

Cultural Trends & King's College London
The Arts Council at 70:
A History in the Spotlight
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Participants

Welcome

Deborah Bull (King's College London) and Sara Selwood (Cultural Trends)

Witness Seminar 1: Defining Excellence at the Arts Council

Luke Rittner

Sandy Nairne

Ken Worpole

Naseem Khan

Chair: Robert Hewison

Witness Seminar 2: Regionalism, Devolution and the Arts Councils

Tim Challans

Jo Burns

David Powell

Robert Hutchison

Chair: Kate Oakley

Witness Seminar 3: Use of Research and Evidence at the Arts Council

Andy Feist

Ann Bridgwood

Pauline Tambling

Chair: Sara Selwood

Keynote Speaker

Dame Liz Forgan

Welcome

Deborah Bull

Good afternoon, everyone, and a very warm welcome to King's College London. My name is Deborah Bull; I am Assistant Principal for London and it is a great pleasure to see you all today here for this conference, which we think is the only event of its kind as we approach the 70th anniversary of the Arts Council in this particular way. It is a way that we hope will be not only interesting but also useful to anyone who has an interest in the history of cultural policy.

I am particularly pleased that we are hosting this event here in King's. When I joined King's four years ago it was with the idea that we might make this a place where exactly this sort of conversation could take place. My ambition was to find ways in which a university could partner with individuals and organisations across the cultural sector: great partnerships where the benefits flowed in both directions. Now we have these partnerships in place across all our faculties, with large organisations, small organisations and individual artists. We believe these partnerships will inspire new ways of thinking, new ways of looking at the sector's challenges and new ways of engaging with the communities around us.

Crucial to this collaboration is communication and sometimes translation. If we cannot understand each other then we cannot work together. It was with this in mind that we came up with the idea for CultureCase. Culturecase.org, as I am sure you know, is our free-to-use website that collates peer reviewed academic evidence on the impact of arts and culture across a huge range of societal impacts: education, health and wellbeing, social regeneration and so on. Crucially, it translates those pieces of academic work into 300-word lay summaries which are very much focused at the cultural sector. The summary also includes a link to the full paper and to the author so that cultural sector practitioners and organisations can get in touch if they want to investigate the study in more detail. I mention this because Dr James Doeser, who will be known to many of you both in his early career at ACE and in his role as Editor of CultureCase, is one of the organisers of today's conference.

Our most recent annual report is at the back of the room: *Connections Through Culture*. If you want to know more about what we are doing we of course would love you to take a look at that and take it away. You will also find over there reports from three of our cultural inquiries. The inquiries aim to occupy a space between academic insight and analysis and the needs and the interests of the cultural sector as a whole. We like to think of them as creating a neutral space in which shared conversations take place around challenges and opportunities. The inquiries so far have focused on partnership working in the cultural sector, on the legacy of the Cultural Olympiad and on 70 years of policy-making intended to ensure access to the arts for young people. That last inquiry is very relevant to today's conference. I mention it for two reasons: partly because of those 70 years much of that policy has come through or from Arts Council England in its various names and guises, but also because the inquiry's final report was richly informed by a witness seminar, and that is the format that we are going to be using today.

Witness seminars were developed by Dr Michael Kandiah from the Institute of Contemporary British History here at King's, and they are a particularly vibrant way of gathering evidence about the recent past simply by bringing together a small group of people who were involved and who were there at the time and giving them space to discuss their perceptions of what happened. The end result provides a record of decisions and the actions leading up to those decisions that have different features and emphases to the official record. Therefore, they are of great value and interest to academic researchers.

I know that we have three stellar panels and three stellar chairs for those panels lined up, so I have no doubt that the witness seminars today are going to provide some fascinating insights into Arts Council England on this the occasion of its 70th anniversary. I am going to hand over, to introduce the day and tell you more about the format, to Sara Selwood, Editor of *Cultural Trends*, among many other great achievements. We are delighted to be working along with *Cultural Trends* on this very important conference, and I hope you have a fascinating and enjoyable afternoon.

Sara Selwood

Thank you, Deborah, for your enormous and generous hospitality by having the conference here today. I know that you have been enormously supportive of us and I am really grateful to you for that, so thank you enormously. It really comes down to me to say something very briefly about *Cultural Trends* and very briefly about today's conference. *Cultural Trends* is theoretically celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. I think it is actually rather longer than that but because we were never so good at getting the issues out on time in the past. It comes down to 25 volumes. The first editors of *Cultural Trends*, Andy Feist and Robert Hutchison, are both here today and are on the panel, so I am absolutely delighted that they are here. If you want to know more about *Cultural Trends*' history they will be the people to tell you.

I am interested in the history of the Arts Council for a number of reasons: partly because it forms much of what happens, but also because I wonder if it might not do it differently and whether it might not learn rather more from its own history. At the point at which the Arts Council library got sent to the Victoria and Albert and went missing from the building, I always wondered to what extent cultural memory might pertain, whether officers would ever think about what had happened in the past and indeed take some lessons from that. It might save them from reinventing the wheel every time. I still wonder about that many years later.

Today will not be telling you a strictly chronological history of the Arts Council, but I imagine that it will touch on the many milestones in the Arts Council's history. It might touch on the legacy of the 1965 White Paper. It might touch upon Redcliffe-Maud's report, and *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain*, which of course came out of the Policy Studies Institute where *Cultural Trends* came from. It might touch on the National Lottery, the establishment of DCMS and PSA targets, the Taking Part survey. There are many milestones that it might refer to.

One of the things that you will have picked up on is that many of the witnesses on the panels either worked in or had historic affiliation with the Arts Council. They are likely to be talking about the relationship that they had with the Arts Council as then, and think about how it was in those days. I am interested in what difference it has made, and I think it is going to fall to those of you who are sitting in the audience to intervene and talk about how the ideas they are talking about may or may not have left the legacy that is pertinent today. I am really interested in hearing both from you as well as the people who are witnesses on the panels today.

With no further ado I am going to hand over to the first panel which is being chaired by Robert Hewison, and I am going to leave him to introduce it. Welcome to today. I hope you enjoy it and hope that we get to talk over a drink afterwards. Thank you.

Witness Seminar 1: Defining Excellence at the Arts Council

Robert Hewison

Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Robert Hewison. I have never actually worked for the Arts Council although many people had said I had worked against it. We have 55 minutes to cram in 75 years of experience, so I get to be quite brusque with my witnesses. I do hope that I will be able to leave some time at the end for you to ask questions. The idea about this section, and indeed all three sections, is as far as possible to produce something that will be useful historically. Of course there will be some differences of view but the important thing is to establish the circumstances in which those views were held.

What I am going to do to start on this subject, which is defining excellence – and we could be here until Doomsday – is to ask each of our witnesses to briefly introduce themselves. They each have connections with the Arts Council, and I would like to start with Naseem Khan because we are not just celebrating the 70th birthday of the Arts Council. It is also forty years since, back in 1976, Naseem Khan produced a radical and provoking document called *The Arts Britain Ignores*, which was jointly paid for and promoted by the Gulbenkian and the Community Relations Commission. Naseem, you were not then working directly for the Arts Council, were you?

Naseem Khan

No, not at all. I was the voice outside the Arts Council. I had come from working with communities, particularly around Notting Hill. It started with a local newspaper called *The Hustler* and with people who lived in the area. In 1974, I was approached by the three bodies that Robert mentioned who said that they perceived there was a hole in the Arts Council's range of provision. They wondered whether these new immigrant communities had any culture that needed to be brought into the fold. At that point the suggestion was that I should do a research study that would take half a year part-time, and that I did not need to give up my day job; I was working at that point for Time Out as its theatre editor. As is obvious, this was rubbish and it took a year and a half to research and produce the report that brought together the range of so-called ethnic minority communities within Britain. It then led to the establishment of the Minorities Arts Advisory Service, which lasted for 20 years. I left after a few years and did things on the outside, working with the public sector research organisation, Comedia. Eventually I had my arm twisted by Usha Prashar, who was on the Council of the Arts Council, who believed that diversity had atrophied within the Arts Council and for seven years I worked with the Arts Council as –

Robert Hewison

You joined in 1996.

Naseem Khan

1996, so I became a game keeper rather a poacher at that point. It was Head of Diversity.

Robert Hewison

You left in 2003. How did you feel?

Naseem Khan

Satisfied and stimulated. I had had a tough time with the Arts Council. I felt that we were shifting away from a very old fashioned view of diversity into something that was much more radical than what was even laid out in *The Arts Britain Ignores*. I left exhausted.

Robert Hewison

I am going to turn to Luke because in order of joining the Arts Council he is our most senior person. Luke Rittner is the Founding Director of the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts, which he ran from 1976 to 1983, and then was Secretary General of an acronym we do not use anymore: ACGB – the Arts Council of Great Britain. What did you feel when you joined?

Luke Rittner

I suppose I could best answer that question by telling the story, because it is now ancient history, of that appointment. It was at the time a very controversial appointment. There were three key objections to my appointment. I was too young; I was 34. I was uneducated; I had run away from school. I have never taken an exam let alone passed one. I hardly dare say it in these august surroundings but it is true. I had come from, as Robert said, running an organisation whose sole purpose was to encourage the private sector to spend money on the arts. There was a view of some that I was being brought in under cover of this appointment to privatise the Arts Council.

Robert Hewison

This was a moment of important policy change in the Arts Council because the following year emerges this document, given the title by the then Chairman Rees-Mogg, *The Glory of the Garden*, which turned out to be pretty wilting.

Luke Rittner

That is another debate I suppose. Looking back now, that appointment probably does turn out to be something of a major change and a watershed. It has in a sense come to represent more of the Arts Council today and since than it did the Arts Council before. There was huge resistance. There was huge anxiety about the whole notion that mixed funding was the way forward rather than almost total dependence on state funding. I am useless at quoting numbers but I do know that if you were to look at the ratio of public funding of the National Theatre in 1983 to private funding and compare it with today, had we been told in 1983 that is what the situation would be, none of us would have believed it. There has been a very radical change, and that change happened during the 1980s for all sorts of reasons.

Robert Hewison

The other thing about *The Glory of the Garden* is something that we will be discussing in our next session, which is to do with the whole relationship between the metropolis and the regions. We will not go there because we are going to go there later with another lot of witnesses. Your first Chairman was William Rees-Mogg: Tory gent of the old school. Your second Chairman was Peter Palumbo: Tory gent of the new school perhaps.

Luke Rittner

Yes, they were. It is dangerous in a way to talk about personalities but they were two very different Chairs. I suppose it is not unknown that I did not get on with the second one, and I found the making of policy around a dinner party the night before coming into the office quite difficult to

take. I think it was an unfortunate appointment. Rees-Mogg was a very robust Chairman and introduced a lot of policy changes. He was not particularly popular within the arts world but he brought a very worthwhile robustness to debate around the Council chamber. I am not sure that had happened to that extent before. He was not someone who simply had such a strong opinion that he imposed it on everybody. He genuinely wanted to know what people were thinking and feeling, and policy was better formed during his time than it was certainly in the immediate aftermath.

Robert Hewison

That is why you resigned in 1990.

Luke Rittner

I resigned because the Chairman did not have any confidence in me, and also because he accepted a review of the Arts Council by the government, which I did not think he should have done.

Robert Hewison

Thank you very much indeed. Now to Sandy Nairne, Director for Visual Arts 1987-1992. What is interesting about you, Sandy, is that in your previous incarnations at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford and then at the ICA you, alongside Nicholas Serota, were quite critical of the Arts Council before you joined it. Is that right?

Sandy Nairne

Yes, I had two encounters with the Arts Council prior to joining as Director for Visual Arts. One was that, I think to his surprise, I was one of the people whom Roy Shaw asked to go and examine community arts. There was a moment in the late 1970s when Roy Shaw had a big wobble about whether the Arts Council should be funding community arts. I was a young curator and I think he thought I would go and look at the quality of it and tell him that it was no good. What he did not know was that I had big strand of my interests in community art, so I had a wonderful year going around the country looking at wonderful community arts activity, and came back and told him it was fantastic, which was not what he wanted to hear.

In the early 1980s, I was amongst those who argued very strongly that, on the visual arts, the Arts Council had continued with a formation structurally that was completely out of order. Many in the room will be aware that, whereas in all other art forms the Arts Council simply funded other people to do things, it was not so in the visual arts. For the visual arts the Arts Council had carried on organising exhibitions, forming a collection and running venues itself. It was a very odd way of doing things, and it was pretty central to the questions of excellence because in a way it was clear the Arts Council only did it because they thought they were the only people that could do it. That is certainly what came out. Once that had changed and the Hayward Gallery was devolved to the Southbank a lot of people ganged up on me and said, 'You better have a go at running it.'

Robert Hewison

The interesting thing again is that the fact you acquired the Southbank was to do with political circumstances, the abolition of the Greater London Council and all sorts of external factors which then produced this post-*Glory of the Garden* situation. When you were there, I think it is fair to say that your big interest, your monument, is InIVA. Is that right?

Sandy Nairne

The Institute of International Visual Arts was one of the things that came out. I was acutely aware that the visual arts had almost no money at all. The only way to do anything from my perspective was to try and learn about these other things such as classical music, opera and ballet, which I knew very little about. I had to go and hang out with people and try and learn how they got hold of money, because the visual arts had almost nothing comparatively. What it drove us to was saying that we needed to make change in different ways, whether it was Percent for Art or whether it was other areas of specific visual arts development. What became clear was that we needed to work with our colleagues in the regions, work across the whole country and try and make change in a different way.

Robert Hewison

You left in 1992 to go to Tate; is that right?

Sandy Nairne

No, I escaped because I got the Getty Research Fellowship, and then I got hired to go to the Tate.

Robert Hewison

The word 'escape' indicates a certain dissatisfaction with your position.

Sandy Nairne

There are two different things. Luke has already raised the shift from Rees-Mogg to Palumbo. The Palumbo era for me was critically both difficult and fascinating, because of course Peter Palumbo was very involved and interested in the visual arts, and we can come back to that. What really changed was that in the early 1990s so much time was being taken up in structural change. Some of it was for very good reasons, by talking about how one did or did not get the right arrangements in organisational opportunities. Frankly, from my point of view they were getting in the way of actually getting on with policy development.

Robert Hewison

Let me turn finally to Ken Worpole. Ken is our non-Arts Council person, and he is here because he and Geoff Mulgan published a really important book in 1986: *Saturday Night or Sunday Morning?* That came out of your work with the Cultural Industries Unit to the Greater London Enterprise Board. You were observing, in effect, what these other three people were doing and always have done. What was your feeling, particularly at that time, about where the Arts Council was going, bearing in mind where you are coming from yourself?

Ken Worpole

Firstly, in the community *The Glory of the Garden* report was cynically known as 'Few, But Roses'. I came like Naseem out of the early 1970s explosion of cultural activity on the ground in the inner cities. I do need to set the context. I was involved in setting up Centreprise, a radical bookshop in a community centre in Hackney in 1971. Just up the road in Tower Hamlets, Chris Searle was sacked in 1971 for publishing children's poetry. A lot of teachers in schools were looking at the images of children and young people in books, and in reading books particularly, which were all of white children from middle class, often rural or suburban backgrounds. Thus there was a tremendous interest in opening up new voices and new imagery in the culture. There was a proliferation of radical book shops, oral history projects and the oral history movement under

the Marxist historian Raphael Samuel also happening at this time. The History Workshop movement was very strong and helped proliferate the use of tape recorders, cheap printing techniques often resulting in fantastic autobiographies and reminiscences from those otherwise invisible historically.

Robert Hewison

Whether you like the phrase or not, ironically it is from the GLC that the whole notion of the cultural and creative industries first emerges, although possibly in a different guise.

