

Appendix 1: Arts Council England's art form seminar consultation to support response to Ofcom's Second PSB Review

In late May and early June 2008 Arts Council England convened five seminars to solicit the views of the Arts sector about the future of cultural public service content. The seminars were held both to assist ACE develop its digital strategy for the Arts and to inform the Arts Council's response to Phase 1 of Ofcom's PSB Second Review.

Each four-hour consultation involved between 20 and 40 invited contributors from one of the following art forms: Literature, Dance, Visual Arts, Music and Theatre. The discussions were open, wide-ranging and provocative; edited transcripts of each are available after July 14th.

Each of the seminars was structured in three sessions, preceded by an Introduction from Arts Council officers and concluded with a plenary discussion. Although topics inevitably spilled across the boundaries, the three sessions focussed on:

1. Current public service broadcasting and arts content
2. Content creation and distribution now by arts organisations
3. The future for cultural public service content

1. Current public service broadcasting and arts content

The seminars provided extensive evidence that digital media is now fundamental to the creation and dissemination of the arts in England, as well as to audiences' engagement with its diverse forms. There was, however, a very broad recognition in all of the discussions that public service broadcasting, on both radio and television, remains essential (in the words of one of the psb public purposes) "to stimulate [audiences'] interest in and knowledge of arts... through content that is accessible and [that] can encourage informal learning."

The importance of television to stimulating interest in and knowledge of the arts was expressed in the seminars on numerous occasions, and often with passion.

To suggest that TV is somehow dead just because it's part of a very significant change in cultural consumption is lunacy... When you look at mass consumption and our absolute obligation to reach as broad audiences as possible, do we really believe that we're perfectly content for a kind of broadcast medium to exist without the intervention of the arts? I just think it would be a disaster.

Honour Wilson-Fletcher, National Year of Reading

I think those first four or five buttons on the EPG... will probably still

command the largest budgets and the largest audiences and certainly in the case of the BBC are likely to command the most far-reaching online presence... We need those legacy broadcasters for their reach and clout with the public and for their influence on the texture of our living in this country.

Geraint Talfan Davies, Welsh National Opera

A number of contributors stressed that television can reach, surprise and involve audiences who may have little or no prior interest in the arts.

What's incredibly important about mainstream broadcasting still is people come across the unexpected -- and culture's got to be in there in unexpected ways. Otherwise we lose it at our peril.

Genevieve Plot, Reading Agency

I believe that dance has a place on mainstream TV to allow people who don't know that they like dance to have an access point in their own living room... I love that we have dance content on *Three Minute Wonder* slots. I think it's incredibly valuable place for people to unexpectedly find art.

Vicky Bloor, South East Dance

The seminars drew on expertise from across England and many of the participants acknowledged the key importance of television and radio reflecting cultural activities from right across the nations and regions. This was recognized as vital to the public purposes of "reflecting UK cultural identity" and to "representing diversity and alternative viewpoints"

The public sector broadcasting services need to recognise that this country has a cultural and artistic life which is rich, varied, vivid and extends beyond London. We need that recognised. We need to get the level of coverage on these networks that they give to sport and to other things.

Keith Jeffrey, Quad, Derby

Speaking from the experience of the European City of Culture, Liverpool, the interest that was generated in terms of broadcasting has been minimal. There were highlights of Paul McCartney's concert and The Culture Show had one piece. But in terms of theatre, there's been no interest whatsoever, the BBC have not been interested in showing that work on a national level.

Keith Saha, Twenty Stories High, Liverpool

More generally, there was concern most especially in the dance, visual arts and theatre seminars, that the broadcasters appeared to be continuing to retreat from stimulating interest in and knowledge of the arts.

What we have to do is rediscover cultural confidence about Britain and make a really strong case for the value of the arts.... There's an enormous gap between culture in the country and culture that's actually broadcast.

James Runcie, filmmaker and author

There needs to be a space for high quality, cutting-edge art within public service broadcasting and the success of this should not be judged on audience figures. That's a wish, isn't it? A heavenly wish.

Mairead Turner, Chief Executive, South East Dance

In relation to Ofcom's characteristics of public service broadcasting, there was an acknowledgement that while the programmes with arts content that were produced and broadcast were often of high quality, engaging and, at times, widely available, they too often fell short of being original, innovative and challenging.

Dance programming on mainstream TV is very important, as it is many people's first experience of dance, but it is vital to consider all of the different types of dance programming that are possible.... Dance as entertainment seems to be quite well covered on mainstream TV... [but] dance as art is massively under-represented... Contemporary art dance performances are rarely presented on television

Becky Edmunds, screen dance artist

Plurality of provision was recognized in the seminars as vital for stimulating interest in and knowledge of the arts. Several participants commented on the scaling back of arts content by the BBC and Channel 4 and the perception of an increasingly homogenous output lacking in true innovation.

