



department for  
**culture, media  
and sport**

# Supporting Excellence in the Arts

## From Measurement to Judgement

Sir Brian McMaster

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# Foreword from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

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I wholeheartedly support the findings of this timely and comprehensive review. Sir Brian has brought a wealth of experience and a profound understanding of the arts to it, and his passion for achieving the very best shines through.

This review will mark a real shift in how we view and talk about the arts in this country. The time has come to reclaim the word 'excellence' from its historic, elitist undertones and to recognise that the very best art and culture is for everyone; that it has the power to change people's lives, regardless of class, education or ethnicity.

It is also time to trust our artists and our organisations to do what they do best - to create the most excellent work they can - and to strive for what is new and exciting, rather than what is safe and comfortable. To do this we must free artists and cultural organisations from outdated structures and burdensome targets, which can act as millstones around the neck of creativity.

The move from measurement to judgement which Sir Brian suggests is a vital one, and one that will allow all of us to articulate better the importance of the arts, how and where they add value to our society and why, now more than ever, they are deserving of public funding.

I commend this review to all public funders of cultural activity, artists, practitioners and organisations. The arts in this country are on the cusp of greatness, and we must now take the steps necessary for them to excel.

James Purnell

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

# Foreword from Sir Brian McMaster

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Earlier this year, it was said of culture in Britain that we are living in a “golden age”. It is certainly a time of phenomenal creativity but I think that the true golden age could be ahead of us.

The society we now live in, in Britain, is arguably the most exciting there has ever been. The experience that it encompasses could produce the greatest art yet created. This will have an impact around the world. We could be on the verge of another Renaissance.

We need, though, to do all in our power to facilitate this. The driver must be not the achievement of simplistic targets, but an appreciation of the profound value of art and culture. Just as the new society we live in has immense potential for the creation of art, so art has never before been so needed to understand the deep complexities of Britain today.

This was the context within which I was working as I responded to the invitation to consider how public subsidy can best support excellence in the arts. There was also an extraordinary synergy at work. Arts Council England had just conducted an inquiry on public value and the arts in England. The results show that there is a desire by the public for a “focus on the quality of artistic experience” and a recognition that public funding should prioritise innovation.

It was a huge pleasure to talk to so many people involved in culture in Britain today. Themes emerged from these discussions which inform the report. The crucial element underlying these discussions was to emphasise that the arts are driven by individuals, be they a great creative artist or a brave and imaginative curator or producer.

My thanks go to the wonderful team of people who have worked on this report with me, to the ‘Sounding Board’ and to all those who gave their time either to contribute in person or in writing.

Brian McMaster

# Executive Summary

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In July this year I was asked by the Secretary of State to consider the following:

- How the system of public sector support for the arts can encourage excellence, risk-taking and innovation;
- How artistic excellence can encourage wider and deeper engagement with the arts by audiences;
- How to establish a light touch and non-bureaucratic method to judge the quality of the arts in the future.

'The arts' encompasses a variety of forms. I have focused on those supported by public funding. These include the work of museums and galleries supported through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and the performing and visual arts and literature supported by Arts Council England.

This report is founded on the belief that excellent culture goes to the root of living and is therefore relevant to every single one of us. There are many examples of excellent work to be found in this country today, but this report suggests that with some tuning of approach, our society could foster even more exciting and vibrant work.

The process of developing this review involved extensive consultation with over 140 members of the cultural community, 249 written consultations and an online public consultation. These discussions have been instrumental in developing the recommendations which are set out below and explained in greater detail in the main body of the report.

Funding bodies must move to a new assessment method based on self-assessment and peer review that focuses on objective judgements about excellence, innovation and risk-taking and is made up of people with the confidence and authority to take tough decisions. Funding bodies must also have, as the quid pro quo for removing 'top-down' targets, the ability to intervene strategically when an organisation is failing.

Artists, practitioners, organisations and funders must have diversity at the core of their work. Out of the society in which we live today the greatest culture could grow, but this will only happen if the cultural sector is truly relevant to 21st century Britain and its audiences.

Internationalism is essential for artists and organisations to understand their work in a global context and to achieve and maintain world class status. The Arts Council, the British Council and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport must work together to investigate and implement an international strategy that stimulates greater international exchange, brings the best of world culture here and takes the best of our culture to the world.

The desire and ability to innovate and the willingness to take risks is fundamental for any organisation striving to be excellent. Boards of cultural organisations must therefore be the custodians of innovation and risk-taking. To best support the delivery of the artistic vision, and to keep that vision at the heart of an organisation, the board of every publicly funded organisation must include at least two artists or practitioners. There should also be a Knowledge Bank, made up of artists and practitioners, to help boards make senior appointments.

Boards also have a duty, alongside funding bodies and arts organisations, to act as the guardians of artists' freedom of expression, and to provide the appropriate support to deal with what can be a hostile reaction to their work.