Ken Worpole

That is right, yes, but interestingly bookshops were trading entities, and I became very interested in this notion that somewhere between the arts subsidy sector and the commercial sector there was something you might call the independent sector. It wanted to be in the market place but it needed public funding, if only as 'seedcorn' money. I will come on to the issue of excellence when we get to it, but what happened was that, at the same time punk came along – in 1976 – this notion that everybody could express themselves and make culture hit the Arts Council at the end of the 1970s. The network of community writers' groups and community publishing projects hit the Arts Council literature panel with a resultant force, and for three bloody years, a terrible, very bitter and personal battle ensued. It is painful to look back on. There was absolute resistance of the Arts Council literature panel to the idea that anybody other than a few groups of white men, and fewer women, could write books, let alone be given public money towards that end.

Robert Hewison

I hate to cut you short, but in a sense you represent one form of opposition to the Arts Council and a slightly better organised one than the rest of us during this period. Moving on rapidly, I have a question for you, Luke, although it is a question for each of you, it seems to me, since we are here to define it. During your years as Secretary General of the Arts Council, did you ever at any point have a formal conversation asking the question that we are asking during this hour: what is excellence?

Luke Rittner

Certainly I do not remember. However, having said that, that does not mean to say that it was not discussed all the time. Practically every single meeting that was ever held in the Arts Council was in some way or another discussing quality, excellence and all the issues around them. Yes, it was often linked, perhaps even usually linked, to money, but the money case, the money debates and the money discussions usually came out of discussions about quality and about excellence. People working at the Arts Council, believe it or not, cared passionately about the arts, and they were much more comfortable talking about excellence and quality and the produce, dare I use the word, than they were about the wretched money, which was never enough anyway.

Robert Hewison

Naseem, from your point of view, was the word excellence ever debated?

Naseem Khan

The whole issue about excellence and quality was endemic within the whole fabric of what we were about. We were discussing diversity within the Arts Council and the questions about whose quality, whose excellence, how do you achieve it and how do you define it? As I remember, one of

the most burning criticisms from black and minority ethnic artists of the Arts Council was the claim that they were always being trained but never being given opportunities.

Robert Hewison

Because of their ethnicity they were seen as outside the sector.

Naseem Khan

Generally, comparing artists from the Arts Council's known stable and 'diverse' artists, there was a serious mismatch between styles of art, aspirations and general situation.

Robert Hewison

Sandy, did you ever have a formal conversation about excellence?

Sandy Nairne

I had many conversations. Let me pick three quick stories that I think show some of the difficulties. I do not have such a positive memory of Rees-Mogg, I am afraid. There was an occasion when, very early on in my time, we had managed to get a discussion on the field of architecture, and we managed to get the President of the Royal Institute of British Architects to come to a lunch roundtable at the Arts Council. Rees-Mogg was in the chair. He tapped his glass to open the discussion and said, 'Let me start by saying that I understand the National Theatre is a building that leaks both from above and from below.' You cannot think of a worse start to try and have a discussion with Royal Institute of British Architects.

Robert Hewison

Was he speaking metaphorically?

Sandy Nairne

No. Secondly, I am hugely aware of Naseem and everybody's work on that report but also more particularly because I had made a television series, *State of the Art*, and had been very involved in working with a lot of black and Asian artists. There was this huge gulf between what the Arts Council was doing. It is very hard to describe just how large it was, but trying to find ways to that excellence to me was totally clear. There was a lot of excellent work and there were some incredibly energetic people. The Keith Piper/Sonia Boyce generation was coming through. There were more senior figures like Gavin Jantjes, and a lot of that became a huge debate around Rasheed Araeen's exhibition for the Hayward in 1989. There was a huge amount of debate. A lot of it was focused on excellence and trying to drive it to things that people could see.

Lastly, I have a counterpoint about excellence. There were wonderful moments. The moment when I found out through a contact at Sotheby's that the new Chairman had been in touch with Sotheby's in order to get the whole of the Arts Council's collection valued in order to test whether it could be sold was the type of test of one's ingenuity that one had not expected. However, it was also about excellence and what you did with things.

Robert Hewison

Ken, as an observer of this, would it not appear that the idea of excellence in those years emerged out of a particular, shall we say, class and cultural formation?

Ken Worpole

Yes. In the last couple of years – by the way I was never a punk as I suspect you might guess – I have thought that the punk ethos was one of the most important cultural developments in post-war Britain. It is still ramifying now. In the late 1970s a number of these community groups, including community publishing groups, open history groups and literacy groups from all over Britain, got together and formed something called the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, representing many of these hitherto marginalised or silenced voices.

Robert Hewison

You were a secretary of it, were you not?

Ken Worpole

I was. I will just give you a list of some of the people involved, though I am aware of the paradox of cherry-picking from what was genuinely a democracy of equals: Jimmy McGovern and Tony Marchant, two now eminent TV writers; Ann Cassidy and Roger Mills, both established children's writers; Alan Gilby, a BAFTA award winner; Henry Normal, writer of *The Royle Family*; Lemn Sissay; John Cooper Clarke: his first poems were published in a trade union magazine in 1977; there was also Sandra Agard, Patience Agbabi, Levi Tafari and Bridget O'Connor. The Federation applied to the Arts Council for money for a national co-ordinator, and they handed in around 50 different publications from around Britain as representative of the work published. The answer was that members of the literacy panel considered the whole corpus 'of little, if any, solid literary merit.' The application was dismissed.

The Chairperson, Jane Mace, wrote back and got an answer from Charles Osborne, then the literary officer, who was a literary officer who perversely appeared to believe that money should not be spent on literature. His letter contained the following paragraph: 'It may seem to you unfair that some people are more talented than others, and indeed it is unfair; however, it remains a fact that talent in the arts has not been handed out equally by some impeccable, heavenly democrat. It is important that we do all we can to increase audiences for today's writers, not that we increase the number of writers. There are already too many writers chasing too few readers.' This is the response of the literature panel on 1 December 1978 to the reality out there that we were now living in a fast-changing, multicultural, post-industrial Britain. The high culture/popular culture binary was in crisis, everything was up in the air, there was an urgent need to listen to all the new voices emerging – and the response was, we do not need any more writers, thank you very much.

Robert Hewison

Let me move on. Luke, you mentioned already that a discussion about excellence, however defined, also has to be framed in the context of money. To what extent were these other criteria, and not just the money but actual national politics, influencing those discussions as the idea of excellence emerges through decisions and in the decisions of the various panels which are then re-communicated?

Luke Rittner

Politics with a capital P was never mentioned in any meetings or any discussions.

Robert Hewison

Does that not suggest how powerful it was?

Luke Rittner

It may do. Politics and movements linked to politics and fashions are going to affect every part of every discussion in an organisation like the Arts Council. It affected the huge debate about London and the regions, the debate about bringing the regions onto the Council and the debate about devolving to Scotland, Ireland and Wales. All these were very current and very powerful discussions, and lobbying was going on certainly through the eight years that I was there. That of course is all linked to politics and is linked to what is going on in national politics. I think that everything is going to be linked to the political situation of the day, and I am sure it has been ever since. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? It is an inevitable thing, and if it was not I would be far more worried because any organisation would be in an ivory tower denying what was going on around it and under its nose.

Robert Hewison

There has been a suggestion by Ken Worpole that perhaps the Arts Council's decision-takers were in a particular mind-set, a certain ivory tower mind-set.

Luke Rittner

There is always that kind of a situation when you are in an organisation, particularly a bureaucracy. However hard you try, you do tend to pick up your internal language and the trends and the thoughts of your colleagues. Many organisations, perhaps not so much nowadays, are slightly behind the curve on things. In the Arts Council, there was not absolute determination to stop things changing and moving forward. I certainly found myself working with people who were really willing to listen and to change. Charles was a one-off, God bless him.

Robert Hewison

Charles Osborne.

Luke Rittner

Charles Osborne. He had very strong views and they were rooted in an earlier time, absolutely, but there were much younger officers who were more than willing and wanting for the Council to change, like Sandy Nairne – one of the best appointments I ever made.

Robert Hewison

Sandy, the question is: your own idea of excellence must have shaped every decision you took. That is your idea, not the Council's.

Sandy Nairne

What I really remember at this minute is a lovely quote when Alastair Niven came in a tiny bit later as the new Director of Literature. Alastair was immediately pounced on by journalists who said, 'Are you going to support good writing?' with a lot of emphasis on good. He said, 'I am going to support good reading.' It was a very neat response from Alastair.

One's personal formation has a place, but I was hugely interested in trying to shift where and how decision-making of other kinds could matter. Again, it is partly because the visual arts had so little money it was pointless worrying too much about where the grants went, because we had so little to give out. With Luke's support, I was really keen to try and say, 'Are there other ways in which the Arts Council can influence what might happen?', which is where the Percent for Art idea, along with many others, came from. It was about saying that the great amount of money that is being

spent that could go to the visual arts is happening in developments and buildings around the whole country. If we can influence that, then that is going to be much more effective than simply saying, 'Is it another £10,000 to the Whitechapel or is it another £10,000 to the Serpentine?' – not that those decision did not matter. What I was aware of was trying to say, 'Could we shift the ways in which we enact this?'

The second point is that this is a period of high Thatcherism in which we cannot ignore the sense that many of us had – Luke had it, and Anthony Everitt too. We felt defensive. It quickly became the case that there was a very strong sense that, if we did not re-invent the way the arts were funded, i.e. as Luke said by bringing in private sector funding, the Tory Government was going to give up on the Arts Council completely. That was certainly the word that went out. I should say, and I wish he was here, that recently in a conversation with Peter Palumbo I said to Peter, 'You must have been aware that as Chair you had to defend this institution against others in a Tory Government who had no interest in the arts.' He paused and he said 'Actually, Mrs T was more sympathetic than you thought.' I said 'Really? She cannot have been. She did not give any instance of that.' He said, 'No, I do remember her going to see something in the arts overseas.' She had been taken to something in Berlin, where she had been visiting, and she was very impressed, thought it was fantastic and came back talking quite enthusiastically. Then Peter Palumbo had said to her, 'Maybe we could talk a bit about the future of the arts.' She said 'No, they all hate me, don't they?', and Peter very coolly said 'Yes, Margaret, they do all hate you. They will always hate you. That is how it happens for Prime Ministers with artists.' He was pretty cool about it, but whether it was less acute than it felt, it certainly felt very acute, and that sense of political pressure to me was very immediate.

Robert Hewison

Naseem, you were at the Arts Council when New Labour took over. Did the atmosphere within the Arts Council at that time feel as embattled, then, as Sandy has implied it was feeling embattled in the 1980s?

Naseem Khan

This was just around the time when I came into the Arts Council, and to be frank I do not particularly remember that sense of embattlement. There was a sense of excitement at that point. What I want to pick up on was Luke's comment about the mind-set and the culture of an organisation. When I went into the Arts Council in 1996, there was an immediate absence of, or very few, people of colour. At that point, if you wanted to try and shift the perception of the Arts Council, it had to be done as an amalgamation of the people within the Arts Council and their history of perception. This in that time was overwhelmingly white.

What I tried to do was to create a network of officers within the regions. There were a number within each Regional Arts Association. There was somebody who was officially looking after diversity and they tended very often to be a young black woman, very low down in the pecking order. It was a matter of creating a network, a feeling of expertise and a push from below. In terms of the internal politics of the Arts Council this was really quite shaky. My interest is more internal than external.

Robert Hewison

The 'other' of excellence has always been access. Who would like to say something about this eternal struggle between access, whatever that is, and excellence, whatever that is?

Ken Worpole

I think people have gathered by now that I have only dealt with the literature side of Arts Council policy. It was very interesting that during the conflicts I've described above, there was a lot of guilt and anxiety around issues of access and excellence particularly, because Richard Hoggart and Roy Shaw came from the WEA tradition: the self-educated/autodidactic tradition. Yet they were the most vehemently opposed, as Naseem said, to the idea that culture can happen from below. Their idea was steeped in the WEA thinking: that the people must be led towards the light, and it was through education or the training that cultural democracy would emerge.

Robert Hewison

That is the Workers Education Association.

Ken Worpole

To his credit, Melvyn Bragg wobbled. The flurry of letters in this period was very frequent, very powerful and very acrimonious. Melvyn Bragg was slightly more sympathetic, although the person interestingly who broke through the log-jam was Marghanita Laski. She went up to Liverpool, the Scotland Road Writers' Workshop run by David Evans, and she was completely delighted. She came to Hackney Writers' Workshop, which I ran, where she was much taken by the linguistic dexterity of a black railway worker, Fred Williams, who wrote wonderful dialect poems, and Marghanita was actually an etymologist and did a lot of work for the Oxford English Dictionary. She began writing personal letters to a number of these writers, and it was that kind of human sympathy that broke the log-jam, but at an institutional level there was still a cold war going on.

Robert Hewison

Probably only a few people ever knew Marghanita Laski. I did, because I used to have to do *The Critics* on Radio Three with her, and a more Bloomsbury-type looking and sounding person you could not imagine, although of course she did write detective stories and so on.

Sandy Nairne

A lot of the debates of course were still around the galleries, and this is the crossover with *Glory of the Garden*. The challenge of *Glory of the Garden* was particularly sharp for the visual arts because there had been this cut-off between local authority galleries that had not traditionally had any Arts Council funding at all and had been left in a completely different space. It was very difficult for them to develop. They sometimes had little bits of capital money to redo a bit of lighting. The challenge was then trying to use *Glory of the Garden* to bring some kind of rapprochement between all the independent galleries – Arnolfini, Ikon and others – that had developed across the years.

Then began a big debate about what was going to happen in education work, what was going to happen in outreach work and what was going to happen in access, between access, exhibitions and collecting. It was very fragmentary. A lot of what I really remember was that, yes, Nick Serota at the Whitechapel was doing terrific things in education and outreach in Tower Hamlets, alongside doing outstanding exhibitions in the Whitechapel programme, but that was not the whole story. One was aware that one needed a story that needed to work in lots of other places, not just in the few places that happen to get the principal Arts Council grants.

Robert Hewison

I would like to open this up now to anybody who has questions they would like to ask. Please make it a question not a provocation, if that is possible. Does anybody want to ask a question?

Lynn Maree

I worked for Greater London Arts when *The Glory of the Garden* came out. My question is about how change happens. I was in the dance field, and initially dance was a tiny little adjunct of music, when there was music for dance. Then there was ballet, and then there was battering on the doors, and then there was contemporary, and then there was battering on the doors, and there was Indian dance and then there was African dance. It has always been battering on the doors. I want to know in a more general way how people think change happens at the Arts Council.

Robert Hewison

Luke, you have been the observer. How does change happen?

Luke Rittner

People make it happen. An organisation gets lucky and gets people who want to bring about change, who have the influence and respect of their colleagues, and you build a wave of change. Change is not some abstract thing that happens in an abstract way. Perhaps using a specific example, *The Glory of the Garden*, I guess, history will say was not a greatly successful policy document but I think it represented a shift of thinking. The important thing 30/40/50 years later is the shift and the change rather than the detail, because organisations come and go. Change is about people and it is about choosing people that are not frightened of change. We all are to some extent. We are nervous of it, but somewhere like the Arts Council ought to have a lot of people who are really willing to bring about change because, at the end of the day, it has to be the servant of the artist and the creators. If they are not about change then all is lost.

Robert Hewison

Naseem, you obviously wanted to bring about change. Do you think the institution allowed you to do that?

