

# ARTISTIC AND QUALITY ASSESSMENT (AQA) FAQs for NPOs

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## **Scope of AQA**

### **What kind of work is assessed?**

- **Standard assessments**

Work created, curated, commissioned, produced, published or performed by NPOs.

**Festivals** are also included, even if they did not commission or create the work. The standard assessment model is used for festivals as we are assessing the festival as the piece of work, regardless of whether the component parts are works made by the organisation or bought in work by other organisations. One or two days/visits to a festival should be enough for an AQA.

- **Participatory assessments**

The term participatory art prompts much critical debate and can be understood in multiple ways across the arts and cultural sector. Participatory work enables audiences or participants to be part of the artistic experience or enquiry. Outcomes are frequently a balance between personal and public, artistic and social and the degree of participant involvement and ownership can vary.

As part of the Artistic and Quality Assessment programme we include participatory projects that are undertaken by NPOs including:

- Participatory work where the primary reason is to engage in the arts.
- Engagement projects that have social and/or informal learning outcomes, and may be using the arts as a tool to engage
- Outreach work undertaken by building based organisations that use participatory work as a tool for informal learning development.

The nature of work may vary across the spectrum of participatory work NPOs present. This will be discussed with the assessor before they attend the assessment. Assessors may also experience the work at different stages of the process; for example they may observe a project in its early stages and then return near to the end of the project, or it may be appropriate to view a final performance. Assessors are asked to comment on the quality of the facilitation, participant experience and evaluation methods used.

- **Programmed work assessments**

This strand covers organisations that programme work e.g. organisations such as arts centres or venues with a range of artistic and cultural activity. Whilst we already assess events programmed by NPOs – we don't currently assess an organisation's approach to programming. Our recommended process is for one assessor to attend three events programmed by an organisation across a season, and to write one assessment incorporating all three events, contextualising the events within the organisation's wider public programme. (For consortium based organisations this may be over a longer duration of time). Artistic and Quality Assessments for programming organisations should take place once per year. It could be possible for the kinds of events assessed to change annually, and we will aim for the assessor to change annually.

## **Who decides what is assessed?**

Arts Council Relationship managers recommend work to be assessed. NPOs do not decide which of their work is assessed, although they are free to discuss options with their RM if they wish to.

## **Is there anything that can't be assessed?**

Artistic and quality assessments are a routine element of ongoing monitoring of band 1 NPOs, but not all NPOs receive assessments. For example, they will not be appropriate for service; umbrella or networking organisations. Artistic and Quality Assessment also excludes conferences and professional development events and activity.

Sector Support Organisations (SSOs) and non-NPOs are ineligible for assessment.

Activities which take place as part of formal education are also not included in AQA. This is because we recognise that this scheme is not the best way to assess formal learning programmes. We recognise there is a wide spectrum of work, and by its nature participatory work may well have strong learning elements; however it's not the purpose of the AQA programme to assess formal education outcomes.

## **Assessment Arrangements**

### **Can we provide information in advance of an assessment?**

Depending on the nature of the assessment, yes, some briefing information will be facilitated when arranging the assessment to provide context for the final assessment.

For assessments exploring programmed work and participatory activity, the QE team will potentially have some initial information provided by RMs to assist the team in selecting an appropriate assessor as well as highlighting any necessary information about the nature of the work. In addition to this, when informing the organisation of the confirmed assessor we also ask the NPO to supply some further information to give a full context to the activity/programming choices.