Many have described ways the production of new, innovative and risky work could be further encouraged. Financial security has been highlighted as being essential for this process and therefore for producing excellent work. Ten year funding for ten organisations with the most innovative ambition would allow them to further that ambition and fulfil their potential.

It is vital that young people are given the chance to experience culture within and outside school, and that this experience is excellent. Cultural organisations must be proactive in meeting the extra demand for their work that the 'cultural offer' will generate. They must ensure that the activity that makes up this offer is of the highest standard, reflecting the diversity and internationalism highlighted in this report.

As well as developing the cultural education of young people and allowing them to reach their potential, cultural organisations need to embrace continuing professional development for their staff. A more strategic approach to mentoring and networking for all practitioners is required, with young practitioners given the opportunity to better experience the work of others and artists and practitioners able to continue to develop their practice throughout their careers.

Engaging new audiences and deepening their experiences has long been a goal of funding bodies, cultural organisations, artists and practitioners alike. One of the biggest barriers to audience engagement is the notion held by many that the arts are simply not for them. The 'it's not for me' syndrome is endemic and conspires to exclude people from experiences that could transform their lives. To help overcome this and building on the experience of free admission to museums and galleries, all admission prices should be removed from publicly funded cultural organisations for one week.

Once the initial barrier of engagement is overcome, audiences must be given the opportunity to deepen their experience and be introduced to more complex work. The best person to communicate with audiences is the artist; therefore artists, practitioners and cultural organisations need to explore ways of communicating more effectively with their audience. Digital technology offers extraordinary opportunities to do this.

A crucial factor in the recommendations I've set out so far is the touring of excellent work. We must provide the opportunity to experience excellence across the whole country. That is why I recommend a more strategic view be taken by funding bodies of where and how culture in England reaches its audiences.

Above all else I want to see every funding body and every cultural organisation, every artist and every practitioner given the chance to fulfil their potential. I want to see them striving to be as creatively ambitious as they can and being absolutely confident in their ability to change people's lives.



# Chapter 1: Encouraging Excellence, Innovation and Risk-Taking

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Before I set out my recommendations I want to address the vital question of language. There is a fundamental mismatch between the way we talk about culture and the values we attach to it. The language we use has become tainted and the terms we use – ‘art for art’s sake’, ‘the right to fail’, ‘risk’, ‘innovation’, let alone ‘excellence’ – have all acquired accretions of meaning in recent years that have blunted or distorted what we want to say. Excellence itself is sometimes dismissed as an exclusive, canonical and ‘heritage’ approach to cultural activity. I refute this. We need to be clear from the outset what we mean when we say ‘excellence’, ‘innovation’ and ‘risk-taking’.

## 1.1 Excellence

Excellent culture takes and combines complex meanings, gives us new insights and new understandings of the world around us and is relevant to every single one of us. It is why culture is so important to societies that flourish. If culture is excellent it can help us make sense of our place in the world, ask questions we would not otherwise have asked, understand the answers in ways we couldn’t otherwise have understood and appreciate things we have never before experienced. The greater its power to do these things the more excellent the cultural experience.

The best definition of excellence I have heard is that excellence in culture occurs when an experience affects and changes an individual. An excellent cultural experience goes to the root of living.

This idea may seem abstract, but in fact it is quite concrete. We have all been to performances which have been good technically but stopped short of being excellent. We can train artists to a degree of technical ability so that their work is of high quality. Excellence is another quality altogether. This report looks at how to create the conditions where it can happen.

There is also an important difference between what I define as excellence and what I would call good practice. Excellence is about experience and good practice is what leads to it. There can be no doubting the value of excellent administration, financial management and research; all of these are factors that

contribute to excellence of experience. Good practice alone, however, is not what I mean by excellence.

Cultural excellence is not just the preserve of the performing or visual arts. Excellence in museums and galleries, just like excellence in any other cultural sphere, is about life-changing experiences. Just as an excellent theatrical, orchestral or operatic work can help an individual make sense of the world around them, so can an excellent gallery, museum, exhibition or display. As has been said, if museums and galleries, like all arts organisations, want to matter, they should aim to have the creativity of great artists, the radicalism and drive of environmental campaigners and the insight of contemporary novelists.

## 1.2 Innovation and Risk-Taking

It has been argued that culture does not always need to innovate to be excellent, but if it is to be truly relevant to our society, it absolutely must. Innovation is understood to be the introduction of something new, where old methods and systems are insufficient. Innovation is therefore an integral part of the search for excellence, and should be encouraged if we are to encourage excellence.

Risk-taking is about experimentation and pushing boundaries in ways which artists and practitioners themselves may not be sure will work. It demands courage, curiosity and desire, and a degree of spontaneity. However, these cannot exist in a vacuum. Successful risk-taking should be informed by skill and sense and be managed, but not avoided. The biggest risk, of course, is taking no risks at all.

