

ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAINTHE ARTS COUNCIL AND ETHNIC ARTS1. Background

At its meeting in June 1980 Council agreed that there was a prima facie case for some affirmative action in support of Ethnic Arts. But before considering what particular form such action might take, officers were instructed to monitor the progress of ethnic arts applications to the Council to see whether it suggested any evidence of internal bias (for whatever reason).

This paper sets out the results of that monitoring exercise and makes proposals for future action on ethnic arts.

2. The monitoring exercise

Although the monitoring exercise inevitably presented some problems of definition (and indeed some officers were sceptical as to whether any attempt at a definition could properly reflect the multi-cultural aspect of the arts in this country), there is no reason to suppose that the results are seriously misleading. It had the benefit of continuing advice from the CRE and a strong RAA input.

In the 12 months to August 1981 the Council received about 130 ethnic arts applications excluding applications referred to RAAs. Positive recommendations were made in 96 cases and nil recommendations in 34 cases. This raw success rate is broadly equivalent to that for applications as a whole - 2,890 in total, of which 2,140 received positive recommendations.

The 130 ethnic applications contained requests totalling about £950,000. Positive recommendations amounted to £335,000 in respect of applications totalling £685,000. However, it has to be borne in mind that a significant proportion of many applications was for non-arts activities or for arts activities (eg educational work) which the Council would not normally support irrespective of the intrinsic merits of the application. These overall figures mask important differences between kinds of application. Thus, for example, in music about £31,000 was recommended towards sums requested totalling £39,000; the structured nature of the theatre writing scheme resulted in £19,000 being made available towards requests totalling £21,000. In contrast applications totalling £139,000 were received in respect of the 1981 Carnivals for which the Council's total allocation amounted to only £22,000.

The Council's direct expenditure on ethnic arts in England therefore amounted to less than £350,000. This figure excludes all RAA expenditure and takes no account of the ethnic content of programmes presented by the Council's non-ethnic clients. Even making generous allowance for these factors the Council's total direct and indirect expenditure on ethnic arts could not be more than 1% of its total expenditure.

3. Regional Arts Associations

In tandem with the Council's monitoring exercise, the Regional Arts Associations conducted a similar survey which revealed that some RAAs are at a very much more advanced stage than the Council in developing policies and practices within which to consider ethnic arts activities. As expected those RAAs which are most advanced in this respect are those with the highest concentrations of ethnic communities - in particular Greater London Arts and West Midlands Arts.

4. Observations and Suggestions

Whatever its limitations, the monitoring exercise has not provided prima facie evidence of any internal bias operating within the Council to the disadvantage of those ethnic arts applications actually received. At the same time it has highlighted the paucity of the Council's total support over this field. Both ethnic representatives and the RAAs are convinced that the Council would receive more applications if ethnic artists knew more about the Council and were less suspicious of it as an organisation catering primarily for the Western European cultural tradition. Officers have a little anecdotal evidence to bear this out.

If further progress is to be made in public funding for ethnic arts, officers feel that more should be done to build on the experience of existing ethnic arts clients and on their work. Furthermore the uneven distribution of the ethnic minority population, coupled with the essentially local impact of much ethnic arts activity suggests that any growth in funding (at whatever time this might be achieved) would be best weighted in favour of funding through the RAAs.

Bearing these points in mind officers recommend Council to consider the following courses of action to be pursued in continuing close liaison with the CRE and RAAs.

- a) exploring ways in which, say three current ethnic clients can be given particular encouragement to develop;
- b) inviting RAAs particularly concerned with ethnic arts at present to specify their priorities for development;
- c) incorporating the needs of ethnic arts as a specific element in the Council's submission to Government for 1983/84;
- d) encouraging non-ethnic client organisations to consider how an ethnic contribution can be built into their own programmes, including employment opportunities for black artists and other workers;
- e) exploring what can be done to improve the effectiveness of ethnic arts advisory services;
- f) continuing to develop training opportunities of all kinds for ethnic arts workers;
- g) avoiding so far as possible devising criteria for revenue subsidy schemes or other grants which might by their nature discourage ethnic applications;
- h) seeking more opportunities for dialogue with the ethnic press on both general and specific issues;
- i) exploring the possibility of some research to identify the true extent of ethnic arts activity on the ground.

If Council broadly accepts this as a reasonable basis for proceeding it would be appropriate to draw this paper and Council's comments and conclusions to the attention of advisory Panels, RAAs and the CRE.

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