[Within the BBC] decision-making has been narrowed down to basically one person, the genre commissioner, and so all offers coming in to television are being mediated in the end by one person. That's an incredibly narrow focus to curate the nation's diet of culture on television... and so plurality of styles and cultures and tastes in commissioning would be a real benefit.

Hilary Boulding, Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama

There were, however, some acknowledged exceptions to what was overall a gloomy sense of broadcasting's engagement with the arts. These included a recognition of the BBC's still-vital role as both a patron and a provider of classical music and also BBC's Radio's support for and involvement with many forms of literature.

I think we've got to be careful about being too negative. I mean actually writers, directors, actors, artists, everyone we work with is working, and in huge numbers, across the two media... And I think we should be thinking about what role we can play going forward in the new world rather than lamenting what's been a really dismal last few years. Let's be more proactive about what we could contribute beyond what we're already contributing in terms of artists.

Nicola Thorold, Royal National Theatre

Throughout the seminars there was praise for Channel 4's achievements in programming with arts content, and most especially for Commissioning Editor Jan Younghusband's achievements in promoting new forms of popular series such as *Operatunity* and *Ballet Hoo!* and in bringing to the screen adventurous performance films like *The Death of Klinghoffer* and *Exodus*. At the same time concern was expressed about Channel 4's commitment to such programming in the future.

Other individual initiatives were also praised.

The Manchester Passion and the Liverpool Nativity [both on BBC Three]... were actually really interesting events with huge crowds in the cities' squares, using music, and live to the audience watching on TV. When I was watching the Manchester Passion I was talking by text with a friend who was watching it on TV and I was watching it in the square.

Ed Higginson, Rasa

2. Content being created and distributed now by arts organisations

The seminars demonstrated that for many in the Arts, and especially younger practitioners, television is no longer central for their engagement with arts content.

I'm 29 [...and] I don't watch scheduled broadcasting... There's so much [cultural] stuff out there that actually you just want to tailor it to what it is that you like and what it is that you need... People like me are drifting away from top-down broadcasting and towards a more tailored kind of media consumption.

Mary Harrington, Institute for the Future of the Book

Recognising and responding to this new digital world, and in numerous diverse ways contributing to and creating it, representatives from arts organizations of all kinds spoke in the seminars about working with digital and interactive media to stimulate interest in and knowledge of the arts.

As the seminars heard -- and with some demonstrations (including Dance TV and fact.tv) also saw -- many institutions are using digital media for marketing and audience development, for content distribution and the development of new strategies for access, for education activities, and for original creation. The majority of these diverse activities stimulate interest in and knowledge of the arts, as well as making contributions to reflecting UK cultural identity and representing diversity and alternative viewpoints.

It occurred to us about three or four years ago that it probably was time to stop thinking about Tate as a museum and actually to start to think about Tate as a content business, and that was an incredibly liberating insight.

Will Gompertz, Head of Tate Media

There are two things that we all are. Certainly as far as the Opera House is concerned, we're a production house. Not just on the stage but in many ways right across all media, for all kinds of audiences. And we know what's of value... We've reshaped our entire organisation to bring together what's on the main stage, what is on the other stages, what we are broadcasting, what DVDs we are doing, what cinema relays, what online exploitation...

Tony Hall, Chief Executive, Royal Opera House

Other examples discussed included podcasts by Bookslam and Sadlers Wells' YouTube channel, innovative work by Pilot Theatre, educational activities and the innovative marketing initiative Rabbit at the Royal National Theatre, and a recent world music and video project co-ordinated by Bigga Fish.

Ofcom suggests (Figure 33, PSB Review Phase 1) that available online public service content in the fields of arts, culture and heritage has only "limited" availability and its discoverability is "difficult". The evidence of the seminars indicates that "significant" would be a more accurate

characterization of availability. The “limited” label, however, may be explained because this content is indeed scattered, often poorly sign-posted and lacks effective and trusted aggregators. Search issues were recognized as central to any discussions of the future of public service content.

Spectrum is limited, but online allows any amount of dissemination. What’s scarce now, as spectrum used to be, is “search-ability”. And that’s dominated by Google and by one or two other search organization. Getting your content found by people is now a political issue – and that is a function of what public service content and dissemination ought to be.

