**<https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/arts-council-england-review>**

Baroness Hodge of Barking has been appointed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to conduct an independent review of the Arts Council England (ACE). This survey is an essential part of the evidence collection for this Review. Read more for CHWA's response to help you design your own.

**Background: Arts Council England’s Mandate**

1. develop and improve the knowledge, understanding and practice of the arts;
2. increase accessibility of the arts to the public in England;
3. advance the education of the public and to further any other charitable purpose which relates to the establishment, maintenance and operation of museums and libraries (which are either public or from which the public may benefit) and to the protection of cultural property;
4. advise and co-operate, where it is appropriate to do so, with Departments of our Government, our Scottish administration, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Welsh ministers, local authorities, the arts councils and equivalent organisations in the museums and libraries sector for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (or their successors) and other bodies on any matter related to the objects.

**Survey questions**

**Question 1:** In what way(s) does ACE fulfil its current mandate? - [free text box]

For context: The Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance (CHWA) is the national free-to-join membership organisation for creative health for England. We use the term “creative health” to mean any arts or cultural activity that supports health or wellbeing. This work happens in a vast range of settings, from traditional arts and cultural venues to hospitals, care homes, and community and faith settings; and impacts an enormous range of people living with a range of conditions, a significant proportion of whom might not otherwise be able to engage with the arts.

We are an Investment Principles Support Organisation and have been core-funded by ACE since we came into being in 2017. We also work strategically with ACE to help develop their broader work with health and wellbeing alongside colleagues such as the National Centre for Creative Health and Mayoral Creative Health Network. Our main roles as an organisation are advocating for creative health, convening and supporting networks, and building resources to help make this work more possible. Our work with creative health specialist providers is underpinned by a commitment to the broader role of the arts and culture in building a healthy society.

We believe ACE is working hard to deliver its mandate and broadly delivers it well. In particular, we strongly support its efforts to improve the accessibility of the arts. This includes its work to create a more equitable sector. This has been underpinned since the launch of Let’s Create by its adoption of “Inclusivity & Relevance” as an Investment Principle. We feel strongly that inclusion, access and equity should remain absolute priorities for ACE and that the Inclusivity & Relevance principle should be maintained and deepened as a crucial mechanism for supporting a truly equitable, representative sector. This is of particular importance at a time when our cultural services are under pressure at home and abroad to disengage from work in this area – work which we believe is essential to building community and trust in otherwise divisive times.

Our surveys of the creative health sector suggest that ACE is consistently largest single funder of creative health work in UK – effectively ensuring the sector’s survival and development. A direct line can be drawn between this ACE funding and huge impacts on health costs, as evidenced in the recent DCMS/Frontiers report *Culture and Heritage Capital: Monetising the Impact of Culture and Heritage on Health and Wellbeing* (2024). Crucially, ACE’s investment also underpins the burgeoning infrastructure of creative health; this commitment has demonstrably unlocked investment from other funders at a local and regional level, including our partners in health and social care. So the DCMS settlement really, really matters to our sector – to the tens of thousands of people who work in it, and the many, many thousands more who benefit.

There has been some useful collaboration between ACE, the Arts Councils of Northern Ireland and Wales, and Creative Scotland around creative health; our conferences have been attended by representatives of Arts Councils in other home nations as well as ACE and we know ACE is following the successful development of the Arts Council of Wales’ MOU with the Welsh NHS Confederation.

In terms of this Review itself, we would encourage broad and deep consultation on these questions with the creative and cultural sectors, with an emphasis on engaging with freelance colleagues and those working in more precarious organisations – who provide much of the leadership in creative health but may struggle to prioritise this survey and may need more support to participate. We know our colleagues at WhatNext? have already been seeking to support the Review in similar ways; we are fully supportive of their work, and would be delighted to help facilitate or support engagement with the Review from the creative health sector.

**Question 2:** What changes, if any, would you like to see in ACE’s mandate?

We would like to see the mandate to advise and co-operate strengthened and also met with reciprocal agreements from arms-length bodies relating to other government departments. As a model for this we would draw on the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act in Wales, where it requires arms-length bodies to work together to effect the wellbeing of future generations. This has proved an effective mechanism for legitimising a more joined-up embedded approach to creative health in Wales; but is also a model for broader social improvements. This also responds to the Culture Secretary’s stated aim of ensuring that culture is at the heart of all five Labour Missions.

