

**Arts, culture and rural communities – how the Arts Council works in rural England**

Summary

**Background**

In 2013 Arts Council commissioned an evidence review to look at evidence, research and data about the state of arts and culture in rural areas. This was undertaken as a response to the recommendations of a rural stakeholders group (convened by Arts Council) and in close association with Defra.

A Position Paper provided the accompanying narrative and made recommendations for future action. It was agreed that Arts Council should adopt Defra’s ‘rural proofing‘ approach rather than establishing a separate funding stream, and should consider investments and participation against geographical data.

This has been done mainly through our approach to geographical balancing for strategic funds and the National Portfolio Organisation investment decisions for 2018-22. It was agreed that we should update the rural evidence in 2018 and re-consider the Position Paper, in order to cover the period up to 2020 and that findings should feed into the new ten-year strategy which commences in 2020.

**How we approach working with the sector and with communities in rural England**

1. We are continuing to work with the Department for Environment , Food and Rural Affairs (Defra ) and the Local Government Association (LGA ) on relevant data and evidence to inform policy making. This is proving to be useful partnership work with practical and tangible results – for example plans for a joint round table with the LGA in Autumn 2019 to address culture and rural areas . The updated review has therefore be undertaken in consultation with these agencies. They are enthusiastic about the work and expect to disseminate and use the findings in their own policy work. We will work in partnership with local government, key national bodies and stakeholders on issues, initiatives and interventions relating to the arts and culture in rural areas, particularly to aid understanding and policies about rural place making.
2. The range of urban / rural classifications adopted by Defra are useful in understanding the different types of places and the continuum from densely populated areas to places with very dispersed populations. Our understanding of the changing nature of places, demographics and services suggests that binary urban-rural models no longer help to understand the characteristics and infrastructure of different places and that a more nuanced approach is vital.
3. There is significant demographic change happening within the population in different parts of the country .The proportion of the population from older demographics is increasing in rural areas and this is combined with significant migration to rural areas from urban areas, particularly from older age groups. The only outward-migration from rural areas is typically among the young, aged between 17 and 22. Organisations planning arts and cultural services in rural areas need to be aware of demographic change and its implications for planning. People living in rural areas are also likely to have less social mobility than people in urban areas.
4. Within the broad headline findings relating to investment and participation data there are a number of trends to which we should focus attention. The Arts Council Grants for the Arts over £15,000 investment strand has made a lower proportion of awards to rural areas and there is some evidence that rural projects find it harder to raise matched funds. Alongside substantially decreased investment from local authorities and lower amounts of contributed income and sponsorship, Arts Council and partners may need to give further consideration to best ways of supporting particular rural locations where there is a convergence of these factors.
5. Rural arts and culture investment and infrastructure has been disproportionately hit by reductions in local government spending. This has particularly impacted on advice, support, production and commissioning capacity. This, combined with a relatively low number of rurally based NPOs (see appendix for list of rurally based NPOs), means that there are low levels of cultural infrastructure in more dispersed areas. It will be important for the Arts Council to take account of this in the future.
6. Costs of cultural infrastructure are higher in rural areas , for example : Music Hubs (see appendix). In areas where the population is widely dispersed it may be more difficult for artists and organisations to work together and benefit from creative collaboration, partnerships and clusters.
7. In some age bands, children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in rural areas have lower attainment levels and expectations than their urban counterparts. This finding is of particular note for the Arts Council’s Goal 5 work.
8. A number of new stakeholders and partners are coming into the frame. These include rurally based arts and culture partnerships , for example : Create Gloucestershire and The Hereford Culture Partnership ; countryside and nature partnerships: for example, National Parks; Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs); and a number of innovative rural projects supporting culture’s economic contribution, for example those led by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) which cover rural areas, universities and further education, and The Creative Industries Federation. Access to the countryside for health and wellbeing is featuring in Government policy, for example within the 25 year Environment Plan and in public health initiatives. Arts Council has formal partnerships with national organisations with a strong rural presence such as the National Trust, Canal and Rivers Trust and the Forestry Commission, and as well as key regional ones like the South Downs National Park. Given the reduction in local government spend in rural areas, it may be important to consider working more closely with some of these agencies and partners to address infrastructure, partnership, commissioning and production capacity.
9. Membership of the Arts Council England Rural Stakeholders Group will need to be reviewed in the light of new partners and to reflect greater diversity in membership  
   and approaches.
10. Further research should be considered: for example the role of market towns as creative hubs for their wider hinterlands; and research to help understand effective ways of supporting the resilience and sustainability of rurally based organisations, addressing Arts Council Goal 3.

**Introduction**

1. Arts Council England is the national development agency for the arts, museums and libraries in England. Our mission is great art and culture for everyone. We work to achieve this through advocacy and partnership, development and investment.
2. We are committed to realising our mission across the country, taking full account of the differing aspirations and needs of people and communities. In October 2013 *Great art and culture for everyone[[1]](#footnote-1)* set out a ten-year vision with five ambitious goals at its heart. This makes clear our commitment to ensuring that everyone in England, including people living in rural areas, has the opportunity to participate in the nation’s cultural life. We need to show we are taking account of the way society and demographics are changing and of the differing needs of different places. We do this in partnership with local government and other partners. We also take full account of the respective needs of rural and urban communities, so that people are not disadvantaged by where they live. (Great art and culture for everyone, Arts Council England, 2013, p.29)
3. We recognise the strength of the arts and culture in England’s rural areas and communities. The richness and diversity of rural England is reflected in its cultural life. There are a number of leading artists and cultural organisations based in rural areas, and their work and connections with local communities underpin a high and healthy level of engagement with the arts, museums in particular have levels of engagement which are higher in rural areas than in urban ones. Libraries are welcoming and safe spaces where communities come together, and are hugely important to rural digital infrastructure, learning, and access to information and public services. Rural areas are often strong in terms of community based ‘bottom up ‘ everyday participation in the arts and culture , with strong traditions of self-help and cultural volunteering and activism.
4. Festivals and outdoor arts are also strong in rural areas and touring is fundamental to this. Organisations like the National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF) ensure that touring meets the aspirations and ambitions of rural communities. There is increasing evidence about the importance of the rural creative economy and about creative innovation emanating from rural areas and the importance of rural creative industrial clusters. There have been improvements in high-speed broadband which has helped small and medium enterprises based in rural areas, although there are still parts of the country with poor coverage.
5. There is huge change affecting the arts and culture infrastructure in all parts of the country and whilst it is critical that less sparsely populated areas have resources and infrastructure, many of the partners involved in the rural evidence research attested to the value of *doing things differently*: drawing on the strengths in rural areas, diversifying rural economies, bringing together communities and recognising the strength of community activism in rural areas.
6. Arts Council investment and support is vital, but we also recognise that we have to work in partnership with local government, national and local agencies within the arts and culture sector and with rural communities themselves. It is through these partnerships that we can sustain and grow culture and the arts in rural areas.
7. We recognise that there are challenges facing both culture and communities in rural areas. We will seek to improve our understanding of these through our partnerships, making better use of evidence and engaging regularly with rural stakeholders, using this to inform our policy and activity.
8. This position statement sets out how we will approach the specific needs and aspirations of rural communities in order to deliver the goals of our strategy. It sets out our key partnerships and how we will engage with rural stakeholders on an ongoing basis to ensure that our approach is appropriate.

