The arts debate – About the consultation

Issued 12 February 2007
Respond by 11 May 2007
Arts Council England works to get more art to more people in more places. We develop and promote the arts across England, acting as an independent body at arm’s length from government.

Between 2006 and 2008, we will invest £1.1 billion of public money from government and the National Lottery in supporting the arts. This is the bedrock of support for the arts in England.

We believe that the arts have the power to change lives and communities, and to create opportunities for people throughout the country.

Cover photo: Safahr, at Birmingham Hippodrome.
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Introduction: Your chance to tell us what you think

Arts Council England is the national development agency for the arts in England, distributing public money from government and the National Lottery. Our mission is to put the arts at the heart of national life and people at the heart of the arts. We work to get more art to more people in more places, engaging the public as both audience and participants and supporting artists and arts organisations.

We are currently celebrating the 60th anniversary of the granting of the royal charter to the Arts Council. This is a moment to celebrate six decades of the arts as they are experienced and enjoyed by millions of people across England. England is one of the most creative, competitive and enjoyable places to live, and that is partly because it has some of the most exciting and varied arts in the world. And this thriving creativity is nurtured and developed across the country by public funds through Arts Council England.

This is also a time to look to the future, and think about the challenges and opportunities ahead. What should the long-term goals be for public investment in the arts in this country, and what will success look like for the next 60 years?

To address these questions the Arts Council needs to know what really matters to all the communities we serve. What do you value about the arts and the public funding of the arts, and how might the Arts Council better meet your needs? With this knowledge we can make more informed decisions and better account for what we achieve in the future.

We therefore launched the arts debate – our first-ever public value inquiry. It is a large-scale public engagement exercise to explore the value that our stakeholders expect to see generated through public investment in the arts. The arts debate involves members of the public, artists, arts organisations, and other stakeholders. It includes a programme of formal research, events with groups of our stakeholders across the country, an online discussion forum and this formal consultation. If you would like to read more about the background to the arts debate visit our website at www.artsdebate.co.uk/about.php

This consultation document represents one of the ways that people can have their say in the future of public investment in the arts in this country. We are not asking you to comment on a specific proposal, or choose between different options. Rather, we want to understand your broad views on the public value of the arts and how this value might be increased. By gathering a wide range of responses to
this important question we can better understand public aspirations for the arts, and how they can be balanced with the needs of artists and arts organisations. We will identify shared priorities, understand points of difference and plan for the future with the hopes and expectations of all our stakeholders in mind.

To help guide your response we have identified five questions on which we would particularly appreciate your input (see ‘The questions’ section below). These questions reflect the views and concerns of the public as explored during a series of discussion groups that we held throughout autumn 2006. You can see a full report in the research findings section of the arts debate website at www.artsdebate.co.uk

To respond, please use the document *The arts debate – Consultation response form*, also available at www.artsdebate.co.uk In your response you can answer all, or any, of these questions.

This is your chance to tell us what you think and to influence the future of the arts in England. We look forward to hearing from you.
How will the consultation work?

Learning from you
We are calling for views and suggestions from people around the country: national organisations, local organisations and individuals. This includes artists and arts organisations as well as other stakeholders, such as local authorities, local and regional government, charities and representative groups. We would like your responses on five questions. These are provided in the section ‘The questions’ below, along with some background and context to each question.

We ask for your help in this important initiative, and we look forward to hearing your thoughts and insights.

Bringing together the results
We will combine the responses from this consultation with the information we get from the other strands of the arts debate, including the formal research and the online discussion forum. We will be working throughout the consultation period and beyond to bring all this information together. We will publish all the findings from the arts debate, as well as a separate report setting out how the Arts Council will act on those findings.

Feeding back
The reports will be made public and shared with those that contribute. We aim to publish these reports on the arts debate website (www.artsdebate.co.uk) in autumn 2007. If you would like to be notified when these reports are available, please let us know when you respond using The arts debate – Consultation response form.
The questions

We would like your responses to all, or any, of the following questions. You are also welcome to provide evidence, where appropriate, to support your responses.

1. What do you value about the arts?
2. What principles should guide public funding of the arts today?
3. What are the responsibilities of a publicly funded arts organisation?
4. When should an artist receive public money?
5. Should members of the public be involved in arts funding decisions?

We give more details and context to each question in the following sections.
1 What do you value about the arts?
Some people are passionate about the arts, going to a wide range of events and exhibitions and taking part in creative activities as often as they can. For others, the arts are a part of the fabric of their lives, something to be enjoyed with friends and family when the occasion arises. Some people don’t think of themselves as interested in the arts, even though they might go to the cinema, listen to music and read books. So what do the arts mean to you?

What arts activities do you enjoy? What do you get from those experiences, and why are they important to you? What role do the arts play in your life, and how is your life different as a result? Is there anything you would change about your involvement with the arts?

