



Creative Production Hub Scoping Study Discussion Paper

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Introduction

Background

Arts Queensland is undertaking a study to scope the development of a Creative Production Hub to support small and mid-scale performing arts in Queensland. The study will scope new mechanisms to invigorate and extend small and mid-scale performing arts in Queensland and grow audiences. This paper has been prepared to engage with the sector and stimulate discussion on this subject. It raises some questions and suggests some ways forward but it is not definitive. It is likely more ideas and possible actions will be uncovered through research and consultation. Your input and participation to enrich this project is invited and welcomed. There is information about how to do this at the back of this paper.

New approaches

This project will develop options and new ways of working that can be progressively implemented, commencing with investments from existing funding and growing as more resources become available.

Role of small to medium sector

This project is part of Arts Queensland's ongoing work to strengthen the sector and increase public engagement in the arts. The research is framed within the context of the Queensland Arts Industry Sector Development Plans released in early 2007, and follows implementation of a new funding framework, \$2m for Queensland's small to medium sector. It draws on relevant information gathered by governments over the past five years. This shows the critical importance of the small to medium sector as a vital arts contributor. The 2002 report by the Cultural Ministers Council into the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector showed this sector generates most innovations and new work, provides important access and employment, is a key regional and diversity contributor, and is vital to sector professional development. Yet despite this importance, this sector still lags in infrastructure, support and recognition.

Challenges

The environment in which small to medium organisations operate presents some challenges. While generally well managed, and despite recent Queensland reforms, many small to medium organisations still face strong pressures. These include doing more with less, burnout, balancing creative risk and innovation, governance and engagement challenges, adverse impacts of rising costs on areas such as marketing and production values, balancing aspirations with government expectations, and impacts of new technologies and competition. Most funded producing organisations focus on realising the vision of one artist or artistic director with their own creative teams. While understandable, this places great reliance on one person and can limit their ability to work meaningfully with other producing artists, particularly over the long term. In this environment there is a case for greater artistic diversity and it is increasingly clear the traditional non-profit organisation may not be the best way forward for all activities.

A major challenge lies in how funding is distributed. Arts Queensland invests most operational resources in a mature set of companies. While there are good reasons for this, it leaves little provision for new approaches or entrants and independent practitioners. Is this the best way forward? With a limited funding pie, how can growth aspirations of these companies and other artists be supported? Could diversifying build the sector's ability to grasp new opportunities and markets? Is there a 'lighter touch' approach to governance and operations for some activities? Could a 'Hub' provide an 'umbrella' of overhead services to a range of artists? One approach would be to ask existing organisations to do this work. Another is the idea of investing in producer-led infrastructure, advanced in this paper. It could be both are needed. Other approaches may exist as well. There are some real issues for funders here. Supporting a Hub may change

the operational funding mix, may mean relinquishing some control and implementing some devolution, and could require differing governance approaches. And a perennial issue is: with more talented artists, ideas and opportunities than funding, where can resources be targeted to be most useful?

Policy context

This project addresses key arts policy issues within Queensland. These include developing high quality and viable work that differentiates us, plays to our strengths and is suited to our places and our people. We need to strengthen our competitiveness for national and private arts investment, and provide increased opportunities for quality cultural participation by our rapidly growing population. We also need ways to retain more of our talented artists and practitioners in the sector and state. Arts Queensland is undertaking this Scoping Study as part of a suite of policy initiatives including a Performing Arts Touring Strategy and a Regional Arts Strategy to address these key issues.

This research is also part of a broader national and international movement regarding the small to medium sector, particularly in relation to the role of producers. Internationally this has seen the Arts Council of England launch The Producer's Project as a three-year initiative to test the potential for new kinds of support for independent producers. In Australia the Australia Council's Make it New initiative looked at many of these issues and the recent Managing and Producing Services (MAPS) project is an investment in partnership with some states including Queensland. In Queensland the MAPS project, supporting dance and theatre groups over three years, will act as an action research project for this Hubs work. This project is seeking to determine the best way for Queensland to address these issues.

The purpose of this study

Why do this?