For assessments exploring **programming**, the NPO will be asked to provide some **brief** 'programmer's notes' for the assessor. These should assist the assessor in contextualising the work in terms of the wider programme from an artistic and creative perspective, and should outline information around the following where relevant;

- The aims and priorities in your mission statement and how this is reflected in your overall approach to programming
- How the selected events sit within the wider programme's aims as outlined above
- The nature of the relationship between your organisation and the artists/companies

- Where relevant, outline why work has been programmed into your venue at a specific time or in a particular performance space

For **Participatory** work, we require some **short** briefing notes to assist the assessor in placing the activity they are assessing in context. It would be helpful if this included information where relevant such as:

- The aims and priorities in your mission statement and how this is reflected in this participatory activity or project
- The intended outcomes for participants
- How the balance between the artistic process, the engagement of the participants, and any final product is managed.
- The relationship between facilitator/artist and the participants, and the balance of co-creation where applicable
- History of the group (how long they been together, how was the group assembled, etc) and information about any sensitivities the assessor should be aware of
- Relationship between your organisation and the facilitator
- The session's location within the timeline of the project, e.g. week three.
- Communication and publicity material, for example publicity brochure, website, social media, including pre-project correspondence and information.

We do recommend that the facilitator and/or a member staff from the organisation make acquaintance with the assessor on the day prior to the session.

We also encourage assessors to take communication and publicity material into account, for example publicity brochure, website, social media, including pre-project correspondence and information so it would be greatly appreciated if these were made available.

It is worth noting that on making the request for an assessment, we ask RMs how the assessors may experience the work; as a participant, or to observe depending on the nature of the work.

For **Standard** assessments where we assess public facing work, we do not encourage providing further guidance as the assessment is primarily about the artistic quality of a particular piece of work as it would be experienced by any other member of the public. It can be useful for assessors to comment on the overall quality of the experience (such as front of house facilities) and this can provide useful feedback to the organisation. The main role of the assessor, however, is to make judgments about the work experienced.

Assessors are encouraged to do some basic background research, for example by looking at the organisation's website or buying a programme, but they are not

expected to spend a lot of time studying the organisation or the work. Assessors may choose to comment on activity around a piece of work (such as after-show discussions, websites, programmes and so forth). It is not the role of the assessor, however, to make judgments about the organisation as a whole.

An exception to this is in the matter of organisations that facilitate rural touring. For this, we require some brief notes to assist the assessor in contextualising the work in terms of the wider menu and it would be helpful if these notes included information around the following;

- The nature of the relationship between your organisation and the artist/company, and why they have been selected for the menu. Are they new to the menu or have they been chosen before? Have they been part of an artist development scheme?
- Is there a particular reason why the promoter has chosen the artist/company? For example if the work is new/more challenging/ or an art form which you are trying to offer more of, has the promoter been given extra support or subsidy to take the show?
- The overall approach to choosing the selected events within the wider menu offer.

## **How are assessments arranged?**

The scheme is managed centrally by the Quality Evaluation team. The team informs organisations in advance when an assessor is going to see their work, letting them know which assessor will be attending. There is a short biography of each assessor on the [Arts Council website](#). All arrangements are made through the QE team for clarity, monitoring and transparency.

## **How are assessors selected?**

The assessors are appointed following an open recruitment process against published criteria. All AQA assessors should be regarded as arts-literate and informed audience members who have been appointed on the basis that they can produce good written assessments; therefore, any assessor should be able to undertake any assessment unless an area of specific expertise is required.

The QE team select assessors for specific assessments based on a number of factors and information provided by RMs. Assessors are not “assigned” to particular organisations. As a general rule we commission different assessors to assess an organisation’s work where possible on different occasions, to help ensure that organisations are assessed from a range of different perspectives.

If the NPO believes the assessor is unsuitable (for example, the NPO believes the assessor has a very strong conflict of interest), they may raise this with the QE team.

We will consider this, consulting the RM and other colleagues as appropriate, and may decide to send a different assessor. The NPO does not have a veto over which assessor is used. We expect that there may often be different kinds of conflicts of interest but that in most circumstances they can be managed as long as they are recognised and understood.

## **Do we need to make any special arrangements?**

Apart from providing tickets, **we do not expect NPOs to make any special arrangements for the assessor**. We would not expect our assessors to be given special treatment by NPOs, ie, invitations to dinners, receptions, private tours. Assessments are primarily about the quality of a particular piece of work as it would be experienced by any other member of the public.

