

HAMMERSMITH AND FULHAM ARTS COMMISSION

BRIEFING PAPER 6: PARTICIPATION
WHAT DOES HIGH-QUALITY ARTS
ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE IN 2020
AND HOW MIGHT LBHF SUPPORT IT
IN THIS PART OF LONDON?

CONTEXT

In recent years there has been a profound change in the way that arts leaders think about engagement. While there are still many opportunities to attend a theatre performance or to visit an art gallery, it is increasingly common for people to experience art and culture in a more participatory way. A more active engagement with art (more active than merely buying a ticket, then looking and listening) has been proven to be more beneficial in all the ways we've talked about before (on health, wellbeing, community cohesion, etc.). This deeper understanding of what counts as effective engagement has reached the top of the political agenda in the latest Arts Council strategy, [Let's Create](#), published in January 2020. There has never been a better time to think about what we mean by "high-quality arts engagement".

A quick recap:

In Briefing **Paper 1** we outlined the demographic characteristics of Hammersmith and Fulham and offered a modest sketch of the range cultural activity underway in the borough. We identified three clusters of activity, four anchor institutions, and a patchwork of affluence and poverty that shaped how people engaged with culture.

In Briefing **Paper 2** we looked at the social impact of arts and cultural activity and the ways in which small specialist and larger more general arts providers might work in partnership to deliver against an agreed set of local authority priorities. We identified the following as over-arching areas where arts and culture might have a positive social impact:

- climate change
- adult social care
- tackling pollution and local environmental issues
- mental health
- affordable housing
- food poverty and homelessness
- children's safety
- local hospital provision
- social integration and tackling racism

In Briefing **Paper 3** we looked at the way that inclusion and diversity is conceived in the arts and how that does or doesn't chime with current local authority priorities in Hammersmith and Fulham. We outlined the Creative Case for Diversity that is used by the Arts Council, and presented some of the key statistics in the borough as well as some ideas for best practice.

In Briefing **Paper 4** we focused on the identified town centres of Shepherds Bush, Hammersmith, Fulham Broadway and White City, explored the extent to which each might be identified as a cultural hub, and examined other examples where culture has driven a sense of placemaking. The examples in this last paper were further amplified by expert witnesses providing case studies of culture-led regeneration in London and further afield.

In Briefing **Paper 5** we took a long-term strategy and some of the mechanisms Hammersmith and Fulham has its disposal to develop and promote arts and cultural activity across the borough. These included:

- clarity and guidance on, and more strategic use of Section 106
- further development of BID's in the borough
- the development of a realistic, costed, prioritised arts strategy
- cultural districts and cultural compacts
- opportunities with the GLA's London Borough of Culture initiative
- new financial instruments e.g. endowments, percent for art etc

This paper **(6)** tackles three big questions:

- What does good arts engagement look like (for young people and adults)?
- Why might LBHF want to encourage high-quality arts engagement in the borough?
- How can LBHF make sure that there are opportunities for all to experience high-quality arts engagement?

GLOSSARY

Getting clear on what we mean by attendance, participation and engagement.

Most of the reports on arts engagement uses the term “participation” to mean just about everything from watching on a screen to the actual making of art. We want to be a little more precise in order to highlight an important trend in the cultural sector that has prompted this session’s discussion.

We use the term “**attendance**” to mean sitting in a theatre or a concert hall, or visiting an art gallery, or reading a book.

We use the term “**participation**” to specifically refer to the active making or sharing of work by singing or strumming, or acting or dancing, or writing or painting. In addition, we use “participation” to mean organising or fundraising or anything that is active but perhaps not traditionally envisaged as “creative”.

“**Engagement**” is our catch-all term that includes all of the above, from walking through a gallery, to attending a special gallery tour, to giving that special tour, to painting the works featured in it!

ARTS POLICY

A changing notion over time

For a very long time the notion of high-quality arts engagement followed a traditional model in which “the masses” would be improved by seeing something from the western canon of art in a setting like a grand neoclassical gallery or a theatre decked out in velvet and brass. Those who didn’t or couldn’t engage would have to find some way to teach themselves. If you weren’t engaging with an improving work from the western canon then you were indulging in entertainment, not art!

While this idea tended to dominate the world of cultural policy and arts administration there was always room for a parallel world of amateur and participatory arts. This would include church choirs, am-dram societies meeting in village halls, knitting circles, book groups, classes at the Workers Educational Association or University of the Third Age.



The RSC's 2016 production of A Midsummer Night's Dream toured the UK blending amateur and professional coasts

Nowadays it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between the amateur and professional, the improving and the entertaining, the highbrow and everyday. It's quite common for theatre productions at elite national companies to feature local volunteers in the cast.

Some of the most exciting contemporary art is made by and with local communities e.g. David Best's Temple, Derry UK City of Culture 2015 (below).

At the same time there has been a growing discomfort with the general orthodoxy that says that the role of public funding is to support the making of 'great art' by artists and its dissemination around the country for the benefit of a grateful public.

