

Dear Arts Council,

We, the undersigned, are writing to you as representatives of arts institutions, businesses, cultural institutions and trades unions across Calderdale.

We wish to express in the strongest possible terms our concern about, and opposition to, the recent updates to Arts Council policies stating that “political statements” made by an individual can cause “reputational risk” and therefore be in potential breach of funding agreements.

These updates to the Arts Council’s Relationship Framework policies, made on 28th January 2024 and since communicated to National Portfolio Organisations and Investment Principles Support Organisations, deeply concern us. Arts Professional report [here](#) that the policies explicitly state that “overtly political or activist” statements may breach funding agreements. We are concerned by this because:

- Art has a long history of political engagement, and the Arts Council should support the production of politicised art as being good for democracy, rather than seeking to defund it;
- This new policy position may disadvantage artists and art institutions who have made overtly political statements in the past, or discourage them from engaging politically after receiving Arts Council funding. Again, this would be bad for both democracy and for the arts;
- During a time of intense ‘culture war’ rhetoric it is incumbent upon arts institutions to protect and defend the rights of artists to political speech and freedom of expression within the law, not to impose arbitrary restrictions limiting such freedom of expression.
- At a time of political polarisation in the world at large, artists and arts institutions ought to feel free to engage with the pressing political questions of the day. Imposing generic restrictions on the rights of artists to make ‘overtly political or activist statements’ is anti-democratic and will potentially reduce the ability of the arts and artists to contribute to democratic political discussion and debate.

As arts institutions, businesses, cultural institutions and trades unions across Calderdale, some of whom have received Arts Council funding, we are all proud to have worked with and supported artists - authors, poets, musicians, film-makers and others - who are politically committed, and who have made statements that could be construed as being “overtly political or activist”. We think that these artists and their artworks enrich the global conversation and contribute to a vibrant culture of democratic engagement. We worry enormously about the impact of a blanket ban on such artists, artworks and arts institutions from receiving Arts Council funding on the basis of a vaguely-defined reference to “political or activist statements”.

We call on the Arts Council to:

1. Revise the Relationship Framework policies to remove reference to “overt political or activist” statements as a justified reason for breach of funding arrangements;
2. Carry out and publish an impact assessment setting out the possible impact this misguided change could have on current and past Arts Council grant holders;
3. Recommit publicly to supporting artistic engagements with politics, political artworks and artists, and political freedom of expression within the law for all artists, arts institutions and art works.

We look forward to receiving a response from you shortly.

Yours sincerely,

Signed:

Daniel Whittall - Chair, Calderdale TUC
Kevin Duffy - Publisher, Bluemoose Books
Michael Ainsworth - owner, Grayston Unity
Jeff Turner - Director, verd de gris arts
Del Bailie - General Manager, Hebden Bridge Trades Club
Bernard Wadsworth - Chair, Calderdale Industrial Museum
Michael Crowley - author and dramatist
Kate Claghan - Independent Bookshop Owner

Sarah Shaw - Independent Bookshop Manager
Louise Beere - Writer and Bookseller
Georgie Evans - Writer and Bookseller
Anna Coatman - Writer and editor
John Newsham - Writer
Benjamin Myers - Writer
Zaffar Kunial - Poet
Adelle Stripe - Writer
Amy Liptrot - Writer
Marcus Jack - Painter
Pete Keal - Equity representative, TUC Yorkshire & the Humber Creative and Leisure Industries Committee - personal capacity
Hamish Heald - Calderdale NEU District Secretary
Heather Woodstock - Committee Member, Hebden Bridge Trades Club
Paul Tansey - Committee Member, Hebden Bridge Trades Club
Julian Goddard - Committee Member, Hebden Bridge Trades Club
Andy Young - Committee Member, Hebden Bridge Trades Club
Gilly Lewistone - Committee Member, Hebden Bridge Trades Club
Angela Clarke – Committee Member, Hebden Bridge Trades Club
Tom Newbury - Committee Member, Hebden Bridge Trades Club
Ric Brooke - Committee Member, Hebden Bridge Trades Club
Kelly Loughlin - Curator