

Arts and the new coalition government

After a decade of scaling new heights, the UK's arts institutions have been bracing themselves for drastic cuts. This week culture secretary Jeremy Hunt gave his inaugural speech. We asked leading figures for their response

Charles Saumarez Smith
Royal Academy

Given the disastrous state of the public finances, [Jeremy Hunt](#)'s strategy is sensible: reassure the arts community by heaping praise on the achievements of the last 10 years; lever in extra public funding by restoring the lottery to its original purposes; and then do everything that can be done to encourage private philanthropy. Since the Royal Academy is in the unusual position of not receiving any public funding, other than benefiting from government indemnity, this strategy suits us well. However, there are two issues relating to private philanthropy which he did not address. The first is the mean-spirited regulations that govern benefits to donors. These mean that if, for example, someone gave money to support our Palladio exhibition, we could not invite him or her to dinner for fear of contravening the gift aid regulations. This is ridiculous. Minor benefits oil the wheels of private philanthropy. The second is the exact nature of the tax incentives which encourage banks in most European countries (for example, Belgium, Spain and Italy) to sponsor major exhibitions. Blockbuster shows are an underestimated part of the arts economy and have a big impact on cultural tourism. He should do all he can to support them.

Dominic Cooke
Royal Court Theatre

I was encouraged to hear that Jeremy Hunt, in his inaugural speech as culture secretary, cited *Jerusalem* as an example of how subsidising our cultural life is one of the best investments we can make in this country.

I do hope, however, that the new government will recognise that artistic excellence isn't achieved overnight. While some plays can be written in a few weeks or months, many, such as *Jerusalem*, are the result of years of work; and it is only with the intervention of a continued, sustained and appropriate investment in the arts that great art such as this will ever see the light of day. I look forward to discussing with Hunt the potentially disastrous effect that the US philanthropic funding culture could have on the UK, severely reducing opportunities for playwrights to be produced.

My fear is that the government will privilege the short-term kudos of the Olympics above the long-term nourishment of sustained arts investment. Subsidised theatre is the research-and-development wing of the UK's thriving creative industries. At the Royal Court, we run 10 courses for emerging writers each year, plus an international residency. Many of these writers, such as Polly Stenham (*That Face*, *Tusk Tusk*), go on to be produced in other theatres across Britain and the world. A few, such as Lucy Prebble (*Enron*, *Secret Diary of a Call Girl*), create high-quality television series that are successfully exported. Some, such as Joe Penhall, go on to write Hollywood movies (*The Road*). Several are studied at GCSE and A level. The directors, designers and actors we nurture become the lifeblood of the commercial theatre, which is a prime draw for tourism in the UK.

My one request is that the government facilitates new-writing theatres to continue making a valuable contribution to British life.

Robert Robson
The Lowry

Nick Clegg stated prior to entering into coalition that his party would like to see the arts protected from spending cuts and, in his inaugural speech, Jeremy Hunt has promised more lottery funding and a drive to increase philanthropic giving, both of which would be welcome and potentially beneficial.

However, the reality is that, as the culture secretary conceded, savings will almost certainly be required of the arts sector, and one would wish to remind the government that, in these circumstances, it is usually the artistically adventurous and ambitious projects that suffer most. There tends to be less visiting international work in tough financial times – certainly in respect of drama and dance, but also in the visual arts. Would we wish our cultural life and the picture we present of it to the world to become narrower, more mainstream, more inward looking, especially in the years leading up to the Olympics?

The reach of the arts in the UK has been steadily increasing and improving with each passing year of late, including genuine engagement with some of our more disadvantaged communities. At the Lowry, we participate in the Centre for Advanced Training and Youth Dance England initiatives, which offer young people across the country and from a variety of backgrounds the opportunity to take part, and gain high-quality training, in dance. One can only hope that the funding of schemes such as these, providing access and skills development for young people, is sustained.

One request: I'd simply ask that, in any decisions about arts funding, organisations that balance artistic ambition with managing their finances responsibly are looked upon favourably.