**The Arts Council’s priorities for arts and culture**

1. The Arts Council has put the following five goals at the heart of our strategy:

* Goal 1: Excellence is thriving and celebrated in the arts, museums  
  and libraries.
* Goal 2: Everyone has the opportunity to experience and to be inspired by the arts, museums and libraries.
* Goal 3: The arts, museums and libraries are resilient and  
  environmentally sustainable.
* Goal 4: The leadership and workforce in the arts, museums and libraries are diverse and appropriately skilled.
* Goal 5: Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts, museums and libraries.

1. We also recognise the value that culture and the arts bring to localities, to regions and to the nation as a whole. This includes the social and community value of culture, building cohesive communities, fostering aspiration and personal development, making for healthier lives and playing a vital role in learning. It also includes the economic value of culture; as a fundamental aspect of England’s tourism offer, as the bedrock of our world-class creative industries and as the sector’s importance as a job and wealth creator. These values benefit rural and urban communities alike and we recognise that we need to take full account of the diversity of England – in geographic, demographic and socio-economic terms – in order to see equal access to arts and cultural opportunities and the benefits these bring.

**The Arts Council’s approach to rural communities – action to date**

1. The Arts Council’s approach to working with rural communities has evolved over the last fifteen years. In 2004 we reviewed our approach to rural proofing, establishing a national rural working group and publishing Arts in Rural England, in which we committed to respond to the particular needs of rural areas, supporting artists, improving access for audiences, building partnerships for growth and campaigning alongside rural organisations for recognition of their work. In 2007 we reviewed the approach set out in Arts in Rural England and incorporated rural proofing into our policy-making, investment and delivery, rather than defining it as a separate activity.
2. In July 2013 the Arts Council held a rural proofing event, facilitated by Defra. This looked at how the Arts Council operates in relation to rural communities and how it understands the needs of rural communities and led to a number of actions that have since been adopted, including a Rural Evidence Review and Position Statement which was presented to a group of rural and cultural stakeholders in November 2013. These were adopted and are published on our website and the Rural Stakeholders Group has continued to meet bi-annually as a forum for consultation, advice, guidance and partnership. The Evidence Review and Position Statement were recommended for review and update in 2018.
3. Given that the new ten-year strategy for Arts Council is due to be produced for the period 2020 to 2030, it was agreed that the Rural Evidence review and the Rural Position Statement would be updated. This would provide an evidence base to inform policy and decision making by the Arts Council up to March 2020, and would also provide an important into the development of the Arts Council’s new ten year strategy.. This proposed approach was ratified by the Rural Stakeholders Group in December 2017 and it was recommended that a reference group be set up to help guide the Arts Council team working on The Review and The Statement. This group was comprised of: Nic Millington, CEO Rural Media Company; Ralph Lister, Executive Director :Take Art and Development Director National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF) (until Spring 2018); and Heidi Johnson, North Yorkshire Music Action Zone NYMAZ.
4. Our review of data and evidence relating to engagement with and investment in the arts and cultural sector in England up to and including 2017/18 shows that at headline level there has been some progress in the balancing of rural and urban investment as well as strategic initiatives and partnerships which promote investment and opportunities in rural areas. It is important to separate out the figures for Arts Council separate strands of funding : NPO ; Gfta and Strategic / development funds ( see Evidence Review ) . Anecdotal evidence suggests that since November 2013, “we have come a long way particularly in relation to strategic funds and touring “. Robin Simpson : Director Voluntary Arts We are working more effectively around balancing in relation to our strategic funds: for example, Great Places, The Creative Local Growth Fund and Cultural Destinations. Nic Millington CEO : Rural Media Company noted that “since we started in November 2013 we have got a greater level of sophistication, we can pick off particular problems and do something about them, we are now better balanced “. The focus on rural balancing following the Defra rural proofing approach means that we are alive to the issues. However, there is an inevitable time lag between action and a discernible difference being measured.

**The Evidence Review 2018**

*Findings relating to population and rural trends are written in consultation with Defra and the LGA:*

**Demographics**

1. Based on the most recent Census, in 2011, 17.6 per cent of the English population live in rural areas and 82.4 per cent in urban areas.
2. However, since this Census, proportion of those within the rural population aged over 45 is growing . This is caused by migration from urban to rural areas as well as by retirement. Net migration to rural areas is 60 to 70 thousand per year from urban areas, mainly within the over-45 age group. This will create an increasingly large population of older people over the coming decades. Demands on social care resources are therefore likely to increase, impacting on the budgets of health and social care providers. The average age of the rural population is also rising faster than in urban areas; this is because of a lower birth-rate and previously cited migration.
3. The only net outward-migration from rural to urban areas is within the 17 to 20 age group. However, within this age band, those who have lower educational attainment are less likely to leave the places they grew up to access further or higher education.

**Deprivation**

1. In order to identify rural deprivation, Defra is mapping the poorest Super Output Areas (SOAs) and overlaying these with the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) ward level data, as well as with data about access to services and public transport. It will be helpful to share this data with Arts Council in order to help to understand where pockets of low investment are combined with deprivation and lack of access to services. The Arts Council should consider this data and evidence carefully. It is worth noting that statistics which utilise a binary urban-rural split, with averages, can mask problems. This will be useful information for the Arts Council to share with rural NPOs and organisations like The Audience Agency and other Sector Support Organisations (SSOs), to help understand how particular age groups may be affected. For example, young people without access to transport; lower income families; and older and disabled people.
2. Analysis of the Department of Education index ‘IDACI’ for educational attainment shows that rural children do worse than their urban counterparts coming from equivalent levels of deprivation. A lower proportion of children on free school meals from rural areas go to university than their urban counterparts. Hence, there is a cohort of children and young people ‘left behind’ in rural areas.

