

An aerial, top-down view of a city street map, rendered in a vibrant green color. The map shows a complex network of streets and buildings. Scattered across the map are several people, appearing as small figures from this perspective, walking in various directions. The overall scene suggests a busy urban environment.

Culture off the beaten track

Economy Committee

LONDON ASSEMBLY

Economy Committee



The Economy Committee scrutinises the work of the Mayor relating to economic development, wealth creation, social development, culture, sport and tourism in the capital.

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Foreword



Hina Bokhari AM
Chair of the Economy Committee

London’s cultural offer is often associated with large, globally famous institutions based in central London. These organisations undoubtedly offer world-class cultural experiences, attracting millions of Londoners and tourists alike every year. But the London Assembly Economy Committee wanted to explore another sometimes neglected but equally important part of London’s cultural scene. We wanted to look at culture off the beaten track: grassroots culture, and small cultural organisations that are rooted in their local communities.

The Committee heard how important grassroots culture is to London’s wider cultural ecology. It is where most emerging artists, musicians and actors start their careers, providing a talent pipeline into more mainstream parts of the sector. However, London’s small cultural organisations should not just be seen as feeders into large organisations, but rather as providers of unique, compelling cultural experiences that are accessible to Londoners on their doorsteps in all corners of the city.

Speaking to representatives of the sector, it was clear how responsive these organisations are to their local communities. They spoke about their work with local schools and community groups, often in parts of London with high levels of deprivation. They discussed their commitment to widening participation in cultural activity, and on reflecting the diversity of these communities through both their workforces and their audiences. This is a great success that needs to be celebrated more. We also heard repeatedly that these organisations can be more agile than larger organisations in adapting to changing circumstances such as the pandemic, when many moved their activity online at very short notice.

The Committee heard that these organisations face multiple challenges. They explained that they find it more difficult to attract public funding than larger organisations, as they do not have the same time or resources to dedicate to the application process. Many do not have long-term leases and therefore lack security of tenure, restricting their ability to plan for the long term. Some highlighted the disconnect they feel with other organisations in the sector, and the fact that they don’t feel their voices are heard, including by the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor for Culture and Creative Industries, and the Night Czar. The Committee believes there is opportunity for the GLA to do more in this respect to bring the sector together. We are therefore recommending that the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor establish a network of

grassroots cultural organisations to provide opportunities for networking and partnership working.

The pandemic generated considerable financial hardship for the cultural sector. Most stakeholders did not feel that the industry had ‘recovered’, and the financial legacy of the pandemic is now being exacerbated by rising inflation and cost-of-living pressures. It is therefore more important than ever that the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor provide adequate support to this vital part of London’s cultural ecosystem.

Executive summary

‘Culture off the beaten track’ refers to small cultural organisations such as small museums, galleries, theatres and music venues, particularly those located outside London’s Central Activities Zone.¹ It also includes local arts festivals, pop-up exhibitions and more informal cultural projects and activities. This form of culture is often rooted in local communities, and is distinct from London’s large cultural institutions that are mostly located in the Central Activities Zone.

The Economy Committee held a meeting in City Hall to discuss ‘culture off the beaten track’ on 15 June 2022, and followed this up with a roundtable with representatives from small cultural organisations at Theatre Royal Stratford East on 13 July 2022. The Committee subsequently wrote to Justine Simons, the Deputy Mayor for Culture and the Creative Industries, with a set of questions about the GLA’s work in this area. The Committee received a response from the Deputy Mayor, which has been used as written evidence for this report.

The Committee made a number of key findings as part of its investigations, which are summarised below:

- Grassroots cultural organisations are often embedded in their local areas, working closely with schools and community groups. Their audiences tend to reflect the diversity of Londoners more than large cultural institutions. They are also integral to London’s wider cultural ecology, acting as feeders into larger organisations and the success of the UK’s creative industries.
- The arts and culture sector as a whole was severely impacted by the pandemic. The vast majority of the sector’s organisations were forced to suspend activity and endured significant losses as a result. This is now being exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis, which is a major concern for small cultural venues.
- Small cultural organisations can sometimes feel isolated and detached from other parts of the sector. Representatives of the sector that the Committee spoke to emphasised the importance of bringing the sector together to share experiences and develop networks and partnerships. The Mayor and the Deputy Mayor should play a greater role in bringing small cultural organisations together, enabling these groups to network, share experiences and explore opportunities for partnership working.
- There are various ways in which the Mayor could provide additional support to London’s grassroots cultural organisations. London’s small cultural organisations felt that the Mayor’s Culture at Risk Business Support Fund is needed on an ongoing basis and should be focused on prevention, rather than addressing crises in the sector as they arise. The Mayor and the Deputy Mayor could do more to help promote these

¹ Mayor of London, [Central Activities Zone](#)

organisations, as part of the Let's Do London campaign and future promotional campaigns. The Mayor could do more to help small cultural organisations access long-term affordable leases, including as part of the development of high streets.

- London has historically received a larger proportion of Arts Council England (ACE) funding than other parts of the country. Although much of London's share of funding goes to large organisations based in central London, community-based and grassroots organisations have also been recipients of ACE funding. There is therefore a risk that the redistribution of arts funding to other parts of the country will result in a loss of funding for London's grassroots cultural organisations.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Mayor and the Deputy Mayor should initiate the convening of a network of grassroots cultural organisations. This network should provide a space for organisations to develop connections, share experiences and explore opportunities for partnership working.

Recommendation 2

The Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, and London & Partners should consult with London's grassroots cultural organisations on how best to include them in GLA initiatives to promote London's cultural sector, including through the Let's Do London campaign. This must include organisations outside central London.

Recommendation 3

When the Mayor next appoints members to the Cultural Leadership Board, he should prioritise appointing members from London's grassroots cultural organisations.

Recommendation 4

The Mayor and the Deputy Mayor should lobby the Government to ensure that London's grassroots cultural organisations do not lose out as part of the redistribution of Arts Council England funding away from London, and to ensure that funding is distributed equitably to grassroots cultural organisations in London.

Recommendation 5

The Mayor should extend the Culture at Risk Business Support Fund, and ensure that its new iteration is focused on helping organisations to remain on a sustainable financial footing, rather than addressing crises in the sector as they arise.