Are the arts important in your local community? If so, why? If not, why not? What role do the arts play in national life? Would you like to see the arts play a different role? And what are your expectations and hopes for the arts in the future?
What principles should guide public funding of the arts today?

There are many reasons for public funding of the arts. It supports organisations and activities that are part of our cultural heritage and enables excellent arts practice that might not survive if left to the market alone. It supports new work and alternative voices. It makes the arts more accessible to more people in more places.

The Arts Council has to balance all these ambitions in a changing society. We need to prioritise our funding to reflect the needs and expectations of many people. Many types of arts activities and experiences are available without any public funding at all and, with limited resources, we need to understand where our support can have most impact.

So what’s your view? Do you think public and lottery money should be used to support the arts? If so, why do you think that? What sort of activities should we support? Are there areas of arts activity that should not receive public funding? How far should we try to improve people’s access to the activities we fund? What principles should guide our decisions?
Photo: Music for Change's Global Weekend, part of Canterbury's Urban Cultural Programme.

3 What are the responsibilities of a publicly funded arts organisation?

Many arts organisations in this country receive at least some of their income from public funds. This support helps organisations to produce great work that excites and inspires their audiences. It helps organisations to make their activities more accessible to a wider range of people. It also helps them to make a positive contribution at a local level by getting involved in activities such as education and community development. Sometimes balancing all those demands can be difficult.

Do publicly funded art organisations have responsibilities to wider society as well as producing excellent art? How far should an organisation go to widen its reach? How important is it to support work that is risky and has limited appeal? If you’re a publicly funded arts organisation, what, if anything, should you give back?
4 When should an artist receive public money?
Public funding is also used to help individual artists develop their ideas, often at the start of their careers. This helps the arts to evolve and develops new talent that might otherwise not be discovered.

The Arts Council aims to support artists in ways that benefit them individually and benefit society as a whole – and there are many more artists than we have funds available. So what sort of support do artists need most? How should we decide which artists deserve support? Are there artists – or work – that we should not fund? What conditions should we put on our grants? And what, if anything, should we expect from the artists we fund?
5 Should members of the public be involved in arts funding decisions?
Most decisions about arts funding are made by professionals: Arts Council staff, with guidance from artists and public bodies. This expert opinion is critical — it can take skill and experience to judge the quality of a piece of work, the viability of a particular project or the potential of an individual artist.

The public is currently represented through our Regional and National Councils, whose members set our policies and make the most important decisions. There are many other ways in which members of the public could be involved in the arts funding process, from local groups deciding on public art commissions to a national consumer panel advising on policy at the highest level.

Would greater public involvement bring arts funding closer to the needs and expectations of society? How might it work in your community? How much time and energy would people have to invest? Would it improve the decisions? And what happens when members of the public and experts disagree?
How to have your say

To let us know what you think please fill in The arts debate – Consultation response form, available from www.artsdebate.co.uk. You can email your completed form to:

artsdebate@artscouncil.org.uk

Or post it to:
Emily Keaney
Arts Debate
Arts Council England
14 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 3NQ

When responding please state whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation. If you are responding as an organisation, please state who the organisation represents and, if applicable, how the views of the members were assembled.

Closing date
The closing date for submissions is 11 May 2007.

Confidentiality and data protection
Your responses may be made public by the Arts Council England. If you do not want all or part of your response or name made public, please state this clearly in the response. Any confidentiality disclaimer generated by your organisation’s IT system will be taken to apply only to information in your response for which confidentiality has been specifically requested.

We are listed as a public body under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This means that by law, information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure. However, we will not release those parts of the documents covered by one or more of the exemptions under the act. For information on the exemptions and freedom of information generally, please visit www.foi.gov.uk

So it would be helpful if you explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that
confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. Any confidentiality disclaimer will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Arts Council.

The Arts Council will process your personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act and in the majority of circumstances this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

Help with queries
Questions about the policy issues raised in the document can be addressed to:
Emily Keaney
Arts Debate
Arts Council England
14 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 3NQ
Email: artsdebate@artscouncil.org.uk

If you have comments or complaints about the way this consultation has been conducted, these should be sent to:
Lucy Horner
Chief Executive’s Office
Arts Council England
14 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 3NQ
Email: lucy.horner@artscouncil.org.uk

A copy of the consultation criteria from the code of practice on consultation is in Appendix A.
Appendix A: Code of practice on consultation

Our code of practice is based on the Cabinet Office guidelines, summarised below. The complete code is available at www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/regulation/consultation

1 Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.

2 Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.

3 Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.

4 Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.

5 Monitor your department’s effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation coordinator.

6 Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment if appropriate.
To have your say, download *The arts debate – Consultation response form*, available at www.artsdebate.co.uk

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We are committed to being open and accessible. We welcome all comments on our work. Please send these to Andrew Whyte, Executive Director, Advocacy and Communications, at the Arts Council address above