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Arts Council England response to DCMS consultation on the timing of UK City of Culture competitions

Introduction

Arts Council England is the national development agency for the arts, museums and libraries in England. Our remit for 'the arts' includes a wide range of visual and performing art forms, music, dance, theatre and literature. We have funding responsibilities for regional museums, and a development role across libraries and the wider museums sector. We are sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in order to make the arts, and the wider culture of museums and libraries, an integral part of everyday public life, accessible to all, and understood as essential to the national economy and to the health and happiness of society.

Our mission is 'Great art and culture for everyone'. We work to achieve this through advocacy and partnership, development and investment.

Arts and culture enrich our lives. They fire our imaginations, challenge, inspire, educate and entertain us. Everyone should be able to visit or experience a high-quality museum, library or live performance or participate in a cultural activity. These experiences open us to reflection, engender debate and critical thinking, and deepen our understanding of the world.

We believe that increasing the number of people who experience and contribute to the arts, to museums and to libraries is good for society. Sharing cultural experiences brings communities together and we will work to better understand the social impact of the arts and culture.

To this end, we have been involved with the design and development of the UK City of Culture programme and have been strong and early supporters of Derry-Londonderry and Hull. We also were a key partner and investor in Liverpool's successful year as European Capital of Culture 2008.

The pull exerted on both overseas and domestic tourists by arts and culture is strong: at least £856 million of annual spending by visitors to the UK can be directly attributed to their influence¹. Two of Arts Council England's strategic goals in particular play an

¹ http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/Cultural_tourism_case_study.pdf

important part in ensuring that the standard of this cultural offer in each area remains high and that everyone has access to it. They are goals one (excellence is thriving and celebrated in the arts, museums and libraries) and two (everyone has the opportunity to experience and be inspired by the arts, museums and libraries).

Our support for the UK City of Culture concept is very much in furtherance of these goals.

Hull's bid to secure the title of UK City of Culture 2017 - and its ultimate success in doing so - is a prime example of the transformative power of culture. In 2013 the city was awarded a £3 million Arts Council England Creative People and Places grant to develop the city's cultural offer. This brought together a consortium of organisations including Artlink, Hull Truck Theatre, Volcom, Hull City Council and Hull and East Yorkshire Community Foundation and led to the development of the strategy that secured the title for the city. The opportunity to bid for UK City of Culture was also the catalyst behind the '2017 Angels'², a consortium of 22 local businesses who backed Hull's successful bid and who were later awarded an Arts and Business Award³. Plans are now developing for a 365 day programme of 1,500 events, including 25 festivals in and around the city in 2017. The city predicts it will welcome seven million visitors during its special year. The core programme will be supported by up to £3 million funding from Arts Council England.

Liverpool continues to build on the legacy of its year as European City of Culture 2008. In July 2014, the city staged a flagship cultural event marking 100 years since the outbreak of the First World War. *Memories of August 1914*⁴ was commissioned jointly by Liverpool City Council and 14-18 NOW, the First World War Centenary Cultural Programme, to which we are contributing £5 million of Lottery Funding⁵.

Every two years the city also hosts the Liverpool Biennial, the largest international contemporary art festival in the UK. Since the first Biennial in 1999, over 279 artists from 72 countries have presented artwork in the city. Supported by Arts Council England, Liverpool City Council, the European Regional Development Fund 2007 – 2013 and Founding Supporter James Moores, in 2012 the Liverpool Biennial attracted 692,000

² <http://www.hulldailymail.co.uk/Hull-s-2017-Angels-sign-support-City-Culture-bid/story-19920765-detail/story.html>

³ <http://www.hulldailymail.co.uk/Hull-City-Culture-2017-Angels-consortium-honoured/story-21127047-detail/story.html>

⁴ <http://www.giantspectacular.com/>

⁵ <http://www.1418now.org.uk/about/>

visitors to the city and in the last 10 years it has had an economic impact of £119.6 million⁶.

1. Should the DCMS run a UK City of Culture 2021 competition when the European Capital of Culture selection competition will take place around the same time?

Yes, for several reasons:

- The competitions have different objectives, meaning that cities will bid for the opportunity that is most relevant for them, and if there is rationale for applying for both opportunities, we expect cities will rise to the challenge to meet this.
- The bidding process has strong value in itself in pulling together local cultural strategy development, creating a strong network of stakeholders in a city's cultural offer, and in galvanising private support for the arts and culture in a city (see Hull's '2017 Angels'). This has positive implications for the long term cultural strategy and sustainability of a cultural offer in those cities.
- There has been strong engagement with the UK City of Culture programme to date and it makes sense to build on this, and to promote the value of the UK City of Culture programme as distinct from the European Capital of Culture programme.

a. Would potential candidate cities feel obliged to bid for only one title? If so, which competition would be of most interest to cities?

Realistically the two competitions require dramatically different bids in order to address the different objectives. While the cost and demand of preparing a bid may prohibit entries to both competitions, it is more likely that cities may wish to bid for the opportunity that suits them best - or, if they have capacity, resource and the will, they would bid for both titles.