Recommendation 6

As part of their work with a network of grassroots cultural organisations, the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor should consider how to provide support to these organisations in applying for funding from Arts Council England and other funding sources, and, in response to this report, should set out how they intend to do so.

Recommendation 7

The Mayor and the Deputy Mayor should take action to make available more permanent, affordable premises for grassroots cultural organisations. This should involve using the Mayor's planning powers to support small cultural organisations to access space in appropriate locations, not just on the high street, and providing advice and support to the organisations themselves.

Recommendation 8

As part of their work with a network of grassroots cultural organisations, the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor should prioritise initiatives that promote diversity across the sector, including in relation to social class. This should start by exploring best practice from those grassroots organisations with a successful track record of growing diverse workforces and audiences.

Recommendation 9

The Mayor's creative academy hubs should work with grassroots cultural organisations in developing training courses, to ensure that they are addressing the skills needs of the sector. The hubs should also work with these organisations to ensure that they are benefiting from the apprenticeships and work placements being created.

Recommendation 10

The Mayor should promote his Good Work Standard to organisations within London's cultural sector. In response to this report, the Mayor should inform the Committee about the action he has taken to promote the Good Work Standard within the sector and to encourage cultural organisations to sign up to it.

Culture off the beaten track: challenges and opportunities

Background

London's creative industries contribute £58 billion to its economy and employ one in six people in London.² London is home to world-famous cultural institutions, including museums, galleries, theatres and music venues.

But culture in London is so much more than those large institutions based in central London. London is home to a diverse range of cultural activity based in every borough. Data published by the Mayor in 2019 showed that London was home to 52 LGBT+ night-time venues, 94 grassroots music venues, 263 theatres, and 165 museums and galleries.³ These organisations are located throughout the city, and many play a central role in their local communities. As well as these established organisations based in long-term locations, London's grassroots culture includes local arts festivals, pop-up exhibitions and more informal projects and activities. This 'culture off the beaten track' is the subject of the Committee's investigation and report.

Policy-makers are increasingly recognising the importance of grassroots, community-facing culture. A key theme of ACE's ten-year strategy, launched in 2020, is to support culture that is rooted in local communities. One of the strategy's three desired 'outcomes' is 'cultural communities', which is defined as 'how culture is created by and with people in their communities, and how it shapes the places in which they live, work, learn and visit'.⁴ Local and community culture is also a central theme of the Mayor's 2018 Culture Strategy, Culture for all Londoners, which pledged to 'expand access to culture beyond Zone 1 and into every borough and corner of our city'.⁵

The importance of grassroots culture

Guests at the Committee's meeting and roundtable spoke of the importance of grassroots culture and its value to London's diverse communities. These organisations are often embedded in their local areas, working closely with schools and other community groups. Guests argued that their audiences tend to reflect the diversity of Londoners more than large cultural institutions, which will be discussed in more detail below. They are also integral to London's wider cultural ecology, acting as feeders into larger organisations and the success of the UK's creative industries.

² Mayor of London, [Mayor's culture fund helping to support 141 grassroots music venues](#), 21 September 2020

³ Mayor of London, [City Hall launches cultural map of the capital](#), 19 March 2019

⁴ ACE, [Let's Create: Strategy 2020-2030](#), 2021

⁵ Mayor of London, [Culture for all Londoners: Mayor of London's Culture Strategy](#), December 2018

“The way that I describe these music venues are they are sort of like the Artists and Repertoire (A&R) department of the live music industry. It is where you get artists who are new and developing, just-emerging artists at the beginning of their careers ... it all starts at these small venues.”

**Clara Cullen, Venue Support Manager
Music Venue Trust**

“[Small cultural organisations] often reflect the diversity of their communities and they can really garner hyperlocal community participation.”

**Lorna Lee, Assistant Director, Culture and Heritage
London Borough of Waltham Forest**

“Often those smaller organisations can be quite fleet of foot ... very often those organisations that are smaller are able to spot those opportunities where they are needed and really take them very quickly.”

**Paul Bristow, Director, Strategic Partnerships
Arts Council England**

“It is an interesting point of saying that smaller cultural organisations can be feeders into larger organisations. However, they can also be just world-class culture on your doorstep in their own right and provide that experience without necessarily having to travel into central London. That is really important for local schools, for local communities, to have that.”

**Aditi Anand, Artistic Director
Migration Museum**

The impact of the pandemic and cost-of-living pressures

The arts and culture sector in the UK as a whole was severely impacted by the pandemic. The vast majority of the sector's organisations were forced to suspend activity, and endured significant losses as a result. Research carried out by academics at the University of Sheffield has found that the arts and culture sector suffered a 60 per cent decline in output because of restrictions.⁶ Around 450,000 people nationwide, which represents 55 per cent of jobs in the sector, were placed on furlough, which was second only to hospitality and well above the national average of 16 per cent.⁷ Many workers in the sector also missed out on government support. For example, one in three freelance workers in the theatre industry received no support from the furlough scheme or the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS).⁸

In July 2020, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) announced the £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund (CRF) rescue package for cultural organisations to help the sector survive and ultimately reopen.⁹ The fund provided a combination of grants and loans to organisations of all sizes. Organisations in London received a total amount of £285 million from several rounds of funding.¹⁰ A total of 38 venues in London received funding as part of the Emergency Grassroots Music Venues Fund, which formed part of the Culture Recovery Fund.¹¹

Although the impact of the pandemic was felt across the arts and culture sector, smaller organisations with fewer reserves experienced even greater challenges. According to the Music Venue Trust, a charity that works to protect UK grassroots music venues, grassroots venues were £90 million in debt by October 2021 as a result of the pandemic.¹² Research evidence is limited but suggests employees of small and micro-sized employers across the cultural sector were more than twice as likely to be furloughed as those working for large employers.¹³ The Museums Association stated, "Independent museums often have smaller reserves, are more reliant on earned income and are more vulnerable to sharp changes in economic conditions."¹⁴ The Museums Association also noted that 'national museums' have been badly affected as they are more reliant on international visitors.¹⁵ However, central London venues received more targeted support in the form of the Let's Do London domestic tourism campaign, which was focused on central London.¹⁶

