

Literature policy



ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

Introduction

We will support the development of literature 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 literature and the Arts Council's role. It sets out our vision for literature 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 literature sector that is valued by and in tune with the communities it serves.

Front cover: Jackee Holder at the Arvon Centre, Hebden Bridge, as part of Inscribe. This writer development project for writers of African and Asian heritage was initiated by the Arts Council in partnership with Peepal Tree Press

Photo: Paul Floyd Blake

The context for literature and the role we play

Literature has at its heart the communion between writer and reader, brought together by the book. It is that most private interaction that gives literature its power. However, as literature continues to evolve, technology and new forms of distribution methods and the development of live literature are creating new ways of engaging with writers and the living word.

We can connect with literature throughout our lives, from a baby's encounter with picture books onwards. We can find it in an increasingly wide variety of settings: from festivals and events to reading groups; in schools, libraries, prisons, and hospitals among other 'public' spaces. The opportunities to take part in the arts through literature are limitless.

The way in which we support reader development in England is admired and replicated abroad while writers from this country have reached and transformed the reading world and are part of an international culture.

Author Jean McNeil, International Fellowship, Antarctica, December 2005

Photo: Layla Curtis



Arts Council England's investment in literature has increased significantly over the past 10 years and we have been able to increase our strategic support for children's literature, international literature and literature in education.

We regularly invest almost £6 million a year in over 75 literature organisations. Through these organisations, often working with other public and private sector bodies, we develop the impact of literature right across society. Our partners include the British Council, the BBC, commercial publishers, government departments and local authorities, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and the Society of Chief Librarians.

Literature can have a powerful effect on our lives. It can help us explore the world and understand ourselves and others. The value and uses of literature in the health

sector are apparent through ongoing work around therapeutic writing and storytelling. In the criminal justice sector the Writers in Prisons Network and PEN are examples of how literature plays a positive part in rehabilitation, while our partnership with the Youth Justice Board and others makes literature part of an overall arts approach to helping those 300,000 young people aged 14–17 who are not at school, in training or in employment and who are at risk of becoming involved in youth crime.

For increasing numbers of people the live literature event, once essentially a vehicle for promoting and selling books, is now an arts experience in its own right. The power of language and good writing can make a real impact on people's lives, be they old or young, and of whatever cultural background.



Our vision for literature



Lemn Sissay's *Something Dark*, Apples and Snakes

Photo: Joel Fildes

Our ambition is to make it possible for more people to have access to high quality literature in a wide variety of forms.

We want to encourage participation in literature by helping to develop the best possible environment for writers and readers, publishers, performers, audiences and literature organisations.

We recognise the value of those organisations dedicated to writers and writing development. We will support them to help writers develop their full potential. This means putting in place opportunities for financial support and a range of imaginative professional development opportunities, both national and international.

We want literature to reach as many people as possible, taking account of the diversity of the country and engaging all our communities. We want the organisations we fund to be

artistically creative and entrepreneurial. We will support the development of new business models that enable them to forge new partnerships and reach new readers and writers, using technology to develop imaginative distribution solutions.

We recognise the increasing trend in the contemporary literature industry towards conglomeration and the impact of this on independent presses and literary magazines whose subsidy enables them to publish new, often untried, emergent work but which struggle to meet the financial requirements of the book chains. While not disregarding the benefits of traditional production and distribution methods, we want to see these presses and magazines take a lead in developing new methods of distribution and explore new uses of technology for both publishing and distribution. We believe that our funded presses would benefit from developing creative clusters.

We recognise the potential of live literature as a new way of communicating the power of the written word. We want to help develop a network of creative producers and venues offering an experience that is as artistically imaginative and professionally enticing as any other performing arts event.

We believe that public libraries are central to the drive that makes us a reading nation. We want them to continue to play a significant role in the cultural life of the country, forming a national network of literature centres and providing free access to reading for all members of the community in which they are based. We want public libraries to be real hubs of literature activity, not only providing spaces for reading groups and workshops but programming a wide range of live and digital events. We will work with the relevant agencies to ensure that our public libraries are at the heart of literature development.

We will build on our work in children's literature and will continue to work with public libraries and reader development agencies to promote reading to children and young people through the public library network.

We will continue our work with the publishing industry to ensure it becomes more culturally diverse. We have supported positive action traineeships in publishing houses and the development of DipNet, the Diversity in Publishing Network, which provides training and networking opportunities for people from culturally diverse backgrounds. We also support a range of research projects that indicate diversity trends and needs in the sector as a whole.

We want to increase the profile of international writing in this country by supporting those publishers committed to literature in translation. We will work with national and international partners to give a breadth of perspective to international work. We will help to develop the editors, directors, and programmers of the future and ensure they are more representative of the country's diversity. A career in literature should be something to aspire to and have the working conditions, training opportunities and professional development that will attract a wide range of talent. We will work with the industry and other partners to develop an environment in which literature, a key component of the creative economy, can thrive, develop and surprise us.



Our priorities for literature 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 that give their work greater impact and reach
- We will encourage and support new writing. We will help build the capacity of organisations directly involved in supporting writers. We will help create the time, space, money and networks that writers need. We will give emphasis to the dialogue between cultures brought about by literature in translation
- We will work with promoters and producers to support live literature and encourage opportunities for its distribution both as a live event and through digital distribution

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

- We will encourage more people to read literary fiction and poetry. We will work with chain and independent bookshops, libraries, internet providers and live literature promoters to develop new distribution methods

To help create vibrant communities across the country

- We will develop the impact of literature in the wider community, working with partners in the education, health and criminal justice sectors. We will place special emphasis on the needs of children and young people and develop models of good teaching practice

To celebrate diversity

- We will create greater equality of opportunity for readers, writers and those in the publishing industry. We will continue to work with the industry to support training and networking opportunities to remove institutional barriers

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