



Agreement between Arts Council England and the British Council

Background

A Memorandum of Understanding was agreed between Arts Council England and the British Council as part of the development of Arts Council England's international policy (published 2005). This ran from 2003-5 and then lapsed.

The two agencies have been in discussion for some time about renewing the agreement. Our discussions were given added imperative by the McMaster Review, which exhorted Arts Council England and the British Council, with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to "work together to investigate and implement an international strategy that stimulates greater international exchange, brings the best of world culture here and takes the best of our culture to the world".

The British Council's Action Plan for the Arts, published in 2008, commits the organisation to "exploring with ACE a revitalised and more strategic memorandum of understanding, which will play to the respective strengths of each organisation". Its 2009-11 Corporate Plan states that with the downturn in the global economy, "there is an even greater need to ensure that the UK creative and cultural sector has access to global markets and ideas."

The Arts Council plan 2008-11, meanwhile, builds on McMaster by focussing on "excellence, risk-taking and innovation" as a means to "encourage audiences' wider and deeper engagement with the arts". It includes a commitment to "develop strategies for diversity, internationalism and touring in order to ensure that work is provided more evenly across all regions and to reflect the widest range of artistic experiences".

Purpose of Agreement

The agreement attempts to define the common territory between Arts Council England and the British Council, but recognises that the two agencies serve different purposes. It establishes a framework within which the two organisations can jointly develop and create programmes (i.e., a catalyst for action rather than a piece of paper). It envisages the relationship structured around programme streams (rather than projects, as previously).

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1 Our approaches to the arts and internationalism

The two agencies' respective approaches to the arts and internationalism are:

Arts Council England believes that working internationally is fundamental to the health of the arts ecology and economy in England and to the best possible experience of the arts for audiences. We will advocate the value of internationalism to the English arts sector and will contribute to critical and policy debate on the arts and internationalism in England and abroad. We will support artists and arts organisations to explore, develop and present their work in England and abroad without limitation in an international context and to develop internationally their networks and programmes, their repertoire or portfolio, their professional and business opportunities, and their profile, recognition and reputation. We will also work to encourage international exchange, supporting artists and arts organisations to see the connection between local and global and make the most of it.

The global creative economy thrives on the generation and exploitation of innovation and imagination. The British Council's work in this area builds openness, allows the sharing of knowledge and ideas, and promotes the UK's creative excellence. This work is rooted in the vibrancy of the UK's own creative and knowledge economy, which is a powerful way to promote understanding of the UK and its positive influence in the modern world. Taking excellent arts practice as our starting point, we enable artists, audiences and participants to explore their society and its relationship with the rest of the world and encourage genuine dialogue and collaboration between people with diverse opinions, viewpoints and values. In doing so we support UK artists to work internationally, giving them access to new markets and new ideas.

2 Rationale for collaboration

The rationale for collaboration between the two agencies is centred on the shared territory between us:

- offering the benefits of our information and relationships to further artistic practice in this country
- supporting artists and arts organisations to take the fruits of this to audiences worldwide
- bringing the best of international practice to audiences in this country.

3 Assets

Individually and jointly, the two agencies bring a wide range of assets to this agreement:

Arts Council England brings	British Council brings
Access to Government via the Department of Culture, Media and Sport	Access to Government via the Foreign & Commonwealth Office
Funds for artists and organisations working in the arts	Access to funds to enable high quality work from the UK and emerging UK talent to be seen by target audiences overseas
A broad and inclusive network of relationships with artists and organisations working in the arts (many considered world class) across most arts disciplines	A network of relationships with UK artists and organisations in both the subsidised and commercial sectors, who have an interest in working internationally
An ability to act as a platform for critical debate in England about the arts and internationalism and to provide a medium for personal development and capacity building	Experience in enabling critical debate overseas about the arts and culture, and of creating opportunities for UK artists to engage and collaborate with people of world-class talent in other countries
A network of offices in all nine regions of England with access to key regional and local policy-makers, organisations working in the arts, arts venues and individual artists	A network of offices across the UK and in over 100 countries with access to key decision-makers in the public and private sectors, cultural organisations and venues, and individual artists
A successful track record of engaging with international partnerships, often alongside local or regional authorities and development agencies, to secure European investment through the arts	A successful track record in EC-funded project management and of working in cultural development partnerships with European and international organisations.
Access to a body of in-house data and intelligence about the international engagement of the arts in England	Access to data and intelligence about the international policies and activities of the arts and culture sectors in other countries.

