

The real battleground

This isn't whingeing, the collective of cultural leaders who fronted a press conference (reported on p3) assured us, this is serious business. The difference is that with the latter you are arguing from a position of strength from where you can fire statistics in withering machine gun fashion; in the former you just snivelled as your catapult was confiscated.

So it was from that stance that the passionate Lord Stevenson - Dennis Stevenson when he was chairman of the Tate - led the fusillade, flanked by Sir Nicholas Serota, Nicholas Hytner, Jude Kelly, and Virginia Tandy.

Their point is that with an export value of over \$9m - probably an underestimate since the figure is based on 2002 statistics - culture is not only at the heart of polite society, it is big in the economy and getting bigger at all levels of society.

Their message, they say, is not financial, which is why the funding agencies aren't in the assault group - even though the ghost at the feast is the Arts Council, in the audience in their numbers but not on the platform - but simply to say that they got an uplift in 2001 and this was what they were able to do with it. How much more can be achieved if only the momentum can be maintained, and not allowed to slacken as it was in 2004.

But while the national companies may be doing unprecedentedly well, looking to the regions we see a less triumphal story. A while ago we reported the near collapse of The Public, West Bromwich's ambitious cultural development, and the demise of Margate's Turner Gallery.

We have also had to report that a tranche of local and regional museums are closing, or reducing opening hours, largely because local authorities believe that in tough times they are dispensable. Saddest is the Silk Museum in Macclesfield, just four years old, but starved of visitors for whom the answer is not to step up marketing, PR and advertising, but to cut losses.

So while the big guns are right to aim their fire at the Treasury, we must not forget the less likely dollar earners down the food chain, local museums, arts centres and theatres, and the local authorities and trusts responsible for them. These centres of community life are at least as much part of this nation's cultural personality, many would say more.

NEWS

Scheme has helped improve pupils' pride and self-esteem

Artsmarked up a success in report

The Arts Council's Artsmark scheme is achieving its aim of developing arts provision in schools and raising the profile of arts education.

That's the verdict of a new report evaluating the Artsmark scheme, which now includes more than 4,000 schools, more than 13% of the total.

But the report, by consultants Matthews Millman, also found that some headteachers found the applications system difficult, time-consuming and formulaic.

The report - *The impact of Artsmark on schools in England* is the first large-scale evaluation of the Artsmark. The award is given to schools which have made a strong commitment to the arts and have developed a range of arts provision for their pupils.

Key findings from the report showed that there was an increase in the quantity, range and type of arts activities in schools and more support for arts policy and provision. Teachers surveyed

also said that Artsmark had improved pride and self-esteem among both pupils and staff and an increase in professional development opportunities for staff

Primary schools were particularly keen to engage with the Artsmark scheme, despite having fewer resources for the arts, according to the report.

Sir Christopher Frayling, Chair of Arts Council England, said:

"We are delighted that the first large-scale evaluation of Artsmark has shown the scheme's success in enhancing opportunities for arts provision in schools."

Artsmark was led by a partnership between Arts Council England, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Education and Skills, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Ofsted and Sport England.

The impact of Artsmark on schools in England is available on www.arts-council.org.uk.



It's a beach hut but not as we know it... Artists and architects have been asked to transform the iconic symbol of British seaside architecture - the humble beach hut - in an international design competition conceived by artist Michael Trainor. The winning entries will be constructed on the Lincolnshire coastline. Construction of the first 'brave new beach hut' is already underway with a design by Trainor due to be installed and revealed in the summer. Three artists' impressions of imaginary entries have been drawn up as inspiration for the project and include *House of the Rising Sun* (above).