

MAY 2013
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ARTS FUNDING

**TOM SLATER
& DOLAN CUMMINGS**



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KEY TERMS

Patronage

Philanthropy

Quango

INTRODUCTION

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Since the Second World War, the government has financially supported the arts in Britain, primarily through the Arts Council.

Like other aspects of the welfare state such as the National Health Service and council housing, public funding for the arts was seen as a public good, something that benefitted society as a whole. There have always been some who saw arts funding as a misuse of taxpayers' money, which they thought would be better spent on things like schools and hospitals – or indeed not taken from people as tax in the first place. Nonetheless, there has long been a political consensus that some level of state funding for the arts is a good thing. To the extent that there has been controversy, it has concerned whether it is right to fund 'elite' artforms like opera and ballet, which are disproportionately enjoyed by more privileged sections of society, or indeed whether the scope of arts funding is too broad, supporting work of dubious artistic merit. In May 2010, then Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt announced significant spending cuts to the Arts Council and various other institutions responsible for distributing public money to the creative industries [Ref: [Evening Standard](#)].

This led to uproar within the arts, and the ensuing debate has seen a variety of arguments for and against state funding. Broadly, these arguments are social, economic and artistic.



THE ART FUNDING DEBATE IN CONTEXT

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A public good?

The Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (which later become the Arts Council) was established in 1940. Even, or perhaps especially, in the context of the Second World War, it was felt that funding the arts was justified because of the role they might play in boosting national morale. Moreover, there was a feeling that while ‘high art’ had previously been the preserve of the elite, it should be made available to the nation as a whole. The forerunner to the Arts Council was set up in a similar spirit to that of the BBC, famously described by its founder Lord Reith as having a mission to ‘inform, educate and entertain’ and to raise up the cultural level of the common man. For some, the arts continue to be a force for civilisation and a means of self-improvement. Others see this view as old-fashioned, patrician and elitist, and certainly no justification for public funding. A different case for art as a public good was made in the Department for Culture Media and Sport paper, *Museums, Galleries and Archives for All*, published in 2000. It defined cultural spaces as ‘centres for social change’, and stressed art’s role in combating ‘social exclusion’ and fostering ‘community involvement’ [Ref: [National Archives](#)]. This helped form the criteria under which funding applications would be appraised for much of the next decade – potential for social improvement and a diverse audience being among the most essential [Ref: [Arts For Health](#)]. Nevertheless, critics see this approach as overly instrumental, reducing art to a means to an end and neglecting its true value [Ref: [spiked](#)].

Is art good for the economy?

The proposed 100 per cent cut to Newcastle’s arts budget in

January of 2013 brought out a different side to the debate – that of the creative industry’s economic value [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. Many have argued that, especially in cities where other industries have dwindled, Britain’s thriving arts sector has boosted the economy. Citing the success of the Lowry Centre in Salford [Ref: [The Lowry](#)] among others, proponents have emphasised the opportunity new arts ventures provide for regeneration. Others emphasise the contribution of the creative industries to the UK economy more generally in terms of employment, ‘cultural tourism’ and VAT. In her recent keynote speech on the issue, Maria Miller, the current Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, argued that the arts must make the case for public funding by focusing on the economic – not artistic – value of culture [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. Some even present arts funding as investment rather than subsidy [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. Nevertheless, others suggest the economic impact of the arts is skewed by the numerous tangential professions counting as arts – such as graphic design, gaming and arts journalism – that come under the ‘creative industries’ umbrella. Critics also point to costly failed ventures, such as the National Centre For Popular Music in Sheffield [Ref: [National Archives](#)], as proof that economic gains are far from guaranteed. Others insist that as a matter of principle, art cannot be appraised on purely economic terms, regarding this trend as a philistine distraction from valuing art for its own sake. Some see the recent closure of the much-loved Byre Theatre in St Andrews as an illustration of what happens when such institutions focus on economic success by investing in social spaces and cafe refurbishments etc. One commentator argued, ‘The Byre started to fail when the building became more important than what went on inside it’ [Ref: [Scottish Review](#)].



