

response

Ukie response to Arts Council England Sector Dialogue on Funding 2018 and Beyond Consultation

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ukie
THE ASSOCIATION FOR UK INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT

Extract of the Questions we can Answer:

How effectively does the Arts Council make grant funding decisions?

Arts Council England has in the last few years increasingly recognised the cultural and artistic contribution that games and interactive entertainment make to the UK. Recent examples have included funding for the highly successful Now Play This exhibition at Somerset House as part of the London Games Festival and support for the National Video Games Arcade in Nottingham. This support and acknowledgment of the cultural influence of games is very much welcomed.

However, we believe that games provide many more opportunities for the Arts Council to satisfy their strategic aims of making excellent art accessible to everyone and particularly in engaging young people.

We believe that a coordinated and transparent strategy for games, interactive entertainment and digital art, created in collaboration with the games industry and other digital creators, would enable the Arts Council to make more funding available and for it to be better allocated to sustainable projects.

A coordinated games, interactive entertainment and digital art strategy and the unlocking of more funding to the games industry and the talent actively working in the sector, would lead to the Arts Council more effectively reach its goal of championing enriching artistic and cultural experiences. Additionally, considering that the games industry is geographically diverse – spread over 12 key clusters across the UK - and requires a skill set that is vital to the production of digital creative and cultural content, it presents an opportunity for the Arts Council to represent the diverse technology, skills, ideas, and platforms being used by creative businesses around the country to tell stories and produce innovative content today and in the future.

In November 2015, Ukie's *Blueprint for Growth* for the new Parliament set out a series of recommendations for the decision makers in UK Parliament. The report identified a number of market failures the games sector faces which threaten the global competitiveness and standing of the UK games industry, as well as its potential to spill over and transfer knowledge, skills and innovation to other creative digital sectors. A key recommendation of this was for UK funding to fully and equitably recognise the contribution of games, ensuring effective support alongside other creative industries.

Leadership by the Arts Council in this area would be an important first step in the wider extension of public funding to the games sector. An effective strategy will amplify the effects of public funding not just from the Arts Council, but other public funders as well.

The role of any public intervention should be to support the creation of innovative content, business resilience and sustainability. Evidence shows that lack of investment and engagement from public institutions such as the BBC and Arts Council handicaps the ability for micro studios to be able to build their portfolios effectively which in turn attracts further

investment or opportunities to create resilience and sustainability, and ultimately become globally competitive.

How well does the Arts Council support the development of the arts?

How effectively does the Arts Council advocate for the value of the arts and culture to the public and other stakeholders?

HOW THE ARTS COUNCIL ADVOCATES FOR THE ARTS AND CULTURE & HOW IT INFLUENCES PUBLIC ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS= -

The Arts Council is recognised as a champion of arts and culture, promoting the benefits that they bring to the UK economically, socially, and educationally. Having games and interactive entertainment more explicitly championed by the Arts Council would not only help convey this message to a wider audience (particularly young people) but also benefit those individuals and businesses making cutting edge games and interactive entertainment.

Today games are part of a broader national and international cultural conversation. Indeed, some games have gone beyond being cultural artefacts, becoming platforms and communities where new cultural content is created. Games can enrich the arts, teach the arts, and can be considered works of art in their own right. The UK is already falling behind compared to US, Canada, and Scandinavia in its support for such games as part of the cultural conversation.

In recent years ‘the moving image’ has increasingly meant a focus on the UK’s burgeoning games sector, and its interaction with other screen industries. This mirrors a trend across the screen industries, including film, TV and games, whereby talent – film makers, storytellers and actors - are increasingly seeing opportunities to engage and even to experiment in cross-media projects.

For example, *Minecraft* – representing something of a blank canvas on which to frame other creations – has proven particularly adept in this role. Recently, this has included projects to help children explore different cultures – through the recreation in the software of key religious sites – and of the creation and meaning of artworks, though the Tate gallery’s *Tate Worlds* project.