**Participation**

1. According to the Active Lives survey, those in rural areas are typically more likely to engage in cultural activity than those in urban areas. Rural residents demonstrated higher engagement levels when it came to spending time doing a creative activity or attending an arts event than their urban equivalents, although library engagement was greater among urban residents. Museum and gallery attendance was relatively similar among urban and rural residents.
2. Rural residents were more likely to spend time doing a creative activity. 38.5 per cent of those living in rural areas had done so in the twelve months prior to interview, compared to 33.8 per cent of urban residents.
3. Arts event attendance was more common among rural residents. 56.2 per cent of those living in rural areas had visited an arts event in the twelve months prior to interview, compared to 51.3 per cent of urban residents.
4. Those living in urban areas were more likely to visit a library or use a library service. 35.8 per cent of those living in urban areas had visited or used a library service in the twelve months prior to interview. By comparison, 31.5 per cent of rural residents had done so. However new models of working, partnership and approach to engagement in some rural library services are bucking this trend. For example, Norfolk Library Services (see Appendix) where library services are co–located with other services and Libraries Unlimited in Devon.
5. Museum engagement was similar across rural and urban areas. The Active Lives survey shows that 47.3 per cent of rural residents and 46.3 per cent of urban residents had visited a museum or gallery in the twelve months prior to interview.

**Investment – Arts Council England**

1. 37 (4.6 per cent) of NPOs awarded funding as part of the 2018-22 cycle are resident within a rural settlement. This represents an increase in number from previous cycles – from 29 between 2015-18 and 34 between 2012-15 – but is consistent in proportional terms as a result of the increased size of the portfolio overall.
2. Future investment worth approximately £40.1m between 2018-22 has been committed to organisations from rural settlements. This represents 2.6% of total portfolio value, consistent with the 2015-18 (2.8 per cent) and 2012-15 cycles (2.6 per cent). The annual investment in rural NPOs will be numerically greater within the new portfolio – approximately £10.0m per annum, up from £8.7m between 2012-15.
3. Applicants resident in rural areas made 11.6 per cent of Gfta applications between 2014/15 and 2016/17. 11.2 per cent of successful applicants were from rural areas, receiving 10.2 per cent of awarded funding.
4. In total, £23.4m of Grants for the Arts funding was awarded to rural areas across this period. For comparison, the average of approximately £7.8m per year awarded to rural applicants was numerically greater than the equivalent figure for the 2012/13 to 2013/14 period, which was below £7m per annum.
5. Success rates among rural applicants (47.9 per cent) tended to be slightly lower than their urban counterparts (49.9 per cent). However, there was greater disparity in terms of the volume of money requested compared to value awarded; rural applicants received a lower proportion (45.9 per cent) than urban applicants (51.8 per cent).
6. Success rates by each Grants for the Arts strand provide some context to this; while there was little difference in success rates among applications for £15,000 or below, just 41.8 per cent of rural applications for more than £15,000 were successful, compared to 50.6 per cent of urban applications (although it is worth noting the lower incidence of rural applications within this strand in general).
7. Between rounds 1 and 32 of the Strategic Touring programme, 289 of 713 projects were successful (40.5 per cent), receiving £62.3m worth of funding. Splitting the six-year period in two, we can see that success rates were relatively consistent in Years 1-3 (2012/13-2014/15) and 4-6 (2015/16-2017/18).
8. During Years 1-3, 15.8 per cent of the unique postcodes visited by funded projects were in rural areas. This rose to 23.9 per cent in Years 4-6, with 29.2 per cent of the ‘new’ postcodes (those not visited in Years 1-3) coming from rural areas. When considering performances, 11.1 per cent during Years 1-3 were staged in rural areas, rising to 18.1 per cent in Years 4-6.
9. Creative People and Places focuses on parts of the country where engagement with the arts and culture is below average and has, to date, awarded £37m to 21 projects across 34 local authorities in England. Based on the Defra and ONS classification for local authorities, seven of these projects were based in, or focused on, a rural local authority.
10. The Great Places scheme is a National Lottery-funded programme intended to ensure that investment in arts and culture also has the biggest possible impact on local economies, jobs, education, community cohesion and health and wellbeing. In 2017, sixteen bids were awarded funding worth £20m, of which five were based in rural local authorities and received £5.8m.
11. The Cultural Destinations programme was designed to enable arts and culture organisations, working in partnership with destination organisations, to increase their reach, engagement and resilience through working with the tourism sector. Two of ten projects in Round One and four of sixteen projects in Round Two, totalling £664k and £726k, respectively, were awarded to projects in rural areas.
12. Through the Creative Local Growth Fund, the Arts Council hoped to put art and culture at the heart of growth plans by: securing long-term partnerships between Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), the Arts Council and other local partners; helping to encourage European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs) investment within LEP areas into the cultural sector; and investing in new approaches and developing knowledge than can help achieve these objectives. In one round of funding, in 2017, two of nine projects, totalling £982k, were made to projects in rural areas.
13. Music Education Hubs (MEHs) are groups of organisations working together to create joined-up music education provision, respond to local need and fulfil the objectives of the hub as set out in the National Plan for Music Education. Funding is awarded based on the distribution of eligible and FSM-eligible pupils. Since 2012, £395.8m has been awarded to MEHs, with the most recent figure for 2017/18 at £75m. Of this, approximately £92.8m (23 per cent of total value) was awarded to significantly or predominantly rural areas.
14. It is worth noting that MEH activity within the most rural areas tended to be funded slightly differently; in predominantly rural areas, income from parental contribution and Youth Music grants was significantly higher than elsewhere. Conversely, in predominantly urban and significantly rural areas, school contributions were higher.
15. The Libraries Opportunities for Everyone Innovation Fund (LOFE) was set up to support projects that develop innovative library service activity to benefit disadvantaged people and places in England. 30 projects were awarded funding in 2017, five of which would be considered significantly or predominantly rural, collectively receiving £703k (18 per cent) of funding.
16. Catalyst is a sector-wide private giving investment scheme aimed at helping arts organisations diversify their income streams and access more funding from private sources. Of 1033 applications since 2012, 957 were from applicants in urban areas (92.6 per cent) and 76 in rural areas (7.4 per cent). From this, 511 applications were awarded funding – 471 urban applicants and 40 rural applicants – with success rates of 49.2 per cent for urban and 52.6 per cent for rural applicants, respectively.
17. Although success rates were marginally higher among rural applicants, urban applications requested an average of £160k, while rural applications sought an average of £128k. Similarly, successful urban applications received an average award of £132k, compared to £107k among rural applications. In total, urban applicants have been awarded £62.1m of Catalyst funding, or 93.6 per cent of total funding, compared to £4.3m among rural applicants, or 6.4 per cent.
18. This is also interesting in light of data collected by the Arts Council as part of its annual submission from NPOs. This highlights that in 2016/17, urban NPOs received 13.3 per cent of their income from what can be termed ‘contributed income’, a combination of one-off and regular donations, fundraising, sponsorship and trust income. By comparison, rural NPOs received 11.4 per cent of their income in this way. Urban NPOs also tended to receive a higher amount per organisation from this type of income; £108k, compared to £74k, a difference of 31.9 per cent.
19. The Arts Council’s Capital Grants programme supports arts and cultural organisations to ensure they have appropriate capital assets to deliver their work. This is split into Small Grants, of below £500k, and Large Grants, of £500k or above. Since 2012, the Arts Council has received 577 capital applications; 541 from applicants in urban areas and 36 from rural areas. 312 applications were successful – 296 from urban areas and 16 from rural areas – receiving £311.2m in funding in total. The success rate for urban applicants was higher than their rural equivalents – 54.7 per cent compared to 44.4 per cent, respectively – while the average award was also greater, at £1.0m compared  
    to £680k.

