



Response to 'Cultural Metropolis'—The Mayor's Priorities for Culture 2009-12

The National Federation of Artists' Studio Providers

The NFASP is the national representative body for the groups and organisations that provide affordable studios to artists throughout the UK and is funded by a revenue grant from Arts Council England. We are the voice and support of a sector that has grown over the last 40 years to include mature, multi-building organisations that provide studios to hundreds of artists, but that continues to nurture embryonic groups just establishing themselves as artistic communities.

We offer an essential range of support and advisory services to a sector whose members provide studios to some 6,000 artists nationally, often with an equal number on their waiting lists for affordable space. We campaign to sustain and increase this essential infrastructure upon which so much artistic activity and cultural production depends.

Our member organisations are not-for-profit, many of them being registered charities, and provide studios for artistic practice at a fraction of the cost of commercial workspaces. Their support of art practice is focussed on its potential to create meaning and cultural significance, whilst the artists who work there tend to derive their income from a range of interdependent creative, cultural and educational activities. The studios, and their affordability, are an essential factor in supporting the research and risk-taking that leads to high quality cultural outcomes, as well as the research and development of disciplines that feed education, community engagement and academic excellence.

The NFASP's response to the Mayor's priorities for culture

It is wonderful to hear the mayor's support for culture in its widest forms, and in particular for the importance of art, its traditions, contemporary practices and future legacy. We are especially encouraged by his recognition of the importance of visual art to the everyday lives, educational development and cultural experiences of everyone who lives in, and visits London. His choice of people to lead and work on the London Cultural Strategy Group shows a knowledge of, and commitment to the future of culture in all its forms and we are particularly delighted to see Iwona Blazwick as its Chair.

The role of Artists in the Cultural Strategy

We welcome the recognition of the importance of the work, profile and shareable outcomes of significant individuals, but also consider that it is important to acknowledge and find ways of supporting the creative contribution made by all cultural practitioners and every level in our society. Wherever artists engage with

people and put their work before an audience their creativity and commitment is shared – from the audiences in major public galleries, through the wealth of alternative exhibitions, events and activities that feed the very forefront of artistic culture, to the facilitation of adults and young people at every level of compulsory and elective education and community participation.

Sustaining talent and the benefits of education

The importance of the talented artists graduating from the capital's colleges is recognised in the Mayor's priorities. In order for these early-career artists to be able to sustain and develop artistic practice they need the physical infrastructure in the form of studios, but also the communities of practical, intellectual and creative exchange that engender world-leading contemporary visual arts. The artists whose work populates the galleries mentioned in the strategy will have built up their practices for many years in the studios made available by affordable studio providers, amongst peers who may not have become so prominent, but continue to contribute to culture and society. We would welcome strategic support for the provision of facilities for early-career artists, in order to help preserve their creative and educational investment and to support continuing wider participation in creative and cultural practice.

Importance of production as well as presentation facilities

We recognise the current and further potential of the GLA in setting policy goals that will encourage the arts and culture to flourish, and we would welcome the opportunity this offers to both protect and enhance the provision of facilities for the research, development and production of visual art, as well as those for its ultimate display and audience experience. In order for the events and activities that make our city such a rich and fascinating environment to exist, we must support the ongoing work of those that create them, over the long periods of development and production, as well as during presentations and projects themselves.

The cultural strategy document acknowledges the importance of culture outside of the usual systems of monetary exchange and value, and we would welcome strategic initiatives to support the recognition of 'best value' in cultural as well as fiscal terms, where this might help authorities and agencies to support organisations and initiatives.

London's wider geography

Artists live everywhere in our capital and show enormous initiative in finding places to work, collaborate and engage with the public. The benefits of sustainable, creative and cultural infrastructure can be demonstrated within and beyond their immediate artistic community. We would encourage the support and enabling of such centres throughout the capital's boroughs as the focus not only for artistic activity and production, but also for cultural facilities for audiences and others to participate in creative activities and personal and professional development.

