92-019 DISCUSSION DOCUMENT arts & media N - S RAT

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INTRODUCTION

Within this folder is a discussion document produced as part of the process of putting together a national strategy for the arts and media. It does not form part of the strategy. Neither does it express any sort of 'official' view. It was written in order to focus discussion and stimulate ideas.

WHY?

The arts and media in Britain are in renaissance. Over the last decade, they have shown a confidence and diversity never seen before. In quality of work and audience demand, the arts and media have never looked healthier or more central to people's lives. More than ever before, the arts are a source of civic pride as well as personal enrichment. Ż

The arts and media in Britain are in crisis. Scarcely a day goes by without press stories af theatres facing clasure, grants being cut ar audiences declining; of a lack of good innovative work in all art farms; af the absence of a sense of directian, purpose and adventure.

These views may not be incompatible, and each has some truth. What is beyond doubt is that ideas of what is art have expanded; that demand has rightly grown for access to the arts, film and broadcasting to be the right of all rather than the privilege of the few; and that resources, both public and private, have struggled to keep up. Growth in the variety of the arts contains its own problems. So how can the stategic injection of public money, and the growth of partnership with the private sector, encourage new developments? What should the priorities be? How do we make sure that the opportunity to enjoy the arts is spread ever more widely throughout society?

This is where the national arts and media strategy comes in. In 1990, the Minister for the Arts asked the arts and media funding bodies (the Arts Council of Great Britain, the British Film Institute, the Crafts Council and the Regional Arts Associations/ Regional Arts Boards) to prepare a national strategy. One of its purposes is to provide the basic framework for their work. The Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils are conducting parallel exercises; and the local authorities and museums funding bodies are also associated with the strategy.

A further purpose is to consider whether the public money spent on the arts and media has been used to best effect, and how those responsible can do better in the future. It is important that all those with experience of and a passion for the arts and media provide support, assistance and advice to get the strategy right. Most important, it must be seen as a strategy for the arts and media, not for the bureaucrats.

HOW?

The paper in this folder is part of this process. It is one of a series of discussion documents; each is available free on request. Responses to them will be collated by the National Arts and Media Strategy Unit. Arising from this, a draft of the strategy will be prepared by Spring 1992. This too will be available for comment. The final version of the national arts and media strategy will be completed by Summer 1992. The hope is that the resulting document will be slim, challenging and readable - and that it will provide a mission statement for the arts and media over the next decade, as well as setting out clear goals and targets.

The national arts and media strategy will not write a single novel, put on a single play or make a single film. What it can help bring about, if the funding bodies receive the help of those who care about the arts and media, is the maximum opportunity for such creativity to flourish and for it to enrich the lives of ever more people. Your contribution to this process will be valuable and valued. Please send your views on this discussion document to the address below, to arrive by 30 November 1991.

For further information on the national arts and media strategy, please contact:

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ARTS ACCESS OVERVIEW

ACGB Arts Access Unit, with Naseem Khan & Chris Mullard

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De uitleentermijn is verstreken op:

3 NOV. 1994		
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NATIONAL ARTS AND MEDIA STRATEGY

ARTS ACCESS OVERVIEW

This paper has been written in order to generate discussion and debate and to provide a context for other papers dealing with arts access issues. It is not a chapter of the national arts and media strategy or a definitive statement. The views it expresses are those of its authors.

'Arts access' is shorthand for the complex range of issues surrounding people's ability to participate in arts and media activities not simply regardless of ethnic background, gender or disability, but also, where appropriate, in such a way that these factors may be fully expressed. We should like to hear what you believe may be the key issues in this very broad area over the next few years. With the paper as background, we should welcome views on all or any of the following questions, as well as on any other issue within this subject area on which you wish to comment.

(Documents on related topics are: - Cultural Equity

- Arts in institutions - Women in the arts

- Disability arts
- Access to the arts.)

The paper

1. Does the paper raise and deal adequately with the key issues? If not, where and how could it do better?

Recent developments

- 2. What have been the most exciting developments in the area of arts access over the past five years, in Great Britain or elsewhere? What may be possible exciting areas for development over the next five?
- 3. Has access to the arts and media widened or narrowed over the past five years? Where, how, why and with what effect?

