

Culture and
technology are
becoming more
interactive. Where
they meet, we
need multiple,
small-scale
innovations ...



Logging On

Culture, participation and
the web

John Holden

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John Holden
May 2007

Introduction: Culture Online

This report looks at the convergence of three trends:

- technological change
- the way that people engage with culture
- the policy aim of increasing democratic participation in culture, with particular regard to audiences described as ‘hard to reach’.

What these trends have in common is a movement from passivity to engagement, from uni-directional flows to interactivity, and from the few to the many. Culture Online, an initiative established and funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), was an early and successful innovator in the space where these issues converge.

Culture Online came to an end in March 2007, but this report is not an evaluation of the initiative, nor of the projects that Culture Online commissioned. Rather, it seeks to draw lessons from the Culture Online experience in order to point the way to how new and emergent web technology can increase public participation in culture.

Digitisation has changed everything. It has created public expectations for on-demand, constantly available, individualised access to products. It has also challenged the assumptions of cultural sector professionals that their role is to oversee public access to

culture in the sense that they act as gatekeepers to what is produced, what is shown and how it is interpreted. In the analogue world, the public was able to engage with culture on terms set by experts and professionals: content, pricing, format and timing were all decided by the producer. In a world of infinitely replicable and manipulable digital content, this no longer applies. The full implications of this for the cultural sector are not yet clear. Big business is worried and confused, and is seeking to hang on to as many 'rights' as it can. Meanwhile private, public and third sector innovations from Amazon to the BBC to Wikipedia march inexorably on, and internet phenomena like Second Life and MySpace revolutionise the landscape in the space of months.

In the brief history of the internet, the cultural sector has followed two related paths: on the one hand, the digitisation of content and provision of information and, on the other, interactivity and opportunities for expression. Some have seen these as in binary opposition.¹ The truth is that they are inexorably merging.

But the big question is where do we go next? How can policy intervention best meet with technology to achieve the aim of bringing about a more democratic culture? What will be the role, opportunities and limitations of online culture in a rapidly changing world? The 'Culture Online' programme is used here both as a case study and as a point of departure for wider reflection.

The report contains five chapters. Chapter 1 places Culture Online in the context of recent developments in online culture, and provides an overview of the programme. Chapter 2 highlights some practical lessons learnt from its delivery. Against this introductory backdrop, chapters 3–5 consider the ever-evolving concept, function and potential of online culture, today and in the future in terms of policy development, technological change and developments in society.

1. Setting the scene

Culture Online, a pilot initiative set up by the DCMS to commission online content, has been immensely successful, as evidenced by the 25 awards that its 26 projects have garnered. But perhaps more important is the fact that it has reached a range of audiences with state-of-the-art cultural projects that would not otherwise have been reached. As Culture Online has formally drawn to a close, it is important that the practical lessons learnt from the experience do not get lost but are passed on to the many online cultural enterprises that are to come. On top of that, we should use this opportunity not just to reflect, but to look forward to the exciting possibilities that new technology offers.

Online culture and Culture Online, 2000–07

Year 2000

Do you remember a time when you could make a cup of tea while waiting for a picture file to download? When MySpace conjured up visions of a cosy armchair? When nobody on your high street had an MP3 player? You probably do, because it is as recent as the year 2000.

At the turn of the millennium, the internet in the UK and worldwide was not part of everyday life. Despite a rapid increase in uptake since 1998, no more than one in four UK households had internet access at the start of 2000.² And, even if available, the web was accessed via painfully slow dial-up or ISDN connections. By 2000

most schools (86 per cent of primary, 98 per cent of secondary) and many libraries had already been connected to the internet, but not yet at broadband level.

The nature and extent of online content in 2000 reflected limited internet availability and download speeds. Websites were typically text-based, with little in the way of moving image or sound, and the early adopters of more complex web presences were penalised: people just could not access sites with flashy graphics. The internet was generally perceived as a passive resource for searching and retrieving information; few websites provided opportunities for interaction.

In 2000, UK online culture was also finding its feet. Many cultural organisations and individual artists had, to be sure, realised the potential of the internet for conveying information to the public, and websites of varying sophistication were launched at a solid rate. At the forefront was the rapidly expanding Tate Online, set up in 1998,³ and the entirely virtual 24 Hour Museum, established in 1999.⁴ The priority for museums was to digitise content in order to make it more accessible. The nationals made major efforts in this direction, with, for example, the British Library catalogue going online in January 2001. In the performing arts the first steps in embracing the internet focused on the online provision of information about shows, and then on booking and paying for seats via the web.

At the same time, a number of artists were experimenting with technology, both from the point of view of creating new forms of art, such as generating images through algorithms, or pioneering radical forms of public engagement. An example of the latter is the Australian artist Stellarc, who turned himself into a cyborg by having his arm manipulated by inputs from electronic messages sent over the internet by anyone who wanted to send one. Innovation was occurring within organisations as well, especially in the private cultural sector. Jay Jopling of the gallery White Cube co-created fig-1, which showed 50 multidisciplinary arts projects in as many weeks, relying 'on the internet for the dissemination of its activities',⁵ and the Truman Brewery hosted an exhibition at which the public could feed back their views by email.

In the museum world, too, interest was being sparked:

By the mid-nineties museum directors had figured out along with the rest of us that the worldwide system of production had radically changed with the advent of the PC, then the internet, but no one had begun to figure out how the relations of production were changing. It wasn't that more information was available (which everybody knew) but that people would now process information in new ways which in turn would modify their needs and how they met them.⁶

And yet, in 2000, many in the cultural sector still managed without email or a website, let alone a fully fledged online strategy. Moreover, cultural websites generally allowed a visitor only to browse for information. The first exemplars of interactive online resources were only just beginning to appear – for example, the British Museum's COMPASS system, launched in June 2000, included an educational 'My Gallery' facility that allowed for user-organised and user-generated content by school children.⁷

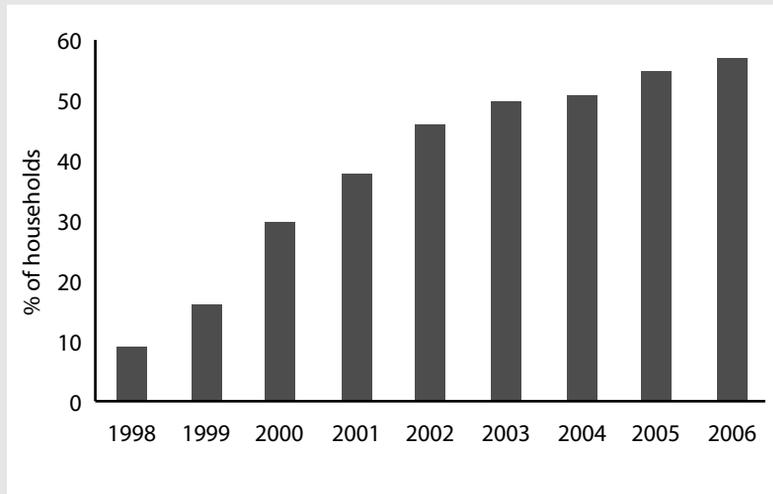
2000–07

Fast-forwarding to the present day, the picture of internet use and capability in the UK has been transformed.

Practically everyone in the UK who wishes to access the internet can do so. Household connectivity has increased year on year (figure 1), and since 2002 virtually all public libraries and schools have been connected to the internet, in line with government targets.

Another crucial development has been the introduction and rapid widespread take-up of broadband, set off by BT's launch of its DSL (digital subscriber line) products in late 2000 (see figure 2). The proportion of broadband subscribers then increased annually, and reached 72.6 per cent by June 2006.⁸ Funded by the National Lottery via the People's Network programme, 80 per cent of public libraries now have a broadband internet connection.⁹ In education, the switch to broadband was fastest for secondary schools but has taken place

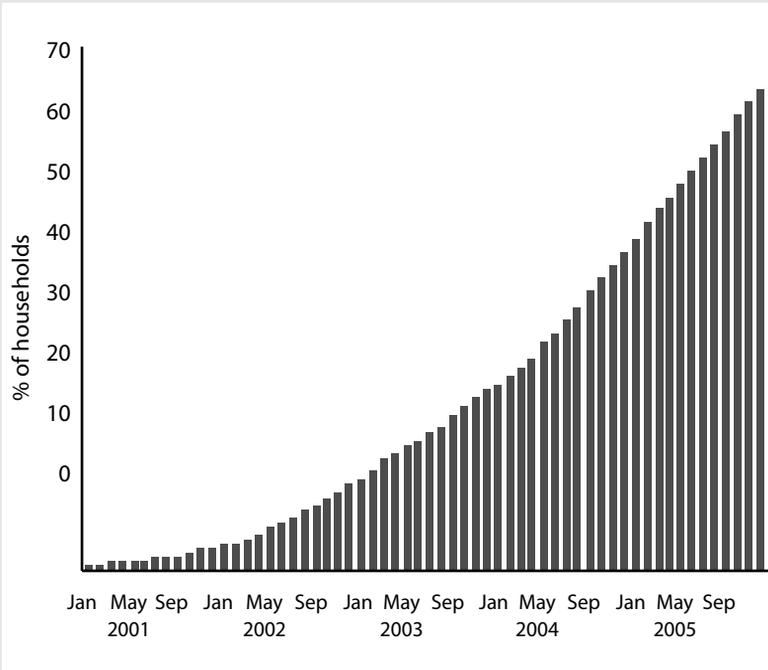
Figure 1 Proportion of UK households with internet access



Source: Office for National Statistics

across the spectrum, and the target to provide all educational institutions with broadband connectivity by the end of 2006 looks as if it has probably been achieved (complete data is not available at the time of writing).¹⁰

Alongside these improvements in internet access and bandwidths, the perception of the internet and the nature of online services has changed. The internet has become increasingly central to our everyday lives, both at work and in our free time. Recent surveys have shown that people in the UK now spend more time on the web than watching TV.¹¹ In particular, new technologies, from SMS to gaming to web usage, have been rapidly adopted by young people. This move – from watching TV, to gaming and the web – is significant because it involves not just a change of media, but a shift from passivity to interactivity. Schoolchildren today are as attuned to IT as past generations were to the blackboard, timetables and spelling tests. Now, our

Figure 2 Proportion of broadband of all UK internet connections

Source: Office for National Statistics

children complete their education with skills and expectations based almost entirely on the digital age – a radical generational shift. By the age of 17, the average schoolchild in the UK will have spent more time in front of a screen than in school.¹²

The internet has consolidated its key role as a source of information, but it has now become much more than that. It is now a primary means of accessing public and private sector services and a way to buy goods, whether from eBay auctions or online shops. It is changing our consumption habits and patterns and broadening our preferences as more goods and services become available. One example

of this is the expansion of niche markets and back catalogues in the music business, where buyers no longer have to go to a record shop (with limited physical space and limited mainstream stock), but can find what they want online.

The impact in the cultural sphere has been profound. Most self-respecting artists and cultural organisations now make a concerted effort to establish a state-of-the-art, engaging online presence with informative and innovative websites.

The influence of online commerce has radically transformed the music and film sectors in particular: fostered by the increasing speed of streaming or downloading, internet resources for sharing and selling music and video files have completely changed the dynamics of both industries. The online dimension has become a force to be seriously reckoned with. It is hard to imagine even five years ago that the Chancellor of the Exchequer would feel the need to reference the Arctic Monkeys in a speech – a band that rocketed to success not through the traditional music industry channels but through their web presence.

There has also – and perhaps most crucially – been a distinct change in the past couple of years towards more interactive and collaborative online content – often dubbed ‘Web 2.0’. Since 2001, a mass of services facilitating user-generated content, information-sharing and social networking have been launched and have gained phenomenal popularity. For example, Wikipedia, a free content online encyclopaedia, was set up in January 2001 and currently has over five million entries in several languages. The peer-to-peer filesharing service Kazaa was set up in March 2001, the video sharing site YouTube in February 2005. Blogging has spread like wildfire – in April 2007 Technorati was tracking over 75 million blogs.¹³ The social networking site MySpace, launched in July 2003, surpassed the milestone of 100 million accounts in August 2006.

This change in online behaviour is intimately connected to issues of access and availability, since interactive digital services usually need a faster internet connection to function properly.¹⁴ The dynamic between behaviour and technology is an increasingly rapid iterative

feedback loop. This is an important point – the shift is not simply to more activity, but to a different form of activity. Rather than people using technology to adapt to their own needs, they are now using the capacity and functionality of technology to create and shape new potential. It is no accident that in Korea, where bandwidth is commonly 30 MB, compared with the UK's 10 MB, online innovations are flourishing: the extra bandwidth is not being used simply to watch more TV.

Yet amid the excitement of Web 2.0, we should not lose sight of the fact that many of the more 'traditional' and established aspects of cultural web presence have been wildly successful. For example, the huge public interest in genealogy, further promoted by the web and by BBC programmes such as *Who Do You Think You Are?*, has been a major factor in increasing interest in the National Archives website, which handled some 85 million requests in 2002/03.¹⁵ This is just one instance of synergy between broadcasting and the internet in the cultural sphere.

