

GPS Culture Comments

Initial Response from GPS Culture to the 'Total Investment Approach' of Arts Council England for 2015-18 announced on 1st July 2014.

Context

'GPS Culture' is the web presence of Christopher Gordon, David Powell and Peter Stark, the co-authors of 'Rebalancing our Cultural Capital' (<http://www.theroccreport.co.uk>) and 'Policy for the Lottery, the Arts and Community in England' (<http://www.placereport.co.uk>). These address in turn the imbalance in taxpayers' funding for the arts and culture between London and the rest of England and the misalignment of Lottery funding priorities with the established portfolio and the consequent failure to support the arts at local level in communities - particularly disadvantaged communities - across England.

Today's announcements by Arts Council England have provided a mass of data and its own interpretation of that data. Recent experience of such in-house interpretations suggests that more in depth analysis of base data would be wise before a considered response can be made. GPS Culture will conduct such an analysis and intends to publish its findings as soon as practicable, and before the end of October 2014.

. It is, however, possible to make some general observations immediately.

First, we recognise and share the mixture of pleasure, relief, sadness and incomprehension that greets the detail for many organisations throughout England.

Secondly, we acknowledge the hard work done by Arts Council staff and Area Council members in promoting their own priorities within art forms and regions in a difficult funding environment.

This said, however, the overall sense we have from the announcement is of a closed system protecting the interests of itself and its members without reference to wider public policy agendas.

London and the English Regions - No change of substance attempted for taxpayers' money

The settlement - for the next four years - announced has no demonstrated ambition to address the significant part that Arts Council England plays in maintaining the ratio of investment of taxpayers money by the DCMS and its agencies between London and the rest of the country at 14:1 in terms of investment per head of population.

The claim that the settlement shifts the balance of funding for the core grants of the National Portfolio as between London and the regions by 2% (from 49% to 47% - *and to be checked*) represents a cash shift within £340m available to the Arts Council of only some £6.4m.

This contrasts with the £7.6m found as a transitional grant for English National Opera and the circa £10m revealed only last week (<http://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/exclusive-ace-pays-debts-select-few>) in special 'unapplied for' resilience grants to major organisations in London.

Using the 'new and additional funds of the Lottery' to achieve overall change

Since the Lottery's inception in 1995, Arts Council England has had stewardship responsibility for the Arts 'good cause' and for £3.5bn of

entirely new money for the arts across the whole country. In that time, rather than address the imbalance in taxpayers' funding it has committed resources as between London and the rest of England in a per capita ratio of 4:1. Over the last three years it claims to have reduced this ratio to 2:1 (*to be checked*) and it now undertakes to maintain this ratio until 2018 (subject to maintained levels of Lottery income).

The arts and the economy

Our own proposal was that, for five years in the first instance, London might accept only its strict 'fair share' of Lottery funds (we made no proposals for change to core taxpayers' funding - above). We argued that such a modest change could provide £100m + pa for new investment in creative cultural production in 'clusters' outside the capital.

Today's announcement plays into a cross party public policy context that prioritises investment in clusters of cooperating local authorities and sectors outside London. The Arts Council proposes a new annual allocation of a wholly inadequate £5m to 'retain talent and boost production outside the capital'.

The arts and society

The PLACE Report illustrated the extent to which Arts Lottery funds had been used to supplement funding to the largest and wealthiest arts organisations playing to the wealthiest and most privileged audiences. The five largest beneficiaries of Arts Lottery in London had received more funding from this source than the 33 local authority areas in England with the lowest current levels of engagement with the arts.

Beyond this, new research shows that over 80% of local authority areas in England have contributed more to Arts Lottery funds through the purchase of Lottery tickets by their citizens than their areas have received in grants from the Arts Lottery.

The 54 authority areas (of 326 in England) that have been net 'winners' have a combined surplus of £1,825m but £831m of that has been granted to organisations in Camden, Islington, Lambeth and Westminster (all four are central London authorities).

'Judge us in 2 years time'

Sir Peter Bazalgette, interviewed by the BBC on the publication of the RoCC Report, accepted that there was a real problem, something that to his credit he has continued to acknowledge. He pledged to address the issue and asked to be judged in two years' time.

Today's announcement provides substantial information on what the Arts Council will have - and will not have - achieved to rebalance its national responsibilities for the Arts, Museums and Libraries in two and then in four years time at 2018.

There is no evidence in the allocation of funds announced today to National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) and Major Partner Museums (MPMs) of other than a glacially slow address to the accepted but then exacerbated historic imbalances in the English National Portfolio.

The unallocated funds still available within the 'Total Investment Approach' for future regional prioritisation in the years to 2018 are clearly wholly inadequate to address the scale of these outstanding challenges.

Next steps

We will now undertake the further work necessary to provide a more authoritative commentary on today's announcement and will, in due course, make that available to the profession, the Arts Council, the DCMS, the political parties and the current Select Committee Inquiry. Meanwhile, the debate continues.

GPS Culture.

Christopher Gordon, David Powell and Peter Stark.

1st July 2014.