

# Achieving great art for everyone

## Consultation report on the process and the views received: Executive summary

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A report to Arts Council England  
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This report contains a summary of responses to a consultation that was managed by Arts Council England and analysed by Dialogue by Design. The views reflected in the report are those of the respondents who took part in the consultation and may not reflect the views of the Arts Council or Dialogue by Design.

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### **Introduction**

Arts Council England is developing a strategic framework to guide the way it will work with partners to achieve its mission over the next 10 years. It aims to develop a transparent planning and operating framework that can both act as a reference point for investment decisions and also enable the arts sector to work collaboratively towards shared ambitions. As part of the process, the Arts Council ran an open public consultation process, inviting comments on interim thinking in a strategy paper entitled *Achieving great art for everyone*. The consultation ran from 19 January to 14 April 2010. There were multiple methods by which participants could respond, including an online consultation and a range of events. The consultation also involved research with members of the public, including children and young people. Around 2,500 people participated in some way in the consultation. This report gives a summary of the findings from the analysis of all consultation responses.

The consultation process generated a wide variety of comments and suggestions. This report seeks to summarise the responses, whilst capturing as many points made as possible. As a consultation process is very different from an opinion poll, the report concentrates on the qualitative content and only gives rough indications of numbers where this is appropriate.

### **Arts Council analysis of achievements, challenges and opportunities and the proposed vision**

Most respondents agree with the Arts Council's understanding of the achievements, challenges and opportunities of the arts sector and vision for its future. Some emphasise that it is important that the Arts Council has a long-term strategy and therefore welcome the vision document.

There are reservations, however. Some respondents are unsure how realistic the objectives are given the economic climate. Others believe the vision lacks detail and does not give a clear direction, especially for the longer term. Some feel the vision is too general and does not represent an obvious change from the current picture. Some respondents question whether the Arts Council can purposefully combine its objectives 'great art' and 'art for everyone'.

A minority of respondents argue that the assumptions made in the vision are deceptive and that it should take into account the fact that much depends on circumstances that the Arts Council cannot control.

There is a strong sense that the vision should make it clear how the Arts Council will continue to work towards making the arts accessible to all. Respondents emphasise that arts can benefit the daily lives of people and that the Arts Council should promote this. Furthermore, they believe the vision should include art in rural and socio-economically deprived areas.

Respondents agree with the Arts Council's proposals to concentrate on partnership working. Many urge the Arts Council to recognise and support individual artists and smaller organisations, as well as grassroots, community and amateur art. This could include helping artists to find and access suitable workspaces.

## **The long-term goals**

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

There is broad support among respondents for a focus on talent and excellence, with many stating that this should be the primary reason for the Arts Council to fund art. Yet, many comment that the Arts Council needs to be clear about its definition of 'excellence', which will mean different things to different people. This is also true for 'talent' and to some extent for 'art'.

Respondents also express concern about how the Arts Council will judge whether something is excellent art or not. Some argue that the Arts Council should be increasingly willing to withdraw funding from organisations it has been funding for a long time if it believes the work of these organisations is less than excellent. Other respondents believe that the Arts Council should leave more to the judgement of audiences. On the whole, nevertheless, many note that art should always challenge audiences.

Most respondents believe risk and innovation are important for maintaining a strong arts sector. They believe the Arts Council should help to ensure that artists have more opportunities to take risks and create innovative work, even if it is not always successful. Some respondents are concerned that the economic climate will force the Arts Council to focus its reduced resources on established large organisations, and they caution the Arts Council to resist this.

Respondents also tend to agree that the arts sector needs to work in an international context. Those who support this aim believe that internationalism leads to a stronger more diverse sector. However, some feel the strategy is too ambitious on this point and should focus more on artists in England and the UK. Others argue that artists are highly mobile and it may be difficult to keep them in England if conditions for their work are better elsewhere.

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

Respondents believe it is crucial that there are opportunities for artists to develop themselves throughout their careers. Suggestions for achieving this include training courses, mentoring, networking, and internships and apprenticeships. Some feel the

Arts Council should support a structured way of seeking out and developing new talent, while others feel it would be better to work with other bodies that already do this.

Many believe there should be clear pathways for those who pursue a career in the arts, including potential leaders and managers. They welcome the proposals for clear progression routes beginning at school. Some note that clear progression routes and support should also be available to those who become artists later in life, should they want them. The vast majority of respondents support the provision of a range of training and development opportunities for artists and practitioners. These should be accessible and flexible, providing people with different ways to learn and develop.