Naseem Khan

That is a difficult question. I think it did in part. The thing that surprised me about the Arts Council was that before I went, which is why I had a great resistance to entering the doors as an employee, I believed it was a juggernaut; however, once inside the doors you discover that it is actually a series of little villages. Some of them knew what you are talking about and many of them did want the diversity department revived. At the very beginning, my cultural diversity committee, who deliberately had no budget, asked different art form departments to come and explain what they were doing in terms of diversity. There was enormous resistance to doing that from departments because they felt that this was a hostile move and that they were going to be pulled to account, sometimes quite justifiably. I have lost the question...

Robert Hewison

How does change happen?

Naseem Khan

Change happens in a number of different ways. There must be persistence and realising the importance of the protestors outside. I think very often about something I read in a Young Foundation report some years ago that saw the process of change in terms of images of bees and trees. I do not know if any of you will have remembered this. The bees are the characters that whizz around and collect pollen from different flowers. They are very energetic, very lively and quite

noisy. The trees are the institution that are very solid and that do not move. The bees without the trees have nowhere to lodge their honey and will die off. The trees without the honey will become static, so you do have to have both sides of the equation.

Having said that, the most effective bit of change that I remember in the Arts Council came about when the lottery conditions were being written up. A very shrewd diversity officer within the Arts Council made it her job to see that one of the basic criteria for getting a lottery grant was to be able to demonstrate that you were responding to disability. As a result of that, slowly over time more and more money went to the disabilities sector and to organisations that were building disability integrally into their plan. It was one very small clause but with enormous effect.

Sandy Nairne

I could not get opera. Before I worked at the Arts Council, I had never been to the opera. I quickly realised I had to go because if I did not go I would not have any idea what this art form was about. I could not have conversations with Luke or with other people. More difficult for me was that I suffer from tutu-phobia.

Robert Hewison

Not the Archbishop!

Sandy Nairne

I could not get ballet at all. I did try and learn a little bit of it. Contemporary dance is fine. The point about change in contemporary dance is that back in the little Museum of Modern Art on Pembroke Street was where the contemporary music network would put on Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and Nick Serota and I would host collaboratively these fantastic new musicians. Richard Alston and others appeared at the Museum of Modern Art. In other words, crossover was happening culturally at other levels, which I think were the seeds of change. One then saw – this was happening certainly in the visual arts – fantastic young new women artists and black artists doing wonderful things. They were of course organising their own exhibitions and were making independent change. It is just about trying to find some ways of allowing some of that to grow and trying to see if one could allow that to get into the mainstream.

Robert Hewison

Ken, as an observer of all this, because this is about people and it is about personalities and those interactions as much as anything else, who in the end do you think actually decides what excellence is in an Arts Council context?

Ken Worpole

I cannot say in an Arts Council context.

Robert Hewison

As an observer.

Ken Worpole

Strangely, the marketplace in some ways is pretty good. The thing that we have not talked about is of course what happened at the end of the 1980s. There was this tremendous explosion of new reproductive technologies: offset-litho printing, local radio and TV, CDs, etc. The 'Workshop Agreement' with Channel 4 required public broadcasting to have film production workshops in all

the regions and in Scotland and in Wales, and it guaranteed them a slot on television. That intervention as a form of regulation to encourage diversity in the public sector was very important. At the GLC, the cultural and industries thing was really about the fact that more of the new generation – particularly ethnic minorities – did not want to go the Arts Council for public subsidy. They wanted to run a bookshop. They wanted to run a recording studio or a film workshop. They wanted their own record label. So we put money into Rough Trade Records. We put money into Brilliance Books, into Gay Men's Press, into Sheba, a feminist publishing company, as well as Onlywomen Press, along with dozens of other independent production houses based in all parts of London. These groups wanted to be in the marketplace. They wanted to focus on young writers, new voices and get them into the marketplace. That is why I think the independent sector was so important at that time, which we hoped would become the focus of New Labour's policies, which I do not think it did.

Robert Hewison

Is that possibly because the Arts Council had reinvented itself sufficiently by then to continue to say 'we represent excellence'?

Ken Worpole

That is interesting. No, there was a very strong fear at New Labour that they did not want to seem to have a 'Ministry of Culture' in the Orwellian sense. They were terrified of the idea that New Labour would be seen to be promoting an official culture, so they were very happy to retain the arm's length principle to the Arts Council, though with just a little pressure on that arm. They even changed the term 'cultural industries', a phrase that had come from Germany in the 1930s at a school in Frankfurt, into 'creative industries', which sounded calmer and nicer. Then we had Creative Britain, creative this and creative that, but it did not tackle the way the independent sector was still struggling in the interstices.

Robert Hewison

Naseem, who do you think decides what excellence is?

Naseem Khan

Can I pass on this and continue pondering it?

Robert Hewison

Certainly, but you only have about three minutes' thought. Sandy, who decides what excellence is?

Sandy Nairne

What comes to mind is a moment when two terrific young writers came to my office at the Arts Council and said 'We have an idea for a magazine'. I said, 'What is that?', and they said, 'We are going to call it *Frieze*.' I thought that was a terrible idea, but I said 'Why shall we not see if we can give some money?', and we did. Of course that was Matthew Slotover and Amanda Sharp, and they have built an unbelievably successful magazine, art fair and everything around the world. If you ask me whether I think the judgement that I made in that moment made a whole difference, I do not. The fact is if I had said 'No, sorry we are not going to give you a grant' it would have held them up for a bit, but they already had the circumstances, the power and the determination.

A lot of what I became more concerned with was about how one would do all the things one could to give more people better opportunity so they would make things happen. It was not that the Arts

Council would sit there as this arbiter because that was not necessarily going to make a difference. It was not that it did not make a difference, but it was not necessary going to make the critical difference.

Robert Hewison

Naseem, have you come to a thought?

Naseem Khan

No, I have not.

Robert Hewison

This is a very good bureaucratic position to adopt, possibly!

Luke Rittner

I am cheating in a way. I have two very short anecdotes by way of answer. One involves a very famous former actor-manager Bernard Miles who ran a wonderful company for many years at the Mermaid. He spent many years trying to get money out of the Arts Council and he failed dismally. To this day, I really do not know why because they were a good company.

Robert Hewison

It was because people thought he was a Communist.

Luke Rittner

Possibly. He did come every time there was a new Chairman of the Arts Council. He was always the first person to get a meeting with the new Chairman of the Arts Council, and he duly came to see the new Chairman of the Arts Council, and he got nowhere with the meeting. As he was leaving, as he was walking across the old lobby at 105 Piccadilly, he was seen to pick up a very attractive 18th century mahogany half-moon table and walk towards the front door. The lady behind the counter said, 'Excuse me, Mr Miles, where are you going with that table?' He turned holding this table and said, 'I am going to leave this building with something, even if it is only an effing table.' He walked out and we never saw the table again.

The other anecdote is that, whilst I was at the Arts Council, we started a very modest programme of taking creative artists into prisons, and it was very modest and small. About five or six years after I had left the Arts Council, I had a letter out of the blue from a man who told me he was a prisoner and he had as a result of this programme had become very interested in art history. He wanted me to know that he had just been offered a full scholarship to go to the Courtauld Institute, and he was about to be given parole in order to do so, and I thought that was truly wonderful.

Robert Hewison

Where did the furniture come from?

Sandy Nairne

Some of the furniture came from the Astors, because the Astors' house was the house that the Arts Council occupied in St James's Square, and they simply left some of their furniture behind. That furniture then got transferred to Piccadilly, which eventually did not get to Great Peter Street. I am afraid I was part of selling it after all.

Robert Hewison

On that commercial note may I please ask you to thank our first set of witnesses: Naseem Khan, Luke Rittner, Sandy Nairne and Ken Worpole?

Witness Seminar 2: **Regionalism, Devolution and the Arts Councils**

Kate Oakley

I am Kate Oakley and, as Robert did, I am going to allow the panel to introduce themselves by way of a sort of short biography and their part in the Arts Council's non-downfall as it were. Can we start with Robert at the end?

Robert Hutchison

I joined the Arts Council in 1973, which when you think about it is a generation and a half ago. It was an organisation with I should think somewhere between 120 and 140 people, of whom 30 or 40 were organising exhibitions. The others were organised initially in four art-form departments: music, drama, literature and visual art. I came in with the new regional department. The regional department was created, I think, to field some of the difficulties that the Arts Council was getting into.

We heard from Ken about the great explosion of arts activity in the early 1970s and that was as I had experienced it. I had just come back from two years in Africa. The 1960s were still going on in 1973, as far as I could feel it. The Arts Council to some extent did not know what had hit them because there were lots and lots of artists of all kinds demanding things from them which they had never had before. First of all, they encouraged Regional Arts Associations, having closed down their own regional offices, and over a long period of time between 1956 and 1973 the 12 Regional Arts Associations were created. They were effectively bottom up organisations and groupings of local authorities and arts organisations.

I will move quickly on, but I will just say that what I came into in 1973 as a Senior Research and Information Officer, despite having no background in research and very little background in information, was a patrician organisation. This was an organisation of Lords and Ladies and similar types. It was actually what I felt: it was a mix of a London club and an Oxbridge college, and it had many of those assumptions. All the directors were male, needless to say, and as far as I can remember there was not a single black or Asian member of staff; this was 1973. I was charged with developing the research programme for this organisation, and we will come on to that possibly.

Tim Challans

My history with the Arts Council is varied. I was not from an arts background. I came into East Midlands Regional Arts Association after having a short and exciting career as a town planner in East London. There was one difference between the job title I was offered there and the job title I already had; the difference was the word 'arts'. I was the first person to be employed by a Regional Arts Association to be the liaison between the arts and local authorities, which sums up what Robert was saying in terms of the patrician nature of the Arts Council. The local authorities were there and they were important, but they had not established a strong link between them and arts funding. I subsequently did that job and in addition I got very interested in areas such as education.

I have two anecdotal things that I remember when joining. I was somebody who thought they were reasonably cultured: I lived in London so I must have been reasonably cultured! I had seen all the right plays, been to all the right dance events, went to all right films and exhibitions, read all the right books and had an Open University degree in art history. I was explaining my background to the Drama Officer, (emphasising that I had been to the theatre), and I said, 'I have this degree in art

history'. She said, 'Oh, you are in visual arts then' and that was it, because everything was categorised and boxed. One of the progressions that I think the Arts Council has made is not perhaps to think in that limited way.

Then I used to go to meetings at the Arts Council. I would sit around with all these people and I knew they had all been to better schools than I had; they certainly had better education than I had as it appeared to me they had all been to Oxbridge. I would sit there thinking, 'What the hell am I doing here?' first, and second, 'When will they find me out?' I got to know people better and I realised that was not such a big issue because they were all concerned about the same things.

I subsequently went on to be seconded to the Arts Council. The director I had at the Regional Arts Association was Anthony Everitt, who went on to be the Secretary-General at the Arts Council. I volunteered to be seconded to the Arts Council to write something called the *National Arts and Media Strategy* in the early 1990s. Here is the product of this work, available on eBay now, and I worked with this group that I had thought was an elite. I realised that the strength of the Arts Council was that, as somebody said in the last panel, people were genuinely enthused about the arts and they had a genuine knowledge of the arts, and that is what they cared about.

Compared to today, money was of no object, though it obviously had been reducing all the time. I met, talked to and worked with a lot of really interesting people, like Sandy. I remember doing the odd work with the dance department, which was outside of my remit in that job. I realised there was a real passion there, and that is my abiding memory of the Arts Council as an institution. There was this worry that it was very hierarchical and patriarchal, and that the Arts Council was seen as the top of the profession, in the Regional Arts Associations, and Jo may disagree with me; then the next layer seemed to be the Greater London Arts because it was London and it was bigger; and then it came to regions.

Kate Oakley

On that note, Jo Burns, came the regions.

Jo Burns

I am the second person of Tim's type who was appointed because the then Director of the Regional Arts Association North West Arts spotted that it was a clever thing that Anthony Everitt had come up with. This was a new generalist post responsible for building strong and paying relationships with local authorities. We then blazed a trail and there were several after us. Before that appointment, I had worked for North West Arts for five years as the Drama and Literature Officer. During that time, I do not think that there was a week that went by without there being some type of unpleasant exchange, but a very amusing exchange, with the aforementioned Director of Literature.

I do not think it has quite been said yet, but that characterised the relationship between the Arts Council and the Regional Arts Associations. We were the bad ones, the radicals. We were the ones that did wicked things. We did slightly off-centre, dangerous things. I was giving money to John Cooper Clarke and Lemn Sissay. The relationship was actually very healthy, a balance between that rather grand, Oxbridge institution in Piccadilly and the regional organisations running around, being counter-cultural and challenging the old order.

It is worth pointing out that immediately before I came into the Arts Council, not that I have ever been employed by the Arts Council, Regional Arts Associations were independent bodies. Each had their own system, and their own discretion in every way, their autonomy, effectively, even though most of the money came from the Arts Council, so there was a type of force majeure that operated, but we managed to wiggle our way around it a lot of the time. Immediately before I came

in, there was a man called Oliver Bennett. I am sure many of you will know who I am talking about. He became the first ever Community Arts Officer of any Regional Arts Association, and he set up a community arts training course, which joined. It was then he spotted that I actually was not a very good artist but I was quite a good organiser. He more or less dragooned me into applying to be the Drama and Literature Officer for North West Arts.

Fast forward and there is one further thing to mention. For the last two years I was employed by North West Arts, I was the first woman director. In fact I was the only second woman director of any Regional Arts Association, the first being Pat Abrams. Even when I say these words, it seems almost inconceivable that that could have been the case, but it was so completely a male dominated world then.

I did not know until about an hour ago, Luke, that you were against the Wilding Review, which was the review that you referred to that was instituted at the time that you were Secretary-General. As a result of the Wilding Review three or arguably four Regional Arts Associations were merged. The smallest of them was Merseyside Arts. It was completely surrounded by North West Arts. I was clearly the aggrandising, ambitious harridan who was taking over this great Merseyside world, and both I and my then still good friend the director of Merseyside Arts knew there was no way we could continue to work within the arts in this new organisation, so I left.

David Powell

I have never worked for the Arts Council in any of its guises, nor indeed for a Regional Arts Board, although I chaired, for my sins, a thing called the Governing Committee or the Sunset Committee, as it was known. That was the moment at which the old Greater London Arts Association became Greater London Arts, and then was very unwillingly dragged into the new order of things in the early 1990s to become London Arts Board. My first engagement with the Arts Council was to seek in pounds, shillings and pence a guarantee against loss for new plays that were put on by a group that I was a very early part of called Inter-Action. It was set up by a very entrepreneurial, energetic, progressive American playwright/producer, amongst many other things.

Inter-Action was firmly based in two places and had feet on two bits of ground. One was that we were very interested in the most experimental kind of theatre writing and theatre production, and we had an absolutely equal-handed strong footing in the community of North London, where we were physically based. Although we went hammer and tongs at the Arts Council for funding and may have been the first company to get funding for a street theatre-based company fairly early on, the truth was this was absolutely at a moment before any sense of co-dependency between those that are funded and those who fund.

That unholy relationship has caused so much difficulty and so much stasis over the last 40, 50 and 60 years. If I take myself back to the late 1960s/early 1970s, it simply did not exist. There was no money available from local authorities except in penny pieces, and the same was true for the work we were doing from the Arts Council. Looking back on it now, that felt both as though we were hugely excluded but actually hugely liberating. Of course, it did not stop the organisation that I was director of, Inter-Action, becoming pretty dependent on the sources of funding as we generally began to prise them open and make them more available for the work that was in left-field.