**Investment – Local Government**

1. Between 2010/11 and 2016/17, local government spending declined significantly, from £85.6bn annually to £75.0bn, a fall of 12.4 per cent. Much of this decline was experienced between 2010/11 and 2011/12.
2. According to the Defra and ONS classification of local authorities, this decline was felt across urban and rural local authorities. ‘Predominantly urban’ areas experienced a 11.1 per cent fall, while ‘significantly rural’ and ‘predominantly rural’ areas experienced slightly greater decreases, at 13.9 per cent and 15.7 per cent, respectively.
3. However, spending on arts and culture decreased more dramatically; from £1.4bn in 2010/11 to £1.0bn in 2016/17, a fall of 26.5 per cent.
4. ‘Predominantly rural’ areas experienced the greatest decline in cultural spend, at 32.7 per cent, while ‘predominantly urban’ and ‘significantly rural’ areas experienced falls of 25.5 per cent and 25.4 per cent, respectively.
5. Declines by ‘type of spend ’ were not always consistent: Library spending demonstrated the significant average decline (26.7 per cent) but was similar by urban/rural type; Arts development observed the greatest average decline (37.2 per cent), with spend in predominantly rural local authorities, in particular, falling 56.5 per cent; spend on theatre and public entertainment declined by the greatest proportion in predominantly rural areas (35.0 per cent); and predominantly and significantly rural areas demonstrated similar proportional declines in museum and gallery spend (29.6 and 28.5 per cent, respectively). It is worth noting that total volume of spend has been lower within rural areas and therefore greater proportional changes typically represent lesser  
   numerical change.
6. There is a complex relationship between investment in culture and the arts in rural and urban areas by both the Arts Council and local government. Investment in one location does not mean that it does not bring benefits to people living elsewhere. Touring, loans from collections and digital innovations all mean that investment in one locality can directly benefit people elsewhere. A further consideration is that people may be prepared to travel from a rural to an urban area in order to engage with culture and the arts. Obviously, such opportunities may be limited by external factors, and there are particular issues that pertain to rural areas; for example, transport to and from isolated communities, access to broadband, and so on. Some of these are outside the control of the Arts Council, but we will seek to improve our understanding of these with our partners and stakeholders.

**Partnerships**

1. **Local government**. The Arts Council’s key strategic and delivery partner is local government. Our partnership with local authorities in rural areas is vital to us being able to realise our ambitions. Within their localities, councils have democratic legitimacy, on-the-ground knowledge and the ability to offer leadership to communities. Sustaining a healthy cultural sector requires partnership between the Arts Council – as the national development agency – and local government. Council services have been subject to major cuts and there is evidence that rural local authorities have had to make bigger cuts to cultural and arts investments than urban ones. For example, there has been a significant reduction in the numbers of arts and culture development officers directly employed by local authorities. Meanwhile councils have developed new roles for local and capabilities to support culture, particularly regarding their brokering, enabling and partnership roles, and also spinning out services to new business arrangements such as trusts and community interest companies and community asset transfer .
2. **Local Government Association** .The Arts Council has a strategic approach to working with local government that recognises the different roles which local government can play, set out in our joint statement of purpose with the LGA. A key element of our partnership with the LGA is undertaking service improvement activity with councils. This has included the Libraries Development Initiative and Leadership Academies for councillors responsible for cultural services. Many rural authorities have directly benefited from this work and we will continue to collaborate with the LGA to provide these opportunities. We recognise that the LGA are members of the Rural Coalition/ Rural Services Network and that their membership encompasses rural authorities . Seven of the National Parks are also members , so the LGA is a key rural stakeholder in its own right. Five places on each of the Arts Council’s Area Councils are reserved for local government members, and this includes councillors from rural areas.
3. The LGA are currently undertaking two important areas of work which directly complement the Arts Council ‘s work:

* The LGA is partnering with The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation to highlight examples of good practice in relation to culture in rural regeneration, exploring the economic and social benefits of this type of approach. This will include eighteen case studies of culture-led regeneration – including Cornwall, East Lincolnshire and Hampshire – with a launch event in Autumn 2018.
* Partnership with Arts Council to produce an online Culture Hub, featuring case studies which include specific rural examples