Respondents from within the arts sector are concerned about the levels of pay for artists and feel this prevents England from being a great place for artists to live and work. People argue that current pay levels do not reflect skills or levels of responsibility, and therefore the arts are seen as a poor career choice. While many state that apprenticeships, placements and internships can be valuable to developing artists, there is concern that these are generally low waged or unpaid. Some encourage the Arts Council to lobby for improved rates of pay.

Many people agree that the arts sector should be (more) diverse, but opinions differ on how the Arts Council could help enhance diversity. Some feel it should be allowed to happen naturally, others support proactive schemes and policies. There is also some debate about the meaning of 'diversity' and whether it is too vague a term. Some respondents believe the Arts Council should target specific groups with particular schemes and funding; others think raising levels of pay and improving career paths will attract a wider range of people into the sector.

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

Most respondents are in favour of making the arts more accessible to a wide range of people. They believe the arts are often regarded as elitist and only for the middle classes. Changing this impression would make more people feel comfortable with experiencing and participating in the arts. Respondents say that attracting a broader range of people requires diverse art which reflects a wider range of interests and experiences. Venues need to be accessible to disabled people, families with pushchairs and those who rely on public transport. They need to be convenient and welcoming. People also recommend affordable tickets, including free or discounted tickets for some groups. Above all, several people suggest, arts should be available locally to make it as easy as possible for people to get involved.

A proportion of the respondents believe that in order to get more people involved, the arts must be meaningful to audiences and able to engage people, rather than just being artistically excellent. They also suggest that the arts should give audiences themselves opportunities to participate.

Community art could engage more people in the arts by bringing work into people's everyday lives, and into the areas where they live or work. Touring could also enable more to people enjoy the arts, particularly where access to the arts is poor, such as rural locations. Respondents believe the Arts Council should stimulate this.

The majority of respondents support further efforts to promote and market the arts in the UK. There are also calls for public broadcasters to include more arts in their programming. New technologies should be used by arts practitioners, and respondents see these as good ways to expose broader audiences to the arts and communicate with them. Many people agree that new technologies will change the arts, although some others believe that the Arts Council is too preoccupied with digital arts and technologies.

Young people and other members of the public think that the Arts Council should support mainstream arts and that public appreciation should be taken into account in its funding decisions.

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

Many respondents agree that it is important for the Arts Council to focus on children and young people. They say that if people grow up with positive experiences of the arts, they are more likely to participate as an adult. A minority, however, question why other generations, especially older people, would be less important. Some people think there is a risk in focusing on young people, as artists and arts organisations could lose sight of their established audiences.

People feel the Arts Council should ensure that all children develop an interest in the arts. They believe schools are particularly important in achieving this, as they have the resources and knowledge that children may not receive at home. People further emphasise that children need to experience different arts on a regular basis. There are suggestions to provide free or discounted tickets to help achieve this. Respondents also believe the Arts Council should encourage more and better collaboration between schools and practising artists.

Children and young people themselves agree it is important for them to experience the arts. They identify themselves first and foremost as arts creators – four-fifths of the children and young people who took part in the consultation say they create their own art at some point. The research with children and young people concludes that, 'supporting young people to develop their art skills is perceived to be the most important action Arts Council England could take in helping to maximise opportunities'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> National Youth Agency, *Achieving great art for everyone – A consultation with children and young people to establish their views on the arts and their priorities for their own future engagement with the arts*, Arts Council England, forthcoming, page 22

Respondents talk about opportunities for young people to build careers in the arts, from school through to higher education and beyond. They believe schools should help young people understand what careers are available to them in the arts, so that more people may aspire to work in the sector. A few of these respondents add that the education system could cover the business aspects and other practicalities of working in the arts sector.

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

It is clear from comments throughout the consultation that respondents understand that the arts sector is going through economically challenging times and most expect the Arts Council will have less funding to allocate in the future.

Most respondents believe that artists and arts organisations should find new income streams. These might include sponsorship, support from larger organisations and commercial revenue, such as catering or retail. Those who talk about this issue think that Arts Council England should support organisations in achieving this.

At the same time, numerous respondents from within the arts sector are keen to emphasise that their work depends on long-term funding security. People say that without secure funding over a period of several years organisations will be less likely to take risks or invest for the future. Those who raise the issue of funding security would like to see more long-term funding agreements, particularly for those producing excellent and innovative work.

Some respondents are reluctant to adopt new business models, with a few adding that their current models are efficient. Others are concerned that artists could lose their artistic freedom if they need to take business objectives into account. However, others agree that the sector needs these to survive the recession and this might be a necessary way forward.