At the meeting and roundtable held by the Committee, we heard that the impact of the pandemic continues to be felt across the culture sector. Clara Cullen of the Music Venue Trust noted in June 2022 that the industry was focused more on 'stabilisation' than 'recovery'. She also said that there was still a '20 per cent no-show rate' (people not turning up for shows they

⁶ BBC News, [Covid pandemic 'catastrophic' for arts and culture, says report](#), 17 November 2021

⁷ BBC News, [Covid pandemic 'catastrophic' for arts and culture, says report](#), 17 November 2021

⁸ Freelancers Make Theatre Work, [COVID-19: Routes to recovery](#), July 2020

⁹ DCMS, [Culture Recovery Fund](#)

¹⁰ ACE [Culture Recovery Fund: Data](#), 31 March 2022

¹¹ ACE [Culture Recovery Fund: Data](#), 31 March 2022

¹² Far Out Magazine, [UK grassroots music venues are £90million in debt following pandemic](#), 4 October 2021

¹³ University of Sheffield, [COVID-19 and Sheffield's cultural sector: planning for recovery](#)

¹⁴ Museums Association, [Redundancies after one year of Covid](#)

¹⁵ Museums Association, [Redundancies after one year of Covid](#)

¹⁶ Mayor of London, [Mayor of London announces plans for biggest domestic tourism campaign](#), 10 May 2021

have booked in advance). Jonathan Ashby-Rock, Artistic Director at The Arts Centre in Hounslow, stated, “Our audience numbers have not recovered.” Ongoing cases of COVID-19 continued to pose problems, and guests at the roundtable event noted that they had experienced recent cases of staff absence due to COVID-19. However, Flo Paul, Head of Learning and Participation at Theatre Royal Stratford East, noted, “There are some shoots of recovery.” Paul Bristow from ACE told the Committee, “Audiences have gone up faster in London than elsewhere in the country.”

The Committee also learned that the pandemic created some opportunities for the sector, although guests stressed that these did not outweigh the challenges. The increase in working online has meant that some roles can now be carried out remotely. The pandemic also led to a rise in online events across the cultural sector. As a consequence, organisations have been able to reach new audiences, including people outside London and the UK, as well as people who work irregular hours or who face barriers to attending events in person. Some cultural organisations that work with local schools have been able to adapt their provision to an online or hybrid offer. However, guests also stressed that this is not a sustainable financial model on its own.

The financial impact of the pandemic is now being exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis, which is a major concern for small cultural venues. They have seen their costs rise, with several guests referring to the rise in energy costs. Since the Committee spoke to representatives of the sector, the Government announced the Energy Bills Discount Scheme, which provides discounts on energy costs for eligible businesses and public sector organisations.¹⁷ The scheme will run until April 2024, and will benefit small cultural organisations in London.

There is also a risk that fewer people can afford to spend money on cultural activities and that audiences become less diverse as a result. As one of the guests put it at the roundtable event, “Moneywise, it is just tough.”

¹⁷ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero/Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, [Energy Bill Relief Scheme: help for businesses and other non-domestic customers](#), 21 September 2022

Support from the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor

Mayoral initiatives and programmes

The Mayor's 2018 Culture Strategy, Culture for all Londoners, pledged to 'expand access to culture beyond Zone 1 and into every borough and corner of our city.'¹⁸ The Mayor has delivered several programmes and initiatives with the aim of achieving this ambition, including the London Borough of Culture, Culture Seeds and Creative Enterprise Zones.

The Mayor launched the London Borough of Culture programme in 2017, in which boroughs bid to receive more than £1 million in funding to deliver a programme of cultural events over the course of a calendar year. Four boroughs – Waltham Forest, Brent, Lewisham and Croydon – have been London Boroughs of Culture so far. A further nine boroughs have received Cultural Impact Awards, which gives funding to deliver cultural projects on a smaller scale.¹⁹ The Deputy Mayor told the Committee that, to date, the programme had 'involved 208 schools, and created 1,570 volunteers and 600+ employment, development and leadership opportunities for young people'.²⁰ A review of Waltham Forest London Borough of Culture 2019, which was carried out by the local authority, found that the programme delivered more than 1,000 cultural events and activities, attracting over 500,000 visits.²¹

Several other Mayoral initiatives aim to support local, grassroots culture:

- The **Culture Seeds programme** ran from 2018 to 2020 and offered small grants of between £1,000 and £5,000 to support community-led projects in all London boroughs. The total funding available for the programme was £1 million.²²
- **Creative Enterprise Zones** are a Mayoral initiative to designate areas of London where artists and creative businesses can find permanent affordable space to work, and are supported to start-up and grow; and local people are helped to learn creative sector skills and access pathways to employment. Launched in 2018, the Mayor has established nine Creative Enterprise Zones in Croydon, Haringey, Hounslow, Lambeth, Lewisham, Hammersmith & Fulham, Ealing and Waltham Forest, with a single zone across both Hackney and Tower Hamlets.²³ In September 2022, the Mayor said, "The zones have brought forward over 17,000 sqm of new, affordable, creative workspace." However, he did not say how many cultural organisations have benefitted from this.²⁴

¹⁸ Mayor of London, [Culture for all Londoners: Mayor of London's Culture Strategy](#), December 2018

¹⁹ Mayor of London, [About London Borough of Culture](#)

²⁰ Letter from the Deputy Mayor to the Economy Committee, 10 August 2022

²¹ Waltham Forest, [Waltham Forest: The Mayor's First London Borough of Culture 2019 – The Story of our Year: Evaluation, Impact and Learning](#)

²² Mayor of London, [Culture Seeds Prospectus](#), 2018

²³ Mayor of London, [The Creative Enterprise Zones programme](#)

²⁴ Mayor's Question Time, [Creative Enterprise Zones \(3\)](#), 13 September 2022

