

Authors' comments

David Powell

"As a Londoner, my instinct has long been that there was inequity between London and the rest of England, but on close inspection, the historical and current record looks pretty shocking even when making due allowance for the additional investment in national and international infrastructure proper to a capital that is one of the world's great cities.

The capital and the rest of the country depend on each other's health for their future prosperity. As we think about arts and cultural policies for new times, we should reflect that regional and local consideration was built into Jennie Lee's White Paper in 1965. This should be an easy policy target 50 years on, and cannot be allowed to remain as unresolved as it ever was to the disadvantage of the whole of England and, long-term, to London."

Christopher Gordon

"It really doesn't have to be like this. Even in so centrally designed an authoritarian state as France, the balance between national, regional and local government roles in setting and carrying out coherent cultural policy is a proper subject for debate in both the National Assembly and the Senate – and that balance can and does change from time to time.

But the UK's combination of local government with few effective constitutional guarantees, and cultural funding being predominantly decided by 'arm's length' bodies results in both strategy and equity being off the political agenda in England. Who takes responsibility for, or makes sense of, 'the big picture'? Answer: nobody. Having no policy is not a justifiable policy. Britain's more autonomous and confident local authorities in the 19th century, backed by local philanthropists, created much of the infrastructure outside London that we still use today. It is now under greater peacetime threat than at any time in the last 150 years."

Peter Stark

"On returning to the UK after a decade working for the arts within the many cultures of the new South Africa, the most startling change I found was the absence of robust debate in any public forum within the arts community – funder or funded – on priorities, programmes and processes. The funded and those aspiring to being funded had become silent in public. That is why this research is self-funded and independent of any interest group. That is why we have sought to make it sufficiently authoritative for it to require debate.

It is now with the leadership of the arts in England – in London and outside it and at all scales – to take the debate forward in partnership with local government and others. I hope that a new generation will find fuel in the report for the fire of their ambition and rediscover the power of their own voice in the commons in doing so."