I was briefly a member of the Arts Council of Great Britain's Community Arts Panel in the middle of 1970s I have done bits of consultancy for the Arts Council in various guises. Sandy Nairne asked me to be the person who set up InIVA (Institute of International Visual Arts) with money that had been left over from the GLC's attempt to create a national black arts centre at the Roundhouse. Then I did a lot of work up in the North East with Northern Arts. One of the things that struck me about Northern Arts out of my really difficult relationship with London's local authorities and with

Arts Council Great Britain in London was that it seemed so regulated in the North, in the relationship between a local authority and its Regional Arts Board, or perhaps it was the other way around, between the RAB/RAA, the RAB and all of the local authorities.

One of the things that I was asked to do there was create what became known as the *Case for Capital*, which was, in 1992, 1993 and 1994, in the years running up to the lottery, the northern region's intention to put a comprehensive plan, including all of the counties and all of the local authorities, into the Arts Council lottery, so that over a 5-10 year period there could be a very serious redress of what were perceived in the North to be the big imbalances. There were two big imbalances, if you like. One was that the local infrastructure which had been in place over many years was pretty threadbare. There were, almost without exception, no big institutions that carried serious national and international clout and weight. Sage and the BAL TIC in Gateshead are perhaps the two preeminent examples of this redress.

I have had a rather ragged career since then in relation to the Arts Council, although I have been poaching away trying to raise funds through the lottery and in other ways for projects, which has brought me latterly back to thinking about how things are now and, in some ways, how little things have changed, not just in my lifetime but actually since 1945. There are the five reports which Christopher Gordon, who is here, Peter Stark and I have done, which have attempted to hold the Arts Council and government to account for the way in which arts funding is not properly and equitably balanced across the whole piece. Many of you will be familiar with that work, which I think has changed the conversation, though it has not changed the institution.

What it makes me feel now, and I am conscious this is a contemporary thought as opposed to any thought that I had then, is that, if you wanted to set up a structure or system to pursue a policy to deliver equity, you would not start with an organisation whose DNA and, in a sense, many if not all of whose moves across its 70 years have been designed to hold together the centre. It had been designed to rebuild London after the war and hold together the big institutions. That is not to say that there have not been good things done out there in Arts Council left-field, but the fact is we are now where we are. We have a very inequitable distribution of funds, audiences, engagement and all sorts of other things which ought to be the product of 70 million people's cultural experiences through their lives. I have to say this is wild rationalisation backwards, because I had none of those thoughts in 1970.

On the other hand we did start out at the point where the Arts Council, in relation to the life of the arts of the country, loomed very large. With the kind of activities that Ken and Naseem and others have talked about, there was through the 1960s and 1970s the possibility of conceiving how a radical and progressive cultural ecology might exist outwith the Arts Council. We are where we are.

Kate Oakley

Indeed we are. Can I bring you back, because David has helpfully raised this issue of what we might call London versus the regions, or the question of equity or otherwise in terms of spending across places? Can I take you back a little bit and attack that question slightly differently? For you two, when you first became involved in the Arts Council, what was your sense of the understanding of place? What role did place play? Were you coming with a particular set of issues about the need for other parts of Britain to be well funded and to have their cultural life recognised? What was the set of understandings that you were working with, and what did you encounter in the Arts Council?

Robert Hutchison

The 1970s were extremely interesting in this respect because it was the end of the old social democratic settlement. The social democratic settlement valued people and place in a way they are not valued now. The arrival of Roy Shaw in 1976 at the Arts Council was important. There were three important things in 1976. There was Naseem's wonderful report, which I am glad to say I get a footnote in somewhere. There was Roy Shaw's appointment, which I will just talk about in a moment, and there was the Redcliffe-Maud report, and I would like to say something about that in a moment too. I came into this patrician organisation in 1973, and in 1976 there was a contest between Angus Stirling who was an Etonian and Roy Shaw who was an adult educator, for the job as Secretary-General. Roy Shaw got the job. The Chairman of the Arts Council, Lord Gibson, was subsequently heard to say we appointed Roy out of a deep sense of ancestral guilt. That does suggest a shift, and there was a shift for a time, before Mrs Thatcher and her four sons had taken over the government of the country.

1976 was important, too, for the Redcliffe-Maud report. I would like to refer to three of the recommendations of the Redcliffe-Maud report which I think we need to get back to. They respond to your question because they do say that places other than London are peculiarly important. The last one is about the role of local authorities. They are still hugely important. This is Redcliffe-Maud's recommendation: 'We must look to elected local councils at district and county level to become the chief art patrons of the long-term future.' Reflect on that now. We are light years away from that and yet that was the main recommendation of the most important report about the arts in the 1970s.

Secondly, and related to that, 'We must now decide to devolve wide decision-taking power from the national level.' We have had, in effect, 40 years of recentralisation. Thirdly, and this is the most important of them, 'The excellence of our artists, professional and amateur, and our increasing enjoyment of old and contemporary art depend in each case more on education than on anything deliberate arts patronage can do. A revolution therefore in educational policy over the next 10 years which brought the arts nearer the heart of the curriculum in British schools and teacher training institutions is what I would most dearly like to see.' That was Lord Redcliffe-Maud, who was hugely respected, in 1976 saying we had gone in the wrong direction. We have gone away from those fundamental concerns of the importance of places outside London and the importance of education as fundamental to all this.

Tim Challans

It is hard to follow that, because I agree with everything that has been said. In fact, only today I was sent another survey to sign about protecting performing arts in education. I certainly had the feeling that it was incredibly London-based, as I think I said earlier. There was this hierarchy within which the London-based institutions were in a sense far more important than what was going on in the regions. We had to pay respect to this. It has only been in recent years where we have seen the national institutions really grasping the fact that they are national and not London institutions, and that they need to be spreading the word a bit more. Digitalisation has probably helped that quite a lot, because you can now see any production in your local cinema.

I do not like talking about the regions because I think of it as the whole country, but I still get that sense that there is a split. There certainly is a split in resources, as Christopher and David have told us. It is worrying that that still exists. There is a decline of everything that I thought was good, including education policies. When I first started working in the arts, education policies seemed to be an add-on to most arts organisations functions and then they got much closer to the centre of those organisations, but, the fact is, that has all disappeared.

After the Arts Council, I went to work in local authorities. The reorganisation of local authorities, creating unitary cities and counties, which then fought against each other rather than working with each other, killed off a lot of the education benefits that we had engendered in that period. Generally, there are improvements in society. There are improvements in the understanding of cultural diversity in society. I am not in the position to argue whether or not there has been improvement in the arts. However, when I look at the document that I was telling you about, which was written in 1993, and I read the culture and diversity chapter, it is frankly embarrassing, and this was progressive at the time compared to a lot of stuff. Naseem had written a discussion paper that we had used, but the emphasis placed on it is frankly embarrassing. I do not know whether I have answered the question.

Kate Oakley

Jo, can I bring you to the 1980s? As an obvious scouse chauvinist, I would say you are working in the North West of England, so you are working in somewhere that has a strong sense of regional identity and where the cities had municipalisation or variations thereof at that time. How did that play into this whole Arts Council-regional place issue?

Jo Burns

One of the things that perhaps we need to make clear is that, while there was this separation of functions and responsibilities between the Regional Arts Associations and that of the Arts Council, the money was not divided geographically. It was divided in terms of type of activity. For example, in the region that I was responsible for, the North West, there were many theatres and there still are such as Bolton, Chester Gateway, the Dukes in Lancaster, never mind the Royal Exchange and Contact. All of those were funded directly from the Arts Council and subject to national policies of the artforms, so there was not an integrated notion of the development of place.

There was an Arts Council view of what should be happening for the major clients, as they were called in those days, and then there were the things that we did which were much more based in community development and more socially and politically aware – much more related to place. They involved education, issues around race and disability and things like that. I do not mean one was better than the other, and there has been a fantastic coming together of the learning that went on in those community and outreach projects that the Regional Arts Associations were promulgating at the time and the way that the bigger institutions began to work. There was a real coming togetherness that I think has worked very well.

In terms of the relationship between the policies that my organisation was responsible for and the social democratic/civic relationship, it was so varied because it is about the particular moments and people. For example, I could not get Manchester City Council to talk to me about the arts for ages because they did not put any money into the Arts Council organisations. They funded their own theatre, the Library Theatre, and their own gallery. They did it all themselves.

They did not get any Arts Council money, but the Royal Exchange was in the middle of a major part of a city centre redevelopment area, fortunately as it happened, just next to where the bomb went off, but that is another story, and the Hallé Orchestra was re-housed as part of a major regeneration project. So from having believed that these high-art organisations were ridiculous – nothing to do with the city council and nothing to do with the needs of their people, they came to see them as assets. It took some time and some convincing to get Manchester to understand the relationship between the cultural organisations and the city's ambitions and aspirations, and to forge constructive partnerships. I could go on.

Kate Oakley

David, you talked about the North in the sense of place working better: being more holistic and being more thought through different art forms and different practices. Am I reading that right?

David Powell

Yes, it is a good, simple description of it. It is worth saying that it was not just the North East because in those days Cumbria, which had been Cumberland and Westmorland, was still part of Northern Arts remit, so this thing straggled along the whole width of Hadrian's Wall. The truth is that I was in what I look back at now as a very privileged position because we were talking with all the local authorities about something quite specific, which was an unknown amount of largesse, which might otherwise become completely bottled up in London, that we might plan for and work out collectively. I would be absolutely certain that both the senior politicians and officers in local authorities and also in Northern Arts had difficult relationships over particular sets of things. It was not as though it was a single simple proposition, but looked at from 40 years' distance, I am trying in a sense to hold the glass up to other ways in which we might think about the relationships between capital cities and the rest of the country, and the big cities in the regions and their own hinterlands, London included. It was the relationship, in a sense, between the well-endowed centres and the peripheries. It seemed to be a very interesting model and one which was abandoned all too soon, which is not to say that everything it was doing was perfect.

One of the things that none of us had realised at that point, and I am not a great conspiracy theorist, was how the body of Conservative economic thinking all the way through the 1970s and 1980s was planning to fundamentally unpick the 1945 settlement. It broke cover at many points, and it is breaking cover again now. Our version of trying to future proof any of those things that we were planning was to say that, absolutely, there should be a bit of local Arts Council and a bit of local authority money, without any sense that over a 20-year political cycle one half of the equation turns out not to have any money in its pocket at all, and is much less valued than it might otherwise have been. One of the things that has been refreshing, in thinking about 70 years backwards, is trying to work out where we made errors – they were not cardinal errors then; there was no way of us foreseeing that – but looking at it now and trying to work out what the lesson of history is out of that for us now. We would have to be much more sanguine about the permanence of institutions – political institutions and non-political institutions.

Kate Oakley

That is a good point to introduce the New Labour period, I suppose, because one of New Labour's geniuses was to create very non-permanent institutions in terms of something like Regional Development Agencies. I suppose the New Labour response to that and the New Labour attempt to create that notion that you are talking about in terms of the North was something like Regional Development Agencies. It was a regional remit in a way, or a way of looking at these things via the regions. Do any of you want to pick up on the New Labour regions, whether regions work and what it has to do with the arts?

Tim Challans

I welcomed Labour getting back in, and I remember not long after they got back in having a meeting in Nottingham with Mark Fisher, who was briefly the creative leader. He seemed to be more surprised than we were. The establishment of the RDAs did help in some respects because at least it was beginning to link economic development in with cultural development, which was something that was missing. Cultural development or certainly arts development has always been seen as being something a bit on the edge and not part of the economic argument. As a result of the

RDAs, there began to be a bit more of a linkage between economic development and the contribution culture makes to that. Some of the issues around New Labour were that the arts themselves began to lose importance. It was what the arts could do, rather than the arts themselves, that became significant.

The RDAs are like a lot of other things that we have discussed: they came and went. Whilst culture will continue because culture is created by people and not by institutions, the support for culture as a whole waxes and wanes, and it is waning at the moment, as we know. RDAs made an interesting involvement with the arts, but their disappearance meant that a lot of that momentum disappeared altogether. Culture now has to re-find its place as part of economic development in this country. It is not just about building buildings. One of the worrying things we see now is that you build a museum or a gallery because that is going to encourage economic development – that is a product partly of that process and partly of the lottery – and then you find something to put in it and then you find a justification for having it. We seem to have lost, partly because of that whole period, the bottom-up growth.

Kate Oakley

Would anyone else like to comment on that one before I open it up to the floor?

David Powell

I have a reflection. Regional Development Agencies and New Labour is one thing. There is this permanent state of tension between the centralising force of governments of any colour over the long-haul and the inability of the Treasury, whoever is the chief treasurer, to want to let power and resources go in any meaningful fashion. The desire for people locally, whether it is on a regional basis or a city basis, or more locally, is to have a significant control over their own resources and their own future.

We are in a very centralised country, and in a country where most decisions about most big things, particularly in the arts and culture, are taken centrally by London-based and purportedly Manchester-based institutions. That is not the only way in which we do them but that tension has played out, absolutely. It is all the way through the other document that we need to reference here, Kate, which is Jennie Lee's 1965 White Paper which has been so outrageously prayed in evidence by the completely risible White Paper that our current Secretary of State for the arts has seen fit to put out a couple of months back. The significant difference between those two White Papers and the two formulations of what a national policy might be is that Jennie Lee's frame of reference, the places that she turned for support, comfort and to encourage, were outside London. They were the local authorities. They were to be the big things that were happening away from Whitehall.

If you go through the Vaizey paper, should you feel the need to sleep soon, his entire frame of reference, apart from Shakespeare, is the Arts Council and the National Portfolio Organisations, which is entirely a self-referential proposition. You do not describe the totality of the national cultural framework that you need to have in place in order for there to be proper support locally for vigorous things to happen locally, whether they are radical or not, by bottling everything up and going through the established route. It simply cannot and will not happen.

Kate Oakley

To some degree, having done exactly that for a piece that I was writing, I had looked for mentions of place and space in the new White Paper. I would say in some ways one of the differences is that it is written in much more defensive mode. It is much more to say 'Yes, the Arts Council does give money outside of London and here is a good example of an Arts Council project here.' In part that

is a response to yours and Christopher's work and to a general debate about that. Being scrupulously fair, in part that is a difference in tone, but I agree with you that it therefore reads as more of an account of the Arts Council rather than the arts in that sense.

Are there any questions?

Christopher Gordon

During the period we are discussing I spent 14 years as a local authority arts officer, and I am part of that first generation I suppose: firstly here in the London Borough of Camden and then for Hampshire County, which was one of three big Tory-controlled – actually, two were Tory-controlled and one was Labour – shire counties that used the 1972 Local Government Act and the powers which were given to it under that Act, when metropolitan counties were also created, to develop a role at strategic level for shire counties. In Hampshire then, Southampton and Portsmouth were both part of the county structure, so we had 13 district councils.

That debate went on: if some local authorities can do it under permissive legislation, then would the situation be better if government gave local authorities a statutory duty to support culture over and above providing basic library services? It went on and on. Even in the early days of New Labour, Mark Fisher, though short lived, was still trying to get a statutory duty in place. It never happened because the local authorities could not agree amongst themselves, because the big, largely Labour-controlled metropolitan authorities were big spenders on culture in many cases, whereas the shire, district councils on the whole tended to be low spenders. For the county councils, it was a variable matter. The view that got back from the local authority associations to central government was that the primary supporter of the arts in the big cities said, 'Do not do it, because we are spending far more than the basic level that the Treasury would set. Most of our elected colleagues will then attack those budgets and say, "You are spending far more than you need to. We need the money for other services which are more essential."' It never actually happened.

