staff to pull together and be responsive and agile. There were times throughout the project when the staff team had to respond to last minute changes to bookings. They were able to respond quickly and efficiently. This has extended the role of the boat building staff, creating a more resilient team with broad skills.

People who can't visit Hunter's Yard learn about the heritage of the Broads and benefit from an enhanced sense of place

The Schools, Youth and Community Project Coordinator initially prioritised the delivery of the schools and youth sailing visits and intended to explore how to address this outcome over the winter period. However, she expressed some reservations about this in terms of what was possible in the time available.

The project initially proposed the idea of developing STEM focused activities for schools. This idea was tested with teachers who were asked about whether or not they would find outreach resources valuable and if so, what would they be interested in. Universally, teachers reported that the value of the connection to Hunter's Yard was the experience itself. Some schools linked the visit to their study of rivers and said that they would make use of additional resources if they were available, but these would not replace the experience of visiting. Another teacher said that pre-visit materials would be useful in helping to build anticipation and excitement of the trip and a further school explained that the visit was not linked to the curriculum at all but used as a team and confidence building opportunity. There was certainly no strong appetite for STEM resources connected to sailing.

It is important to note that teachers were not looking to Hunter's Yard to deliver elements of the curriculum and that any links to the curriculum were seen as a bonus and not a driver. The teachers and youth workers were universal in their understanding of the impact the visits had on the children and young people's confidence and wellbeing and did not feel that could be replicated through outreach materials.

After reflecting on these findings at the end of 2024, the Trust decided not to continue with the idea of developing outreach materials and instead pivoted to create a short promotional film instead, to both showcase the success of the project and to highlight the heritage of the Broads (a move supported by the Lottery). It remains to be seen how this is used, for example, it may be most useful to show children and young people in advance of visiting, rather than those that cannot visit. However, it is fair to say that access to the Broads has been opened up to people who would not otherwise have visited.

One reflection also relates to the impact of how a visit helps to broaden the horizons of children and young people and potentially counter harmful misconceptions about migration. Many of the schools and youth organisations noted that the children and young people had a very localised sense of place, bordering on apathy and insularity. One school described how this narrow sense of place was feeding into racist attitudes and that a visit to Hunter's Yard was seen as quite adventurous in terms of leaving the town, and that experiences such as this really do help to begin to change attitudes.

Progress against quantitative targets

Project Starfish included an approved purpose to expand the programme of engagement with schools and youth organisations and engage with 400 young people in 2024 and 590 young people in 2025 (990 by the end of the project).

The bar chart below shows the number of school and youth organisation visits by month during the 2024 and 2025 seasons

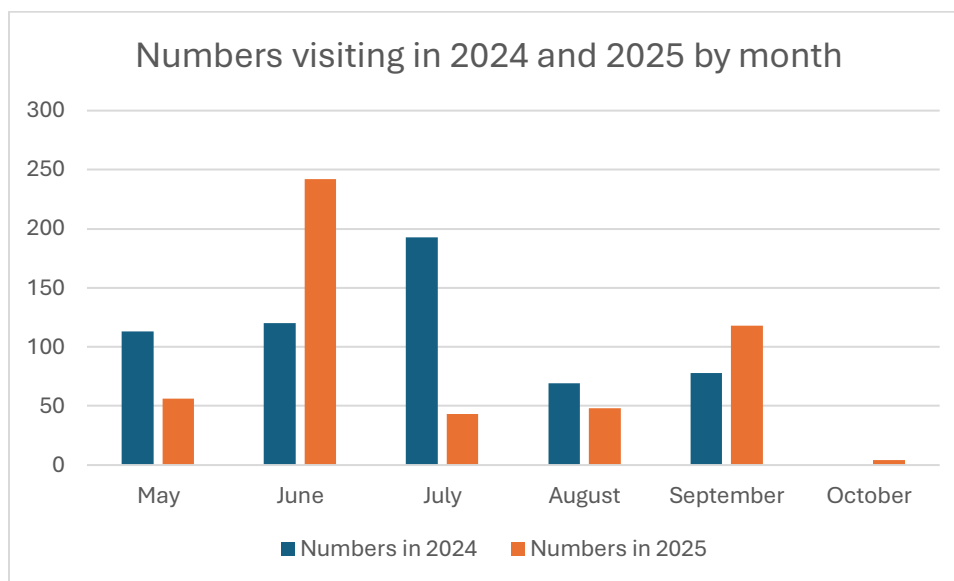


Figure 2. Bar chart showing the number of sailing visits during 2024 and 2025

Over the course of the project 1,084 children and young people have had the opportunity to sail at Hunter's Yard, exceeding the target. It should be noted that the Trust has been very effective in seeking additional funding to help subsidise the Lottery grant, enabling children and young people being able to access the opportunities on offer.