Queensland, like every state, produces very fine professional performing artists. However, it is a real challenge for many artists to stay in the sector and the state. One reason for this lies in the way artists are traditionally supported. Government support for artists is generally provided through one-off project grants, fellowships and travel support. Governments also underwrite presenters to stage and distribute artists' work through festivals, arts centres and touring. However there has been less support for connecting the two, for example by supporting producers to provide an interface between creators and presenters. There is also a limited local market for performing arts producers, managers and agents due to Queensland's small, dispersed population and distance from major markets, and the fact that these professionals have generally not been eligible for funding investment. So, the pathway has been for an artist to self-represent (not for everyone but some do this well), or incorporate an organisation and seek operational funding or commercial investment. The problem here is this can divert energy from creative activity. It is also now difficult to achieve with growing pressures on limited operational funding and an intensely competitive and limited marketplace. While many artists have understandable aspirations to build their own company, this isn't always viable and is increasingly hard to do. Is there a more flexible approach somewhere between the two? If so, what advantages and benefits could flow?

The idea

The idea is it may be possible to support a range of artists with multiple creative visions in a more strategic manner. A creative production hub could support individual artists and small groups to pursue their own work while drawing on larger collective resources. It could stimulate creativity through access to new ideas, and provide resources and critical feedback to develop work in a supported environment. With artists more focused on creative activity the quality and quantity of original performance work could grow.

A Hub could provide new pathways and employment for artists and new markets and audiences for their work. The idea suggests there may be an important role for producer-led infrastructure within the overall sector ecology alongside major performing arts companies, small to medium arts organisations, venues, festivals and touring agencies.

A Hub could initially work with our experienced and highly promising artists to produce high-quality professional performing arts for local, national and international markets.

A Hub could go on to provide commissioning, financing, creative development, rehearsal, production, presentation, touring, marketing and administration. In the long run it could provide a full-service production house focusing on work that develops the artform and builds effective partnerships with festivals, venues, regional and national touring circuits, export markets, other producers and companies.

It could back great ideas early in the creative cycle, seed a number of creative projects from which successes may emerge, and follow these through over time. It could provide a place for artists to experiment and take risks. It could foster new collaborations and networks and achieve economies through sharing business skills, resources and overheads.

It could be responsive to a range of opportunities for artists with diverse initiatives, and to work with artists on an ongoing basis.

A key driver for the Hub could be to connect artistic aspirations and potential with market opportunities in a way that builds on existing activity and strengthens the whole sector.

This is, of course, very aspirational and it is unlikely one single Hub could achieve it all. Arts Queensland will need to resolve what a Hub can do best and where it can be most valuable. It is expected it would commence modestly and grow over time.

The opportunity with new approaches such as a Hub is to build capabilities required for success from the ground up. For example, a Hub could produce adventurous art and be strongly audience focused. These types of organisations have certain defining attributes, often shared with commercial innovators. They prioritise expert knowledge, specialist skills, and public engagement; draw on quality marketing expertise; and consistently connect artists and audiences. They tend to be fluid in structure, well networked, often with few fixed assets, draw on a wide network of talented individuals, and be highly responsive to opportunities and environmental change. The next part of this paper explores a set of questions about what a Hub could be, and then goes on to explore issues for potential participants and stakeholders.

What could a Hub be and what could it do?

This is yet to be determined, however a Creative Production Hub could be:

- a few skilled producers and support people operating with some funding
- a small group of selected experienced professional performing artists
- focused on realising the creative visions of the artists with whom it works
- prioritising creative and adventurous work that extends the artform
- a catalyst for new and existing work, and generator of additional investments
- a presenter and tourer of this work, directly and through partnerships
- a network-based organisation with strong partnerships and collaborations.

Here are some suggestions for what a Hub could do:

- produce quality work for public performance locally, nationally and internationally
- provide strategic support and a dedicated pathway for artists to realise their work
- use agreed curatorial policies to select artists to make great work and engage audiences
- nurture strong relationships with artists, their collaborators and champions for their work
- build a network of committed venues, festivals and other presenters

- tap into existing markets, seek new opportunities, develop specialised and niche activity
- provide quality marketing services
- deliver priority initiatives or investments for governments, eg: devolved grants or market development, or cultural diversity or Indigenous arts, where it offers distinct advantages.

While the above features are shared by some festivals, venues and a small number of subsidised performing arts enterprises, there are very few that do the majority of these things and work with a group of artists over the long term. The Hub concept proposes a new entity operating independently within the sector ecology that may do many of these things and work with a group of artists over the long term.

How could it operate?

The Hub could operate independently or be based at a presenting venue, at a festival, at a not-for-profit or commercial organisation. Similarly, its operational structure could be as a private operator, part of an arts centre management, part of a festival, or part of an existing or a new non profit organisation. Experience to date suggests there is no one 'right' model or structure. Indeed successful producer-led infrastructure could exist at any of these places, or quite possibly in another form altogether. Flexibility appears to be highly important, as is governance that prioritises responsiveness and proactive management of risk. An initial list of possible operational approaches, and some pros and cons, are contained in the Attachments to this paper.

