

LGA response to the Arts Council England (ACE) draft strategy 2020-2030

September 2019

About the LGA

1. The Local Government Association (LGA) is the national voice of local government. We work with over 360 councils in England and Wales to support, promote and improve local government.

Key messages

2. Our member councils remain the country's biggest public funder of culture, investing over £2 billion each year into museums, libraries and other cultural services and playing a key role in increasing exposure to culture for communities across the country. Councils lead on the spatial planning, regulation and infrastructure that underpins a thriving visitor economy, of which culture is often a major component.
3. The LGA is therefore pleased to contribute to the Arts Council England (ACE) draft strategy 2020-2030, and we hope to continue working in partnership with ACE to strengthen creative and cultural opportunities in cities, towns and villages across the country.
4. Arts Council England's vision for the next ten years is ambitious and puts at its core three outcomes which will improve the cultural offer across the country for everyone. We are pleased to see this vision respond to our 2018 consultation submission by focusing strongly on partnership working and building culture in communities. The commitment to investing in skills development for the cultural sector is an area we strongly support.
5. The vision is clear and we look forward to seeing the detail of how it will be delivered develop. However, we believe the vision could be bolder in establishing new ways of working and providing leadership to the cultural sector. As one of ACE's key national partners we hope to work together to realise the vision.
6. We are pleased to see the broad definition of culture which allows individuals and communities to define what culture means for them. This should encourage more people to feel that their art is recognised and valued, in turn enabling more people to engage in the arts and creating positive and lasting change for communities.
7. It is positive to see the strong inclusion of local government in the strategy, and the acknowledgement that councils are a key partner in achieving ACE's objectives. In addition to their traditional role of commissioning cultural activity directly, councils are increasingly acting as place-shapers and conveners, bringing partners together to achieve shared local outcomes. This role and way of contributing needs to be fully recognised and supported by ACE's new strategy, particularly in relation to place-based cultural development.
8. We strongly endorse the cultural communities outcome and the recognition that cultural organisations must work collaboratively to support local agendas from pure cultural creation to tackling loneliness and improving wellbeing. However, the strategy as a whole needs to better embed this place-based approach, particularly in terms of funding. ACE's funded programmes need to move away from predominantly siloed, artform-specific investment to thematic initiatives which bring the creative sector together to work on shared local objectives. This will also build resilience of the cultural sector.

9. The cultural landscape and the funding situation for councils has changed dramatically since the publication of the last strategy. Councils will face an overall funding gap of £8 billion by 2025, meaning that many are no longer able to invest as much in our arts, museums and libraries as they would like. To ensure everyone across the country continues to have access to quality cultural services and experiences, ACE's strategy should reflect the current pressures and ensure funding is accessible. For example, all funding streams should be open to councils and their delivery partners, and ACE should look to provide more flexibility for 'in kind' and match funding contributions.
10. The strategy does not fully recognise the role and needs of public libraries as it remains too heavily focused on collections. Beyond their role as a cultural space, libraries are infrastructure organisations which play a vital role in bringing together communities. Across the country, libraries are delivering on diverse local agendas including skills and business development, education for children and young people, and health and wellbeing. Libraries offer a significant contribution to all elements of the strategy and delivery plan and this should be embraced.

Plans for delivery

11. Cultural venues sit at the heart of ACE's objectives, providing a physical space for individuals to develop creativity and serving as a community hub which can be used for many and varied purposes. However, financial challenges and under-investment mean venues are under threat. Despite innovative programming and dedicated efforts to remain accessible, many venues, particularly libraries and public museums, are now operating with reduced opening hours.
12. We need to call on Government to invest in local cultural infrastructure. To secure the long-term future of cultural spaces, local government needs sustainable funding, and we ask ACE to support us in raising awareness of the vital cultural services local government delivers. To help address the most pressing challenges, a grassroots venue fund would contribute to the revitalisation of high streets and bring other underutilised public spaces back to mainstream use. Local cultural hubs, particularly libraries, are critical to building thriving, resilient and healthy communities.
13. To develop these ideas, we propose a jointly-hosted roundtable with experienced leaders to discuss place-based cultural development and what local areas need from national policymakers.
14. Financial pressures for councils also mean there has been a loss of expert workforce, particularly arts development officers, which has a knock-on effect felt across the cultural ecosystem. To achieve their objectives, ACE therefore need to invest in skills development to grow and support leaders of place. ACE also have a role in providing infrastructure such as national professional networks to share learning.
15. We hope to continue working with ACE to adapt and deliver our joint improvement offer to create the leaders and organisations for the future. We believe the development of place-based peer challenges and leadership training for officers would help to achieve this.

