

AGEING MORE ARTFULLY: HOW FAR HAVE WE COME?

I have been invited by [Age of Creativity](#) to consider 'how far have we come in creative ageing?'. It would be easy to offer something uplifting in response to this daunting challenge and leave it at that. There are hundreds of inspiring case studies of work across all art forms, some of which we have supported. It would be fun to write and hopefully enjoyable to read, but also a bit smug and a little lazy. So I have tried to take a step back and look more analytically. I am afraid that this might be less inspirational – and isn't intended to detract from all that brilliant work – but hopefully is a little more thoughtful.

In 2009, the Baring Foundation published an overview of the field of arts and old people prior to starting our funding programme that would run throughout this decade. Called [Ageing Artfully](#), the report concluded by suggesting fourteen areas that could be key to a larger, higher quality and more ambitious field. The list is an arguable one, but has stood the test of time and at least gives us a starting point.

It is the great joy and privilege of my job that almost every day I will see or hear about exciting new work involving arts and older people either in the UK or internationally. So it is hard not to conclude that the wind is in our sails. But that would both make a short blog and is also subject to confirmation bias – I am always looking for new work, believe passionately in creative ageing and very much want to see it to succeed. But where is the evidence for this?

Measurement is in many ways the bane of the arts and we could easily have spent our entire programme budget on measuring older people's participation in the arts without ever funding any activity or development. Using the largest survey, [Taking Part](#), commissioned by the Arts Council England, it would seem that participation has increased slightly. Welcome though that is, it is quite a narrow general measure of attendance (the Foundation is more interested in creative participation and among more disadvantaged older people) and it is only for England.

Moving to more subjective but still analytic indicators, how about those areas which in [Ageing Artfully](#) we thought needed development?

Research We published an overview of research by the Mental Health Foundation in 2011 which concluded that there was good evidence of the benefits of arts for older people in a number of domains such as physical and mental health. Research has piled up since then and in December 2015 the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) concluded that this was so conclusive as to justify funding on public health grounds. However the research is dispersed and generally hard to find. The demand for research and evidence seems unending despite the strength of the existing evidence base.

Scaling up of activity In 2009 there was already some high quality work but this tended to be delivered by very small arts organisations at a very local level. Although this is still broadly true, some of the larger funding programmes such as the joint fund with the Arts Council, [Celebrating Age](#), will increase the quality of people involved. A Choir in Every Care Home which we have commissioned from [Live Music Now](#) is again intended to scale up the number of people in care homes involved in singing. Digital arts also have this potential for widening coverage and we have

both published two reports promoting this and created a joint fund with the Nominet Trust supporting five promising and diverse projects.

Policy and funding A frequently overlooked fact is that policy (and therefore funding) for both arts and older people's services is devolved. And since 2009 we have had a period of political upheaval unparalleled in my life time. So, policy on ageing in particular seems to have taken a back seat, although with frequent crises in social care bringing it to the fore. In short, there has been little if any policy level attention to development on arts and older people, at least at a governmental level. In 2009, only the Arts Council Northern Ireland had a funding stream dedicated to arts and older people. That funding has been maintained and now Scotland and Wales have major projects in the shape of Luminare and cARTrefu respectively, and the Arts Council England currently has [Celebrating Age](#) and a programme of work in care homes. The Baring Foundation is a partner in all of these.

Festivals These have continued to develop. [Gwanwyn](#) in Wales has been running for many years and continues to grow, and [Luminare](#), a month-long festival across Scotland is now in its fifth year. Although [Capital Age](#) in London has had its ups and downs, Stoke on Trent had the vibrant [Live Age Festival](#) and a number of more local festivals have popped up. We will be supporting a major national and international festival next summer at the Southbank Centre. Preeminent among specialist festivals, the fabulous Sadler's Wells Elixir Festival will run for the second time this summer.

Local authorities and health trusts Probably the most important actors of all in the long term but also under intense pressure from rising demand and stagnant or sharply reducing budgets. As ever, the determinants are different in each country. However, there are examples of great work by local authorities despite the challenges, some of which will feature in a re-issue of our 2014 report on the role of local authorities in arts and older people, which we are refreshing in time for a major conference this autumn.

Partnerships between arts organisations and older people's services Arts organisations and older people's organisations operate in quite different spheres and older people will benefit much more when they work together. While there is scope for much more, cross-sector partnership is a design principle of our joint fund with Arts Council England, Celebrating Age, and the results so far are promising. Partnerships are a focus of our new grant to Age UK to increase its focus on arts.

The regulation of care. Each nation has its own regulator for care, but in England the Care Quality Commission (CQC) had been vocal in emphasising that the arts are needed to score outstanding in their assessments and the Care Commission in Scotland has produced a toolkit resource for inspectors with Luminare.

Networking between arts organisations My sense is that this has improved. We gave an initial grant to [Age of Creativity](#) run by Age UK Oxfordshire which now continues independently. There have been frequent conferences both across art forms and on specialist subjects such as the first symposium for Older People's Theatre Companies held at West Yorkshire Playhouse last year.

Practice development, training and standards This category covers a multitude of sins. I am not sure that the picture has changed a lot. There is training available for artists in working with older people,

especially around working in care homes and with people with dementia. In 2013, Consilium did a review of training for arts and older people work in care homes. There are toolkits and resource packs mainly directed at non-artists, such as activity coordinators in care homes. New resources are constantly being developed, for instance a new playing card pack type resource for all care homes in Wales. But these are often hard to find and dispersed. The [Social Care Institute for Excellence](#) is undertaking a project to bring these together on its popular website. Although there has been much discussion around the pros and cons of accreditation or kite marking, as yet nothing has emerged.

Major venues With some honourable exceptions, most of the work we identified in 2009 was done by very small organisations. This is certainly changing. The work done by West Yorkshire Playhouse on dementia friendly performances is spreading across an ever increasing number of theatres. We chaired a working party which resulted in the Alzheimer's Society's Guide to [Dementia Friendly Arts Venues](#). We also fund the [Age Friendly Museum's Network](#) which include world renowned museums and galleries such as the British Museum, Tate and Whitworth Galleries. And venues just go off and do brilliant things such as the [All Together Opera](#) programme at the Royal Opera House.

Public profile This is hard to assess and certainly hasn't been the subject of any rigorous analysis. My own perception is that not much has changed. There will be good local publicity often about new projects as arts organisations are adept and skilful at doing this, but this rarely gets a higher profile. The recent national conferences we have supported in Wales and Northern Ireland have generated good publicity.

Leadership by older people I see little evidence of much progress here. There are examples of older champions for work, steering groups or, of course many older artists (we funded a whole programme called Late Style by older artists), but much of the work that we fund is organised by arts organisations run and delivered by artists who are not older themselves.

Coordination and sector advocacy The question here was whether there should be a coordinating body for arts and older people in the way there is, for instance, in the US with the [National Center for Creative Ageing](#) or in the UK with the work of [Counterpoint Arts](#) for the arts and refugees (which we have supported). This remains a live question for us. What do you think? Would it help the sustainability of arts and older people work and drive up quality? Something which has become clearer though is that such an initiative is only likely to work on a country by country basis, respecting devolution.

I have no doubt that the field has come far. Many, many thousands of older people have found new purpose and expression in recent years thanks to the many developments I've listed here. I am personally very pleased that artists increasingly find working with older people not something to be regarded as worthy but as a rich artistic opportunity. But it is very clearly unfinished business.

David Cutler is Director of the Baring Foundation