What won't the Hub be?

This is yet to be determined. It is also unlikely the Hub will be a dedicated facility (although it could be based at one such as the Judith Wright or Cairns Centre of Contemporary Arts) as it is expected to engage with existing facilities. It also unlikely to be a service, referral, development agency, artist or tour booking agency, as these are functions undertaken by others. It is not seen as a training ground or incubator, as the focus is on experienced practitioners. However it could work with a few exceptional developing artists to provide a pathway into the program. It is also unlikely the Hub would be a major funder of artists. While some support could be offered it is likely that role would primarily remain with existing funding bodies, venues and festivals.

The role of the producer

More developed in the film world, the producer plays a vital yet less recognised role in the performing arts. The word producer as used here is the individual, or person within an organisation, who makes a performing arts project happen. They may conceive it from their own original idea, and / or champion the ideas and visions of the artists with whom they work. The producer supports the project through its various stages from conception, creative development and rehearsals to public performance and touring; secures the necessary financial and operational resources; and takes responsibility for the outcome. Successful producers tend to display strong leadership qualities, entrepreneurial flair, creativity, passion, good artistic judgement, business acumen, and be great communicators and team builders.

In Australia few arts producers operate independently. Most find employment at arts centres and festivals and within producing companies. The local market is very small, illustrated by the fact that half the Queensland groups showcasing at the 2008 Australian Performing Arts Market were represented by interstate producers. Yet could it be these are the skills the sector and governments need to invigorate and grow the artforms? If thriving arts centres are driven by in-house producers, and if producers play a critical role in driving artform development, maybe it is time to re-evaluate this role. This may also include those producers working across commercial and subsidised arts practice. It may also be useful to further define the skills and attributes of successful producers. Mentoring and development programs may also be needed to grow the pool of skilled local arts producers.

So what opportunities exist for producers? As this paper proposes, there may be scope for producers at a Hub to instigate and lead projects with artists and connect with touring and presenting markets. Opportunities may exist in regional Queensland, where lack of infrastructure may make the role of the producer even more important. There may also be scope to group producers together, to pool resources, build complementary skills and knowledge, and reduce isolation.

A variation or addition may be to develop a producers' network, linking producers working in similar ways, artistically, organisationally and provide shared resources and information. There may potentially be other opportunities for producers this project could consider. Is there value in considering these approaches, and, if so, in what way?

The role of presenters

Queensland has a strong network of performing arts presenters, both traditional venues and newer 'black box' facilities, and arts festivals. Many of these are also important commissioners of new work. Local governments generally provide and maintain regional facilities. These venues are increasing in number, usually with modest programming budgets, and a reliance on touring funding and box office receipts to deliver suitable productions. This can lead to risk-averse programming and inability to support innovative and small scale work. State and Commonwealth investments typically underwrite tours and producing companies. While welcome, provision of distribution rather than development support means a continued reliance on product developed by others. The State also provides the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, and two contemporary arts centres. Brisbane's four venues are all active artist supporters and deliver significant results. However most do not have resources to provide ongoing support to artists, and can only offer one-off commissions or engagements. These may locate a creative project in one place and time, but not move it forward through a creative cycle from conception to completion.

Despite this, the opportunities are many: most arts centres have considerable expertise and potential. Excellent entrepreneurial programming exists, often on modest budgets, and newer arts centres are developing the art-forms, and delivering quality, accessible experiences, that provide new engagement for audiences. Perhaps there is potential for arts centres to further develop, invest in, and commission new works, to generate more locally originating work, to develop richer networks, and to foster niche productions of specialist genres. There may be potential for a Hub to partner with and strengthen support for these presenters.

The role of touring

Performing arts touring is generally driven by presenters or by producing companies. These two approaches account for most funded activity. While generally working well they don't support all activity or often prioritise innovation or creative risk. Another approach, where presenters and producing companies collaborate, is also emerging. A key challenge is to get the right artists to the right venues at the right time rather than primarily serve a set venue circuit or investing in work hoping venues may take it.

Opportunities include harnessing more venue resources and collaboratively driven tours, and incentive mechanisms for specialised and niche tours. Touring agencies could foster more relationships with producers as well as venues, extend the reach and diversity of productions and add more artist driven work to the mix. There is also scope to further extend into non arts venues, such as halls, libraries, open spaces and site specific spaces. Arts Queensland is developing a Touring Strategy to guide future investments in this activity.

