

Press Release
10 August 2021



NEW CONSORTIUM AWARDED £1.18 MILLION TO TRANSFORM THE FUTURE OF VISUAL ARTS IN BRISTOL AND THE WEST OF ENGLAND

We are thrilled to announce a new consortium partnership, the West of England Visual Arts Alliance, has been awarded £1.18 million by Arts Council England to transform the future of visual arts in Bristol and the West of England.

A new National Lottery development fund was launched by Arts Council England in 2020 to increase professional development opportunities and commissioning capacity for the visual arts, and to ensure ambition and opportunity is thriving in this region. In response, a new consortium partnership of nine organisations across the region was formed to bring about this step change.

Co-led by Spike Island and Visual Arts South West, the consortium includes partners Bath Spa University School of Art, Bristol City Council, The Brunswick Club, Creative Youth Network, Culture Weston, North Somerset Council and UWE Bristol. Our collective vision is for the visual arts community in Bristol and the West of England to be more progressive, sustainable and inclusive by 2024.

Over the next three years, the West of England Visual Arts Alliance programme aims to transform Bristol and the West of England into a place where the visual arts can thrive, providing critical opportunities and support to enable diverse local artists, curators and young people to develop their careers and achieve their potential.

Specific detail on the hundreds of opportunities will be announced soon, to include:

- 2,760 opportunities for at least 500 artists
- 3 artist development programmes led by Spike Island, Visual Arts South West and The Brunswick Club
- Online and place-based mentoring, resources and interdisciplinary skills workshops
- Research and development bursaries of between £500–£1,000 awarded to more than 15 South West-based artists, curators and independent art workers each year
- Major new commissioning and exhibition opportunities for South West-based artists
- Research and development fellowships of £10k awarded to 3 South West-based artists, artist-led groups or other independent art workers each year
- New positive action policies for subsidised studio provision and artist development opportunities, designed to remove barriers to access for underrepresented groups
- New fellowship and mentoring opportunities for artists, curators and young people, developed with Creative Youth Network

Artists and curators who would like to hear first about these opportunities are encouraged to sign up to the Spike Island and/or Visual Arts South West mailing lists.

This strategic partnership will also provide support for access costs and network hubs, help artist-led groups to secure urgently needed homes, and enable artist-led organisations and studio providers to become more sustainable and inclusive by adopting new models of best practice. By advocating for the visual arts to be embedded in the region's strategic development, it aims to ensure that the sector's role in regeneration, well-being, and economic and community development is fully recognised.

Phil Gibby, Area Director, South West, Arts Council England, says:

“We are delighted to be announcing more details of our £1.18 million development programme, Supporting Visual Arts Progression in Bristol and the West of England, and we're pleased to announce that the partnership consortium, the West of England Visual Arts Alliance, will be the recipient of the funding award.

The programme was designed with the local visual arts ecology in mind, to transform the opportunities in Bristol and across the West of England. This is the best opportunity we've had to direct a substantial amount of investment towards the development of the visual arts in the city and region.

The consortium's proposal looks set to realise the principal recommendations from the review by creating a more robust package of professional development opportunities for artists living and working in the West of England; increasing the number of commissions open to artists in the region; and nurturing the connectivity between artists and other players in the visual arts ecosystem.

This development fund will help Arts Council to deliver our strategic vision, as set out in Let's Create 2020-30 and will help to ensure England's cultural sector is innovative, collaborative and international by backing organisations and creative practitioners to excel at what they do.”

Peter Heslip, Director, Visual Arts and Brighton, Arts Council England, says:

“England has a remarkable, dynamic tradition in the visual arts, and attracts gifted artists, curators and leaders from all over the world to work and study here. This world leading creativity helps make people proud of our country.

Following the last Arts Council National Portfolio investment round, we ringfenced funding for visual arts in the south west to be deployed in consultation with artists, producers, curators and stakeholders to ensure that Bristol and the West of England could further develop its reputation as a vibrant centre of visual arts excellence.

So now I’m thrilled that the significant funding award we have made to the West of England Visual Arts Alliance will benefit a diverse range of artists at every stage of their career and create a sustainable, long term step change in the visual arts in the south west region. The programme also has strong potential to be a blueprint of best practice for other places, providing an inclusive and scalable model for professional development and commissioning capacity in the visual arts.”

Robert Leckie, Director at Spike Island, says on behalf of the West of England Visual Arts Alliance:

“The awarding of this funding to the West of England Visual Arts Alliance partnership is a significant moment for the visual arts in Bristol and the West of England – it gives us an exceptional opportunity to build a more resilient, progressive and inclusive sector. We can’t wait to start delivering on the many exciting projects and opportunities that this funding enables, to benefit local artists, curators and young people, and for the impact and importance of the visual arts in our region to be more widely recognised.”

Richard Blows, Partnerships Lead at North Somerset Council, says:

“At North Somerset Council we have placed arts and culture at the heart of our ambitions for Weston-super-Mare. Working with our local partner Culture Weston, we believe that West of England Visual Arts Alliance will help us build the visibility, capacity and impact of the visual arts sector in the town. It is a comprehensive programme that will help deliver our shared ambitions to grow and retain local talent, promote the role of visual arts in the public realm and create a sustainable visual arts ecology by generating creative uses for empty retail spaces, whilst also enabling our visual artists to be part of a larger collective that can bring knowledge, skills and expertise to Weston.”

– Ends –

For further information and high-resolution images please contact Jane Faram, Communications Manager at Spike Island on jane.faram@spikeisland.org.uk or +44 (0)117 9292266.