- In 2019, the Mayor launched the **Creative Land Trust**, an independent trust with the aim of protecting and increasing affordable artist workspace in London. The Mayor initially pledged £4 million to the trust, with an additional £2 million coming from ACE. When it was launched, the Mayor stated an aim to secure 1,000 affordable workspaces in its first five years.²⁵ The Deputy Mayor told the Committee, “The Creative Land Trust is on track to secure 1,000 affordable workspaces in five years of full operations.”²⁶
- The Mayor’s £2.3 million **Culture at Risk Business Support Fund** aimed to help grassroots music and LGBTQ+ venues, independent cinemas and affordable creative workspace businesses, during the pandemic, that were not covered by Government support and were at imminent risk of closure.²⁷ A mayoral press release from September 2020 stated that the fund helped to provide advice and guidance to 141 grassroots music venues that had been badly impacted by COVID-19.²⁸ The Deputy Mayor told the Committee that the fund ‘supported 301 cultural or creative businesses and 11,500 artists’, although it is not clear how many of these organisations survived as a direct result of the GLA’s funding.²⁹

Supporting a network of grassroots cultural organisations

Guests at the Committee’s roundtable event reported mixed experiences of interacting with the GLA. Some spoke positively of contact they had with the GLA’s culture team, and some had received funding from Mayoral programmes. But the majority of organisations the Committee spoke to had not received any support from the Mayor, and were not aware of what support was available. Some felt that the Mayor could do more to support and advocate for grassroots cultural organisations, and to involve them in decision-making. Most organisations had not had any interaction with the Deputy Mayor for Culture and the Creative Industries. Aditi Anand told the Committee meeting that she would like to see ‘better access to the Mayor’s office’ and more action to involve ‘smaller grassroots organisations in decision-making’.

A consistent theme of the evidence heard by the Committee was that small cultural organisations can sometimes feel isolated and detached from other parts of the sector. Guests emphasised the importance of bringing the sector together to share experiences and develop networks and partnerships. Aditi Anand said that a ‘lack of proximity to other organisations’ created a challenge. Several guests at the roundtable noted that they were not aware of one another’s work, and that this was a missed opportunity for greater partnership working.

The Committee believes that the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor should play a greater role in bringing small cultural organisations together, enabling these groups to network, share experiences and explore opportunities for partnership working.

²⁵ Mayor of London, [Mayor launches groundbreaking Creative Land Trust](#), 6 February 2019

²⁶ Letter from the Deputy Mayor to the Economy Committee, 10 August 2022

²⁷ Mayor of London, [Culture in London during COVID-19](#)

²⁸ Mayor of London, [Mayor’s culture fund helping to support 141 grassroots music venues](#), 21 September 2020

²⁹ Letter from the Deputy Mayor to the Economy Committee, 10 August 2022

“You could bring us together. You could have a conference. You could have everyone in the room. It is amazing just to have this many small companies that I do not know, to have a load of us and to build something there.”

**Aileen Gonsalves, Artistic Director
Butterfly Theatre**

Recommendation 1

The Mayor and the Deputy Mayor should convene a network of grassroots cultural organisations. This network should provide a space for organisations to develop connections, share experiences and explore opportunities for partnership working.

Visibility and promotion

Several guests emphasised the challenges facing small cultural organisations in promoting themselves and reaching wider audiences. Most do not have large resources to dedicate to marketing and promotion, particularly in comparison to London’s large cultural institutions.

In her letter to the Committee, the Deputy Mayor highlighted the Let’s Do London campaign as a way that the GLA has helped to promote grassroots cultural organisations. However, the Let’s Do London campaign is focused on the Central Activities Zone (CAZ) and therefore primarily benefits cultural organisations in central London. The evaluation report for the programme stated that the pandemic produced a ‘perfect storm for central London’s economy’ and that Let’s Do London was the ‘biggest ever domestic tourism campaign to support the reopening of central London, protect jobs and kickstart growth’.³⁰

According to the Mayor, the Let’s Do London campaign ‘has included spending £7m to encourage international tourists back to London, £2m to attract overnight UK visitors and £1m for reaching out to Londoners’.³¹ Whilst this investment is welcome, it is unclear how it benefits London’s grassroots cultural organisations in outer London. The Committee believes that the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor could do more to help promote these organisations, as part of the current Let’s Do London campaign and future promotional campaigns.

“I do think the GLA could do more about marketing London’s smaller arts organisations. We are little and we do not have marketing budgets but we are the more interesting, innovative, experimental parts of London’s arts economy.”

Seema Manchanda, Managing Director

³⁰ Mayor of London, [Back to Life: Let’s Do London programme 2021–2022 evaluation report](#), June 2022

³¹ Mayor of London, [Mayor’s tourism campaign provides multi-million-pound boost to the capital](#), 16 November 2022

The Showroom, Paddington

Recommendation 2

The Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, and London & Partners should consult with London's grassroots cultural organisations on how best to include them in GLA initiatives to promote London's cultural sector, including through the Let's Do London campaign. This must include cultural organisations outside central London.

The Mayor's Cultural Leadership Board

The Mayor's Cultural Leadership Board is comprised of representatives from London's creative industries, and is supposed to meet four times every year. Its role is to:

- steer the delivery of the Mayor's policy pledges for a specific leadership area
- help to shape the Mayor's Culture Strategy
- keep the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor for Culture and Creative Industries abreast of issues facing the creative industries and culture sector.³²

Most guests that the Committee spoke to had not interacted with the Mayor's Cultural Leadership Board. There was a perception from guests that members of the board are mostly drawn from large cultural organisations, with less representation from grassroots cultural organisations.

In her letter to the Committee in August 2022, the Deputy Mayor stated that members of the Board are 'recruited through an open recruitment process and selected based on their expertise, experience and ability to respond to the immediate needs of the sector'.³³ Five new members of the Cultural Leadership Board were announced in January 2022 (Amanda Parker, Amaarah Roze, Nigel Twumasi, Deborah Williams, Sade Banks and Cllr Elizabeth Campbell).³⁴ The Mayor has said:

"The Board is now more representative of both the demographic make-up and lived experience of Londoners and the diversity of professions from across culture, the creative industries, and the creative and night time economies."³⁵

The Mayor should continue to ensure that small cultural organisations are represented on the Board, in order to allay perceptions that it just represents large cultural organisations. This will ensure that this vital part of London's cultural sector has more of a voice in shaping and influencing the Mayor's work.

³² Mayor of London, [Mayor's Cultural Leadership Board](#), accessed 31 January 2022

³³ Letter from the Deputy Mayor to the Economy Committee, 10 August 2022

³⁴ Mayor of London, [Mayor's Cultural Leadership Board](#)

³⁵ 19th Mayor's Report to the Assembly: Mayor's Question Time, 23 February 2023

Recommendation 3

When the Mayor next appoints members to the Cultural Leadership Board, he should prioritise appointing members from London's grassroots cultural organisations.