1. **Rural Services Partnership.** The Arts Council is a member of the Rural Services Partnership, which operates as the national champion for rural services in England, and includes organisations from across the public and voluntary sectors. The Arts Council’s membership means that culture is not absent from these debates.
2. Other government policies increasingly emphasise that access to the countryside is important for wellbeing, health and recreation. The Social Care Green paper which is now in development with the Department of Health and Social Care will provide a new policy context for social prescribing and helping people lead active and connected lives. The National Planning Policy Framework is held by Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The ways in which culture is accessed will be differentiated between urban and rural areas.
3. Arts Council recognises local government’s statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient public library service under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. New Library NPOs, such as Libraries Unlimited in Devon and Norfolk Library Services, are exploring new ways of delivering creative and cultural activity and new models of delivery though Trusts and CICs which enable them to partner with a wide range of other organisations and raise funds.
4. **Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra)**. The Arts Council values its relationship with Defra. The department facilitated the rural proofing workshop which allowed us to critically assess how we engage with rural communities. We will continue to engage with Defra through the Rural Communities Policy Unit so that we can remain connected to changes in policy relating to rural areas and the countryside and to maintain a source of expert advice and guidance. The 25 Year Environment Plan, in effect, constitutes the government’s strategy for rural agendas. It is the plan which aims to ‘connect people with the natural world and with the environment‘; for example, it refers to increasing access to countryside cultural events. It will be important for government agencies to be able to align policies and investment to the guidance in this plan and to find hooks to show that Arts Council and the cultural sector are contributing, demonstrating the Arts Council’s commitment and approach to rural proofing. Defra continues to use the Hub Towns classification, which will be updated following the 2021 census. The Parks Action Group ( representing the National Parks ) are named within the plan .
5. **Local Enterprise Partnerships** **(LEPs)**. The contribution of the arts and culture to the national economy and economic growth are well evidenced and understood and the Arts Council has a key role in advocating for this contribution, forming partnerships and helping to secure investment. Foremost in plans to boost culture’s economic contribution are relationships with LEPs, especially where these include Higher Education. The UK Prosperity Fund is replacing EU funds and LEPs are producing local plans. The Arts Council seeks to broker partnerships between cultural organisations, LEPs, the Higher Education sector and the private sector. Our funding was eligible to match the LEP’s allocations of European Structural and Investment Funds during 2014-20. This was a major opportunity and there are some good examples of rural arts organisations and their partners making innovative contributions to the creative economy in rural areas. The New Anglia LEP, covering Norfolk and Suffolk, has produced a Cultural Strategy for The East between 2016 and 2022, *Culture Drives Growth*. The Creative Local Growth Fund (CLGF) funded ‘ Starteast’ is at the heart of this, with a Culture Board whose members include the LEP, local authorities, arts an d cultural organisations, the National Trust and Visit East Anglia. This is an excellent example of an LEP recognising the value of the arts and culture in driving growth. In Cornwall, the local authority, the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic England and Arts Council England signed a memorandum of understanding in 2019 that commits partners to work together to develop Cornish culture, heritage and arts.
6. **Cultural Partnerships** .There is anecdotal evidence of the growing importance of place-based cultural partnerships in rural areas in which local authorities may play a key role along with other partners for example : LEPs ; the HEI sector ; and commercial partners . Examples include :The Dorset Arts Development Company, Create Gloucestershire and The Hereford Cultural Partnership
7. **Partnerships extending the reach and impact of art and culture**. The Arts Council works with partners to increase engagement in the arts and excellence in arts commissioning and production. Some of these partnerships have significant strengths in rural areas. The following partners are now working with each other and with Arts Council and are subject to Memoranda of Understanding (see Appendix):

* National Trust – *Trust New Art*, an annual arts programme, has been successfully delivered across National Trust properties and landscapes since 2009, attracting audiences of over 500,000 each year. It has been a highly successful partnership, signalled by the Trust’s commitment to a Contemporary Arts Programme Manager post.
* Canal & River Trust – A national arts programme has been developed for England’s waterways through a partnership which, since 2011, has aimed to repeat the successes of work begun with the National Trust. The Canal & River Trust led a consortium bid to Creative People and Places, and in June 2013 was awarded almost £2 million to develop a ten-year scheme of radical arts programming by the people of Pennine Lancashire that will focus on the waterways.
* Forestry Commission England – A public art programme for England’s public forests has been underway since 2011. The Forestry Commission has received over £100,000 in Strategic touring funding for an experimental music project across the forest estate. The Jerwood Open Forest Competition has been created with the Jerwood Foundation, offering artists the chance to win £30,000 to develop a project in one or more locations within the forest estate.

1. Since the 2013 evidence review and position statement , a number of other organisations have emerged as making significant or potential contributions to building partnerships, infrastructure, capacity and commissioning activity in rural areas:

* Historic Churches and The Churches Conservation Trust.
* RSA, rural economy unit.
* Lottery distributors, HLF and BIG.
* Historic England, eg as partners in the rural Great Places.
* Natural England, eg partnership brought together by the Beaford Arts Centre in North Devon bringing together UNESCO biospheres with arts, environment and heritage.
* Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs), which have statutory functions and include public health.
* Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty eg the Kent AONB arts programme featuring the Ash Tree arts project (see appendix).
* The National Parks, e.g. the developmenr MOU with The South Downs National Park.

1. **Natural science** .Rural sites and locations are increasingly important for creative and innovative approaches to natural and environmental science and creative approaches to understanding and responding to the natural and scientific worlds; for example, Invisible Worlds, The Ambition for Excellence funded project located at Eden, Cornwall.
2. Artists, museum and library professionals, and all those working in the cultural sector in rural areas are and will remain significant partners for the Arts Council. We will engage as appropriate with professional and representative bodies where our interests and ambitions coincide on culture in rural areas (eg the Society of Chief Librarians and the Museums Association). We will work closely with strategic organisations such as the National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF).
3. We acknowledge the role of community-based and voluntary arts and cultural activity and its importance to the rural cultural infrastructure. Thus, we see Voluntary Arts as one of the key NPOs awarded funding as part of the 2018-22 (see Appendix).

**Arts Council England and rural communities 2019/2020: Principles underpinning the Arts Council’s approach to rural communities**

1. The Arts Council’s approach to rural communities is governed by the following principles, which we will take into account as we advocate, develop, invest and form partnerships.
2. We do not see the need for a specific rural strategy or investment programmes – but we do want to see rural communities benefiting appropriately from the totality of  
   our support.
3. Our commitment to equality of opportunity to enable people to experience the arts and culture and our ambition to increase the number and range of people taking up these opportunities is set out in Goal 2 of our existing strategy, *Great art and culture for everyone*. We recognise that rural communities have specific characteristics and needs including sparsity and cost of services , rural deprivation, transport and access issues – and will take account of these.
4. We will continue to work in partnership with Defra to take account of rural proofing and to amend our approach to this over time and in the light of experience.
5. We will continue a national dialogue with rural stakeholders from across England, and use this to inform our policy and work. We reaffirm our commitment to the following ways of working: responding to the specific needs of rural areas; supporting artists working in rural areas; improving access for rural audiences; and building partnerships for growth.

**How we will work**

There are three main aspects to this: investment and development; further research and evidence; and partnerships.