The utilisation of games technology as a medium within the traditional artistic community is an emerging trend, though one that is limited by funding difficulties. Recent examples of this include the work of Dimitry Morozov, a Russian artist who built a small robot using the Arduino platform – this measured pollution on the streets of Moscow, translating these data into artworks.¹ In the UK, Extant have also leveraged such physical game technologies, utilising haptic devices to guide audience members through an immersive installation based on the satirical novel *Flatland*, in total darkness.²

¹ ‘A Wacky Device that turns Polluted Air into Glitch Art’ by Stinson, L., in *Wired* (23rd July, 2014), accessed at: <http://www.wired.com/2014/07/a-clever-device-that-turns-polluted-air-into-art/>

² <http://artsdigitalrnd.org.uk/projects/extant/>

Games themselves can also reflect other cultural works, a factor which can be seen in the UK-made *Monument Valley*. An optical-illusion based puzzle game, the visual style of the game has been compared to the work of M.C. Escher, as well as being highly praised for its own artistic worth. The success of the game was reflected back into popular culture when a specially-adapted version of the game was featured as a plot point in the US series *House of Cards*. This indicates the way in which games can both reflect broader artistic traditions, and can themselves then be used in other creative projects.

Furthermore, it is also unclear the extent to which these products are recognised as being British in many markets. There is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that many people struggle to differentiate between British and non-British products, and as we note this issue can be particularly acute for the games industry: the tools through which the content is created and played provide far greater flexibility in setting, and room for exploration in themes and messages. As a result, whilst we can show that the games sector – akin to other creative industries in the UK – generates cultural value both domestically and internationally, measuring the exact degree of this and comparing one against another are not possible using current data and techniques.

From a cultural standpoint, there are clear grounds for intervening in the games sector. As it presently stands, games developers and those from other artistic sectors looking to utilise games technologies for cultural products have a limited range of options when applying for funding.

How good is the Arts Council at delivering its responsibilities for helping to bring objects and collections of special interest into public ownership, protect them and share them for the long-term public benefit?

The Arts Council should extend its remit to the archiving of games and interactive entertainment. Support for the archiving of games and especially the archiving of the creative process of developing them would preserve their record of cultural contribution and act as a resource for future talent looking for inspiration and ideas.

Such an approach would see games and equipment preserved, recognising the need to maintain technologies of both forms. Ensuring access to Britain's games heritage in the future will require modest investment now to preserve obsolete technologies, but this will have significant payoffs in the future as the remainder of the world increasingly recognises the cultural value of the industry.

This could be linked into the BBC's proposed Ideas Service – an online platform designed to link materials from national institutions including galleries, museums, and universities. This would have the value of ensuring access to this element of the UK's cultural history is broadly available to the public.

Increasing diversity and access to arts and culture across the country

Benefiting communities across the country:

Recent Ukie/Nesta research has identified 12 established games clusters across the UK, with another 6 emerging areas. Ukie would be keen to explore how funding could be used to support innovation in these areas. This work is being migrated to an online platform so that patterns of local growth and connections between creative and innovative communities can be tracked. We hope this can be used, once fully developed, by creative and arts sectors, as well as Local Enterprise Partnerships to identify areas of cultural growth and clustering effects.

We recognise that amongst some key digital clusters, there is a distinct lack of coordination and leadership to LEPs in creating a joined up strategy for creative, technology based businesses, such as games. There is also a clear lack of understanding of why technology and innovation cannot be separate from creativity. The games industry, especially the independent sector, can provide a blueprint for these local place-based creative strategies because they are the crucible of arts, technology and innovation.

Ensuring opportunities of arts and culture are available to everyone regardless of background:

Diversity is a major challenge for the creative industries and further intervention is welcomed to address this.

Games are inclusive, and are valuable ways in which people can access worlds, ideas and people in ways. Organisations such as SpecialEffect work directly with young people with mobility problems to enable them to participate in social activity and play with their friends and to gain or even have control over something, often for the very first time. The UK is leading the way in VR and AR development, but the investment for VR and AR is yet again going to the US.

There are some unique and innovative experiences that the UK could be leading on with these technologies that could utterly transform how people participate in education, culture, the workplace. The UK needs to be brave with this opportunity and fund the development of these kinds of VR and AR applications.

Play should be inclusive, and can open doors for those who feel excluded from daily life. Games can help young and older people tackle and think about serious issues which they might not have the tool kit to think or talk about in their ordinary everyday contexts. There are countless studies of the level social playing field games (especially games with a purpose) can give people, as well as the confidence and cognitive skills one can gain when playing particular games.

These are not “edu-tainment” games or “serious games” – they are games made by people who just want to make something more meaningful. Diversity is the engine of creativity and innovation. Some of the most innovative experiences in games of the future will come from those who have experienced the world in an entirely different way to the majority. Games

are a unique language and are the most accessible and compelling canvases through which these experiences can be shared and these stories be told.