Funding London's grassroots cultural sector

Almost every guest that the Committee spoke to as part of this investigation in 2022 emphasised the financial pressures facing small cultural organisations. This is not a sector that traditionally has a wealth of financial resources, and this situation has been exacerbated by the pandemic and rising costs. Finding affordable premises and workspace in London creates further challenges. Additional funding, whether from public or other sources, goes a long way in helping the sector to be financially sustainable.

Arts Council England funding and Levelling Up

London has historically received a larger proportion of ACE funding than other parts of the country. However, much of London's share of funding goes to large organisations based in central London, rather than community-based and grassroots organisations.³⁶

Paul Bristow from ACE told the Committee that the Government requires ACE to 'redistribute some funding from the capital outside of London to support levelling up'. He stated that this will 'clearly restrict the potential to grow the cultural sector within London off the back of Arts Council funding', although he stressed that ACE funding is not the only source of growth for the sector.

Tonya Nelson, ACE's London Area Director, subsequently wrote to the Chair of the Economy Committee in December 2022 regarding ACE's 2023-26 Investment Programme. ACE recently announced an investment of £431.2 million in 258 creative and cultural organisations across London, which represents a third of the overall investment for England. She noted:

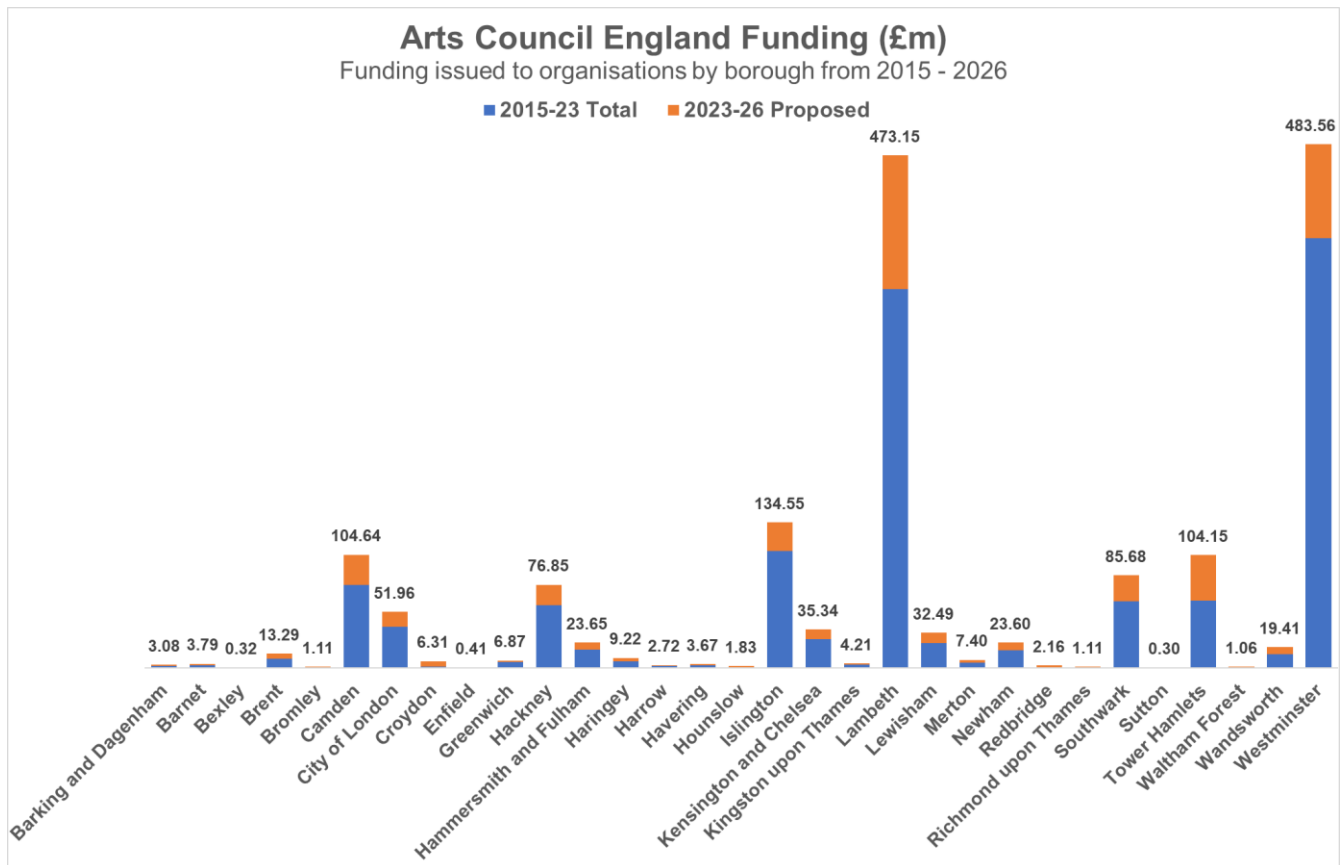
"Moving investment outside of London has required us to make some difficult decisions, and some organisations have left the portfolio or have had their funding reduced compared to previous years."³⁷

The Committee understands ACE's need to increase investment in culture outside London. However, given that smaller organisations already receive a smaller portion of this funding, there is a risk that the redistribution of arts funding to other parts of the country results in a loss of funding for London's grassroots cultural organisations. Tonya Nelson explained that the 2023-26 investment programme involved a wider spread of investment to outer London boroughs than in the previous funding round. This is of course welcome – although, as the tables below demonstrate, ACE's funding is predominantly directed towards organisations in central London. Table 2 also shows that the total amount of annual funding received by London organisations has fallen.