Public funding

4. Is the current public funding of arts and media (including funding by the local authorities) spent to best effect in terms of access? If not, how could it be improved?

- 5. If there were a significant increase (say, 30% in real terms) in public funding of the arts what should be the priority areas for these additional resources so as to make access more of a reality than it is at present?
- 6. A common complaint is that the public funding bodies focus resources too much on arts organisations and do not concern themselves enough with artists as such. Do you agree with this view, and what would it mean in practice, in terms of access, if this emphasis were shifted?
- 7. Is arts funding too concerned with outdated notions of high versus popular art? Is such an 'either/or' formulation necessary or helpful? How can we avoid it?

Arts and society

- 8. Do the published and broadcast media further the general aim of broad public access? How would you like to see them develop over the next ten years in this respect? What might be the role of the funding system in this?
- 9. What are likely to be the key effects on access to the arts in this country of international developments within Europe and elsewhere?
- 10. Is enjoyment of, or participation in, the funded arts related to levels of education and social class? If so, why and how might the adverse effects of this be countered?
- 11. How do you see the relationship between the arts and media and the education sector (including schools, further and higher education, and informal education)? How would you like to see this relationship develop over the next ten years so as to further the cause of maximising enjoyment, understanding and participation?

Management, training and resources

- 12. What are the major needs in terms of physical infrastructure (such as buildings and equipment) if access to the arts is to achieve its full potential? How are these needs likely to change over the next ten years?
- 13. What will be the major issues in the areas of training and management in this area over the next ten years?

NATIONAL ARTS AND MEDIA STRATEGY UNIT AUGUST 1991

NATIONAL ARTS AND MEDIA STRATEGY

DISCUSSION DOCUMENT: ARTS ACCESS - AN OVERVIEW

ARTS COUNCIL ARTS ACCESS UNIT, WITH NASEEM KHAN AND PROFESSOR CHRIS MULLARD

I Introduction & working method

1.1 The Access Unit of the Arts Council represents the latest stage in a series of internal developments that have attempted to address the situation of disenfranchised arts. The Unit's origins lie firstly in the Community Arts section, whose brief covered cultural diversity. This particular strand separated itself, becoming the Ethnic Monitoring Unit but has more recently merged with the Disability Unit. The third major strand in this newly formed Access Unit concerns women and the arts.

1.2 However, it must be said at the outset, that the Access Unit does not define its work solely in terms of those three specific areas. Its essential function is to point out and potentially facilitate all groups of people that, for various historical and philosophical reasons, have failed to be accorded reflection in arts policy and practice.

1.3 The immediate brief that the Unit has been asked to consider concerns a vision for the next 5-10 years of its work and the fields it serves. In order to respond, two operations have been set in motion. Firstly, the Unit's constituent parts - currently Cultural Diversity, Women in Arts and Disability Arts - have set up their own meetings with their committees and constituencies outside. These have resulted in specialist papers that deal with these individual areas of concern.

1.4 Secondly, members of the Access Unit met for a day's discussion aimed at providing a paper that would constitute an overview. This, it was felt, should address the historical roots of inequity, examine the implications it has for wider cultural developments and propose broad strategies for the future. Proceedings were facilitated by Professor Chris Mullard, and reported by Naseem Khan.

