

A Simple Proposition

Peter Stark, Christopher Gordon and David Powell provide a personal reflection on reactions to *Rebalancing Our Cultural Capital*, their analysis of England's regional funding landscape.

One of the most significant threads to emerge from the publication of *Rebalancing Our Cultural Capital*, our analysis of the regional distribution of arts funding in England, is the almost universal recognition of an imbalance and the widespread acceptance of a need to address the problem. http://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/sites/artsprofessional.co.uk/files/rebalancing_our_cultural_capital.pdf

It is now clear that the figures and analysis in this report will indeed fuel a national debate and ultimately will influence public policy. With that in mind, it is perhaps useful now to highlight two of the most important issues that are raised in our report, and clarify a few points.

Firstly, the suggestion has been raised that our analysis of the problem is 'over simplified'. To the extent that any analysis examining trends from publicly available figures and documents will take a broad brush approach, this is true. But such an approach is entirely justified by the context. By definition National Arts Policy must exist at a high level and be capable of being expressed simply. The key points that we raise can, equally, be summarised very simply:

The current balance of funding for the arts between London and the regions beyond the capital, with a ratio of 14 to 1 per capita in favour of the capital, is indefensible.

The scale of imbalances and the history that has created them suggest that clear new national policy (and then detailed programmes to implement it) is required.

Arts Council England (ACE) policy, now refreshed as *Great Art and Culture for Everyone*, makes no mention of any such policy framework or intention.

A policy shift is required and must prioritise new and sustained investment in clusters of creative cultural production outside the capital, building on the capital and institutional infrastructure which has largely been funded by ACE, most often in partnership with local government since the advent of the National Lottery.

Our report has factored in the expected reduction in arts funding from taxpayers in the immediate future; the very grave challenge to local government capacity in this non-statutory area; and the severe difficulties experienced by regionally based arts organisations in attracting private philanthropy and corporate sponsorship. It also recognises that Arts Lottery funding is derived from a different source from Treasury

funding and is targeted at 'new and additional' activity in the arts. It therefore carries a different ethical imperative, one that does call for more equitable distribution. Currently, however, distribution is clearly skewed in London's favour by a factor of 3 to 1 per capita. We have therefore proposed that the new investment needed, even in these hard times, could be found by restricting London's maximum quota from Arts Lottery funds to the capital's 'fair' per capita share in future.

Secondly, our report did not focus on the question of timetables for implementation. Our proposition was addressed to those considering future arts policy for the country in the run-up to the next general election and we proposed this in the context of the 50th anniversary of the first – and to date only – White Paper on national policy for the arts. We argued that any new policy must carry wide democratic support and this will take time, not least to develop plans together with those affected by them and those charged with their implementation.

We assume new national policy will be introduced after the next election. Our proposition for change could, therefore, only be implemented from 2016/17 onwards after agreement in the autumn of 2015. We welcome the statement by ACE Chairman Peter Bazalgette in response to our report in which he appeared to say that regional development is central to the Council's refreshed strategy. He also asked for ACE to be judged on its record in this regard 'in two years' time'. The presentation on 5 November by Bazalgette and CEO Alan Davey on future research, advocacy and strategy <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/news/arts-council-news/watch-now-arts-council-and-rsa-seminar-new-politic/> suggests using the year 2012/13 (the year on which our statistics are generally founded) as the baseline, and an analysis of results two years later would therefore occur in autumn 2015. The timetables of our proposition and the outcome of the Arts Council's public challenge to itself would therefore appear to be aligned.

When our report was ready to be published, we published it. We had no idea that it would coincide with the Arts Council's publication of its own 'refreshed' strategy *Great Art and Culture for Everyone*, its presentation of 'A Grand partnership' with the associated documentation at the RSA or the current briefings on arrangements for the next competitive process for a National Portfolio of Organisations that will carry much of the nation's infrastructure for the arts and culture to the brink of 2020. The debate is alive on the funding balances between the capital and the rest of the country during that period of time.

Peter Stark, Christopher Gordon and David Powell are co-authors of the report *Rebalancing Our Cultural Capital: A contribution to the debate on national policy for the arts and culture in England*
www.theroccreport.co.uk

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