



Let's Create: Arts Council England's 10 year strategy

Arts Council England (ACE) has published a new strategy for 2020-2030. Following an extensive consultation process with the sector, *Let's Create* sets out ACE's vision for the next 10 years.

Overview

Arts Council England (ACE) has published *Let's Create*, the organisation's new strategy for the next 10 years.

ACE has stated that it wants "England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish, and where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences." *Let's Create* outlines how it intends to achieve this vision.

The strategy is built around three Outcomes (creative people, cultural communities and a cultural and creative country) and four Investment Principles (ambition and quality, dynamism, environmental responsibility and inclusivity and relevance). Between now and 2030, ACE will publish a series of Delivery Plans that will set out its specific priorities for each period.

Background

ACE published its first 10-year strategy, *Great Art and Culture for Everyone*, in the autumn of 2010. This strategy set out the organisation's priorities to support and develop arts and culture across the country until 2020.

Since 2018, ACE has been consulting on a new strategy for the decade ahead. ACE's analysis of the initial consultation stage identified a set of key issues facing the culture sector. The 'case for change' grew out of these findings, which informed subsequent consultation stages.

The 'case for change' highlights the following points:

- There are still widespread socio-economic and geographic variances in levels of engagement with publicly funded culture.

- The opportunities for children and young people to experience creativity and culture inside and outside school are not equal across the country.
- There remains a persistent and widespread lack of diversity across the creative industries and in publicly funded cultural organisations.
- The business models of publicly funded cultural organisations are often fragile and generally lack the flexibility to address emerging challenges and opportunities.
- Many creative practitioners and leaders of cultural organisations report a retreat from innovation, risk-taking and sustained talent development.

ACE framed the subsequent consultation stages around these issues, which London Councils responded to. This process culminated in the publication of the new 10-year strategy in January 2020.

Analysis

ACE's vision begins by recognising that many people already lead wide-ranging creative and cultural lives. However much of this activity is not publicly funded and has therefore fallen outside ACE's remit. With the new ten-year strategy, ACE aims to support a more varied range of cultural activity that reaches more people in the country.

This won't just involve investing financially but helping to build connections between ACE-funded organisations, the commercial creative industries and local cultural activity. ACE pledges to work in partnership with various bodies, including local authorities, cultural organisations, media companies, healthcare providers, charities and the voluntary sector.

In 2011, Arts Council England took on national responsibility for the development of libraries and museums, with core funding of public libraries remaining the statutory responsibility of local library authorities. Libraries will be 'central' to the delivery of the Strategy, and ACE pledges to increase investment in them.

The 10-year strategy is built around three Outcomes and four Investment Principles.

Outcomes

1. Creative People

'Everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life'.

Participating in creative activities in communities reduces loneliness, supports physical and mental health and wellbeing, sustains older people and helps to build and strengthen social ties. Over the next 10 years ACE will support communities to design and develop more opportunities for creative activity. Where there are gaps in provision, ACE will support museums, libraries and arts organisations to use their collections, knowledge, skills and other assets to support community-led activities that are open to everyone.

There will be a particular focus on ensuring that children and young people are able to fulfil their creative potential and access the highest-quality cultural experiences. ACE will make the case for a stronger focus on teaching creativity and critical thinking across the curriculum.

2. Cultural Communities

'Villages, towns and cities thrive through a collaborative approach to culture'.

“ACE has stated that it wants England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish, and where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences”

In the last 10 years, recognition has grown of the powerful role culture can play in transforming the streets, boroughs and neighbourhoods where people live. Over the next decade ACE will work with a wider range of partners, including local government, to support communities to use creativity and culture to create thriving places to live, work, study and visit.

There is a recognition that libraries reach audiences from all backgrounds and of all ages, and provide meeting places, maker spaces, and focal points for creative and cultural activity within local communities. ACE will support local cultural organisations, including libraries, museums, Music Education Hubs and arts organisations, to develop a better understanding of the needs and interests of their communities.

3. A Creative and Cultural Country

‘England’s cultural sector is innovative, collaborative and international’.

Currently, the opportunity to establish and sustain a creative career is unfairly dependent on personal background. ACE wants to help children and young people from every part of the country to understand what a career in the cultural sector or the wider creative industries could look like, and to support everyone who embarks on such a career to remain in the sector and fulfil their potential, regardless of their background.

As the country moves to reposition itself within Europe and the wider world, ACE will seek to encourage and develop a cultural sector that is outward-looking and globally connected, and that is committed to working with and learning from international talent and expertise.

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Investment Principles

1. Ambition and Quality

The strategy outlines ACE’s commitment to the pursuit of the highest quality in culture and art, whilst stating that it does not believe that certain types or scales of creative activity are inherently better or of greater value than others.

2. Dynamism

ACE will expect cultural organisations, especially those in the National Portfolio, to invest in their workforces in order to develop the skills required to respond to a rapidly changing external environment, such as new technological opportunities and ongoing pressure on public funding.

3. Environmental Responsibility

Over the next 10 years, ACE will expect the cultural organisations it supports to redouble their commitment to environmental responsibility.

4. Inclusivity and relevance

ACE will ask organisations who receive regular investment to agree targets around protected characteristics and to demonstrate relevance to their communities.

Commentary

In many ways ACE's new 10-year strategy has similar goals to its previous one. At its heart is a commitment to ensuring that the benefits of arts and culture are shared by everyone rather than just a narrow, privileged group. This aim is of course welcome, although – as ACE itself acknowledges – there is still a lot more to be done to make it a reality.

Overall, the strategy implies a move towards a more place-based approach for arts and culture. There is recognition throughout the strategy of the role that culture plays in shaping communities, and a determination to support the development of local culture. We agree with ACE's aim to support more community-led and more non-formal culture that reflects the diversity of communities across the country. We hope that it will expand its placed-based approach with programmes like Creative People and Places, working closely with local authorities in particular.

The strategy commits to creating cultural opportunities across the country. This is welcome, although it is important that ACE considers disadvantage and access to arts within regions, not just between them. Despite its leading cultural institutions, London still has low levels of engagement on some participation indicators. Some areas of London lack cultural infrastructure and not everyone can afford or is able to travel to cultural opportunities in central London. We'd like to see ACE acknowledge this when allocating funding.

London Councils welcomes the commitment to work in partnership with a range of organisations to support cultural activity, and it is important that this work at local level is joined up with local authority strategies for culture and their communities.

There is also recognition of the role that libraries play in reaching people from all ages and backgrounds. ACE has been the national development agency for libraries since 2011, but over the course of this period there has been an ongoing reduction in the library service due to decreases in local authority funding. ACE's commitment to support and increase investment in libraries is therefore welcome.

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