



# Building Resilient Visual Arts Networks

CVAN National Network Strategy  
2018-2021

*Contemporary Visual Arts Network (CVAN)*

# A strategic plan for building the Contemporary Visual Arts Network

**This document gives a roadmap for building CVAN into a robust network-of-networks to leverage regional resources, advocate for the visual arts across England, build closer ties with sector partners and ensure that the visual arts are well-represented on regional and national policy agendas.**

This is a three-year strategy to 2021 when it is envisaged that the CVAN national network will have achieved an integrated and effective presence across the regions and at national level. As part of the initial three-year strategy, we will develop, in regional consultation, a four-year strategy to run from 2021-2025 consolidating and carrying forward England's regional contemporary visual arts networks in the context, also, of our four nations.

CVAN is the representative body for the contemporary visual arts in England. We are a meta-network of nine regional visual arts support networks fostering an engaged, diverse, and vibrant visual arts culture.

**Our vision** embraces the broadest range of visual arts expression in a multi-disciplinary, innovative, and resilient contemporary visual arts practice.

**Our mission** is to support and promote the visibility and resilience of the contemporary visual arts ecology in England, advocating for our regional arts institutions, spaces, and artists, and working for a sustainable future for our world-class contemporary visual arts sector.

## Background

In 2004, Arts Council England commissioned the first ever major review of the visual arts in England which published the [Turning Point](#) review. The review makes recommendations for the development of the visual arts overall – arguing for greater linkages between the historical and the contemporary. Turning Point also gave a mandate to assume a broader leadership role for the contemporary visual arts and to make the case for integrated planning and investment to underpin the sustainability and growth of the visual arts.

Turning point gave birth to the Contemporary Visual Arts Network (CVAN) tasked with providing the integrated planning, support, and facilitation to CVAN's 9 regional networks. The regional networks develop programmes of activity that are specific to their regional needs. This provides direct benefit to the visual arts sector, ensures an impact at grass roots level and is often informed by extensive consultation with artists and arts organisations about what their needs are. Most regional groups have a core group of members that make up a Steering Group. This group oversees the work of the regional Coordinators, programme delivery and expenditure

of funds (where applicable). While priorities and delivery differ at regional level, all regional networks subscribe to CVAN's collective mission, vision and values which detail our overarching ambition. It is this unification of message that is met through delivery at regional level via the nine CVAN groups.

## The regional structure:

A snapshot of the Network at April 2018 at the beginning of the new Arts Council England 2018-22 Investment Round -- CVAN Regional mapping: <https://is.gd/XN85N5>

- [NE CVAN](#) hosted by Baltic NPO
- [CVAN NW](#), hosted by Liverpool Biennial NPO
- [YVAN](#) (Yorkshire and the Humber) hosted by the Art House NPO
- [SE CVAN](#), Hosted by Modern Art Oxford NPO
- [E CVAN](#), Hosted by Wysing NPO
- [New Art West Midlands](#), hosted by Birmingham City University although working towards becoming an independent entity
- [CVAN EM](#) hosted by Leicester Print Workshop NPO
- [VASW](#) hosted by Spike Island NPO
- London (currently inactive)

## The Value of the Visual Arts in the UK

It is notoriously difficult to pin down the economic value of the visual arts - or of the creative economy more widely. Nevertheless, the DCMS estimates that cultural organisations and practitioners contributed £27bn to the UK economy in 2015, a 15 per cent increase on the previous year. This represents the fastest growth of any of the sectors covered by the Department of Culture, Media & Sport [[DCMS Sectors Economic Estimates 2016](#)]. The UK art market was the second largest market worldwide in 2016, with a 21% share of all global art and antique sales by value. [[British Art Market Federation Report 2017](#)] This is also a very resilient sector, the GVA of the creative industries has been growing steadily since 2009.