Change and progression from 2024 to 2025

During the 2024 season the Schools, Youth and Community Project Coordinator resigned. This enabled the Trust to pause and consider the most appropriate next steps. One key change that came from this reflection period was the decision not to pursue developing outreach materials. This decision was also grounded in the feedback from schools, which stated this was not something they would particularly value. Alternatively, the Trust decided to commission a film, which would both act as advocacy for the Trust and its work and also enable those who cannot visit (or are planning a visit) to find out a little more about Hunter's Yard and traditional sailing.

Returning teachers and youth organisations did not notice a significant difference in the offer, continuing to praise the good communication and organisation. However, some schools noticed that some of the onshore activities had changed with the schools that noticed this, appreciating both the activities in 2024 and 2025, but liked the variation.

In 2025 some additional materials for children and young people were introduced. These included:

- a logbook to complete and take home
- a leaflet outlining pathways for those interested in taking up sailing
- trialing a sailing experience for secondary-aged students,
- enabling some young people visiting with a youth organisation to undertake RYA qualifications.

The Trust also developed a residential visit. This is outside of the scope of this project and has not been evaluated but does demonstrate a further development that might be pursued as a legacy activity.

There were also some key changes of personnel with a new Schools, Youth and Community Project Coordinator being recruited and the pool of skippers being expanded. This included recruiting two young skippers who have been useful role models, especially in showing the children and young people that others only a bit older than themselves had sailing skills and were earning money from sailing.

Challenges

The Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust encountered a number of challenges throughout the course of the project. These included challenges around personnel, uncertainty of funding, pitching the offer to the differing needs of the audience, uptake and challenges around health and safety.

Personnel

The resignation of the Schools, Youth and Community Project Coordinator provided a challenge. Fortunately, this coincided with the end of the 2024 sailing season and gave the Trust the opportunity to reflect. It also enabled them to release some funding to create the film. At the beginning of the 2025 season there were concerns that there would not be enough skippers to staff the trips. Many of the previous skippers are older and decided to reduce their time due to other commitments. In response to this, the Trust put a call out on Facebook and received a lot of interest, successfully resolving this issue. The Trust has also tried to diversify the cohort of skippers and now have two young skippers (aged 16 and 17 years old).

Funding

Feedback from schools and youth organisations very clearly indicated that although they valued the opportunity to sail, they would not have had the resources to pay for the experience. Therefore, external funding has been critical in order to make the experiences possible. Sources of additional funding were required to support the offer and to secure the future of the Schools, Youth and Community Project Coordinator's role beyond the lifetime of the Lottery funding. However, the Trust has been very successful in both managing the budget and in securing additional funding to continue the opportunity. The challenge of the short-term nature of funding will continue, but the Trust's excellent relationships with its community stakeholders and reputation with funders helps to mitigate this.

Pitching the offer

The bulk of participants taking part in this project were primary school-aged children, visiting as part of a school group. However, some of the young people involved were as old as 25. The feedback indicates that the sailing itself engaged all of the participants, but there were different levels of engagement with the onshore activities. The teachers interviewed were all very impressed with the onshore activities, but the Schools, Youth and Community Project Coordinator noted that some of the young people visiting as part of youth groups preferred less structured activities onshore, valuing the time to relax. However, she was adaptable in her style and was able to make this happen. She also noted that the older secondary-aged school children were harder to engage and this merits some further work to trial how this can work. Finally, the young people taking part in the RYA qualification found the classroom aspects of this a challenge. On the one hand, it helped them to gain a qualification and to practice being in a classroom setting, on the other hand, the aspect of the experience they most valued was the practical elements of sailing. It is worth reflecting on whether or not to pursue a qualification with future groups and if so if this can be spread over a longer time period or the young people just undertake the RYA 1 qualification but not RYA 2.