The other point I will make is on lottery funding, which has been referred to in a variety of ways. When we knew the lottery was on the way, the lobbying from the Regional Arts Boards at the time to central government was, 'For God's sake, do not make the Arts Council the distributing body for the arts. If you give them the money, they will only repeat the pattern and give it to what they know and the people they know. A disproportionate tranche of the money will continue go to the results of dinner party conversations in London the previous week.' Here we are and in spite of the lottery directions put in place by the government in 2007, the amount of lottery substitution that is going on is absolutely massive.

Sport England and the Heritage Lottery Fund have structures in place to spend the money more equitably. In the arts, the balance is actually going the other way, notwithstanding the covering rhetoric that goes with it. To some extent, what David has said about the North East is that the massive opportunity from the initial capital spend on the arts has been hugely beneficial around the country, and I have some sympathy for the Arts Council that the first big application to land on their desk was the Royal Opera House because they could produce the matching funding, and that was the rule which the government of the day told them they had to follow. The fact is that the lottery money is there and could be spent in different ways to much greater effect on local development participations and supporting the infrastructure, and it is not really happening in the way it was intended.

Robert Hutchison

I wanted to say something positive, which is that I am very pleased that the Arts Council is still here, at 70. I wrote a book about it 35 years ago, which is exactly halfway through its history to

date. This is the book here, but you can buy it on Amazon for 1p. I think that is quite good value. I thought then, in 1982, that the Arts Council should see its life as half over and its work as half done. In which case, we would be waving it a fond goodbye at this point. That has not happened.

We have not got anywhere near that, for all sorts of reasons. Given the world as it is, I am very pleased it is still there, because it is a qualified success. The success is very heavily qualified and punctuated by some mega-disasters, which we need not necessarily go into. It is also a microcosm of wider society and politics. Luke made this point. We know some of the things wrong with our society – that it is far too unequal, that we have dysfunctional local government and a rubbish education system, when it should be first-rate, particularly in terms of arts education. We know those weaknesses, and that is one of the point points. We know what has gone wrong.

In its small way, the Arts Council is a little reminder of how we might put it right and actually invest in the public realm, in the fullest sense of the world. Robert Hewison's excellent book *Cultural Capital* winds up with an argument about that. The arts are a part of the public realm and that is where the investment needs to go, in the widest sense. The Arts Council is a little reminder of that.

The other point I wanted to make is about regionalism. In 2001, I wasted hours of my time coping with Gerry Robinson's absurd wheeze to restructure the whole system, at that point. Eventually, as many of you will know, it was restructured and at an enormous cost. The biggest cost was that 600 people in 2001, who were employees of the Arts Council Regional Arts Boards, had at least a year worrying about whether they were going to be made redundant. That was the main consequence of the way Gerry Robinson went about the restructuring. There were other negative consequences as well. I am not going to die in the ditch for the Regional Arts Boards and Regional Arts Associations.

This was the last point I wanted to make: there is an interesting problem with regionalism in the UK. What are the right boundaries? What functions should be at regional level? Actually, one of the reasons I enjoyed working for Southern Arts was not only that we had an absolutely wonderful and extremely skilled group of officers, who were knocked on the head by Gerry Robertson and Peter Hewitt, without even noticing what they were doing.

Leaving that aside, the Southern Arts and Central Southern England is actually a region. There are some regions and I think it is a reasonably coherent region. Not everybody will agree with that, but the idea that Aldershot is in the South West is frankly comic. We have not got regionalism right. Part of the reason we have not is that we are in a small country. My own feeling has gone more and more towards needing strong multi-purpose unitary local authorities in this country, which actually do these things in the public realm, as well as all the other functions. You would not have this endless tedious argy-bargy about boundaries, functions and so on. Franky, I hope we can get to that, because it is one of the lessons of the last 70 years.

Sara Selwood

Robert, I was going to ask you something about the work you did in 1985 about the distribution of money to the arts in regions. You talk quite a lot about Dave, Chris and Peter's reports, but it seems to me that yours was something like 35 years ahead of theirs. Although it is likely to be one of the things we talk about in the next session on research, I am interested in the idea of having done a piece of research 35 years ago, which still remains relevant and makes all the points that are being made now, but has not actually changed things. I wonder how you feel about that. How do you feel about the validity of research within the cultural policy context and what might be possible in terms of making policymakers more alert to evidence and simplifications?

Robert Hutchison

Very quickly, first of all, anybody who pretends to at least quarter-rational wants evidence-based policy. When I joined the Arts Council in 1973, there was neither evidence nor was there policy. There was gentlemanly vagueness and functional ignorance, both of which have played pretty large parts in British government over the years. I am frankly very impressed with the work that is going on here, in terms of trying to make research findings in the arts much more accessible. We are now moving closer towards a concern with evidence, but we often end up with the wrong policies, for various political reasons.

As to that piece of work I did in 1981, it was called 'A Hard Fact to Swallow'. Here we are 35 years later. As David, Christopher and Peter Stark have pointed out, the numbers have gone in the wrong direction. A higher percentage is now invested in London and cultural things than there was in 1981. David might be able to correct that.

Why is that? It is a very good question. It is because we have this particular political economy that is very London-focused, in all kinds of ways. I would make this small point. Part of the reason why all the arts expenditure is in London, or a disproportionate part of it, is because the Arts Council is in London. I live in Winchester, and we have two very good lottery-funded organisations in Winchester. This is because Southern Arts was based there and we wanted a nice theatre and a nice cinema. My goodness, we got them. In Brighton, where South East Arts is based, you will find better cultural provision than in other parts of the South East. Probably the same goes for Manchester and indeed Newcastle.

Tim Challans

It does not for Loughborough!

Robert Hutchison

Unfortunately, it does not for Loughborough, so it is not 100% watertight, but there is a little bit of that. There is a significant self-interest about the arts funding system. It has gone on since the whole thing began, but we should not underestimate it. It is not the most important thing about it, but it is there. That is why a lot of people vote UKIP, frankly. What has the Arts Council ever done for the white working class? The answer is not a huge amount.

David Powell

As you may guess, I am less sanguine and generous about the great institution. The 70s seems to me to be very good years to be pensioned off. Given Robert's research 35 years ago, and us finding much the same circumstances as prevail now, but worse in many cases, what are we going to be looking at in 140 or 105 years, if you are all to come back? The status quo prevails.

It is absolutely the question that we need to be clear about: what kind of arts we should be publicly supporting and to what end. We have a jolly good institution for doing a certain kind of arts support and, my God, it has worked really well in that circumstance, over the last 70 years. It will probably continue to work pretty well doing that over the next 70 years. If we want something rather different, we have to start from a different place. There is a challenge to us, to our politicians, to new city leaders – and to the arts institutions that are frit as hell thinking about how they might change a system that they know does not really work for them, but suits them because that is where the cheques come from.

In my career line, it comes back to this moment of where we were when we were not co-dependent. We were bonkers; we were broke. We did not know our arse from our elbows. Some of us had no

real idea about Jennie Lee or any of that, but the fact was that, even then, there was a healthier relationship between those who might fund and those who were doing the work than there seems to be now, in large part. One of the things that we need to take out of a review of 70 years of performance is what are prognostications for the next 70.

Lynn Maree

This time it is not a question; it is just a tiny observation. It sorts of fits into where we have ended, but I wanted to say it much earlier. I worked both for Greater London Arts and for Southern Arts. I was at Greater London Arts during *The Glory of the Garden*. We were as much in the regions as Northern, North West and Merseyside Arts, because those national institutions were not in Barking and Dagenham. They were not in Redbridge. We responded to *The Glory of the Garden* in the same way as the other RAAs, and we would still be in that situation now were there those Regional Arts Boards.

Sandy Nairne

I just want to add a little question, particularly to Tim and Jo, about whether we could have done more with local authority councils. You were in a key position for liaison. I remember visiting the excellent Harris Museum and Art Gallery in Preston. As I arrived at the director's office, there were two male figures there who had their feet up on her desk. As I walked in, I thought, 'Who are these guys with her feet up on her desk?' Of course they were Preston councillors and they took it as their absolute right to sit in her office and put their feet up on her desk.

What did we get wrong? The French are much better at getting those councillors not just possessive, but a real force for change. In some places, this has happened but, looking back, I did not know what to say to them, other than talking positively about relations between the Arts Council and Preston. What else could we have done that might have driven the local authority elected members, not just their possessiveness, but their knowledge?

Tim Challans

I am not sure I could answer that completely, because I have worked with a number of local authorities while I was with the East Midlands and subsequently. They are all so different. If you came to Nottinghamshire County Council, which was a strong Labour mining-based economy, they supported the arts. They loved the arts. They saw it as something to inflate their own egos, because councillors are often very egotistical. It is the same with Nottingham City Council, but if you went to one of the smaller district councils, they would simply not understand us.

That is where we went wrong. We seemed to be talking at another level about another subject, and not something they felt was relevant to their people. Now, why Nottinghamshire thought it was relevant and Daventry did not, I have no idea. It is in part because of who we were, to be honest. We represented something that they saw as potentially being elitist, different and difficult. If they could not understand it, they did not want anything to do with it.

Jo Burns

I think my tale is more fortunate and positive than Tim's. I think we did make some changes. I am not even sure about councillors who were sitting in the gallery when you got there or feeling sufficiently at home to stick their feet on the desk. I do not mind about that: they are there; they want to talk to you. It is not the same as the ones where you could not get a conversation. In the end, it is about having a sustained approach to that relationship-building and those understandings.

In all the good things that the Arts Council has done and continues to do, it seems to me that the greatest failure is in not sustaining those conversations with local authorities.

There are a number of reasons why that has happened. One is about the centralising principle. The second is that, in the end, there were just not enough people on the ground to be having those conversations. The regional structures that we had may have been perceived as being expensive but, ultimately, the relationships that were built – getting the message across, understanding civic concerns, knowing what mattered – have completely disappeared. This morning I noticed a quote from a speech by Peter Bazalgette – £265 million has been lost in local authority funding for the arts since 2010. That is huge and it is not going to come back either.

Kate Oakley

Thank you for that. We could have ended on a slightly less depressing note than Jo did. Thank you very much and thanks to all the panel.

Witness Seminar 3: **Use of Research and Evidence at the Arts Council**

Sara Selwood

Welcome to the last of the witness seminars for this afternoon. In terms of my relationship with the Arts Council, it has always been on and off. Casting my mind back, I started as something called an Arts Council seeding in Newcastle. It was clearly related to *Glory of the Garden*, when it was not just about roses, but about the seedings. I was one of them. When I came to London as a visual arts person to run Air Gallery, I think I am right in saying that it was the absolute victim of *Glory of the Garden* because it was one gallery whose money was removed as a result of *Glory of the Garden* in 1984. When I came to it in 1986, not only had that money gone, but I was not actually allowed to apply to the Arts Council to make up for that money at all. I remember that very distinctly, because it was like walking into a black hole at that point.

However, let us move on to more interesting things. First of all, I would like to introduce Andy Feist, who was the person who named *Cultural Trends*, when he was an editor of it at the Policy Studies Institute, before me. Ann Bridgwood was a research officer at the Arts Council, and Pauline Tambling was Head of Research at one point, if I remember rightly.

Andy, let me start with you. Can you perhaps briefly talk about your experience of being at the Arts Council, and what major issues you were dealing with in terms of research?

Andy Feist

I think Robert Hutchison claims co-credit for the *Cultural Trends* logo.

Robert Hutchison

May I make a very brief interruption, just so the record is absolutely clear? Andy was responsible for the word 'cultural'; I was responsible for 'trends'. It was a perfect partnership.

Andy Feist

I joined the Arts Council as a senior policy analyst in 1992, and I lasted five years. I had previously worked at the Policy Studies Institute, which I joined in 1985. I started working with John Myerscough on the renowned *Economic Importance of the Arts*, which was a very interesting experience. I can elaborate on that in due course. Then I got into *Cultural Trends* and generally had a very happy time at PSI.

My arrival at the Arts Council, working to Mary Allen, the then Deputy Secretary-General, was a big transition, going from an independent research organisation to something that has a very clear definition, even if we contest exactly what the ultimate goal is. I was there for the time when we were developing the National Lottery, which was the biggest change that I saw in those five years.

Anyone who knows me will know that I moved out of art and into crime, because I took a job doing research for the Home Office, or essentially for the police, to try to improve their use of research evidence, rather than evidence, in detecting and managing serious crime. That was a bit of a culture shock in itself because, as we have described, the Arts Council has a particular style of organisation and detectives have their own particular style. I am still in the Home Office, doing research on crime and policing, so I have acquired this bigger portfolio of work in a very different

subject, but is also about the use of evidence in policymaking and practice. The contrast is interesting, in retrospect. That is my opening gambit.

I would just put one thing on the table. That is that I think there is a particular challenge about being responsible for using and developing evidence in an arts-funding or arts-policymaking organisation. It is a really big challenge, partly because of the pre-eminence of the excellence agenda, where the researcher often struggles for good positioning. There are very interesting things that the arts researcher can do and perhaps we try to do, but I can expand on that later.

Sara Selwood

I would like us to come back to that point in a minute, so can you hold it? If it does not come up again, can you make sure it does? If we were going to do this chronologically, the next person to talk to would be Pauline, who I think predates Ann. Do you want to say when you were there and what your role was, particularly in terms of research?

Pauline Tambling

I had been in arts education for 15 years when I joined the Arts Council. I was in five different roles in the Arts Council, because it has a particular way of being a serial restructuring organisation, so you do not stay in particular roles for very long. As someone coming in from arts education and actually being quite passionate about research, having been paid to do research in my previous life, I had this idea that, when I arrived at the Arts Council, if I knew this much, I would have access to so much research, because everybody else out there had been forced to do research, so it would all be sitting in Great Peter Street. Of course, it was not. That was a huge shock, as I assumed it would be a research-heavy organisation.

I joined in 1998 as Director of Education and Training. I was quickly restructured into research and development. In that role, I helped set up the Research department with Ann, then moved to development, looking after capital, stabilisation and all the things that are not art, so not excellent, but the other things. I was briefly in arts investment.

Ann Bridgwood

I joined the Arts Council in 2000. I have a particular debt to Pauline, because she interviewed and appointed me. I was there from 2000 to 2005, and we set up a department of research in the Arts Council. I came from the Office for National Statistics. After I left the Arts Council, I spent about two and a half years working for the Big Lottery Fund. One of the points I would like to echo from what people have said earlier is that I was really impressed by the passion for art that people had at the Arts Council.

It was very interesting at the Big Lottery Fund, because people were very committed to being good grant makers. They took that whole process of making grants very seriously and tried to do it as well as they could. At the Arts Council, people were also interested in the substance of what they were doing.

The context in which I joined in 2000 was that the Labour Government had been elected in 1997. As Andy has referred to, it was committed to evidence-based policymaking and also using the Comprehensive Spending Review as a way of allocating money. One of the big issues that we had to deal with in our department, during the time that I was there – though by no means the only thing we dealt with – was collecting data to measure the Public Sector Agreement targets. If people are interested, it would be quite interesting to talk about some of the issues that that raised for research. Again, Andy touched on the difficulty of demonstrating an impact and what that means for the

integrity of the research process. I loved working at the Arts Council actually. When I got the job, I felt like the cat who had got the cream.

Sara Selwood

One of the things that Andy mentioned was the difficulty of doing the kinds of research that we are talking about in the context of an arts organisation. You are beginning to touch on it too. Andy, can you elaborate on precisely why it seemed so difficult? I think we need to get that one out of the way before we proceed with the rest of the conversation.

Andy Feist

There are probably about three types of evidence that you are asking to produce. I think I can say all of this now. One is generally making the case for the arts. In a way, it is the economic importance argument. The best example of that was trying to make people in DNH and DCMS – the Office of Arts and Libraries was the predecessor body – to have the tools to deal with the Treasury. You are generically saying that the arts are important and you are trying to provide the evidence.

