



The arts debate: Arts community and stakeholder findings

August 2007
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1 Introduction

The arts debate is Arts Council England's first-ever public value inquiry. It is a large-scale programme of research, consultation and debate to explore what people value about the arts. The arts debate involves members of the public, artists, arts organisations, and a wide range of our other stakeholders. Its purpose is to help the Arts Council map how we can do things differently in the future to create greater value for all the communities we serve.

Overall the arts debate aims to answer the following key questions:

- How is public value currently created by the arts?
- What would it mean for the Arts Council and the individuals and organisations it funds to create greater value for the public?
- How can we balance the aspirations of the public with the needs of other stakeholders, particularly the artistic community and our partners in central and local government?

The research stage of the arts debate began in November 2006 with three internal workshops to explore how Arts Council staff perceive the value of the arts and the role of the Arts Council. We then commissioned a series of twenty discussion groups with members of the public across the country to explore broad public attitudes to the arts and their funding. A summary of the findings from this first stage can be found in *The arts debate: Stage one findings and next steps*¹.

The next stage of the research was a major qualitative exploration of the views of artists, people working in arts organisations and the Arts Council's wider stakeholder community. Detailed findings from this research are available in *The Arts Debate: Research among stakeholders, umbrella groups and members of the arts community* by research agency Cragg Ross Dawson². This accompanying paper describes who was involved in the research and presents some of the headline findings. It also explains how the key issues will be explored further in the final stages of the arts debate.

¹ Available at www.artsdebate.co.uk

² Also available at www.artsdebate.co.uk

2 The arts community and stakeholder sample

In total the research agency conducted 79 interviews or group discussions with stakeholders and members of the arts community. These included:

- 24 interviews or groups with stakeholders
- 6 interviews with umbrella organisations
- 49 interviews or groups with members of the arts community, comprising:
 - 24 artists
 - 25 arts managers

Stakeholders were defined as current or potential partners of the Arts Council, other organisations in the arts funding system and representative bodies that speak on behalf of particular groups within the community. The stakeholder sample included local authorities, corporate sponsors of the arts, trusts, foundations and key regional agencies.

Umbrella organisations comprised a mix of organisations that represent individual artists and/or specific artforms (e.g. types of music, dance and literature) and those that represent or campaign on behalf of the arts more widely.

The arts community sample comprised artists and arts managers in a range of roles and from a variety of artforms. The sample of artists included classical, rock and blues musicians, actors, playwrights, dancers, sculptors, painters, photographers, fiction, non-fiction and poetry writers and crafts people. The sample of arts managers included representatives of theatres, orchestras, galleries, curators, a record label, participatory and community arts organisations and organisations focusing on specific audiences such as young people, Black and minority ethnic groups and disabled people. Every region was represented, and the sample covered artists and organisations working at local, national and international levels. Both Arts Council-funded and non-funded individuals and organisations were included.

Research was conducted by Cragg Ross Dawson and the anonymity of participants was preserved throughout.

3 Summary of findings

The research generated a wealth of information on how those working within or close to the arts perceive the value of their work, their priorities for public funding of the arts and their views of the Arts Council. Below are some of the headline findings that will be explored further in the final stages of the arts debate.

A diversity of views

The researchers found a variety of views and perspectives within the arts community and the Arts Council's wider stakeholders base. Responses were very diverse, and there was little consistency or consensus.

Value of the arts

Participants identified 'intangible' and 'tangible' benefits of the arts, from enrichment, communication and identity to community cohesion, regeneration and positive social change.

Concepts of value

Many artists and arts managers, especially those without a particular social remit or community focus, prioritise the more 'intangible' benefits of the arts. Those with a strong social focus, particularly among the stakeholder sample, tend to assess value according to more tangible, measurable criteria. For many individual artists, self-validation is the most important aspect of judging the success or quality of a work.

Priorities for public funding

The majority of participants agreed on a number of key criteria for public funding of the arts. Quality was seen to be essential in some form (either of the work or of the project) and innovation and effective management were also important for most participants. The more socially focused participants were also likely to prioritise social benefit and audience size and demand. The less socially focused were more likely to put artistic excellence and innovation first and to support the view that decisions about arts funding should be made by judgement and gut instinct rather than by applying objective criteria.

Views of the Arts Council

Knowledge of the Arts Council was patchy and perceptions of our aims and priorities varied considerably across the sample. There was little understanding of how decisions are made and calls for the Arts Council to become more visible and to promote our work more widely.

4 Next steps

This research has provided a valuable understanding of how the arts are perceived and experienced today by artists, arts managers and a wide range of the Arts Council's other stakeholders. It has helped to identify points of consensus as well as some conflicting desires and priorities. The next stage of the arts debate was a programme of deliberative research, where members of the public and arts professionals came together to debate key issues in depth and work to develop some shared principles for public funding of the arts. The results of this research will be published in autumn 2007, and detailed findings and conclusions from all the research and consultation strands will be published towards the end of the year.

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ISBN 978-0-7287-1360-4

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