Nicholas Hytner
National Theatre

Jeremy Hunt and Ed Vaizey are genuinely enthusiastic about their brief. They have been explicit in their belief that a flourishing arts scene is an essential part of a civilised society. They understand that by investing in the arts, they stimulate the creative economy – by common consent the most successful and fastest growing sector of the economy as a whole.

So I hope that they will be passionate advocates for us as the new government addresses the deficit. I hope that they will point out to the treasury that for much less than one thousandth part of total government expenditure, they create not just well-being but jobs; that for the pittance saved by cutting a few percentage points from our budget, the damage caused would be disproportionately savage.

I hope they will take a leaf out of FDR's book: the US Federal Art, Theatre and Music Projects were vibrantly successful components of the New Deal and the conquest of the great depression. Actually, they could look closer to home: at the start of the New Labour administration, when spending was tight, Chris Smith pushed through an arts funding package that has led directly to an explosion of creativity and confidence, and an international reputation second to none.

I hope they fight for the money to make their jobs worth doing, because it's only with the money (a drop in the ocean though it may be) that they'll be able to do anything. I think they get it – I hope I'm right.

Iwona Blazwick
[Whitechapel Gallery](#)

I'm delighted that the new government has made a strong commitment to the arts, promising us sustained support at arm's length; offering us a foundation for funding but the freedom to produce a programme of great artists and educational projects.

The economic benefits of the UK's major museums and galleries alone are estimated to be £1.5bn per year – a figure that cannot be ignored.

Josie Rourke
Bush Theatre

One of the most appealing and canny virtues of arts in this country is our encouragement of new people. In my field our apprenticeships, both formal and informal, seek out and kickstart the next generation.

I've just come back from directing in America, where our assistant director, a brilliant and talented man, was older than me. This wasn't because he'd come to directing late, or underachieved in any way, but because, since graduating from college, he had been on the regular and dispiritingly slow climb to a career in the unsubsidised theatre. Lack of subsidy holds back the new and the young. In the past 10 years, I've grown through a traineeship at the Donmar, an apprenticeship at the Royal Court and an associateship at Sheffield into being the artistic director of the Bush Theatre, where we're working to identify the writers and artists of tomorrow. The opportunities I've been afforded, and can now make available to others, are a clear argument for the confident funding of the arts that has taken place in this country since I began as an assistant director 10 years ago.

It's this generous and incautious spirit that makes the arts in this country exceptional. If we break this virtuous circle now, we'll lose a generation.

Daniel Evans
Sheffield theatres

There were no surprises in Hunt's speech. Irrespective of which party won the election, cuts were going to be inevitable in every area of government spending – and the arts are no exception. Accordingly, those of us who work in the arts have long fastened our seatbelts, though we still don't know exactly how bumpy the ride will be. While it's good to hear that lottery funding for the arts will eventually increase to 20%, the faith in (and encouragement to rely on) income from philanthropy is potentially very worrying, especially given the gradual disintegration of individual giving in the US. It's all well and good proselytising about how wonderful an extra £5m in philanthropic donations would be for the National Theatre, but reports show that half of London's arts organisations showed a drop in their income from such streams in the past year. It's hard to allay suspicions that any emphasis on philanthropy is a foreboding of the end of government funding for the arts in the future. However, cutting administration costs seems smart, if it means that the savings can be spent on the art itself. There is a remaining, logistical question: how will the coalition collaborate in the sphere of the arts? Here in Sheffield, we've heard the deputy prime minister speak passionately about the arts. Indeed, we know he acted at university and that Samuel Beckett is his hero. It would be good to know that this passion and belief in the intrinsic value of the arts is informing the decision-making process. Finally, I cannot hide the fact that a part of me is pleased that there is at least one surprise in Hunt's appointment: we now have a culture minister who seems to enjoy going to the theatre.

Tony Hall
Royal Opera House

It's important to recognise that a decade of sustained investment in arts and culture has made Britain's cultural life the envy of the world and a significant contributor to the UK economy – £5bn per year. The global spotlight will be on us in 2012 and we can showcase just how culturally rich this country is.