Audiences

A lot of audience development effort in recent years has focused on finding audiences for existing arts products. There may be value now in prioritising new arts products to stimulate new audience demand. This is not to suggest the sector only serve up

palatable fare; indeed the task is more challenging: to engage more people with quality art providing great creative experiences. Can producer-led infrastructure such as the Hub assist? Skilled producers can connect an artist with an audience from the conception of the idea. They can be alert to opportunities, to match an artist and a work with audiences and take flexible approaches.

The challenges are many. People lead more complex and demanding lives than ever before, and face a myriad of choices to allocate their time and money. This makes them harder to reach than ever. Yet funders are more determined than ever that ways be found to reach them. How does one do this? These challenges require determined marketing and programming strategies, to serve existing markets well and also cultivate new markets. A Hub would require a strong audience and marketing orientation and skills to deliver on these challenges.

The case for a Hub

This section looks at opportunities that make a case for the Hub. It identifies potential artform, touring, marketing, infrastructure and government opportunities. These may also provide a case for investment for funders.

Artform: As a producer-led organisation supporting the work of a group of artists the Hub could provide an independent resource to complement existing funded infrastructure which is generally artistic director, venue or festival programmer led. Demand exists for specialist work in genres such as cabaret, world and contemporary music, children's theatre and Indigenous dance, to name a few, or to serve particular geographical areas. These could utilise local artists when available, and originate in regional centres.

Touring: Producers working from the Hub could use the Hub to grow existing state-based and national touring networks and form new ones. For example, existing touring infrastructure could be further utilised such as arts centres, festivals, Long Paddock, Playing Australia, and Mobile States, and contemporary performing arts to mid scale centres across the country. More Playing Australia supported productions currently enter Queensland than originate here and tour interstate. Is there scope to address this imbalance? International markets are increasingly opening up to Queensland artists through platforms such as the Australian Performing Arts Market. In 2008 six Queensland productions showcased at this market with significant tours expected to follow. However over half these artists are not operationally funded, and have limited resources for follow up or rely on interstate producers to do so. There is scope to provide these artists with more support.

Marketing: There is an important opportunity to grow specialist arts marketing and market development capabilities in the sector. A Hub with specialised marketing expertise and a strong audience orientation could deliver a comparative advantage within the small to medium sector. It could be that a component of any funding invested in the Hubs can be directed to marketing activities to boost this overall investment in the sector.

Infrastructure: Queensland's cultural infrastructure investments have seen the state emerge as a leading provider of quality arts centres. There may be great potential now to focus investments on first rate innovative content for these facilities. This could have one eye also on creating quality product for national and international markets. There is scope to leverage greater arts outcomes from Arts Queensland's two facilities the Judith Wright and Cairns Centres of Contemporary Art. The vision for both as active contemporary arts contributors is consistent with the notion of the Hub. Operational economies may exist by basing a Hub at these venues or contributing to their programming.

Government: A Hub could administer devolved funding for creative development or presentation if this can provide good results. This would place investment decisions closer to the creative 'coal-face' where they may be better informed, and provide the 'right grant at the right time'. It could also be less time consuming as producers would

administer one larger grant dispersed to several artists, saving the need for multiple applications and acquittals. A Hub could also deliver initiatives responding to priority arts areas for government. These may include quality programs by and for the Indigenous and cultural diversity sectors, arts engagement for children and young people, and strengthening regional arts development and participation. Market development work, particularly promoting artists into international markets, could be undertaken by a Hub where producers' specialist knowledge of artists can be a key success factor.

Key project questions

The sections below list some key questions we have identified for the major Hub stakeholders of performing artists, producers and presenters.

Performing artists

- How can we make Brisbane 'a hot spot' for quality small and mid scale performing arts?
- What opportunities are there for more locally produced high quality work that contributes to the artform, and can find viable audiences? What sort of work could this be?
- What sort of locally produced work would interest Brisbane venues, arts festivals, touring circuits, regional centres?
- How can pathways for work be strengthened? Eg: better connections between funded creative development activity and presentation by venues
- Would individual artists and small groups find it beneficial to be based in a 'hub' to pursue their own work while drawing on collective resources? How would this be useful?
- Would artists benefit from shared resources in management, representation, administration, marketing, technical production, planning, scheduling, booking and touring? How would this be useful?
- Would it be useful to have skilled producers working with artists, supporting them in developing, presenting and touring their work?
- Can a range of artists with multiple creative visions be supported in a structured manner? What could this look like?
- Would care be needed to ensure a new layer of bureaucracy is not created?
- Do you have any other suggestions for how a Hub could work?