Innovation and risk are therefore both distinct from one another and intrinsically linked. The distinction comes from the fact that innovation is a constant process, which should be part of an organisation's core business whilst risk is a means to a particular end. Both are linked to the concept of excellence. For something to be excellent it has to be relevant, and for it to be relevant it has to be continually reinterpreted and refined for and by its audience. Risks have to be taken, innovation must be central to the process.

However, it was often highlighted during consultation that there are pressures that conspire against the new and innovative, let alone the risky.

I recommend that innovation and risk-taking be at the centre of the funding and assessment framework for every organisation, large or small.

Putting innovation and risk-taking at the centre of the funding and assessment framework does not mean that the rulebook is thrown out, but that we need to create a new, more flexible, more trusting environment where innovation, risk-taking and above all excellence are better rewarded.

### 1.3 Diversity

Within these concepts of excellence, innovation and risk-taking, and running through everything that follows below, must be a commitment to diversity. The diverse nature of 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain is the perfect catalyst for ever greater innovation in culture and I would like to see diversity put at the heart of everything cultural. We live in one of the most diverse societies the world has ever seen, yet this is not reflected in the culture we produce, or in who is producing it. Out of this society, the greatest culture could grow. As I have said, it is my belief that culture can only be excellent when it is relevant, and thus nothing can be excellent without reflecting the society which produces and experiences it.

Many organisations have already introduced initiatives to provide pathways for talented young people of all backgrounds into the cultural sector. However, we must not be afraid to recognise that although some ground has been made on this, more needs to be done and there are still major challenges ahead.

It should be clear that diversity does not simply mean work or people from an Asian or African-Caribbean background. It is vital that we move into an understanding of diversity that is as broad as possible, to cover the span of ages, religions, cultures, sexualities, disabilities and socio-economic backgrounds. There are, for example, new and underrepresented communities settling in the UK, such as those emigrating from Eastern Europe or fleeing conflict around the world. They should be given the chance not only to find their feet, but to find their voice and to contribute to the culture, diversity and creativity of this country.

I recommend that funding bodies and arts organisations prioritise excellent, diverse work that truly grows out of and represents the Britain of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

I also feel strongly that artists and cultural organisations, when creating and presenting work, should not be afraid of being controversial, particularly when the desire to avoid controversy restricts freedom of expression, the lifeblood of any artist. We should not be content to live in a society where artists censor their work for fear of extreme responses. One of the most important parts of an artist's role in society is to question, to provoke, to aggravate and, at times, to anger.

I recommend that funding bodies and arts organisations act as the guardians of artists' freedom of expression, and provide the appropriate support to deal with what can be a hostile reaction to their work.

### 1.4 Internationalism

The power of culture to build and sustain relationships, and to transcend physical, linguistic, religious and psychological barriers, is becoming increasingly important in the global context. The chance to take the best work abroad is a great ambassadorial tool, and ever more important as we create distinctive work.

Our artists and cultural organisations need to engage internationally to ensure they maintain their relevance and competitive edge. To be world class they need to be seen on the international stage. International comparisons are an important yardstick for an organisation to assess itself against. Additionally, working internationally builds an organisation's morale, broadens horizons and opens up different perspectives on an artist's or an organisation's work. Equally, international practitioners working within this country can inspire British practitioners and audiences.

I recommend that the Arts Council, the British Council and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport work together to investigate and implement an international strategy that stimulates greater international exchange, brings the best of world culture here and takes the best of our culture to the world.

## 1.5 Governance

Alongside broader concepts of innovation, risk-taking, diversity and internationalism, I have also identified a number of more specific conditions that are crucial in supporting excellence. The governance structure of cultural organisations and in particular the role of the board is fundamental.

The boards of cultural organisations, and I include museums and galleries in my understanding of this, are - or should be - the guardians of innovation and risk-taking. Artists and practitioners need a board with the expertise to support them artistically and to give them the authority to do what is innovative and risky.

For boards to achieve their primary aim of securing the excellence of their organisations' cultural endeavour, they must have the appropriate expertise. A board can best support a creative vision when it understands that vision, and the process that has generated it and that delivers it.

I recommend that the board of every cultural organisation contains at least two artists and/or practitioners.

The most important task of the board of any cultural organisation is to appoint the Chief Executive, Artistic Director or Director. However, the move in recent years towards boards encompassing a variety of skills has in some places been at the expense of artistic expertise. Appointing the right person for the job is a complex task and when undertaken by individuals without a professional knowledge of the sector, the effects can be hugely damaging. It is individuals that matter and we need to put the focus of the appointments process on getting the right people into the right places.

I recommend the setting up of a Knowledge Bank which could be called upon by boards to feed into and support the appointment process and to advise on potential candidates.

