

John McMahon, Strategic Lead for Arts and Health, Arts Council England

JOHN MCMAHON is Arts Council England's national policy lead for health and wellbeing, criminal justice, and wider social outcomes. He also leads the organisation's core national policy team. Recent activities include leading the inclusion of arts and health in the Arts Council's new 10-year strategy, Let's Create; and designing and launching the £1.8m Thriving Communities Fund in partnership with the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP). John is a member of NHS England's Social Prescribing Task Group, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport Loneliness Task Group and the Royal Society for Public Health Arts Special Interest Group.

'The changing landscape for arts and health through the lens of the Arts Council's new 10-year strategy, Let's Create.'

I manage the National Policy team at the Arts Council England, and I am also National Strategic Lead for Arts and Health. Over the course of this short presentation, I am aiming to give a short introduction to the Arts Council England, who we are and what we do. A bit about our new ten-year strategy, Let's Create, and arts and health in the context of that, what that means for partnership working for arts and health, nationally, regionally and locally, and a bit on the learning we've extracted so far with Thriving Communities bid.

A lot of people know that we are a funder, but some do not grasp that we are a national development agency for the arts culture and creativity in England. We are an arm's length body for Department of Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport. We work on behalf of government but have a degree of freedom in terms of decisions we make, and defining the support needs of the sector, which is artists and art organisations across all art forms, museums, public libraries, and the broader role of culture and creativity in English society. Including in fields like education, local government, and health care.

In January last year we published our 10-year strategy, Lets Create, our strategic vision and the key outcomes that we hope to deliver over the next 10 years, serving as a blueprint for creativity and culture for communities across England. By 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given a chance to flourish, and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of quality, cultural experiences. In a normal year we distribute £620m from both government and general taxation and the National Lottery money. We also allocate funding for other government departments including £76m from Department for Education to support creative education programmes and maintain a national network of music education hubs. Of our expenditure the lion's share goes towards our

National Portfolio Organisations, that is the wider network of arts organisations of all scales, who get funding between 2018-23 from us, there's 829 of them. We usually award about £90m a year to about 3500 projects through an open rolling programme we call Arts Council National Lottery Project Grants, and a wider pot of funding for artists and art organisations through other targeted programmes.

This has not been a normal year this year. On top of that we've have distributed a further 809 mil, to over 15,000 artists and organisations through a Covid support programme. That is about 4.5x our normal operation workload, and normal annual individual grant making as well. As well as that funding footprint, we are the main responsible body for the 2,500 accredited museums in England, over 3,000 public libraries, 32,000 formally constituted voluntary arts organisations, over 280,000 businesses in the creative and cultural industry, and as many as two million workers. On top of all that, we are responsible for the place of culture and creativity across society including schools, colleges and healthcare etc.

As mentioned, we launched this new ten-year strategy on the eve of the pandemic. In March we further published some updates which further detail how we will support the sector to thrive in the wave of COVID. The strategy was underpinned by extensive consultation, about 5000 people, not just from culture, but right across other sectors and with the public as well. I would like to highlight that for the first time in a major strategic document for the Arts Council England, it really strongly foregrounds the contribution culture and creativity can make to health and wellbeing. Here is a direct quote by way of example:

Getting involved in creative activities in communities reduce loneliness, support physical and mental health, sustains older people and helps to build and strengthen social ties.

The strategy focuses on partnerships, not only between Arts Council England, but amongst cultural ecology and across to adjacent sectors. In our field of interest today, for example, the strategy directly states the aim to collaborate with the Department for Health and Social Care, NHS England and other health care partners, including also, to drive the development of social prescribing. Moving down to a more local level,

Over next decade we will work with wider range of partners, including the other national lottery distributors, local government, further and higher education, schools, health care providers, the criminal justice system, the voluntary sector, the commercial creative industries, and wider business to support communities to use creativity and culture to create thriving places to live, work and visit.