II Cultural context

- 2.1 The gradual development of a professional arts world rather than a world in which the arts concerned everyone has led to the tacit adoption of definitions of what precisely constitute the arts. These involve certain assumptions and value-judgments: that only those professionally trained could produce something worth hearing or seeing; that amateur non-profit-making arts are somehow inferior; that the arts are a product of single individuals; that there is a distinction between 'social' or therapeutic arts and 'proper' arts.
- 2.2 The result of these is a system of funding that concentrates its resources and favours on a band of arts that the Access Unit believes to be non-representational, culturally selective, socially divisive and potentially arid. The perspective of the Access Unit and the very many with which it works is different.
- 2.3 The arts in these latter areas have a different function. They are not spectator sports but essential, valued tools of expression. They deal with the essentials of life with the experience of gender, ethnicity, of ageing or its counterpart, disregarded youth, of imprisonment or isolation springing from other reasons. They are passionate weapons in the fight for self-definition, often against great odds, in a society that offers them either a destructive image of themselves or invisibility. They are a means of finding a language to explore existence; to mirror one's experience back to oneself, one's peers and anyone else who cares to listen.
- 2.4 It was this impulse that originally powered all the arts. It is not sectional, but a general sign of humanity. The mistake that is now made is to confuse the object created by that impulse with the impulse itself. Hence we will fund the 900th production of The Messiah but not the innate creativity in the young that could one day create future and very different Messiahs (or, at the least, works that have a vitality and message for their day). Because we are product-orientated, we focus on the product and not the potential.
- 2.5 As a result, our approved arts have become more and more rarefied and divorced from the ordinary facts of life. The physical tests, aimed at predicting bone-growth, carried out on children who want to become ballet dancers means that many of them will be denied the chance to dance. (Indeed, it is questionable whether all our greatest ballet dancers of the past would have ever been able, in current conditions, to train at all). Yet dance work by the physically diverse -

Amici, for instance - can stirringly communicate the values at the heart of dance.

The idea of the perfect body (or the perfect age or colour) is so limiting as to be absurd. There are many groups and individuals who do not fit the formula who nonetheless demonstrate the power of dance. The dancers in Peter Badejo's company or in Adzido, for example, are not all young or all slim. But they are all eloquent. The arts work of Carousel (conducted with people with learning difficulties) has produced events that are witty, memorable and joyful.

The unreal divide that has grown up between amateur and professional is a polarity that should be abandoned. At the same time, it should never be forgotten that the professional world itself militates against those from what it accounts marginal cultures. Black performers have long been aware of a ceiling on their careers, having - as actors - to fight for representation that goes beyond token presence and - as dancers - to gain significant access at all to Western ballet.

Class also plays its part. Middle-class children have far greater access, for instance, to ballet classes than working class ones, as well as parents prepared to fetch, carry and facilitate. And a recent report for the Department of Employment into the black music industry revealingly 'unpacked' the various contacts that an upper-class white music promoter naturally had, all of which helped to assure his success.

2.9 The Arts Council itself is by no means guiltless of discrimination. It still, for instance, experiences severe difficulties in funding away from the apparent mainstream. A brief look will serve to confirm the narrowness of funding practice. Despite various initiatives, the representation of cultural diversity is fragile. (Where, for all the upsurge in South Asian dance, are the revenue clients in that dance form? Where are professional companies of artists with disabilities working from a revenue-assured base?) People are disenfranchised on the basis of age, background, health, race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, geographical location.

2.10Arts produced by white university-educated men form the bulk of artistic product and are said to be the expression of the whole of society.

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- 2.11 Nor is the situation in administration of the arts any better. Women have a minimal place in running bodies and institutions, being more represented at levels that carry lower budgets and hence less power. People with disabilities are rarely to be seen in the corridors of cultural power.
- 2.12 There are huge implications for the arts affecting structures, criteria, standards, procedures of assessment, and delivery systems - in including the currently excluded and their perspectives in programming. They will have to be addressed. The system at present has evolved in order to respond to and express a minority perspective. If it is to take in the majority, change must occur.

III Immediate context

- 3.1 The Arts Council's involvement with the three areas that form the Unit's current focus is quite recent. In 1974, it commissioned the research and production of 'The Arts Britain Ignores' which resulted in 1976 in the first look at culturally diverse arts. It called for significant increase of resources, an Arts Council steering group that would monitor policy and practice and a network of black regional centres, among other recommendations. It is questionable how far these have been achieved.
- 3.2 However, the push for equity continued with the major report, 'Towards Cultural Diversity' in 1989. This called for the Arts Council to establish a fund in order to allow building-based black and Asian work to develop, training schemes, monitoring procedures and an active advocacy role for itself.
- 3.3 The arts and disability have had a shorter official history, being first brought to the centre of public attention in report form only in 1983. At that point, the Attenborough Report called for across-the-board action to allow people with disabilities the freedom to participate and create. This led to the adoption of a Code of Practice in Arts and Disability by the Arts Council, and its later acceptance by the Scottish Arts Council, Welsh Arts Council and Arts Council of Northern Ireland. All clients of these bodies, including regional arts associations, received the Code of Practice.
- 3.4 The role of women in the arts has been accorded even scantier attention. Significant activity around the issues took place in the field itself - as is the case with disability and cultural diversity. Specific

work, such as the study of women in theatre, has demonstrated continuing inequality. But although the larger-scale Women in Arts research project is now under way at the Arts Council, no major study has as yet pulled the arguments into a single focus.

