

A&Q Read more:

Cultural organisations and individuals are ambitious and committed to improving the quality of their work.

Being ambitious and striving for quality is at the heart of what we do. We want those who engage with us to be inspired and experience those moments that can change how we see ourselves and how we understand others.

Ambition and quality applies to talent development, educational activity, and community programmes as much as it does to public presentation. This touches every aspect of the process from concept, through creation, to delivery and evaluation of impact and reach.

To consider how to adopt this principle it is useful to define its two key components:

- **Ambition:** the formulation and articulation of what you want to achieve and how you plan to achieve it.
- **Quality:** the delivery of your activity and the evaluation of it against your ambitions.

With that in mind, we have defined three pillars that make up Ambition and Quality:

Understanding perceptions

Our ambition:

We want a sector that develops creative ambitions and improves the quality of work by listening to the views of people inside and outside its immediate circle. We will engage with the sector about mission and the quality of creative and cultural activities.

What this means for you:

To contribute to this, you will seek to understand, reflect and respond to the views of audiences, participants, co-creators, customers, peers, staff, and other stakeholders. These external views can inform the way you work and provide you with sound evidence on which to base decisions about your activity. In practice, this could mean:

- Seeking out external perceptions of you, your organisation and your work, particularly from those outside your immediate circle.
- Using differing perceptions to inform your planning and delivery.
- Exploring ways to close the perception gap between you, and those you wish to reach, testing your assumptions along the way and exploring new ways to communicate your ambitions.
- Facing outward, inviting feedback, and sharing how this process has impacted your work.

Progression

Our ambition:

The creative and cultural work of those we fund contributes to a well communicated set of aims and ambitions. There is a strong commitment to professional development and collaboration. Review takes place between creatives and partners to refine and improve the creative and cultural practice of the sector.

What this means for you:

Progression can be described as the journey from articulating ambition to quality delivery and viewed in two stages. The first is the deciding on and planning of what you want to achieve. The second is about the collaboration, effort, training, and refinement required to get there. To help you articulate this process you can:

- Test how all your creative and cultural work, both its public and non-public aspects, clearly links to your aims and ambitions.
- Consider both the technical quality of what you present to the public **and** the way that you work with participants, such as through your education programmes and community outreach and engagement.
- Value and engage in professional development and look to other creatives and partners to continually refine and develop creative and cultural practice.

Measuring performance

Our ambition:

We want to support a sector that values the measurement and expression of what quality looks like, identifies scope for improvement, and tracks progress. We want to see the adoption of performance measurement and its application in shaping work and developing future plans.

What this means for you:

Establishing a system for performance measurement can support you in many ways. It helps provide early warning of potential issues, it provides the opportunity to check that your programmes of work are contributing to your strategic aims, and it provides useful evidence of your non-financial impact to funders and other stakeholders. You may already have, or want to think about adopting, a process to do this and so will be considering:

- How you can test your stated ambitions and measure whether you are performing as well as you intended.
- Building an evidence base to measure progress, in particular to help report to governing bodies and stakeholders.
- Introducing positive changes as a result of reviewing performance and capturing that change.
- Utilising tools to measure how people's experience of your work compares with the way you intended it be received.

Conclusion

The three elements above connect into a continuous cycle of development. But the feedback cycle does need to extend beyond those who are intimately involved in delivering the work. Listening, developing, evaluating and listening again to new and different voices can be rewarding and incredibly helpful for any business or practitioner. We believe this outward-facing attitude will make the sector more resilient and likely to produce the culture that will help achieve the vision of **'Let's Create'**.

Further thoughts...

To develop this approach, you can benefit from using a suitable framework and an agreed set of quality markers that enable you to evaluate your work.

Your markers of quality will be unique to you and depend on your work. Examples commonly in use across the sector now relate to things such as connection, relevance, rigour, distinctiveness, concept, captivation, challenge, belonging, enabling personal progression, and being authentic and inclusive.

If you haven't engaged with this before, there has been work undertaken by the sector already in developing the **Quality Principles** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/quality-metrics/quality-principles>) and the **Impact and Insight Toolkit** (<https://impactandinsight.co.uk/>) which collates the views of creatives, peers, audiences and participants across a common set of quality indicators.

We will continue to share best practice and learning and celebrate pioneers in this field. The Arts Council is on this journey with you. We are committed to embodying Ambition and Quality across every aspect of our organisation.

To learn more about our expectations around this principle, and particularly for those in receipt of, or with the ambition to apply for, regular funding, look out for further resources this summer. To ensure you get notified of new material, you can sign up to our newsletter here <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-organisation/sign-our-email-updates>

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