

ARTISTIC AND QUALITY ASSESSMENT (AQA) GUIDANCE TO NATIONAL PORTFOLIO ORGANISATIONS (NPOS)



The public deserve the best in return for their investment, so the Arts Council is committed to the pursuit of the highest quality in everything we do. We believe in the value of training and skills, and we will use our investment to support organisations to develop talent and improve quality – across all their creative work and processes, and in the way in which they run their organisations.

We do not believe that certain types or scales of creative activity are inherently better or of greater value than others: excellence can be found in village halls and concert halls, and in both the process of participation and the work that is produced. We are committed to backing organisations and creative practitioners of all ages who have the potential to excel at what they do, as well as supporting those who are already at the top of their game.

Judgments about quality are inevitably complex and open to debate. We will therefore continue to work with the cultural sector to establish a shared language around it, which we will draw on as we consider and explain our investment decisions. But in the end it will be the Arts Council's responsibility to use our experience and expertise to make the judgments that determine those decisions.

The aim of artistic and quality assessment is to provide a fair, robust and transparent platform for discussions about quality of work and to develop a broad range of insights from arts and culture professionals. This will help:

- Contribute to better discussions about quality of work between Arts Council relationship managers (RMs) and national portfolio organisations (NPOs).
- NPOs reflect on the quality of their work.
- Support NPO's own improvement and self-evaluation processes.

AQAs are written for the benefit of the Arts Council by independent assessors. Their primary purpose is to provide external viewpoints which contribute to a broader picture of quality. They can be used in collaboration with a variety of evaluation methods to explore the quality of an organisation's work. RMs decide which work will be assessed. AQAs can also be useful to arts and cultural organisations to help them reflect on their work and support their own improvement. One assessment in isolation can only ever be a "snap shot" of a particular piece of work as assessed by one individual. It may provide a useful starting point for a discussion about quality but would not be used in isolation to inform a funding decision.

What do we assess?

Standard artistic and quality assessments apply to all public-facing work which is created, curated, commissioned, produced or performed by NPOs using their core-NPO funding only

(work made possible through other funding streams is ineligible). NPO Museum assessments should focus on publicly-accessible events/activity and exhibitions produced or commissioned by NPO Museums. The artistic and quality assessment programme also includes programmed and participatory work.

All band 1 NPOs making AQA-eligible work should expect to have this assessed at some time. As a guide, each band 1 NPO should be assessed at least four times over the 2018-22 investment period. Band 2 and 3 NPOs will use the Impact and Insight Toolkit to gather insight into the quality of their work. NPOs in bands 2 and 3 may still receive occasional assessments – this can be discussed with your relationship manager.

Who are the assessors?

Assessors come from a range of backgrounds, including artists, arts managers, journalists, academics, museum specialists and others. They should be regarded as arts-literate and informed audience members who have been appointed against published criteria, including:

- Knowledge, expertise and understanding
- ability to make fair, evidence-based judgments about artistic quality and to explain those judgments clearly in writing
- understanding of the context within which arts organisations make their work.

We also ensure that we appoint a diverse range of people who together:

- are able to assess artistic activity across the whole of England
- have particular specialisms – for example in work for children and young people, culturally specific arts or disability arts.

What is the scope of AQA?

Assessments should contain fair, balanced and honest judgments about quality based on sound evidence and it is important that those judgments are explained clearly. To encourage a degree of consistency of approach and to prompt assessors to consider different aspects of the work the assessments are all written to a common template available on the [Arts Council website](#) and this aims to cover a range of elements that contribute to the quality of the work as a whole.

The Quality Evaluation team informs NPOs in advance when an assessor is going to see their work, letting them know which assessor will be attending. Upon completion assessments are available to both the organisation and their Arts Council relationship manager through Grantium.

Artistic and quality assessments are not intended for publication and the Arts Council retains copyright of the assessments. It is important to remember, however, that they will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act and as such may be disclosed and published by third parties.