To give you an example of that, Christopher Gordon was instrumental in making us think about redoing a decent international comparison to public spending in advance of the 1997 election, just so that we had some good comparative data about the fact that we are mid-table spenders, compared to Finland, Germany, Sweden and the like. There was that broad policy agenda.

The thing that we did not do, which is where it becomes very difficult, is that when I was there we were not doing anything evaluating programmes or the effect of work that was being funded through the Arts Council. I remember talking to a Canada Council for the Arts researcher who essentially that, if you are in that kind of territory working in an arts funding body, you have about six months and then you are out. It is very challenging territory, because you are seen as a potential threat to the art form structure within the Arts Council.

In a way, those were the two extremes. One is that you provide evidence to support the wider advocacy argument. Another good example is trying to demonstrate the impact that the Thatcher regime was having on local government spend. Everyone kind of new a little bit about that, but we did not really have good data. Again, we were trying to work to fill that space and provide DCMS and others, or DNH as it was at the time, with good data on what was happening with local government spend. That was safe territory but, as soon as you moved away from that, it became much more challenging. To some extent, there was an expectation that we were not going to get into that as researchers. That was not our role. We were a small team, so it was not as if we could do everything. Those were the sorts of contrasts.

The only other thing I would add is that you then start looking for likeminded customers. Somebody said earlier that it is very difficult if you do have a customer to buy into. We probably worked more closely with some of the Regional Arts Board representatives, because they have a slightly broader view of the evidence world. Perhaps they were just thinking about evidence in a different way. We range wide and far, but there was always this sense that, in terms of providing art forms with evaluative evidence, that was really weak.

The only exception I can think of is this thing called white or green papers that the art forms started preparing. That seemed to slightly catalyse some ideas about using evidence, but it was slightly internecine, with art form versus art form. As one example, I remember the Drama Director asked for some stuff on this. He said, 'Give me some evidence to show that we are struggling in this sector, in terms of some hard facts.' The only thing we could show was that average cast sizes were

reducing over time. You kind of thought that was good; that was about one of the few times that I could give something in that space.

Sara Selwood

What I always liked about being a visual arts person, in a very masochistic way, was that it was always really hard to find evidence for the visual arts, not least because people did not pay to go into galleries, so there was no equivalent of counting bums on seats. It was always a real problem.

Let me turn to you, Pauline, because some of the stuff Andy is talking about would have fallen to you as the head of department. How was it for you being caught, presumably, somewhere between art forms and research, with the need to support and advocate for the Arts Council itself?

Pauline Tambling

I echo everything that Andy said there. Within the arts sector and the Arts Council, there is a huge demand to make the case for the arts. We do not necessarily seem to make that much progress with that in any sort of sound way. A good example of that, when I first came to the Arts Council, was the Mozart factor. If you remember, about 15 years ago, it was proposed in the States that if you listen to Mozart you are more intelligent or can become more intelligent. In fact, the case went, you can be better at maths if you listen to Mozart.

If you look at the actual research, there were two other groups – a group that heard no music and a group that heard modern music. It was only true of Mozart, as I remember. A huge amount of effort and short-term Arts Council money went into commissioning research around the Mozart factor, which was basically setting out to prove that, if you did arts, you would be better at maths. That is a good example of one of the problems making the case for a lot of the debate that goes on. A lot of effort goes into basically saying that what we do is great and we need more money. That is not necessarily a good motivation.

On evaluation, Andy is right again about the Regional Arts Boards. There is a huge amount of interest in whether we are doing our work well and if we could do it better. There are quite a lot of examples of collaborations with the Regional Arts Board around things like new audience development and specifically education. There was a piece that Karen Dust and Felicity Woolf did on Partnerships for Learning, which was an evaluation tool used a huge amount in arts education. Too little of that goes on.

Then there is the impact issue. There is just never enough money, time and patience to be able to make that 'time series' work happen, so that you can actually evidence the impact. Ann and I spent a lot of time debating with the DCMS, when we got big money in 2002. Gerry Robinson had secured £200 million of new money from the government. As Ann said, there was a lot of pressure to evidence how that money was making an impact on the arts, but DCMS wanted that evidence pretty much three months in.

Ann Bridgwood

They wanted evidence of what Creative Partnerships had achieved before it even started.

Pauline Tambling

We started spending money in April 2002, but DCMS had announced it in 2000, so there was a real demand for progress. We sat in some really difficult and uncomfortable meetings, probably for the best part of three years, trying to explain that it was too soon to tell whether the funding had had any impact.

The other thing that I think is really difficult in the arts, and I now run a sector skills council, so I collect labour market intelligence, alongside other sectors like food and drink, retail and construction, is that it is much less passionate in other sectors. You will always be asked if you are making the economic case, the social case, art for its own sake, the intrinsic case and the extrinsic case. I just feel that we tie ourselves in knots over this so much, because we cannot agree among ourselves how to measure anything. That leads to a sort of paralysis, which is problematic.

Linked to that, we are tiny in real terms. At the time that I was in the Arts Council, the NHS overspent by 1%, which was equal to the whole of the Arts Council's annual budget. We operate as if we are really big public sector. We are in terms of the number of people employed, but not in terms of the amount of money we spend. That is hugely problematic, because our money is not 'behaving' in the same way that money is for the NHS or the schools system.

Going back to Robert's point from the last session, I got my first job in the arts in the aftermath of the Redcliffe-Maud document. We have never really managed to persuade the education sector to do the work they need to do with us. We have never managed to engage with the local authorities well enough. That has been absolutely fundamental in terms of what the art sector can achieve. We pride ourselves in the view that we can do this alone, but we cannot and that is really problematic.

Sara Selwood

Ann, let me ask you. You are of the generation of people at the Arts Council Research department who were trained researchers, who were statisticians and had done a lot of work in other areas before coming to the arts. How did the kinds of agendas that Pauline is talking about impact on you as a statistician at the Arts Council? What kinds of pressures did you feel under, and how did you respond?

Ann Bridgwood

I am going to pick up on some of the points that Andy made. This is going to be a very boring panel, because we are going to agree with each other all of the time.

Sara Selwood

We can agree on what might be passionate subjects shortly.

Ann Bridgwood

I had worked in research for something like 15 years before I went to the Arts Council, and I was a teacher before then. I now work for the Open University and I teach research methods, among other things. I had always worked in research organisations, so the Arts Council was the first policy department that I had ever worked in, although I had done research for other government departments. The Office for National Statistics, as you can imagine, in many ways is the gold standard of 'objective research'. It was really drummed into us that you had to treat the whole research process and the data with great integrity. You had to be very careful of over-claiming. You had to include all the caveats and so on. I know Andy would have gone through the same process in the Policy Studies Institute. That was the mindset with which I came to the Arts Council.

I always have a mental image of two particular managers that I had at ONS, Jil and Joy, one of whom later became the Chief Statistician for England and Wales. They would be sitting behind me saying, 'Is this justified in terms of the research process and the data?' As Pauline and Andy have both said, it is matching that with an absolutely legitimate aim of making advocacy for the arts. I believe in the arts. I believe that everybody should have access to the arts. It is not an issue, as far

as I am concerned, but I want to make claims that are based on the data and I know Andy was the same.

I am sure that a lot of people found the stuff that we wrote as dull as ditchwater, because we would make a point and then say, 'But the caveat is this and the limitation is that. You have to take this with a pinch of salt.' We talk about things like, 'There's evidence here, but it's anecdotal,' or 'There's a survey here, but it's a very small sample, so you have to be really cautious.' I think some people found that frustrating but, in the end, if you have good data, you can always go back to it and use it for lots of different purposes.

For example, we did an Arts in England series, which later became the basis of the Taking Part survey. I felt very proud of that. My team did a really good job on that, because that data is there. People can use it; anybody can access it through the data archive at the University of Essex. It has been used for lots of different purposes, because it stands up to the test of robustness. Not over-claiming is an issue.

Impact was such a huge issue when I was at the Arts Council, not just because of Creative Partnerships, but because of all the Public Sector Agreement targets, the Comprehensive Spending Review and so on. I remember going to a meeting at the Treasury with Peter Hewitt and walking along this long corridor. There was one room after another labelled 'Public Sector Agreement Team'. It was a whole industry of people negotiating with public and government departments to set the targets and what kind of data we used to measure it. I sometimes thought that they had missed the point, because the arts clearly have lots of impacts on people. The most important ones are the most intangible ones. They are the ones that are the most difficult to measure.

Everybody in this room can probably think of an occasion when a particular experience of art has had a profound effect on them. I can certainly think of examples like that. I do not know how you measure that. I genuinely do not know. I think it is very difficult. I remember sitting in a meeting at DCMS once, with all the heads of research from the DCMS family, as we were called. We were talking about measuring the economic and social impact of the arts, in the widest sense, and sport as well. My colleague from the UK Film Council said, 'I think we're missing the point here. Art is about what people get from it, the experience they have from it and transcendence,' if I can use a rather vague term. A person from DCMS said, 'Oh yes, we can treat that as an externality,' which is kind of missing the point. There are big issues there when you get engaged. We have to do it. I do not feel embarrassed about what we did, because we produced a good survey and also we needed to make the case for the Arts Council. We needed the money. It is as simple as that.

Pauline Tambling

Also, data is hugely important. Quite irrespective of how much you spend on evaluation and research, having the knowledge of what you are actually doing is fundamental. We did not have a list of nationally funded organisations until 2000. We had people who applied for money to different Regional Arts Boards and the Arts Council, and pieced together income from those different funders. We had a list of the original NPOs, as they are now called, who were the ones that were funded from Great Peter Street, but just knowing how much money we were spending as an arts funding system and where we were spending it was missing.

We had the NPO survey, the RFO survey it was called, but until Ann came I do not think anyone ever looked at it. I do not know if Andy looked at it in his day, there was no sense that the art form folk looked at the RFO survey and said, 'What are we doing here? How much are we giving to different sorts of art in different places?' and so on. The only time we were actually questioned on that was when we turned up at political party conferences each year. You end up in an Arts Council session, and someone puts up their hand and says, 'How much are you spending in Salford?' You

have nowhere to go. You have no idea how much you have spent in Salford or anywhere else. From 2000, there began to be much more sense that there was a list, we knew how much we were spending and where it was being spent. It was not necessarily being spent in the right places, but that was a whole other conversation.

Sara Selwood

Let me move the conversation on a bit. I ask this question as an outsider. I sometimes think about the evolution of collection of data within the arts and heritage as spectator sport, because I sit and watch what happens. What interests me is that you talk about not being able to capture the intangibles by definition, so you obviously default to what can be quantified. My question is this. If you look at the kinds of targets that were set under New Labour, which changed with every Spending Review and which tended to have three-year projections, Chris Smith talked a lot about responsibility. He talked about the arts having to take on responsibility. Here is the money; if you do not deliver, we are going to take the money away. There seemed to be a tacit understanding that arts organisations, in receipt of what was an enormous amount more money – I cannot remember how much money to the arts went up under New Labour. It was a lot. In percentage terms, it was phenomenal. Actually, if you go back and look at the data for the returns from the arts as reported to DCMS, you'll see that they didn't always hit the targets. They particularly missed the targets when it came to social inclusion.

My question is really about what difference did collecting the data make? Clearly, despite all the threats from DCMS, it did not affect the continuation of funding to everybody. How did you feel about that? To what extent do you think that that data collection either drove performance or that actually the threats were merely rhetorical? Where do you sit on that?

Pauline Tambling

I was first aware of the issue of collecting statistics about diversity in 1983, when I was given the job of doing that statistical analysis for the Royal Opera House. I know that the Arts Council has been asking people to collect data about the ethnic profile of their staff and audiences since 1983-84. I would say it has probably had very little impact at all. It is completely right to have such a policy but it is about what you are prepared to do with that data when you have it.

This is probably a bit of a controversial point but, if you are a big organisation, is the Arts Council really going to cut your funding if you do not meet those targets? I would like to think that, when people were agonising about why they could not persuade the banks that they would do what they said, because they were in public ownership, they became 'National Portfolio Organisations of the Treasury'. The truth is that there are certain organisations that are too big to fail.

Then there are a lot of tiny organisations. I chair one called Shape, which is a disability arts organisation, and we worry excessively about those targets. We do know that the Arts Council would cut out funding if we did not meet those targets. There are a lot of organisations in the middle, between those two extremes. You have to have a genuine will to make change, by looking at the data and deciding that you are going to give people targets.

I would say this in defence of New Labour. In 1997, we had 'Mapping Creative Industries', and we had a much stronger sense of where the creative industries and the creative sector stand vis-à-vis other departments, which has been really positive. If you have targets but you do not quite meet them, it is better than having no targets and doing nothing at all. A huge amount was achieved.

Finally, I would say that the best is often the enemy of the good. We measure things as if there is general delivery across the equivalent of 25,000 schools. There is not that sort of funding. What there is a small amount of funding for a small amount of activity, and some of that is really

excellent. We know that from case studies, testimonies and the rest of it, but there is also a huge amount of 'good' work. There just is not enough money to go round.

Sara Selwood

Ann, how did all that seem from where you were sitting? You were producing the data, but the government was conceivably not using it – or were they?

Ann Bridgwood

It was not the government; it was DCMS. They were the people who we dealt with. To some extent, it depended on who you were dealing with. Creative Partnerships was a good example, where they wanted evidence of the impact before it had even started. I am going to choose my words carefully here: people have careers, and the success of those careers will depend on particular initiatives that they want to promote. Demonstrating that something you have managed has been a success can help your career. We all do this; I am not being holier than thou.

For example, with Creative Partnerships, which was a fantastic programme, we were asked to demonstrate things like it reducing crime and teenage pregnancies. You would have these discussions, but that is not actually what it is there to do. It is there to involve more young people in the arts. You also cannot prove that something has reduced something if it is not there. If X is not there, you cannot prove that Y is responsible for X not being there. It might be a third factor. It is like what Pauline was talking about earlier about the Mozart effect. It has an intervening factor, which is social class. Social class means that children who are good at music also tend to be good at maths. It is not that one causes the other. We need to have those kinds of sophisticated arguments. I think I am going off the subject. Bring me back to the subject.

Sara Selwood

It was just about how the data that you were using was actually used in the progress and development of policy. Creative Partnerships is a particularly interesting one, because – as I remember it – it was one of the initiatives that Chris Smith brought in, when he was made Secretary of State. It was a very top-down intervention with a load of money attached. It was really important in terms of New Labour's essentially instrumentalist agenda for the arts. In a sense, precisely the kind of things that you were saying it could not do, but was supposed to be doing from the point of view of DCMS at that time.

Ann Bridgwood

That is right, but when you do research you have different audiences. Clearly you have your paymasters. That is one of your audiences. In this case, it was the Treasury rather than DCMS setting the targets. Also, you have your colleagues in the Arts Council and the Regional Arts Boards, as they were when I first joined. Hopefully, they can use the material that you are collecting to help form policy. I do not know if it ever did or not.

Also, academics use your data, so there is a much wider constituency out there. Some very interesting work has been done by John Goldthorpe at the University of Oxford, for example, using the data from the Arts in England surveys. You have a big constituency basically, so you can make an impact in lots of different ways. I think Andy and I would agree that what we are concerned with is the integrity of the research process and making sure that the data is solid.

Sara Selwood

I was just going to come on to Andy. I do not want to pre-empt you, but I do not think you are going to be able to account for the impact of Creative Partnerships on diminution of crime, but I am interested in how the data that you collect now, in your capacity at the Home Office, may impact on policy. Does it have the same kind of slightly ambiguous relationship?