This sustained government support has enabled organisations of all sizes to have a robust foundation on which to build, to become cultural entrepreneurs and find new revenue streams.

If there have to be savings, the question for both government and cultural organisations is: how do you make the savings without hitting the funds available to frontline arts organisations? It would be such a waste of what has been achieved to take money from where it counts – on stages and in concert halls and galleries.

Three things in Jeremy Hunt's speech gave me particular encouragement. First, he announced plans to restore the lottery to its rightful place funding arts and culture. Second, he talked of practical ways in which this government will encourage philanthropy. We look forward to conversations as to how this can best be achieved. Already the growth in cultural philanthropy in this country has enabled arts organisations to increase the quality and reach of their work. Finally, his proposal for longer-term financial arrangements. At the Royal Opera House we schedule up to five years ahead, and to have that sense of security would enable us to deliver even better value for money.

Seventy-six per cent of the population now actively participates in the arts; 96% say they will attend again. Arts projects have been proven to play an integral role in regeneration projects. We can see the difference the arts make – aspirations are raised, communities come together and lives are changed. This success story must continue.

Ian Brown
Yorkshire Playhouse

I want to be reasonably optimistic. The Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats both seem to recognise the importance of the creative industries and the value, both economically and socially, that the arts bring to this country. Jeremy Hunt seems to be passionate about maintaining and supporting the creative sector. However, I have some fears. Hunt has made it very clear that the arts will not be exempt from the impending massive spending cuts. A 20% cut to the sector could do enormous damage and make very little dent in the deficit.

I would like to remind our new government that there is no real substitute for public investment in the arts. That as attractive as private investment might be, philanthropists are thin on the ground outside

London, particularly in the current financial climate. As for the idea of endowments, I cannot see how these could pay the kind of interest that would keep a theatre open. If grants become dependent on matched private funding, then the success of the last 10 years will soon be decimated and theatres closed.

I am reassured by his announcement that lottery funding is to be restored to the arts. This is vital to the growth and development of the industry over the next 20 years. There is a real possibility of a "double whammy" of cuts which could have a very serious impact on cultural industries. Therefore it is vital that local authorities and Arts Council England remain in close contact.

My big wish is that the government trusts the Arts Council to deliver and has faith in its knowledge and expertise. I am all for cutting spending where it is not required, such as on unnecessary administration costs and unaccountable quangos, and possibly trimming the cultural Olympiad (I don't think the country expects or wants an Olympic cultural event we cannot afford).

Finally I would like to say to Jeremy Hunt: remember that the arts are something the UK does brilliantly. It may also be an important part of keeping our society together through these tough times.

Dominic Dromgoole
Shakespeare's Globe

Even from the perspective of an unsubsidised theatre, it would seem perilous to the point of lunacy to lessen the amount of overall subsidy in our culture. The Globe manages to run an ambitious programme of Shakespeare and new plays, as well as a far-reaching educational operation, without a single penny of subsidy, yet all the skills, experience and passion that we build our achievements on would not exist without the subsidised network of theatres. It is long proven that the creative industries know how to turn a penny into a pound with more flair and efficiency than almost any other, an uncanny ability which they exhibit both in their own theatres and in the national economy. If the new coalition wants to be sophisticated about how it cuts, it would seem injudicious to cut in an arena that takes so little and gives so much.

Questions should be asked about where the subsidy goes, and they should be rigorous. Are we spreading money all around the country without bias? Are we satisfying all audiences, including, most crucially, those who are already interested, and not just the nonexistent fantasy audience of the Arts Council's imagination? Are we putting the money into the art and the artists, and not just into bloated, staff-happy infrastructures of arts administrators? And are we funding real risk and real adventure and real, ugly, awkward dissent, as we should be, and not spending large amounts on institutions which should be perfectly commercially viable on their own? To shy away from such questions at a time when others are having to make painful and difficult sacrifices would be self-indulgent. But if the process of asking and answering such questions did not reveal to any sane, unprejudiced mind the necessity and the virtue of subsidy, then I would eat my desk.