DCMS, the Arts Council and the MLA would need to work together to decide whether there would be one Knowledge Bank serving the entire culture sector, or whether each funding body would have its own, working together on areas of mutual benefit. The Knowledge Bank would be a revolving group of informed practitioners and artists from here and from overseas, set up and managed by the funding bodies. It would:

- Influence the appointment of Artistic Directors, Chief Executives and Directors;
- Help identify the skills needed for a particular role;
- Bring a diverse and international perspective to talent-spotting and short-listing processes;
- Build contacts overseas and tap into networks for the benefit of all cultural organisations;
- Give expert support, when required, to funding bodies.

Every opportunity to add knowledge and expertise to the appointment process must be taken. The right to be represented on selection and interview panels, for example, is given in Arts Council funding agreements. The representative need not necessarily be an employee of that particular organisation, but could be an individual from the Knowledge Bank.

I recommend that all funding bodies have and take up the right to be involved in the appointment processes of the organisations they fund.

In museums and galleries staff turnover is low, so there is a particular duty here to find new and innovative ways of giving opportunities to young, diverse staff, particularly curators and educators. To support this we should be equipping the boards of museums and galleries with the ability to find and hire the very best and most diverse curatorial, learning and research staff from around the world. The Knowledge Bank, set out above, would support this process.

## 1.6 Culture and Education

Much has been done in the last fifteen years to further promote cultural learning, including schemes such as Creative Partnerships and Renaissance in the Regions. There are also some laudable programmes overseas. Norway, for example, has a programme called the *Cultural Rucksack*, which aims to help all pupils aged 6 to 16 become acquainted with all forms of culture. Responses to our consultation revealed the extraordinary reach and scope of funded arts organisations to engage with children and young people as well as to offer support and development to artists at early points in their careers.

However, it seems to me that cultural education is still not being recognised as important enough within schools, or within some arts organisations. Introducing children and young people to culture at an early age and as frequently as possible is critical. It makes culture familiar, it provides a framework for understanding new cultural experiences and above all it gives the *opportunity* for engagement that many miss out on. There is much to learn here from existing practice.

We must inspire a new generation of creative, culturally aware and culturally active individuals, giving people the chance to experience the power of culture at an early age. The Government announced in the Children's Plan on 12 December its ambition to move to a position where all children and young people, no matter where they live or what their background, have the opportunity to engage in five hours of cultural activity a week. This would be a remarkable achievement. As well as quantity, however, we must also see quality. The excellence and depth of the experience must form the core of any activity included in any 'cultural offer' made to young people.

I recommend that cultural organisations be proactive in meeting the extra demand for their work that the 'cultural offer' will generate. They must ensure that the activity that makes up this offer is of the highest standard, reflecting the diversity and internationalism I highlight in this report.

## 1.7 Continuing Professional Development

It is essential to acknowledge the role of the individual in stimulating innovation and encouraging risk-taking. Whether it is a single person, passionately committed to the art form, an artist/producer relationship or a team committed to constantly challenging an audience, innovation and risk-taking are most often driven by individuals.

As individuals develop their careers they are dependent on others to encourage and support them. I have identified four elements that best support talented practitioners:

- Personalised support from mentors;
- Networking and exposure to the work of others at home and abroad;
- Time, space and resources to experiment and develop practice, equivalent to research and development in other sectors;
- The funding system actively seeking out and supporting individual artists and producers.

It is important for all new appointments to artistic director and other senior creative positions in funded organisations to be mentored. We can place too much of a burden on our best talent too early, expecting too much of them without giving them the necessary support. With the right support structures, practitioners can flourish.

I recommend that the cost of mentoring for senior appointments should be a standard feature of any recruitment budget.

It is of the utmost importance that practitioners experience each others' work both at home and abroad. Understanding the variety and depth of an individual's chosen cultural field is crucial to fulfilling their potential. In addition, exploring diasporic links can be of fundamental importance to some artists, producers and curators. It is impossible to know what you are creating without knowing the context within which it will be produced and experienced.

I recommend that, since cultural organisations have a vested interest in and responsibility for supporting and developing talent, they should be providing free or discounted tickets to aspiring practitioners.

It would be valuable if this principle was shared internationally, co-operating with schemes offered by networks of arts organisations in other countries.

I recommend that funding bodies explore the potential for international co-operation that allows young practitioners to see more work abroad.

Many arts organisations devote resource to nurturing practitioners, particularly at the early stages of their career. A few provide the time and space for experimentation. Responses to the consultation have highlighted this vital activity, although I have some concerns about the consistent availability of this support across the country and across art forms.

Whilst investment into pre-professional and young talent is crucial, I believe it is important that both artists and practitioners continue to develop their practice throughout their careers. Sabbaticals, for example, offer opportunities for more intensive career development, further study and foreign travel. It is hugely important that everyone working in the arts recognises the value to practitioners, throughout their careers, of continuing professional development.

I recommend that funding bodies, organisations and practitioners prioritise opportunities for continuing professional development throughout careers.

