

## Arts Council Roundtable

11<sup>th</sup> of October 12.30pm – CultureMix Arts

### Attendees:

- Nathifa Jordan – CultureMix Arts
- Mary Genis – CultureMix Arts
- Toby Davis – Rabble Theatre
- Suzanne Stallard - Jelly
- Jamie Reed – Berkshire Music Trust
- Kate Powell – Cultural Education Partnership
- Beth Allum – Dance Reading
- Nick Thompson – Reading Rep
- Rosie Durance – Make/Sense Theatre
- Lisa Woynarski –University of Reading
- Kate Arnold-Foster – The MERL
- Gavin Lombos – Readipop
- Donna Pentelow & Zsuzsi Lindsay (notetaker) – Reading Borough Council
- Darren Henley, Hazel Edwards (Chair), Peter Heslip, Nuala Friedman – Arts Council England

### Apologies:

- Susanne Clausen – OHOS

### Agenda:

1. Welcome from the Chair: Hazel Edwards Area Director, South East
2. Darren Henley, Chief Executive
  - a. Update on our working context in the arts and culture sector
3. Roundtable discussion:
  - a. With increasing competition for funding, how can we ensure sustainable support for cultural initiatives that address rising inequalities, promote social cohesion, and provide essential support for vulnerable young people and adults?

### Minutes:

Meeting started with introductions and a short informal presentation from Darren Henley, key points from the presentation:

- Wealth of culture in Reading, work you all do is very important to ACE, and contributes to the ACE Strategy.
- ACE invests in public lives, though investing in your organisations and the people and teams.
- Success rate of applications has gone down due to increased demand. ACE are lobbying central government for a larger contribution. Portion of funding comes from National Lottery players, it is a monthly percentage of overall takings from players.
- Stories and narratives are great for conveying what you do and why'. It is for Reading to decide what we want to be famous for.
- **ACTION: Reading Cultural Sector to decide what it that they want to be famous for. (All)**

Hazel Edwards, Chair of the meeting then invited questions from the attendees. The following is a record of questions that were asked and a summary of the answers that were provided by ACE and where indicated other members of the roundtable.

- Q: What do you think arts funding will look like going forward?
- A: ACE do not have any insights into the next budget; however they are advocating for more investment, especially around capital funding. New government is mission-led, a new way of working.
- Q: University of Reading is an important part of the cultural eco-system, but they are quite vulnerable in terms of their creative course offerings. How do we protect what Universities have to offer?
- A: ACE continue to advocate for universities and their role as important placemaking institutions and the contribution that they make to the talent pipeline. Industry Summit will be happening soon, creative industries are now part of that summit, which has not happened in the past. Amazon and Google are putting pressure on the government to skill up more people in the creative industries, as there are significant gaps. Cultural education will be a big part of this. Importance of the arts throughout education, arts, music, drama, sports are all things we want all children to be able to experience. There is no national centre for arts and technology. These names happen when organisations come together to create this, a possible opportunity for Reading?
- **Action: Cultural Sector to continue working in partnership on creating opportunities for creative skills development and work in partnership to grow these opportunities. (All)**
- **ACTION: ZL to meet with LW to discuss possible collaborations around space – all welcome to join the discussion.**
- Q: Lack of space in reading coupled with drop in corporate sponsorship and lots of artists and groups. How do we exist in these economic times to ensure the continued growth and sustainability of the sector?
- A: Work together on a place-based proposition, ways of coming together to improve economies of scale, some examples could be sharing some back office systems.
- **ACTION: Cultural Organisations to discuss possible opportunities for economies of scale savings.**
- **ACTION: SS to contact make contact with ACE NPO team to discuss Jelly journey.**
- Q: How can we get support to develop and deliver at the same time?
- A: Make sure you ask for enough. Organisational development can also be funded. With additional needs and costs, these can be funded. Have conversations with the team to be advised in the best way.
- **ACTION: NPOs can offer advice and guidance, organisations are invited to reach out to them, RD invited to reach out to GL.**
- Q: Increasing expectations to delivery health and social care outcomes – that then have to end due to limitations of funding timescales. Are there likely to be any changes to this model?
- A: Public funding is not set up in this landscape, treasury funding cycle. Government will move into a 2 year rolling cycle. RBC also has only 3 months to plan services, we keep making the case as a sector. LA pressures are on care and other areas. Cabinet office do seem to be making changes. We have to make sure we're in these discussions.

- Q: Gov wants to put more cultural activities into the curriculum – but difficult to get into schools without the funding. Want to deliver in school time, lots trying to do the same. Most of the funds we usually get to go into school is being redirected social services. Will there be funding for this work?
- A: [Professor Becky Francis](#) is currently leading the curriculum review. There is a survey out now asking for [feedback](#). Need to ensure we are making the argument and strengthening case for health and wellbeing benefits – e.g. ensuring evaluations cover these.
- **ACTION: All to contribute where relevant.**
- Q: How to make the case for Reading, when not a Priority Place.
- A: You have had 2 successful library grants, 4 NPOs, lots of culture growth and investment year on year. ACE will do what they can to support the best ideas come to life. Reading is still a place that's really important to ACE.
- Q: We have a very big neurodivergent community in Reading, we could not meet demand. A hub for organisations that do this work maybe could.
- A: Think about how might this happen. Again, perhaps talk to the University, is there research in this area that could support this work?
- Q: Thinking about the next round and the IP (Investment Principles). Will quality feature higher next time? Doesn't feel like there's space to emphasize this aspect currently.
- A: How would you evidence quality?
- Q: A space to tell the journey and story of the organisation, accolades, awards etc.
- A: Very good point, we struggle with evidencing quality and it's quite subjective. We continue to review how we measure quality, so it's really valuable to hear your feedback

#### **Final thoughts from the Cultural Sector:**

- Many of the organisations round the table would not be here if it weren't for the support received from ACE. Huge thanks from Reading go to ACE for their continued support. As organisations we strive for financial independence, to reduce our reliance on funding to be sustainable - being able to grow without a dependency on funding.
- The general attitude from the public needs to be changed; people will pay for a meal out but won't pay for a show. It's about creating a society where culture is valued.
- Music hubs funding has changed several times over the years and how services are accessed changes, what we're able to offer for the cost is different and often too expensive for some to access. We must be able to change how we deliver so we can be everything for people as they will make choices.
- As arts organisations we do work that isn't always chargeable but is of great value to those who engage with it, often meeting a need.