We ask that NPOs do not contact assessors without checking with the team whether this is appropriate first.

Some assessors will want to talk to the organisation about the work and the intentions behind it and some organisations will want to talk to the assessors. There is no prohibition on this, provided that both parties understand the context and are willing to engage in this way and that the assessor is still able to experience the work in a similar way to any other member of the public.

## **What are Arts Council's expectations when asking organisations to provide tickets?**

In order to keep the costs of artistic and quality assessment to a minimum, we ask NPOs to provide up to two free tickets to assessors. (If the work being assessed is a publication, we ask for one free copy for the assessor).

We expect that this will almost always be met from spare capacity and will be sensitive about asking for tickets which would otherwise go to a paying customer. The artistic and quality assessment scheme is the only circumstance in which the Arts Council will ask for free tickets. When Arts Council staff wish to attend a ticketed event, we must pay for our tickets. Of course, organisations are free to invite Arts Council staff to their events but that is at their own discretion.

If you are sold out or there are any other capacity issues at the selected event, we will either look to make alternative arrangements for assessments or potentially cancel the assessment.

## **What happens if an assessment is cancelled?**

Inevitably, there are situations which are outside of the control of both assessors and organisations which could lead to assessments being cancelled. During office hours, we ask assessors to contact us directly if they can no longer attend an assessment and we will inform the organisation as soon as possible to explain the situation and solution. Where possible, we will look to rearrange the assessment whether this be for a different date or with an alternative assessor. If it is outside of office hours and short notice, we advise assessors to contact the box office or office of the organisation as soon as possible and inform the team so this can be recorded. If a situation arises where an NPO has to cancel an assessment, we similarly ask them to contact the QE team to inform the assessor as soon as they are aware. Where this is outside of office hours we understand that assessors will be informed on arrival.

## **What do we do if we experience issues on the day of the assessment?**

On the very rare occasion that an assessor does not collect tickets as arranged or does not arrive as expected, please do let the QE team know and we will follow this up. Similarly, if you have any further questions about anything that takes place during/after an assessment visit, please do highlight this to the QE team directly.

### **Completed assessments**

## **How do I know an assessment is completed and what do we do with it?**

The Quality Evaluation team will do a basic quality assurance process on the assessment and add this to Grantium. Upon completion, assessments are available to both the organisation and their Arts Council relationship manager. Organisations will receive an automatic email once the assessment is available to view.

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, organisations and relationship managers will choose to discuss a range of assessments annually, for example, as part of a broader conversation about quality.

### **Overdue assessments**

We look to return assessments within 21 working days of the final visit date however, the QE team will be in touch with the organisation directly if there is likely to be an extended delay.

## **How do we provide feedback on a written assessment?**

We are happy to receive feedback following the return a completed assessment, positive or negative, as this informs our understanding of how AQAs are being received.

If an NPO responds in writing to the comments in the assessment, or if there is a clear error of fact in an assessment then this should forwarded to the QE team for our records.

We ask NPOs not to contact the assessor directly with any feedback, we are happy to receive all feedback and pass it on to the assessor if helpful.

## **Can we share assessments and/or use them as further evidence?**

Artistic and quality assessments are not intended for publication. It is important to remember, however, that they will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act and as such may be disclosed and published by third parties.

The Arts Council owns copyright of the assessments and we would not permit, for example, selective quotations from assessments to be used in publicity material.

Opinions in assessments are those of independent assessors and are not necessarily the opinion of the Arts Council therefore it would not be appropriate for quotes to be circulated with wider groups, but assessments can be shared with the NPOs board and those involved creatively in the work. They may only be shared with those directly involved in making the work in a hard copy format and as an entire document form (not electronically). Assessments cannot be quoted from or used in any publicity or promotional material which includes grant/funding applications.

**For further information please email the [QE team](#).**