

Turning Point network

A national network, for a stronger visual arts.

Summary

Arts Council England is working with a range of partners across England to establish the Turning Point network, a national network of regional visual arts groups made up of individual artists, independents, and organisations who share a stake in the future development of the visual arts sector.

This is a pilot project. It aims to test approaches to partnership working and collaboration, and to identify how a national network can help to achieve Turning Point's mission: to strengthen the visual arts.

This document aims to provide information about the background, context and method of delivery. It also provides an overview of progress to-date within each of the regional groups.

Background and context

Published in 2006, Turning Point is a 10-year strategy for the visual arts in England. It was the final outcome of the Visual Arts Review, the largest ever review of its kind, and was written in consultation with leaders of the visual arts, up and down the country.

Turning Point recognises a vibrant, talented and dynamic visual arts sector that has experienced significant growth since the mid-nineties. It also sets out a number of ways the sector can develop further.

Since the strategy was published, Arts Council England and its partners have been preparing the best possible environment for the full realisation of the Turning Point mission: to strengthen the visual arts.

As part of this process people working in the visual arts, across the country, have been coming together to form regional visual arts groups with a view to defining and delivering a shared vision for growth and change.

Crucially, this constellation of groups connects up to form the national Turning Point network: an ecology of mutually dependant partners cooperating locally, regionally, nationally and internationally for the benefit of artists, arts organisations and audiences, present and future.

Turning Point identifies fragmentation as a key and immediate challenge for the visual arts to overcome. By establishing a network of this kind the sector aims to improve working relationships and foster a culture where knowledge, skills and resources are shared for the benefit of the visual arts as a whole.

Once established, the Turning Point network will be a hub for intelligence and a place where future thinking is formed. This will ensure that the development of policy is driven by the sector, and will enable joined up advocacy on behalf of the visual arts.

It is Arts Council England's ambition that the national network will lead on developing the next 10-year strategy for the visual arts in England. This move towards lateral and disbursed policy making will require a change in culture and behaviour. Reciprocal relationships across the network must replace traditionally vertical forms of interaction. Focus must shift away from individual concerns (local, regional, public, private, discipline specific etc.) towards shared aspirations for the sector, defined by the sector. Respect for a wide range of skills, experience and perspectives (individual artists, curators, technicians, public institutions, commercial galleries, academics, teachers etc.) will be more important than ever before. Establishing the Turning Point network is the first step in a process that will lead to the necessary change in culture.

In parallel to the development of regional visual arts groups, several national Turning Point initiatives have begun, addressing key issues including:

- developing national and regional collections of contemporary art
- formulating a blueprint for workforce development, and
- building contemporary art markets outside of London.

It is the role of National Coordinator, Turning Point for Arts Council England, Simon Zimmerman, to ensure that these activities are informing and informed by work across the Turning Point network. The coordinator is also responsible for monitoring progress across the national network, ensuring knowledge and learning is being captured and shared effectively.

The national network

Establishing a national network of regional Turning Point groups will result in a visual arts sector that is:

- better connected and more cohesive
- confident about sharing knowledge and resources
- working together towards a shared vision, and
- stronger as a whole.

This will be manifest in:

- better relationships and increased collaboration
- more resource sharing and additional capacity
- greater visibility and influence (beyond the visual arts)
- new non-arts partnerships
- more and better used intelligence
- a powerful and resonant story about the visual arts in England

- transparent and trusted decision making, and
- clear alignment of policy and planning.

This is a pilot project that began in April 2008 and will continue until March 2011. Arts Council England has agreed funding for these groups during this pilot period. Funding is being used to sustain the operation of the network of groups, and to seed fund group led activity. Some groups have secured additional funding from other sources (Business Link in the West Midlands, for example).

The pilot aims to provide everyone involved with space to test different approaches to partnership working, and to assess how effective and feasible they are. It will also allow those involved to determine what resources are needed beyond 2011, and to identify where they will come from.

The regional groups

Each regional group has four key functions:

- to **cultivate** a shared vision change in their region
- to **deliver** strategic programmes of work, in collaboration
- to **inform** future thinking by sharing knowledge across the network
- to **advocate** on behalf of the sector

Each group is responsible for agreeing Terms of Reference that will govern who its members are, and what the scope of their work is. This process is informed by a set of national guidelines, published by Arts Council England and based on learning from the early stages of the programme.

Four groups are currently active and meeting on a regular basis. A further nine groups are in the early stages of development. (Please see the attached map for more details.)

Key development themes emerging from initial conversations across the network include:

- Research & Development and Critical Debate
- Marketing and Audience Development
- Advocacy & Communications
- Workforce Development and Leadership
- Regional Market Development
- Cultural Olympiad (2010 to 2012)

Groups are developing organically and, as a result, will take many shapes.

We will evaluate the development of each regional group as we go, feeding what we learn back into the national network.

The following pages provide a summary of developments in each region and the shape that groups are taking.

For more information about these groups please contact National Coordinator, Simon Zimmerman: simon.zimmerman@artscouncil.org.uk.