³⁶ ACE, [2023-26 Investment Programme](#)

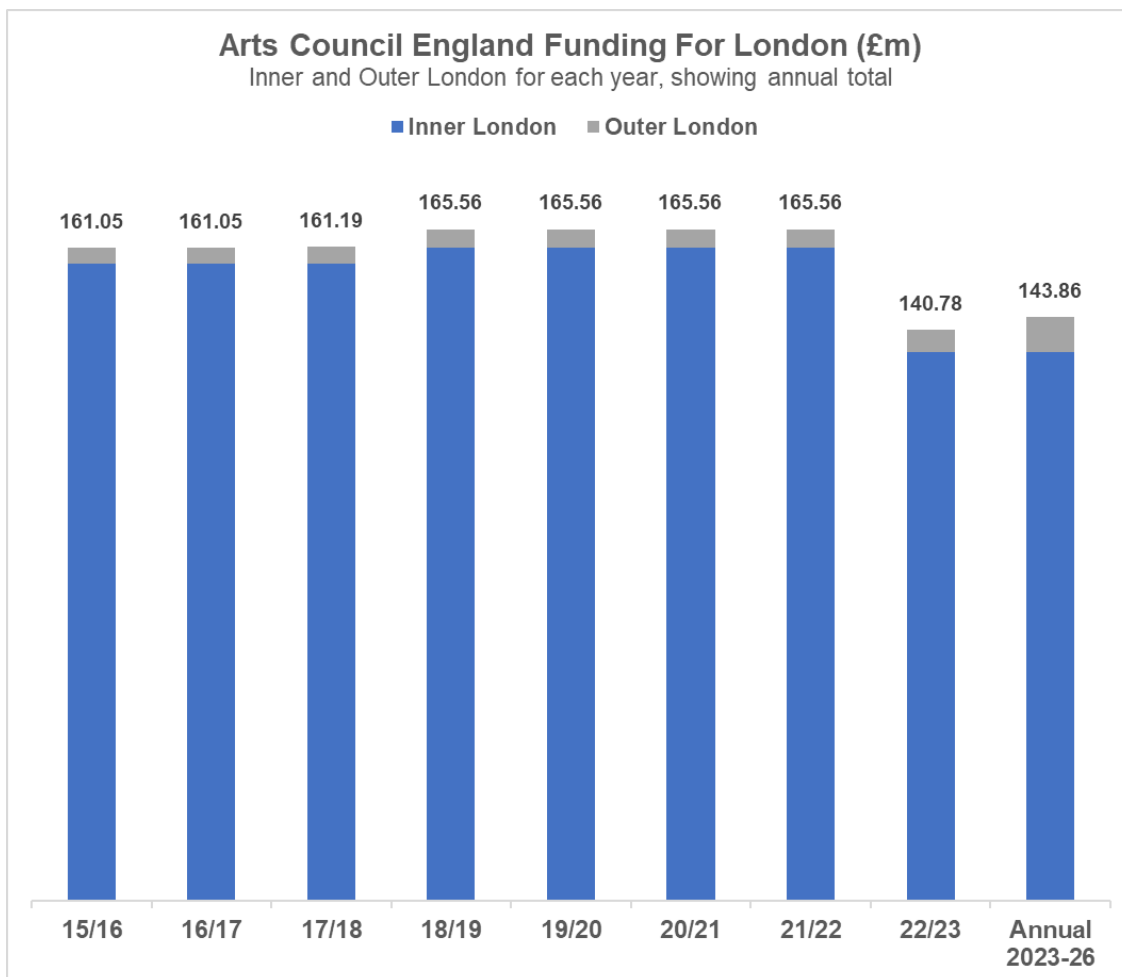
³⁷ Letter from ACE to the Economy Committee, 1 December 2022

Table 1³⁸



³⁸ ACE, [2023-26 Investment Programme](#) and [National Portfolio 2018-22](#). Analysis of data carried out by the London Assembly Secretariat Research Unit. The 2023-26 funding was calculated as the annual proposed amount multiplied by three. Funding calculations include NPO and Investment Principles Support Organisation (IPSO) funding, but not transfer funding.

Table 2³⁹



Recommendation 4

The Mayor and the Deputy Mayor should lobby the Government to ensure that London’s grassroots cultural organisations do not lose out as part of the redistribution of Arts Council England funding away from London, and to ensure that funding is distributed equitably to grassroots cultural organisations in London.

³⁹ ACE, [2023-26 Investment Programme](#) and [National Portfolio 2018-22](#). Analysis of data carried out by the London Assembly Secretariat Research Unit. Inner London boroughs defined as: Camden, City of London, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Newham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth and Westminster. The 2023-26 funding was calculated as the annual proposed amount multiplied by three. Funding calculations include NPO and IPSO funding, but not transfer funding.

Financial support from the Mayor

Whilst the Mayor does not have the same resources as central government to help fund London's cultural sector, and he is not able to plug any gaps left by a reduction in ACE funding, he has historically provided some financial support to the sector.

The Mayor's £2.3 million Culture at Risk Business Support Fund aimed to help grassroots music and LGBTQ+ venues, independent cinemas, and affordable creative workspace businesses during the pandemic that were not covered by Government support and at imminent risk of closure.⁴⁰ It provided funding to support these organisations in 2020 and 2021. The Deputy Mayor told the Committee that the GLA:

"supported culture to survive during the pandemic through the Culture and Community Spaces at Risk programme and provided a funding lifeline through the Culture at Risk Business Support Fund and the Community Spaces at Risk Fund".⁴¹

Some organisations that the Committee spoke to had received funding from the Mayor, including from the Culture at Risk Business Support Fund and the High Streets for All Fund. Those organisations highlighted how important this funding was, particularly during the pandemic.

However, given the ongoing challenges faced by the sector, organisations felt that this funding is needed on a continuous basis, and that it should be focused on prevention, rather than addressing crises in the sector as they arise.

"The Culture at Risk fund is great, but maybe ... there should be a shift to prevention, to prevent there being risk, not trying to put out fires everywhere but just stopping the fire totally, trying to stop the risk from being there and assessing where the risk is."

**Jonathan Ashby-Rock, Artistic Director
The Arts Centre, Hounslow**

Recommendation 5

The Mayor should extend the Culture at Risk Business Support Fund, and ensure that its new iteration is focused on helping organisations to remain on a sustainable financial footing, rather than addressing crises in the sector as they arise.