Creative people

16. We welcome the recognition of the wider outcomes cultural engagement can achieve such as reducing loneliness, supporting health and wellbeing, and boosting community cohesion. Many councils are developing exciting and impactful practice in this area and the LGA will continue to share and inspire innovation. However, the links to these wider outcomes need to be embedded across the delivery plan. All cultural organisations should be encouraged to consider how they can help tackle wider social issues.
17. We are pleased to see the strong inclusion of health and wellbeing in this strategy. More investment and strategic development of the role cultural organisations can play in this area is needed, from health interventions to long-term public health and prevention, building on the work of Creative Health. NPOs should be encouraged to pioneer health and wellbeing initiatives, helping to build momentum for and supporting wider local activity. The LGA is keen to develop its work in this area in partnership with ACE, for example through stronger emphasis on health and wellbeing in our improvement offer and by embedding the findings of the LGA's upcoming publication on social prescribing.
18. A place-based approach must be taken to addressing barriers to participation, whether these are restrictive definitions of culture, cost or lack of transport. Current levels of cultural engagement and key challenges vary widely across the country, and cultural organisations should work in partnership to respond to local need. ACE has a crucial role in facilitating this, for example through cultural compacts and place-based interventions, including shared leadership training.
19. It is critical that creative spaces and activities are provided in schools to foster the development of individual creativity from a young age. As such, the LGA is keen to endorse and collaborate on ACE's advocacy to the Department for Education for increased and sustained policy and funding support for creativity in education.
20. Libraries should also be recognised as key to developing children and young people's creativity beyond the curriculum, with initiatives such as rhyme time and coding clubs running successfully across the country. ACE has already developed extensive information about the high-quality programmes which are being delivered for pre-school children and their families; while additional longitudinal studies may help to strengthen the evidence base, the emphasis should now be on wider delivery and engagement rather than research.
21. We strongly agree with the aim of helping people from all backgrounds to understand and access careers in the creative sector. To achieve this, ACE should continue to support the British Library in the rollout of the Business and Intellectual Property Centres, which have demonstrated an ability to reach significantly more diverse audiences than other business initiatives, in part due to their location in libraries.

Cultural communities

22. Place-based cultural development and fostering collaborations with a wide range of local partners is key to creating thriving cultural communities. Cultural organisations need to work together as a whole system to achieve shared goals for local areas; our [culture-led regeneration research](#) and [culture hub case studies](#) demonstrate good practice in this area. We are pleased we have been able to work with ACE to develop the culture hub and hope to continue sharing best practice examples in this way.
23. To achieve the transformation to place-based service delivery and systems leadership, local skills require development. The LGA in partnership with ACE runs

an impactful and popular support offer to the sector through our leadership training and library and cultural services peer challenges.

