**APPG for Arts Education**

For the past eight months, arts and culture organisations across our country have faced an existential crisis with very real implications for arts, design and craft in education.

Undoubtedly decisions made by the current government have had a very real impact, but the arts and culture sector was left fragile and exposed well before the pandemic hit.

This is what my report, Cultured Communities, looks at.

A lack of resilience in English arts and culture, exploited by Covid-19, is the result of local government funding cuts, Arts Council England focus on London and the largest arts organisations, and the resulting unavoidable reliance on volatile earned income from ticket sales, hospitality, and donations.

For decades, local government has been the most important funder of arts and culture in England. And so it remains today. But over the past 10 years, councils have been forced to cut back significantly on the support it provides to the sector.

Annual local government spending on arts and culture in 2018/2019 was more than £860 million lower in real terms compared to 2010/11. That’s a cut of 38.5 percent, with arts development and libraries seeing funding fall further.

Every region has felt the impact, with cuts proportionately worse in the West Midlands, the East of England, the North East, the South West, and the North West.

Looking at per person cuts, London experienced the largest fall – but overall spending was much higher to begin with and remains higher now. The West Midlands and the North East also saw significant per person decreases.

This is further evidence of the extraordinarily painful decade for local government spending. Of course, non-financial support is still be provided to the arts and culture sector – but austerity has weakened that too as the staff, the buildings or the advice just isn’t there.

As local government has pulled back its support, the arts and culture sector has sought help from other sources of funding – but ones that are unequally distributed.

Arts Council England is the largest England-wide funder of arts and culture. But it’s funding has long favoured major institutions largely based in the capital, contributing to historical underfunding outside of London.

This support is mainly distributed through two main funding streams: the national portfolio, which guarantees annual investment to organisations over a period of time, and National Lottery funding, paid for through tickets to support community arts across the country.

In the 2018 to 2022 round, Arts Council England will invest £1.67 billion in national portfolio organisations. Those based in London will receive over 41 percent of that; a much higher proportion than other English region. Indeed, London will receive 3.7 times as much funding per person as the rest of England.

Looking at National Lottery funding distributed by Arts Council England between 2009 and 2018, London again received the largest per person allocation – receiving twice as much as the rest of England. There is evidence to suggest that National Lottery proceeds from the North, Midlands and the South West have been subsidising arts spending in London and the South East.

But the main replacement for local government funding has been private investment and earned income. Many organisations are now reliant on this as they become more ‘entrepreneurial’. This funding favours London, again overwhelmingly, as organisations outside of the capital are overlooked.

The National Campaign for the Arts has argued that a consequence of this shift away from public to private funding has been ticket price increases, reducing affordable access to the arts.

So what does it mean for arts, craft and design in education?

It is important to recognise the important role of local government in the education communities receive, despite the academisation of schools. They can influence the ecosystem in which all education providers operate in.

So, reductions in council funding for local arts and culture have contributed to arts, craft and design education being pushed out of schools – and out of the lives of many.

In Primary Colours, a Fabian Society piece of research on the decline of arts education for the Fabian Society, I found that many schools struggled to provide school trips to access culture away from the classroom.

Our survey of English primary school teachers found that 58 percent thought there had been fewer visits to arts institutions in 2018 compared to 2010.

Because more arts organisations rely on earned income, some struggle to provide affordable access to schools. Young people can’t access arts outside of school either due to the cost. Young Londoners may live in the place that receives the most private income for arts and cultural organisations, yet around a third cite having to pay to take part a barrier to engage in arts and culture.

But equally in many small towns and rural areas, there simply aren’t the cultural amenities that are easily accessible due to a lack of funding. We should not have a system of funding that relies on people going to the nearest large town or city to participate in culture or arts education.

And as the Government has relied on the outsourcing arts education to museums, galleries, theatres, opera houses and orchestras because it will not fund it in schools, local government funding cuts mean that many – especially from deprived backgrounds – have little opportunity to experience arts education at all.

We fundamentally do not have a funding model for arts and culture that works for encouraging arts, craft and design in education. And it risks creating what the Warwick Commission of Cultural Value described as: a two-tier system” in which the most advantaged [socially and economically] are also the most advantaged in benefitting from cultural and creative education experiences.

Covid-19, and the Government response to it, is likely to make things worse.

The struggle for survival of thousands of arts and cultural organisations will take time to recover from, if they recover at all. Every institution that disappears is one less than can provide outreach to schools or open their doors for learning.

Of course, the sheer size of the Cultural Recovery Fund has to be welcomed. But for many, particularly smaller organisations, it was simply too late. By focusing on the so-called ‘crown jewels’, the Government is like to further entrench inequalities in arts provision and access – as places outside of London or the big cities miss out on their fair share of funding when it is most needed.

At the same time, the failure to support local government through this crisis threatens a new wave of spending cuts that arts organisations cannot survive. The County Council Network has warned that two-thirds of its member councils will cut library budgets, despite a 41 percent cut over the past 10 years.

An arts and culture recovery that opens up access and opportunities for arts education will be incredibly difficult if we not only fail to learn from the mistakes of the past decade but rely on a turbocharged version: more local government austerity, more reliance on earned income.

So, we need a real plan to rebuild the arts and culture sector and place it on a sustainable footing. In doing so, the Government can unlock the benefits of arts, craft, and design education – and level up our country.

In the immediate term, the remaining Cultural Recovery Fund grants – worth £258 million – should be distributed by local government, working in partnership with Arts Council England. They can ensure that funding goes to where it is most needed for the local area, and attach conditions on support packages to require organisations to widen outreach and access to the creative industries, cultural experiences and arts education.

The Government has so far missed an opportunity to not use the Cultural Recovery Fund to reset the arts and culture sector in this way.

Shakespeare’s Globe in written evidence to the DCMS Committee suggested a “new scheme whereby the government purchases in advance up to 20% of Globe tickets for the next five years for disbursement to groups experiencing barriers to engagement” as a plan to enable the theatre to survive. Imagine the difference that could have been made if the Government used some of the money to create a scheme on a national scale, securing access to all forms of art for hundreds of thousands of children?

But that cannot be the last word for the sector. We need a sustainable long-term funding settlement to give councils the capacity, certainty, and flexibility to prioritise arts and culture – and use it to meet the ambitions of their local communities. To strengthen the sector in every part of the country for the long-term, we need an Arts Resilience Fund that match funds council investment.

And we need to rebalance Arts Council England funding to end our failure to build up assets outside of the capital – whether its community arts venues, or the so-called ‘national treasures’.

The government should explicitly require Arts Council England to phase in equal per person distribution of National Lottery funding to the regions of England by 2025 at the very latest. This change will push new investment to places outside of London, creating the opportunity for more world-beating, accessible culture right across England and making a powerful contribution to the government’s levelling up agenda.

Once a new National Lottery funding formula has been adopted, the money should be devolved to local arms-length organisations on a pilot basis in selected mayoral combined authorities and the Greater London Authority. This would place millions in the hands of independent bodies with local expertise, able to forge connections between culture and local priorities including improving education.

These steps can be taken to reset the funding model and rebuild arts and culture so that the next recession doesn’t result in another existential crisis for the sector, but also so that over the next decade the arts and culture sector can play the fullest part in educating our country.