Uptake

Given that the Trust exceeded their target number of participants at face value, uptake does not appear to have been a challenge. There seems to have been no issue at all in attracting schools, the fact that the offer was free and there was a bursary to have covered transport was an important factor in this.

However, there was a high rate of drop off from young people from the youth organisations and a low take-up from the secondary-aged pupils. In terms of the young people, one issue was getting to Hunter's Yard for an early start. As the young people might be travelling from some distance, getting to the Yard early, during the holiday periods was a challenge for some. Also, these young people faced a number of challenges, including being carers or having additional needs, and therefore, these factors will have impacted on uptake and turn out. It is perhaps wise to develop a tolerance for dropout for young people attending via non-formal settings, but also a consideration of timing might be helpful.

Some of the young people were designated Not in Education, Employment and Training. These young people can face significant barriers to participation and so although numbers are low, impact is high. The Trust have indicated that working with young people Not in Education, Employment or Training will be increasingly important in the future.

Additionally, the staff at one youth organisation mentioned that in some cases the parents were concerned by the idea of sailing and were reticent to give permission and some of the young people were anxious about sailing. These staff felt that the experience offered a safe way for the young people to push their comfort zones and the staff at the Trust noted a number of cases where young people who initially seemed anxious visibly grew in confidence throughout the day. During the season the Trust produced a visual story, which helped neurodivergent and anxious young people to engage. The film will also support young people and their parents understand the nature of the visit and hopefully, will reassure them. However, producing an additional handout of materials in advance of a visit detailing health and safety procedures may provide further reassurance.

As noted previously, the low uptake from the secondary school students relates to generalised fears and anxieties about leaving their hometown. This is part of a wider and complex societal issue. However, the experiences of those who did make the visit will have helped to change attitudes, with those students being able to act as advocates for future visits. Additionally, the film and the Trust visiting the school as part of their careers fair may also help to reassure students ahead of a future visit.

Health and Safety

A sailing experience from Hunter's Yard is very safe. The Trust staff operate stringent rules and procedures around health and safety, and in general the waterways are very safe, with the Broads being relatively shallow. The Health and Safety challenges relate to the requirement for

Trust staff to undertake dynamic risk assessment to deal with unknown issues. In one specific case a young person with a severe wasp allergy arrived but did not have an EpiPen. The Trust staff worked closely with the young person's parents to develop a robust plan on the spot, which enabled the young person to sail.

The other challenge relating to health and safety relates to the older school children's visit. Due to concerns about health and safety, information about boat building was conveyed mainly through talking, rather than hands-on activities. It is worth considering how this information could be safely conveyed in a more active way in future to support the engagement of this audience.

Inclusivity and access

The Trust targeted their offer and prioritised schools and organisations working with cohorts of children and young people experiencing disadvantage. The majority of the organisations taking part were located in urban areas of Norfolk. The youth organisations worked with young carers, young people at risk of substance abuse or affected by substance abuse, and young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The schools targeted tended to include higher-than-average numbers of pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding (for children receiving free school meals or with parents in the armed forces). The average percentage of children in receipt of free school meals in England in 2023/24 was 24.6%, whereas for the schools targeted this was as high as 47%. Therefore, the project has been successful in reaching children and young people experiencing disadvantage.

Some of the schools also reported an extremely mixed demographic, with one teacher explaining that 33 languages are spoken by pupils in one of the participating schools. Others reflected a very low level of ethnic diversity and the challenges that come with that. Many schools also reported high levels of special educational needs and disabilities among their pupils. In one case, a child with an orthopedic boot was still able to sail. Another school valued the ability to bring the whole year group, rather than selecting a small number of pupils, enabling universal access.

Teachers and youth organisation representatives described the trips as accessible and inclusive—not only in terms of the activities, but also the behaviour and attitudes of Hunter's Yard staff. One organisation that works with traumatised young people praised the team's patience and sensitivity. Similar comments were echoed by other interviewees. One teacher also noted the benefit of children interacting with older staff, helping to foster intergenerational understanding. The Trust has also worked to diversify its cohort of skippers, recruiting two young skippers aged 16 and 17, with further plans to diversify further. It is a strength of the Trust that they recognise the ongoing need to keep making improvements to their practice to support inclusion.