With a more joined-up approach the findings of the recent DCMS / Frontiers report (for example that the “society-wide benefits [of creative health] range from £18.5 million per year to £8 billion per year”) would be more likely to generate much-needed investment from health and social care to sustain these savings.

We would like to see the mandate to improve access strengthened and we would like to see this move towards a commitment to equity, giving a ACE a formal mandate to help build an equitable and representative creative and cultural sector in terms both of audiences and workforce. (As the Creative Health Quality Framework makes clear, we cannot have health and wellbeing without equity.)

The mandate should recognise the importance of community and place-based creative and cultural activity, and its links to placemaking, regeneration, wellbeing, social cohesion and local inclusive economies.

**Question 3:** How would you rate ACE’s performance against its mandate?

* Very poor
* Poor
* Average
* **Good**
* Very good

**Question 4:** In what way(s) could ACE deliver more effectively? [free text box]

We believe improvements in the simplicity, accessibility and proportionality of ACE’s systems would help it better deliver on its mandate (we have given more detail on this in Question 17).

We believe ACE could work more effectively with other funders to support the wider social value of creative and cultural work. This might allow, for example, for more consistent means of assessing and reporting on social value. This would limit the burden on creatives and arts organisations to measure their own impact – something which ironically makes evaluating the quality of their work more difficult. It would also allow funders to jointly commission and therefore legitimise resources for the sector. It could also help support other funders whose commitment to social value is less well-developed.

Whilst understanding that it needs to remain politically neutral, we feel ACE could have a more public role in shaping debate. ACE’s influence across the sector – and in other public and voluntary sector spaces – is considerable, and we were very heartened by Darren Henley’s recent robust public commitment to access: “access and excellence are not an either / or scenario – the fact is that the one leads directly to the other”. This kind of statement is an incredibly important reminder of its mandate at a time when resources are very constrained and many managers’ instincts are to pull away from socially engaged work that may generate less short-term income. In short, if funding is scarce we really need ACE to help make the broadercase – in part to ensure skilled practitioners are able to stay in the field, and essential knowledge and partnerships are not lost.

We think ACE could do more to build its relationships with other arms-length bodies within and beyond culture, in turn supporting a cross-departmental government approach.

**Question 5:** On a scale of 1 – 5 how strongly do you support ACE’s current 10-year strategy Let’s Create

* Do not support at all
* Mainly don’t support
* Neutral
* Mainly support
* **Fully support**

**Question 6:** What is important to you in the Let’s Create strategy? - [free text box]

We consulted widely with the creative health sector during the Let’s Create consultation process and believed then and now that the strategy is taking ACE’s work in a very positive direction. We support its vision, and welcome the acknowledgment of the role of creativity and culture in addressing health and wellbeing, but also that this sits within a broader recognition of the role of culture in building and sustaining community and place. Between two creative health sector surveys, in 2020 and 2023, ACE became the largest funder in our sector, overtaking independent trusts and foundations, which we think is a direct result of *Let’s Create*.

We acknowledge that ACE has been striving to meet the vision of *Let’s Create* in a very difficult political and economic context and we strongly support their commitment to this vision. We hope that DCMS can now support their vision and help them to deliver on *Let’s Create*.

We also support the aims of ACE’s newer Creative Health and Wellbeing plan, including its focus on partnerships with health and social care and acknowledgement of the strategic role of organisations such as CHWA and National Centre for Creative Health.

In particular these areas of *Let’s Create* are important to us:

* addressing inequalities in access to arts and culture, diversifying the creative workforce, and supporting communities to flourish
* raising public awareness of the benefits of creativity and culture to health and wellbeing
* partnerships with health and social care
* recognition that we need both universal and targeted offers to support equity
* supporting place-based approaches and cultural institutions such as libraries, museums and galleries as community assets which can contribute to health and wellbeing
* widening access for children’s participation in arts and culture
* emphasising environmental responsibility: the health of the planet is intrinsically linked to the health of the population
* the acknowledgment that people already have creative and cultural lives and that ‘everyday creativity’ is a vital part of the ecosystem that also needs support

**Question 7:** In what ways would you wish to enhance the strategy? [free text box]

We would suggest:

A greater emphasis on climate and environment, ensuring it is woven into outcomes more overtly – we believe this needs to go beyond a current emphasis on carbon footprints and sustainable practice, and place greater emphasis on the role of creativity and culture in helping us to envisage an equitable, sustainable society to work towards.