I am aware that a number of recommendations in this report put demands on individual practitioners, such as mentoring or participating on boards or the proposed Knowledge Bank. However, I believe that practitioners should actively engage in supporting the health of the cultural ecology. My conversations with practitioners suggest they agree and are prepared to contribute further.

I recommend that practitioners take responsibility for the cultural ecology and actively engage with the development of their peers and the next generation.

## 1.8 Public Subsidy

Those that give out and those that receive public subsidy have a responsibility to ensure that from every penny spent, the greatest value is extracted. Distributors of public funds should not spend money on what is not, or does not have the potential to be, excellent. Nor should they be putting subsidy where it is not needed, where the market can sustain an artist or an organisation without compromising their artistic integrity.

Risk-taking and innovation, and hence excellence, require a stable environment in which to work. The confidence that assured, long-term, sustainable funding brings can give organisations the freedom to plan beyond the immediate need to break even, open up opportunities for innovation and allow risk-taking to be planned and managed properly.

I can see sense in moving funding for culture beyond the current three year framework – to five years and beyond. However, to have maximum impact I would like to see the funding system go even further in a small number of cases.

I recommend that DCMS and the Arts Council work with HM Treasury towards a new scheme for the ten organisations with the most innovative ambition to receive ten year funding to further that ambition.

The scheme would be an incentive to organisations to produce work that fulfils their potential to innovate and take risks. Such a scheme would also support the notion that trust in an artist, a producer, a director or a curator is key to producing excellent work.

In consultation it was suggested that longer-term funding may in fact work against innovation and risk-taking and bring about complacency. However, it is my belief that an excellent practitioner or organisation always strives for constant improvement, and may in fact never accept that they are excellent. This scheme would require a special form of assessment, alongside that proposed later in the report, which would need to be drawn up according to the specific plans of each organisation.

Those who fund the arts and those in receipt of funding have a duty to continuously encourage innovation. For funders this is about making sure that it is possible to have new entry to the funding system. Funders need to actively seek out new and challenging work and bring it into the portfolio of funded organisations. The system must be permeable to new talent and new ideas from across the whole cultural spectrum.

I recommend that funding bodies actively identify innovative ways for new talent to be identified and funded.



## Chapter 2: Encouraging Wider and Deeper Engagement with the Arts by Audiences

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I see three issues at the heart of how to encourage a wider and deeper engagement with the arts. The first is an unwillingness by many to engage at all. The notion that the arts are not for everyone must be tackled head-on, since excellent art is by definition for, and relevant to, absolutely everyone. The second issue is, once the initial barrier of engagement has been overcome, how to maximise culture's potential to change lives. To do this, audiences must be drawn into it. The third is that too many organisations are trying to second-guess what their audiences want and are therefore cheating them out of the deepest and most meaningful experiences.

As I have said, I believe that to be excellent, the arts must be relevant. However I am concerned that there is still a large portion of the population who believe the arts are not for them and that they are neither relevant nor accessible. The 'it's not for me' syndrome, combined with high ticket prices in many cultural organisations has conspired to put off many potential audience members and exclude them from experiences that could transform their lives.

The prime example where a great many people have been enabled to experience cultural excellence is free admission to museums and galleries. While it would be difficult to make every performance and exhibition free, we can look at ways of creating events that will allow people to experience a range of new cultural experiences. This would be an opportunity to rebrand the arts and to send out a clear message that the arts are for everyone.

I recommend that to overcome the endemic 'it's not for me' syndrome and building on the success of free admission to museums and galleries, for one week admission prices are removed from publicly funded organisations.

I believe that something radical needs to be done in this area and I therefore suggest that a detailed study be undertaken into the implementation of such a scheme.

The best person to communicate about their art is the artist. As part of the drive towards promoting new and potentially more challenging work, practitioners must be strongly encouraged to engage with their audiences, informing them about the

work and passing on their passion for it. This is a key way to draw more people into a deeper engagement with the arts. Digital technology offers extraordinary possibilities for doing this.

I recommend that practitioners communicating about their work be the primary tool of any programme of audience engagement.

I believe very strongly that excellence attracts an audience and this was born out in the consultation process and by the Arts Council's public value work<sup>1</sup>. However, in recent times, perhaps as a result of the target-based assessment system, too many organisations, particularly in the performing arts, have been content to supply audiences with a superficial experience that provides immediate satisfaction but no lasting impact.

I recommend that cultural organisations stop exploiting the tendency of many audiences to accept a superficial experience and foster a relationship founded on innovative, exciting and challenging work.

It was highlighted in consultation that the problems arising from these three issues have been exacerbated by the decline in the provision of cultural programming through the public service broadcasters. This is an issue that few can fail to have noticed, and I believe that it has been to the detriment of public understanding of the arts and the depth of engagement in cultural activity. The timing of this review coincides with the forthcoming Public Service Broadcasting review.

I recommend that the Public Service Broadcasting review examines the extent of the cultural provision provided by public service broadcasters.