Andy Feist

It is an easier dialogue partly because of the very nature of the organisation and partly because so much of what you get drawn back to is the measurement of very different things. I still teach occasionally about this and I always smile to myself at the challenge that the poor old DCMS civil servants had. Everyone around the table would say, 'Okay, the first thing that we have to measure is excellence' and essentially the measure is: 'We cannot really do it this year' and they never do it. It is a much harder environment to work in. The objectives are much clearer in many other areas of public policy, even ones as badly measured as crime; but the measurement on crime is a separate debate and a very complicated one.

There is an almost utopian view that, when you create evidence, it is decent and robust and it then influences people and leads to better policy. It just does not. In all my professional career, it has happened in a much more fragmented way over an elapsed period time. To take a pertinent example, one of the really big changes that arose from the National Lottery – notwithstanding Christopher's pertinent comments about how it is being used at the moment – was that it really saw the Arts Council kicked into broadening its interest in the non-professional sphere. Robert and I both worked on a piece of work about defining the amateur arts in the late 80s. That then had some kind of useful material to talk about its role and how it related to the professional arts, bearing in mind that, with the exception of the music department at the time, most other departments were not really interested in amateur or non-professional.

Then there was a survey, which is one of my more contentious moments in my time at the Arts Council, when we ran a public opinion survey just in advance of the lottery about what people thought the lottery should be spent on. One of the slightly shocking findings was that people thought that participative arts were a jolly good idea; and that actually galvanized this very long process of trying to get the Arts Council to broaden its world view and to put, in a sense, the non-professional arts on an equal footing. Of course, as we know, Boosey and Hawkes shares went crazy, brass bands completely refurbished their instruments and a lot of other organisations benefited.

You have to see that as a 10-year process, at least, from decent evidence to informal debate to galvanizing the right kind of people; and then the opportunity arising that allows some of that evidence to be put in place. Most of the time, that does not happen even in really strong evidence-based organisations. It is a challenge. A lot of stuff falls on fallow ground and it will always do that because politics and the heartbeat of the organisation cannot often come in the way. That does not mean that we all give up and go home. The resonance of *A Hard Fact to Swallow* is still being felt today and, if it had not been done, we would still want to do it; but it is sometimes difficult. That is when you make evidence that points in the general direction in which the organisation is pointing. Occasionally you come up with stuff that they do not want to hear. I remember having a conversation with an art form director who said, 'Why have you published...?' There is a really interesting question at this point.

Sara Selwood

That was what I was getting at in terms of advocacy.

Andy Feist

There is a really interesting question. I think of the quite appropriate controls that I currently work under as a researcher in a government department. When I was working at the Arts Council, there was really none of that at all. The Council itself had no idea what I was doing most of the time and that was somewhat great but somewhat frustrating because I wanted an advocate at Council level and there really was nobody speaking with that kind of authority.

I remember that we put out something which was just an assimilation of existing evidence on employment in the arts. There is a slightly uncomfortable truth from a piece of research – and I do not know if the research was essentially that fantastic as there was no peer reviewed assessment of it – that people who do further degrees, i.e. beyond their initial degree, in arts areas, actually have a poorer financial trajectory than people who do a PhD in a non-arts subject. I was basically told-off for having agreed to that document going out. In a way, I understand that now because, perhaps if the organisational structure and the governance was better, there would have been a clearer view about what was put out; but that was not there at that time, which is interesting – perhaps that was something that developed later – and there is quite a lot of evidence out there which is also quite uncomfortable for us. The researcher is often having to play that difficult role where you are offering stuff up which is genuinely really helpful and sometimes you are saying ‘this is just a challenging message’ by which point your policy colleagues look at you and think, ‘You are just rubbish to me. Why are you here? I have a really clear job and you are just not helping.’ Sometimes those are quite important messages to at least have a debate about. It is not as if I am constantly trying to undermine a particular art form but sometimes you just say: ‘Is there a better way of tackling the problem or the issue that this evidence then allows you to think about?’.

Sara Selwood

As a researcher, if you're findings aren't a good news story, you have to deal not only with the art form departments but also with the press department and all sorts of other people. There is a point at which sometimes the bad news stories might be really quite important in terms of how people begin to change their programming or how they think about managing what they are managing.

Ann Bridgwood

In about 30 years of research, I have only ever worked on one project that had an immediate impact on policy which was when I was working at the Office for National Statistics. We did some work for the prison service on women prisoners and what happened to their children when they went into prison. Our team of interviewers interviewed every single woman in the prison service who agreed to be interviewed and, as a result of that, the policy was changed and, instead of there being four women's units in the country, there was something like 12. Clearly the mood was right to change that policy but it is the only example I can remember where a piece of research that I have worked on has had an immediate, and actually quite beneficial, impact on policy. Anybody here who is a fan of *The Archers* will know how important this is at the moment.

Sara Selwood

You took the very words out of my mouth.

Ann Bridgwood

Good and robust data which has been collected with integrity can often be used for lots of purposes for which it was not necessarily designed. For example, when we started the Arts in England survey, which later became the Taking Part survey, we did quite an extensive pilot which we wrote

up in *Cultural Trends* and we got the interviewers to debrief the people who took part in the pilot study afterwards and asked them about the experience of being interviewed, and we learnt a lot from that process.

One of the things that came back to us was that a lot of people did dance for fitness purposes; and, because that is not an art form, we had not included it in the questionnaire. People who did not do much arts – and I realise that is a very ugly phrase – often felt very awkward at responding to the interview because they felt they had nothing to say. We therefore decided to include it because lots of people do it and it makes the interview comfortable. You have to think of an interview as an interactive process: it has to work well for the people taking part.

About a year after we got our first set of data, DCMS contacted us and said, 'Don't suppose you've got any information, have you, on whether people dance to help keep fit?' That data then proved to be useful. I have to say that we had a lot of support from the Regional Arts Boards, as they were, and that Robert Hutchison in particular was very supportive of the work that we did in the research department at the Arts Council.

Pauline Tambling

Sara, you asked earlier about policy and it just strikes me that we were very lucky post-1997 with New Labour because they did actually provide £275 million in extra money, but the normal situation is that, when you say something is a good thing, you do not get government money for it. You normally get government money when there is a problem, whether that be fighting crime, tackling obesity or stopping people smoking, i.e. something that is actually dangerous to society. We can sometimes think about the 70 years of the Arts Council as incremental but, as was hinted at earlier, we have been through some very different regimes over the years and we are currently in a very clear austerity regime and therefore making the case that something is great is making the case for something that might seem luxurious to policy makers. We have to be careful not to assume that, if we prove something is good, someone will come along and fund it. In my experience, governments only tend to fund the problems. Finding lots of problems, i.e. that no-one is going to the arts, is probably more impactful in terms of getting government funding than trying to say that everything is wonderful.

Sara Selwood

I have never thought about that. That is a great point and a fitting prompt to opening up discussion from the floor. Does anyone have any questions? We have about five or six minutes left.

John Newbigin

I am Chair of Creative England. How much freedom of manoeuvre do you or people in the Arts Council now have to select the data that you are going to explore and how and why? I will give you a couple of specific instances. When Paul Collard was running Creative Partnerships, he was under a lot of pressure and certainly the Education Department hated it and wanted to close it down; and one of the issues was that it was only affecting a very small number of children in schools directly. I went around schools and practically every head teacher said 'I am not quite sure how but it is completely transforming the atmosphere in schools'. How do you begin to capture that?

In another instance, a guy I had been working with in Bristol had done a tracking study on some kids he started a dance company with 20 years ago, and the evidence of how many of them are now in steady jobs and in stable relationships with kids that are doing well at school and so forth compared with the control group of other kids from that school is phenomenal. It seems to me that

the Arts Council needs to be making the case more assertively to say that sometimes you have to measure these things over 15 or 20 years if you are going to get sufficient value out of it.

With Creative England, we have a project going with King's College at the moment where they are looking at the data we are collecting for some of the partnerships between big corporates and little companies. To my delight, one of the things that the researcher has said is, 'Why the hell are you collecting all this completely irrelevant data?' The answer is: because BIS tells us that that is what they want – but it is measuring all the wrong stuff. My question therefore is: to what extent do you think the Arts Council ought to be insisting that the kind of data that is being collected is wrong, the way in which it is being collected is wrong, and, if the government wants anything valuable out of it, it needs to be done this way not that way.

Pauline Tambling

It is great, first of all, that they want data; but the point is very interesting because we had a very finite number of schools involved even though we were supposed to be having an impact on a much wider number of schools. This led to diluting the impact by taking it wider than it was ever intended to go. When we first went to see James Purnell about Creative Partnerships, he wanted something that would improve young people's experience in schools without going through the DfE. That was the aim.

You have to be true to yourself. You have to find data that you want to collect which is going to be valuable for your project. Unfortunately, Ann was in a position where she was being given lots of targets which were being imposed by the whole PSA process and then there were a whole load of Policy Action Teams going at the same time which we had no control over at all.

Ann Bridgwood

As Pauline said, we had to collect certain kinds of data because there was a Public Sector Agreement target that had to be measured which covered eight art forms; but you can use that process for more than one purpose. When we designed the Arts in England surveys, we went through a long process of consultation. Helen Jermyn did a lot of work on this, working with our art form colleagues and also with our colleagues on the Regional Arts Boards, to make sure that we were collecting data which was going to be useful to the Arts Council as well as to DCMS. For example, I have brought along the final report in a series focusing on cultural diversity where we collected good, robust, solid data on participation in different art forms by people in different ethnic groups. This is one of the things that I am most proud of from my five years at the Arts Council because this is good, robust, solid data. There had been lots of work before but this was really good. You use the research for lots of different purposes. Remind me of your question again.

John Newbiggin

To what extent do you think it is the role of the Arts Council to be more proactive in saying what kind of data should be collected?

Ann Bridgwood

We should but the reality of the situation is that, if DCMS has given you the money, you are the piper to some extent and you have to play their tune. There is no getting away from that and you just do it with as much integrity as you possibly can. Interestingly, the first PSA target was a number target: to increase the number of people engaged in the arts by 500,000 over one or two years – I cannot remember which it was – and we were lucky in that the population went up. The percentage was more or less the same.

Sara Selwood

You did not tell them that, did you?

Ann Bridgwood

I spelt it all out in the technical appendix, whether they read it or not. Julia Crookenden, who was a good colleague at the Arts Council, and I had lots of discussions with the DCMS because they realised that doing it as a number was not a good idea and they would have to do it as a percentage. Julia and I had discussions beforehand of what we could get away with and then we would go in and negotiate. You have to be realistic. I am not against targets. In the health service, in terms of waiting times, they have made a huge difference particularly for people who have serious conditions; but your targets have to be sensible. Quite a lot of people in this room are old enough to remember when we used to laugh at the Soviet Union because of their five-year plans and their targets. We all know the story of the Soviet screw: you have to produce 20,000 tonnes worth of screws so what you do is you make a small number of very big ones. It does not serve any purpose other than to meet the target. One has to be pragmatic about these things. DCMS gave us the money: we had to provide the data. My concern, as Head of Research, was to do it with as much integrity as possible to the research process.

Andy Feist

I agree with that. The Arts Council is not leading on long-term evidence. DCMS probably also has a role and it will have social researchers within its staff but the Arts Council is the pre-eminent body and should be thinking about the longer term. The critical concern here, which I think is shared by anyone who is doing evidence in government, is that you are driven by absolutely short-term agendas. That is fine and that is part of the business of being in government but it is about being able to say that there is a long-term evidence base.

Certainly when I started, the word 'research' was used very liberally. It has been used liberally in most sectors most of the time but in the arts sector it was used extremely liberally to describe almost anything that anyone had done. A lot of artists use the 'R' term and what we have had across government is a move towards more professionalising and people being more critical about method and robustness and all those things. It is a tougher environment but it is better for public policy. There has been movement within the arts as well to that degree; but there is still a hangover which is that the things that we all love about the arts such as passion and commitment can start to mask sensible judgements about good evidence, good research and good research design.

Sara Selwood

It's more or less time to finish. Geoff, I know you had your hand up for a question; can you make it a very short one, or a question that will require a short answer?

Geoffrey Crossick

Yes, I can make it requiring a short answer; you can just say 'yes'. As Chair of the Crafts Council, I must draw people's attention to a pot that Grayson Perry made in 2007 which some of you will know: a wonderful pot which was called 'This pot will reduce crime by 29%'. If you have not seen it, look it up on the web. It is brilliant.

The issue I want to raise is about data. We are getting a picture of data coming across that is defined very much by what government expects to receive, as if we cannot teach the government to understand better things. In my Cultural Value Project report, which some people in this room will have read and know about, we argued very strongly that non-quantitative methods are necessary to

capture a lot of the differences that we think arts and culture make, and that those are not non-rigorous. They are often embedded in the arts and humanities and the branches of social science. They are rigorous under different kinds of methodology and they are capable of pinning down the experience, and the difference that experience makes, in much more effective ways. They are not intangible.

I get the sense that Arts Council England is still reluctant to accept the need for that kind of research. Research that has been recently funded is all good stuff but I know that there was good stuff that they were not funding which did not fit the particular model of evidence. Interestingly, DCMS are very keen to talk to me about the Cultural Value Project because they are interested in the notion of other kinds of evidence. I do not feel that the Arts Council is.

Sara Selwood

Can I take the Chair's prerogative and answer that one very quickly? More specifically, I would probably answer it with another question which is that it would seem to me that the fundamental issues are: whether institutions actually want to know the answers; what they would then do with them; and what such answers might then mean in terms of how those agencies are constructed and what they do. Frankly, it is like opening Pandora's box.

Geoffrey Crossick

I agree entirely: it takes us back to the answer which we do not want to hear. For example there is no evidence whatsoever, in the United States or in Britain, that engagement with the arts in school improves attainment on standardised tests; and yet people keep saying it does.

Sara Selwood

I am going to stop this now. I would like to thank the people who asked questions and I would especially like to thank the panellists who have been fantastically interesting and insightful. I am really grateful to you all for your time this afternoon. We will have a five-minute break before the keynote.

[Break]

Sara Selwood

It is with enormous pleasure that I introduce our next speaker for this afternoon: Dame Liz Forgan. She was the Chair before last of the Arts Council and she will, I think, have a very particular view on the political relations. Thank you.

Keynote Speech

Dame Liz Forgan

I. Preamble

Hello, everyone. I have heard bits of today. I had to rush out in the middle so I had to miss the bit in the middle, but I gather you have had a really fascinating and terrific day. It is a wonderful idea, I think, to have a look at the 70 years of the Arts Council and I look forward to seeing the whole thing later on.

II. Evolution of the Arts Council

1. Continuity and Change

The Arts Council has been talking about the same four things, I think, ever since it was invented: posh or pop; London or the rest; instrumental or aesthetic; and, rather more recently, public or private? Jennie Lee, Maynard Keynes, *Glory of the Garden*, Treasury targets, the crusade of philanthropy. There we are; that is it: a bit this way, then a bit that way; arguments that can never be finally resolved, and probably should not be. It has essentially been the same institution all that time, although its style has morphed a bit. Once upon a time, as you heard earlier, it was in St James's, then Piccadilly. The Chairman went about in a chauffeur-driven limousine. By the time I got there, we had gone downmarket to Westminster and the Chair did not even get a residents' parking ticket. Today, I am afraid, it is Bloomsbury and a shared office with the Horserace Betting Levy Board; that is cuts for you.