Shifting language from access towards equity; we noted in the original consultation process that sometimes the strategy speaks about helping people to access culture in a way that may erase the culture that is already there but needs support.

In Creative People, a greater emphasis on skills-development for community-based, participatory work and work in health settings .

A greater emphasis on supporting grassroots organisations to thrive – we are quoting our colleagues at the Mobilising Community Assets to Tackle Health inequalities research programme here: “small, community-based organisations offering creative and cultural opportunities at hyper local level can be vital assets for improving health and wellbeing and addressing inequalities due to their understanding of the communities they serve, and the relationships they have developed over time. These small organisations struggle with short-term, project based funding, and finding capacity to complete complex funding applications and capacity and resource for research and evaluation. The strategy could be enhanced with greater focus on the precarity of the sector at community and grassroots level. This should recognise the need for equitable and sustainable funding models, supporting financially viable careers and building in resource for support, training and professional development for staff. This should also facilitate programmes that can run over the long term, with flexibility to incorporate learning and adapt to need. This is particularly important in the creative health sector where the withdrawal of a creative programme could have a significant detrimental impact on participants.”

More emphasis on work with other arms-length bodies in culture and in other sectors (e.g. education, criminal justice and health); on the ground these siloes are often not real: creative practitioners might work in all three of these settings in one week, and in heritage, creativity and the museums sector; more work across the ALBs will help us make better arguments about about the cultural infrastructure of the country and its importance to a life well-lived.

We would also welcome more communication from ACE about how the strategy is unfolding, including how it is working with its Investment Principles Support Organisations to deliver on its outcomes.

We feel more could be done to demystify ACE – to make its decision-making processes more transparent, and to carefully consider language which is non-specific (e.g. “dynamism” vs “ambition” – what’s the difference to the layperson?). This will support colleagues in local places who are currently having to spend too much time on demystifying language and systems to try to support a wider range of people to apply to funding. We also feel that greater national recognition of networks and other sector-support organisations as Strategic Partners of ACE would be helpful. We concur with our colleagues at the National Rural Touring Forum that “the strategy should acknowledge and empower these Sector Support organisations”.

**Question 8:** Arts Council England is the development agency for arts and creativity - How effective is it in delivering this role? What does it do well and what could it improve? - [free text box]

We think ACE is delivering effectively in many areas; we note in particular its commitment to distributing funding more equitably across the country, despite considerable pushback; its emphasis on building a diverse and representative cultural sector; and its emphasis on access. We fully support the principles that underpin all this work.

We think the areas for improvement are largely about systems and communication. Specifically we think ACE could

* create better mechanisms for communication across the national portfolio, to support learning and development. Currently, it is up to local or thematic NPO groups to self-organise, which is beyond the means of many. We suggest this is a wasted opportunity in a sector which struggles with leadership development in particular (see *Imagine It Different*, Clore Leadership 2024).
* Create a more substantial role for NPOs in supporting local ecosystems. This could be based on formalising their roles as community “anchors” with a requirement to support the more fragile parts of the system, including small grassroots organisations and freelancers. We know from our surveys that there is a huge need here for support with wellbeing, peer-to-peer and other learning, marketing and physical space. Larger NPOs could be in a position to provide this support cost-effectively, whilst building much-needed communities of practice.
* work much more effectively with strategic organisations and IPSOs it funds - placing trust in them to deliver work that ACE can then coordinate/distribute/communicate to government and other partners, and resisting the temptation to pull this strategic work in-house. ACE could also communicate this strategic partnership work more effectively; this would shore up the stability of strategic organisations and IPSOs and increase their efficacy in the sector. The Creative Health and Change team at ACE, for example, have been extremely supportive of CHWA and other strategic partners in creative health; they have actively sought to learn from the work they have commissioned us to do, which we know informs their conversations with external partners and government. This is a big part of why the sector is able to keep developing despite challenging circumstances. But we note that this is not always the case and would encourage other ACE departments to follow the lead of the Creative Health and Change team.
* improve data-gathering for its NPOs and IPSOs, which currently doesn’t address the breadth of different organisational models and aims that ACE serves and seems to respond more to a ‘traditional’ arts organisation model (a building and audience), rather than (for example) participatory work carried out by an organisation with no physical base. There is currently inappropriate data-gathering for IPSOs – no evidence is gathered or disseminated of their impact, which contributes to their under-use by ACE (see above).
* We note that ACE tends to favour the organisations it funds – this is understandable in some of its communications, but for its more strategic / developmental work it is vital that ACE works with the relevant IPSO networks to reach *beyond* its grantees and into the whole sector.

