

LGA response to the Arts Council England (ACE) 2018 conversation

April 2018

Submission

About the LGA

1. The Local Government Association (LGA) is the national voice of local government. We work with over 370 councils in England and Wales, to support, promote and improve local government.
2. We are a politically-led, cross-party organisation which works on behalf of councils to ensure local government has a strong, credible voice with national government. We aim to influence and set the political agenda on the issues that matter to councils so they are able to deliver local solutions to national problems.
3. Our member councils remain the country's biggest public funder of culture, investing over £2.0 billion per year into arts, museums, libraries and other cultural services, so playing a key role in increasing exposure to culture for communities across the country. Councils also lead on the spatial planning, regulation and infrastructure that underpins a thriving visitor economy, of which culture is often a major component.
4. The LGA is therefore pleased to contribute to the Arts Council England 2018 conversation, which will contribute to the Arts Council England strategy 2020-30.

Key Messages

5. Local government, as custodian of a significant percentage of England's museums and libraries, as well as a provider and supporter of many other cultural services including arts programmes, theatres, galleries and festivals, has long recognised the value and importance of culture in helping create vibrant, healthy communities; and in creating attractive destinations for domestic and international visitors.
6. The importance of culture led regeneration is a key focus for the LGA. We are currently commissioning research into the impact of culture led regeneration, including best practice learning, and would be pleased to share results of this work with ACE in the near future.
7. Outside London, the majority of National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) are co-funded by councils. Therefore, it is vital that ACE

continue to work closely with councils to ensure that the total public subsidy is spent as efficiently as possible to encourage new ways of working between NPOs, councils, cultural and other organisations.

8. However, the funding landscape for local government continues to change. Councils will have lost 75p in every £1 of core funding by 2020, leaving an overall funding gap of £5.8 billion, which is needed to provide adult social care and children's services. These financial pressures mean that councils are not always able to invest as much in our arts, museums and libraries as they would like.
9. ACE therefore has a key role in ensuring that communities right across the country continue to have access to quality cultural services and experiences. A key feature of this will be ACE continuing to make all funding streams open to councils and their delivery partners.
10. Despite these ongoing funding pressures, councils still have a core role in bringing together partners around a place, including acting as a seed-corn funder to allow other investors to contribute with confidence in local projects. This means councils will continue to be essential partners for ACE in delivering its new strategy.
11. More flexibility for 'in-kind' and match funding contributions should be considered for all ACE funding streams. In a challenging financial climate, including the potential loss of European funding, this would help councils continue to support worthwhile cultural projects, and better reflect their new role as convenors of local partnerships.
12. There has also been a decline in resources available to support applications, both within councils and across the voluntary sector generally. Application processes for funding will need to be kept as simple as possible, with clear criteria, so that potential applicants can make realistic assessments of their likelihood of success and so prioritise their efforts. This will also reduce the administrative burden for ACE.
13. Cultural leadership remains key within the sector, and the joint LGA/Arts Council England cultural leadership offer has delivered training to over 100 portfolio holders with responsibility for culture as well as over 20 in-depth cultural/library peer challenges within councils. Both programmes have received very positive feedback and have strengthened the voices for cultural services in local government. We strongly believe that it would be beneficial for Arts Council England to continue investing in these programmes.
14. Sharing learning is equally important. The LGA has worked with ACE to establish the 'Culture hub', which features case studies of how councils have continued to invest in cultural services. Further joint initiatives to share good practice would be welcomed.
15. Given the strong track record of locally-led interventions, the LGA recommends that ACE also continue to re-balance funding to all parts of the country. Councils and their local partners are well placed

to lead a step-change in cultural participation that can help to boost growth and improve the nation's wellbeing.

16. ACE has already taken positive steps to collaborating with other funders, particularly lottery-based funders, and this approach should be explored still further. For instance, the collaborative investment in Hull in their run up to being City of Culture enabled much greater activity, with risks shared across funders to allow more innovative initiatives and economic growth to take place.
17. ACE should continue to embed museums and libraries within its remit, acknowledging that the development needs of these two services will be different to that of the arts services and will extend beyond the skills necessary for delivering arts and culture.