Does state funding make for better art?

Some argue state funding of the arts is necessary to support more innovative and challenging art that is less commercially viable. Left to the market, they suggest, only safe and pedestrian mainstream fare can succeed, which makes cuts to state arts funding philistine [Ref: [Evening Standard](#)]. But when announcing the cuts, Jeremy Hunt pointed out that other sources of funding are available, such as the American model of cultural philanthropy by wealthy benefactors [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. Critics of the government counter that this model, like corporate sponsorship, leaves artists beholden to their powerful patrons. The sense of anxiety surrounding the influence of big business was reflected in the protests outside the Tate galleries in 2010, when it was revealed they were receiving much of their funding from multinational oil company BP [Ref: [Daily Mail](#)]. From this point of view, state funding is necessary to support more left-field or risky art and ensure artistic autonomy from corporate influence. Nevertheless, others counter that grant applications for Arts Council funding actually involves highly prescriptive criteria and implicit political influence [Ref: [Huffington Post](#)]. Moreover, state funded art can also be safe and predictable: one writer reflects that the late UK Film Council had a reputation for 'backing mainstream work that would surely find funding elsewhere' [Ref: [Evening Standard](#)]. For some, it would be best for the public to 'vote with their wallet' about which artists are worthwhile [Ref: [Economist](#)]. Others insist that state funding allows arts institutions to raise the public's horizons by exposing them to art they would not always choose as consumers.

ESSENTIAL READING

Economist Debate: Arts funding

Economist 22 August 2012

Arts debate: 'Brutal and vulgar'

Lloyd Evans *Spectator* 9 October 2010

Is austerity good for the arts?

Josie Rourke and Sean O'Hanagan *Guardian* 30 May 2010

FOR

We can't afford not to support the arts

Peter Bazalgette *Telegraph* 19 September 2013

Arts Council report: our children will end up barbarians

Rupert Christiansen *Telegraph* 7 May 2013

Arts funding – what it does and why it matters

Andrew Mellor *New Statesman* 22 November 2012

A government of philistines

Sholto Byrnes *New Statesman* 24 July 2012

A blitzkrieg on the arts

Nicholas Serota *Guardian* 4 October 2010

AGAINST

Time to end UK art's dependency culture

Denis Joe *spiked* 29 April 2013

Creative Scotland was a project doomed to failure

Ian Bell *Herald Scotland* 5 December 2012

The arts can survive, and thrive, without public money

Simon Heffer *Telegraph* 7 May 2011

Cutting edge: radical arts funding

David Lister *Independent* 24 August 2010

Ignore the protests against BP at the Tate. Oil and art get along fine

Stephen Bayley *Telegraph* 2 July 2010

IN DEPTH

Arts are economic gold for Britain

Sir Nicholas Hytner *Telegraph* 24 April 2013

Arts Funding, Austerity and The Big Society: Remaking the case for the arts

John Knell and Matthew Taylor *Arts Council England* 1 February 2011

In an era of austerity, reasons to fund the arts

Robert Hewison *Art Newspaper* 6 July 2010

The Arts Council: Managed to Death

Marc Sidwell *New Culture Forum* 2009

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BACKGROUNDEERS

The arts and instrumentalism

Magnus Linklater *The Times* 29 June 2013

I argued for the arts – and won. We will keep the philistines from the gates

Maria Miller *Guardian* 20 June 2013

Can Liberate Tate free the arts from BP?

Susanna Rustin *Guardian* 24 April 2013

Peter Bazalgette

BBC Radio 3 *'Music Matters'* 9 March 2013

Byre drama has consequences for all

Tiffany Jenkins *Scotsman* 5 February 2013

The avoidable death of a much-loved Scottish institution

Kenneth Roy *Scottish Review* 29 January 2013

100% Arts funding cut? This Newcastle budget is an act of vandalism

Lee Hall *Guardian* 18 December 2012

When it Comes to The Arts, BP's 'Oil Money' Is Far Less Compromising Than State Funding

Nathalie Rothschild *Huffington Post* 14 July 2011

Hunt's glass slipper is filling with toxic toes

Mark Donne *Huffington Post* 13 July 2011

Giving to the arts: we need to follow America

Jeremy Hunt *Huffington Post* 5 July 2011

Art For Everyone: A strategic framework for the arts

Arts Council England November 2010

Where now for the British film industry?