In summary, new web tools, greater computing power, better connectivity and increased uptake have changed the perception of the cultural possibilities of the internet from being a passive pool of digital information to being a vibrant fourth dimension of life with limitless opportunities for interaction.

Culture Online: the vision in context

At the 2000 Labour Party conference, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Chris Smith, announced plans to create Culture Online, a new online resource for participation in the arts and culture. His vision and ambitions for the project were big and bold, with the cost envisaged to be up to £140 million. Culture Online was painted as a revolutionary resource, likened to the Open University and Channel 4 in its impact. It would effect a step change in public access to culture and in opportunities and ways of learning, particularly in schools.¹⁶

On 15 March 2001, DCMS launched a report called *Culture Online: The vision*, which gave more detail about the objectives and

rationale. The two priorities already highlighted by Smith – education and access to culture – informed every layer of the vision. The stated aim of Culture Online would be to ‘build a digital bridge between culture and learning.’¹⁷ Using the unprecedented potential of the internet, it was to improve access to, and engagement with, culture: access because the internet would make culture available to anyone, and everyone, with an internet connection; engagement, because the online medium would also permit and encourage new ways to experience and interact with culture. The original vision was later significantly revised, and Culture Online was launched as a much smaller initiative over a finite period, with funding totalling £16 million stretching over a four-year period. Nevertheless, the founding principles of participation, learning, engagement and reach were adhered to.

Significantly, the report made a case for prioritising active contribution – for adopting a ‘contributory principle’. In other words, the projects could be required to allow users not only to research and work with the online materials, but also to generate material themselves to be posted back to the website.¹⁸ As the report put it: ‘Culture Online should make participation in arts and culture a two-way street, not a one-way download.’¹⁹

When viewed against the changing context of online resources and internet access, the Culture Online *Vision* report was indeed visionary. It correctly read the signs of change and designed a project not for the year 2001 but for the future, envisaging the role of the internet as ever more central, and with faster connection widely available.

The emphasis on participatory content was particularly forward-looking and experimental. And yet, in 2001 the report’s author could not have predicted the full scale of change in the popularity of interactive, collaborative Web 2.0 resources in the years immediately following, particularly among young people. The success of Culture Online was rooted both in its pioneering outlook and its ability to keep up to date and respond to the constantly changing trends.

The project commissioning criteria, set in 2002, included

participatory content as one of the 'desirable' criteria, rather than being 'essential'. However, within 12 months, participation became the cornerstone of much cutting-edge online content, and in practice all later Culture Online projects provided opportunities for interaction and user-generated content. Culture Online's experience was emblematic of the convergence of the participatory trend in broader online activity, and the changing nature of people's cultural engagement.

An illustrative comparison can be drawn between one of the earliest and one of the last Culture Online projects to be launched, Stagework and ProjectsETC. Stagework went live in January 2004. In its original format it offered a rich, engaging introduction to the world of theatre, with various types of multimedia material, but with no interactive elements per se. But in line with the changing trends, Stagework introduced its first interactive content in April 2005. This took the form of a scene builder that features actors and director at work, and allows users to develop their own 'mini production' of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* by selecting their favourite scenes for their own interpretation.²⁰ The multimedia content and interactive elements transformed the experience of visiting the website.

ProjectsETC was one of last projects delivered by Culture Online. It was not commissioned but produced in-house and went online in beta (ie as a pilot) on 8 May 2006 and was launched in October 2006. ProjectsETC exemplifies a typical 2.0 resource, acting as a tool for social networking, interaction and user-generated information-sharing. In its present form, it contains a collection of user-generated case studies of good practice and podcasts, with the promise of more interactive elements to come.²¹ As such, its development reflects changes that have been seen in online engagement in general.

In between these two 'bookend' projects, others have shown a high degree of user-generated content and social interaction. *Icons*, one of the biggest and best-known projects, has created the space for a national debate about 'national identities' both by the website's users and commentators in other media. The trajectory from display to interactivity is clear.

Culture Online was an experimental pilot in the use of digital technologies to enhance culture and learning, and a successful one in terms of timing, content and adaptability. The context in which Culture Online has thrived – general internet access and participative Web 2.0 resources – was largely undeveloped at the time the programme was planned, but took hold only during its development and running. These technological changes have been particularly important for successfully engaging children and young people. The growing use of the internet in schools and households and the rise of the internet as the sphere of youth culture and interaction have provided an ideal context for Culture Online to develop and prosper within.

From vision to reality: Culture Online

The second half of the first chapter takes a step back to where it all started – the vision for Culture Online – outlining the programme development and project output up until the present day.

A timeline

Following the announcement of Culture Online at the Labour Party conference in September 2000, steps were promptly taken to set the plan in motion. The Culture and Recreation Bill, presented to Parliament in December 2000, included provision to establish Culture Online as a statutory corporation.²²

The financially ambitious aspiration announced by Chris Smith was scaled back significantly when it came to its application. There were, however, many positive results to this diminution in scale. Governments are fond of large numbers in public pronouncements, but acting on the large is not always either necessary or desirable. Big initiatives attract media and public scrutiny and are expected to deliver results in unrealistic time frames: the teething problems of many newly established organisations, from NESTA (National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) to NOF (New Opportunities Fund, now part of the Big Lottery Fund), from MLA (Museum, Libraries and Archives Council) to the Child Support

Agency, are well known. Big projects are more difficult to manage, often more complex, and the infrastructure to support them can rarely be put in place overnight. In the event, the size of Culture Online was fit for its newly articulated purpose.

The tendering process began in August 2002.²³ Jonathan Drori, managing director of the consultancy Thoughtsmiths Ltd, was appointed director of Culture Online effective from October 2002, to lead the commissioning and delivery of the projects.²⁴ He recruited a team of 12 cultural and technical experts to support the work. The first seven commissioned projects were announced in October 2003 and the first project (Stagework) went live in January 2004.

Following a successful first phase, an additional £3 million was allocated for Culture Online in 2005 to do two things. First, to commission more projects in 2005/06. Second, to create useful resources and a programme of activities to disseminate best practice to other government departments, non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) and practitioners in the creative industries, so that the expertise gained during the Culture Online project would not be lost but be passed on.²⁵ The Culture Online programme drew to a close in March 2007.

Scope

The 2001 *Vision* report envisaged two roles for Culture Online:

- to support infrastructure
- to fund online content.²⁶

In the event, and in response both to its budget and to consultation on its business strategy, Culture Online focused only on the latter role, but in doing so, its function has encompassed:

- acting as a commissioning body
- becoming a development agency for online culture
- catalysing and stimulating interactive content
- raising the game among participating institutions

- acting as a quality benchmark for others
- supporting project development and delivery
- providing strategic leadership
- providing content, technological, legal and cultural expertise
- brokering partnerships between the culture, media, technology and education sectors
- facilitating the sharing of good practice, project management and ideas
- providing expertise on child protection and intellectual property issues
- promoting best practice in Accessibility and Usability; 'Accessibility' is a technical term to describe standards that allow people with disabilities to use websites easily.

To date, Culture Online has commissioned and overseen the delivery of 26 projects. An outline of their core principles and financing is given below. More details on the individual projects – content, partners, schedules, budgets – can be found in appendices 1 and 2.

Core principles

The fundamental rationale for Culture Online was to enrich cultural experiences and education through interactive online content. When it was formally launched in 2002, five distinct strategic objectives were articulated. These were to:

- enhance access to the arts for children and young people and give them the opportunity to develop their talents to the full
- open up our cultural institutions to the wider community, to promote lifelong learning and social cohesion
- extend the reach of new technologies and build IT skills
- support wider and richer engagement and learning by all adults

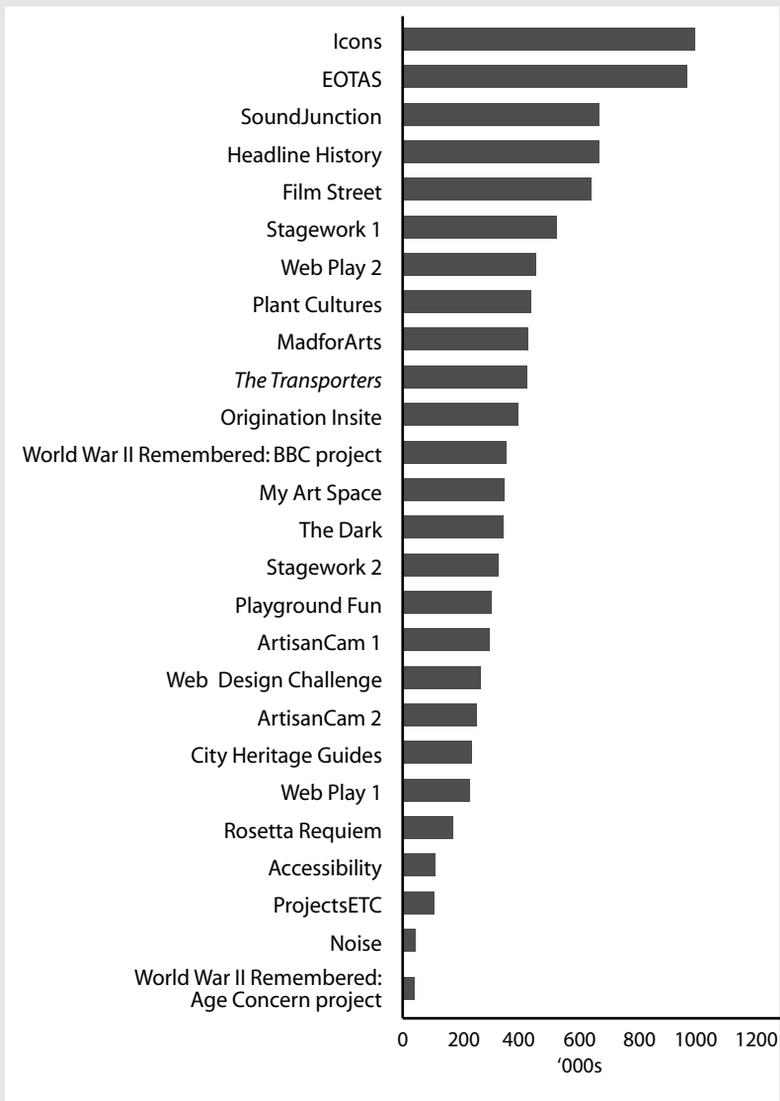
- promote good practice within the industry and within the public sector with regard to commissioning, process, usability and accessibility.²⁷

These five objectives flow directly from the strategic priorities and SDA/PSA (service delivery agreements/public service agreements) targets of the DCMS and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). In particular, they reflect the focus of both departments on children and young people, as well as the importance given to promoting continuing education and improving cultural access for adults from traditionally underrepresented groups: the mentally or physically disabled, black and minority ethnic (BME) and lower socio-economic groups C2, D and E. The fifth objective reflects the aims to maximise the economic benefit of and to the cultural sector, and to ensure efficient, user-focused delivery.²⁸

The Culture Online commissioning team developed a set of commissioning criteria against which ideas and proposals could be assessed and prioritised. The criteria naturally reflected the strategic objectives. They fell into two groups, A and B, roughly ‘essential’ and ‘desired’, respectively. The first-listed group A criterion was the ‘potential to delight at least one of the target audiences’. In its way, this was visionary. It anticipated a move in cultural policy towards recognising the intrinsic value of culture rather than viewing it solely as an instrumental means of achieving other agenda. The issue became a hot topic in cultural debate, and was addressed by Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, in her personal essay *Governance and the Value of Culture*.²⁹ Moreover this criterion correctly acknowledged that it was exactly this – the individual’s delight in the experience – that made the achievement of all else possible. Without that initial engagement, there is nothing on which to build.

The other criteria concerned issues of delivery (eg productivity, cost-effectiveness, managerial acumen, motivation) and appropriate content (eg support for English in the school curriculum, ethical soundness, innovation). Group B includes more criteria for desirable project content (eg participatory, long-term benefits, contribution to

Figure 3 Culture Online project budgets



Source: Culture Online

social inclusion or DCMS strategic priorities, promotion of use or further evolution of new technologies) and factors facilitating smooth delivery (eg evidence of collaborations with other sources of funding, potential for revenue generation).³⁰

Commissioning process, budgets

An invitation to submit expressions of interest was opened in the summer of 2002. This produced over 650 responses. A small commissioning team was in place by November 2002 and one of its first tasks was to develop a set of strategic commissioning criteria and to select proposals for further development. In parallel with the external submissions, the team developed a set of ideas internally, focused on the needs of the target audiences. A number of these selected proposals subsequently went to tender and were delivered by external suppliers. The Culture Online funding process differed from the largely grants-based model used by comparable organisations. Instead of distributing grants, Culture Online commissioned and oversaw work, and entered into contractual relationships. The importance of meeting the agreed criteria was enshrined in all project contracts and payments were released only when specific delivery targets were met. This created the necessary legal and operational context for effective planning, delivery and sustainability.