Building capacity and supporting organisations

Capacity building for small organisations will be of great benefit, particularly in the artists' studio sector where much existing provision has grown up out of grassroots initiatives. We feel that there is much to be gained for culture and the wider public from the efforts of small organisations and artists themselves, who often gift their time, creativity and practice to a wider audience. It is encouraging to note the recognition of the different needs and requirements of the subsidised and commercially-led creative industries, but it is also worth noting that a great deal of artistic production – and consequently the educational and participatory activities that derive from it - are funded by the artists themselves, effectively creating a third sector. We would welcome strategic initiatives that provide advice and support not only to creative industries and businesses, but to the voluntary, non-commercial and charitable sectors as well, improving longevity and sustainability and helping them to preserve scarce resources and consolidate all of their efforts.

Cultural value

We are glad to hear of the support for the recommendations of the McMaster report, and the recognition of the intrinsic value of culture in and of itself. We feel confident that this will lead to policy and strategy decisions that allow art and culture to develop to the highest level, and for their benefits to feed into society, education and the economy through the most appropriate means.

Support from GLA policy initiatives

The affordable artists' studio sector has been largely self-supporting, drawing very little revenue or capital funding in return for the provision that it makes for visual arts practice across the capital. This profile has traditionally left it vulnerable to market forces at times when property and its development value have been at a premium. Strategic and policy guidance from the Mayor's office on issues such as planning legislation in support of cultural uses, business rating decisions on a mandatory and discretionary level, and local authority 'best value' considerations for the long term use or asset transfer of building stock would all contribute towards the sustainability and increased provision of affordable artists' studios, as well as the associated facilities and activities that our sector provides for the wider public.

We welcome support for capacity and partnership building amongst not-for-profit and voluntary organisations, and would like, once again, to draw the Mayor's attention to the important phase of cultural development, innovation and production that occurs in affordable workspaces and artistic communities before the results of that work are made public.

We look forward to the Cultural Olympiad and the 'inspire mark' projects that will bring cultural events and activities into being in response to the Olympics. We hope that the effect of this cultural focus will accrue beyond those organisations and practitioners directly involved, and keep Londoners invested and interested in culture into the future. We would welcome the opportunity that the Olympiad could offer to raise the profile of affordable studio providers and the relation between the art and cultural activity that people see and experience, and the places in which it is developed and made.

Artists' networks, workspaces and cultural quarters

The artists' networks referred to in the cultural priorities are often formed, and to be found, in affordable studio buildings, as well as forming the basis for studio-providing organisations themselves, in many artists' search for a mutually-supportive place to work. Cultural quarters have often grown up around such networks, which have then been displaced by other economies and priorities. We would encourage the GLA to support and preserve the place and role of non-commercial cultural production, and specifically visual artists' studios, within cultural quarters to ensure that the differential benefits and requirements recognised in the Mayor's priorities are protected and treasured, alongside more economically-powerful cultural sectors. This has particular bearing on the legacy planning for such areas as the Olympics site itself, as well as other regeneration schemes in the capital, where existing visual arts provision - for research, development and production as well as more public presentation - needs to be protected and retained as a vital cultural asset.

Young people and the arts

We welcome the strategic focus on education for young people in the arts, and on participatory creative activities for all, and would encourage the support of all places and organisations that facilitate this. The priorities are well laid-out for the importance of intensive and high-level involvement in music and dance, but not so specific about the significance of the visual arts at a similar level of aspiration for young people.

We would like to draw the Mayor's attention to the role of many affordable artists' studio providers in offering creative, educational and personal- and professional-development activities for all Londoners, including our young people, and the importance of artists themselves in delivering these experiences.

In our experience, the artists who provide the formal and informal education of young people and adults in visual art do so as a result of their own professional art practices, which feed and inform their educational work. These aspects are symbiotic and the income from one often supports the other in the development and exchange of related expertise and experience. The artists' studios are essential to these practices, as are the creative and intellectual communities that they support. We believe that the best and most vibrant art education can be provided by practicing artists and urge ongoing support of the fundamental infrastructure of this network: long-term, affordable artists' studios, and in particular the organisations that provide high-quality art activities for the wider public through their dedicated artists' communities.