**Question 9:** Since 2011 this has included being the development agency for museums and libraries - How effective is ACE in delivering its relatively new responsibilities in relation to libraries and museums? What does it do well? In what ways could it improve its effectiveness? - [free text box].

Our members’ sense is that museums and libraries are not always on an equal footing to other creative practice in ACE communications and strategic work. We know that ACE is working on this already but more may need to be done to address this imbalance. We do feel, however, that this is a far better approach than *not* bringing together museums and libraries within a broader arts and culture mandate for ACE – and this single umbrella could also support more effective strategic work with Arms-Length Bodies in *other* spheres (e.g. health, education, criminal justice) – see our response to Question 2.

We are aware of increasing pressure on our members working in museums and libraries in the last 2-3 years, with the combination of many years of austerity in local authorities, and increases in NICs being particularly challenging. This has led to museums and libraries pulling back from community programmes that do not generate the same level of short-term income as more ‘conventional’ programmes. It’s vital we don’t lose these programmes just as our colleagues in public health are fully recognising their status as community assets (supported by research like the Mobilising Community Assets to Tackle Health Inequalities Research programme). There are already examples of council culture teams disinvesting from small grassroots organisations just as their own public health teams invest in creative health strategies that cannot then be realised. ACE cannot be expected to plug all these financial holes but as a development agency we believe it has a crucial role in publicly supporting and showcasing socially engaged practice in these settings.

We also know that, with notable exceptions, museums and libraries often rely on individuals or small teams within their structures to deliver health and wellbeing outcomes, rather than embedding health and wellbeing into their strategies and business planning. This creates enormous pressure on those individuals and teams and we believe ACE has a role in encouraging leadership across these sectors to engage strategically with this work, creating organisations that are founded on wellbeing principles that support their staff and working environments as well as their communities.

Similar to our point in Question 8 about NPOs, we believe museums and libraries have enormous potential as anchor institutions supporting the wider ecosystem of creative health.

**Question 10:** What should ACE’s role be in promoting and supporting technological innovation across the arts and culture sectors, and can you share any thoughts on its visibility in this regard? - [free text box].

Many creatives and arts organisations are already incorporating technological innovation into their health and wellbeing practice – there is huge potential for digital work in (for example) prevention, in health spaces like hospitals/care homes and in specific conditions like dementia. We also note that digital can open up access for many Disabled people and people with long-term health conditions who are currently excluded from physical spaces. We would like ACE to support the role of technological innovation in particular in terms of its mandate to increase access.

We are aware simultaneously that digital inequity is rife, so we would encourage ACE and all ALBs to consider how funding or development work in this space is supporting people’s longer-term capacity to access and also control tech developments. To this end it’s also vital that ACE considers the skills gaps in the creative workforce and how it might support organisations and individuals to work effectively with newer tools (e.g. AI). We are aware that ACE is working on some new guidance around AI, which will be very welcome – this is an area with complex ethical and skills implications, not least in relation to health and wellbeing. We will need support to work in a way that is not disempowering to the precarious elements of the sector. There is also no question that AI technology presents a threat to some areas of creative practice, and we need ACE’s help to address this head-on.

**Survey questions - activity and decision making**

**Question 11:** When applying for grant funding from Arts Council England, to what extent do you agree with the following statements:

* 11.1. ACE staff are responsive and helpful and work collaboratively with me to ensure my application is as strong as possible
* 11.2. The guidance and instructions provided by ACE staff are clear and easy to understand
* 11.3. The guidance and instructions on ACE’s website are easy to find and easy to understand
* 11.4. ACE staff are knowledgeable and understand the specific needs of the sectors and regions in which they work
* 11.5. The resources required to engage in the application process are proportionate

All with the following options to choose from:

* Strongly disagree
* Disagree
* Neither agree nor disagree
* Agree
* Strongly agree
* Don’t know

**Question 12:** Please choose three priority areas where ACE could improve its grant application process.

* Issuing guidance on application criteria
* Application support
* Online application form
* Decision making process
* Timing of receiving decision
* Application feedback
* Receiving initial payment arrangement

Free text: Grantium is not fit-for-purpose for either applicants or ACE and needs a thorough overhaul.