In 2025, Trust staff introduced further adaptations to ensure maximum inclusivity. These included developing a visual story and dynamically adjusting onshore activities to suit participants' needs. Some youth groups benefited from a less structured approach, while others thrived in guided sessions. The impact of this inclusive practice was clear, with at least two instances of previously non-verbal young people visibly growing in confidence and leaving the Yard smiling and talking.

Overall, interviewees agreed that the project increased access to an activity that would normally be beyond the reach of the participants. This access was underpinned by Hunter's Yard staff, whose attitudes and behaviour modelled inclusion as a core value.

Impact statement

Between 2024 and 2025, The Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust made significant progress in widening access to heritage sailing and maritime learning for children and young people across Norfolk. Over the two-year period 1,084 children and young people took part in fully funded sailing experiences at Hunter's Yard.

The evaluation evidence demonstrates that the project has had a clear and positive impact on participants' learning, confidence, and sense of place. Qualitative data from surveys, interviews, and diaries shows strong engagement and recall, with teachers and youth leaders reporting high levels of enthusiasm and enjoyment. The activities effectively combined practical sailing with cultural learning.

Developments introduced in 2025, including pupil logbooks, information on progression routes, and opportunities for older students to gain introductory Royal Yachting Association qualifications, further enhancing the project's legacy for children and young people beyond the visit itself. Repeat visits by schools and youth organisations indicate emerging long-term relationships and sustained interest.

The project has also demonstrated strong performance in inclusion and accessibility, successfully reaching young people from areas of social and economic disadvantage and adapting activities to meet diverse needs. Staff at Hunter's Yard were commended for their patience, flexibility, and understanding, with several examples of participants showing increased confidence and social interaction during visits.

Finally, Project Starfish has contributed to the organisational sustainability of the Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust, strengthening relationships and reputation with funders. Overall, the project has exceeded its quantitative targets and achieved substantial qualitative impact. It provides a strong model for heritage-based engagement that combines cultural learning, wellbeing, and environmental connection.

Conclusions

The Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust has made good progress against the outcomes to broaden the access to the heritage of the Broads and increase awareness of the Broads

The Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust have made good progress in delivering their intended outcomes. They have provided over 1000 children and young people with the opportunity to sail. They have also opened up access to and knowledge of sailing on the Broads, widened young people's horizons and helped them to feel more confident. The Trust have also been very successful in meeting the needs to enable sailing for children and young people with a range of social, emotional, behavioural and physical needs.

The Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust has strengthened its relationships with local community stakeholders and funders

The quality and generosity of the offer has helped to develop and cement relationships with community stakeholders, creating a small army of enthusiastic supporters and advocates for the Trust and its work. The Trust have also proved to be particularly adept in sourcing appropriate funding streams and cultivating funders and financial supporters in a difficult fundraising environment.

The project has been less successful in opening up the heritage of the Broads to those who cannot visit

The offer provided by Hunter's Yard is so good that all the participants have been very clear about the value of physically visiting and have wanted the Trust to continue to develop this offer, rather than developing outreach activity. Having said that the film will help to promote access and being part of school careers fairs do provide outreach.

Project Starfish has kickstarted a programme which will have a strong legacy

The offer for schools and youth organisations will continue beyond the lifetime of the Lottery funding. This is thanks to the positive organisational culture and strong relationships that have been developed with both community stakeholders and funders. This project has enabled the Trust to develop new ways of working and deliver organisational change that supports the sustainability of the Trust and the

continuation of charitable and educational work. Throughout the project the team have constantly reflected and innovated, which has strengthened the team and kept the project focused on delivering its outcomes and sustaining its future.

The culture of Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust is positive and inclusive and is supported by a highly skilled and agile team.

Inclusion is a core value for the Trust and this should be recognised and celebrated. Throughout the project staff have demonstrated that they live this value and are good role models. However, it is important not to be complacent about this and to continue to think actively about inclusion and how to demonstrate effective allyship.

The team have also proved themselves to be proactive and skilled in a range of areas, including working with children and young people and in fundraising in particular, the refresh of Trustees, has no doubt helped to ensure the board is resilient. The staff team are highly skilled too, but some explicit reflection on staff skills (e.g. recruiting more skippers with a variety of lived experience or undergoing training to ensure the currency of skills) will help strengthen the Trust even further, going forward.