[Fun Palaces](#) takes a different approach: it champions community at the heart of culture, and culture at the heart of community.



David Best's Temple, Derry UK City of Culture 2015

FUN PALACES MANIFESTO

We believe in the genius in everyone, in everyone an artist and everyone a scientist, and that creativity in community can change the world for the better. We believe we can do this together, locally, with radical fun – and that anyone, anywhere, can make a Fun Palace.

[64 Million Artists](#) (full disclosure – David Micklem is co-founder and Chair) exists to unlock the creative potential in everyone. It is a campaigning body that since 2016 has focused on:

- [Everyday Creativity](#) – the idea that we are all creative, and that art is not just 'what artists do' but something all of us should feel ownership of;
- [Cultural Democracy](#) – which describes an approach to arts and culture that actively engages everyone in deciding what counts as culture, where it happens, who makes it, and who experiences it.

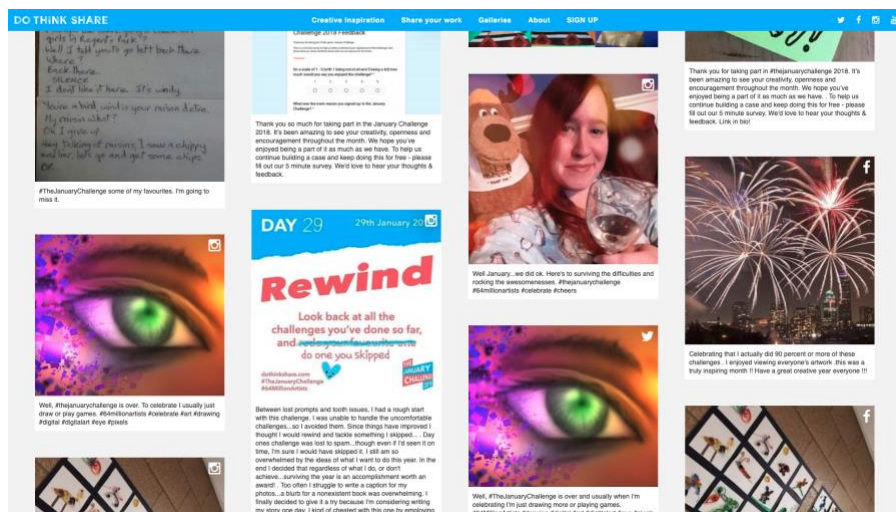
These projects, and other grassroots cultural organisations, have tried to shift the narrative so that policymakers and funders appreciate that everyone has the right to develop and express their creativity. It's a radical rethinking of the purpose of public funding.

This has really crystallised in the most recent [10-year strategy from Arts Council England](#): a document that will shape the agenda in England for cultural funding and policy throughout the 2020s.

It's rallying cry is: A country transformed by culture, Bringing Us Together, Happier, Healthier. To Excite, Inspire, Delight. To Enrich Our Lives.

It aims to achieve the following three outcomes by 2030:

1. **Creative People:** Everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life.
2. **Cultural Communities:** Villages, towns and cities thrive through a collaborative approach to culture.
3. **A creative and cultural country:** England’s cultural sector is innovative, collaborative and international.



64 Million Artists Do, Think, Share website featuring contributions from everyday artists across the UK

The new Arts Council strategy, and the shifting landscape of arts and culture in the UK, have changed the ways in which we think about engagement. Rather than specific artform or activity, we can begin to talk about high quality arts experiences in terms of a set of principles, ethics and conditions that lead to high quality engagement. These principles are already known to you...

In **Paper 2 (Social Impact)** you will remember we identified a number of ‘success factors’ that make it more likely that a cultural programme or project will have a positive social impact, regardless of which is being targeted. These were:

- **Depth and duration:** the most impactful arts and cultural activity is meaningful and takes place over a considerable period of time. The converse – short term, light touch interventions – rarely have a lasting social impact.

- **Clarity of purpose:** *having a clear set of objectives about what social impact is being addressed*
- **A robust theory of change/logic model:** *simply, having a strong understanding about how your cultural activity will generate the social outcomes you want*
- **Authenticity:** *not simply imposing an activity on a community or parachuting in people from outside without proper consultation*
- **Resources:** *making sure that people have the resources (financial and otherwise) to fulfil their roles with full attention and high quality work*

EXAMPLES

Many of our arts and cultural organisations are changing how they engage people.

Local

[The Lyric's](#) commitment to nurturing young people sits at the heart of its mission as one of the UK's leading producing theatres. Their Young Lyric programme includes classes, performance opportunities, apprenticeships, work experience, supporting emerging artists, schools' activity and targeted work supporting vulnerable young people.

As we've discovered, The Bush is one of London's premiere new writing theatres and supports a broad range of local community initiatives to support its commitment to reflecting the diversity of its audiences and participants.