## **Realising the vision**

### **Partnership working**

Respondents see the Arts Council as well placed to help artists and arts organisations to work together. People in the arts sector perceive there to be few successful partnerships and therefore believe there is potential for more collaborative working. They believe many artists and arts organisations need help to realise partnerships with others, and suggest that the Arts Council can make a difference as a broker or facilitator. Yet, respondents from the arts sector clearly resist the idea of the Arts Council imposing partnerships on organisations.

According to a number of respondents from both the arts sector and other sectors, the Arts Council should also help artists and arts organisations to connect with schools, businesses, local authorities and other potential partners. Such links could help artists and arts organisations access new audiences and new sources of funding.

Respondents working in local and regional government, as well as people in the arts sector, see working with local authorities in particular as a crucial part of the Arts Council's task. Those who work in local or regional government say that the Arts Council should approach them as equal partners.

In addition, respondents suggest several (specific) organisations they believe the Arts Council should seek to work with more closely. These include commercial and third sector organisations, international organisations and, notably, media and broadcasting organisations. People see the latter as crucial to developing and educating audiences for the arts.

A number of respondents feel the Arts Council should be clearer about how it wants partnerships to work. They argue that partnerships may mean different things to different people and the strategy provides little detail.

Beyond the Arts Council itself, there is great support for more partnership working within the arts. Respondents from the arts sector are keen to see more collaborative working among artists and arts organisations as well as partnerships that involve the Arts Council. They emphasise that partnerships are inevitable in times of reduced funding. There is a common belief that partnership working is likely to be beneficial to those involved, as it can lead to mutual learning, artistic innovation and efficiency savings. Some respondents, however, are concerned about the cost of, and the effort involved in, the development of new partnerships. A few people note that partnership working in itself is not a guarantee for success.

A substantial number of respondents, mostly from arts organisations and local authorities, say that in order to be successful, partnerships need to be both flexible and genuinely two-way. People generally believe it is a good idea for larger and smaller organisations to work together in partnerships that benefit both. Some respondents warn that larger (funded) organisations should not dominate such partnerships, and worry that individual artists and smaller organisations may lose out if the Arts Council concentrates its funding on those in partnerships.

There is strong support for collaborative working at local level. Several respondents highlight the potential benefits of local networks and local partnerships – for artists as well as audiences.

### **New funding programmes**

Respondents are favourable towards more flexible funding structures, but many would like the Arts Council to be clearer about this. There is a sense that the Arts Council should give priority to artists who create excellent art and that less funding should be spent on buildings and administration. Many respondents appeal to the Arts Council to monitor funding and end it when organisations fail to deliver good-quality work.

Several respondents call on the Arts Council to fund more smaller organisations and individual artists, as well as school, community and grassroots initiatives, as opposed to large organisations or big events.

Respondents are keen to point out that different organisations have different requirements with regard to funding terms and conditions. For example, some stress that various arts organisations need long-term funding to plan ahead.

The response to the proposed proactive funding programme is mixed. Although some believe it would enable the Arts Council to shape the English arts sector according to its vision, others worry about freedom of expression and fairness between big and small organisations.

Respondents from regularly funded organisations are concerned about the suggestion of changing the system, but non-regularly funded organisations welcome the revision, saying it may result in a fairer funding system. They claim that a larger number of funded organisations, together with reduced funds for big organisations, could attract more funding and revenues from diverse sources.

### **Role of Arts Council England**

Respondents believe the Arts Council has an important role to fulfil as an advocate for the sector, lobbying with central and local government and securing funding. In a time where funds for the arts are likely to diminish, they feel it is necessary that the Arts Council makes the case for the arts. People suggest that the Arts Council should target those government departments responsible for culture and the arts as well as other departments. In this regard, health authorities are mentioned repeatedly.

Throughout the consultation there are many comments about the Arts Council's way of working. Many believe Arts Council England's regional approach is being eroded, and are worried about this. Some respondents think the Arts Council can be out of touch, bureaucratic and aloof, and encourage it to improve its communication and relationships with artists and art organisations. There are suggestions that the Arts Council should have more artist involvement in its management. A number of people believe Arts Council staff could be better informed and more skilled, as well as more representative of society at large.

### **Conclusion**

Stakeholders generally believe that *Achieving great art for everyone* is an important step in the right direction and would like Arts Council England to continue the development of its long-term strategy. At the same time, they give some clear signals urging the Arts Council to review or clarify some elements of the strategy – and the Arts Council will need to consider doing so as it finalises its plans.