

## FAQs

### 10 questions and some answers

**Q.1** Who commissioned this report? If it wasn't commissioned, why has it been produced?

**A.** Nobody commissioned the report. We have produced it independently, funded its costs ourselves and – although we consulted colleagues widely – we took no brief from any interest group. Looking ahead to 2015 as an election year and the 50th anniversary of Jennie Lee's celebrated 1965 White Paper on the arts, the three authors felt it was a good time to take stock of what has been achieved. We are concerned that the London : rest of England imbalance is still such a major issue, particularly given the amount of 'new and additional' National Lottery proceeds distributed since 1995. We were shocked at the scale of the inequity.

**Q.2** Isn't this just another attack on the large organisations in London, which are equivalent to what every capital city in the world is likely to have anyway?

**A.** No. The authors recognise London as the great global city and cultural capital that it is. However, the over-concentration of cultural resources and decision-making at the centre – without democratic checks and balances – makes the UK the extreme case in Western Europe. This is not how the British 'officially' tend to see and represent the virtues of our 'arm's length' system operating in culture as a model that others might try to follow!

**Q.3** Some of your figures might be challenged. How do we know they are trustworthy and not slanted in their selection or interpretation?

**A.** All the analysis has been done from published figures on the DCMS website, ACE and NDPB annual reports etc (with occasional requests for additional breakdowns of publicly accountable information). Anybody could have assembled this data and come to very similar conclusions. Any errors of

estimation or calculation are very likely to be within margins that would not affect the analysis or the conclusions drawn.

**Q.4** Why do you focus only on England? You seem to be ignoring Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

**A.** These three UK nations now have the devolved power and capacity to address cultural policy in their own terms. Historically, since 1886, they have also had the benefit of funding formulae applied to their 'share' of central government resources (and Arts Council and National Lottery revenues), which has taken account of population and wealth. By far the strongest impact of the London bias is therefore experienced by the rest of England, not by the UK as a whole, and the real issue may be that England's cities and regions (beyond the South East) have no such counterbalance.

**Q.5** Which 'London' are you talking about? Surely you should at least be taking account of the wider metropolitan area?

**A.** We acknowledge that there are at least four Londons: two within the 32 boroughs and the City of London – comprising the richest and several of the poorest areas of the UK; the wider 'metropolis' (broadly within the penumbra of the M25 and with a population of 15 million); and the still wider region that is within a comfortable and affordable 'cultural commute' distance for either an extended daytime visit or evening performance.

Beyond 'Metropolitan London' (population 15 million) are the North East, North West and Yorkshire (combined population 15 million) and the Midlands and South West (combined population 15 million) and outer areas of the greater South, South East and East (population 8 million).

**Q.6** What do you mean by 'cultural production'?

**A.** Cultural production is used as shorthand for the stages of the value chain from the initial idea through the earliest stages of R & D, through talent

development and the testing and making of work to production, exhibition and touring beyond local and regional bases nationally (including into London) and internationally. We also apply it across the full range of creative and cultural industries now covered or touched on by arts funding for music and the performing arts, museums, visual arts and crafts, media and digital, and literature.

**Q.7** Capacity, quality and standards – what makes you think the regions will produce work of at least the same quality that investment in London might be likely to deliver?

**A.** London has always acted a place of opportunity attracting talent from beyond. This is, as much as anything, a natural consequence of its huge critical mass. There is every reason to believe that the trend could be reversed and the overall national creative 'ecology' strengthened by investment in such clusters in other centres – often specialising in particular areas of the arts – throughout the country. If the rest of England is perceived as sub-standard, then London is endangered too.

**Q.8** Participation? Why do you focus on cultural production? What about the arts at local level and opportunities for the general public to participate?

**A.** The main focus of DCMS and ACE spending is, and always has been, on professional work and production. Local authorities are under increasing pressure to deliver their statutory services at a time when the ageing population is increasing, with cultural participation at risk of becoming an even more marginal concern. This is clearly another area of apparent major policy failure – the failure to connect local and national government policy to the benefit of individuals and communities, which we will address in future work.

**Q.9** Aren't you just three dinosaurs unable to let go of past policy agendas and systems you once worked in?

**A.** No – we are still alive. We don't foresee any return to previous structures, which would in any case be naive and limiting. What motivates the three of us (based on more than 135 years of

cumulative experience of just these debates, in the abstract and as they have impacted on the ground for artists, audiences and participants), is the evidence we have observed from time to time and from place to place of the benefits to the overall artistic and cultural life of the country that flow from the development of centres of critical creative mass beyond the capital as a counterbalance to the London concentration and drift.

**Q.10** What happens next?

**A.** As co-authors we are clear that our role is to place our research, analysis and proposition into (a) the debate on future arts policy in the run-up to the next general election and (b) the reflection that should inform the 50th anniversary of A Policy for the Arts: The First Steps. We have offered to attend regional meetings of the What Next? network to answer questions and engage in discussion. Others must carry the debate on future policy forward: we have neither the locus nor the resources to do so.