We do not feel that the opportunities are in competition with the other.

b. Would stakeholders and funding bodies realistically be able to support both competitions?

In the past few years we have seen funding bodies and stakeholders support multiple competitions within a short timeframe. This includes, for example, the Olympic, Paralympic and Commonwealth Games that were staged within two years. While there will be necessary discussion over the cost of staging 'big ticket' events (such as the Turner Prize) we nonetheless believe that it is possible for the UK, even in times of austerity, to stage three large-scale events within a five year period, particularly considering that the scale of investment and organisational effort required is less than that of any of the major sporting events.

⁶ <http://www.biennial.com/about>

The proliferation of transformative City of Culture opportunities, whether UK or European, provides a further opportunity for the Arts Council to support regional development and regeneration and while resources are not infinite we will strive to assist each city deliver its cultural offer.

c. Should the DCMS postpone the UK City of Culture 2021 competition, and move to a UK City of Culture 2025 instead?

No. We see value in building on the momentum of the UK City of Culture programme. There are differences between the scale and objectives of the UK City of Culture programme and the European Capital of Culture programme. It is important that these different opportunities are offered to cities across the UK. UK City of Culture, for example, may be seen as more effective for cities which need to focus on socioeconomic development and cultural diversity and therefore more able to benefit from the opportunity to attract inward investment to support regeneration agendas through a UK remit rather than pan European. The offer of the two opportunities will engage a much wider spectrum of cities in the bidding processes than will happen if the UK City of Culture programme is postponed. There is a strong value in the process of preparing a bid, as mentioned above in terms of developing business investment into culture.

We know that the possibility of postponing the next UK City of Culture programme has concerned the organisers of Hull 2017 who feel that the change will affect the reputation of the UK City of Culture project and its ongoing status and development. This could affect their ongoing negotiations with funders, the public and stakeholders, and inevitably, jeopardise the artistic and cultural offer. For that reason, and in order to build coherently on the success of the UK City of Culture and to secure its future and position both nationally and internationally, we recommend that the UK City of Culture competition in 2021 is not postponed.

2. If DCMS does decide to run a UK City of Culture 2021 competition, when should the selection process take place? Would cities prefer:

- a. to bid for the UK City of Culture competition at the start of 2016, before the European Capital of Culture selection competition begins at the end of 2016?**
- b. to have the two competitions run simultaneously?**

There is a slim possibility that the two competitions will be put in competition with one another, in the sense of one city being a 'runner up' to another. However the two competitions will require markedly different approaches, and so we feel that the current timetable allows enough time for unsuccessful applicants to build on their first application

should they wish to apply to the other opportunity. We feel it is likely that each city will apply for the opportunity that most suits their cultural development needs.

3. How should future UK City of Culture competitions be funded?

We believe that, by calling upon the expertise and experience of grant makers and programme managers within the DCMS family, it should be achievable to run a cost effective process. The idea of national level sponsorship, as noted in the consultation guidance, could be explored to support the cost of the competition phase.

a. Could we ask bidding cities to pay an ‘entry fee’ to help cover the cost of the competition?

The UK City of Culture initiative delivers strong return on investment for nominal central government investment in the competition phase. We think an ‘entry fee’ approach would deter many cities from taking part –the time and resource needed to prepare a bid is already substantial, especially at a time of decreasing resources.

We also think that the ‘commercialisation’ of the UK City of Culture could be negative, in stifling the collaborative approach, the risk taking and innovation which has been a mark of the more successful bids.

b. Could we ask the winning city to pay for the whole of the next competition through the sponsorship funds they could potentially raise?

No. While there is merit in having winning cities coordinate the final assessment stage because of their first-hand experience of delivering the programme, we do not believe that winning cities should pay for the entirety of the competition phase. This would not be an attractive proposition for a sponsor and it could place undue influence in shaping the criteria and bids for future competitions.

4. What sort of organisation is required to support the UK City of Culture?

a. Should the competition continue to be run by DCMS or do we need a new single purpose body to support it?

We believe that DCMS has been an effective conduit for the management of the competition, conferring a national status and providing a neutral and dispassionate context for decision making. We do not see that a new single purpose vehicle would be any more cost effective and we would have concerns about the long term sustainability and neutrality of such a body.

b. Could it be managed within an existing organisation?

With some resource, we believe one of the DCMS family could manage the competition in partnership with others. For example, Arts Council England has a track record of collaborative and collegiate working with partners from across the UK. We managed the process and grant making for Unlimited, the national programme of commissions for deaf and disabled artists, in partnership with organisations like Creative Scotland, Arts Council Wales, the British Council and LOCOG. We can demonstrate strong working relationships with Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) around the country and the LEP Network as a whole. If required Arts Council England would be prepared to support and manage the UK City of Culture competition and delivery process with collaboration with national and local partners.

For more information on this response, please contact:

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