The most recent data available on Culture Online project funding (January 2007) detail the current funding breakdown for the 26 projects and are shown in appendix 1. The individual project budgets have varied widely, however, ranging from £188,000 (Rosetta Requiem) to £1.1 million (Icons), depending on the duration and type of activities involved (see figure 3). The cheaper projects (< £300,000, such as Rosetta Requiem and WebDesign Challenge) were either of short duration and/or involved limited active outreach work. The more expensive projects (> £700,000, such as Icons, Every Object Tells a Story, Headline History, Film Street, and Stagework) have involved more than one phase, engaged a wide range of technical and arts professionals in the development process and/or involved extensive outreach and educational programmes.

2. The success story of Culture Online

This section describes how Culture Online has met its objectives and highlights some practical lessons for the future. The discussion draws on the individual project evaluation reports and the nine case studies prepared by Burns Owens Partnership in March–November 2005 on individual aspects of Culture Online.

Meeting the targets

Culture Online's strategic objectives called for (*inter alia*):

- widening access to cultural organisations
- learning
- brokering partnerships between sectors
- promoting social cohesion.

Widening access to cultural organisations

Culture Online projects have been successful in opening up the resources and know-how of various UK cultural institutions to a wider public (see appendix 4 for examples of project reach). The projects cover a broad spectrum of cultural activity, from visual arts, music and theatre to newspaper journalism, oral history and filmmaking. The project partners that have contributed materials and expertise range from established, large-scale cultural and media

organisations (Victoria & Albert Museum, the National Theatre, BBC, Channel 4, Channel 5) to small-scale ones (24 Hour Museum, Braunarts, Artists@work, First Light). In their diversity, they represent a wide spread of types of organisation and cultural form.

The most literal cases of opening up the resources of cultural institutions are perhaps Stagework, which offers unprecedented access to behind-the-scenes life of theatre productions; Every Object Tells a Story; and Plant Cultures, where objects and pictures from various museums are presented and explored online. These projects, and a number of others, also allowed users to contribute their own objects and narratives to an evolving 'virtual collection' alongside those created by institutions.

In cost-per-user terms, maximum reach is ensured by the fact that all Culture Online resources were set up on a free-of-charge basis. Public sector initiatives, such as the People's Network, have also contributed to the infrastructure through which access is achieved.

The target groups of the Culture Online projects demonstrate the focus on opening up cultural resources to children and hard-to-reach adult audiences. Children are a primary target group in 13 of the 26 projects and four more projects targeted children and young people as a secondary audience.

Eight of the 26 projects were primarily targeted at hard-to-reach adult audiences:

- Plant Cultures gave British-Asians a chance to contribute their knowledge about south Asian plants and their wider social meaning.
- Origination Insite facilitated the creation of websites telling stories of the diverse incoming cultures and ethnic communities in the UK.
- MadforArts 1 & 2 gave a voice to mental health service users.
- City Heritage Guides actively sought contributions from citizens from a range of ethnic backgrounds.
- Rosetta Requiem involved terminally ill hospice users.

- WWII Remembered targeted elderly people isolated by geography, infirmity or access.
- *The Transporters* provided a resource for young children with autism.
- The Accessibility DVD was a resource promoting good practice in web design and functionality to improve the provision of online services for people with disabilities.

To reach the target audiences, Culture Online undertook strategic marketing campaigns. For adults, for example, information was made available in libraries and local media, and disseminated via community groups that have access to the target groups. Children were reached by marketing the resources to teachers. Another way in which children were encouraged to participate was through a number of creative competitions, for instance, designing a Christmas card for a government department (ArtisanCam) or through website-building competitions (Origination Insite and Web Design Challenge). Word of mouth proved to be a powerful driver.

The goal of maximising accessibility also informed the process of website design. All the website content was planned in collaboration with Culture Online technical experts, keeping in mind the requirements and available resources of the intended audience groups – for example children, elderly, non native-English speakers and the disabled. In addition, Culture Online arranged for a number of projects to take part in accessibility workshops, run by the Centre for Human Computer Interaction Design at City University.³¹ Crucially, all sites were user-tested prior to their launch and throughout their development.³²

In addition to facilitating and encouraging independent online access, Culture Online projects made a concerted effort to reach out to new audiences – particularly hard-to-reach adult groups – via outreach and touring workshops in outdoor and community venues. Efficient outreach strategies were formed by teaming cultural organisations with experienced outreach organisations that have established access to and relationships with the target groups, and an

existing body of outreach workers and/or volunteers. One of the reasons that projects reached their intended communities was because the initiatives linked into existing networks and local or sectoral knowledge bases.

For example, the mental health charities Mental Health Media and Rethink worked with, and pooled their resources and knowledge bases with, the Community Channel in MadforArts. In the case of WWII Remembered, the BBC, the charity Age Concern and the MLA worked together to collect stories from older people. The reputation, reach and established 'brand values' of Age Concern and the BBC were crucial success factors. In the case of Plant Cultures, which targeted adults of south Asian minority ethnic groups (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi), the appropriate cultural understanding, trust and language skills of outreach workers was crucial to the success of the project. One of the outreach partners, Bradford Community Environment Project, had close ties with the Bangladeshi community and people were given the chance to contribute stories in Bangla.³³

Much effort went into securing media partners for projects from the outset, both to enhance projects and to ensure effective distribution. Media partners included the BBC, Channel 4, The Community Channel and Associated Northcliffe Digital.

Finally, a further reason why Culture Online projects were successful in actively engaging both young people and adult audiences was their focus on user-generated content, often generated in innovative ways. Every Object Tells a Story sought contributions across a range of age and social groups. The Victoria & Albert Museum and its regional partner museums and galleries hosted a series of outreach workshops in a range of public venues: schools, community centres, parks, markets and shopping malls. Stories were collected using a range of engaging methods including iPods, laptops, video-booths and a mobile video-booth taxi. Icons of England is a mass-participation project encouraging users to explore, share, comment on and vote for aspects of contemporary English culture. In its first year the project has attracted well over one million visitors.

Nearly all Culture Online projects provide a chance for the participants to actively work with material and contribute online content, or at least to share their views with other users and provide feedback. The interactive element is crucial for children to maintain their interest and focus in a project. For adults also, not only do they find it inherently enjoyable to share their experiences, memories or knowledge, but the chance actively to contribute content also gives a clear structure and purpose to the project.

Learning

Culture Online was successful in promoting learning both among project partners and participants.

Project partners and practitioners

For several of the cultural organisations the Culture Online project was their first extensive project involving advanced digital technologies. The IT skills are retained in the organisations for future projects thanks to the Culture Online technical experts, who devoted time to training, giving advice on, for example, selecting technical partners, helping projects with setting up and running user-testing, or technical evaluation.³⁴ Many of the partnerships brokered between cultural and technological companies have resulted in fruitful, sustaining collaboration and information exchange. Substantial support was also given in the areas of finance, marketing, accessibility, evaluation and project management. Much of the knowledge and experience gained by Culture Online and its partners has been consolidated into dissemination resources, most notably the website ProjectsETC.

Users and participants

For the participants, the Culture Online projects supported learning in IT skills and in key areas of the Curriculum. All of them taught IT skills and improved familiarity with the possibilities of the internet by engaging them with state-of-the-art online content. Additionally, explicit IT learning was built into the projects Origination Insite and

Web Design Challenge in the form of workshops and school competitions.

One potential limitation for Culture Online was that participants would be self-selecting by existing IT ability. However, projects used targeted training and facilitating workshops to build participation through IT learning. This was particularly important in accessing hard-to-reach adult audiences. As mentioned above, several projects ran extensive outreach and IT workshops, in collaboration with local community groups or charities. For example, to help older people to record their stories, the WWII Remembered project ran hundreds of workshops with volunteers in conjunction with the charity Age Concern in libraries, archives and community venues across the UK. Workshops specifically focused on IT skills were a part of Origination Insite: the project team ran a series of two-day website-building workshops in partnership with local museums and galleries to promote contributions from less IT literate people.³⁵

In addition to IT, several Culture Online projects aimed at school-age children succeeded in supporting young people's learning in other subjects because they made it as easy and attractive as possible for teachers to use them in class. One of the desirable commissioning criteria was fit with the National Curriculum, and in practice all projects aimed at children had their content geared to match one or several subject areas of specific age groups. In addition to relevance to the curriculum, projects also aimed to have important social outcomes in building self-confidence and self-esteem among children of school age.

The project websites also provided support and resources for teachers, such as teachers' packs and ready-made lesson plans, further to encourage their take-up in class. For example, for Origination Insite, Channel 4 commissioned and made available for free, downloadable lesson plans for key stage 3 in English, ICT, Citizenship, Art & Design, History and Music.³⁶ Similarly, Stagework offers resources for English, Citizenship and Religious Education. The Curriculum Online website, a DfES initiative to support the use of online content in education, includes a comprehensive, validated listing of available

online resources for education.³⁷ Currently five Culture Online projects are listed on the site (Headline History, SoundJunction, Stagework, WebPlay and ArtistCam); the learning section of Every Object Tells a Story has also been registered with Curriculum Online and awaits validation.

Brokering partnerships between sectors

Culture Online contributed to creating structures that support community development by successfully bringing together people from different sectors with shared interests and/or locales. For example, for Plant Cultures, partnerships were brokered between the lead partner, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and other organisations that shared resources and the desire to make them more accessible to the public. In addition to Kew, four library and museum partners supplied images of flora (British Library, Victoria & Albert Museum, Wellcome Library, Natural History Museum) and four museums and four community organisations (Bradford Community Environment Project, Leicester Museum, Liverpool Museum, Museum of London) worked with Kew on outreach projects in four different locations. In the case of MadforArts, Culture Online brokered a partnership between the lead partner Community Channel, the voluntary and charitable sectors, and two mental health charities with specialist knowledge of the target audience, Mental Health Media and Rethink.

Social cohesion

Crucially, the brokered partnerships commonly – as in the above cases – brought together cultural or media organisations with partners experienced in community work and closely in touch with user needs. This was vital for the success of the projects, particularly in the cases where the lead partner was a large-scale national organisation with limited local knowledge. Perhaps the best example is the project WWII Remembered, led by the BBC. The project aimed to collect a large volume of personal stories about the Second World War. In order to reach one of the key target groups, older people, Culture Online brokered partnerships between the BBC, the charity

Age Concern, and numerous local museums, libraries and archives. Through their combined expertise, networks and resources, a total of 780 outreach workshops took place in museums, libraries and archives, old people's homes and other community venues across England in 2004/05. The target audience of 60,000 was surpassed by 17,000 and 40 per cent of the sampled audience were over 60 years old.³⁸

Finally, two of the projects specifically address issues of national identity and diversity, the awareness of which is crucial for building community cohesion: Icons explores the issue of Englishness through a search for cultural icons, while Origination Insite provided an avenue for minority ethnic groups to tell their stories of entering and living in the UK.

Practical lessons

The fifth and remaining strategic objective of Culture Online was to 'promote good practice within the industry and within the public sector with regard to commissioning, process, usability and accessibility'. Many important lessons have been learnt during the life of Culture Online, lessons both about managing online cultural projects and about the organisational structure of a facilitating body itself.

Lessons on project management

Lesson 1: Brokers are needed to put projects together

Culture Online staff and project partners found that one of the most useful roles of Culture Online was to act as a broker, bringing together organisations from the cultural world with partners from the charity sector, the media and technology. Culture Online commissioned feasibility studies during the developmental stage for some projects to gather information about demand and potential risks involved. For instance, the decision to proceed to the development of a full project for both Icons and Film Street was based on extensive scoping work done into audience need and behaviour, content types, technical infrastructure and potential for partnerships.

One lesson from the Culture Online experience is the importance of ensuring that all partners are clear about the project plan and particularly their role and responsibilities as part of it. Projects that established a clear understanding of this at the outset were better able to operate efficiently. In some early projects, difficulties in establishing roles and responsibilities and of reconciling the aims and the methods of different organisations led to difficulties and delays. In one large project with multiple partners, it took nearly a year to agree a contract and project plan. Another project was discontinued when the objectives of Culture Online and a project partner could no longer be reconciled. Taking account of the experience of early projects, Culture Online set up initial ‘kick-off’ meetings, held with all involved parties before the contract was finalised, where all the project rationale, the management roles of the partners and Culture Online, and the expected outcomes are clearly spelled out.

