

## A Cumberland Lodge Colloquium

# Do We Have the Arts Funding System We Deserve?

Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2009

This is a summary of speakers' and participants' comments, some of which were contradictory, others hotly contested, and many widely agreed upon. This summary does not attempt to evaluate the worth or accuracy of what was discussed.

Please contact Sandra Robinson ([sandra@cumberlandlodge.ac.uk](mailto:sandra@cumberlandlodge.ac.uk)) if you have suggestions on how this summary might be improved.

### Speakers

**Dr Paul Brooke Barnes**, General Secretary, Association for Cultural Exchange

**Alan Davey**, Chief Executive, Arts Council England

**Venu Dhupa**, Creative Consultant

**Vikki Heywood**, Executive Director, Royal Shakespeare Company

**Tim Joss**, Director, The Rayne Foundation

**Jude Kelly**, Artistic Director, South Bank Centre

**Gary Pulsifer**, Publisher, Arcadia Books

**Phyllida Shaw**, Arts Consultant

**Colin Tweedy**, Chief Executive, Arts & Business

**Jatinder Verma**, Artistic Director, Tara Arts

### The Value of the Arts

Everywhere in the UK there is evidence that the Arts are flourishing. This is surely the result of a magnificent commitment to funding.

Internationally, the UK is seen as having successfully branded itself as a creative nation.

The creative industries are the fastest growing aspect of the economy. The cultural and creative industries make up 9 percent of the UK's GDP while financial services are 13.5 percent; it is thought the cultural and creative industries will soon eclipse the financial services.

We can talk confidently about the impact of the Arts on the economy and social cohesion.

Funding of the Arts, from public and private sources, is a human right, not an optional extra. The Arts do not just provide entertainment for the cultured few, they are fundamentally important to everyone's humanity and sense of shared values.

British experts talk about the value of the Arts in mainly rational terms, as good for their economic value, or their social impact. We need a wider story, which sees the Arts as a way to be more fully human, offering the chance for transformation, spiritual or emotional fulfilment, and meaning.

The Arts can play an important part in the recession, as people want to reflect on the uncertainty of the times. If we are building a society with new values after the financial crisis, we need a strong sense of what builds quality of life, happiness and fulfilment.

There is an emphasis on *attendance* at Arts events, while the value of *participation* is often overlooked. The prison Arts programme run by The Koestler Trust is just one example of non-professionals benefitting from the opportunity for creative expression.

There needs to be more recognition that all Art is the product of a diverse society, while still being universal in its appeal. When Peter Brooks works with international artists it is 'world theatre' and is highly, widely praised; when someone less well known does it, it is categorised as 'ethnic theatre'. The Arts and diversity are generally seen separately, and are evaluated independently of each other. Furthermore, the diversity agenda puts pressure on ethnic minority companies to fulfil particular social agenda.

## **The Funding System**

We have a mixed economy in terms of the Arts. Funding is currently about one third public money, one third private and one third earned income from sales.

It was argued that in some ways the UK's mix of public, private and earned funds for the Arts is the envy of the world; the financial crisis has revealed the weaknesses of American and some European funding models.

Do we have a system, or a sack full of kittens? The UK's framework for funding should now be up for analysis; what could we do to make the system better?

Our funding model is quite complex and a simpler model might be desirable. Money should be made available, from all sectors, without strings attached.

Private money should be seen as an addition to, not a replacement for, public funding. When Lord Goodman, former Chairman of the Arts Council, founded Arts and Business, he felt there needed to be a 'court of final appeal', when public funders were not able to support artists.

There is a need for a new generation of philanthropists to give more.

Should Arts board members give, in proportion to their means, to their organisations? Is this just part of their duty, or will they seek to buy board positions?

Obviously, in the current financial crisis public spending will be hit, how hard?

Private investment has continued to grow, but the indications for the future are confusing; a recent survey showed a 25% increase in individual giving, but a 7% decline in corporate giving. The decline in corporate giving is likely to continue.