3.5 While inroads have been made, to varying degrees, into the areas above, others have failed either to be identified or developed. Work on arts in prisons, for example, began energetically but has not been absorbed into a coherent programme. Attention has been paid inconsistently, if at all, to many other unreflected areas - arts and the elderly, the needs of parents and children (or family arts), rural arts, youth arts.

- 3.6 Great concern over the future also informs the views of this paper. We note equal opportunities are being pushed off agendas nationally. Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1986 has put an effective clamp on the freedom of gay cultural development. The pressure of the community charge has led to the closing of women's units and race awareness sections across the country.
- 3.7 The Access Unit believes its role within the Arts Council is crucial at such a time: further, that the Arts Council itself should be giving a clear lead, since radical debate is becoming increasingly at risk.

IV Substantive change

- 4.1 The aim of the Access Unit is equity of cultural provision. In order to achieve that (or address it), the Arts Council, regional arts boards and related bodies need to tackle the barriers to such a state.
- 4.2 Briefly, they can be grouped under four main headings barriers due to attitude; barriers due to resources; barriers due to structures; barriers due to training.

4.3 Attitude

4.3.1 Attitudes or inherited assumptions dictate the image of the arts, affecting what is thought to be right in content, style, expressive language and even organisation. The content should be expressed via a single art form, for instance (be it drama, visual arts, dance and so on). It should take the form - if a performance - of a show in the evening during which audiences quietly observe events on a performance area before them.

- 4.3.2 But the arts to which the Access Unit currently gives focus derived from cultural diversity, women and disability singularly fail to adhere to these patterns, as do so many others.
- 4.3.3 The single art form model has little place in traditional African or Asian arts. Both see them as unified, with cultural events frequently comprising more than one art form. Women are also more fluid in their ways of working, less prone (as various management studies have found) to accept compartmentalisation or hierarchical styles of operating.
- 4.3.4 Art forms traditionally developed by women from the intricacies of hair-plaiting to the delicacies of applique and kantha work find little support in funding agencies.
- 4.3.5 The form of cultural events and occasions differ from the apparent norm. Many audiences of different backgrounds find, for instance, that the traditional evening performance does not answer to social patterns in which families go out together. The fear of violence in the street has also influenced Asian audiences in particular away from venue-based work to the world of the video.
- 4.3.6 The relationship between audience and performer is, again, often different, having that vibrant sort of charge that comes from the sharing of experiences: particularly when, because of the dominant cultural modes, such a public expression is rare. Indeed, the fervour of the occasion, and cultural mores, can lead, at times to audience and performers physically merging.
- 4.3.7 But at the very least, it means that the audience feels, uniquely, that the performers are speaking to, with and for them. This is the event's main raison d'etre, not technical excellence of acting or purity of line.
- 4.3.8 There is little place in the mainstream for performers with disabilities or a disability culture. Yet it is clear from the work of groups like the Theatre of the Deaf that the work developed makes a valid, considerable statement in its own right.
- 4.3.9 Not all work is the product, unlike mainstream indigenous arts, of a single owner/creator. Many carnival designs and costumes evolve out of a complex process of group consultation. Some women's art like patchwork-making can be a communal activity, reflecting female patterns of social organisation.

- 4.3.10 Hence it is obvious that the criteria by which a work is assessed can differ radically from those that pertain to mainstream indigenous commercial productions or products.
- 4.3.11 Work derived from other cultural bases also exists on the margins, being all too often disparaged or exoticised. The skill and complexity of Afrikan peoples' dance was largely disregarded till recently, hidden under colonial stereotypes of great power. South Asian dance has long been shrouded in an intense mantle of weirdness and mysticism.
- 4.3.12 This is all the more unacceptable given the contributions both cultures have made to global expression. The culture of the West has developed eclectically, borrowing from the vigour of other aesthetic traditions (adopting, for example, the Kashmiri paisley design). This is a continuing process: Australian English is now enriched by over 300 words of native Australian roots.
- 4.3.13 This Unit supports the free passage of ideas. But it also supports the situation of cultural parity that that exchange implies.