We looked at these organisations, and other grassroots exemplars of community engagement practice in our first paper and discussion. Beyond the big anchor institutions a few of the highlights that we've heard about:

- Fulham Symphony Orchestra – amateur 30-piece symphony orchestra
- Dance West – run dance workshops for older people to combat isolation and dementia.
- The Rena Initiative – artist-led organisation in White City empowering women, especially women of colour.
- White City Youth Theatre Group – fast-growing, working with young people.
- Outside Edge Theatre Group – based in borough for 20 years. Work with addicts using theatre as a means to combat addictions.

National

Elsewhere there are many examples of new and dynamic thinking from arts organisations. Some examples for this paper:

[Battersea Arts Centre / Contact Theatre – The Agency](#)

The Agency is a creative entrepreneurship programme enabling young people aged 15 to 25 from some of the most deprived areas in the UK to create social change projects based on the needs they identify in their own communities. The programme began in 2013 in the UK through a partnership between Battersea Arts Centre (BAC), Contact and People's Palace Projects (PPP). Since the pilot year in 2013, it has had a significant

impact not only on the young people who have taken part but also the organisations and communities that enable them to realise their ideas. W

It is based on 5 over-arching principles:

1. It puts young people from some of the most deprived areas of the UK at the centre of social change, using an asset-based approach to achieve sustainable, local change through young peoples' life experience, community resources, culture and passion.
2. It supports young people on an individual level to improve their opportunities but also creates a collective force for systematic change, mobilising young people around social issues they care about.
3. It changes the way cultural and community organisations work with young people by adopting more inclusive, co-created, collaborative working practices across their organisations
4. It uses creativity as its key currency to unlock innovation, helping young people to achieve their potential and achieve future success in education, employment and enterprise.
5. It is a tool to create robust networks within a locality where young people, cultural organisations and communities work together around shared goals and values.



Agents gathered at Battersea Arts Centre 2017

[Heart of Glass](#)

Heart of Glass is the Creative People and Places project for St Helens. It is one of 30 CPPs across the UK which aim to bring people and communities together through the power of arts and culture. Recent and exemplary projects have included:

Rupture: a coaching support programme for early career artists directly engaged in, or passionate about, socially engaged practice.



A Right Knees Up – Heart of Glass

Madlove: an arts festival for mental health.

#dearsthelens: young people invited to contribute to a declaration for the local authority in response to the question: what does a child-friendly borough look like and feel like to live in?

With For About: an annual conference on the role of artists in civil society

[Hounslow Creative People and Places](#) – consortium led by Watermans

In Hounslow, the approach has been to work from the grass roots up with the vision of creating a confident, colourful and creative Hounslow. They run things like a community choir and a community brass band. It also works in conjunction with a new [GLA Creative Enterprise Zone](#) (the so-called Great West Creatives) located in the neighbourhood. We'll hear more from Lucy Thurley from Hounslow at our meeting.

[Creative Barking and Dagenham CPP](#)

The programme underway in LBBD is devised by their Cultural Connectors (an ever-expanding network of adults living locally), who are making decisions about the Creative Barking and Dagenham programme. There are now more than 180 connectors part of the open, supportive and flexible network. Cultural Connectors give as much or as little time as they would like and are never made to feel bad about being busy. They are invited to all

our events and opportunities and given support if they have their own ideas for creative projects.

[Coventry UK City of Culture 2021](#)

In 2021 Coventry will be UK City of Culture. Learning from Derry (2013), Hull (2017) Coventry is working on a bold plan that puts the people of the city at the very heart of everything. There will be a programme developed and made by, with and for everyone, and will run for five years, starting now and running through 2021 into future years programmed and curated by communities on the ground in Coventry.

It's a high-risk strategy and one that shuns the parachuted in spectacles of other years of culture. But if it works it will suggest a new grassroots approach to participation and engagement. It places the principles of Cultural Democracy that we touched on above at the heart of an approach that aims to enable Coventry citizens to positively influence and shape the city they want to live in through arts and culture.



Block9

[National Theatre of Wales](#)

Since its inception in 2009, the English-language National Theatre of Wales has placed participation and engagement at the heart of its thinking. It started life as an online community and over the past decade has grown dozens of productions through dialogue between professional and amateur creative practitioners.

It has been an exemplar in blurring the boundaries between top-down and bottom-up culture, participant and commissioned artist and audience member, between formal and informal arts and cultural activity. The project

that perhaps describes this was WildWorks' The Port Talbot Passion in 2011 that brought together former resident and Hollywood star Michael Sheen, a cast of over 1000 community volunteers, and hundreds of artists and creative practitioners to retell the story of The Passion in one of Wales' most overlooked communities.



Michael Sheen in NTW and WildWorks' The Port Talbot Passion

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What does good arts engagement look like (for young people and adults)?
- Why might LBHF want to encourage high-quality arts engagement in the borough?
- How can LBHF make sure that there are opportunities for all to experience high-quality arts engagement?