Xan Brooks *Guardian* 7 October 2010

Response to the Department for Culture, Media & Sport consultation document

Museum Libraries Archives Council 31 July 2000

Big Society: Arts, Health and Well-Being

Clive Parkinson *Arts for Health*

World-renowned Lowry puts Salford on the map

The Lowry

National Centre for Popular Music: What happens when a strong vision lacks a strong business case

CABE

ORGANISATIONS

Arts Council

Liberate Tate

RSA

UK Uncut

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IN THE NEWS

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'Entitled' attitude to public funding is 'unlikeable', says National Theatre executive director

Telegraph 9 November 2013

Arts 'contributes £7 to GDP for every £1 subsidised', report finds

Telegraph 7 May 2013

Maria Miller: Arts must make economic case

BBC News 24 April 2013

Holyrood pledges support for Byre Theatre efforts

Scotsman 6 March 2013

Arts cuts lead to 'shrivelling' of theatre industry, report says

Guardian 22 February 2013

Arts cuts so deep even the Tate may charge

Independent 17 February 2013

Moray Council approves 100% cut in arts funding

Guardian 13 February 2013

Theatre director: only philistines make arts cuts

Evening Standard 4 February 2013

Culture Clash as threat of 100% cut in arts funding divides

Newcastle Guardian 29 January 2013

'Sad day' as Byre Theatre in St Andrews closes

Scotsman 26 January 2013

Outgoing arts chief attacks budget cuts (at her £8,000 farewell)

Daily Mail 17 January 2013

Arts Council to face £11.6m of further cuts

Stage News 11 December 2012

Creative Scotland Board Promises Changes After its leader resigns

BBC News 7 December 2012

Maria Miller responds to criticism over arts cuts

BBC News 29 November 2012

Arts face battle to avoid funding 'abyss'

BBC News 29 November 2012

Stage stars blast 'madness' of cuts in arts funding at Evening Standard Theatre Awards

Evening Standard 26 November 2012

Scottish quangos spend £113million on PR, overseas travel, consultants and hospitality

Telegraph 22 November 2012

BP Protest: 'Tate should come clean about dirty oil money'

Channel 4 News 20 April 2011

UK Film Council hands over funding control to BFI

BBC News 1 April 2011

Jeremy Hunt outlines plans to boost art donations

BBC News 8 December 2010

Hedge fund billionaire helps bring back grand old days of art patronage

Guardian 28 November 2010

Oil painting: Artists gatecrash Tate Britain's summer party in protest at BP sponsorship

Daily Mail 29 June 2010

'Bonfire of red tape' as Jeremy Hunt orders cuts for arts budgets

Evening Standard 19 May 2010



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Debating Matters because ideas matter. This is the premise of the Institute of Ideas Debating Matters Competition for sixth form students which emphasises substance, not just style, and the importance of taking ideas seriously. Debating Matters presents schools with an innovative and engaging approach to debating, where the real-world debates and a challenging format, including panel judges who engage with the students, appeal to students from a wide range of backgrounds, including schools with a long tradition of debating and those with none.

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Debating Matters engages a wide range of individuals, from the students who take part in the debates, the diverse group of professionals who judge for us, the teachers who train and support their debaters, and the young people who go on to become Debating Matters Alumni after school and help us to continue to expand and develop the competition. If you enjoyed using this Topic Guide, and are interested in finding out more about Debating Matters and how you can be involved, please complete this form and return it to us at the address below.

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- I am a sixth form student and would like further details about events in my area
- I am interested in becoming a Debating Matters judge
- I am interested in sponsoring/supporting Debating Matters
- Other (please specify)

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