

WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY ON THE WORK OF ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

MONDAY 24TH FEBRUARY 2014

SUBMITTED BY THE CHIEF CULTURE AND LEISURE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION (CLOA)

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission to the Culture, Media and Sports Select Committee on the work of Arts Council England is made on behalf of The Chief Cultural & Leisure Officers Association.

- This enquiry is welcomed as an opportunity to re-focus the resources available for public support of the arts, taking greater account of the geographical distribution.
- We broadly endorse the current priorities for the Arts Council England.
- Our members are concerned that there is a widening gap between areas of high and low investment; not simply between London and the regions, but also urban and rural.
- It's more than just the money: Places of low engagement do not have the same social capital as London or the core cities.
- Further examination of levels of investment, levels of engagement and social and economic outcomes will demonstrate clear links between low cultural engagement and indices of poverty such as ill-health, low educational achievement and low incomes.
- A key barrier to local engagement is the lack of affordable, high quality product, relevant to local audiences.
- Given the impact of cuts in funding to arts organisations, more resources need directing towards supporting organisational development in the wider arts sector.
- A review of current allocations for artform development and also definitions of the arts would also be welcome.
- Closer partnership working with Local Government using Arts Council funding to incentivise sustained or increased investment from local government should be considered.
- A number of recommendations are made that would help to redress the current imbalance.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.3 Alan Davey recently stated in an article in The Guardian: "The commitment of local government to arts and culture remains vital to the sector, and pressure on their funds is the single greatest threat to a sustainable future for art and culture provision across England. We will continue to work with councils who invest in culture. Given the scale of the funding challenge ahead we will not be able to replace all lost funding, but we remain determined to

find creative ways to underpin ambition outside in the regions – where local authority cuts bite hard”

- 2.4 We suggest that strengthening the partnership with local government is critical if the arts across England are to thrive and contribute to the UK’s social and economic recovery.

3. ABOUT CLOA

- 3.1 The Chief Cultural & Leisure Officers Association (CLOA) exclusively represents senior strategic leaders managing public sector cultural, tourism and sport services. It works closely with central government and key national organisations to influence the development of national policies and to lobby for positive change in the cultural and leisure sectors. It is also a founder and leading member of the National Culture Forum.
- 3.2 The Association is not only important in its own right, but acts as the hub for many of the influential professional organisations working in the leisure and cultural industry. It provides a unique vehicle for cross-fertilisation of ideas towards common goals and plays an important part in delivering a key agenda – a more equal and just society, providing its citizens with high quality opportunities for cultural and leisure that contribute significantly to quality of life.

4. SCOPE, SCALE AND REMIT OF ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

- 4.1 The current mission for the Arts Council is “Achieving great art and culture for everyone” which is laudable and one which CLOA members would support. However, we are concerned that there is a widening gap between areas of high and low investment, and between places of high and low engagement. Furthermore we are concerned that this entrenches inequalities between areas of prosperity and socio-economic disadvantage.
- 4.2 We understand that ACE has lost around 50% of staff in order to meet its financial obligations under the Comprehensive Spending Review. Those places with an already-strong (comparatively) cultural offer report that they highly value the work of the Arts Council and of individual officers. The need to reduce staffing has increased pressure on staff within the organisation, meaning that those places who have little or no contact with their regional offices expect little or no contact in the future. This can only exacerbate the disparity.
- 4.3 We broadly endorse the current priorities for the Arts Council. However, given the impact of cuts in funding to arts organisations, both from local government and the Arts Council England, combined with the pressures on ticket-buying audiences, we are surprised that more resources haven’t been dedicated to supporting the organisational development and financial remodelling of cultural organisations. This is as much for the major institutions as for smaller National Portfolio Organisations (NPO’s), those former Regularly Funded Organisations who lost funding and indeed local government cultural departments.

- 4.4 We would like to see the Arts Council take greater account of the geographical distribution of funding, as well as historical levels of ACE investment and the current 'arts ecology' when making decisions about funding.

5. ECONOMIC AND ARTISTIC CRITERIA FOR FUNDING DECISIONS

- 5.1 Current funding processes and decision-making favour those organisations with a track record of investment, particularly those in receipt of large levels of funding. Furthermore, artists and organisations with less experience and understanding of the Arts Council tend to struggle to navigate the application process.
- 5.2 Creative People and Places (CPP) has been welcomed by those areas who have benefited. What makes it particularly important is the level of the funds, for the first time substantial enough to create a demonstrable step-change, which simultaneously puts the purchase power in the hands of the locality, rather than that of the supplier. However, we would make the following observations:
- 5.2.1 The funding, whilst bigger than previous funds (and very welcome) is proportionately small compared to many of those places and organisations in receipt of regular revenue funding over decades. In some places the funds only touch the surface of the need – and the funds from ACE could be spent ten times over if they are to enable these areas to reach their potential.
- 5.2.2 The funding is currently limited to three years, with no guarantee of further funding. In addition, CPP partnerships have been challenged by the Arts Council to build a demand for the arts which will encourage people to become regular, ticket-buying audiences. In areas of high levels of deprivation, with limited track record, these targets within the timescale are potentially overly-ambitious, if not impossible.
- 5.2.3 Local government was discouraged from having a lead role in CPP partnerships. This meant that many eligible places, where local government happened to be the only partner with the capacity and capability to co-ordinate and lead bids, lost out. Councils reported mixed messages from the Arts Council and generally a lack of understanding about the role of local government as a cultural player. This had perhaps unintended consequences, with local authorities reporting that the process left them disenfranchised or undermined by the Arts Council and that this was not conducive to a positive working environment. Where local government was able to have a role, for example in Blackpool, officers were able to make the case for increased investment in the arts.
- 5.3 There needs to be a review of current allocations for artform development and also definitions of the arts. It is not clear why some are funded (brass-bands, circus) and others are not (comedy, ballroom dance).
- 5.4 A key barrier to local engagement is the lack of affordable, high quality product, relevant to local audiences. Increased funding for regionally-based production, particularly derived from outside the core cities, could help with this. This would also have a range of other benefits, including supporting talent development and retention, strengthening cultural

