

Arts Council England - The Next Ten Years - The Conversation, Discussing a future strategy for arts, museums, libraries 2020 to 2030

Arts Council England has been conducting a “*conversation*” which is arts speak for consultation. The word that should have been used is debate. The consultation has been running for 12 weeks and concludes on the 12th April 2018.

The Arts Council asked a number of questions under the following subject headings:

- Looking to the future
- Role of the sector
- The role of public funding in arts, museums and libraries
- Funding strategy - 'great' arts, museums and libraries
- Arts Council England's role beyond funding

I answered the following three sections:

1 Looking to the future

What changes would have to be made in order to ensure the sector makes the most of the opportunities available and is adequately prepared for what the future holds?

The first thing that the Arts Council should do before they even ask this question is to ask two questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?

The answers to these two questions will provide the criteria and the changes that have to be made to get where you want to be.

Secondly what constitutes the sector? Is it the total creative industries sector, that is; film and TV, advertising, architecture, publishing, design and fashion, IT, software and games, and music, arts and culture? I am assuming it is music, arts and culture.

However without the two initial crucial steps the changes that have to be made are:

1 Develop art form policies with reasonable goals and quantified objectives so that the impact of the funding/subsidy/investment can be measured.

2 Ensure a level playing field for funding so that there is equality in funding and the funding is distributed fairly to London and the regions. Ensure transparency in this process by publishing the criteria and the formulae that result in each funding allocation. For example, in 2018/19, Opera will receive a total of £57.1 million of which 32.5% will be spent outside of London. Classical music will receive £19 million of which 55% is allocated to the English regions and jazz will receive a total of £1.6 million of which 30% is spent outside of London; 3.4 million people attend classical music concerts, 2.1 million people attend jazz concerts and 1.7 million people attend opera.

3 Undertake an audit of the infrastructure of the arts in England in terms of venues and especially venues for under represented music's such as jazz, folk music, world music's, artist studios, rehearsal room for music, ballet, contemporary dance rooms. Once the weaknesses of the infrastructure are determined then ensure that they are strengthened.

4 Make it a condition of funding that that all arts organisations meet at least the 33% female requirement for charity/company/board/trust members as set out in the Alexander-Hampton Review FTSE Women Leaders. Additionally ensure representation in terms of diversity and from people with disabilities.

5 The Arts Council stops making funding decisions based on the “bounded rationality” of the past.

6 It would be useful for the Arts Council to look at arts provision in other countries such as Germany and Norway.

7 Finland offers each school child the opportunity to learn a musical instrument at no additional charge. This produces an overall improvement in educational attainment, an introduction to the creative arts, a sense of self-worth and the fostering of tomorrow's informed audience for music. If the UK could offer the same opportunities to every school child in England this would be of inestimable benefit to the children, the arts and society in general.

8 The Arts Council needs a joint action plan for exporting the arts and music in particular with special reference to under-represented musics such as jazz and folk music with the; British Council, the Foreign Office, DCMS, Department for International Trade plus appropriate lottery funds. The recent Heritage Alliance Report might be a useful starting point: http://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/tha-website/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/THARreport2018_Final_Pages.pdf

What are the opportunities and what are the threats for the sector over the next ten years?

Opportunities are:

- A chance to develop art form policies
- Ensure level and equitable funding of the arts
- In terms of BREXIT, to shape and develop an export scheme for the arts
- To look at the supply of musicians, dancers, artists and so forth and to match the supply with available demand with the development of a nationwide infrastructure to make sure that the demand is satisfied.
- To enable funding of internet radio and TV that will provide cost effective distribution points for the arts.
- Leading and supporting education in schools.
- Finally to develop a coherent plan for the arts.

Threats are:

- An inability to develop a coherent and equitably funded action plan for the arts with art form policies.
- BREXIT
- The Arts Council is asked to take on more funding roles for which it is ill equipped in terms of capacity and expertise.

What are the key issues that you think will affect arts, museums and libraries over the next ten years?

- Adequate levels of funding, supported by a transparent decision making process, based on pre-published criteria and formulae.
- A trained work force.
- Access to museum and library collections on line.
- Develop a national marketing plan aimed at those people who do not attend concerts, go to museums or use libraries.
- Next time undertake a scenario planning exercise. The report, Experimental Culture A horizon scan commissioned by Arts Council England, commissioned by the Arts Council from NESTA would have been enormously useful if it had been delivered before this exercise commenced

- Make sure that the arts are embedded into the school curriculum.
- So far the Music Hubs have not been mentioned. Ensure they are adequately funded to deliver music provision in schools

How well equipped is the sector at present to face these future trends, and the challenges they present?

In terms of artistic performance the arts are well equipped however there is always room for improvement in terms of pay and conditions. Where that the arts are badly let down is firstly an utter lack of art form policies and secondly the arts funding bodies are not joined up in any coherent way. Finally there is a lack of a concrete vision for the arts for the performers, administrators and the general public.

