

Triennial Review of the British Council: Call for Evidence



Arts Council England response

October 2013

Arts Council England's mission is 'great art for everyone' and we work to achieve this by championing, developing and investing in arts and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. As the national development agency for the arts, museums and libraries, we support a range of activities from theatre to music, reading to dance, photography to digital art, carnival to crafts.

We hold a strong relationship with the British Council, and regularly work with them on areas relating to our mutual vision in support of arts and culture in England. We first signed a Memorandum of Understanding with them in 2009. It was informed by Sir Brian McMaster's 2008 review of arts funding which had called on both bodies, together with DCMS, to work together to "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". Our MoU with the British Council defines common territory between our two organisations, while recognising that we serve different purposes. We support the work the British Council does, and believe they remain a relevant and necessary organisation.

The support that the British Council offers to the UK creative industries (including publically-funded arts and culture) cannot be understated, and is an essential piece of the investment that the government makes in the wellbeing and prosperity of the nation. We believe there is an ongoing need for this activity, and do not believe it should be discontinued. We believe the current portfolio of activity that the British Council undertakes is appropriate, and does not need to be amended.

We believe that arms-length independence from Government and political influence is an important principle for the work that the British Council does in supporting the arts and culture. We would not wish to see any change to this arrangement.

We do not believe there is any duplication of activity between the British Council and other UK public bodies, including Arts Council England. The outcomes that are sought through British Council activity (e.g. the encouragement of cultural cooperation and understanding between the UK and others) are valid and continue to need public intervention. It is clear that these outcomes may on occasion be achieved through activity undertaken by other public (or private) bodies, including Arts Council England. However, it is wholly appropriate

that there be an experienced and knowledgeable organisation dedicated to proactively achieving these outcomes.

Our MoU with the British Council outlines our joint working on a number of areas, including developing new talent and dialogues, collaborating on showcases and platforms, promoting leadership and supporting the digital economy. We have recently worked together on Transform, a cultural programme designed to promote exchange between UK and Brazilian artists in the run-up to the Rio Olympics in 2016. We plan to build on this model to work together on Re: Imagine India: a programme focusing on exchange and talent development, market intelligence and shared learning, leadership skills and more opportunities for audiences to experience new work from England/India. Two major showcases are planned in the run-up to 2017 (the 70th anniversary of Indian independence).

The Centre for Economic and Business Research recently undertook research into *the contribution of the arts and culture to the national economy*.¹ Their report found that arts and culture (not including the wider creative industries) represents 1% of all UK GDP, and generated £12.4 billion turnover in 2011 alone, including nearly £6 billion of Gross Value Added (GVA) going to the UK economy. In particular, the report demonstrated that the impact of the cultural sector in encouraging inward tourism is considerable, finding that ‘the total spending by visitors to the UK that was directly motivated by the arts and culture in 2011 is at least £856million’.² It is clear that the work of the British Council in this area has made a strong contribution towards the UK’s prosperity.

As a result, the budget that the British Council receives for its activities (£175m) represents amazing value for money for the British taxpayer, given the high level of return-on-investment to the UK for a comparatively tiny level of public investment.

The 2012 Cultural Olympiad was a considerable achievement for the UK, cementing our position as an international cultural leader. Building upon this success will require sustainable and careful work, and investment of public funds. Arts Council England remains committed to working together with the British Council in pursuit of this aim.

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¹ Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR), *The contribution of the arts and culture to the national economy*, May 2013. Available here: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/browse-advice-and-guidance/contribution-arts-and-culture-national-economy>

² Ibid, p.59