Peter Bazalgette, English National Opera

What we need is to find ways to work to do things which Google has to respond to. By understanding how Google and the search engines work and providing... something which all of the arts organisations can latch into. There are mechanisms to promote all your organisations in search engine results but don’t expect any assistance from the search engines themselves.

Bill Thompson, technology writer

3. The future for cultural public service content

An enormous sense of the potential of digital cultural media with public purposes ran right through all of the seminars. There was great enthusiasm both for working in partnership with public service broadcasters to create this and also for working in parallel with them.

The seminars expressed a sense of excitement at the possibilities of new forms of collaboration with the existing broadcasters and digital channels. A number of innovative collaborations were discussed, including the Reading Agency's work with children's radio clubs in the northeast and *The City Speaks* between Film London and Radio 4's drama department, but these tended to be confined to radio. But overall, there was a feeling of disappointment that at least to date true and worthwhile collaborations with television are achieved only rarely.

There is a real opportunity for new collaborations, but you have to go into them understanding that the broadcasters, particularly the BBC, because of its size and scale, come with a very poor understanding of how to engage in collaboration... The BBC's just not good at collaboration.

Frank Boyd, Consultant

In the context of attempts to develop these partnerships, several contributors expressed the concern that traditional broadcasters found it exceptionally hard to adjust to the new potential and the new demands of digital technologies.

If you do TV or traditional forms of broadcasting and you want to do participation and interaction then it changes everything from top to bottom in terms of how you work. We were bought in to make an interactive project with BBC Radio 3 when it turned out it had no possible medium of interaction. They didn't even control their own web page.

Matt Adams, Blast Theory

Institutions as well as individuals right across the arts sector believe that they can act as providers of cultural public service content -- – and indeed in many ways that this is what they already do. They can offer the plurality of provision that they see as essential for a diverse, stimulating and enriching cultural environment.

Barriers to the continuing development of this provision are, first and foremost, financial, since only very limited production funds are available outside the control of the broadcasters.

I don't think it's a reticence because we don't want to do it on the creative side, but it's lack of equipment, lack of know-how, lack of funding -- and time. We're a very small company, one marketing

person, one stage manager, and we're very busy. So it's wanting to do it but just not having the resources.

Karen Goddard, Eastern Angles

We're one of those traditional companies, we produce traditional, large-scale work in big theatres. We're desperate to engage in this but I think we're really overwhelmed to know how to do it. Where to go to get advice... it's really quite scary. For all kinds of companies, it's scary, and we know it's going to be expensive, and where are we going to find the money?

Jane Clare, English Touring Theatre

One of the biggest challenges we've all got is how we take control of our content in the future. The broadcasters in the past have basically come in and paid people to do things but therefore got control of that content. What we need to be doing is controlling our content... but it's how you get the funding to enable you to take those risks.

Loretta Tomasi, Chief Executive, English National Opera

Other barriers include significant gaps in knowledge and skills within cultural organizations, significant unresolved issues about rights, and also effective forms of marketing, aggregation and ways of reaching sizeable audiences.

Most of the smaller medium-sized arts organisations have a very low technology base, and they have a very low skills base. So actually when we're talking about becoming the types of organisations who can go and pitch content to broadcasters there are still many issues around that.

Hannah Redman, Ambition

Ofcom should look at encouraging infrastructures that lots of organisations could use, to ensure that there are lots of publishers. For example, can the BBC make the iPlayer open source, so other content providers can make use of it? Because it's public money that has been spent on this.

Simon Worthington, Mute

Rights issues are very critical in terms of opening up the opportunities for many more people to see work.

Eddie Berg, BFI Southbank

There is a final point, however, which is perhaps specific to the arts in the context of public service media. It was clear from the seminars that many artists and organizations have fundamentally different understandings of broadcasting and media in a public service context to those detailed in the Ofcom PSB Review document – and indeed to the dominant views of the broadcasters themselves.

These different conceptions go beyond resisting the characterization of the

purposes of the arts as being for “informal education” (although a recognition of the full richness and complexity of the arts is fundamental). Rather, these conceptions, it was clear from the discussions, derive from a sense of the profoundly original possibilities that networked media open up.

In the work of many artists we can see a different vision of broadcasting than the one offered to us by Ofcom. Broadcasting is an overall system which can be intervened into, reshaped and rethought. Since the ubiquity of the Internet... artists have also had an unprecedented ability to not only make different forms of content but to build the tools by which that content is created and create the platforms by which it's distributed... The game is not only about content anymore. It's about context.

Honor Harger, AV Festival

The embrace and development of these fundamentally new understandings of media and its possible public values was a key challenge laid down by a number of participants in the seminars.