Thinking about the key issues the sector will face over the next ten years, what do you think the impact of these will be on arts, museums and libraries?

- Admission charges will have to be levied again.
- The attenders and audiences remain the same and there is little or no growth.

2 Funding Strategy

What are the challenges that some parts of the sector might encounter, and what are the opportunities?

In terms of jazz challenges are; continued under funding, lack of a connected and consistent infrastructure for the live performance of jazz and underrepresented music, a complete lack of any art form policy from the Arts Council. The opportunities are; to develop an action plan for jazz that would embrace the following; promoting excellent music (whether tours, gigs, festivals), developing current and future audiences, leading and supporting education, building strategic partnerships and networks, online distribution and online radio and TV, export UK jazz to markets abroad where there is a market e.g., Europe, North America and the far East.

How can Arts Council England measure their impact in the future?

The Arts Council should develop a plan for the arts with art form policies that have very simple performance indicators that will assist in measuring the impact – but keep it simple.

How important is quality when thinking about which arts, museums and libraries are funded by public and Lottery funding?

Quality is self evident. To put it crudely if the quality of the product is below par then no repeat purchase. However you have to allow for the shock of the new and new product development.

How important is accessibility (that it is ‘for everyone’) when thinking about what arts, museums and libraries are funded by public and Lottery funding?

Accessibility for everyone is crucially important. The public and lottery funds are paid for by the tax payer so the arts should be as widely available as is humanly possible and then some.

Arts Council England’s current strategy is titled ‘great art and culture for everyone’. What does that mean to you?

Absolutely nothing. It would be the same as if the Co-op Funeral Services advertised itself as “Great Funerals for Every One”, or a local accountant advertised themselves “As great number crunching for everyone”, I may be harsh and unkind but the strap line was not particularly inspiring

What should Arts Council England prioritise when thinking about funding?

At the risk of repeating myself, the Arts Council must first ask “Where are we now?” and then answer the question “Where do we want the arts to be?” They might then be in a position to develop a national vision and mission statement for the arts with a strategy and tactics to deliver the vision. However art form policies have to be a crucial part of the strategy

Those under represented art forms get a place in the sun.

Opera receives a disproportionate amount of public subsidy compared to other art form. In a time of continued austerity there are two opera houses in London soaking up substantial public funding.

The Arts Council’s funding decisions are based on the bounded rationality of the past. The lack of art form policies guiding funding decisions has bedevilled the arts in England since the instigation of the National Portfolio bidding process in 2012.

The National Portfolio scheme was an abrogation of the Arts Council’s duty to ensure funding by art form on an equitable basis. The result is that in 2018/19, Opera will receive a total of £57.1 million of which 32.5% will be spent outside of London. Classical music will receive £19 million of which 55% is allocated to the English regions and jazz will receive a total of £1.6 million of which 30% is spent outside of London; 3.4 million people attend classical music concerts, 2.1 million people attend jazz concerts and 1.7 million people attend opera.

Can the two points – ‘for everyone’ and ‘great’ arts and culture – coexist, and if so how?

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3 The Role of Arts Council England

How do you see Arts Council England's role in the sector?

The Arts Council ensures that public funds are invested in the arts in an equitable way. The Arts Council funds companies and organisations to deliver art form policies.

What opportunities of partnership might there be for Arts Council England with organisations beyond its direct funding relationships in the future?

The Arts Council develops an international policy that is aimed at exporting talent in England. However the Arts Council should not view partnerships as a way of outsourcing problems on the cheap.

Beyond funding, what role, if any, should Arts Council England take in the sector in the future?

The Arts Council should invest public funds and advocate for the Arts. The Arts Council should also have a research function that delivers marketing data – Taking Part Survey

Leading and supporting arts and culture education in schools and advocating the opportunity for every school child to learn a musical instrument.

How well-placed would Arts Council England be to take-up roles other than funding?

The question has to be asked first what roles? The Arts Council should stick to its core business which is funding the Arts and it should do it well by ensuring that the clap trap of relationship managers are dropped and you have art form officers with a high level of expertise in their field who also have a reasonable level of business acumen and knowledge. They can read a balance sheet, understand marketing. To do this the culture at the Arts Council would have to change.

Is there anything else Arts Council England would need to do in order to take-up roles beyond funding?

This question is exasperating. How could anyone know as we do not know what roles there would be beyond funding?

What do you think the strengths of the organisation are, and what could it improve?

The Arts Council is supposedly at “arms length” from Government – that is one strength. The Arts Council has helped increase diversity in the arts and helped raise the profile of access for people with disabilities.

To improve the Arts Council the culture of the organisation would have to change and the funding priorities re-evaluated. The Arts Council should undertake a root and branch review of its own capabilities, staffing levels, the culture of the organisation, its grant giving mechanisms, develop empathy with the arts generally and musicians, dancers, artists in particular. Finally cast to one side the perpetuating rationality of its funding priorities. Like the banks some organisations are deemed to big by the Arts Council

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