Image: Izzy Mooney, Dreamtime Fellow at Spike Island supported by artist Luke Jerram (2019)
Photograph by Rebecca Goldman

NOTES FOR EDITORS

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. They have set out their strategic vision in Let's Create that by 2030 they want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high quality cultural experiences. Arts Council England invest public money from Government and The National Lottery to help support the sector and to deliver this vision.

www.artscouncil.org.uk

Following the Covid-19 crisis, the Arts Council developed a £160 million Emergency Response Package, with nearly 90% coming from the National Lottery, for organisations and individuals needing support. They are also one of the bodies administering the Government's unprecedented £1.96 billion Culture Recovery Funds.

www.artscouncil.org.uk/covid19

SPIKE ISLAND

Spike Island supports, produces and presents contemporary art and culture across an 80,000 square foot former industrial building in Bristol. Its diverse artistic programme includes free major exhibitions, events and engagement activities taking place on-site and online. Championing outstanding work by emerging and underrepresented local, national and international artists, the programme enhances access to contemporary art for audiences from all backgrounds.

Alongside its public offer, Spike Island directly supports artists through new commissions, over 70 subsidised studios, and sector-leading artist development opportunities that widen access to its programme and facilities. Its Exhibition Services business supports the bespoke production and installation of artists' film and video throughout the UK and internationally. Spike Island is home to a dynamic community of hundreds of artists and creative businesses, working in flexible, affordable workspaces, alongside UWE Bristol's Fine Art department, Spike Print Studio, and café bar Emmeline.

www.spikeisland.org.uk

VISUAL ARTS SOUTH WEST

Visual Arts South West (VASW) is a sector support organisation. Its mission is to advocate for visual arts and enable the sector to thrive in South West England. Its core aims are to: raise the visibility of the South West's visual arts sector, both in the region and nationally; advocate for diverse perspectives in our region; address significant structural and systemic issues facing the sector; develop a more resilient visual arts sector. VASW is part of the national Contemporary Visual Art Network and is based at Spike Island, Bristol.

www.vasw.org.uk

BATH SPA UNIVERSITY

Bath Spa University is where creativity and enterprise meet. Offering a wide range of modern courses across the arts, science, education, social science and business to 7,000 students, the

University employs outstanding academic and technical staff to deliver innovative learning opportunities. Based in stunning countryside just a few minutes from a World Heritage City, Bath Spa University students graduate as engaged global citizens who are ready for the world of work. 96.1 per cent of graduates find themselves in work or further study within six months.

www.bathspa.ac.uk

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

“The cultural and creative economy is what makes Bristol unique. It is the city’s beating heart bringing life into all of our communities. It isn’t what we do – it is who we are.” Lynn Barlow and Cllr Craig Cheney, Co-Chairs of the One City Culture Board.

Bristol City Council use culture as a catalyst and play a leading role in driving a city of hope and aspiration where everyone can share in its success. Their focus is on being inclusive, collaborative and sustainable and enabling citizens of Bristol to share their stories in creative and innovative ways.

www.bristol.gov.uk

THE BRUNSWICK CLUB

Set up in 2017 when collectives BEEF, Champ, Residence, Thorny and Bermuda Triangle Test Transmissions came together to occupy a former working men’s club in Bristol, The Brunswick Club is an autonomous community of over thirty artists, musicians, researchers, filmmakers and performers. It provides space and facilities for production, and presents a collaboratively organised programme of events, exhibitions, residencies and workshops.

www.facebook.com/thebrunswickclub

CREATIVE YOUTH NETWORK

Creative Youth Network enables young people to reach their own potential whatever their background or experience. All of the young people they work with are experiencing barriers that are preventing them from flourishing. They support them in removing or overcoming these barriers by: building trusting relationships, enabling them to address young people’s individual needs; providing a wide range of programmes and activities to help young people reach their potential; amplifying young voices and advocating with young people to influence policy and practice.

www.creativeyouthnetwork.org.uk

CULTURE WESTON

Culture Weston came into being in April 2020 and is a pioneering initiative that places outstanding creative, cultural and heritage activity at the heart of Weston’s daily life and future development. Culture Weston is being led by North Somerset arts organisation Theatre Orchard, in collaboration with North Somerset Council, Arts Council England and the local community. It supports and illuminates all that makes Weston ‘Super’ through a partnership-led programme that dynamically develops people and places. Driving an ambitious, outward looking and collaborative approach to arts and culture that enables more people to experience and get involved in culture and creativity and growing Weston as a place where more people can develop and sustain careers as artists/creatives - shaping a thriving town and destination with opportunity, optimism and energy.

Culture Weston aims to grow Weston as a destination that is known for its distinctive culture; as a place for outstanding arts and cultural experiences that excite and inspire, and where community is at the heart of the cultural offer.

www.cultureweston.org.uk

NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL

North Somerset Council is aiming to make North Somerset a distinctive destination for heritage, arts and culture, serving residents and visitors alike and contributing to the economic growth of the area. Working with partners, the council want to create new opportunities for participation, to grow the cultural sector and to ensure that local talent can thrive. Since launching their ten year plan in 2020, North Somerset Council has already seen significant increases in engagement, support and investment across a wide range of heritage, art and cultural activity.

<http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/>

UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND (UWE BRISTOL)

The University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) has a global and inclusive outlook, with approximately 30,000 students and strong industry networks and connections with over 1,000 employers. Research at UWE Bristol focuses on real world problems and the University plays a pivotal role in the regional economy. With over £300 million invested in infrastructure, buildings and facilities across all Campuses, UWE Bristol is creating a place for learning that is innovative, ambitious, connected, enabling and inclusive. UWE Bristol is ranked 21st in the Guardian university league table, as well as 7th in the UK for student satisfaction, and has been awarded the highest possible rating in the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) 2018, achieving GOLD Standard.

www.uwe.ac.uk



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**ARTS COUNCIL
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Spike Island

**VISUAL
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SOUTH WEST**