## 2.1 Technology

Harnessing the possibilities offered by the exponential growth and development in new technologies is an important part of enabling risk and innovation. Cultural organisations are waking up to the potential of new technology and particularly the internet, but this is still happening in a haphazard way, with little coordination and knowledge sharing between art forms and organisations.

Why is it that we see cultural organisations, with some notable exceptions, following behind the demand for technological advances rather than driving it? The potential of Web 2.0 (the second generation of web-based communities and hosted services - such as social-networking sites, wikis and collaborative tagging), 3G mobile and wi-fi technology should allow unprecedented interaction

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<sup>1</sup> Public Value in the Arts, November 2007

with audiences, and amongst audience members and provide radical new opportunities to deepen their cultural experiences.

I am concerned that many cultural organisations are not making the most of their potential for innovation because of a lack of awareness and access to the latest technological knowledge and breakthroughs. I believe that there needs to be a group specifically tasked with monitoring new technologies and innovative ideas. They should disseminate this information throughout the cultural ecology, thus enabling organisations that may not otherwise have the capacity to keep abreast. Outside the cultural sector Knowledge Transfer Networks have been used to fulfil a similar purpose. Knowledge Transfer Networks are national networks of technical experts and other interested parties, designed to improve the UK's innovation performance by increasing and accelerating the knowledge transfer of technology into UK-based businesses.

I recommend that DCMS explore the possibility of either involving the sectors covered by this review in the Creative Industries Knowledge Transfer Network announced in 2007, or by setting up a dedicated cultural Knowledge Transfer Network to improve the awareness and take-up of new and innovative technological solutions within the cultural sector.

## 2.2 Touring

The maximum value must always be extracted from public subsidy. Crucial to this is touring. The initial investment in the rehearsal of a complex performance or in the creation of a production or exhibition is best recouped by exploiting the work to the greatest possible extent. To do so strategically, taking into account the dynamic between audience and work, is vital to the health of the arts in Britain. Touring though is complex and often onerous. It requires commitment from both the receiving venue and the producing organisation. Since the closure of the Arts Council's touring department, there has been a loss of a strategic overview and a decline in touring. Furthermore, the department used to broker relationships between provider and receiver, while ensuring that those running receiving venues were informed of, and enthused by, the work available. This was a valuable tool and its loss has had an adverse effect on the arts as a whole.

The Arts Council is in the process of reviewing its support of touring and has recognised the need to strengthen its national overview and ability to directly influence the touring and distribution of high quality work across the country.

I recommend that a new way forward be found that reclaims a strategic approach to touring, while exploiting the regional structures created by the Arts Council's reorganisation.

The Arts Council, in implementing a strategic overview, intervened as a facilitator where they perceived a deficit in provision. Thus Opera North and the Dance Agencies resulted from initiatives taken by the Arts Council. Both flourish today

and are of seminal importance. The Arts Council should not be hesitant in taking such initiatives in the future. This is particularly important in the field of diversity, where a real deficit exists.

In the museums and galleries sector, organisations routinely loan and borrow items from collections and many larger organisations have specific touring shows. However, there is no mechanism for a strategic overview for the touring of exhibitions, although there is widespread appetite for national/regional collaborations.

I recommend that the touring of exhibitions is encouraged and implemented strategically.

# Chapter 3: Judging the Quality of the Arts in the Future

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I have been asked to make recommendations that would establish a light touch and non-bureaucratic method to judge the quality of the arts in the future.

Clearly the Government and people of this country need to know that in return for public investment, the arts in England are as excellent and inspiring as they can be. The issue is how this can be best judged and how the system of assessment itself can enable excellence. It is necessary therefore to move from a system based on measurement to one based on judgement, and one that in making judgements on excellence, innovation and risk-taking, doesn't end up discouraging all three.

I welcome the Government's commitment to empowering artists and organisations to be the best and the recognition that current systems of assessment are in danger of inhibiting innovation and risk-taking in the arts. As is occurring in other areas of the public sector there needs to be a move away from 'top-down' targets. In some cases these can be an effective and useful tool, but if applied crudely or permanently can become demoralising and distorting. At their most damaging, targets have led arts organisations to take decisions based on meeting quantifiable targets (such as filling seats) at the expense of less easily measurable but equally important outcomes such as excellence, innovation and risk-taking.

I therefore recommend a new assessment framework be adopted by funding bodies:

- Self-assessment by cultural organisations and practitioners as the starting point;
- Complemented by a system of peer review managed by the funding bodies;
- Informed by funders confident in their judgements and equipped to take strong action where necessary.

## 3.1 Self-Assessment

It must be understood that the primary focus of self-assessment is as a tool for practitioners to measure their progress against their stated objectives and

mission. In my experience artists are the greatest critics of their own work, and their judgement of its success or otherwise should be trusted.