2. Innovation and Inclusion

During my four years as Chair of the Arts Council, we waffled on as much as anybody about these four eternal arguments, but, underneath, two big passions had come to dominate our thinking: the desire to support innovation, artistic courage and imaginative thinking about all aspects of the arts, their production, distribution and consumption; and secondly, the desire for inclusion and diversity, not as a piece of social engineering, but in firm belief that they lead to better art. Both these ideas, innovation and inclusion, were open to profound misrepresentation, and they got it. Innovation was taken by some critics to mean nothing more or less than the avant-garde, and there was a good bit of that, Sandy: *Mittwoch* in helicopters, speechless drama in odd places, Einstein on the beach more than once; can that be true? In fact, the purpose was just to insist on the use of the creative imagination, over and above just repeating something wonderful to the same enthusiastic audience. It meant innovation in audience engagement, funding and technology, emerging genres and the use of place and space, as well as in artistic expression. Some was weird and difficult, but lots was just new and refreshing.

Inclusion, let alone diversity, was a word guaranteed to excite ridicule in the *Daily Mail*, who thought it was political correctness gone mad – is there any other sort of political correctness? – and

some disapproval in the *Daily Telegraph*, who thought it was dumbing down. *The Guardian*, of course, kept its cultured head throughout as you would expect and the Labour Government did not help, with its fatuous insistence on targets for peculiar fractions of the population deemed to be especially worthy of seduction. Enormous amounts of time and money were spent, it seemed to me, by us and our clients filling in what I always feared were wholly fictitious figures for 16 to 35-years old in the Midlands or ethnic minorities in Wales. The numbers rarely moved very much and the whole exercise I just found dispiriting.

But behind it lay a truly inspiring and powerful, creative idea: that creativity lurks in all manner of places and that the desire to be transported by a particular arrangement of words, movement, colour and shape is a universal human longing which ought to be met. There were plenty of failed experiments; expensive art centres were plonked unwisely into places taken from indices of deprivation. Things that should properly have been called 'mucking about', rather than any kind of art, occasionally benefited from public subsidy, but look back 20 years and you will see what a transformation has gradually crept up on the British public in their attitude to culture: its unbounded meaning, its volatile character and its continuing challenge to the idea of 'good'.

I do not claim that the Arts Council was solely responsible of course, but it was damned important in a moment that was making Britain a less stratified, more open minded, more culturally confident nation than it ever had been. So innovation and inclusion: good watch words for a public sector patron of the arts, I think, and ones that I entirely relished.

3. Funding Allocation

I arrived at the Arts Council in the wake of a tremendous hoo-hah, following on the spending round which ended in a yelling and stamping war between the Labour Government and the arts. We had less than three years before the next one was due, so clearly no time to lose. Part of the problem, I thought, apart from the cuts themselves of course, had been that the Arts Council was just not very clear about what its own spending priorities were, let alone how you went about getting the money. Regularly funded organisations, as they were called in those days, were sitting fairly pretty, but if you were not already in that charmed circle, you tend to feel a bit resentful. That did not matter so much when there was lots of money, but when it became necessary to start slashing budgets, the absence of clear criteria became a serious grievance.

So we did two things. Alan Davey and Althea Efunshile led the most intensive months of consultation and debate the arts world had ever seen. The result was a document called *Achieving Great Art for Everyone*, a short clear statement of what we meant by excellence – at least, I think it was short and clear; I wrote the introduction, which attempted to be both those things – and how we intended to encourage excellence, through investing in the arts and artists.

The second thing we did was to make everyone apply in writing for the funds they wanted, explaining clearly how their plans contributed to ACE's objectives and what they would do for the money. This was revolutionary, if a total nightmare for all concerned. The organisation was buried in application forms. John Whittingdale, then chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, accused me of swamping the system in bureaucracy. The artist groaned and complained; the poor staff had a few weeks to process thousands of complex documents; but it worked, by which I mean that the artists benefited from the requirement to think really clearly about their aims and how they would spend the money. The Arts Council had the basis for a tough but creative dialogue with those asking for public funds. Accountability was genuinely possible, and no one could say the process was arbitrary or incomprehensible; well, they could, but they should not have.

The result? Equally, or if not more, horrendous cuts in the next spending review, but minimal shouting and stamping, except for poets, who never really took to the system, I am afraid. That

pleased me, not because the politicians had got away without a slapping, but because it allowed the world to see that artists, although temperamental and often badly behaved when you stop them doing art, are in fact extremely smart, well organised and reasonable people who can be exemplary custodians of public investment.

4. Philanthropic Income

The big change that arrived with the Tory Government, and Jeremy Hunt as Secretary of State, was his declared determination to increase the philanthropic or, as I call it, private proportion of the Arts Council's income – nothing wrong with that. I have always been a passionate supporter of the British system of funding that divided, very roughly, equally between public funding, private donation and box office – very healthy and balanced: no one piper to call the tune; any two could cover if one went wobbly. But it soon became clear that Jeremy was not just bent on a marginal improvement in the private contribution to the arts; he was after a major shift involving steep and continuing cuts to the public contribution. What is more, his plan fitted in to a much wider strategic purpose, on which the new Government was clearly determined: a redefinition of the borders of the public realm and what was the rightful business of the state alongside individuals.

I wish I could say that Jeremy and I had a principled row on the subject and that that is why he declined to review my tenure after my first four years as Chair. In fact, we never got that far because I had not really then twigged the full scale of the Government's plan. Had I done so, I would have had to resign anyway, as I believe with every fibre of my being that a civilised nation should invest in its culture from its own resources, thus demonstrating its understanding of the value of the arts to the well-being and prosperity of its citizens. I am terrifically keen on private investment and deeply admiring of and grateful to the amazing funders, in both this country and the United States, who have poured their wealth into supporting our culture, for the support of artists and for the benefit of their fellow citizens. But I do not want opera houses run by people who can cough up, in terms of a recent ad from the Lincoln Centre, a minimum contribution of \$25,000, and I do not want the range of experimental performance limited to the personal whims of donors, however cultured. I want the brilliant British system with plural funding and an Arts Council at arm's length from everyone: politicians and wealthy backers alike.

That is a hard one to police, but it is impossible if you have to rely entirely on private sponsors. I remember Gerry Robinson saying, in his leaving speech after stepping down as Arts Council Chair, that he had gone in, determined to bring his private sector retailing skills to bear on the airy fairy world of the arts and luvvy-dom, only to discover arts organisations producing more extraordinary output from more minute resources than he could possibly have imagined.

III. Conclusion

Let me end with a rubric that you all know by heart, but it is none the less true for that. The arts in Britain are one of the glories of the nation. They reach higher, deeper and further than ever they have done. There is a bottomless wealth of talent. Never let anyone tell you that the pool of talent is limited; it is not. All it needs is opportunity and resources. The arts are pretty efficiently run. The creative industries are splendid but we should not have to hide behind them to justify creative art. The Arts Council may drive people mad, but it has been a patron, an impresario, an encourager and a champion to artists who have benefited enormously from its work. The only black cloud on the horizon now is the disappearance of arts education from the state system, thus diminishing the pool of talent, ensuring that brilliantly trained Etonians will dominate the BAFTAs forever and destroying the audiences of the future, but that is another story for another time. Thank you.

Sara Selwood

Since we are in good time, it would be great if anybody had any questions that they would like to put to Liz.

Participant

Great speech. Why does it have to be another story for another time?

Dame Liz Forgan

Actually, I got through it a bit quicker than I thought I would. I mean, I am in despair. I am chair of the National Youth Orchestra, and I see us still producing the most incredible musicians, but generations of kids who come out of school, never having heard a note of Mozart. How do you expect them ever to go to a concert?

Participant

While I have you, it is a question I have always wanted to ask: what proportion of the members of the National Youth Orchestra are attending state schools, please?

Dame Liz Forgan

Well, the answer to that is a very long answer, which I love, so I am going to tell it you. First of all, on paper, it is something like 70% coming from the private sector. What you should know is that almost all those kids are on scholarships. However, we audition every year for the NYO. To do that, you have to be grade 8 with distinction. About 700 and something kids audition; 162 get in to the orchestra. The proportion of kids from state schools in the 700 is much, much bigger than the proportion who actually get in to the orchestra. Why? Because they have better instruments, they have been taught properly and they have had experience of ensemble playing.

The cure is not a cure for the nation; it is addressing the problem. This really is long, so just stop me if you are getting bored. Somebody died and left us £2 million, so we decided to do something important with it. We thought: we cannot address the whole disappearance of music from schools, but we can look at that band of really talented kids who are in the state system and not getting proper opportunities, so we founded an Inspire orchestra. We used the NYO, its member, its tutors, its alumni, its peer-education tradition to teach their contemporaries. The Hubs contribute their best people, and they come to residences and workshops, and we have another orchestra, whose job it is to go and play classical music in schools, because we think that maybe the only way to get teenagers to listen to classical music is for other teenagers to go and play it to them. So far, it has been running for just over a year; it is a wild success. If we had the money, we would do four or five orchestras around the country, but I hope we will be able to grow it.

John Newbiggin[?]

If you did not have a principled row with Jeremy Hunt, what did you have?

Dame Liz Forgan

Oh well, I can be very indiscreet. He called me in one day; I didn't meet him very often. I thought he was rather good. I thought his obsession with private funding was nutty, but, you know, I thought my job is to make his job easier, and I understand his main priorities and I will deliver them. And one day he said, 'Can I come and see you?' 'Yes'. He was sitting on the sofa looking very, very grave and he said, 'I have something very serious to tell you'. I thought, good heavens, he is going to tell me he has cancer. Then he said, 'I am not renewing your contract as Chair of the

Arts Council.' So I said, 'Why not?' He sort of burred about digits and change, and I said, 'But, Jeremy, everyone will say it is political. Are you sure you want to do this?' He said, 'No, no, no.' I said, 'Well, you'll have to think of a better reason than you have just given me.' So off he went. Secretaries of State should have power to choose the people they want to chair arts organisations, I guess. Anyway I had a lovely four years; I would have loved to have another lovely four years, but there we are.

Robert Hutchison

I just wanted to ask you about the relation between the BBC and the Arts Council, because it seems to me that, on the whole, the news about the future of the BBC is less bad than we might fear, but I have always thought, having worked for both of them, that they have enormous complementary strengths and the question really is: do you see new and exciting ways in which they might play to each other's strengths?

Dame Liz Forgan

Well, as long as I can remember, all of us, people like us, have been talking about the relationship between the BBC and the great cultural institutions of the country and how one of the things the BBC does ought to be to make the publicly funded cultural institutions available to everyone in the country. Now and again, it happens. Nobody's ever managed to make it systematic and a commitment by the BBC. The relationship with the Arts Council is always just very slightly awkward, because of the orchestras. I kept trying to make the BBC sit down with me and think strategically about the orchestras, because the BBC's orchestras and other orchestras do not take any notice of each other. The BBC is always absolutely terrified, for reasons I can well understand, that any such conversation would pose a threat to their orchestras, and so they basically just turn their back and say, 'We're not going to discuss it', which think is a pity. With a good will, and that is asking a lot, I suppose, in this context, you could sit down and make a better, more strategic arrangement of all the great orchestras we have, so that they cover the country better than they do.

Sandy Nairne

Raymond Williams was not a Council member of the Arts Council for very long, but he was there long enough to make the famous remark that what's known as the arms-length principle, in his term, he referred to as the wrist's length principle. I wonder whether you can say a bit more about the wrist length. You just referred to the Secretary of State's, in effect, power not to continue your position as Chair, although the system of appointment obviously has an independent panel, independently viewed, to try and get the best person.

Dame Liz Forgan

Not so much these days.

Sandy Nairne

Well, I was going to say, in the changing scenario of the wrist length or half-arm length, how do you see it in terms of these changes?

Dame Liz Forgan

The history of it is a continual history of political fingers creeping closer and sensible tough Chairs whacking the hairbrush down and saying, 'That is far enough'. I thought of it this morning, oddly enough, with reference to the man who runs whatever the French tennis court is called. There is a championship going on in France and they do not have a roof and it is pouring with rain, so

everything is chaotic. 'Why haven't we got a roof?' said somebody to the man who runs it, to which he replied, 'Ask the President of the Republic' – not for nothing, you know. I do not want a system like that.

I understand why politicians want to interfere in arts. I mean, sometimes it is quite vulgar. Sometimes they just come and say, 'My constituency needs a theatre' and so that is easy. Sometimes it is more subtle than that, and that gets more difficult. Jeremy Hunt started out being what I thought a Secretary of State ought to be. What I thought a Secretary of State ought to do is summon the Chair and say, 'Here are my four big priorities. Can you deliver those?' 'Yes'. 'Very well. Off you go; here's the money; I trust you'; not, 'Please will you send your staff once a week to meet mine and be told in absolute detail what I am expecting of them', which is what Jeremy Hunt did.

But they are politicians, miserably punished by the electorate and by the media for every penny they raise in taxation. There is the lottery, pouring streams of gold on the arts without anybody having to beg for it practically. I do not blame them for wanting to get involved, but I do think it is up to the arts to defend that rampart. You must not expect politicians not to want to run the arts. It is us who have to keep them at arm's length, for good reasons. They are hopeless at running the arts; they really are bad at it. Now, the Arts Council has not always been perfect, but basically the place on which its feet are standing is a better place than that where politicians start from. I think it is a hugely important principle. I tried to write a document for Ed Vaizey on this subject, because I was worried about it getting eroded. Silly me. Civil servants buried it many, many feet before it ever got near anybody.

Robert Hewison

The other great phrase of Raymond Williams's – I think it is a good question to end on, in a sense – is the phrase he used about how decisions emerged in the Arts Council in the early 60s and so on, and he described it as a mellow dusk. Do you think, in the 21st century within the Arts Council, that mellow dusk has been at all dissipated?

Dame Liz Forgan

Well, I am just wondering whether mellow dust is what I really think is the best possible service we could render to art. Maybe I misunderstood. If what he meant was: just give them the money, bugger off and let the artists get on with it, that is one way of doing it. I am in favour of a slightly more strategic way of doing it, therefore slightly more directive, and I do not think that we would have seen the opening up of the arts, the idea of art, to a broader range of what constitutes art – I do not think that would have happened spontaneously – without the Arts Council and, indeed, the Heritage Lottery fund, both armed with huge bags of money, saying, 'Here's a big bag of money for you, but if you're going to have it, you have to buy this proposition.' That is a very persuasive thing.

I think that it is quite a tempting thing to think we should just leave the artists to get on with it, put the money in the middle of the table and say, 'Get on with it'. I think it would probably be impossible to sustain politically. I think you have a have a story for the government as to what you are up to. Do you think it has got too close, too interventionist? I do not know. Art is looking in pretty good nick to me. I think it looks pretty plural, pretty unchecked. I do not feel as if I am in a state-regulated art sector myself, at the moment, but what was it – 'mellow dust'?

Robert Hewison

Dusk.

Dame Liz Forgan

Oh, dusk. I thought you meant 'dust'; that is a whole different story. No, bright, earnest, wonderful dawn, I would say.

Sara Selwood

Thank you so much. I am really grateful to you. Before we all stop and have a drink, I wanted to thank everybody for coming. It has been a really interesting afternoon as far as I can see, and I hope it has been for you as well. I am especially grateful to Liz, for an enormously elegant and incisive view into the Arts Council. Thank you so much for that. I am really grateful to the panellists and to the chairs, particularly when they had to time-travel back to when they were last in the Arts Council. It was illuminating, very illuminating, I thought. I am very grateful, as ever, to Routledge and Taylor & Francis for all the work they do on *Cultural Trends*, but particularly in terms of supporting this conference today, and I am especially grateful to King's for hosting this; it is very generous of you. At King's I would really like to thank both Sophie Cornell and James Doeser for putting this conference together with just great aplomb. I am really grateful for all the work you have put into it. Thank you everybody, and please have a drink.

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