⁴⁰ Mayor of London, [Culture in London during COVID-19](#)

⁴¹ Letter from the Deputy Mayor to the Economy Committee, 10 August 2022

Applying for funding

The Committee repeatedly heard that, in comparison with larger organisations, smaller cultural organisations do not have sufficient time, capacity or expertise to apply for funding. Pallas Citroen, Managing Director of The Bomb Factory, told the Committee that The Bomb Factory does ‘not have time to even approach it [apply for Arts Council funding] because we just do not have staff enough to do it and you are often unsuccessful. It is just such a lot of time and stress’. Paul Bristow from ACE noted, “There is a significant challenge for smaller organisations in attracting some of the public funding because often the public funders require match funding.”

Guests felt that the GLA could play a role in providing more support to organisations seeking to apply for funding. Abdul Shayek from Tara Theatre noted that large organisations have support from ‘freelance fundraising experts’, but organisations such as his do not have the ‘capacity and finance’. He suggested that there could be support for organisations ‘from the Mayor’s Office in this next NPO round’. Whilst the application window for the 2023–26 round of NPO funding has now closed, there is an opportunity for the GLA to provide support to organisations applying for funding in future rounds and from other sources. This could take the form of training days to help develop the skills of small cultural organisations in writing funding bids.

Recommendation 6

As part of their work with a network of grassroots cultural organisations, the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor should consider how to provide support to these organisations in applying for funding from Arts Council England and other funding sources, and, in response to this report, should set out how they intend to do so.

Security of tenure

Many small cultural organisations struggle to access long-term or affordable leases in London. According to the Music Venue Trust, 93 per cent of grassroots music venues in the UK are tenants.⁴² Some organisations, such as the Migration Museum (which gave evidence to the Committee), have had to move between various locations in London, which can restrict their ability to plan for the long term. Taking on short-term leases or occupying temporary ‘meanwhile space’ also brings upfront costs, but without some of the long-term benefits.

One organisation that attended the Committee’s roundtable, the Vagina Museum, has since had to leave its premises in Bethnal Green. The museum had been occupying the premises under a property guardianship since March 2022, but was evicted in January 2023. The museum is now the process of looking for a new home.⁴³ This is the second time in less than a year that the Vagina Museum has had to find a new building to operate from, having been

⁴² New Statesman, [Inside the new venue ownership scheme hoping to save live music](#), 23 May 2022

⁴³ Museums Association, [Vagina Museum in search for new home following second eviction](#), 31 January 2023

evicted from its previous site in Camden in 2021.⁴⁴ This example highlights the challenges that small cultural organisations face in finding affordable, long-term premises.

The Deputy Mayor told the Committee, “The London Plan is the most pro-cultural plan to date.”⁴⁵ She highlighted Mayoral planning policies and initiatives such as Creative Enterprise Zones, which aim to provide affordable workspace for artists. She also noted that the 2019 Cultural Infrastructure Plan ‘sets out why it’s important to support the capital’s venues, rehearsal spaces, grassroots venues and studios, what is at risk and what can be done in partnership across the city to protect them’.⁴⁶

However, guests at the Committee’s meetings felt there was more the Mayor could do to help small cultural organisations access long-term affordable leases, including as part of the development of high streets. This is particularly pertinent given the commitment set out in the High Streets for all recovery mission to ‘deliver enhanced public spaces and exciting new uses for underused high street buildings in every Borough by 2025, working with London’s diverse communities’.⁴⁷

Recommendation 7

The Mayor and the Deputy Mayor should take action to make available more permanent, affordable premises for grassroots cultural organisations. This should involve using the Mayor’s planning powers to support small cultural organisations to access space in appropriate locations, not just on the high street, and providing advice and support to the organisations themselves.

⁴⁴ Museums Association, [Vagina Museum in search for new home following second eviction](#), 31 January 2023

⁴⁵ Letter from the Deputy Mayor to the Economy Committee, 10 August 2022

⁴⁶ Letter from the Deputy Mayor to the Economy Committee, 10 August 2022

⁴⁷ Mayor of London, [High Streets for All](#)

Diversity in London's grassroots cultural sector

Research has found that London's wider creative industries have often lacked diversity and have not been representative of London's population. Analysis carried out by GLA Economics in 2016 found that 23.4 per cent of jobs in London's creative economy were held by people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, compared to 33 per cent in the economy as a whole.⁴⁸ In the creative and cultural workforce in England, only 12 per cent of workers classify themselves as disabled.⁴⁹

ACE's strategy states: "There remains a persistent and widespread lack of diversity across the creative industries and in publicly funded cultural organisations, although awareness of the issue is greater than it used to be."⁵⁰ The sector is often reliant on volunteer labour, which could impact the diversity of the workforce.⁵¹ Meanwhile, in London and throughout the country, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have lower levels of participation in cultural activities.⁵² ACE's 2020-30 strategy, *Let's Create*, contains four 'investment principles', one of which is 'inclusivity and relevance'. This makes a commitment that 'England's diversity is fully reflected in the organisations and individuals that we support and in the culture they produce'.⁵³

However, the evidence received by the Committee suggests that smaller cultural organisations in London tend to reflect its diversity more than large organisations. This could be because they are more rooted in, and responsive to, their local communities. Aditi Anand told the Committee at its meeting that the Migration Museum attracts a 'very diverse audience' and provided data to support this. She quoted research carried out in conjunction with the Audience Agency showing that 43 per cent of the Migration Museum's audiences are under 34, compared to 26 per cent for all London museums; 46 per cent are from Black and ethnic minority groups, compared to 16 per cent for all London museums; and 27 per cent are from lower socioeconomic groups, compared to 14 per cent for all London museums.

Most of the organisations the Committee spoke to are based in parts of London with highly diverse populations, and these organisations stressed how important it is that their audiences are drawn from the same demographics as the whole community. There is an opportunity for other organisations to learn from those with a successful track record of growing diverse workforces and audiences.

⁴⁸ Mayor of London, [Culture for all Londoners: Mayor of London's Culture Strategy](#), December 2018

⁴⁹ Mayor of London, [Culture for all Londoners: Mayor of London's Culture Strategy](#), December 2018

⁵⁰ ACE, [Our strategy 2020-2030](#)

⁵¹ Museums and Heritage Advisor, [Museum volunteers: the priceless people who work for free](#), 5 December 2019

⁵² Mayor of London, [Culture for all Londoners: Mayor of London's Culture Strategy](#), December 2018

⁵³ ACE, [Our strategy 2020-2030](#)

“I would say yes, our audiences do reflect the diversity on our stage. We are very careful to ensure that our casting is very diverse in the widest sense, as you said, including disabled actors and really thinking about who we are casting ... 33 per cent of our audiences come from Newham and I would say that yes, our audiences are diverse.”