Liz Forgan
Arts Council England

The arts earn our living, but for 17p a week per head they also lift our spirits, challenge our dullness and make sense of the world. We won't get through the next five years as a sane nation without a functioning creative life, and public investment in artists and arts organisations is essential to that.

My fear is that a desperate policy of flat percentage cuts everywhere will do fatal damage to the new, the brave, the difficult and the unpopular. The government is determined to act quickly, but if there is no time to be skilful in the way we make savings we will be guilty of unnecessary atrocities. And if public money dries up it will be 10 times harder to sustain the support of the private sector, which is our essential partner. The arts have survived the recession extraordinarily well so far, thanks to this plural funding system and their own resourcefulness. Two years before a great Olympic festival is not the time to deal them a fatal blow.

My request would be to each and every member of the government to go out and actually experience an arts event, preferably somewhere that is suffering from industrial decline, poverty, depression, alienation, or social dislocation, and preferably in the company of someone under 12.

Jude Kelly
Southbank Centre

The cultural sector judges its government representatives on their knowledge, enthusiasm and willingness to speak boldly about why arts and heritage are fundamental to our society – and, when necessary, to thump the table to be heard.

Most politicians find it difficult to "come out" about their love of and belief in the arts, despite living in one of the most culturally active nations in the world. So the fact that Jeremy Hunt and Ed Vaizey were effusive about culture while in opposition – and talked the talk so conscientiously – has won them many friends. We want Hunt and his team to argue for people's human right to participate in the cultural life of their community and to enjoy the arts. This should be a major consideration for the coalition government as it debates the ambition and practical scope of the "big society".

Victoria Sharp
London Music Masters

Jeremy Hunt's firm expression of commitment to the arts on all levels, from local to national, is enormously encouraging. In particular, greater support for high-quality grassroots educational efforts will provide the early inspiration which translates to lifetime aspiration in the broadest sense.

I am heartened to see the significant focus on voluntary and community efforts. These are vital in the undertakings made by many smaller arts organisations, such as the Bridge Project of London Music Masters, which provides music education in south London primary schools. Nurtured students and their communities of today are the audiences and community leaders of tomorrow. I have also seen how larger arts entities, such as the Southbank Centre and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, work successfully in educational partnerships with smaller, local organisations to this very important end. Equally exciting is the indication that more provision, not less, will be given to the arts. The nod to the enhancement of gift aid is a step in the right direction. However, a more creative approach to developing all-important philanthropic support would be a revolutionary development.

John Leighton
National Galleries of Scotland

The arts and heritage are devolved matters, so it falls to government in Edinburgh to show the lead in questions of policy and funding for the arts in Scotland. Nevertheless, the direction taken by the new administration in London is bound to have a profound impact on the arts sector north of the border. Will the new coalition government understand that we invest in, rather than spend on, art, culture and heritage in the UK?

The development of a vibrant museums sector has been one of the great British success stories of recent decades. The total worth of museums and galleries to the Scottish economy alone has been calculated at over £800m every year. With evidence of the benefits to urban and rural regeneration, of benefits to education, health and well-being, ministers, politicians and community leaders are increasingly aware that museums can be a part of the solution to many of the pressing social and economic challenges that we face in Scotland today.

Museums across the UK have been successful in attracting enormous support from the private sector. However, it is public subsidy that unlocks private support, and the whole-hearted commitment of government has been essential to attracting this extra investment. The Conservative arts manifesto was thin and unconvincing in this regard, with, for example, vague indications of a new emphasis on "endowments". The private sector will not rush to fill the void created by diminishing subsidies. The balance is fragile and the threat of a spiral of decline is not an idle one.

One request? Don't ignore the regions. In common with the rest of the UK, England is blessed with a diverse and high-quality museums sector that has been nurtured in recent years through excellent schemes such as the "Renaissance in the regions" funding. Commit to extending this.