The role of arts, museums and libraries

18. We believe that the definition of arts should be left to individuals and communities to define what it means for them. This has the benefit of encouraging more people to feel that 'their' art is recognised and valued, which in turn should enable more people to engage in the arts and create positive and lasting change for communities.
19. The role that cultural services play in our communities is changing and expanding. Cultural services are increasingly engaging with other key social agendas, including promoting public health and wellbeing, regeneration and supporting local economic growth, as with the new Business and IP centres in libraries. Increasingly, this engagement is not constrained to an asset-based approach, but involves outreach activities and connecting with new audiences. Arts Council England's support for these organisations will need to adapt to support these approaches, which further cement cultural services as key anchor organisations in our communities.
20. Cultural provision, be it museums or arts festivals, is one of the most often cited reasons for visits to a place, and we strongly support ACE to work with councils, Local Economic Partnerships, as well as VisitEngland and VisitBritain, to maximise the contribution that cultural provision can make to the visitor economy across the country.
21. Councils' experiences of placemaking, evidenced by Arts Council England's Creative People and Places projects, demonstrates that local understanding is key to increasing diversity. We therefore encourage ACE to work more with councils to identify local barriers to participation and finding solutions. This includes consideration of funding projects that can no longer be supported by individual councils.
22. While ACE cannot and should not attempt to replace all local authority funding, the scale of the financial challenge facing local government means that ACE must be more flexible than it has been in the past and base decisions on an assessment of the value of the project/asset at risk, rather than the source of their funding.

Changes to society in the next 10 years

23. Against a backdrop of reduced funding, councils are taking a strong lead on finding innovative ways that use cultural activity to deliver key outcomes, such as: tackling disadvantage; job creation; creating cohesive communities; and improving people's health and wellbeing. Examples of this can be found in the LGA publication People, culture, place. This was also a key topic at the recent LGA Culture, Tourism and Sport Annual Conference.
24. We have touched on the way that cultural services are changing in the earlier section. As part of this, many councils are using digital technology to engage more diverse populations to enjoy and experience cultural services. However this can be more challenging in rural areas where digital connectivity may not be as good. On a related note, the LGA continues to champion the case for better rural broadband services.
25. Many NPOs have expertise in the digital arena that is not readily available to smaller, regional or local organisations or groups. ACE needs to ensure skills and expertise is shared across and between organisations and sectors.
26. As mentioned previously, the role that cultural services are playing in the regeneration of places is a key focus for the LGA and we have therefore commissioned research to identify good practice in this area. We would welcome ACE undertaking more work in supporting culture led regeneration.

The role of public funding in arts, museums and libraries

27. The LGA would support efforts to prioritise funding based on meeting a range of outcomes. It is important that funded projects can demonstrate the value that the investment has delivered, especially in strengthening local economies, improving the national skills base and enhancing well-being. However, requirements from applicants should not be over burdensome and be proportionate to the level of funding they receive. In a challenging financial climate, having 'in-kind' and no match funding requirements would be welcomed.
28. We firmly support a more place based approach to funding and we look forward to ACE working with us and the professional bodies to develop what this means in practice and for that analysis to take into account ACE and local government investment in culture.
29. The LGA believes that the support and development of capacity and resilience amongst the sector would be particularly valuable, helping councils to protect the cultural services in their localities. Investment in networks and professional development that has been particularly affected by funding pressures and support from ACE, including through the sharing of expertise, would provide a welcome boost to a stretched sector and provide additional cultural champions within councils.

Guiding principles for public funding – ‘great’ arts, museums and libraries

30. In order to encourage the widening of participation in arts and culture, the concept of ‘great’ may create a perception of exclusivity of what is ‘great’ and what is not. The defining of what ‘great’ art and culture is should be left to individuals and communities to determine and define for themselves, in order to create a more inclusive approach to arts and culture.
31. Councils are keen to encourage all of their populations to participate in as wide a cultural offer as is available, in order for them to enjoy the wider benefits of participation, such as improved health and wellbeing. Therefore, removing barriers to participation, be it restrictive definitions or other barriers, such as cost and lack of transport should be pursued.
32. The guiding principle for public funding for arts and culture should be that ‘everyone’ has the opportunity to participate at whatever level they choose or the option not to participate. The enormous success of Fun Palaces, run by community members for community members is a great illustration of how this type of participation can be supported. Similarly, the phenomenal reach of Hull’s City of culture activities provides something of a blueprint for engagement and participation.

Arts Council’s role beyond funding

33. The LGA has developed an excellent working relationship with ACE through jointly delivering political and sector improvement activity, including the ‘Culture Hub’. The LGA/ACE ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ will need to be refreshed and renewed to reflect the new strategy, and commit local government and ACE to working together over the next ten years.
34. The LGA and councils value the developmental, funding and advocacy role that ACE has, ensuring that the cultural sector has a body that can connect all the different strands together. The LGA recommends that ACE continue to develop this role, in partnership with councils and the LGA.
35. ACE should consider more collaboration with other Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), such as Sport England, in order to develop more efficiencies and sharing of good practice, especially around common challenges, for example, increasing participation amongst people from lower socio-economic groups.