

Affordable studios: how NFASP uses facts and figures from the Register

THE VALUE OF THE AFFORDABLE STUDIOS SECTOR is being increasingly recognised by local and national government, regeneration agencies, property developers and housing associations. A register of artists' studio groups and organisations in the UK captures vital information on studio providers across the UK, which NFASP uses in advocating for and promoting the studios sector with all these agencies.

The Register, published in May 2008, records the basic details of 147 groups and organisations that manage affordable workspace in 270 buildings across the UK, supporting around 6,000 artists. Although of widely differing scales, structures and ways of working, together these groups make a vital contribution to the development and success of the visual arts in the UK through their fundamental support for artists and art. The Register provides an invaluable source of information about these groups and their activities.

FACTS AND FIGURES FROM THE REGISTER ABOUT AFFORDABLE STUDIOS

- 147 groups manage 271 buildings providing studios for around 6,000 artists;
- Some 58% of all studio space in England is to be found in London;
- Studio groups and organisations are of widely differing scales, structures and ways of working, but all support artists at the fundamental level of research and production;
- Only 61 buildings are freehold, 210 are leasehold - 77% of studio space is rented;
- All studio groups provide public value either directly or indirectly. Over 50% provide activities that directly benefit the public, including: open studios (116), exhibitions (103), community/educational workshops (87), talks and events;
- There are more than 5,000 artists on waiting lists for studios across the UK, showing there is high, unmet demand for affordable studio space; and
- Commercially available studios are two to three times more expensive than studios managed by affordable studio providers.

HOW DOES NFASP USE THIS INFORMATION?

The information in the Register contributes to two main areas of the Federation's work, **advocacy** for the studios sector, and **advice and support** to the studios sector. This year (2010), NFASP is updating the Register and undertaking a more comprehensive survey of studio groups and organisations in order to gather important data that will help us continue to make the case for the importance of affordable studios for visual artists - *why affordable artists' studios matter*. NFASP needs this information to be able to speak authoritatively for the sector.

These are some of the ways we have used the Register information about studios:

Advocacy for the studios sector

We have made **presentations** to a wide range of local authorities, policy groups, housing and regeneration bodies, about the value of artists' studios and approaches to supporting long-term studio provision.

We have **participated in national conferences and events** where we have raised issues, given advice and presented statistics about the sector.

We have **responded to policy consultations** at national and regional level:

- DCMS consultation on the Lottery shares (the Government intention to restore the allocation of Lottery funding to each of arts, sports and heritage to 20%. This is important, as an increase in the arts Lottery share might lead to more capital in the future being available for studios);
- Creative and Cultural Skills Visual Arts Blueprint;
- Arts Council England's ten year strategy Achieving great art for everyone;
- The London Mayor's Cultural Strategy. NFASP responded to the initial consultation document, *Cultural Metropolis*, and very recently to the *Draft London Mayor's Cultural Strategy*, (consultation closed 6 September 2010). Such documents make reference to creative workspace, but rarely differentiate between affordable artists' studio provision and workspace for more commercially orientated creative industries. NFASP restates the case for affordable workspace, emphasising the vital role affordable studios play in our communities and the cultural life of the city;
- The London Plan; and
- Kent County Council Cultural Strategy (where the aspiration to work with NFASP to promote artists' studios is specifically mentioned).

We develop guidance and offer advice on specific issues. An example is **temporary workspace**, where there has been considerable media and Government interest over the last year in the potential for using empty shops as galleries and studios and for other arts purposes in order to revitalise our high streets and communities. In response to this NFASP has:

- Published Guidance on the use of temporary space as artists' studios – www.nfasp.org.uk/page.php?id=170;
- Been instrumental in getting off the ground a pilot project in south London – Wandsworth Arts Village – where 42 early career artists rent low-cost studio space and have formed a creative community in the heart of Wandsworth. Full details in an NFASP case study; www.nfasp.org.uk/page.php?id=171
- Advised Essex County Council on their procurement process in commissioning a feasibility study to assess the potential for developing artists' studios in Harlow town centre's empty shops, a study which has led to two being used as studios for 11 artists; and
- Commissioned a case study of The Shed, a Gateshead City Council Starter for Ten regeneration project which has turned an empty bed showroom in Gateshead's high street into creative workspace for, initially 11, and now a further 25 creative practitioners.

At the same time, NFASP continues to make the case for long-term, secure studio provision, so that artists can continue to provide benefit to culture and communities.

London 2012 Olympics: in 2008, NFASP commissioned research into the impact of the Olympics on artists' studios in the five London host Olympic boroughs. NFASP provided statistics and information from the Register about all known groups in the affected area, which informed the research. Following the report's publication, NFASP held meetings with a range of agencies using the information in presentations and discussions, and pressing the case for studio provision to be integrated into future plans for the area and the legacy plans for Olympic venues such as the Media Centre.

NFASP continues to be involved in issues relating to the Olympics and artists' studio provision by responding to consultations, and taking part in events such as SPACE's annual *Legacy Now* event and the Hackney Wick Creative Forum and responding to policy consultations.

Advice and support to the studios sector

The statistics from the June 2008 register indicated that security of tenure continues to be a significant problem, with 79% of building space rented. At that time a minimum of 21 groups in England faced a threat from rent reviews and increases, redevelopment of their buildings and expiring leases. Whilst the recession has slowed many development schemes and made more property available on a short-term basis, studio groups remains vulnerable. Many occupy spaces on short-term leases, or with no lease at all, only too aware that the moment the economy picks up, they may well have to move again. The more we know about issues to do with tenure, the more we are able to highlight the issue and lobby for more secure, long term space.

The NFASP advice service responded to over 110 detailed enquiries in the last year and continues to offer advice to members on a range of topics. Principally for members, but also for those with an interest in developing studios, the NFASP advice service is proving to be one of our most popular and highly regarded services. The most frequently raised issues are:

- leases, rent reviews and lease renewals and how to negotiate with landlords;
- advice on dealing with developers and planners and requests for letters of support;
- a benchmark of affordability for studio rents;
- starting up studios, finding space, getting the appropriate constitutional structure and securing capital finance;
- studio occupancy procedures;
- information about local authority policies which include creative workspace; and
- queries to do with business rates and VAT.

MEMBER EVENTS

Within the last year NFASP has held five member events (in Leeds, Southampton, Manchester, Lancaster and London), the largest of these being our AGM in London in November 2009. These events have provided an opportunity for representatives of studios across the country to meet, share information and experiences, learn and generate new ideas. We have also offered one-to-one advice sessions at each event. Events in previous years included two major, national conferences, in Bristol and Liverpool.

RESOURCES

Over the last year, NFASP has published a wide range of resources for the benefit of members and others involved in developing and managing studios.

Guidance notes we published six new guidance notes during the year: making the case to local authorities for investing in creative workspace, legal structures for studio groups, Community Interest Companies, and sources of finance for developing studios, all of which were developed from workshops at the NFASP's 2008 conference in Liverpool. We also published: guidance on inclusive access for studio groups (prepared by one of our members – The Arthouse in Wakefield); and developing a powerful online presence is in preparation. We continued to work with experts in charity law to investigate the potential for charitable status for studio providers.

Case studies we prepared six new case studies, many of which support our guidance notes. These include: Wandsworth Arts Village, a case study looking at the use of temporary space as artists' studios; Green Close Studios, a grassroots approach to rural artists' studios; and Bow Arts Trust Poplar HARCA live/work scheme: a social enterprise for artists and communities. See: www.nfasp.org.uk/page.php?id=169 for all case studies.



Bow Arts Trust open-studios event

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