There are challenges too - cultural institutions have been under pressure over this period with negative growth for museums. Another worrying trend is that whilst Lottery funding has increased, Local Authority funding has been crashing and the Arts Council England's survey of Private Investment in the Arts indicates that business investment has also been falling. In real terms sponsorship fell by 20% in 2014/15. Since 2007/8 Treasury funding for the arts has fallen by 28% and local government funding by 37%. Whilst Trusts have been stepping up to fill some of the shortfall the gap is far too great. Arts organisations have become increasingly reliant on Lottery funding whilst income from sale of Lottery tickets has also been falling. Public support for public funding of the arts is in decline. Ticket prices have been rising above inflation as venues become more reliant on generated income. Brexit adds yet more uncertainty. [[Arts Index 2017](#)]

Despite a number of reviews and reports including 2014 ACE [The Value of Arts & Culture to People & Society](#), 2015 [DCMS literature review](#) and the 2016 [AHRC Cultural Value Project](#) demonstrating the impact and wider value of arts and culture, the vital role of the visual arts in wider culture, society, and economy too often falls 'below the radar'. But in these days of austerity and the uncertainty surrounding the future of the UK economy as well as the wider cultural challenges facing our society, a vibrant visual arts sector has never been more important.

*In the context of the deep and widespread political division expressed through the 2016 EU referendum campaign and vote, it is increasingly clear that new approaches to many of the UK's political processes require urgent and radical attention. This includes how cultural policy operates – and who and what cultural policy is for. Questions about how culture is made and by who, and which creative activity gets recognised and supported, are matters in which we all have a profound and ever more urgent interest.*

-- [Towards Cultural Democracy](#)

## Working together for a sustainable future

The visual arts sector in England is enormously varied, encompassing everything from a global arts market hub and internationally significant institutions, through regional and local museums and galleries, artist-led spaces, community arts centres and projects, and - at its core - individual creative practice.

### CVAN's Purpose:

- A sustainable future for our world-renowned visual arts sector
- Demonstrating the cultural, social and economic value of the visual arts, building their profile with funders, policymakers, government, public, and media
- Promoting excellence and a culture of innovation and experimentation
- Promoting social, ethnic, cultural, and gender diversity and participation in visual arts production, workforce, education, and audience

### CVAN's Objectives

- **Strategic:** building CVAN's networks, leveraging the networks' resources and our external partnerships. Building an evidence base to inform visual arts policy.
- **Visible:** raising the profile and promoting the interests of the contemporary visual arts sector
- **Connected:** balanced advocacy across the regions which maximises our resources, supports and builds on regional agendas.
- **Sustainable** visual arts sector in times of challenge and rapid change, adequate space and remuneration
- **Resilient:** skilled, entrepreneurial, diverse and inclusive workforce, a dignified working culture.

## Strategic:

CVAN's regional networks do impressive work with limited support and resources and they can deliver most effectively when working collaboratively. CVAN's strength and resource lies in its regional networks and it is therefore crucial that we integrate our work as much as possible whilst ensuring that bringing the sector closer together does not impact negatively on the rich diversity, individual characteristics, and agendas of its regional networks. CVAN will offer a leadership role to bring together CVAN's diverse regional networks into a whole greater than the sum of its parts

<b>Aspiration</b>	<b>Plan</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
Overall strategy for CVAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult regions on national strategic focus</li> <li>• Map the networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation report</li> <li>• Agreed national strategy document</li> <li>• Publication of regional strategies on CVAN website</li> </ul>
Build evidence base	Improve evidence base for visual arts advocacy Demonstrate social and economic impact of visual arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commission and undertake research to address gaps in policy evidence base</li> <li>• Develop repository for evidence from research and regional impact studies</li> </ul>
Ensure balanced representation across regions	Work with regional decision-makers and influencers and carry forward issues to national agendas as appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with ACE Culture Fora and other regional initiatives</li> <li>• Build influence for CVAN policy working groups across North and Midland regions</li> </ul>
Enhance understanding of policy trends and initiatives across the sector	Horizon scanning and response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide briefings on key developments</li> <li>• Consult with regional networks on key issues</li> </ul>

## Visible

The visual arts sector in England is facing a number of significant challenges including the effects of austerity, lack of recognition in policy and national culture, a crisis in the skills

pipeline, increasing casualisation as well as professionalisation of the sector. It is crucial that the public and policymakers have a better understanding of the sector's value and impact and that we are able to engage with and influence visual arts policy.