Earned money will be lower; people will still attend theatres, but spend less in bars and restaurants.

Local authorities do not have a statutory requirement to support the Arts, and many are cutting their culture and Arts budgets.

## **Political Issues**

There is concern that politicians give funding of the Arts low priority, because they do not have the time to understand the value of culture.

There have been valuable cultural education programmes funded by the Arts Council or the DCMS. Other government departments, such as Health and Education, do not include culture

in their agenda, although it can often enrich work in these areas. The DCMS needs better ways of discussing and evaluating the arts to demonstrate their value to related departments.

Central government has a role to play in encouraging corporate and private giving.

Lord Goodman said he regretted propounding the Arts Council principle, as it meant the government could hide behind the statement 'Nothing to do with us, it is the Arts Council's decision and responsibility.'

## **The Arts Council**

The Arts Council was set up at the end of WWII, like the NHS and the Welfare State, when there was idealism about creating a stronger society. Its initial aim was to bring serious art to the masses.

Excellence is a core mantra of the Arts Council, as is engagement. How can we have both? Educational barriers, price and availability should not prohibit access.

A variety of speakers suggested ways the Arts Council could be improved. It might:

- be more outward, international looking;
- talk openly rather than politely;
- have more mixed senior management teams, in terms of both gender and ethnic minority representation;
- give artists more control over the spending of money;
- have a concerted, long-term strategy for Arts funding, particularly in relation to the independent publishing sector. It is not helpful to give funding and then withdraw it because of some short-term signs of success;
- scrap diversity targets, which are generally not met, and have not changed our system;
- put more trust in artists; artists need to be involved in the Arts Council's decisions;
- ensure reports are done by more than one officer.

## **The International Considerations**

The Arts Council is funding some exceptional, experimental companies which are not based in this country.

The Arts Council needs to allocate money for a more coherent international strategy.

The importance of smaller cultural organisations devising their own international strategy should not be underestimated.

Arts organisations need to consider how they celebrate international culture, and how they find ways to make our arts and culture relevant to others. This can be a way of achieving more funding.

What do we mean by international? Britain looks mainly to the USA, not Europe.

## **The Way Ahead – Thoughts**

It is important to understand the ingredients for successful, effective partnerships between the funder and the funded, otherwise there is a danger the relationship will sour.

- Honesty – appraisals need to be honest and results implemented.
- Flexibility – being in a constant state of change is the prerogative of the artist and the burden of the funder. We can't have a scheme thought up for the few by the many.

- Selflessness – how many arts organisations, and how many funders, are willing to share information?
- Trust – artists and arts organisations need to be left alone, trusted and valued.

Expressions of belief in the arts are all very well, but to secure more funding, building the evidence base is important. For example, a scheme for under 25 year olds called 'A Life Less Ordinary' gave them theatre tickets for free, in the hope that they would become theatre goers later in life. Is there evidence that this programme has had any success?

A stronger distinction needs to be made between 'accessibility' and 'public engagement'. The former refers to access for disabled people, or imaginative ticket pricing, while public engagement is about getting out to where people are, about arts organisations understanding the audience and what they want.

Does funding produce greater art, or just more art? Money does produce better art because it enables artists to take risks.

The Art world might learn some lessons from the world of Science. For example, many are working in the area of the public understanding of science and there is a science media centre; why are there not similar attempts to communicate with the public about the Arts? There is a British Association for the Advancement of Science, but where is the equivalent for the Arts? If science can have six research councils why should culture have only the Arts and Humanities Research Council? Scientists work mainly in large public bodies, while there are many more freelance artists, working disparately.

It was noted that the conference had focused mainly on the Arts Council; does it need tinkering with, radical change, or complete abolition? The majority of participants voted for complete reinvention. (There was no one present at that point from the Arts Council to respond.)

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