In the development and implementation stages of the projects, Culture Online continued to oversee the projects. To ensure that projects ran on schedule and to budget, they established a project management structure, modelled on Prince 2 methodology (a project management system in common use in the public sector) and a rigorous risk management system. Regular board meetings were set up to check that projects were on track in terms of schedule, budget and content development. To help with tracking, projects were required to produce detailed ongoing documentation about interim outcomes.³⁹

Many project partners were at first unfamiliar with such a methodical project management system and ongoing evaluation. But after an initial period of familiarisation, the system was a success. The projects ran to a schedule and a budget that were agreed and controlled. Partners were supported in the use of rigorous project management techniques, significantly enhancing the degree of professionalism and efficiency in some of the publicly funded arts and cultural organisations that were involved. In a 2004 National Audit Office evaluation, Culture Online risk management was singled out as an example of best practice among government departments.⁴⁰

Lesson 2: Commissioning can be more effective than grant giving

One specific lesson learnt from Culture Online project management is that a contractual model of commissioning projects – payment against deliverables – can work well in the cultural sector. When successfully administered, the contractual model focuses projects on target as well as providing a financial incentive to deliver exactly what they promised, on schedule. This was particularly important in terms of motivating projects to undertake the costly and potentially risky outreach work that was central to the purpose of Culture Online. As a 2004 audit states: ‘To gear projects towards its target audience of hard to reach users, Culture Online pays projects more for reaching members of the public who do not normally participate in cultural activities.’⁴¹

The active commissioning approach adopted by Culture Online focused on deliverables, supported innovation and achieved a balance between flexibility and minimising risk through sensible change control.

Initially, some partner organisations had difficulty in understanding that the commissioning process was different from grant funding – essentially that they were contractually accountable to deliver specific outputs at agreed stages in the project for the money that they received. The contract negotiations were felt to be complicated and to take too long. A lesson learnt from the Culture Online experience is that clarity about tasks, obligations and responsibilities is essential from the outset. Realising this, in addition to the kick-off meetings mentioned above, Culture Online produced a handbook outlining the expectations for partners in order to clarify and quicken the commissioning process.⁴²

A further benefit of the contractual model is the possibility of bringing in additional partners. To streamline the management structure, Culture Online established a system where only the lead partner of a project had a direct contract with Culture Online. All other partners are subcontracted to the lead partner and are managed by them.⁴³ This brings clarity and efficiency to the management

structures and a sense of ownership of the project for the lead partner.

Lesson 3: Clarity about editorial control is vital

In addition to clarity about project management roles, the Culture Online projects taught the importance of having absolute clarity from the start about who creates and controls content and quality. Some initial disagreements were reported in some Culture Online projects over Culture Online's role in the direction of project development and its responsibility for editorial decisions.⁴⁴ Projects worked best when there was a detailed description of editorial aims and outcomes and a process for signing off work at recognised milestones, coupled with the freedom for a commissioned organisation to deliver against the plan.

In projects where the commissioning party wished to retain a direct role throughout the process, this needed to be clearly articulated up front, approval sought at kick-off meetings or similar negotiations prior to the project launch, and included in the project contract.

Lesson 4: Intellectual property rights need to be decided and defined at the start

Valuable lessons have been learnt about the best practice with intellectual property rights (IPR) in government-backed cultural projects. Culture Online ensured that everyone involved was clear about the IPR arrangements from the beginning by initiating the IPR negotiations in the commissioning phase of the project. Culture Online further encouraged project partners to seek legal consultation on their position. The success of the resulting IPR arrangements lay in their flexibility. Instead of a blanket approach (such as the former standard approach to place all produced content under crown copyright) an appropriate solution for the IPR division was designed for each project.⁴⁵

Culture Online took a pragmatic approach to the assignment of IPR, deciding on a case-by-case basis what position would most

benefit the audience. In some cases, the willingness of Culture Online to give up a share of the IPR was crucial to ensure project viability and sustainability. For example, in thinking of the project continuation past Culture Online, if the IPR were to be owned by the Crown, any future reuse of the content would be less likely because of the complex processes of applying for and negotiating permission.⁴⁶

Overall, Culture Online devised a successful template for dealing with the IPR of various types of online content, distinguishing between commissioned material, third-party material, content generated by users of the site, and material owned by contractors prior to commissioning. However, it has to be recognised that IPR is a much contested and developing field involving ethical and practical issues of great complexity. The large-scale global battle characterised by Lawrence Lessig between the read-only and the read-write cultures is just one aspect.⁴⁷ Another is the practicality of IPR enforcement in countries where IPR are regularly flouted. A third is the question of fairness when user-generated content is exploited in unforeseen ways. Culture Online faced this last issue in the case of Rosetta Requiem when a song written by one of the participants gave rise to a charity single. Culture Online resolved this by waiving its right to profits made by the single, thus ensuring that the charities involved received maximum benefit from the sales.

Lesson 5: Choose the right project partners

The Culture Online projects have worked with some of the UK's leading cultural organisations including the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Design Museum, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the BBC, Channel 4, the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) and the National Theatre.

One of the lessons learnt is that there are various benefits from having a recognised, established lead partner. They have access to large, high-quality resources in-house and to centralised support services (finance, marketing etc). The negotiation of subsidiary partnerships (for example the National Theatre Rights deal on streaming video content with actor's representative bodies in the case

of Stagework) is made easier when the main partner is an established player in the field.⁴⁸ Also the recruitment of volunteers and participants can be facilitated by a known lead partner. For example, the WWII Remembered evaluation found that many people were encouraged to volunteer and to submit a story by the idea of being a part of something national and important run by BBC, an organisation they know and trust.⁴⁹

With the projects Stagework and SoundJunction, the brokering of effective partnerships with production companies and other organisations enabled large, established institutions such as the National Theatre and the ABRSM to extend their reach and competencies to new areas, winning both recognition and awards. Stagework, for example, won two BAFTA Interactive Awards in 2005 in the Best Factual and Best Learning categories. It also won an AOP Award, a UN World Summit Award in the e-learning category, and a BETT Award in the English Key Stage 3 and 4 categories. A list of the 25 major awards garnered by Culture Online projects is shown in appendix 3.

Partnering between large and small organisations can benefit both parties; it is by no means a one-way street. With the project ArtisanCam, Culture Online enabled a very small organisation (Artists@work) to benefit from the infrastructure and support of a larger body, Cumbria and Lancashire Education Online (CLEO), and an appropriate production company thereby transforming a creative idea into a viable, award-winning and sustainable project.

It is important to be aware of the potential complications of working with established cultural organisations, however. Large-scale organisations have more complex and fixed organisational structures that may not fit the Culture Online project process. They are used to managing their projects on their own, which can bring issues of control. The key preventive strategy is, again, maximum transparency up front: clarity about who is responsible for what and accountable to whom, the schedule and interim targets.⁵⁰

Lesson 6: Focus on the user

Trust is a vital element in reaching people. By definition, hard-to-reach groups present special challenges not just in communicating with them, but in gaining their trust. Large-scale national organisations may lack the local perspective and trust in community levels of society. For example, one of the possible reasons for initial low intake to workshops run by the project Origination Insite was suspicion among members of grassroots community groups of a project initiated on the national level by Channel 4. Origination Insite had to work very hard with local groups to establish connections and trust in order to get the planned number of people to attend the community workshops.⁵¹ The best option is, therefore, for large-scale organisations to work in partnership with charities and community organisations on projects involving public or outreach events.

Working with particular target groups throws up other challenges. In the case of children, Culture Online had to be assiduous over child protection issues. Various moderation systems were in place to ensure appropriateness of website content.

- 1 Post-moderation
 - Post-moderation of website contributions was advocated by Culture Online to spot inappropriate material or anything risking copyright infringement.
 - Culture Online lawyers devised an indemnity clause that involved time limits within which moderation needs to take place, to date a sufficient precaution against the chance of being sued.⁵²
 - In Every Object Tells a Story, large quantities of material are posted online. Images are pre-moderated but text-only material is post-moderated. All contributions that have not been pre-moderated have an 'Alert the moderator' link, which allows any other user to make a complaint about it; any post with a complaint is removed while the moderator assesses it.⁵³

- 2 Editorial moderation
 - In many cases posted content was first monitored by an editorial team, eg in Icons the nominations for icons are moderated by a team of ‘experts’.
- 3 Protected online environments
 - Some projects operate in password-protected environments that are accessible only to school children and teachers, with further teacher monitoring. For example WebPlay operates on the password-protected Think.com site.
- 4 Clarity about terms and conditions of user-generated content
 - Culture Online websites ask people to tick a box to indicate their agreement with ‘terms and conditions’ when contributing material, which gives Culture Online the licence to use this material, with a ‘non-exclusive perpetual licence’ to the content.⁵⁴
 - To make sure that children understand what they are agreeing to, Culture Online required the language to be appropriately adjusted, as part of their overall accessibility strategy.
 - Some other projects went further. For instance, Playground Fun required children under 18 years to get their parents/+18 guardian/teacher to read the site’s terms and conditions on their behalf.⁵⁵

Lesson 7: Project sustainability needs to be built in at an early stage

One of the challenges with projects that are funded for a limited period only is sustainability after the project funding has run out. One lesson learnt from Culture Online is the importance of identifying possible sustainability strategies for each project well ahead of time.⁵⁶ Possible avenues explored and used in Culture Online projects have included seeking funding from other sources, private sector sponsorship, or progress towards financial indepen-

dence – ‘potential for revenue generation’ was one of the desirable commissioning criteria for Culture Online projects.⁵⁷

For a number of projects Culture Online has given additional funding for a ‘Phase 2’ to assist in the transition process. For example, WebPlay has received additional funding from Culture Online while also securing further support from NESTA, Arts Council England and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to develop a new ‘Page to Stage Platform’. Stagework has received further funding from Culture Online but the National Theatre itself has also committed to cover a part of the costs, and further sponsorship was successfully secured from BT for the interactive scene-builder feature launched in April 2005. This is an interesting example of project sustainability being achieved when a project becomes embedded as a core activity of an organisation, rather than being a time-limited, stand-alone ‘add-on’. Icons is an example of a project where the management and editorial development of the site has been transferred to an appropriate external organisation – the 24 Hour Museum – when the contract with Culture Online was concluded in March 2007.⁵⁸

Lessons on organisational structure

Lesson 8: Both technical and cultural expertise are required

The make-up of the Culture Online team was instrumental in the successful support of several projects. Led by Jonathan Drori, it consisted of specialists in both cultural and technical aspects of project delivery, from commissioning, development, production, marketing, finance and IT to communications. The staff oversaw project development including running, scrutinising, discussing and shaping the plans, attending board meetings, identifying risks and solutions. Many of the project partners have attested to the key role of Culture Online staff in shaping and overseeing, for example risk management, financial arrangements or technological solutions.

One of the problems identified by Burns Owens Partnership was, however, that the first projects, commissioned and launched before the full range of specialist staff was in place, did not have access to the same level of expert advice.⁵⁹ For example, evaluation and marketing

experts were recruited only in summer 2004. The lesson learnt, therefore, is for a coordinating body like Culture Online to establish a full team of cultural and technical experts as early on as possible.

Lesson 9: Get the scale right

It is no accident that Culture Online achieved success on a smaller scale than that originally envisaged. It is an important lesson for government that the big numbers and grand announcements of political rhetoric need to be tempered with an understanding of the practicalities of implementation. One reason why Culture Online worked in the relatively short timescale involved is because the team that managed it was able to function as a cohesive and coherent unit. If the organisation had been any bigger, in our view it would probably have been unable simultaneously to manage its own growth and the delivery of the programmes. In addition, the necessity of producing quick results to justify the public investment would have pressured both Culture Online and the partners into making mistakes.

Lesson 10: Use the learning

In the time between the first call for tender in 2002 to the close of the programme, the Culture Online team has gained expert first-hand knowledge and experience in commissioning and managing interactive cultural projects. Culture Online has injected new working practices and confidence in working with digital technologies into DCMS. It is vital that the best practice and lessons are not lost as the programme draws to a close, but disseminated within DCMS, other government departments, and culture, media, charity and technology sectors.

One step towards this aim has been the dissemination of learning and resources for best practice that the Culture Online team have been providing to members of government departments, NDPBs and individual project practitioners since 2005. This has taken the shape for example of workshops, seminars, presentations, DVDs and CD Roms, pdf manuals and templates, and the ProjectsETC website.

3. The (changing) context

Technology and the internet

The internet has changed the face of culture and cultural engagement. From the now famous example of Lily Allen launching her career on the web, to the thousands of clips uploaded daily onto sites like YouTube, the internet is a prime means by which we access, search for and display culture. The Tate considers its website its 'fifth gallery'. In a project run in partnership with Culture Online, a number of theatres including the National Theatre, Bristol's Old Vic and Birmingham's Repertory Theatre have worked to open theatre to new audiences that might otherwise be unable or hesitant to visit the theatre itself.⁶⁰ Far from replacing actual experience, virtual engagement has proved a stimulus to actual participation. Via an internet vote, the *Guardian* has opened curation to the public.⁶¹ The paper's conclusion is that 'the success of Your Gallery', as the project is called, 'proves once again that people do not want to abandon the physical work of art, only find new ways to communicate it'. Elsewhere, the Science Museum has enabled visitors to engage with its exhibit, 'Who am I?' not just within the walls of its South Kensington home, but also from wherever they can access a computer; and, at the most basic level, we can access library catalogues from the comfort of our homes.