**Investment and development**

1. **National portfolio organisations (NPOs)**. This provided funding for organisations for four years, to March 2022. The selection process included geographic balancing criteria as part of the decision-making. NPOs are diverse and encompass a number of organisations with a direct rural focus, including rural touring organisations and rurally based arts organisations. NPOs form the spine of arts and culture infrastructure , close working relationships with the rurally based NPOs are therefore critical to development in rural areas ( see appendix ).Investment in rurally based NPOs represents 2.6% of total portfolio value, consistent with the 2015-18 (2.8%) and 2012-15 cycles (2.6%). However, the overall number of rural NPOs is still relatively low, and this will need to be a consideration in the next NPO investment round.
2. **Grants for the Arts now replaced by National Lottery Project Grants for the Arts and Culture**. Our open-access Lottery-funded grants programme is for individuals and organisations, and funds activity engaging people in the arts, and helps artists and organisations carry out their work. Panels are able to take into account geographical balancing criteria .Success rates among rural applicants (47.9%) tended to be slightly lower than their urban counterparts (49.9%) and there was greater disparity in terms of the volume of money requested compared to value awarded; rural applicants received a lower proportion (45.9%) than urban applicants (51.8%). We will continue to monitor application and success rates in rural areas and prioritise advice and support  
   if appropriate. It will be important to continue to be alert to low investment in rural districts and to take this into account in the decision making process.
3. **Strategic Touring programme**. Arts Council recognises the value of touring to places where there is a low physical cultural infrastructure or where there are small numbers of arts and cultural organisations. Support for rural touring organisations remains important across the country, and especially in regions with issues of sparsity and rurality, such as the Midlands, the South West and the North. In years 4-6 of the STP a growing number of performances were held in rural areas. We will continue to build on and support this trend.
4. **Strategic Funds**. The Creative People and Places fund provided focused investment in parts of the country where involvement in the arts is significantly below the national average, seven of these projects were based in, or focused on, a rural local authority. We will continue to learn and disseminate findings from these schemes which appertain to the development of arts and culture in dispersed areas. The 2017 Great Places scheme awarded funding to five out of sixteen projects based in rural local authorities . These schemes are being evaluated and will add significantly to our understanding of rural place making .
5. Other streams of investment which awarded a significant proportion of funding to rural areas include: the Cultural Destinations programme, the Creative Local Growth fund, Music Education Hubs, and the Libraries Opportunities for Everyone Innovation Fund (LOFE) and Celebrating Age. As above, we will learn from the evaluations of these projects, specifically in relation to rural regeneration and place making.
6. **Digital and creative media**. Digital technologies and creative media are transforming how art and culture is produced and consumed. They are making a major contribution to culture in rural areas and they have significant potential to do more. There are still some rural areas without superfast broadband, ‘the final, hard-to-reach 5 %‘. We will look at extending audiences geographically, particularly in places of low engagement and rural areas where broadband infrastructure can be lacking, potentially investing in digital equipment in community spaces and libraries to widen access to an increasing number of ‘live’ arts events and cultural films. The Arts Council will consider how the ambitions of the government’s 2018 *Culture is Digital* report can be best applied in rural areas.

**Research**

1. There are a number of areas which would benefit from further research and evidence.

* **Philanthropy**: Do rural areas have less success in achieving philanthropic and donated income?
* **Market Towns:** How important are market and coastal towns as hubs for cultural development and smaller scale creative clusters which impact on the surrounding rural hinterlands?
* **Culture and the economy:** Are there features, weaknesses and growth spots around the development of the creative industries and cultural tourism in rural areas? What can we learn from partnership with rural LEPs and research funded through AHRC and in partnership with higher education? What will be the impact of the cessation of EU funding opportunities to impact on rural economies?
* **The social value of culture**, specifically in relation to demographic change. Engaging with culture brings a range of values, from health and wellbeing to cohesion, safer communities and learning opportunities. As approximately 50 per cent of those living in rural areas are over the age of 45, the challenges of an ageing population will be acutely felt in the countryside. Ageing populations, even if they are often more affluent than other parts of the community, will face particular barriers to participation, from difficulty in travel to arts venues to issues posed by care needs. Does this need further study and specific partnerships?

**Partnerships**

1. We will investigate the development of partnerships with some of the organisations listed previously. Many of these partnerships are already happening at a local level. We will seek to learn from and value this work in relation to rural place making and the need to do things differently, particularly as many parts of the rural infrastructure are  
   being challenged.
2. Other ways we will work include:

* **Rural proofing and rural balancing**. We have agreed to include reference to Defra’s rural proofing guidance in our advice to our staff about policy development. Within the Arts Council, the Deputy Chief Executive will be responsible for rural proofing.
* **Defra and the LGA** . Arts Council will seek to develop and maintain its relationship with Defra. Overall responsibility for the relationship with Defra will be held by the Director, Strategic Partnerships.
* **Stakeholder engagement**. The Arts Council will continue to engage with rural stakeholders. It will make a commitment to host a bi-annual meeting of rural stakeholders to consider issues relating to arts and culture and rural communities. This has been happening since November 2013. The Rural Position Statement has been on our website since March 2014. We will review and refresh membership of the Rural Stakeholders group to reflect a greater emphasis on diversity and new partnerships.
* **Raise awareness in rural areas of the opportunities presented by Arts Council investment**. We do not consider that there is a need for rurally specific programmes or investment by Arts Council England. We do, however, recognise that we might make better use of our networks and partners to raise awareness of the arts and culture in rural areas, and we will commit to doing this. We will look for active support to achieve this from the rural stakeholders with whom we engage.

**APPENDIX**

**Case Studies and Links**

1. Voluntary Arts Network – Cultural Commons Project

Cultural Commons is a series of weekly articles curated by Voluntary Arts that ran between November 2017 and February 2018. The articles were written by cultural thinkers and doers in response to the emergence of cultural commissioning. The aims of the series is to publicise cultural commons in action and encourage new approaches to creating and sustaining cultural activity in local places in the UK and the Republic  
of Ireland.

<https://www.voluntaryarts.org/Pages/Category/our-cultural-commons>

1. Creative People and Place – East Durham Creates

In 2014 East Durham Creates was funded by Arts Council England as part of its Creative People and Places (CPP) programme, which is all about more people choosing, creating and taking part in brilliant art experiences in the places where they live. East Durham Creates is one of 21 independent CPP projects. Each project is completely unique to its area and residents, testing how to grow arts provision in ways that are sustainable and can last.

The East Durham Creates team is based at East Durham Trust in Peterlee and managed by a group of partners: East Durham Trust; Beamish Museum; East Durham Area Action Partnership; and Culture and Sport, Durham County Council.

<http://eastdurhamcreates.co.uk/about/about-the-project/>

1. Great Place Scheme – Northern Heartlands

Northern Heartlands is one of sixteen Great Place Schemes in the UK funded by Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England. We are using a ‘cultural landscape’ approach, recognising that landscape and places are shaped by what has happened in the past, what is happening now and what may happen in the future. Our landscapes tell an ever-changing story.

