

Artistic assessment

Introduction

We have approximately 210 artistic assessors that are asked to experience individual pieces of artistic work by our regularly funded organisations and from April 2012 our National Portfolio Organisations, for example, a show, a concert, an exhibition or a publication, and each time to write a report for the Arts Council assessing the work's artistic quality. The assessments feed into our ongoing artistic evaluation of the organisations; broadening the evidence base available to us when making decisions about our funding and providing a valuable starting point for discussions about artistic quality between us and the artists we support.

The artistic assessments are written on a template provided by the Arts Council. The template covers a range of elements that contribute to the artistic quality of the work as a whole. We expect completed reports to contain fair, balanced and honest judgments about artistic quality based on sound evidence and that those judgments are explained clearly. Upon completion assessments are sent to both the arts organisation and their Arts Council relationship manager. Although we do not currently publish them, the artistic assessments are disclosable under the Freedom of Information Act, including the names of the assessors. We publish the names of all our assessors on our website, along with a short biography. The current list is available here <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/apply-for-funding/regular-funding-for-organisations/artistic-assessmen> .

The aims of the scheme

The aim of artistic assessment is to provide a fair, robust and transparent platform for discussions about artistic quality and to develop over time a broader evidence base to inform our funding decisions.

Artistic assessments are written for the Arts Council and their primary purpose is to contribute to the evidence which informs our funding decisions. We would also like artistic assessments to be useful to arts organisations, however, and to provide a context for conversations about artistic quality.

Informing funding decisions

Clearly, one artistic assessment in isolation can only ever be a "snap shot" of a particular piece of artistic work as assessed by one individual. It may provide the Arts Council and the funded organisation with a useful starting point for a

discussion about artistic quality but it will never provide a full picture of the artistic quality of an organisation and the Arts Council will not use one assessment in isolation to inform a funding decision.

Artistic assessments will provide an evidence base as they build up over a period of months and years. They will play a role in the next round of investment decisions, in 2014.

Of course, Arts Council staff will continue to assess the artistic quality of funded organisations' work and we are not asking assessors to make funding decisions for us nor take any responsibility for our decisions, directly or indirectly. An artistic assessment will be one piece of evidence of artistic quality, alongside other kinds of evidence, which we take into account when making judgments. It is worth saying too that, although artistic quality is a vitally important criterion for funding decisions, it is not the only criterion that we need to take into account.

The assessment

Artistic assessment should contain fair, balanced and honest judgments about artistic quality based on sound evidence and it is important that those judgments are explained clearly. In order to encourage a degree of consistency of approach and to prompt assessors to consider different aspects of the work, the assessments are all written to a common template. The template will cover a range of elements that contribute to the artistic quality of the work as a whole.

We recognise that no artistic assessor can be completely "objective". In fact, it is the subjective experience, expertise and understanding of each individual assessor that makes their judgment valuable. It is important that the subjectivity of each assessor is recognised and understood.

The assessors

The assessors are appointed following an open recruitment process against published criteria, including:

- artform expertise
- ability to make fair, evidence-based judgments about artistic quality and to explain those judgments clearly in writing
- understanding of the context within which arts organisations operate and

- an understanding of the context within which arts organisations make their work.

The assessors come from a range of background, including artists, arts managers, journalists, academics and others. Our artistic assessors' skills, experience and location do broadly match our National Portfolio of Organisations

The next round of recruitment will take place in the summer 2012.

Assessors are contracted for two years, after which they are eligible to apply for a further two year contract. After a second two-year contract, however, assessors will be required to stand down for a period of at least two years before we will consider them again. This is to help ensure that there is a reasonable turnover of artistic assessors over time.

Assessors are not "assigned" to particular organisations. As a general rule we commission different assessors to assess an organisation's work on different occasions, to help ensure that organisations are assessed from a range of different perspectives.

Work which is not included in the scheme

Artistic assessments apply to all artistic work which is created, curated, commissioned, produced or performed by our regularly funded organisations (national portfolio organisations from April 2012). The exception to this is festivals and carnivals which are included even if they do not commission or create work. All these organisations should expect to have their work assessed at some time or another and should see it as a normal part of their relationship with the Arts Council.

It is not appropriate to commission artistic assessments of service, umbrella or networking organisations. At this stage we are also excluding participatory, learning, education and outreach work where the main aims of the work are achieved through the process itself. This is not because we do not value this kind of work – far from it – but we don't believe that this is the best way to assess learning programmes or participative work.

Commissioning assessments

Relationship managers in Arts Council regional offices decide what work is assessed. The scheme is managed centrally by Arts Council Head Office in London. Head Office informs organisations in advance when an assessor is going to assess their work, letting them know which assessor is going to undertake the assessment. There is a short biography of each assessor on the Arts Council website <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/apply-for-funding/regular-funding-for-organisations/artistic-assessment>

If the organisation believes the assessor is unsuitable (for example, the organisation believes the assessor has a strong conflict of interest), they may raise this with the team at Head Office. We will consider this, consulting the relationship manager and other colleagues as appropriate, and we may decide to send a different assessor. This happens only in exceptional circumstances, however. Assessors may often have different kinds of interest but in most circumstances this can be managed, as long as it is openly recognised and understood.

Completed assessments

Head office sends completed assessments to the organisation at the same time as they are sent to the relevant Arts Council relationship manager. The Arts Council retains copyright of the assessments and organisations may not use them for promotional or publicity purposes. If an organisation wishes to show an assessment to a third party, they need to obtain our permission in advance. We can then, as a courtesy, inform the assessor that his or her assessment is going to be shared with another individual organisation.

The organisation is free to contact its relationship manager at any time, of course, to discuss the assessment. We envisage, however, that rather than discussing each assessment individually, many organisations and relationship managers will choose to discuss a range of assessments in annual review meetings, for example, as part of a broader conversation about artistic quality.