4.4 **Resources**

- 4.4.1 Funding, despite several funding policy initiatives, is low for the disenfranchised arts. The application of inappropriate criteria serves too often to keep the work at an ineffective and static level.
- 4.4.2 The emphasis placed on project funding (where funding exists at all) leads to a situation in which groups have no continuity and no ability to take a long view in their own development plans. This also means instability in the groups, with personnel having to leave to take up surer options. Groups such as Graeae should have been put on revenue funding long ago in their fraught years of life.
- 4.4.3 The current importance accorded to business sponsorship works against the interests of 'non-mainstream' arts. Few of them have the status and emphasis on large-scale product that business sponsors generally require.

4.5 Structures

4.5.1 Although 'Towards Cultural Diversity' spoke up strongly for the development of an ongoing fund for building-based black and Asian arts, this has been slow to emerge.

- 4.5.2 The reallocated Roundhouse funds have allowed Talawa Theatre Company to base themselves in a theatre and helped Manchester's NIA Centre to open as the country's first African/Caribbean cultural centre. This has been very welcome.
- 4.5.3 However, the Asian theatre group, Tara Arts, almost simultaneously lost its local authority grant and were unable to continue as a building-based performance company. The only Asian art gallery, the Horizon, also lost its funding. The only South Asian arts centre currently running is London's Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and that urgently needs upgrading and reorienting in order to fulfil its potential.
- 4.5.4 Meanwhile small South Asian and Afro-Caribbean organisations struggle on, sometimes incessantly fund-raising, like Sangam, in order to acquire their own base, or sometimes existing precariously in out-of-hours school premises which LMS might well price out of their capability.
- 4.5.5 Women's resource centres similarly struggle, with initiatives like Manchester's Pankhurst Centre finding the battle for existence hard. These are of particular value since they are the nuclei of repositories of history, correctives to the textbooks that have so predominantly ignored women's contribution to the arts.
- 4.5.6 Existing structures also form barriers to access. Arts centres, galleries, performance spaces are not options for everybody as either consumers or workers.
- 4.5.7 The Attenborough Report into Arts and Disability underlined the need for physical access. Despite schemes like ADAPT, significant headway needs to be made over access for wheelchair users. Fire regulations are still cited by hostile venue managers as a reason for excluding disabled people.
- 4.5.8 But there is more to it than simply a matter of gaining an entrance to a building. Thought needs to be given to making events and artifacts accessible, whether by sound induction loops, signed and audio interpretation, larger-type programmes or catalogues and guidebooks on tape to exhibitions. Women may be deterred from going to an arts venue if the area (particularly the site of bus-stops) is unsafe and public transport hard to come by late at night.

- 4.5.9 The Arts Council should consider whether buildings that cannot be used by a significant section of the population are fit recipients of grant-aid. Boroughs giving out performing licences should also consider the same question. We believe inaccessible buildings effectively disqualify themselves as public venues, and should be penalised.
- 4.5.10 Employment practices of arts producing structures bear little in depth examination. Few people with disabilities work in the arts. This is too often put down by venues themselves to the absence of facilities like chair lifts, which could be solved, or the belief that particular jobs in the arts require able-bodied people. We believe that an analysis of the precise function of those jobs will uncover alternative ways of working that will not exclude people with disabilities.
- 4.5.11 The low employment level of women and black people in arts structures (from regional arts boards to major galleries) suggests a comparable resistance or failure of imagination. All of these aspects of performance should be considered by arts-funding bodies when they consider grants.

4.6 Training

- 4.6.1 There is only haphazard, ad hoc training for existing arts administrators in the aesthetics, dynamics and nature of the arts that emerge from the experience of race, disability and gender.
- 4.6.2 Vocational training in the arts for members of those cultures is also hard to achieve. Students with disabilities have problems in enrolling on courses. The lack of structures and facilities for child-care, as well as the decreasing inclination of councils to give non-mandatory grants, discriminate against women. The absence of black administrators is noticeable.