However, while self-criticism is intrinsic to any genuine artistic process and funding bodies have started to introduce this approach, we lack a culture of rigorous and constructive self-assessment. Above all the cultural sector has difficulty in assessing the impact of its work on audiences.

I recommend that the funding bodies, jointly with representatives of cultural organisations, develop good-practice guidelines for self-assessment. These should focus primarily on the excellence of the art and commitment to innovation and risk-taking.

Individual organisations would use this recommended methodology to develop their own tailored self-assessment and share this with their funding body. To be meaningful for the arts organisation and the funder this self-assessment must be honest and based upon trust between the executive and board and in turn the cultural organisation and its funder.

I understand that funders are investigating or commissioning toolkits for assessing the impact of work on its audience. This is a complex issue and I heard many examples of interesting evaluating techniques during the course of my consultation. Light-touch examples of good practice in this area should be shared widely with funded organisations and become a bed-rock of the self-assessment process.

### **3.2 Peer Review**

There was a high degree of unanimity amongst respondents that peer review is an effective way to judge artistic excellence. Peer review as an assessment method is well respected. It is in use around the world and if used properly, is constructive for the funding body and for the organisation. Furthermore, many of those who have taken part in peer reviews have told us that it is an enormously useful process for their own development. Care and consultation must be taken in constructing a peer review system as traditional models have proven to be cumbersome and distorting if not managed properly. A new and more refined format is needed.

I recommend that, to complement the culture of self-assessment, funding bodies institute a system of peer review. I suggest all regularly funded organisations should be reviewed by peers on a cyclical basis and that the process is managed by the funding body.

I would envisage these peer review groups consisting of a small number of individuals appropriate to the organisation they are assessing. They must champion diversity and internationalism in their assessments.

### 3.3 Informed Funders Making Judgements

The third element of this framework depends upon the funding bodies having the confidence and authority to make judgements that are respected by the arts community. The involvement of artists and practitioners in the process of peer review and in the Knowledge Bank will go some way towards this.

As part of this new framework of assessment funding bodies will need to lay out clear expectations of what they expect in return for their funding and what they will be assessing and reporting to the Government and the public. I would expect this to be based on the expectation that all organisations aspire to excellence and seek innovation and risk-taking in their work. Evidence would be based on the self-assessments provided by cultural organisations and supplemented by the peer review and funders' dialogue with the organisations. In this context funders would recognise that not all risks will be successful and that failure should not necessarily be penalised.

The quid pro quo for getting rid of cumbersome targets, however, must be an understanding and acceptance that there needs to be dialogue between funders and organisations on the issues of excellence, innovation and risk-taking.

Where organisations are failing, funding bodies must intervene strongly. I am aware that the Cultural Leadership Programme has commissioned *Organisations in Difficulty: A Framework for Support*. This is still at a draft stage but I commend its approach. It starts with diagnostic self-assessment by the arts organisation based on an agreed 'health check'. If this proves insufficient, the process moves to formal review. Ultimately if this also fails, the funder must intervene.

There are three options for a funder:

- To introduce short-term funding with tough conditions for improvement.
- To remove its support altogether;
- Where the organisation is of strategic importance, to set conditions for funding, such as an improvement in the work produced, greater engagement with audiences, or ultimately a change of leadership

This intervention in the event of the failure of an organisation must be acknowledged in funding agreements.

I recommend funder intervention where organisations are failing, setting fixed conditions for funding or, in extremis, its removal entirely, and that this be acknowledged in funding agreements.

From HM Treasury to DCMS, from DCMS to funding bodies, and from funding bodies to cultural organisations, funding decisions must be approached from the same light-touch perspective. These decisions should be informed by a shared overall understanding of excellence, based on judgement rather than measurement against 'top-down' targets.

I recommend that funding decisions made by all funding bodies (DCMS, Arts Council, MLA) are based on professional judgements of what is and what is not excellent.



# Conclusion

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I have found a hunger in the cultural sector for the system of public funding to be more ambitious and to be tuned to allow excellence to occur more than it currently does. There are pressures in the system that favour financial and artistic safety. There needs to be a more confident articulation of the concept of excellence – from government and funders to artists and cultural organisations. A greater sense of what excellence is within public discourse on culture is required. This must be led by practitioners better articulating their vision and intent, and by cultural organisations meeting public demand for a deeper engagement with the arts.

The recommendations I make in this report are founded on the firm belief that there exists a genuine opportunity, building on the already world class status of many of our artists and cultural organisations to create some of the most exciting culture the world has ever seen.

# Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

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- **Art form:** The work produced by artists and practitioners, and used to specify their chosen field.
- **Artist:** Someone who creates art.
- **The arts and culture:** These terms are used interchangeably and refer to the full spectrum of activity covered by this review. This includes the work of museums and galleries supported through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and the performing and visual arts and literature supported by Arts Council England.
- **Arts/cultural organisation:** These terms are used interchangeably and refer to any organisation supported by public funding which falls within the remit of this review.
- **Audiences:** Used as a generic term for members of the public engaging in the arts, including visitors to museums and galleries, readers and active participants.
- **Funding bodies:** The Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Arts Council England and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.
- **Museums and galleries:** This refers both to the organisations directly sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and those who receive funding through the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.
- **Practitioner:** Someone from the cultural ecology, who may not necessarily create art in the same way as an artist. For example a producer, a curator or an editor.

# Appendix B: Summary of Consultation Process

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The following three methods of consultation were used to collect data and experiences related to the Review's terms of reference:

1. Each of the Arts Council's Regularly Funded Organisations (RFOs) received the following letter. Museums, charitable trusts and fellows of the Clore leadership programme received similar consultation documents. 249 responses were received in total.

I have been asked by James Purnell, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to undertake a review that will report on:

- how the system of public sector support for culture can encourage excellence, risk taking and innovation;
- how artistic excellence can encourage wider and deeper engagement with the arts by audiences.
- how to establish a light touch and non-bureaucratic method to judge the quality of the arts in the future;

In considering these issues I am approaching a number of artists and cultural organisations to understand more clearly their experience of developing excellent work. I would be most grateful if you could share your experience with me to inform my thinking. In particular I would be very interested to learn the factors that have contributed to encourage excellence, risk-taking and innovation in your work? I am also keen to hear your views on the relationship between your work and the audiences and artists you work with. You should be aware that your response may be used in the drafting of the final report.

In answering these questions you might want to consider the following (but do not feel you have to limit your response to these areas):

1. Support at pre-professional stages
  - Are you able to give support to artists before they are professional?
  - If so, how important is this to your work?
  - Any other views/comments
2. Support for artists at the early stage of their professional careers
  - What support can you offer?

- How important is this to your work?
  - Any other comments
3. Factors that help excellence, risk-taking, innovation
- What support can you offer for experimentation, risk taking and innovation?
  - How important has that been/is that to your work?
  - The importance of artists seeing/reading/hearing other peoples' work
  - The importance of artists talking to others and developing ideas with others
  - Were there any particular obstacles or hindrances you faced? What might have made progress easier?
  - Any other comments
4. The importance you place on physical infrastructure
- Places to create work (workshops, creation centres etc)
  - Places to show work, (facilities etc)
5. Audiences and participants
- How can artistic excellence encourage wider and deeper engagement with the arts by audiences? Please give examples of where this has worked well in your experience.
  - Are audience expectations a barrier or enabler of risk and experimentation for you?
  - Do you believe that audiences can gain more from an artistic experience if they are better informed about the work's intent?
6. Have you been able to sustain and support a company/artist over a long period, and if so, how?
7. How important to the creative process is feed-back and evaluation of your work
- Peer to peer
  - Critics
  - Academics
  - Audiences
  - Other

2. Meetings were held with 140 members of the cultural community: artistic directors, curators, chief executives, board members, practising artists from across the cultural spectrum, senior figures from arts education, critics, representatives from DCMS' Non-Departmental Public Bodies and other major stakeholders. Three meetings were held with the 'Sounding Board': Diran Adebayo, Assis Carreiro, Serge Dorny, Joséphine Markovits, Sandy Nairne, Kully Thiarai and Nicola Thorold. Meetings were a forum in which to share ideas, analyse difficulties and develop proposals for change.
3. A full list of those consulted can be found at:  
[http://www.culture.gov.uk/what\\_we\\_do/Arts/mcmaster\\_review.htm](http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/Arts/mcmaster_review.htm)

4. An online consultation document was made available to the public on the DCMS website. There was some public interest, with 183 responses. Participants were asked to contribute their thoughts in a free format, structured around 4 sets of questions.

1. What “excellence” means to you and how that might be defined;
  - Was there a particular moment, or a certain experience that triggered your interest in the arts?
  - What is the difference between something being enjoyable and being excellent?
  - How would you describe what makes art excellent?
  - How can the aspiration for excellence be encouraged, from training right through to presentation?
2. Factors that encourage or discourage taking risks and being innovative in what you produce or experience;
  - How important is being able to take risks and push boundaries in the arts?
  - Is there the right encouragement for artists to take risks and create new and innovative art?
  - Is there enough encouragement and support for audiences to experience new and innovative art?
3. The importance of the audience and the role it plays in developing work and setting the direction an artist takes;
  - Do audience demands lead the development of new work? Or should art be allowing and encouraging audiences to experience something new?
  - How can audiences be pushed outside their comfort zones, to try new things?
4. How audiences might engage more deeply in the work they experience
  - How do we ensure an informed, critical, demanding audience in the future, curious about what is being developed?
  - What helps you understand the art you see/hear?
  - As an artist, how do you help audiences understand your work better?

All three methods of consultation were enormously beneficial in formulating the themes and conclusions of this review.





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