James Grieve, George Perrin
Paines Plough

I'm not sure we've ever had a deputy prime minister who has performed in *Krapp's Last Tape* before now, so that's a positive omen. Nick Clegg's formative board-treading has left him in thrall to Beckett, and I hope that might signal an appreciation of the vibrant and flourishing contemporary playwriting culture that can confidently claim to be the best in the world. Trailblazing young talents such as Mike Bartlett, Alexi Kaye Campbell, Lucy Prebble and Polly Stenham are valuable exports to the commercial and international markets – all of them nurtured by the subsidised sector. Cuts to public spending are essential and unavoidable, and in Jeremy Hunt's pre-election words the arts sector will need to "take its share of the pain". But we urge the new government to be mindful that arts subsidy is the reason we're able to create outstanding theatre and to develop Beckett's heirs. As an industry, we have to help ourselves, too, and the political coalition is perhaps symbolic of a new spirit of unity. Here at Paines Plough we're co-producing this year with 20 other companies, we've started to co-commission writers with other companies and we're looking at creating a new small-scale touring network. All of which means we can make our public subsidy stretch much further. I'd urge Hunt to read Dominic Shellard's paper "Economic Impact Study of UK Theatre" (2004), which makes an incontrovertible case for the fiscal value of subsidised theatre in the UK. But the return on investment is not just financial. Hunt should ask Clegg about the life-long social and educational benefits of participating in theatre. It's up to the new coalition to sustain the UK's world-beating cultural offerings.

John Berry
ENO

The arts in the UK have for decades boxed above their weight and continue to pay for themselves through revenue from tourism, exports and the leveraging of private funding. My hope is that quality and artistic vision will be rewarded and organisations that are reaching out to new audiences and producing innovative work can continue to do so. Public subsidy should primarily support work that would otherwise not happen. It should enable organisations and artists to put their heads above the parapet, challenge their art forms and, in ENO's case, build relationships with smaller organisations such as Punchdrunk, Complicité, Fabulous Beast and Improbable.

My fear is that Jeremy Hunt and Ed Vaizey will underestimate the fragility of our big arts organisations and their crucial role in nurturing talent. Please continue to talk to us about this and how we are producing value for money. See for yourselves how we are very reliant on the goodwill and passion of gifted individuals. There is no fat; nothing to spare. Cutting will mean that the future Anthony Minghella, Stephen Daldrys and Simon McBurneys of this world – all having learnt their trade in the UK subsidised arts sector – will simply not have the opportunity to flourish.

Sandy Nairne
[National Portrait Gallery](#)

Like everyone in the arts and cultural sector, I hope the new government can fully recognise the huge positive economic and educational impact of our work. Even moderate cuts in budgets would significantly reduce what we are able to offer to the public. I want to see the new government loudly celebrating the successes of the arts sector – subsidised and commercial, specialist and popular, alike. At the same time it is important to promote and maintain an appropriate degree of critical response, whether coming from young people, general audiences, arts professionals, or ministers themselves.

I would ask that the efforts going into the Cultural Olympiad and festival around 2012 are extended beyond the Games to give us major cultural development towards 2020.

David Pickard
Glyndebourne

I am delighted that Jeremy Hunt has recognised the importance of a mixed economy of private and public funding for the arts. This is central to Glyndebourne's business model. We could not maintain the artistic standards of our festival, which receives no public subsidy, without the support of our enlightened patrons and donors. On the other hand, funding from the Arts Council is crucial to our work in reaching new audiences through touring and pioneering education projects. The prospect of tax breaks for donors is welcome, but we do also have to accept that some of the most important and exciting work in the arts will never attract private support.

If I have one wish for the future, it is that Hunt's obvious enthusiasm will help to boost the arts higher up the political agenda, reflecting the contribution we can make to the broader government priorities of health and education. Let's celebrate the arts rather than apologise for them.

This article was amended on 24 May. The original used the spellings John Betty and Josie O'Rourke. These have been corrected.

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