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# Visual arts: achievements, challenges and opportunities

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Consultation paper appendix

Contemporary art has never been as popular or as high-profile as it is today in England. Major venues and festivals all over the country have transformed the sector in the past two decades, and several visual arts ecologies have emerged in places outside London. Growing visitor numbers reflect an increasing appetite for the visual arts, thanks in part to increased and better-informed media coverage. In 2005–6, 62 per cent of the English adult population attended or participated in visual arts and crafts activities, 43 per cent attended museums and galleries and 22 per cent visited temporary exhibitions. The voluntary and amateur sector was recently estimated to include 1,810 visual arts groups and some 265,000 participants.

The visual arts contribute £1.9 billion gross value added to the UK economy each year, and employ more than 37,000 people. The sector has strong links with other creative industries such as architecture, design, advertising and the computer games business. The annual art market in Britain has been estimated at £8.5 billion – second only to New York. New art fairs in London, such as Frieze and Zoo, have caught the public imagination. Increasing numbers of people are buying art for the first time, many of them helped by our Own Art scheme. The connections between the subsidised and commercial sector are complex and varied, with public and private investors often combining to fund new works, exhibitions and education programmes.

We are one player among many supporting the visual arts, with key partners in local authorities, national and regional museums and other funders. Our investment focuses on the production, display and interpretation of contemporary art, with much of our funding going towards a network of galleries, spaces and festivals such as the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, the Whitechapel Gallery and the Liverpool Biennial. We also fund an array of support and development agencies and invest in tours of high-quality exhibitions and projects by artists and organisations of all sizes, including dedicated touring bodies such as Hayward Touring. We invest in organisations that commission art, while also supporting the Southbank Centre to develop, exhibit and conserve the Arts Council Collection for the nation.

Our 2006 review of the visual arts and the subsequent publication of *Turning Point*, a 10-year strategy, identified a number of challenges for the sector. Among them was the need to address the fragmentation of the visual arts sector, to increase the professional opportunities and diversity of the workforce and to fill specialist skills gaps. *Turning Point* also signalled the need for visual arts organisations to understand audiences and their requirements better and to create more opportunities for people to experience the visual arts outside galleries. Changes in the use of digital technology present further potential in this respect.

Other opportunities are offered by the inclusive and experimental nature of the form. Visual arts practice continues to expand, and it is characterised by innovation and risk-taking – qualities that are in demand across the creative industries. Developments in moving image and new media work, especially, have produced original forms and content, with consequences for rights, licensing and distribution that are likely to have an impact beyond the visual arts. The presentation of art, too, has been characterised by change. Contemporary art has become part of the fabric of public places all over England, and impressive new venues of international standard now exist across the country – including Nottingham Contemporary, QUAD in Derby, Towner Art Gallery in Eastbourne, mima in Middlesbrough and Wysing Arts Centre in rural Cambridgeshire. Galleries have pioneered new, imaginative approaches to reach audiences of all ages, with such success that England is now an acknowledged world leader in gallery education.

Many of our visual artists have an increasing presence globally, and high numbers of students, artists and curators from overseas come to Britain because of the vibrant art practice and opportunities found here. Internationalism of all kinds is increasing, with growth in organisational partnerships, exchanges, residencies, art fairs, biennials, sales, publishing and networking possibilities. The dialogue that results from this influx of different viewpoints helps to create a sector that is rich in ideas. In this diverse and complex landscape, there are many achievements on which to build, and opportunities to seize.

## Our ambitions for the visual arts

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### Goal 1: Talent and artistic excellence are thriving and celebrated

We want to see more artists and galleries excel within the global context of the contemporary visual arts.

We want new partnerships to emerge between arts organisations and the worlds of business, science, technology and higher education.

We want there to be stronger relationships between the public and commercial sectors to capitalise on the role of small-scale and independent galleries in incubating talent.

We recognise the need for improved access to production and workspace facilities for visual artists.