The scope of activity enabled by the platform for engagement that the internet offers is immense. As well as multiplying exponentially

the opportunities we can find or simply chance on, it is a platform on which we can express ourselves. In the brave new world of the internet, one thing is clear – it is our world. It gives us the chance to contribute and shape. The critic and scholar Julian Stallabrass has written of the internet as handing ‘back to artists a prize and an obligation long since surrendered in liberal societies in favour of artistic license and cottage-industry production values: an explicit social role’.⁶²

Annually, the magazine *Art Review* publishes a list of ‘the hundred most powerful’ people in the contemporary art world. A guide to the great, the good and those with real influence and power in today’s art world, it lists the glitterati and movers of New York, London, Beijing and Venice. This year, there is something new on *Art Review*’s list – Google appears at number 100. The search engine’s position belies the importance that it actually has. It is often called ubiquitous, but there is more to it than reach. It is not so much that Google is everywhere we look . . . it’s more that it is the means *by which* we look, and that, so often when we do look, we look online.

Google does something new. Just as it does with all that it covers, it opens the arts and culture to a whole new audience. As well as reaching new eyes, it also presents culture in a totally different and more participatory way. Through the self-ordering preferences of its users it manifests the power of public engagement and displays a barometer of public will.

This is an important point. New web tools enable users collectively to express their preferences through their actions, without having to be asked. For example, Google searches work only because Google monitors the linking activities of users. Without their preferences, the search would not produce useful results. In other words, the value of many small actions, when taken together, open up new shared domains of cultural significance.

User-participation-driven Web 2.0 tools offer particular potential in the cultural sector in light of the arguments above. These include:

- podcasts (developing on existing museum experiments, eg

- V&A and Culture Online's own podcasts with ProjectsETC)
- blogs
- social tagging
- syndicated feeds (RSS)
- social networking sites and their implications for community-building
- online 'curation', eg Steve.museum.

All of these extend beyond simply the digitisation of data to models of linking and sharing information. Podcasts function as audio soundbites, which can be easily syndicated or shared. Blogs are the vehicles of the internet, allowing personalised views and conversations to travel in real time. Blogs can be brought to the user as syndicated content 'feeds' (called RSS feeds). Instead of searching the web for a blog update or news, users can sign up to receive content into a 'feed reader' that is refreshed whenever a favourite blog or website is updated. As individual blogs are linked together, new communities of ideas emerge, which are self-directed and not bounded by geographical region.

And that is just the beginning. Social tagging, for example, allows the user to apply keywords to any item of online content. Then the content can be viewed from the perspective of the users, not just the creators of that content. The results can be syndicated as feeds or viewed for navigation purposes as 'tag clouds' where the most commonly used words appear larger than other words. These tag clouds are sometimes called 'folksonomies' (the opposite of rigid taxonomies) because they represent the diverse perspectives from which people view a piece of content.

Aggregating the diversity of individual acts can result in surprising new domains for cultural expression that emerge from the bottom up. For example, on flickr, a photo-sharing website, many users who began tagging their photos with the word 'circle' started to publicly discuss the role of the circle in photography. Next week or next year, there will be something new to discuss as more photos are added and more tags lead to new interpretations.

What we are seeing now are tools that build on and extend ‘Web 2.0’ trends:

- *mashups*: linking feeds of feeds so that content continues to be combined and ‘mashed up’ in new ways
- *small social networking sites*: alongside or instead of large, global social networks, some may find it useful to keep social networks small
- *linking the online and offline in new ways*: linking physical products with online services is just one way that online and offline networks are joining up. It becomes possible to unleash the power of social networking among people who share a product or geographical location. An iPod is much more useful when coupled with the music searching and sharing activities of MySpace. An advocacy website like avaaz.org will send targeted messages to people based on their postcodes as well as their interests.

It is not the content itself, nor the new delivery mechanisms for content, or even the one-to-one linkages between them. Rather, we are beginning to see the emerging properties of a mass of bottom-up activities that create new meaning. By continuing to recognise and value *individual* expression, new forms of *collective* awareness and action are revealed. Yochai Benkler in *The Wealth of Networks* has called online activities such as Wikipedia ‘social production’,⁶³ the value of which we are only beginning to comprehend.

The social context: from provider to creator, the changing role of culture in society

Policy-makers, funders, local authorities and other authoritative bodies often speak of cultural provision. In many ways, this is a misnomer. Culture is not something that is ‘provided’, culture is something that describes our society, and something that we generate together. It is characterised by the many interests and the multiple backgrounds of the people who comprise that society. What *is*

provided are the means by which this can be represented and the means by which the many different aspects of our culture can be shared. These are the galleries, museums, theatres, concert halls, dance clubs, projects and events – and websites – that make up our cultural sector.

We are coming to recognise the new context in which culture exists. For some time, cultural organisations have been moving to incorporate different points of view into the culture that we see and engage with. Throughout the country, exhibits, productions, shows, concerts and other cultural forms have provided their publics with a chance to present their opinions and contribute to the creation of the UK's culture. The feedback mechanisms range from filling in comment books to audience participation in the evolution of storylines in theatres. One recent example of large-scale public inter-activity happened in the autumn of 2006, when Margate's Exodus project was both a presentation of a production by cultural professionals like Antony Gormley and the opportunity for the people of Margate to create cultural forms that expressed their opinion and attitudes.

To understand this trend of public input into cultural endeavours, and the co-creation of culture by experts – be they artists or curators – and the public, we need to look at changes in society as a whole.

Changes in society

Our culture is inseparable from our society. At school, when we study the past, we look to cultural forms and products as a means of finding out about the people of Rome, the Middle Ages or any other period of history. By contrast, in contemporary life we rarely connect the films people watch, the music that they download and the paintings that they go to look at or buy with the same level of understanding and inquiry. Too often, the logic of 'cultural provision' ignores this link between people and the culture they use and create, and sees culture simply (and mistakenly) as a leisure pursuit, or an add-on to 'real life'.

With the realisation of the centrality of culture, we can think anew about the potential of initiatives like Culture Online. As we have seen,

changes in the way that we use the internet mean that our lives, leisure and work are shaped by technologies that give us new potential to create and contribute to wider networks and discussions. Similar changes in the way that we consume media and that we seek to engage in culture are more than simple coincidence. In general, society is seeing changes that make both culture and online engagement increasingly potent forms. These include:

- the growing sense of the individual and **identity**
- the reconstruction and redrawing of **communities**
- the increasingly assertive **expression** of will and preference.

These three areas are very much connected. As individuals, we are more conscious of the different groups of which we are a part, and our identities can be shaped by a range of different senses of belonging. Alongside the formation of new communities, both actual and virtual, there is an unsettling trend for communities to dissolve or change. Technology and the ease of communication have not only provided multiple platforms on which we can express this identity, but have also given us multiple choices that we can make in constructing identity. We can, in effect, withdraw from geographic communities and define our own professional, consumer and cultural communities.

Some have feared the homogenising power of the internet. With the US leading the way in content generation and technology development, there were particular fears over ‘American cultural imperialism’ in which ‘globalisation would have an American face, an American outlook, and an American taste’.⁶⁴ In the event, and despite the US’s domination of the web, this has proved to be far from the case. The uptake of the internet has brought with it social diversity and brought new opportunities and a means of bringing issues to greater attention. To take an example from linguistics, it was feared that the dominance of the English language would crush smaller languages. In fact, the internet has given endangered languages a

means of bringing attention to themselves on a world stage and so raising interest in the cultures that they represent.

Language is only one medium that enables people to have a cultural identity, a sense of community and a means of expression. In the UK today, the way that these three factors play out in different ways in different contexts creates the social setting in which initiatives like Culture Online both exist and offer value. In wider terms, each of these areas of concern have impacted on policy-making and thinking about public services, bringing the public into decision-making about the way that services are configured and provided.

Identity

Identity is shaping the way that we think about politics and society in the UK today. Are we urban or rural? Are we A, B, C2D? Are we British, or Welsh, or from the UK? We may identify ourselves differently at different times and for different purposes. Identity has become more fluid and certainly less uniform: no longer is there a relatively stable set of cultural signifiers that encompass large sections of the population. What has become apparent over the past decade is that a significant number of the UK's citizens struggle to link wider assertions of identity, including citizenship itself, to their own ideas about who they are, what they stand for and how best to express that. Whenever politicians offer lists of common cultural references (most famously, John Major's nostalgic appeal to county cricket grounds and warm beer) they are immediately disputed.⁶⁵

By seeing cultural production and engagement as a form of expressing identity and as a means of accessing that of others, we come to recognise that the UK's culture is the sum of its identities. More than ever, culture must be at the heart of how we think about the future and how we address many of the problems that we face because political and managerial solutions will fail unless they take account of differing cultural identities. Places to express, share and forge those identities, be they physical or virtual, are thus becoming more important.

Communities

Part of the way we form and express our identity is through bonding with others of like mind and concern and forming communities. Communities are at the heart of our public and political realm. Figures from the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister revealed that 82 per cent of UK citizens asked believed that ‘community involvement’ is a good idea. However, there is a problem: only 26 per cent of the same sample said that they are actually involved in their community.⁶⁶

Our participation in a community depends on our identification with a sense of common unity, interest and purpose. Assumptions made around community are often geographically based; however, our lives are far less based on locale than they used to be. Technology is just one route that has allowed us to link far more by individual interest than by geography. Using blogs, websites, Skype and even technology as simple as the telephone, we may be closer to somebody in Australia who shares our specialist interest than to our next door neighbour.

Our growing sense of independence and dissociation from conventional expectations of our roles and identities has created a new environment in which there is a drive to produce and create. In so doing, we form new networks and new communities that demand integration into the structures, political and otherwise, through which we look at the world. As we seek to create these, we will have to reconsider the relationship between the expert and the public, looking to people’s activities and interests, rather than assumptions both of authority and of community.

Expression

Identity and community are combined in expression. By expressing ourselves and our opinions, we make a statement about our identity and align ourselves with people who share our opinions. We therefore need to create opportunities for expression that fit with the ways that people are leading their lives and the values that they associate with

their own sense of relevance. The challenge for policy-makers and others is in maintaining the balance between our many individual wills and the national sum of our desires and culture.

As we are becoming increasingly conscious of more distinctive identities and communities, we are also seeking to assert them more clearly. This is becoming a defining feature of our daily lives, as organisations from public services to the media seek to meet public demand by providing opportunities for expression and the platforming of the self and identity. In public services, this has led to the increased personalisation of provision of which the social innovator Charles Leadbeater has written;⁶⁷ and in the media, it takes the shape of websites where journalists open their analysis to the public. More than that, and in line with the blurring of the professional and the amateur, we are also coming to shape and collaborate on the content of the services we use and consume. One constructive story to emerge from the London bombings of 7 July 2005 was the spontaneous innovation of citizen journalism. Footage from within London's Underground, deep in the tunnels at King's Cross and Aldgate, was taken not on the professional cameras of the BBC, Sky or ITN, but with trembling hands and on the granular footage of people's mobile phones.

In part, this reflects a wider trend in our society, the renegotiation of the roles of the public and the professionals whose services and expertise they use. 'With the emergence of new technologies and the decline of deference, people have become more questioning of professionals than ever before,' wrote John Craig in his pamphlet, *Production Values*. This is intimately connected to emerging concepts of the individual and community. 'As individuals, we are more likely to check out the advice of a doctor online,' continues Craig, illustrating the trust implications of wider access to knowledge. 'As a society, we are more likely to share our intelligence about professional practice with both communities of interest and the national media.'⁶⁸

In our desire to express, we are forging new communities and identities. We are also bringing new expectations to the services and products that we use. At the same time as we are yearning to express

our identities and opinions, so we are becoming more vocal in our questioning of relationships to authority. This is the social context in which Culture Online existed, and in which future initiatives will operate. It brings with it not only a more demanding audience, but also a new, democratic potential.

The implications for society

Changes in our society today have created both a momentum for expression and a need to understand identity and diverging communities. In other words, there are contrary currents with, on the one hand, proliferating means of individual expression, people identifying themselves in terms of sub-groups from religious affiliations to style tribes, and a political rhetoric of personalisation, yet on the other hand, a desire for communal experiences, 'social cohesion' and 'national identity'. The irony of this situation is that it is rare for these to be connected. This dilemma, coming as it does at a time when we are becoming more and more attuned to the creative potential of new technologies, is very important in relation to the cultural sector. As we have seen, culture has for too long been seen as an add-on to our social, political and professional lives. However, as we are forming communities around individual and personal interests, it is becoming more and more important.

Culture and cultural display have the potential to be a new forum in which we can express our opinions and relate to those of others.