There may be many opportunities for partnerships, residencies and mutually beneficial infrastructure development that can be supported by strategic policy-making at the level of the GLA. Geographic proximity and specific hosting helps in the forming of relationships and there are many models of collaborative partnerships that can help in bringing of the worlds of community engagement, education, research and high-quality culture together.

We welcome the initiatives to broaden the access to education and understanding of the visual arts through the teaching of art history and about contemporary art practice. We believe that this can be further enriched by contact between young

people and working artists, in the educational and gallery environment, but also within the artists' own working spaces: their studios and artistic communities.

Cultural infrastructure for development, production and dissemination

The document recognises the importance of cultural activity and experience for all Londoners. The infrastructure through which visual art reaches its audience – the public and other galleries and museums - is well acknowledged, as is the significance of the commercial gallery scene in London's status as a world centre for visual arts. What is less apparent is the importance of the 'means of production' for all artists, and especially the contribution that an affordable place to work makes in supporting artistic practices whose outcome is more cultural than commercial. Such work forms the backbone of the diverse cultural activity and educational opportunities that make London such an extraordinary place to live, work, learn and create, as well as visit and enjoy.

Continuing professional development

There is also excellent recognition of the importance of education and training for careers in the cultural and creative sectors. One of the most significant factors in curtailing the careers and professional development of visual artists is the lack of affordable workspace in which to continue to explore possibilities alongside the peers and networks built up during years of education and so necessary to keep opportunity and evolution alive. By supporting and facilitating the infrastructure in which artists' communities can flourish, cumulative benefits accrue to all members rather than just to certain lucky individuals, and the self-help traditions out of which much artistic infrastructure has grown can be accelerated into the future.

There are existing models and pilot programmes that can be considered, as well as further great potential - for the support of organisations and representative bodies, for interventions and activities in education, and the development of strategic partnerships within and beyond academia - to the benefit of large numbers of early career artists and the culture and communities that they will engage in.

Preservation of grass-roots culture

We are delighted that artists' studios are specifically mentioned in relation to grassroots culture, and that the priorities recognise the need to consider artists' studios in the legacy planning for the Olympics site and surrounding areas that already contain a great number of established and more grassroots studio groups and organisations. We would urge the Mayor's office and the GLA to ensure that the cultural vibrancy of this part of London is maintained in the long term by the strategic provision of cultural facilities that protect the fragile artistic ecology from competing development interests.

Regeneration and development planning

We welcome the recognition of the importance of cultural factors in plans for major new urban developments, especially the provision of cultural facilities, and would welcome the specific inclusion of facilities for the creation, as well as dissemination,

of all aspects of art and culture, of which affordable artists' studios are only one. We look forward, and would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the London Cultural Strategy Group's guide to planning for culture, especially the role it will play in ensuring that cultural uses are written into the future of all of our communities, and are protected from the market forces that might drive other development considerations.

Working with the London Cultural Strategy Group

We read with interest about the revised role and membership of the London cultural strategy group and look forward to being able to help contribute to its important work, and to forge partnerships with other agencies, to the benefit of London's cultural life and future.

The NFASP is a national representative body but one whose constituency reflects the concentration of cultural activity in the capital, where over fifty percent of the UK's affordable artists' studios are based. We are engaged in the research, development and delivery of the support mechanisms that our sector needs and can provide research reports, case studies, pilot projects and models to help further inform cultural strategy – especially with regard to the provision of affordable artists' studios and associated facilities and opportunities for artistic production, creative engagement and professional development for the wider public.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with the cultural strategy group, the Mayor's office and the GLA to help extend some of the benefits of the Mayor's priorities to the affordable artists' studio sector, to the benefit of London's culture and its people.



Naomi Dines

**Chair of Trustees
National Federation of Artists' Studio Providers**

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