Recommendations

The Trust should continue to reflect and adjust the offer and experience

The ongoing ability of the whole team (project staff, skippers and Yard staff) to reflect on the offer and make adjustments, both in the moment and at a later date has proved to be particularly powerful. This agile way of working has helped the Trust to respond and take advantage of opportunities as well as to pivot away from work streams and ideas that are not fruitful. This is a real strength of the organisational culture and should be continued and celebrated.

The Trust should build on the legacy of the project to look for opportunities to help young people develop skills

Project Starfish was focused on delivering sailing experiences and raising awareness of heritage boat building skills and the Broads environment and history. The work in the boat yard has been highlighted and referenced throughout the project, but has not formed a core part of the offer. However, the secondary school students who visited in Summer 2025 were keen to have a hands-on experience in the boat yard and staff from

Hunter's Yard have begun to engage with local careers fairs. Developing hands-on programmes which help young people develop skills and address the skills shortage in at-risk heritage skills is a logical next step and legacy for the project.

The relationship with partners, and in particular, the Wherry Albion, is important and should be further nurtured

The visit to the Wherry Albion was clearly extremely memorable for the children and young people who visited. This was evident from the accounts of the visit written by the children of one school following their visit and from the comments of the school and youth organisation staff interviewed.

A visit to the Wherry Albion provides an immersive environment for the children and young people to further learn about the sailing heritage of the Broads, but it also adds to the programme, enabling more children and young people to access this important heritage. Work with others such as the Broads Authority is also valuable.

The NHFT have developed a really effective hands-on way of working with children and young people and will be able to use their influence with partners to help share this approach which will also strengthen partners' offers.

The Trust should continue to develop their inclusive approach to equity diversity and inclusion

The Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust has been really successful in responding to access needs, driven by a commitment to provide an inclusive environment. Recent changes at Trustee level, which have diversified the Board have been helpful and plans are in place to diversify the skipper cohort (through formal call outs, informal networks and partnerships and building a community through targeted sailing afternoons). This is laudable and it is always helpful for a diverse set of participants to see themselves reflected in a staff team. However, equally important are people's attitudes and that a sense of inclusion is reflected in people's behaviours. The staff and Trustees at Hunter's Yard appear to understand inclusion as a core value and ensuring that these attitudes of openness and tolerance continue to be demonstrated explicitly means that the staff are effective role models.

Appendix

The following people were consulted through the course of this evaluation:

2024	
Name	Organisation
Matt Burroughs	Bluebell Primary School
Kelly Woodrow	Cringleford School
Kathy Moore	Friends of NHFT
Toby Whalen	Milecross Primary School
Stephen Lowy	Museum Development South East
Aggie Rothern	NHFT
Andrew Tween	NHFT
Dan Plummer	NHFT
Ezra Bailey	NHFT
Guy Thrower	NHFT
Ian Grapes	NHFT
Martin Gunton (Skipper)	NHFT
Martin Whitaker	NHFT
Neville Khambata	NHFT
Steve Mackay (Skipper)	NHFT
Su Booth	Norfolk Heritage Network
Marie Dawon	Ormiston Cliff Park Primary School
Isabel Cato	Ranworth Trust
Polly Gilham	Spixworth Infant School
Lea Denley	The Matthew Project
Piers Warner	The Museum of the Broads
Martin Hills	Norfolk Wherry Trust
Jade Crowe	YMCA

2025	
Name	Organisation
Sara Ward	Coltishall Primary School
Sandra McAfee	Grant Manager, Norwich Freemans
Adam Riley	Newton Flotman Primary Academy
Ela Keegan	NHFT
Martin Whitaker	NHFT
Dominic Chessum	NHFT (Trustee)
Rebecca Smith	NHFT and Aldborough Primary School
Marie Dawon	Ormiston Cliff Park Primary School
Ryan Sewell	Ormiston Venture Academy
Laura Richardson	St Mary's Church of England Junior Academy
Rowena Cove	The Benjamin Foundation
Alice Stevenson	The Benjamin Foundation
Becky Wood	The Matthew Project
Mark Woods	Town Close School