Producers

- Is there scope to develop and recognise the role of the producer in the performing arts?
- Is there scope for 'seize the moment' type organisations that realise high quality, diverse and adventurous work with a range of artists, groups and projects?
- Is there a case to encourage more producers working independently as well as within existing infrastructure?
- How could a Hub assist producers to realise more quality Queensland work?
- If producers are placed in regional areas how would they work and with whom?
- Would a Hub that groups producers together (to pool resources, build complementary skills and knowledge, and reduce isolation) be of value?
- Can we develop a producers' network, linking producers working in similar ways, artistically, organisationally and provide shared resources and information?
- Can government achieve particular priorities by working with producers? For example, in cultural diversity, Indigenous, regional arts and with young people?
- Can commercial producers play an arts development role?
- Is there value in considering these or other approaches, and if so in what way? Are there other opportunities for producers this project could consider?

Presenters

- Is there scope for mechanisms to encourage arts centres to further develop, co-invest in and co-commission new works and develop long term relationships with artists?
- How do we boost activities and output and generate more work that originates locally rather than being received from elsewhere?
- Could richer networks and partnerships spot new opportunities to back more great work?
- Is there potential for more collaboratively developed local work and tours? Could this nurture new work and add more artist driven work to the mix?
- How can we stimulate more high quality locally produced touring product?
- How can we extend activity into non arts venues and site specific performing spaces?
- What role is there for a Hub in this activity and what potential is there for a Hub to partner with and support these presenters?

Existing support structures

The Hub notion and many of these ideas are not new. A range of existing organisations and networks including Ausdance and Q Music already provide important services to independent artists. It is intended in general that Hub activities would complement and strengthen existing activities. In order to map current capabilities and identify gaps or opportunities the Study will compile a list of existing support. This will focus on organisations with dedicated published initiatives for independent and small and mid scale performing arts. Information on such activities is welcomed.

Next directions

A project overview document for The Creative Production Hubs study was published in March 2008 and is available on the Arts Queensland website. This Discussion Paper is the most recent document and will inform the research and development phases. Detailed consultation with key stakeholders has been conducted across Queensland during May 2008. If you wish to contribute to this project you can do so via the email address below. In July 2008 the project team will draw on findings to develop a framework for the Hub. This will lead to a final report and recommendations.

Further information

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How can you be involved?

1. Register your details via the Arts Queensland website www.arts.qld.gov.au or via email to prodhubs@arts.qld.gov.au to be placed on the circulation list for this project.
2. Provide your response to this discussion paper by 16 July 2008 via email.
3. Check the Arts Queensland website regularly for updates on the project.

Paper prepared by Chris Bowen Arts Queensland June 2008

ATTACHMENT – Possible ways to invest in producer-led infrastructure

Funders could invest in producer led infrastructure in a variety of ways through competitive grant funding or tendered contracts.

Here are a few different investment options with some initial pros and cons:

1. Creative Production Hub

Advantages – Could have producing as its core business, be established for this purpose, and bring together expert skills and resources.

Disadvantages – May require a new organisational structure.

2. Existing Arts Queensland Venues

Advantages – Can leverage further arts development outcomes from Arts Queensland's existing investment in these facilities.

Disadvantages – Priorities of venue management and producers may differ.

Other advantages and disadvantages similar to Presenting Venue or Festival, no 7.

3. Existing non-profit arts Organisation

Advantages – Can bring existing resources, capacities and networks, may offer synergies with organisation's current activities, may assist in repositioning and revitalising a static organisation.

Disadvantages – May not bring the right skills and focus, may divert organisational energies from other necessary activities, this work is probably not its core business, may bring the organisation's own problems.

4. Individual Producers

Advantages – No organisational structure required, can back identified strong performers.

Disadvantages – Continued isolation in which many producers operate, limited economies of scale.

5. Local government partner(s)

Advantages – Can offer local investment, resources and capacities and a strategic local approach.

Disadvantages – Limits scope of activities to within local government boundaries.

6. New non-profit arts organisation

Similar advantages and disadvantages to those of 1, Creative Production Hub.

7. Presenting Venue or Festival

Advantages – Can bring solid resources, capacities and networks to the table.

Disadvantages – Must work within charter and vision of their own organisation, may favour works in their own venue / festival, not all 'producers' in these organisations would have required the skills.