24. Our leadership essentials training offer is well-attended and receives very positive feedback from delegates. It helps councillors leading cultural services to understand how to transform their services to improve outcomes for communities. The two-day course shares learning and provides an opportunity to network with peers and national organisations. This offer could be expanded to training for cultural officers. Our sport leadership training for officers run in partnership with Sport England is highly successful in attracting officers from councils, trusts and active partnerships. The shared training model builds cross-sector understanding and facilitates partnership working.
25. Our library and cultural peer challenges apply the LGA's established methodology to provide skilled analysis and recommendations for improvement. We are interested in developing place-based peer challenges which would evaluate and support organisations collaborating in a local area to achieve common goals.
26. It is encouraging to see that an increasing number of councils are developing cultural strategies with partners, and we hope to support the spread of this practice as a method of place-based cultural development. The LGA's upcoming cultural strategy in a box will provide improvement guidance for councils developing strategies within a cultural area. It would be valuable for this to be expanded to more specific strategies such as a library strategy in a box; NPOs may be well-placed to help deliver on this. In our improvement work we have found many smaller services struggling to develop strategies, which limits their ability to influence within their organisation and with partners.
27. Place-based partnerships to deliver shared outcomes must include local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) as well as civic universities. As Local Industrial Strategies are developed, cultural organisations need to be empowered to engage with their LEPs and to ensure culture both features prominently and supports the delivery of wider local ambitions. LEPs are also a key partner for supporting access to creative careers and driving the development of the creative industries.
28. Councils up and down the country are working in partnership with businesses, the third sector and communities to help create more inclusive economies. Local government is uniquely placed, with levers across culture, skills, transport and health, to help rewire our local economies to ensure more people feel the benefits of growth. However, there is wide variation in understanding of the term inclusive growth, and further development is needed to establish how culture specifically can contribute to this agenda.
29. We support the emphasis on touring, which is an excellent way to take culture to smaller and rural communities. Alongside this it is important to invest in cultural venues in smaller communities so they have the capacity to host high-quality exhibitions.
30. In terms of the delivery of Priority B, we endorse the suggestion of using data to build and share a more sophisticated picture of investment at a local level, and we call on ACE to commit resources to develop this. [LG Inform](#) is a helpful model as a practical website which shares local and nationally-collected data to inform areas and support their improvement. Further work will also be needed to ensure all creative organisations collect robust data and understand how to use it. Many NPOs have

expertise in this area that is not readily available to smaller organisations. ACE need to ensure skills and expertise are shared across the sector.

31. Any needs analysis to design place-based activities must be simple to use and should be approached through consultation with the sector. It is important to consider that there are already a number of agreed local assessments signed up to by partners, including joint strategic needs assessments and local partners. We helped to create the libraries taskforce [toolkit for longer-term, evidence-based sustainable planning](#) which is a helpful model to build on in this work.

A creative & cultural country

32. We welcome ACE's commitment to support risk-taking and innovation in the sector. The LGA has developed a number of programmes which help councils to innovate and could be tailored to the culture and libraries sector. For example, the [productivity experts](#) scheme equips councils to deliver efficiencies and income generation and has helped cultural services such as [Tullie House Museum](#). Our [Design Council Programme](#) is an 18-week intensive scheme to explore issues and identify transformational change. This could be channelled to support placed-based cultural delivery across organisational boundaries.
33. National professional networks are vital for sharing innovation and learning, thereby supporting the development of a cultural country. In the last decade, networks across the country of cultural professionals have been lost. As part of its strategy, ACE should strive to rebuild these networks so that all cultural professionals can readily connect and converse with their peers, including through online platforms.
34. To support independent creatives, ACE should adopt a [Work Local](#) approach which responds to skill challenges across a local area and empowers organisations to work collaboratively. Our recent research on [tourism skills](#) applies the Work Local approach to the visitor economy, demonstrating how the funding system for skills is not sufficiently flexible. Councils need to be empowered to respond to local creative and cultural industries demand, and we hope ACE will support our advocacy on this.
35. Increased superfast broadband connectivity could unlock many benefits for culture and the creative industries. It underpins ACE's ambition of using new technologies to create and share cultural content, particularly in rural areas. Significant progress has already been made by local government, in partnership with broadband providers, to extend superfast broadband connectivity to 95 per cent of premises across England. Despite this progress there is still an unmistakable digital divide between urban and rural areas, cutting off residents and businesses from the benefits of being online. We would value ACE's support in helping us make the case to Government to support the expansion of world-class digital connectivity to all local areas, as outlined in greater detail in our Post-Brexit England Commission [final report](#).

Investment principles

36. To achieve the outcomes of creative people, cultural communities and a creative & cultural country, it is vital that ACE's investment principles consider the whole cultural ecosystem, and how funding can support culture to thrive across a place. This means that the organisations ACE fund, particularly NPOs, must work with and support a wider network of local cultural organisations to flourish, creating a robust and varied local cultural ecosystem.