Our Great Place is in County Durham and includes the catchment of two rivers – the Tees and the Wear – extending from their sources in the North Pennines to the lowland arc through which they flow. The area includes the market towns of Barnard Castle, Bishop Auckland, Shildon, Crook, Tow Law and Willington and the communities of part of the former Durham coalfield, together with the isolated hill farms and villages of the rural upper Dales.

<https://northernheartlands.org/about-us/>

1. Great Place Scheme – Lakes and Dales

The exciting Great Place: Lakes and Dales project was launched with a creativity-filled event in Grasmere celebrating the wealth of local culture, arts and heritage. Arts Council England and the Heritage Lottery Fund have awarded £1.34million for this innovative project which will boost the local economy through celebrating local culture, arts  
and heritage.

Great Place: Lakes and Dales aims to create a sustainable, resilient, creative community and economy, which will retain and attract younger people and business to the area to influence, support and create our future economy. The project is being led by Craven District Council, in partnership with Arts Council and also the Yorkshire Dales and Lake District National Park Authorities.

<https://www.southlakeland.gov.uk/news/councils-launch-creative-and-cultural-project/>

1. Area of National Beauty (AONB)

Following a successful partnership with Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), in 2015 Activate worked with And Now to develop a piece of work that would deepen existing lines of enquiry into the landscape and bring other AONBs together to work with artists in a way they hadn’t previously.

The impetus behind this work was to address the challenges faced by rural areas, where access to services and employment opportunities are limited and young people migrate to cities. Given AONBs advocacy of the positive impact that nature has on wellbeing – and the widely recognised contribution that arts make in this area – it was felt that a partnership between the two sectors would be hugely beneficial.

A visit to Oerol festival on the Frisian Island of Terschelling led to the discovery that Dorset was linked to Terschelling by an ‘ancient super highway’ called the ‘Icknield Way’. Four other AONBs were also traversed by this ‘highway’: Cranborne Chase, North Wessex Downs, Chilterns and the Norfolk Coast Partnership. Following discussions, the participating AONBs agreed that inviting artists into their landscapes could be a way to reach new audiences and engage visitors differently.

The result of this partnership is the Life Cycles and Landscapes project. The project aims to develop strategic relationships between the custodians of landscapes and the outdoor arts sector through professional development, advocacy and skills sharing, and to produce artworks that inspire audiences to access and see the landscape in a new light. The Wayfaring commissions, which will be performed as part of Inside Out Dorset 2018, will take place at a series of locations within AONBs and will see And Now: create a series of artworks inviting audiences to move through, investigate and contribute, before culminating in a final celebration of the project.

<https://activateperformingarts.org.uk/project/life-cycles-and-landscapes-wayfaring>

**National Agencies: Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs)**

1. Forestry Commission

Forestry Commission England will work with Arts Council England to support achieving *Great Art and Culture for Everyone* in England's public forests. We believe that great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. We believe that woods and forests are vital places for contemporary artists to engage with, to make and present new work. We seek to create high-quality, ambitious work that breaks new ground for both artists  
and audiences.

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Forestry_commission_MoU_2016-2020.pdf>

1. Canal and Rivers Trust

The principal outcome of this agreement will be high-quality, socially engaged, contemporary arts programming in the Canal & River Trust network to reach and engage new arts audiences and new visitors to the waterways. Working with high calibre arts partners and third party artists and producers will bring to life the unique heritage, rare environments and varied communities that make up the waterways  
of England.

This will stimulate many more contemporary arts projects and events across the art forms, connecting diverse communities along waterway corridors in urban and rural areas in England. Many of these communities have limited access to both the arts and the waterways. The arts will become increasingly embedded within the Trust’s core work, helping to deliver its vision to create living waterways that transform places and enrich lives.

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ACE_CRT_MoU_Draft_Sept_2016.pdf>

1. National Trust

A new relationship between Arts Council England and the National Trust is designed to enable the two organisations to work together in achieving a shared vision for the interaction between historic properties and contemporary art. With over a million objects, hundreds of unique gardens, open spaces, walks and over two hundred properties, the National Trust holds a remarkable and largely untapped resource for upcoming and established artists, makers, and curators of contemporary art and crafts. This resource can be enhanced and focused through collaboration with the expertise and national artistic overview of Arts Council England.

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/NT_MoU.pdf>

1. Research into the social and economic impact of rural touring with Coventry University and the NRTF – TO BE ADDED
2. Report on rural music hubs

Golant Media Ventures was commissioned by Arts Council England to provide ‘interventions’ to support the managers of selected Music Education Hubs (MEHs), which included addressing the challenges of delivery in rural areas. The report found that rural MEHs benefit from long-term experience of delivering music services and have extensive existing relationships to schools within their areas. They work with wide networks of music teachers under a range of structures and compensation structures.

Challenges faced by these hubs include the sheer distances between the extremities of their areas, making it difficult to match teachers and pupils. Management and communication issues can arise as teams are not always co-located and scattered populations and smaller schools and class sizes can make ensemble  
activities challenging.

A number of technological opportunities have been identified to mitigate such issues. These include the facilitation of remote lessons via services such as Skype, live streaming of performances and the use of a management communication and workflow tool for the hub team and workforce. New technology is emerging to facilitate remote teaching, for example subscription streaming of music that permits annotation.

Notably, North Yorkshire is leading the charge in remote lesson provision, and has shown that they can deliver comparable results to face-to-face lessons.

1. Wi-Fi scheme in libraries

On the back of a recommendation from the Independent Library Report for England, in the 2015 budget the government allocated £7.4 million funding to support libraries in England to provide internet access and Wi-Fi for the public. Up to £7.1 million was set aside for capital funding and was used to either install new or upgrade existing Wi-Fi equipment in English libraries. By March 2016, 99.3 per cent of English libraries were providing free public access to Wi-Fi, an increase of 27 percentage points from the previous figure of 72 per cent. The impact survey showed that despite decreases in visitor figures at libraries, there has been a significant increase in the number of unique devices connecting to the library Wi-Fi.

The survey demonstrated increased digital connectivity with attendees in 2016/17, which were complimented by an increase in the percentage of libraries offering Wi-Fi enabled programmes, courses, clubs and sessions. There has also been an average increase of 364 per cent in eBook loans between 2014 and 2017 per service.

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Wifi_Public_Libraries_England_evaluation.pdf>

1. Digital Worcester: Worcestershire 5G Consortium - Testbed and Trials

Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership with a grant of £4.8m.

A team of 5G and Industry 4.0 experts lead this project. Working with Worcestershire LEP, the consortium comprises: Worcestershire County Council, 5GIC at University of Surrey, AWTG, Huawei, O2, BT and Malvern Hills Science Park. With local businesses Worcester Bosch and Yamazaki Mazak, it will focus on ways to increase industrial productivity through preventative and assisted maintenance using robotics, big data analytics and AR over 5G.