4. Putting online engagement at the forefront of emerging cultural policy debates

Cultural democracy

In March 2006 the Minister for Culture David Lammy said:

Democracy is about debate, dialogue, deliberation and, ultimately about the representation of what the public genuinely values . . . cultural democracy has always been there – it’s been the lifeblood by which many organisations have survived – but it must now become a way of life for those who have the responsibility to speak for their sector as a whole.⁶⁹

In a different speech he expanded on the theme:

Like that other great institution that sprung from the incredible energy of the 1945 Government, the National Health Service, public provision of culture embodies the democratic values of quality, fairness and universal provision. And like the NHS, our cultural institutions must stand ready to adapt to the changing circumstances in which they find themselves today. This means confronting the test of moving from a cultural framework that guarantees the right to access to one in which regular and sustained participation is the norm. We can legislate for access from above but participation needs to be built from below. We

need to move from a world in which people's rights are guaranteed to one in which everyone participates in shared civic life.⁷⁰

His words both reflect and promote an increasing policy interest in the cultural sector engaging with the public in new and richer ways: to move from a culture of display and performance before a relatively passive 'audience' to one where people have a deeper level of involvement – as participants in the experience, as commentators, and as better informed citizens. Examples of this happening in practice extend from the world of heritage, where the Heritage Lottery Fund has set up Citizens' Juries to simultaneously learn from and educate members of the public; to Tate, which is publishing details of its purchases; to the Unicorn Theatre, which is holding open days and public meetings; to Arts Council England, which has set up a 'Public Value debate'. Cultural practice too is shifting towards participatory mass events such as the Sultan's Elephant in London, and Artangel's Margate extravaganza that involved everyone in the town in some fashion.

Online cultural engagement opens new avenues for the democratisation of culture in terms of:

- engaging the public in shaping the nature of cultural provision
- allowing people to contribute to and shape culture for themselves (eg by uploading as well as accessing information, and responding to the contributions of others).

All of the changes and happenings described above – both physical and virtual – demonstrate a more open, and more democratic culture fuelled by direct public demand. The latest MORI survey shows that, across the board, an increasing number, and an increasingly diverse range, of people are participating in culture through libraries, museums, theatres, galleries and other forms.⁷¹ People are reading, seeing, listening, more and more. But they are also photographing,

playing instruments, writing and singing more and more. This is a culture of participation not just consumption.

Technology is both shaping and reflecting these dynamics. New tools are emerging that encourage interactivity, connectedness and creativity. Rival conceptions of intellectual ownership are being used ad hoc by people to negotiate their own paths into the world of culture and creativity. Lawrence Lessig has recently described the battle between read-only and read-write on the web in his book *Free Culture*.⁷² The first is where professionals and corporations own the copyright of culture and the public are allowed access to it at a price. Amazon and i-Tunes are examples of this way of working. Amazon will not list a publication unless it has a price tag; i-Tunes does not sell music, it rents it out in order to keep reaping continual rewards. Read-write is a freer and more open concept where people build their own culture. Examples here include MySpace, where people can post their own music files, and YouTube, which performs a similar role for the moving image. Both the commercial and open source models have been phenomenally successful and popular.

Culture Online is itself an example of creating a policy initiative and a funding stream to promote technological engagement with the public. Its successes point to ways in which policy needs to change to encourage ever greater public engagement in shaping the nature of cultural provision. In particular, PSA targets between government and NDPBs should be urgently and radically revised to accommodate changing patterns of cultural participation, in street theatre, in carnival, in literature, but most pertinently here, in terms of new technology and activities involving new media.

Culture and creativity in education

According to DCMS, 'the runaway success of the government's £150 million Creative Partnerships (CP) programme proves that creativity itself is a key element in teaching.'⁷³ The Creative Partnerships programme and the Robert's Review of Creativity in Education demonstrate that creativity is recognised as a skill, a basic requirement, by government. Culture Minister David Lammy said:

Paul Roberts's report showed just how important Arts and Culture are in exciting young minds. Ensuring that our young people have the right creative skills is vital to this country's future economic prosperity.⁷⁴

Online cultural engagement can contribute tremendously to this agenda because it encourages creative contribution (ie using and creating cultural forms to express ideas and outlooks that can then be displayed and platformed in communicative contexts). In addition, the process of linking between ideas that is central to the use of the internet could be a crucial tool in encouraging creativity. Connecting between different ideas has been central to many of Culture Online's partner projects – this process of linking and connecting is central to a wide range of current concerns, from creative education, through to drawing connections between cultures and societies.

The nexus between culture and education is also important for the future of cultural engagement. The most significant barriers to engaging with publicly funded culture are socialisation and education.⁷⁵ Thus, just as cultural engagement works for education, as OFSTED's recent report on Creative Partnerships concludes,⁷⁶ so education helps with building audiences for culture.

5. The future of online cultural engagement

At the beginning of this report, it was noted that both the number of online users and the types of online engagement are growing rapidly. Both these trends will continue. In June 2006, 73% of internet connections were broadband, although only 57% of households were connected to the internet at all.⁷⁷ There is still a lot of growth potential in this market, and we can therefore expect that ever greater numbers of citizens will have their cultural lives enriched, whether through ease of buying tickets, or uploading their own music.

People will also engage with culture in new ways. The early debate that occurred in the museum world, between proponents of digitisation and interactivity⁷⁸ is increasingly irrelevant as the two feed off each other. Both are needed because more content, and more interactivity with that content, are marching hand in hand. Now, 'culture on the web' encompasses many forms: information sources, portals, digitised collections, interactivity, social software, RSS feeds, personal curation, filesharing, community-generated interpretation and even cyborgs. New ways of using the web are being found all the time, and the ones that succeed will display breath-taking growth – Second Life did not exist four years ago; now it has millions of users around the globe.

The next trend will be for these web resources to converge even further with mobile technology, making access to web content more fluid. Mobile alerts to ticket availability as one walks past a theatre, or

downloads of live performances while on the train, will become common. One challenge that will face the next generation of technological innovation in culture is how to mesh increasingly personalised culture (evidenced by such things as personal playlists and individual curation) with the desire for communal experience (evidenced by the huge popularity of festivals and events like The Sultan's Elephant in London in 2006). Technology will develop to serve and to enable both these facets of contemporary culture. Tools to customise and personalise our online activity and to create small groups will flourish, alongside the huge proliferation of raw content.

It is safe to predict that there will be an increasing need for cultural organisations to invest in technology, and in the capacity to use it effectively. There can be no doubt that technology is most useful, and is used most innovatively, where it is most deeply embedded. This presents big challenges for the people working in cultural organisations, who will need to keep themselves abreast of technological developments; for the organisations themselves in supporting their staff and finding funds to invest in hardware and software; and for the cultural funding system.

Experience with lottery funding shows that investment in new or refurbished physical infrastructure, allied to good management, pays off in terms of visitor numbers and changing audiences. It is equally important that investment is made in technology to keep abreast of and anticipate citizen expectations and user demands.

This investment will be needed right across the cultural sector, as increasing numbers of citizens become web-literate. Special attention will still be needed to bring the benefits of this investment to everyone. Recent reports from the EU and BT suggest that the issue of the 'digital divide' is getting more complex.⁷⁹ The divide is no longer simply between those who have access to a computer and those who don't. There is a 'broadband divide' as well – and as with hardware the divide can be physical and/or financial. Although some groups who were formerly underrepresented as computer users, such as women and the over-55s, are catching up, there still remains an excluded group of the poor and poorly educated. This is an issue that extends

well beyond the cultural sector, and one that government will need to continue to address: culture needs to be a part of that initiative, because, as Culture Online projects such as WWII Remembered have shown, cultural projects can draw people in to learn new skills.

The investment in new technology in the cultural sector that is proposed will need to take many different forms:

- collaborative projects to encourage new users and overcome the digital divide
- creation of meaningful experiences (delighting audiences)
- innovation in new ways of using technology to keep the UK at the leading edge of global cultural practice; this will stimulate transfers into the commercial sector, and raise standards in the private sector
- online booking and ticket and publication sales, needed to maximise earned income and build audiences
- digitisation of collections, which is primarily about access and learning and scholarly resources.

The Culture Online experience, where innovation, funding and energy were distributed across a number of distinct projects within one family (and the well-publicised problems of the opposite approach of government-led technological mega-projects⁸⁰) suggest that relatively small amounts of government money can have effective results. Seed money, advice and pump-priming will continue to be vital, in spite of ever-cheapening computing power and ever-greater familiarity with new technology.

The cultural sector is, almost by definition, at the forefront of innovation. Experimentation in models of organisation are as necessary as new expressions of cultural content. The cultural sector and the organisations that mediate and enable the sector could and should have a role to play in trying out new forms of technology, especially in highlighting non-market or emerging market fields.

Investment in innovation will continue to be needed because cultural organisations, both large and small, cannot afford to take the

financial risks involved and they often do not have the in-house capacity to devote to new projects. Science has Department of Trade and Industry innovation funds, and culture should have these as well in order to shoulder risk. This does not always mean providing funding – there should be a mix of dedicated funding streams, guarantees against loss and practical assistance – especially with technical issues such as IPR.

The rationale for investment in innovation, judging from the Culture Online experience, is thus:

- Government assistance creates a body of learning in the cultural sector that can be *shared*.
- Investment produces an economic and social dividend.
- Innovation leads to unexpected beneficial consequences.
- Investment is needed in order to shoulder risk, thereby enabling innovation.
- Investment and innovation can help raise standards in the public and private sectors.

Culture Online was set up to act as a pilot for smart intervention. As we have just argued, the need for assistance and intervention has not gone away, but the present context is considerably more complex than it was in 2000. Government should learn from how this example of relatively small-scale, fleet-of-foot, experimental approach has worked. Given the accelerating pace of both technological change and cultural innovation, real-time initiatives relying on expert professionalism are likely to be the best way forward, rather than large-scale, pre-planned, more risk-averse structures of intervention.

Culture Online was not just an interesting experiment for the cultural world, it was an interesting experiment for government. Instead of predetermining what provision was needed, setting targets and giving grants, a different model was used: seeking partners within a framework of goals, commissioning work and overseeing editorial content. This is a much more contractual, quasi-commercial model

that brings risk-taking and the management of risk much closer to government.

Such a shift in attitude and role on the part of public servants, involving a willingness to set out a vision, and to act in an entrepreneurial, risk-taking manner, guided by professionalism and in pursuit of the public interest, is exactly the type of activity that is proposed by Mark Moore in his influential work, *Creating Public Value: Strategic management in government*.⁸¹

What the Culture Online experience shows is that, to be effective, such initiatives *must* deal with issues of quality. The quality of interventions is difficult enough to measure *ex post facto*, but is evidenced in such things as user engagement and the winning of awards. However, when taking investment decisions, the judgement needed concerns the *expectation* of quality. If government or its agencies play safe, there is a danger of convergence or homogeneity in the finished product. If they do the opposite the risk is the waste of public money. Culture Online shows one answer to this dilemma: a portfolio of limited investment akin to a private sector venture capital fund. Some failure should be tolerated; it is the overall value of the totality of the investment that really matters.

In risk-taking situations, it will be natural for project partners to try to put as much financial risk back to the contracting or commissioning body as possible. This is especially true in areas where there is lack of clarity, for example Culture Online found that partners expected them to assume intellectual property risks and take IPR decisions. The difficulty for government here is that they must at once hold the ring between competing demands among the population (between open-source/free software/filessharing advocates and artists/businesses who want longer periods of copyright ownership), while simultaneously taking operational decisions directly and, via their agencies, about individual cases. This should not be seen as a major problem. In any area of emerging practice there are competing ideas about what should happen; indeed it is through such debate that legislative and administrative solutions and norms emerge. Agencies can and should be part of that debate, and

can provide a useful source of information to government – those closest to the operational issues are usually those with the best ideas about solutions.

Another area of emerging practice is the issue of Accessibility, used as a technical term to describe standards adopted by website producers like the BBC, and the creators of the operating system, browser and specialist assistive technologies that allow many disabled users to, for example, view websites in easier-to-read colours, with larger fonts, or as spoken text.

At the moment Accessibility is defined by Worldwide Web Convention user groups, and initiatives like Culture Online contribute to the definition and achievement of the standards. User-agreed and user-developed standards have many advantages, especially in an environment where the technological possibilities are changing rapidly, because they are willingly adopted, can change quickly, and are light on bureaucracy. But there is one serious downside in that there are no sanctions when standards are not met, other than the operation of market dynamics. In this developing area, initiatives like Culture Online have a role to play in demanding that standards are met in their commissioning contracts, and in sharing their views with other developers of cultural websites.

In any new initiative of a similar nature, a web resource devoted to emerging practice in such areas would be useful. This should include social software so that site visitors can add their own perspectives, thus feeding back into the practice of the initiative itself.

Culture Online has reached its endpoint, but there is a continuing need for an agency where culture and technology meet. Such an agency should:

- provide advice to organisations throughout the cultural sector, in particular acting as a point of reference on difficult issues like IPR and the development of Accessibility standards
- have available a modest fund for investment as seed capital in new ventures

- provide finance in flexible forms to meet need
- provide advice on where partnership funding may be available for web projects
- act as a broker, arranger and introducer for partnerships between the cultural sector, technology enterprises and others, such as user groups
- stimulate innovation
- promote knowledge transfer between the publicly funded cultural sector, academia and the private sector
- promote the use of social software that involves more user-generated content and helps articulate the public voice and the public will
- develop and encourage networks to form among project developers.