37. Place-based funding models, such as the Total Place, Troubled Families and Whole Place Community Budgets initiatives, should be considered as means of better distributing resources and encouraging collaboration to achieve these shared goals. ACE should articulate the value of place-based funding models in their discussions with government departments and incorporate this approach where possible in their own funding streams. A thematic approach to funding would help to avoid artform-specific silos and bring local organisations together to tackle community issues such as growth, inclusion and wellbeing.
38. The collaborative funding programmes delivered with other lottery partners such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund, VisitEngland, National Trust and Historic England have been highly successful. We welcome more collaborative initiatives of this kind going forward.
39. ACE has made progress to improve the regional spread of funding. ACE need to continue to actively manage this to further tackle the London cultural dominance and to ensure creativity flourishes across the country.
40. We strongly welcome efforts to diversify the recipients of ACE funding and to ensure all the organisations ACE fund are aligned with key strategic objectives. New applicants can demonstrate creative potential through community-based outcomes such as engaging new audiences, generating positive social impact, and supporting skill development and start-up businesses. Applicants should also be able to demonstrate a commitment to place-based cultural development. Established NPOs must also be able to demonstrate they are proactively working towards these goals.
41. In order to diversify recipients of funding, it is critical that requirements for applicants are not over-burdensome and are proportionate to the level of funding being received. There is a risk organisations and places with strong bidding capacity remain familiar faces, and ACE should ensure it works hard to encourage and enable new organisations to receive funding. In a challenging financial climate, having 'in kind' and no match funding requirements is crucial for accessibility.
42. In relation to the principle of dynamism, ACE must take care to avoid prescription in how it defines the characteristics of successful organisations. While many of the proposed characteristics are important and valuable, ACE must bear in mind that these may manifest very differently in organisations and smaller or newer organisations may not have the same capacity to initially demonstrate these characteristics.
43. We endorse the investment principle of environment sustainability. The LGA recently declared a climate emergency and is supporting and leading the local government sector to become more sustainable and to reduce its carbon footprint. There is an important opportunity for ACE to provide environmental leadership to the cultural sector. Target-setting can be a useful tool to achieve this, although targets must be balanced with retaining accessibility (particularly for smaller cultural organisations) and underpinned by an environmental support offer from ACE which shares good practice and practical guidance.
44. In terms of inclusivity and relevance, the role of councils should be recognised. As democratically-accountable public organisations, councils play a key role in connecting other cultural organisations to the public and strengthening their relevance to communities.

45. In terms of applying the investment principles, we support the approaches proposed for improvement support and sector-led improvement, particularly peer review, learning networks and examples of best practice. The LGA is keen to continue providing support in these areas. However, we do not believe awards and financial prizes are the best way to ensure delivery of the investment principles.

Summary

46. We welcome ACE's draft strategy 2020-2030 and look forward to seeing its further development. At its heart, the strategy aims to ensure every person can develop and express creativity throughout their lives and that villages, towns and cities across the country thrive. Councils have a key role to play in realising this, and we look forward to working with ACE to make this happen.
47. The emphasis on place-based cultural development is encouraging and we are pleased to see ACE acknowledge that partnership working and local solutions are the best way to grow the cultural offer. ACE needs to embed this place-based approach throughout its strategy, and work with local communities to develop the skills needed to achieve systems leadership and deliver transformational change.
48. Cultural venues, particularly libraries, underpin ACE's strategy and are critical to its delivery. However, increasing financial pressures mean treasured local spaces are at risk. ACE needs to recognise and support the wider role of libraries in its strategy and call on Government to invest in local cultural infrastructure.
49. We strongly endorse efforts to diversify the recipients of funding and to ensure all the organisations ACE fund are aligned with the key strategic objectives. To achieve this, ACE must encourage and support new organisations through the application process and ensure 'in kind' and no match funding requirements are in place. The organisations ACE fund, particularly NPOs, must work to develop and support the wider cultural ecosystem.
50. We hope to use our improvement offer, support and advocacy to work with ACE in the coming decade. We want to empower cultural organisations, councils and communities to achieve this vision for creative people, cultural communities and a creative & cultural country.