

**PSA3 target for the arts:**

# Focusing on under-represented groups



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Most of us would agree that everyone should have the opportunity to access the arts. However, it remains the case that people from certain groups are far more likely to attend arts events than others.

This is an issue that has become increasingly important to the arts sector and policy makers – the fact that while some groups regularly benefit from attending and participating in arts activities, other groups in our society are under-represented and are missing out. The arts PSA3 target which DCMS has been set measures how effective we are at doing something about this.

Let us look at some of the evidence about which groups are least represented in the arts. We know that around 34% of all adults in England attend two or more different arts events in a year. For example, they may have attended a local theatre production and a photography exhibition. If we break the adult population down into groups, then we start to see who is currently under-represented and less likely to engage with the arts. 24% of people from Black and Minority Ethnic groups (BME) attend two or more different arts events in a year. The figure for people with a limiting disability is 24% also, and for people in the lower socio-economic groups (C2DE) the figure is 17%. The last statistic is even more telling when you consider that for the higher socio-economic groups (ABC1) the figure is as high as 45%.

## **'Not for the likes of you'**

In terms of participation in arts activities (this could mean playing a musical instrument, attending a painting class or creating digital art work, for example) the

gap is slightly smaller. 24% of all adults participate in two or more activities, while only 21% of people from BME groups, 19% of people with a limiting disability, and 15% of people in the C2DE bracket do the same.

We need to do more to try and improve this current situation. Large amounts of public money are invested in the arts each year (the two biggest funders being Arts Council England and Local Government, to the tune of about £412m and £260m per year respectively) and it is right that all sections of the public should be able to access the benefits of this spending. As local government arts officers, you won't need telling about the benefits of participating in or attending arts events – we know that engagement with the arts and culture can improve people's quality of life because most of us have seen it first hand. If, then, there are groups in society who are under-represented in the arts, and may feel that there are certain barriers preventing them from engaging fully, then something needs to be done about it.

So how do we find out what action is needed, and how do we decide where we should focus our efforts to drive up engagement amongst the priority groups? Well, fortunately there are several useful pieces of research we can draw on for starters. 'Not for the Likes of You' is a study that Arts Council England commissioned as part of their New Audiences initiative. The researchers set out to dig down and find out what makes people from some groups feel like some arts venues are 'not for the likes of them' and look at some different ways in which organisations have turned this around. All aspects of the way an arts

venue is organised is explored in the report, and good practice (as well as not-so-good practice) is highlighted. For example, they look at the way a venue presents its café/restaurant facilities. Simple things like changing menu items such as "Goujons of Plaice and French Fries" to "Homemade Fish Fingers and Chips" can go a long way to making a venue more accessible to people.

## **When to clap**

People who don't currently attend arts events may have reservations as they do not know what to expect or what will be expected of them. The Borderline Theatre group devised a scheme called "Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About Theatre-Going But Were Afraid to Ask" which was designed to reduce the 'fear factor'. It involved inviting people who felt theatre was 'not for them' to come to a theatre and be taken through the whole process from creating the show to buying a ticket, ordering interval drinks and when to clap. These are just two examples from many contained in the report, which is well worth a read. Other research is ongoing, and we are continually finding out more about the barriers people perceive, and what drives demand among different groups.

Another valuable source of information is the Taking Part survey. It is an unprecedented survey commissioned by the DCMS and Arts Council England (and other NDPBs) and was launched in July 2005. It is an ongoing national survey conducted by interview using a sample size of 29,000 people. We now have access to a wealth of information about how people

choose to spend their time on the leisure activities and facilities available to them. This data is being used to help with our understanding of people's leisure choices and the reasons behind their participation or non-participation in our sectors.

The Taking Part survey will be used to measure progress against the arts PSA3 target, DCMS's key target for the arts. Public Service Agreements (PSAs) were introduced in 1998, and they set out each Government Department's key performance objectives. The current PSA3 target for the arts is "to increase attendance at arts events by 3% and participation in the arts by 2% among the priority groups by 2008". This is a very challenging target, and one should not be misled by the small percentages. For example, achieving a 2% increase in the number of people from the C2DE group attending arts events would mean an extra 315,000 people by 2008. And to achieve a 3% increase in participants with a limiting disability, an extra 171,000 people.

## **Drive up engagement**

That is our PSA3 target. How do we plan on delivering it? Arts Council England is our main delivery partner, and they have developed a delivery plan which is fundamental to their ambition 'to put the arts at the heart of national life and people at the heart of the arts'. They believe that arts organisations (including themselves) need to look at their own profiles to see if they reflect the diverse audiences they are trying to attract. They have produced a Race Equality Scheme and more recently a Disability Equality Scheme and their Regularly Funded Organisations are going through the same process. They also have several schemes to support diverse artists and a broader range of cultural relevance, such as the Black Regional Initiative in Theatre and the decibel programme.

And they will continue with research, advocacy and marketing to try to drive up engagement where they can. Some of you will have heard Phil Cave (Director, Participation Strategy, ACE) speak at the recent NALGAO event in Bristol about the participation agenda and their commitment to Taking Part and the PSA3 agenda. ACE is currently considering what more they can do to make their relationships with their RFOs more effective and to strengthen their links with local authorities and voluntary and community arts organisations.

We would be very glad to hear any ideas you might have about attracting new audiences, or perhaps you might know a local arts organisation that has been successful with similar initiatives that you think we should hear about. Contact details can be found at the end of this article so please get in touch.

We know that for years local government arts officers have been working hard to reach out to these groups. Clearly local authorities have a role to play in this agenda, and can make a huge impact. Eastbourne Borough Council is a great example of what can be achieved. In April 2006 it was awarded Beacon status under the Government's Beacon Authority Scheme, recognising its excellent provision of arts for hard to reach groups. The success of their work has led to culture being at the heart of the Local Strategic Partnership. Another example is the set of Cultural Pathfinder projects involving 12 Authorities from across the country which were set up to show how culture can be used to help achieve both local and central government aims. These are drawing to a close now and the evaluations of should provide evidence for the impact of cultural activity in meeting community priorities.

## **Roles as 'place-shapers'**

The participation agenda will continue to be important within the new Local Area Agreement framework. The Local Government White Paper focuses on how Local Authorities will have stronger and reinforced roles as community leaders and "place-shapers". They will be better placed to respond to the needs of the communities they serve. Local Area Agreements will be used to assess how successful an authority is at this. As arts officers, you are already aware of the considerable benefits arts and cultural projects bring to those who take part, and the community as a whole. The new Local Area Agreements are your opportunity to demonstrate how the work you are doing directly impacts upon the wider aims of your Authority, for example, working towards safer and stronger communities.

Success in permanently reducing the under-representation of some groups relies on the important work being done across the sector by local authorities, by ACE, by voluntary and community arts groups, and many other people around the country. If arts officers continue building on previous successes by forming new partnerships and looking for new ideas, then together we can maximise the impact and start seeing change happen quickly. Our challenge is to get the figures moving in the right direction, away from the current situation of under-representation in the arts among the priority groups. PSA3 is the key target through which the progress we make together will be measured. ●

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