<b>Aspiration</b>	<b>Plan</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
Advocate the interests of the contemporary visual arts sector	Develop partnerships with ACE and other key sector policy bodies	Respond to government and other calls for evidence and statutory consultations
Communicate the value of visual arts practice and careers in and to wider society	More strategic communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications strategy</li> <li>• Engage artists in communicating the value of arts and culture</li> <li>• Develop strategic partnerships</li> </ul>
Celebrate and enhance diversity in the visual arts sector	Improve evidence base, campaigning, lobbying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commission/develop research into diversity in workforce and audience</li> <li>• Advocacy</li> </ul>

## Connected

As a federation of regional networks in England with a non-geographic national layer, CVAN relies heavily on effective internal communications. CVAN also relies on close partnership with a number of external organisations and bodies to deliver its project work and to promote the interests of the sector.

<b>Aspiration</b>	<b>Plan</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
Improved public facing communications	Review CVAN website and social media presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and recommendations for enhanced web presence</li> <li>• Develop capacity for web-based campaigning</li> <li>• Develop new web-based services</li> </ul>
Develop external relations	Support and enhance regional clustering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop relationships with key sector national bodies and cultural sector advocacy organisations</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in regional Culture Forums</li> </ul>
Diversity	Celebrate and expand diversity of visual arts audiences Build workforce diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversify national and regional committees</li> <li>• Develop diversity evidence base</li> <li>• Work with regions to showcase diverse participation</li> </ul>

## Sustainable

Visual arts culture is already highly critical, exploratory, and innovative but is facing some key innovation challenges in a rapidly developing environment. The recent ACE consultation report [Arts Council England: The Conversation](#) found that whilst both the public and the sectors strongly support more investment in participatory projects, the arts sectors are also concerned at maintaining excellence, the risk-taking and innovative practice which make the UK visual arts globally renowned.

Aspiration	Plan	Indicators
Support, connect, and leverage regional placemaking initiatives, cross-disciplinary and innovation research collaboration	Build STEAM capacity across the network  Work with regions to map capacity-building initiatives in the regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic partnerships with regional AHRC Clusters, creative HEIs and LEPs</li> <li>• Develop cross-sector partnership</li> </ul>
Support capacity building in regional networks	More consistency in support across the sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CVAN repository for toolkits</li> <li>• Disseminating or brokering for capacity building services</li> <li>• Develop federated model</li> </ul>
Advocate the role of visual arts in digital culture	Gather evidence of visual arts' contribution to the UK's culture of innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster cross-disciplinary research collaboration with HEIs</li> </ul>

## Resilient

Artistic practice faces a number of challenges including diminishing funds, a crisis in availability of studio space, and disruption of creative pathways through the UK education

system. Delivery of CVAN’s development work rests in the regions and it is the role of the national network to support and to help disseminate the successes of regionally tailored approaches across all our networks which may be adapted and adopted more widely.

Aspiration	Plan	Indicators
Advocate for adequate support for arts practice	Work in partnership with a-n and ACE to address issues relating to artists’ remuneration and space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Advocate regional workspace strategies</li> <li>● Support partner campaigns relating to artists remuneration</li> </ul>
A Dignified working environment free from discrimination, harassment and bullying across the contemporary visual arts sector	Put adequate policies in place and monitor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop CVAN policies working with BALTIC and CVAN regional hosts</li> </ul>
Support high-quality arts education across all levels	Advocate for a holistic creative skills pipeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Collaborate with key sector bodies</li> </ul>

## Next steps

CVAN national network workplans for Director and Communications Manager are reviewed 6-monthly and delivered working closely with the regional Chairs individually and as the CVAN national Board as well as with the regional Coordinators. The national Communications Manager also works closely with regional communications staff and CVAN’s national Director.