

# Combined arts policy



# Introduction

**We will support the development of combined arts in order to achieve our ambition of putting the arts at the heart of national life and people at the heart of the arts. This means enabling artists and arts organisations to take creative risks and pursue new opportunities. Our policy summarises the context for combined arts and the Arts Council's role. It sets out our vision for combined arts and the priorities we have set to help us deliver it.**

**All our arts policies prioritise strengthening and developing the infrastructure for the artform. They identify particular areas of contemporary practice that we want to help develop. They confirm our support for individual artists.**

**Collectively the policies will help us deliver the six areas of our agenda for the arts: taking part in the arts, children and young people, the creative economy, vibrant communities, internationalism and celebrating diversity.**

**We are prepared to make choices – sometimes tough ones – about how we commit our funding to respond to the kind of ambitious thinking and high quality work that will take our priorities forward. We believe they will help us develop a confident, diverse and innovative combined arts sector that is valued by and in tune with the communities it serves.**

# The context for combined arts and the role we play

Combined arts is often the place where art is reinvented and reinvigorated. The spaces for combined arts are flexible ones and encourage the kind of diverse and innovative practice that develops new work for new audiences. Combined arts

encompasses participatory and celebratory work, festivals and carnival, arts centres and rural touring. The common link between all the combined arts organisations we support is that they work with multiple artforms to achieve their aims.



Strange Cargo Arts Company  
on the streets of Folkestone  
Photo: Brigitte Orasinski

In areas that are less well served by theatres, concert halls or galleries it is often through the local festival, carnival, arts centre or rural touring scheme that people get to take part in the arts. These examples of combined arts contribute to a broad range of agendas including regeneration and inclusion, and often exemplify the best models of partnership with regional and local government. We currently support more than 20 organisations exclusively for their participatory programmes. These programmes have many different outcomes, from developing artistic skills to encouraging individuals to use the arts for personal development. We want to ensure that each participant has access to a quality experience that supports their aspirations and interests.

We currently invest over £36 million a year in regular funding to some 180 combined arts organisations. A significant percentage goes towards supporting festivals, site-specific work, celebratory events

and participatory programmes. Our definition of festivals includes culturally specific celebrations such as melas. We recognise that both artists and audiences respond to festivals in a unique and exciting way. They expose themselves to more artistic risks in less comfortable environments than they would with any regularly programmed venue.

Carnival brings together music, design, applied arts and crafts and choreography. It acts as a catalyst to bring communities together, celebrate difference and aid cultural understanding. Carnival-based arts skills have been increasingly used in national celebrations and it is common for carnival arts to play a key role in major events and celebrations. Through the National Lottery we have been able to invest almost £8 million in two new carnival building projects. These are being developed to act as focal points and centres of excellence for carnival. The Luton Carnival Centre was launched in 2005 and London's Carnival Village in November 2004.

*A little more light* performed by Groupe F  
at Brighton Festival 2006  
Produced by Zap Art for the Streets of Brighton  
Photo: Matthew Andrews





We support a diverse range of artistically and geographically significant arts centres. These range from the South Bank Centre to Green Room in Manchester. The multi-space, multi-artform culture of these organisations makes them feel more accessible for both artists and audiences. The production and distribution of digital and new media work has become a core function of arts centres, both in response to the needs of younger audiences and to reflect the more personalised cultural experience which many arts centres seek to provide.

New arts centres have also been developed such as The Drum in Birmingham and Rich Mix in London which prioritise the promotion of Black and minority ethnic work. Designed to offer a mix of professional and participatory arts experiences, their programming is inspired by the communities in which they are based, and aims to entertain and challenge audiences in equal measure.

In partnership with local authorities we support a range of rural touring circuits. These small organisations have a significant impact within their communities, engaging people of all ages and backgrounds in participatory arts activities and developing volunteer arts promoters. Our ongoing investment in touring companies and schemes is vital to the existence and survival of these circuits. Our funding for the National Rural Touring Forum also helps to support the touring infrastructure as a whole across England.

Producers are central to the work of combined arts. They work with artists and organisations to create or adapt work that can be toured or placed in specific contexts. This often requires many months of collaborative work, led by producers and bringing together professional and community groups for a national celebration.

# Our vision for combined arts

Our ambition is to support work that grows to meet the needs and aspirations of a changing Britain. To do this we need to develop a portfolio of flexible, responsive organisations and individuals, recognised as leaders in their field, who are able to combine exceptional arts practice with strong community engagement. We will continue to take a flexible approach, working with organisational structures, however unconventional, which are fit for purpose; working creatively to respond to the needs of artists and audiences; and supporting the growth of hybrid artforms and arts practice.

Arts organisations must have artistic policies that acknowledge and support the communities they serve. Working closely with our funding partners we want to ensure that the organisations are adequately funded to achieve this.

Sustainable communities and the development of tourism are two key areas for combined arts. Festivals,

arts centres, rural touring circuits and celebratory events fulfil a dual purpose in delivering work for both indigenous communities and visitors. They promote a sense of wellbeing and belonging alongside excitement and spectacle.

We are concerned at the decline in the size and number of outdoor and festival events where artists can perform. We want to see festivals commissioning new and sometimes high-risk work that encourages artists to make imaginative use of multiple industries from engineering to thermal imaging. We will support individuals and organisations that make a significant contribution to local and regional economic renewal and maintain England's reputation as a vibrant tourism destination and centre for innovation. Working with strategic partners to limit the adverse affects of the new licensing laws will be central to this.

Our ultimate ambition is to see every community having access to a range of quality work in spaces and

formats that meet the aspirations of artists, audiences and participants. We will encourage artists and arts organisations to look at how their work is distributed and to become more entrepreneurial in their outlook.

International promotion and exchange is a long-standing priority for the combined arts sector, in particular for carnival artists. We see this work assuming a greater importance for more combined arts organisations as they seek to programme work that reflects the backgrounds of their participants and audiences and gives them access to the best of international culture and creativity. We will continue to promote international artists and support international exchange. We will exploit the opportunities for combined arts practice offered by Liverpool European Capital of Culture in 2008 and the run-up to the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games in 2012.



One of the Bardi Aboriginal Dancers from Western Australia performing at Salisbury Festival

Photo: Kevin Clifford

# Our priorities for combined arts 2007–2011

**To support a more confident, diverse and innovative arts sector, which is valued by and in tune with the communities it serves**

- We will fund a portfolio of organisations that are contemporary in their approach and committed to engaging people in their work in new ways. We will continue to review the organisations we fund. We will prioritise those seeking to implement more sustainable business models and to develop partnerships designed to give their work greater impact and reach
- We will support the development of combined arts practice. We will work with partners to address the decline in the size and the number of outdoor and festival events where artists can perform. We will put in place an action plan for festival development. We will continue to support independent producers so that work can take place where and when it is required. We will encourage the creation of experimental work

**To enable more people to take part in the arts as both audiences and participants**

- We will prioritise investment in organisations that are embracing new ways of creating and distributing work, for example through the use of digital technology, and that encourage audiences to engage with art by actively participating in it. We will support research to identify current and potential audiences and participants and work with organisations to create appropriate development programmes
- We will develop the range of international work promoted and toured through combined arts. We will work with partners to develop and support opportunities for international exchange

**Arts Council England  
14 Great Peter Street  
London SW1P 3NQ  
www.artscouncil.org.uk  
Email: enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk  
Phone: 0845 300 6200  
Textphone: 020 7973 6564**

**Charity registration number 1036733**

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