**Question 13:** What do you think of the level of data and information requested by ACE in proportion to the amount of funding being applied for?

* Far too little
* Not quite enough
* Just right
* A little too much
* Far too much

Free text: This is quite variable - applications for strategic funds have been relatively proportional, but the IPSO application process was far too complex for small organisations, using language and systems that feel impenetrable even to very experienced arts managers.

**Question 14:** ACE’s funding decisions are…

* Based on clear evidence
* Reflective of community needs
* Reflective of national priorities and needs
* Transparent in rationale
* Consistent in approach

All with options to choose from:

* Strongly disagree
* Disagree
* Neither agree nor disagree
* Agree
* Strongly agree

**Question 15:** How clear is ACE in communicating, including when sharing the results and reasons for its funding decisions to applicants?

Please choose:

* Very unclear
* Somewhat unclear
* Neither clear nor unclear
* Somewhat clear
* Very clear
* Do not know

**Question 16:** Please rate your agreement with the following statements:

* 16.1. ACE clearly defines the intended outcomes and impacts of its funding programmes
* 16.2. ACE collects relevant data to measure the actual outcomes and impacts achieved
* 16.3. ACE transparently reports on the demonstrated impacts of its investments
* 16.4. The information ACE provides about its impacts is easy for the public to understand
* 16.5. ACE’s approach to measuring and communicating impact is effective in holding the organisation accountable

All with the following options to choose from:

* Strongly disagree
* Disagree
* Neither agree nor disagree
* Agree
* Strongly agree
* Don’t know

**Question 17:** What, if anything, do you think ACE could do to better measure and communicate its impact? - [free text box]

We think ACE needs to substantially simplify its systems: at present the NPOs and IPSOs are required to use the ACE site, Grantium, Illuminate, a separate annual survey system; and a separate system for carbon footprint reporting. There are simply too many inconsistent formats, most of which are only fit-for-purpose for a proportion of grantees. ACE is sometimes slow to acknowledge the capacity and time required to manage these systems.

We think ACE could consult more inclusively and transparently on the development of these systems; it’s often unclear how these consultation processes work and consequently funded organisations quickly feel left out.

More intelligent, streamlined systems could be lighter-touch but generate more effective data. See Question 4 above: we also feel ACE could work more effectively with other funders to provide consistent ways of measuring impact that are derived from simple data from grantees in combination with existing population-level research.

**Survey questions - working relationships and partnerships**

**Question 18:** Based on your experience or knowledge, please rate the following aspects of Arts Council England’s engagement with local stakeholders:

* 18.1. ACE’s efforts to actively engage with regional stakeholders and other relevant Public Bodies / organisations
* 18.2. ACE’s efforts to actively involve local organisations, and community groups in decision-making
* 18.3. ACE’s incorporation of local stakeholder input when setting funding priorities and program designs
* 18.4. ACE’s transparency in communicating how local stakeholder feedback influences its decisions
* 18.5. ACE’s efforts to engage with diverse communities including in deprived areas

All with the following options to choose from:

* Very poor
* Poor
* Average
* Good
* Excellent
* Don’t know

**Question 19:** Are there ways that ACE could improve engagement and responsiveness to local communities? - [free text box]

From our base in Barnsley (South Yorkshire) we are aware of very good relationships with the local community: the ACE North office has been proactively supportive of the local sector and helped ensure a huge uplift in provision in the 2023-6 round. They also worked to bring CHWA together with local partners prior to this round to help us work together more effectively – the clout the ACE team brought to this was essential to our now longstanding and very effective partnership with Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, which has led in turn to strategic work with the South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board.

This kind of support really helps beleaguered local authorities who may not have capacity to zoom out and see how their cultural offer might connect with wider work. Those local authorities also want to work with each other and ACE’s ability to work across a larger patch has huge advantages.

ACE’s support has been essential to our work with the South Yorkshire Mayoral Authority, who don’t have an in-house culture team but who are now part of a strong collaborative Creative Health Board; again ACE funding has catalysed funding from SYMCA and local authorities to support the local infrastructure. We see this as a really good model. And although ideally we would hope the ACE proportion of this funding would drop and be covered by Local and mayoral authorities in the future, we see ACE’s developmental role and oversight here as absolutely essential in the medium-term.