The future of the cultural sector in the UK will be heavily influenced by what new technology has to offer. In a rapidly developing environment, populated by heterogeneous organisations, large-scale directive government interventions are likely to be counter-productive. Instead, an entrepreneurial, agency-led system would help to promote multiple small-scale innovations. Such innovations must be encouraged and networked together to take full advantage of the energy, vitality and knowledge that the cultural sector brings in its approach to technology.

Appendix 1. Project overview

Project	Partners	Date of launch	Budget
ArtisanCam Projects 1 & 2	CLEO (Cumbria & Lancashire Education Online) (lead partner), artists@work.org, Notion 23 (technology)	ArtisanCam North 2004 Nationwide 2005	1st phase £292,931 2nd phase £253,402
City Heritage Guides	24 Hour Museum, SSL (technology), Get Frank (design)	September 2004	£236,702
Every Object Tells a Story	Victoria & Albert Museum, Channel 4, Ultralab (technology), Tyne & Wear Museums, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Brighton & Hove Museums	Events summer 2003 Microsite in V&A Website August 2003 Website January 2005 Full database version May 2005	£1,960,000
Film Street	First Light (lead partner), CBBCi, British Film Institute, UK Film Council, Creative Partnerships, Atticmedia (website design)	April 2006	£640,850

Appendix 1. Project overview

Project	Partners	Date of launch	Budget
Headline History	Associated Northcliffe Digital	June 2004	£663,187
Icons	Cognitive Applications/ Icons Online	January 2006	£1,065,000
MadforArts	The Community Channel (lead partner), Mental Health Media, Rethink, Web Agency Reefnet (technology)	Website August 2004 Project live October 2004 to December 2005	£429,103
My Art Space	The SEA (website design, technology), CETADL (Centre for Educational Technology and Distance Learning), Urbis, The Study Gallery, D-Day Museum	January 2006	£343,924
Noise	Noise Festival	October 2006	£60,000
Origination Insite	Channel 4, National Museum of Film, Photography and TV, At-Bristol, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Rugby Library, Art Gallery and Museum, The Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms, Tottenham Hotspur Football Club	January 2005	£381,510

Logging On

Project	Partners	Date of launch	Budget
Plant Cultures	Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew (lead partner), Museum of London, Bradford Community Environment Project, National Museums Liverpool, Leicester City Museums, NYKRIS (website design)	Outreach work May 2004 Full website February 2005	£431,367
Playground Fun	Developed by Learnthings, based on an original idea by the University of Glasgow	Website and school project April 2005	£293,169
ProjectsETC and other dissemination activities	Produced in-house by Culture Online	Website in beta from May 2006 Launched October 2006	£116,689
Rosetta Requiem	Rosetta Life	Website live July 2005 Official launch October 2005	£171,142
SoundJunction	ABRSM (lead partner), Atticmedia (website design)	October 2005	£668,686
Stagework Projects 1 & 2	National Theatre (lead partner), Illumina Digital (technology), Bristol Old Vic, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Northern Broadside	January 2004	Phase 1 £535,885 Phase 2 £320,291

Appendix 1. Project overview

Project	Partners	Date of launch	Budget
The Dark	Braunarts	Installation March 2004	£342,950
<i>The Transporters</i>	Autism Research Centre (Cambridge University), National Autism Society, Catalyst Pictures Ltd	January 2007	£424,847
Web accessibility DVD and workshops	City University Centre for Human Computer Interaction Design	Workshops 2004/05 DVD launched Feb 2005	£117,455
Web Design Challenge	Hansard Society, Design Museum	School competition October 2004 to June 2005 Being Heard website live September 2005	£263,166
WebPlay UK Projects 1 & 2 (WebPlay US/ London 2000/01)	WebPlay	November 2003	Phase 1 £225,038 Phase 2 £448,649
WWII Remembered: BBC project	BBC Factual and Learning, Museums Library and Archive Council in four regions – South West, East of England, West Midlands, Yorkshire	Outreach work Spring 2004 to Spring 2005 (BBC People's War website live June 2003)	£371,646
WWII Remembered: Age Concern project	Age Concern national organisation with regional federations in the South West		£59,514

Appendix 2. Project descriptions

ArtisanCam – www.artisancam.org.uk – Projects 1 & 2

The ArtisanCam website allows students to watch videos and webcams of artists at work in their studios or other locations. Once live watching is finished, their work is captured in a time-lapse video which summarises their activities. One artist per term is featured in a live webcam. An interactive part of the website allows users to virtually ‘try’ the artists’ techniques themselves. The website provides ideas and extra material for teachers: there is more information on each featured artist (techniques, influences, gallery), a questions section, video lessons etc. The project is aimed primarily at Key Stage 2 and 3 pupils and their teachers.

ArtisanCam was created as a partnership between CLEO (Cumbria and Lancashire Learning Online, artists@work and Notion 23. ArtisanCam North was launched in 2004.

The following year ArtisanCam was redeveloped as a national project. The project is ongoing with new artists and new genres being added; the most recent artist has been commissioned by a consortium of schools.

City Heritage Guides – www.24hourmuseum.org.uk/cityheritage

The City Heritage Guides website offers up-to-date cultural and heritage guides for ten UK cities (Birmingham, Brighton & Hove, Bristol, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Newcastle &

Gateshead and Norwich). The guides are written by a variety of contributors, including community groups and individuals, who submit their stories and pictures using a specially created authoring tool, 'Storymaker'. The subsections range from 'local history' and 'city trails' to 'by kids for kids', catering for a variety of social groups.

The guides were commissioned from the 24 Hour Museum, the Brighton-based UK's National Virtual Museum, and were launched in September 2004. The website remains active and has continued to be updated by student writers, volunteers and 24 Hour Museum staff, the database of venue and listings by partner institutions.

Every Object Tells a Story – www.everyobject.net

Every Object Tells a Story is an online collection of thousands of stories about objects, customarily accompanied by their pictures and at times by video footage, which mean something special to a person. The site relies on user-generated content. Any member of the public can contribute a story via the website. Staff at the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) and its partners Tyne & Wear Museums, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery and Brighton & Hove Museums have submitted stories about objects in their collections. Stories were also collected by outreach projects run in schools, communities, outdoors parks, markets and shopping malls, by the V&A and the partner museums via iPods, laptops and video stories in video-booths and a mobile video-booth taxi. The featured objects range from everyday items with a special, personal history and meaning (eg grandfather's old camera) to more exotic ones (eg Nicholas II's coronation commemorative set); they can be browsed in sub-categories of 'visual arts', 'entertainment', 'fashion', 'homes', 'childhood', 'hobbies', 'nature', 'beliefs and ideas' and 'science and technology'. The 'learning' section of the Every Object website provides free classroom resources for Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 lessons in ICT, history, English and citizenship.

Since October 2005, Every Object has released a series of audio podcasts, where curators, archivists and researchers share their personal stories about items, and video podcasts of the finalists of a

video competition – the first audio and video podcasts from the UK museum and gallery sector. The project is ongoing and the website continues to be updated with new stories. The website will continue to be hosted by the V&A Museum for another four years.

Film Street – www.filmstreet.co.uk

An interactive website which seeks to engage children between the ages of 6 and 9 years in the world of film by improving understanding of the medium and encouraging the exploration of filmmaking. Led by First Light, the collaborating partners include CBBCi, the British Film Institute, the UK Film Council and Creative Partnerships. The website was produced by Atticmedia and launched in April 2006. It allows children to engage with activities on, eg sound, lighting and special effects, write film reviews, and think of ideas for film scripts. A 'Film Mag' has features and information on upcoming films. The website also includes a section for parents and teachers with activities, downloads with curriculum links, and information on children's cinema film festivals in different areas.

Headline History – www.headlinehistory.co.uk

Headline History is a multimedia educational website on the theme of newspaper journalism. It contains 24 fact-based lead stories – six issues each of four 'virtual newspapers' from different periods in history: the Romans, the Tudors, the Victorians and World War II – which link directly to areas in the history National Curriculum. The website allows pupils to search the facts, interview witnesses (choosing from pre-selected questions), write reports and edit the web newspapers by adding quotes etc. They can also send in their own stories of their neighbourhood in the featured eras, some of which will be published. Teachers act as the newspaper editor, setting pupils tasks as though they were running a proper newsroom. The website has dedicated sections for both pupils and teachers, with lots of material to download. The project supports Key Stage 2 (7–11-year-olds) in the National Curriculum in subjects of history, ICT and English.

Headline History was created and is maintained by Associated Northcliffe Digital, part of the Northcliffe Newspapers Group. The website has been live since June 2004. Since April 2006 Headline History has also hosted live chat sessions where children can ask questions from someone impersonating a historical figure.

Icons – www.icons.org.uk

Icons, developed by the interactive media company Cogapp and a purpose-created non-profit company Icons Online, went live in January 2006.

It is a gradually growing online collection of British cultural ‘icons’, which will piece together a portrait of contemporary England in a jigsaw fashion. The Icons website allows users to nominate and vote for possible icons and to add anecdotes and comments about the icons. The aim of the project is to spark debate about what makes England what it is in the twenty-first century. The current icons collection includes, for example, people (eg Robin Hood, Sherlock Holmes), cultural products (eg the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Monty Python*, *The Archers*), food and drink (pint of real ale, cup of tea), the built environment (eg Tower of London, Blackpool Tower) and natural sites (eg the Lake District). A ‘learn & play’ section of the website provides resources for teachers (lesson plans in literacy and citizenship, activities), audio-visual material on the icons and an icons quiz.

Once the project contract with Culture Online finished in March 2007, Icons was transferred to the 24 Hour Museum, which will continue to maintain and develop the site with further releases of Icons content.

MadforArts – www.madforarts.org

MadforArts was an internet and TV project aimed to encourage people with mental health issues to talk about the public art that inspires them. The project was delivered by Community Channel in partnership with Rethink and Mental Health Media, and it received support from all other leading mental health charities (eg Sane,

Mind). Ten short films (5 minutes each) were produced as part of the project. In each film a person suffering from a mental illness spoke about a chosen artwork and related it to their illness (depression, manic repression, schizophrenia, postnatal depression, psychotic behaviour, anxiety). All films were shown on Community Channel and Channel 5 and they are now available for viewing via the website.

The MadforArts website went live in August 2004, and the film project ran until late 2005. Events were hosted in 19 galleries around the UK during the project, including launch and closing events hosted by Tate Modern and the National Gallery. The project website remains live, allowing access to the films.

My Art Space – www.myartspace.org.uk

A project aiming to revitalise children's experience of museums and galleries by the use of mobile phones and the internet. In association with museums and galleries the project allows students on school visits to 'collect' and share cultural artefacts using mobile phones. These 'collections' can then form part of culture-related classroom work. The project is aimed at Key Stages 2 and 3.

My Art Space is being developed by SEA and CETADL (Centre for Educational Technology and Distance Learning). The pilot of My Art Space started in January 2006 in three participating organisations: the D-day Museum (Portsmouth), Urbis (Manchester) and the Study Gallery (Poole).

Noise Festival – www.noisefestival.com/

Noise is an arts festival for young people (25 and under) aimed at showcasing talent and promoting creativity across a series of media platforms on television, radio, online and print. Noise received over 4000 submissions from young people across every major postcode in the country and has held a series of successful showcase exhibitions in London, Manchester and Liverpool. Showcased submissions were selected by a panel of acclaimed industry professionals including top UK entrepreneur Wayne Hemingway and design legend Peter Saville (of Factory Records). Promotional partners for the festival included

Aesthetica, Blueprint, Cent, Flux and Marmalade and the festival was also featured in *Vogue*, *Elle Decoration*, *Creative Review*, the *Telegraph* and the *Guardian Guide* as well as on BBC2, MTV and Community Channel.

Culture Online helped Noise recruit an online producer and lead technologist. They also funded a review of software that Noise intended to use for the site and part of the website development.

Other funders include NWDA (North West Regional Development Agency) and ACE (Arts Council England).

Origination Insite – www.channel4.com/insite

This project, led by Channel 4, facilitated the creation of websites that reflected and celebrated the communities of various minority ethnic groups. The project hoped both to build IT skills within these communities and to use the Channel 4 brand and web traffic to increase knowledge of and interest in their rich cultural heritage. The websites created under this project that attracted the most traffic were WildWalk (celebrating the cultural origins of various foods and flavours), Arrivals and Integration (a visual narrative of postwar immigration) and Body Adornment (a project by Wolverhampton Art Gallery that looks at the impact of African, Chinese and Asian body art on British fashion and culture).⁸² To foster contributions from target groups with lesser IT ability, in February–December 2005 Channel 4 organised a series of two-day workshops in website-building, in partnership with museums, galleries and community groups in the five project areas (Bristol, Wolverhampton, Bradford, Rugby and London). To encourage participation by young people, a website-building competition was run in schools.