V Action plan

5.1 In order to release the potential of the very many people at present operating outside the major arts structures, the Arts Council needs, over the next 5-10 years, to adopt and implement a high-profile energetic programme that tackles structures, resources, training and attitudes. It should do so in conjunction, where appropriate, with other agencies, report back to a monitoring group and publish interim progress reports at regular intervals.

- 5.2 An independent access unit is crucial, particularly now that broad-sweeping institutional change seems likely to result in a diminished degree of cultural diversity, in its widest definition, on a national level.
- 5.3 The access unit should be flexible and well-resourced in order to be able to focus rapidly on areas of need and to cope authoritatively with a continually changing range of issues. Its campaigning, investigative function should be reinforced and given extended scope by improved co-operative links with the art form sections.
- 5.4 The strategic nature of the access unit's work should be echoed in similar appointments in the professional field. Access officers should operate at a senior level in organisations ranging from the BFI to the Royal Ballet, with the common job of constantly challenging their organisations' particular assumptions and practice.
- 5.5 The question of shifting resources should be re-addressed. The Arts Council and regional arts boards should institute a system of zero-funding for current clients so that the principle of equity could be built firmly into the base of future practice.
- 5.6 Arts employers should analyse the function of jobs, with the aim of devising alternative methods of working so as to make them accessible to people currently excluded, whether for reasons of timing, physical conditions or language.
- 5.7 Members of disenfranchised groups should be recruited onto committees, while it should be made clear that they are there not to speak solely on matters that directly affect their art forms.
- 5.8 Arts committees of voluntary bodies should be encouraged deliberately to widen their remit, so as to create space on their agendas for work that springs from hitherto different cultural bases.
- 5.9 Charities dealing with disability should be encouraged to draw up arts policies and appoint arts officers.
- 5.10 Networks like the Disability Arts Forum, the National Association of Women's Organisations (via an arts caucus) and MAAS should be seen as prime movers in the development of links and co-developers of training programmes.

- 5.11 Think tanks, related to regional conferences, should be funded and develop as fora for pooling experiences, formulating policy and exchanging views.
- 5.12 Arts promoters, managers, administrators and funders should be expected to consult with those client groups currently not being accorded access over the formation of policy and practice. This should be a prerequisite for funding.
- 5.13 Venues should be asked to demonstrate that they have consulted and liaised with unrepresented groups over programming.
- 5.14 Arts venues that are physically inaccessible should not be eligible for funding. The Arts Council should negotiate for further funds for adapting premises.
- 5.15 Those involved in the arts should have in-service training to help them deal with arts that differ in function, style and content from mainstream Western arts, while realising that it is attitude or perception that must change. The implications for programming should be clearly understood.
- 5.16 Centres for under-represented work (like that of women, young people, black and Asian communities) should be encouraged via a building and development fund.

VI Conclusion

- 6.1 The access unit's name is both accurate and misleading.
- 6.2 On the one hand, it suggests that the unit's job is simply to achieve an entrée for marginalised groups into the mainstream. In fact, the Unit's aim is for something deeper than this limited, albeit necessary, type of facilitation.
- 6.3 The aim of the access unit is a society in which diversity in all its forms is fully represented.
- 6.4 This does not mean adding disregarded cultures onto current agendas. The foot of an agenda rarely has much power. Instead, it must mean a profound rethinking of definitions and relationships. What are the so-called major art forms and how have they come to be accorded that status? How do the various varieties and levels of arts nourish

each other? How can a situation of respect and genuine parity be achieved?

6.5 'Access' is, in fact, a mutual concept. It means not only opening a route into the mainstream (a term for which the Unit, it must be said, has little sympathy). It also means that society in general should acquire access to new, varied, more multi-layered and challenging ways of looking, seeing and responding.

6.6 Given the potential, the access unit is appalled by the irrelevance of funding structures and the thrust of thinking that governs their actions. It urges the Arts Council to relinquish its tunnel vision and re-focus its vision on the wider world outside.