**Question 20:** ACE Relationship Managers are often the first and most important port of call for organisations in receipt of ACE funding. If relevant to you, how would you describe your experience working with your ACE Relationship Manager?- [free text box]

We have an excellent relationship with our Relationship Manager. They have high levels of expertise in our specialist area of work, and work with us as a partner to ensure we are able to tackle risks and opportunities in a realistic way. We have been really grateful for this relationship during particularly challenging phases for the organisation, and they are extremely responsive and supportive; it’s worth noting that the funding and reporting processes can be extremely hard to understand sometimes, even for very experienced arts managers – so receiving this kind of support and also, crucially, feedback on our reporting is incredibly important.

**Question 21:** Based on your experience or knowledge, please rate the following aspects of Arts Council England’s collaboration and knowledge sharing:

* 21.1. How effective is ACE at cooperating and sharing knowledge with the United Kingdom’s Arts Councils in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?
* 21.2. How effective is ACE in fostering international collaboration, and promoting British art and culture abroad?
* 21.4. How effective is ACE at working with other agencies and bodies in the creative sector to promote and enhance the UK’s creative capabilities?
* 21.5. How effective is ACE at working with and bringing different institutions and organisations together to support arts and creativity in places?

All with the following options to choose from:

* Very ineffective
* Ineffective
* Neither effective nor ineffective
* Effective
* Very effective
* Don’t know

**Survey questions - Arts Council England and government**

**Question 22:** How much involvement should the national government have in the work of ACE?

* **Limited involvement**
* Some involvement
* Moderate involvement
* A lot of involvement
* Maximum

**Question 23:** How much involvement should local governments have in the work of ACE?

* Limited involvement
* **Some involvement**
* Moderate involvement
* A lot of involvement
* Maximum

**Question 24:** How much influence should each level of government have in funding decisions?

* 24.1. Local government e.g. local councils
* 24.2. Regional government e.g. Mayoral / Combined Authorities
* 24.3. National government

All with the following options to choose from:

* No influence at all
* Nearly no influence
* Moderate influence
* Near total influence
* Total influence
* Don’t know.

**Question 25:** How effectively does the government hold ACE to account?

* Very ineffectively
* Quite ineffectively
* **Neither effectively nor ineffectively**
* Quite effectively
* Very effectively

**Free text**

We are fully supportive of the Arms-Length Principle. Although we would like DCMS to support ACE and acknowledge its expertise, it is vital that ACE can operate independently of government.

The previous government’s interference in ALBs’ processes while driving culture wars in the cultural sector was extremely damaging, both structurally and individually – we have seen people who are totally committed to supporting their communities be badly attacked in public campaigns against ‘wokery’ and we feel very strongly the government should distance itself from such campaigns.

We broadly support the government’s ambitions for devolution and local determination of priorities – this is connected with a place-based approach we also advocate for in creative health. However, we want to state plainly that we do not support moving funding or development work decisions away from ACE’s already sophisticated understanding of local and regional structures and organisations.

The Culture Secretary has mentioned examples of organisations helicoptering into communities and “doing *to*” the community when the work could be better done by organisations rooted in that area. We agree, and we note that ACE is arguably one of the few state mechanisms that *has* begun to consistently spread its funding outside London, enormously benefitting areas like our own home town of Barnsley. It has received a lot of unjust criticism for this, despite signposting this work extremely clearly; we support ACE absolutely in this endeavour.

There is no substantive cultural infrastructure in even the most developed mayoral authorities. Moreover cultural funding is always at risk and especially when perceived as being in competition with other pressing local needs at a time when local funding is under acute pressure; we have seen from local authorities already that many cut culture funds before anything else, despite the clear knock-on benefits for wider areas (public health in particular).

We also think it’s vital that the arts’ development is supported by a national agency with a mechanism for sharing excellent practice so that ideas can be spread across different boroughs, cities, districts, and regions.

**Survey questions - future development**

**Question 26:** What is the biggest challenge facing the arts and cultural sector in the next 10 years? - [free text box]

Underfunding. We note an extraordinary undervaluing across successive governments and in the national discourse for the huge economic impact and soft power of culture and creativity. And this includes participatory arts and creative health, for which the UK is widely regarded as being world leading. The economic impact of the arts is not just about the creative industries - it’s also about vast savings to health already happening, but potentially vastly more savings – especially if ACE is able to carry on and deepen its work to engage with the social determinants of health. We believe that ACE should help foster health and wellbeing but we also believe the arts and culture should be supported by other government budgets including health and education.