We want to see an increase in the ambition and scale of high-quality exhibitions in this country. For this to happen we know that Arts Council-funded visual arts organisations will need to collaborate more, share resources, co-commission and tour exhibitions. We need to help the sector to identify and maximise key opportunities to showcase the best of contemporary art such as that offered by the Cultural Olympiad.

We want to support the careers of England's artists by encouraging the development of public collections and the habit of collecting art among the wider public. We want to see our contemporary art organisations working with the museums sector to unlock the creative potential of England's historic collections.

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### Goal 2: The arts leadership and workforce are diverse and highly skilled

We want to support the continuing professionalisation of the visual arts sector, building the workforce's transferable skills to increase opportunities for movement between the visual arts and other sectors. We want to see greater collaboration between visual arts organisations on training, peer-exchange and mentoring networks. We also want to strengthen the profile and leadership of diversity-led organisations so that talent is recognised and nurtured in artists from a wider and more representative range of backgrounds.

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**Goal 3:**  
**More people value  
and enjoy the arts**

We want to see contemporary art and artists playing a central role in the life of communities across the country. We want to encourage high-quality art in the public realm. We want to broker partnerships to bring art to new places.

We want to increase attendance to visual arts exhibitions and events and broaden the social and demographic profile of audiences. We want people's experience of the visual arts to be richer and their engagement deeper. We want to see our funded organisations being more responsive to audience needs in their artistic programmes, increasing the opportunities for interaction between artists and the public. We recognise the value of the sector using clearer, more everyday, language to describe the visual arts to non-specialist audiences.

We want to see visual arts organisations working with broadcasters, the media, technology providers and others to create new ways for the public to engage with contemporary art.

**Goal 4:**  
**Every child and  
young person has  
the opportunity  
to experience the  
richness of the arts**

We want to improve opportunities for children and young people across the country to work with contemporary artists and arts organisations. In particular, we want to improve the profile of the visual arts among young people and families from a wider spectrum of class and ethnicity.

We want to see visual arts organisations making use of new creative and social technologies to stimulate young people's appetites, as well as to enable them to participate in the production, display and interpretation of the visual arts.

Major events such as the Cultural Olympiad, festivals and biennials will provide a host of opportunities for young people to get involved in the visual arts.

We also want to see the country build on its achievements as a world-leading innovator in gallery education.

**Goal 5:**  
**The arts sector is sustainable, resilient and innovative**

We want to strengthen the visual arts by encouraging new national and international collaborations and networks. We also want to see greater partnership working with others – museums, higher education, the private and commercial sectors – to develop a more connected and effective ecology.

We want to see improved advocacy for contemporary art, and a greater recognition of the central role that the visual arts play in the cultural life of the nation and in contributing to the creative and knowledge economies.

We recognise the fragility of the new visual arts organisations and the specific needs of current capital developments, and we want to work with partners to support them during their transition to successful enterprises. More generally, we want to support new, more sustainable, business models within the visual arts, and encourage a diversification of income streams. We want to see greater use of shared resources, services and infrastructure and more operational efficiency among funded organisations.

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## What next?

### Proposed areas of focus, 2011–14

Areas of focus	Supporting
Nurture artistic excellence and invest in a network of funded organisations best able to incubate and develop talent within the visual arts.	Goal 1
Increase access to affordable production and workspace facilities for visual artists and provide better training and continued professional development.	Goals 1 and 5
Implement the Creative and Cultural Skills/Arts Council England visual arts skills blueprint to increase the professionalisation, diversity and skills of the visual arts sector and maximise the contribution of the visual arts to the life of the nation.	Goals 2 and 5
Enable more people to enjoy contemporary art by encouraging galleries to diversify their audiences, supported by better and more consistent audience data.	Goal 3
Address the inconsistent provision of opportunities for children and young people to engage with the best of the visual arts, and ensure that the opportunities for engagement provided by the Cultural Olympiad are exploited to the full.	Goal 4
Continue to build the Turning Point national network so that visual arts organisations can work together to implement changes to strengthen the sector, adapt to the changing external environment and ensure future growth and sustainability.	Goal 5