Onto partnerships which is the main aim of this session. We all instinctively know the strong tenets around partnership working, trust, shared goals and planning, clear communication. In general, we know the reason why partnership work is important. It means aligning resources for greater impact, it enables the attributes of different partners to combine in complimentary ways, it can create networks and capacity that outlive fixed term project funding. It can also prevent fragmentation and simplify the user interface, that is at all levels, from funders above us, to client organisations, but also the interface for clinicians and LWs, patients and audiences as well. In this field there is something more fundamental.

To make social prescribing work, and more generally to create the shift in understanding and practice through which the contribution of culture and creativity to public health can be fully realised, partnerships are essential. Collaborative networks within broader movement. Layers of partnership, we have got Chris Bailey from WHO, speaking tomorrow, and we are working with fellow Arts Councils internationally to identify and share good practice in the field at this moment. I think this is something that we can further elevate. Really strong national partnerships are already formed, and NHS England lead a National Social Prescribing Task Group which includes all the main Whitehall bodies, and arm's length bodies like Sport England, Natural England and Historic England etc.

Intermediate parentships, regional and sub regional, really important in this space. We have heard from Georgia from a county council perspective, we have devolved mayoralities in this nexus now. ICS, larger NHS Trusts, both hospitals and mental health, that cross regional footprint, care providers and structures of national agencies like the Arts Council England, Sport England. Bodies like the Wildlife Trust which operate regionally or county wide. Most importantly is locally. How cultural organisations collaborate and partner not only with each other, but with adjacent sectors like sport, nature, the wider voluntary sector, GP practices, PCNs, care networks, other local health care providers, and of course the social prescribing link worker (SPLW) as well.

By way of a really quick example, over the past 12 months Arts Council England co-designed and is now administering the Thriving Communities fund. That is in partnership with NASP, NHS England, Office for Civil Society, Historic England, Natural England, Sport England, the Money and Pension Service, and NHS Charities Together. That is an incredibly broad range of partners for us, for a single fund. In terms of both design and reach the programmes would not be possible without collaboration across all of those agencies. Likewise, in terms of budget and management of the programme, we have been able

to pool the resources of all of those partners and their capacity to build a 1.8million fund. As above so below, so from that foundation of national partnership, the programme is investing in 37 projects, which at the moment have over 200 named partner organisations involved. Mobilising the capacity of partners right across health, culture, nature, sport, community advice, the faith sector and beyond to meet the need of communities hardest hit by the pandemic.

In terms of our learning so far, from an application stage, we required a minimum of three partners across those different sectors, so a different model of working. We also required a statement of support from a local LW, that has been a really effective way to foster strong local connections that we believe will endure past the end of project funding. At a national level, the partnership model has also proved to be really effective in leveraging additional resources locally. We set a target of 20% cash match for every applicant to put forward. They have actually hit as a cohort 35% additional cash injection to the programme, and a similar amount of support in kind. So, we have built a 3.1million activity pot from that 1.8million national fund.

Resource is also excellent, the cohort will engage at least 8,000 people over 12 months with bespoke targeted activities, and we're definitely seeing this fantastic set up where you have a specialist community level organisation that might work, for example, with women at risk of domestic violence, you have their reach and ability to engage that kind of community, but adding the activities in the capacity of a local football clubs community foundation, or it could be the theatre, could be the Wild Life Trust. Really interesting and effective.

We have seen the partnerships who weren't successful with their applications due to high demand, are in many cases continuing to work together, so that's exciting. Key questions are how do the Arts Council England and other partners facilitate more of this sort of granular partnership working at a local level? I really want to highlight the role of VCS umbrella organisations, over the whole programme they were most prevalent lead applicants for successful projects and across the applicant field, so they have obviously played an incredibly strong convening role in this space. This is something that we should continue to foster. Also, it is really important to help people understand who the local anchor institutions are in the place are where you are working. Who have that interconnectedness, not just to convene organisations to work together, but with that visibility and reach for patients and audiences as well.

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