leadership beyond London and the core cities, and contributing to wider socio-economic outcomes such as place attractiveness, teaching and learning, and wellbeing.

6. GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDING

6.1 We do not believe that the current weighting of funding in favour of London is fair. However we also recognise that this is a complex area and that the disparity is bigger than geography, for example:-

- Funding across and within London is unevenly distributed with the Outer London Boroughs being disadvantaged versus the inner London Boroughs
- In the rest of England, funding is particularly concentrated on the Core Cities: rural areas and smaller authorities particularly struggle to attract cultural investment.
- There is generally a disparity between areas that are traditionally affluent and those that are poorer. We assert that further examination of levels of investment, levels of engagement and social and economic outcomes will demonstrate clear links between low cultural engagement and the usual indices of poverty such as ill-health, low educational achievement and low incomes.

6.2 Funding for Major Cultural Organisations: The fact that the major organisations attract the majority of cultural funding inevitably creates disparities in engagement across the country. The *Rebalancing Our Cultural Capital* report highlights the disparity in cost for a family from Leeds to access the work of one of our national, London-based, organisations compared to one based in London. Alan Davey rightly points out that the national organisations tour. However, touring and outreach is dependent on local areas with the capacity and infrastructure to broker successful partnerships. Areas of low cultural capital struggle to engage with the national organisations and the cost of brokering a partnership, particularly in current climate, is beyond the reach of some places. Touring productions and exhibitions come at a substantial cost and demand facilities and a guaranteed audience base which are beyond the reach of many organisations. For example: V&A major touring exhibitions can cost between £200k and £1m to host, even for those organisations with professional standard exhibition facilities. Touring productions from National Theatre and others can cost between £40k and £70k and require a theatre with high specification staging facilities. Both require the ability to attract an audience of sufficient size to enable the host organisation to break even – without local subsidy this is simply not financially-viable.

6.3 It's more than just the money: Places of low engagement do not have the same social capital as London or the core cities. As *Rebalancing our Cultural Capital* suggests, areas outside London (and even more so beyond the core cities) struggle to access public funding, and also business sponsorship and individual philanthropy. Furthermore, they do not have access to the same range of high-calibre expertise: it can be difficult for organisations beyond the core cities to secure great Board members, and certainly those who have access to strong cultural networks. This has far-reaching consequences.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend the following:-

- 7.1 Further investigation is made into the patterns of Arts Council England, local authority and Lottery investment. This would identify 'cold-spots' and strengthen understanding of the real winners and losers in the distribution of public funds for culture.
- 7.2 Capacity-building in places of low engagement, beyond the admirable Creative People and Places Programme, is a must. This could include a range of the following interventions:-
 - 6.2.1 Funding for Organisational Development. This should be able to be accessed by any organisation seeking to make a step-change both creatively and financially and it should be accessible to any organisation, including local government cultural services. Funds need to be sufficient and appropriate to the scale of the organisation. Investment should be supported with advice on attracting the right calibre of expertise to support the change process. Funding should also continue to be made available to allow arts organisations to invest in developments that make them more sustainable in the long term.
 - 7.2.2 Funding for Regional Production. This is critical in order to ensure the creation of product of relevance to regional audiences; to develop local talent and build regional supply chains and to support artistic development in areas beyond London and the core cities.
 - 7.2.3 Broker partnerships between Areas of Low Engagement and Major Cultural Organisations.
 - 7.2.4 Develop and invest in cultural leadership beyond London and the core cities. Encourage the Clore Leadership Programme and other leadership development programmes to prioritise potential leaders committed to working in places of low engagement and investment. Provide areas of low engagement with additional support to secure the talent they need to develop and grow. This includes further investment in senior cultural leadership in local government, above and beyond Leading Learning and the LGA programme of leadership events.
- 7.3 Further Advocacy and Increased Partnership with Local Government. Use Arts Council funding to incentivise sustained or increased investment from local government. Reward 'rising stars' and seek out area-based collaboration opportunities.
- 7.4 Advocacy across central Government. Increase awareness of the importance of culture and the creative industries to other Government agendas. Work harder to engage the Treasury; DCLG; LEPs; public health; HCA; BIS and DFE. Directing the spend of other departments into programmes with multiple outcomes creates opportunities for innovation; everyone benefits.
- 7.5 We believe that this could be funded through:

- A prioritisation of Lottery funds for areas of previously low investment both outside and within London.
- A reduction of funds for major cultural organisations, phased over time to enable those organisations to optimise their revenue through other sources.
- Commissioning arrangements from other Government departments, agencies and Europe.