The website-creation phase of the project has now been discontinued. All the created websites can still be browsed and from November 2006 the project website has provided links to other skill-building projects in the UK.

Plant Cultures – www.plantcultures.org.uk

Plant Cultures is a collection of South Asian plants and related

information, created by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Through user-generated anecdotes, comments and recipes for the plants the website aims to preserve and share knowledge about the deeper cultural and religious significance of the plants, and in this way to celebrate Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi) cultures and their influence on British life. The database of stories and pictures can be browsed by theme. An 'activities' section includes recipes and ideas for reading, creative and outdoor pursuits. A 'schools' section contains ideas and worksheets for classroom activities in ten different subjects (eg art, history, religious education, geography) for Key Stages 2, 3 and 4.

The website was launched in February 2005. To encourage contributions from hard-to-reach audiences, outreach workshops were run in four cities by Bradford Community Environment Project, the Museum of London, Leicester City Museums and the National Museums of Liverpool.

Playground Fun – www.playgroundfun.org.uk

Playground Fun is a website which aims to promote traditional playground games, primarily among 7–9-year-olds. The overall aims of this project were to promote physical activity, inclusiveness, improvement of social skills, oral history and interaction. The website contains information and rules of numerous games. They can be searched by the categories of chasing, catching, searching and ball games. Users can contribute rules for their own games or variations on the existing ones; by the end of February 2006 a total of 495 games and game versions had been added to the site. They can also upload pictures to the game pages and contribute to a message forum divided into 'games', 'songs and rhymes' and 'miscellaneous' topics.

In one project Playground Fun was conducted as a partnership between Learnthings and the V&A Museum of Childhood. Six schools from London and East Anglia took part in a six-lesson pilot project to introduce new games to pupils in April–June 2005. In order to support and publicise the website, Learnthings and the V&A conducted teacher training sessions in 2005/06 and a summer

programme of events at the Museum of Childhood in 2005. The website remains live.

ProjectsETC – www.projectsetc.org

The ProjectsETC website aims to bring together people who create interactive resources for education and culture. The site contains practical advice on various aspects of planning and managing online culture projects, ranging from content creation to funding. There are also case studies of best practice such as the 'Children's Tate' website. The site functions as a platform for information sharing and collaboration: users are encouraged to contribute their own experiences and comment pieces, or to suggest article topics for others to cover. It is possible to sign up for updates to the website via an RSS feed. ProjectsETC also publishes a series of podcasts with first-hand accounts and interviews with practitioners; the first one features the former culture secretary Chris Smith. ProjectsETC has been developed by Culture Online. On the conclusion of Culture Online's work, the site was transferred to the sector skills agency, Creative and Cultural Skills, which will maintain and develop the site as a free resource as part of their Creative Knowledge Lab.

Rosetta Requiem – www.rosettarequiem.org

Rosetta Requiem gave hospice users a chance to express their creativity by producing songs and films. The project was led by the charity Rosetta Life, which helps people with life-threatening illnesses to express themselves through art. Rosetta Requiem was first launched in summer 2005. Hospice users created songs and films through a series of workshops and master classes, where artists and volunteers worked with them. Well-known filmmakers, musicians and composers gave up their time to be involved, including Michael Nyman, Billy Bragg, Orlando Gough, Jarvis Cocker and Emily Young. One of the songs from Rosetta Requiem, 'We Laughed', was released as a single and reached number 11 in the official charts in November 2005. The produced songs and films are available through the website. The website also gives access to the online diaries of

participating hospice users during the project, which can be used as a future resource for support for patients, families, carers and friends.

SoundJunction – www.soundjunction.org

SoundJunction is a website which aims to inspire musical learning and exploration by providing a wealth of information, interactive tools and know-how. The website was designed and put together with contributions from over 200 musicians, teachers, students and music industry professionals. It features over 50 hours of audio and video and some 1000 pages of content, covering over 300 pieces of music from traditions around the world. The website tools allow the users to find out about composing, performing, recording and producing music; create their own music by remixing elements of specially commissioned pieces with other ‘sound bites’ from the comprehensive SoundJunction library; listen to music specially written and recorded by more than 40 top musicians, remix artists and composers; explore music, take it apart, listen to different instruments and voices and find out how music works; and discover music and instruments from different traditions.

SoundJunction was developed by the lead partner, the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. The website was launched in October 2005 and is on target to reach 250,000–500,000 young people in the UK over the next three years.

Stagework – www.stagework.org.uk – Projects 1 & 2

Stagework is a website that provides insight into making theatre for new and existing audiences. It allows users to follow the evolution of a production from rehearsal to live performance. The material consists of video footage, photos, web diaries and interviews with leading actors and members of the creative and technical teams. The theatre productions explored on the site include the National Theatre’s two-part production of Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy, *Coram Boy*, *Richard III*, *Henry V*, *The Crucible* and *The UN Inspector*. The website contains resources for teachers, such as advice on how to use theatre practice to encourage creativity and learning, lesson plans for

Key Stages 3 and 4 in history, English and drama, citizenship and religious education. Sections of the website give information on the featured productions, background on the people featured on the interviews and rehearsal footage, and in-depth exploration of the issues of the plays (eg war, blasphemy).

Stagework was developed by the lead partner National Theatre, with contributions from Bristol Old Vic and the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. The website was launched in January 2004. A follow-on project from 2006 added new theatre productions, more regional theatre partners and additional online tools.

The Dark – www.thedark.net

The Dark is a website and a touring interactive installation based purely on sound. It explores the theme of slavery by creating an imaginary, three-dimensional aural soundscape with sound effects, commissioned music and spoken text by three ‘ghost’ characters from the eighteenth century, including the poet Edward Rushton and his work. The online version of The Dark contains a totally blank screen with the three-dimensional soundtrack. To users without broadband, there is the option to purchase a CD-Rom copy of The Dark via the website.

The project was created by Braunarts. The interactive installation was first set up in the Dana Centre, London, March–April 2004. It then toured in other English and international museums and galleries (Rotherham, Birmingham, Liverpool) in 2004/05. The Dark remains accessible via the website and the installation is looking for future venues.

The Transporters – www.transporters.tv

The Transporters is a fun animation series that aims to help children with autism discover the world of human emotions. Culture Online commissioned and developed the series in partnership with the Autism Research Centre at Cambridge University and Catalyst Pictures.

The Transporters DVD includes 15 five-minute stories featuring the adventures of eight loveable characters with real human faces. Each

episode focuses on a different emotion and has an associated interactive quiz to reinforce learning. Up to 40,000 DVDs have been distributed through the National Autistic Society along with an information booklet for parents, teachers and carers.

The Autism Research Centre has conducted some initial research into the effects of using the project with children who have high-functioning autism. After watching *The Transporters* for 15 minutes a day over four weeks, children with high-functioning autism caught up with typically developing children of the same age in their performance on emotion recognition tasks. These results are subject to peer review and further research will follow.

Web Accessibility DVD and workshops

Culture Online saw Accessibility issues as an important part of their audience focus. Their intention was to put individuals in the minds of producers and developers when they considered accessibility, rather than going through a mechanical ‘box ticking’ exercise. Culture Online’s accessibility strategy focused on incorporating the needs of disabled people into the conceptualisation and design of projects from the beginning. In partnership with Prof. Helen Petrie and her team at City University’s Human Computer Interaction Group they hosted an accessibility workshop for each project. They commissioned City University to test most of the websites with people with disabilities and then helped the development teams incorporate the changes necessary to make their sites accessible. Culture Online also commissioned an Accessibility DVD featuring several people with a range of disabilities going about their daily lives and using the web. It made the case for good standards of Accessibility and offered practical advice from experts on how to incorporate best practice into projects.

Web Design Challenge – Being Heard – www.beingheard.org.uk

The Web Design Challenge was a competition for Key Stage 3 pupils run by the Hansard Society in cooperation with the Design Museum held in the 2004/05 academic year.

Students were called to create websites based around the theme of

citizenship. The ideas received ranged from ecology and the environment to politics and religion. The competition website included curriculum-related materials for teachers for the first phase of the competition. The creators of the 200 short-listed entries were given the task of creating a site under the title 'Being Heard' and invited to attend website-design workshops with professional designers. Five of these designs were short-listed, and the winning one formed into a professional, live website – www.beingheard.org.uk – which aims to involve more young people in politics. It has user polls, quizzes and up-to-date political news, which are also available via a news feed. Users can submit articles for the website or write comments for consultations.

WebPlay – www.webplay.org – Projects 1 & 2

WebPlay enables primary school children from rural and urban areas to work with professional theatre companies and a partner school to create, produce and perform short plays. The preparation stage involves communication between children in the partner schools, online discussions about the play between the children and the theatre company, a field trip to the theatre with the partner school, and workshops. The completed plays are uploaded onto a specially created website. The project is aimed at Key Stage 2 pupils and supports the National Curriculum subjects English, literacy, ICT and drama.

WebPlay was first launched in November 2003 as a Culture Online project in schools in Birmingham and Shropshire. (Previously, WebPlay ran in 2000/01 in six schools in London and six in Los Angeles, expanding a year later to include New York.) A new project stage from 2005 expanded the audience to include younger children and extended local activities to include Leicester, Nottinghamshire and, most recently, Berkshire and Hampshire.

World War II Remembered – www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar – BBC and Age Concern

WWII Remembered was an outreach initiative, aimed at overcoming

barriers to the use of new technology among hard-to-reach groups – particularly the elderly. It was built around a ‘call to action’ – in this case, the opportunity to contribute personal histories to the BBC’s People’s War project: an online collection of memories and personal anecdotes about the Second World War. Older people with little or no experience of using computers were able to attend supported computer ‘taster sessions’ in a social environment – often through local museums and voluntary organisations. World War II Remembered comprised two projects working in parallel – one with the BBC, the other with Age Concern, and also involved partnerships with four regional MLAs and a substantial number of local voluntary organisations. It ran between June 2003 and January 2006. Outreach officers were appointed to develop networks of partners. A total of 780 outreach events were held in 2004/05 across England at MLA partners (museums, libraries, archives), old people’s homes and community centres. The target audience of 60,000 was surpassed by 17,000. The thousands of resulting stories were published on the People’s War website – among the overall project archive of 47,000 stories and 15,000 images. The People’s War website has been closed to new additions but it remains live as an online archive of oral histories.

Appendix 3. Recognition for Culture Online's projects

To date, Culture Online projects have won 25 major awards

Award	Project	Category
2004		
Newspaper Society	Headline History	Best web design Best promotion of an online service Best digital media development
BAFTA Interactive	Stagework Headline History	Factual learning Children's learning
2005		
WEBBYS	Headline History	People's voice – broadband
New Media	City Heritage Guides	Education
Association of Online Publishers	Stagework	Design
Web Marketing Association Web Awards	Headline History	Outstanding website

Award	Project	Category
2005 continued		
United Nations World Summit	Stagework	E-learning
Newspaper Society: Digital Media Awards	Headline History	Web design
2006		
BETT	Stagework	English Key Stage 3 & 4
New Media Effectiveness	SoundJunction	Effectiveness in music
Association of Online Publishers	SoundJunction	Innovation Best launch
Music Industries Association	SoundJunction	Best supplier initiative
Newspaper Society: Advertising and Digital Media Awards	Headline History	Best online community webpage
E-Learning Awards	SoundJunction	Most innovative new product
British Interactive Media Awards	SoundJunction Film Street	Education and training Kids
2007		
BETT	ArtisanCam SoundJunction	Digital content (primary) Digital content (secondary)
Yahoo	Film Street	Find of the year
European E-Learning	Film Street	Best international project

Appendix 4. Website visitor numbers

Small project, aimed at a narrow target audience (hospice users)

Rosetta Requiem

- October 2005 to February 2007: 20,046 visits to the website
- worked with 177 hospice users to create music and films with them
- featured twice on Jeremy Vine's BBC Radio 2 lunchtime show (interviews with Billy Bragg and Maxine Edgington); single released due to popular public demand after song was performed by Billy Bragg on the show; also featured on BBC1's live New Year's Eve programme December 2005
- 22,000 copies of 'We Laughed' sold, reaching number 11 in UK singles chart.

Medium-sized educational project

Stagework

- January 2004 to February 2007: 488,520 visits to the website
- 7400 downloads to date
- site also provides career advice to 16+ who want to work backstage in the theatre

- blogs introduced to highlight the touring process and allow the audiences a chance to feed back to individuals involved in the production process
- has won two BAFTAs, a BETT award and a UN World Summit Award.

Large general audience project

Icons

- January to February 2006: 1,521,017 visits to the website
- Just under 500,000 votes cast, nearly 8000 nominations (over 1000 published to date), and 8500 comments left on the site.

Notes

- These figures count one visitor as one IP address. Consequently, the figures shown here for visitors are likely to be underestimates, because they do not take account of multiple users using the same IP address.
- The time frame for these three projects covers different periods.
- The statistics provide interim figures – the projects are still running and visitors are still accessing the websites.

Notes

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