It will also have a cyber security aspect, with QinetiQ providing assurances on the ‘security by design’ of 5G and IoT technology. Entrepreneurs will have the opportunity to test 5G capabilities in a new commercial tech accelerator located at the Malvern Hills Science Park.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/25m-for-5g-projects-on-the-anniversary-of-the-uks-digital-strategy>

1. The Rise of the Rural Creative Class

A growing body of research shows that innovative businesses are common in rural areas, and rural innovation gets a boost from the arts.

<https://www.citylab.com/life/2018/05/the-rise-of-the-rural-creative-class/559319/>

1. Pub is The Hub

Pub is The Hub is a not for profit organisation that offers specialist advise on rural services diversification and community ownership of pubs, so they can provide viable local services at the heart of the community. They work with pub owners, licensees, breweries and the private sector, and depend on donations and grant to support their largely voluntary organisation.

Pubs involved in the scheme provide vital services to local communities, including spaces for a shops selling basic groceries, function rooms, free internet access and providing Post Office services, among others. As a result, the pubs taking part benefit from strengthened business models and greater support from the community, and are often saved from closure.

<https://www.pubisthehub.org.uk/>

1. Kent Area of National Beauty (AONB) – The Ash Project

The Ash Project is a cultural response to the loss of the most common tree in the Kent Downs, the ash tree. In 2012, when ash dieback was first discovered in England, the Kent Downs AONB was one of the first areas affected by the rapid spread of the  
fungal disease.

The Ash Project asks how we might mark and celebrate ash trees before they are lost. The project combines a commission by artists Ackroyd & Harvey with a range of walks, talk and workshops. The project has been funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Arts Council England and Kent County Council. The Ask Project also has active partnerships with groups in the conservation and scientific research communities, including Imperial College London, Forestry Commission and Turner Contemporary.

<https://www.theashproject.org.uk>

1. Suffolk Library Service

Suffolk Libraries are a not-for-profit charitable organisation who run the library service for the benefit of the people of Suffolk. In 2014 Suffolk’s newest Post Office opened in Stradbroke Library. At the time It was believed to be the only Post Office in the country to be run by a library service. In 2017, Suffolk Libraries were award National Portfolio Organisation status, one of only six library services in England to do so.

<https://www.suffolklibraries.co.uk>

1. Libraries Loneliness Project, Norfolk County Council

Norfolk County Council’s library and information service ran the Libraries Loneliness project to help older people feel more connected. The project was part of a wider In Good Company campaign, which provided ways for individuals to build connections with the neighbours and communities. Arts Council England included the project in their 2017 report ‘Stand By Me’ by Shared Intelligence, a study of the contribution of public libraries to the well-being of older people.

*“Norfolk is a sparsely populated county whose 47 libraries (plus 8 mobile libraries and a home reader service) serve a population of just under 900,000 residents. It is also a county where around one in five people aged 65+ are thought to suffer from loneliness. … The Libraries Loneliness Project was launched in November 2016 and is the library service’s contribution to the council-wide campaign. The aim is to deliver a consistent county-wide offer so that anyone - library service staff, community groups, other statutory organisations - can signpost a lonely person to a library, confident that quality and effective support will be available. … In Good Company along with the Libraries Loneliness Project are still in their early stages but already the library service has gathered 30 impact stories from the groups which are enabling them to increase and improve what they do. As they collect more impact stories the staff will be able to identify harder outcomes but for the moment the strongest evidence comes from the immediate reactions of people joining the new groups in Norfolk libraries.”*  
Stand By Me, July 2017, A report by Shared Intelligence for Arts Council England.

1. Rural Diversity Network

Set up by Cornwall Museums Partnership, the Rural Diversity Network (RDN) for arts, museums and culture in 2017 its part of its ACE-supported Change Makers programme—a primary inequality being time and cost of travel. Set up to raise awareness of geographic exclusion and to balance cultural policy that is currently heavily centred on the visible diversity of big cities

Through online awareness raising and events such as Rethinking Diversity in Rural Regions in Jan 2017 and Unlock the Rock co-organised with Tate St Ives in March 2018 the network aims to provide a voice, another view and campaigning for equity of cultural opportunity (based on Defra’s idea of rural proofing).

Led by Cornwall Museums Partnership who are sector-leaders in rural proofing strategy, RDN currently has 55 members from across the UK and also internationally in the USA which experience similar issues to those in other countries. Any member can use the umbrella of RDN to start new collaborations, create their own campaigns and events that promote rural diversity.

1. Arts and Health

The Arts and Health programme at Penlee House Gallery and Museum is a series of workshops for adults facing any number of life difficulties including, but not limited to, physical, long-term or mental health difficulties. It is transformational for adults suffering from isolation—a major health problem in most rural regions

Facilitated by an artist, together the group use the collections as the starting point for activities which develop their arts skills and creativity. Taking part in the programme enables participants to make new connections to others in the community which in turn enhances wellbeing.

The activity is supported through Cornwall Museums Partnership’s NPO programme funded by Arts Council England.

1. Citizen Curators

Citizen Curators is a work-based training programme in museum awareness and modern curatorial practice aimed at volunteers from our community. It can also benefit museum staff who want to learn new approaches to museum work. The course was developed to address barriers to cultural education opportunities in rural regions and to diversify the voices that interpret our collections.

It was piloted at Royal Institution of Cornwall as part of the ACE-supported Change Makers programme, resulting in a major contribution to a new exhibition exploring Cornish-Chinese connections, new relationships with Chinese families in Cornwall and 15-fold increase in digital participation through Hireth art exhibition on Instagram.

It is now being rolled out to seven NPO museums led by Cornwall Museums Partnership, across three years targeting 120 beneficiaries, funded by Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund and delivered by Curators Institute.

1. Tairawhiti Museum, Gisborne, New Zealand

A museum embedded in the centre of a rurally-isolated community on the eastern cape of New Zealand, it is used as the local café, music and lecture venue, teaching space and has also given room for local homeless people

The museum supports adjacent Māori-led community remembrance centre, Manutuke Marae, and provides community-led programming, giving equal weight to Māori stories (including language), European and other cultures represented in the region. Its name was changed from Gisborne Museum to Tairawhiti Museum to reflect this.

1. Rural Disability : Led by Becki Morris of Warwickshire County Council, Museums Disability Cooperative Network: https://www.musedcn.org.uk/about-dcn-how-to-contribute-contact-us/

1. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/great-art-and-culture-everyone> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)