**Flo Paul, Head of Learning and Participation
Theatre Royal Stratford East**

“The diversity in our audience at our pantomime was measured last year. From the data we could collect, which is hard, it was almost exactly the same as the demographic of our community, which is really successful.”

**Jonathan Ashby-Rock, Artistic Director
The Arts Centre, Hounslow**

Recommendation 8

As part of their work with a network of grassroots cultural organisations, the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor should prioritise initiatives that promote diversity across the sector, including in relation to social class. This should start by exploring best practice from those grassroots organisations with a successful track record of growing diverse workforces and audiences.

London's creative workforce

Several organisations that the Committee spoke to reported a shortage of staff, particularly in more technical roles. They also noted that many people left the industry during the pandemic and have not returned. Anna Clark, Development Director at Theatre Royal Stratford East, noted that 'the lack of backstage and technical staff' is 'a big crisis across the whole sector', while Flo Paul said that 'people ... have left in droves over the pandemic'. This reflects evidence heard by the Committee in other recent investigations, including into tourism and the night-time economy.⁵⁴ Furthermore, restrictions on EU workers entering the UK could impact the sector's workforce. According to research from UK In A Changing Europe, EU citizens make up 6.7 per cent of the UK's creative industries workforce in general, but that number rises as high as 30 per cent of visual effects workers.⁵⁵

As part of the Mayor's Academies Programme, the Mayor has established four 'creative hubs'. In her letter to the Committee, the Deputy Mayor stated that, as part of the Mayor's Academies Programme, the Mayor is investing £1.48 million in these four creative hubs, with an additional £1.57 million from the Adult Education Budget. These creative hubs 'are committed to supporting 2,450 Londoners into employment or apprenticeships and paid work placements in the sector'.⁵⁶ The Committee welcomes the emphasis on skills needed by the cultural sector in the Mayor's Academies Programme. It is vital that this training genuinely addresses the skills shortages in the grassroots cultural sector, and that the sector benefits from the apprenticeships and work placements being created.

Wages and working conditions are also likely to be important factors for the sector being able to recruit and retain staff in the future. Guests at the Committee's roundtable said that low wages could drive more people away from the sector. The Mayor has a role to play in this through the promotion of his Good Work Standard, which 'provides employers with a set of best employment practices alongside information and resources to help achieve them'.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ London Assembly Economy Committee, [Night Vision: Rebuilding London's Night-Time Economy](#) and [London Calling: Rebuilding London's tourism industry](#)

⁵⁵ UK In A Changing Europe, [Brexit: impacts on the arts and culture](#), 6 April 2021

⁵⁶ Letter from the Deputy Mayor to the Economy Committee, 10 August 2022

⁵⁷ Mayor of London, [How to achieve the Good Work Standard](#)

“Theatre, by its very nature, is quite a hard slog at times. You put in a lot of hours and pay is not great and you often do it for the love. However, we do need to move away from that idea that people can just do it for the love of an artform. People cannot survive on just doing things for love. They need money.”

**Abdul Shayek, Artistic Director and Joint CEO
Tara Theatre**

Recommendation 9

The Mayor’s creative academy hubs should work with grassroots cultural organisations in developing training courses, to ensure that they are addressing the skills needs of the sector. The hubs should also work with these organisations to ensure that they are benefiting from the apprenticeships and work placements being created.

Recommendation 10

The Mayor should promote his Good Work Standard to organisations within London’s cultural sector. In response to this report, the Mayor should inform the Committee about the action he has taken to promote the Good Work Standard within the sector and to encourage cultural organisations to sign up to it.

Committee Activity

The Economy Committee's investigation set out to understand the value of London's smaller cultural organisations and grassroots culture, in particular the role they play in local communities. It considered the current challenges faced by the sector, relating to issues such as funding, licensing and Brexit; and asked what action government at all levels can take to address these issues. It aimed to understand the impact of the pandemic upon grassroots culture, to what extent the sector is recovering, and whether the pandemic has created any opportunities for the growth of local, grassroots culture.

It also aimed to scrutinise the Mayor's delivery record in this area, following on from the commitment in his 2018 Culture Strategy to 'expand access to culture beyond Zone 1 and into every borough and corner of our city'.

The Economy Committee met to discuss 'culture off the beaten track' on 15 June 2022. The following guests attended the meeting:

- **Aditi Anand**, Artistic Director, Migration Museum
- **Paul Bristow**, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Arts Council England
- **Clara Cullen**, Venue Support Manager, Music Venue Trust
- **Lorna Lee**, Assistant Director, Culture and Heritage, London Borough of Waltham Forest
- **Abdul Shayek**, Artistic Director and Joint CEO, Tara Theatre.

Justine Simons, the Deputy Mayor for Culture and the Creative Industries, was unable to attend this meeting. The Committee subsequently wrote to her with a set of questions. The Deputy Mayor's response has been used as written evidence in the report.

The Committee held a roundtable with representatives from small cultural organisations at Theatre Royal Stratford East on 13 July 2022. The following guests attended the roundtable:

- **Jonathan Ashby-Rock**, Artistic Director, The Arts Centre, Hounslow
- **Pallas Citroen**, Managing Director, The Bomb Factory, Archway and Chelsea
- **Aileen Gonsalves**, Artistic Director, Butterfly Theatre
- **Seema Manchanda**, Managing Director, The Showroom, Paddington
- **Flo Paul**, Head of Learning and Participation, Theatre Royal Stratford East
- **Anna Clark**, Development Director, Theatre Royal Stratford East
- **Florence Schechter**, Director and Founder, the Vagina Museum, Bethnal Green
- **Rosie Thackeray**, Tramshed Theatre Company, Woolwich.

Other formats and languages

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Hindi

यदि आपको इस दस्तावेज का सारांश अपनी भाषा में चाहिए तो उपर दिये हुए नंबर पर फोन करें या उपर दिये गये डाक पते या ई मेल पते पर हम से संपर्क करें।

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Arabic

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