Arts Council England and the British Council share a belief in the value of international exchange and collaboration, and a knowledge of the factors that create successful vehicles for these. Both organisations bring to the agreement a wide set of relationships with UK and international agencies and networks, and

experience of direct delivery through programmes such as Artists' Fellowships, Artists' Links and Connections Through Culture.

4 Principles framing the agreement

Both agencies support a set of principles, which provide the parameters for this agreement:

1. We believe that the arts sit at the heart of civil society and that individuals and communities are strengthened by the free exchange of ideas. The creation of public value for our audiences is central to our work
2. The work we support and the activities we undertake will be driven by a pursuit of excellence appropriate to the context and by targeted engagement with audiences
3. We will reflect both England's diverse culture, in the broader context of the UK, and a belief in the freedom of expression
4. We acknowledge the position of trust we occupy as public bodies. We will be transparent in our decision-making, and will seek always to operate at arm's length from government. We will aim to achieve efficient use of resources and avoid duplication
5. Our joint actions and activities will encompass the British Council's strategic and geographical priorities and Arts Council England's responsibilities to English artists and audiences

5 Programme areas

Arts Council England and the British Council will work together to create a joint plan of the steps we will take to stimulate greater artistic international exchange, bring the best of world culture here and take the best of our culture to the world. We have already identified a number of programme areas, which we anticipate will form the key planks of our joint work:

1. Brokering deep relationships and facilitating dialogue and critical engagement among artists and arts organisations
2. Campaigning on technical issues that are barriers to artists' mobility and cultural import and export (including visas for artists); looking outward to other

agencies to inform policy development in this country through our joint knowledge

3. Making targeted interventions in the following areas, where acting together would benefit both parties' stakeholders:
 - developing new and emerging international artistic talent
 - developing new dialogues that lead to longer and deeper relationships between artists and arts organisations
 - achieving more effective collaboration in providing market intelligence and enabling showcasing and platforms for international work
 - promoting and developing international cultural leadership
 - supporting the digital and creative economy
 - exploiting specific time-limited and high-profile opportunities such as London 2012 and the Cultural Olympiad, Shanghai Expo 2010 and European Cities of Culture

Other internationally focused initiatives we will consider working together on include:

- working through partnerships to develop and promote appropriate and high-quality arts content in education projects and programmes
 - greening the arts
4. Being a catalyst for new and emerging thinking around themes related to the arts, internationalism and cultural relations, through, for example: a joint policy think-tank or a series of conversations drawing on our collective networks.
 5. With others, communicating effectively, to make clear to artists, arts organisations and audiences what we do, and to engage with them on what they think we should do
 6. Exploring ways in which working together can bring benefit to both organisations (work exchanges, secondments, knowledge sharing, exchange of information on international plans and activities)
 7. Influencing cultural policy development, and meeting our joint and individual ambitions, in Europe. recognising that Europe (and the EU in particular) represents a special case, and building on our respective relationships with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

6 Delivery framework

The agreement will be monitored and delivered through the following channels:

- an annual meeting between the two Chief Executives, to review the overall direction of travel and achievements and reconfirm the shared ambitions between the two agencies
- quarterly meetings between the British Council's Director of Arts and the national lead for Arts Council England's international work to:
 - hold the overview on the relationship between the agencies
 - Monitor and review overall progress against the joint plan, agreed programmes of work and joint initiatives, and agree any appropriate amendments, on behalf of their respective teams
 - plan for the future
- meetings as needed between the relevant specialists in each agency to progress individual work streams within the specified programme areas. Each agency will specify a named individual to be jointly responsible for each area of collaboration.
- periodic round-table meetings bringing together people from both agencies involved in the relationship

Conclusion

This agreement represents a joint statement of intent, on the part of both Arts Council England and the British Council, to think and work collaboratively, and is a living and working document. It represents a shared long-term commitment; while we plan to adopt it from the date of its joint signing until 31 March 2012, it is our intention to have a formally agreed updated document in place from that point.

Dame Liz Forgan
Chair of Arts Council England

Martin Davidson CMG
Chief Executive, British Council