It's vital too that this funding is targeted at providing long-term support for smaller, grassroots organisations and freelancers. There are many mechanisms for this which have barely been considered thus far – we refer this Review for example to Ireland’s very successful experiment with Universal Basic Income for artists, which was found to support more sustainable creative practice.

As we state above, the culture wars created a deeply divisive situation where people working in socially engaged ways have been made extremely vulnerable to attacks from both press and government; this has caused some artists and arts organisations to pull back from this work which is both emotionally demanding and poorly financially supported. Lisa Nandy has done a lot to move on from this appalling situation, but we feel the government is treading a dangerous line when it comes to its communications about (e.g.) immigration and Disability benefits. These are two areas where a lot of community arts impacting health and wellbeing happens, and it’s deeply dispiriting to see that work to build community at a local level being undone by government positioning. Lisa Nandy in a Fabian Society discussion at the Labour conference Fringe said: “people feel the system banging up against them when they’re trying to make change, rather than getting behind them”; and that “there's more ambition than I’ve ever known … imagine what they could do with a government that backed them?” This is not how it feels right now.

In connection with this, we are also facing growing social problems in this country, including rising racism, anti-immigration rhetoric, misogyny and transphobia. Last summer’s riots, for example, created huge financial and emotional pressure for global majority-led arts organisations in terms of supporting staff wellbeing and safety. The government must consider how it can help tackle the causes of this imbalance with better funding for grassroots community initiatives – many of which will be creative and cultural, rather than letting these problems grow and destroy the very organisations that could prevent them. We are also starting to import anti-DEI sentiment and a drive to censor more progressive texts from the US (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/apr/14/librarians-in-uk-increasingly-asked-to-remove-books-as-influence-of-us-pressure-groups-spreads>). This is not helped by government’s position on protest laws – which in the wake of the culture wars is creating an atmosphere of self-censorship and fear that is not conducive to a healthy creative sector. The government needs to proudly support a robust culture sector that can hold a mirror up to society and helps us tell a better story about who we are.

**Question 27:** What are the most important things Arts Council England should focus on?- [free text box]

We would underline the need to focus on access, and inclusivity and relevance. This has underpinned a huge amount of new work but we are nowhere near where we need to be yet and really need this steady support from ACE. This is about building a healthy society in the widest sense; and we feel this is a crucial aspect of addressing the social determinants of health and health inequalities.

We really want to encourage ACE to continue to invest in grassroots and community-based organisations and freelancer through a) longer-term investment in these groups, b) investing in infrastructure for these fragile parts of the ecosystem including ‘connector’ roles that bring together culture with other state provisions like health and education; and c) partnering with other funders and ALBs to invest in the wider ecosystem that makes this work most effective.

**Question 28:** What changes would you like to see regarding ACE?- [free text box]

Simplification and streamlining of systems to improve access

More transparency about the practicalities of funding decisions (who has what role in this, where and how are decisions made?)

A greater focus on the development of equitable and sustainable funding models for smaller organisations and freelancers

Investment in infrastructure, and sector support organisations and connector roles that can facilitate collaborative place-based working

Supporting research into how this infrastructure effects change

More work with other ALBs and national partners to model and support a cross-departmental work across government – reflecting the vital role creativity and culture play in health and wellbeing, social justice, placemaking and regeneration and building community

**Survey questions - statutory functions**

Not applicable

**Question 29:** Does Arts Council England carry out its statutory function to operate and maintain Acceptance in Lieu effectively, and do you have any thoughts on how it could improve? - [free text box]

**Question 30:** Does ACE carry out its statutory function to administer the Cultural Gifts Scheme effectively, and do you have any thoughts on how it could improve? - [free text box]

**Question 31:** Does ACE carry out its statutory function to administer the Government Indemnity Scheme effectively, and do you have any thoughts on how it could improve? - [free text box]

**Question 32:** Does ACE manage the process of licensing for cultural goods (including those judged to be of outstanding national importance, and therefore subject to deferral) effectively, and do you have any thoughts on how it could improve? - [free text box]

There are opportunities to provide further information in additional free text boxes throughout the survey. Please do not leave any unnecessary personal data that could identify you.