



SUMMARY

INSIGHT AND EXCHANGE:

An evaluation of the Wellcome Trust's Sciart programme

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Professor Anne Bamford

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – INCLUDING WELLCOME TRUST RESPONSE

Full report available at www.wellcome.ac.uk/sciartevaluation

Published by the Wellcome Trust, October 2009

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Citing this report

We suggest that you cite this report as follows:

Glinkowski P, Bamford A. Insight and Exchange: An evaluation of the Wellcome Trust's Sciart programme. London: Wellcome Trust; 2009. www.wellcome.ac.uk/sciartevaluation (accessed 1 November 2009).

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Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank Meroë Candy and her colleagues Ken Arnold and Sara Candy at the Wellcome Trust, who, together with Paul Glinkowski and Professor Anne Bamford, formed the Sciart evaluation research project steering group.

The Engine Room also extends its thanks to the many Sciart project participants, recipients of and applicants for Sciart awards, and other individuals with an involvement in or opinions about the Sciart programme who contributed their time to provide detailed and frank responses in interviews, focus groups, surveys and meetings.



This research was commissioned from Engine Room Enterprise Research and the University of the Arts London.

Cover image: 'Primitive Streak', a Sciart-funded project by Helen and Kate Storey. *Jason Lowe*

In 2007, the Wellcome Trust commissioned the Engine Room at the University of the Arts London to undertake an independent evaluation of the Trust's Sciart funding programme.

Running from 1996 to 2006, Sciart was originally launched to fund "visual arts projects which involved an artist and a scientist in collaboration to research, develop and produce work which explored contemporary biological and medical science". Over the course of a decade its remit shifted and expanded to embrace a wider spectrum of arts and science activity. In total, Sciart supported 118 projects with nearly £3 million of funding to:

- stimulate interest and excitement in biomedical science among adults
- foster interdisciplinary and collaborative creative practice in the arts and science
- create a critical mass of artists looking at biomedical science and build capacity in this field.

Sciart was believed, anecdotally, to have supported the development of a unique community of arts practitioners, a new form of interdisciplinary practice and a body of contemporary artistic work relating to science, and to have had a significant influence on the public's engagement with science. The Sciart evaluation was commissioned to investigate, document and summarise the outcomes of the scheme and to seek evidence of its impacts.

The evaluation process included desk and archival research, primary data collected through 46 in-depth interviews and survey techniques, project and audience case studies, an audience exit survey and focus groups. In addition to a written report, a limited distribution DVD giving an overview of ten Sciart case study projects was produced. The report was launched at a conference, Evaluating Sciart, held at the Wellcome Trust on 5 June 2008.

A summary of the key findings is organised here around a series of types of 'capital'¹ for which evidence was found through an analysis of the scheme's ten years of grant giving.

Cultural capital

Whether it was a matter of timing or incentive, during the decade of Sciart there was a cultural shift, especially within the arts, towards more interdisciplinary practice. The burgeoning academic research culture of the visual arts in particular benefited from having Sciart as a context within which artists could develop projects. Through the contacts that it encouraged and enabled with the world of science, Sciart also helped to facilitate a tendency that was perceived to be taking place within the arts towards a more explicit 'social engagement'. The Sciart programme had enabled sometimes forgotten connections between the 'two cultures'² (art and science) to be recognised and accentuated. Both Sciart and the Wellcome Trust were seen as powerful and well-recognised brands. Partly as a result of this, individual Sciart projects were often very successful in attracting media coverage and wide exposure. However, there was a feeling that the potential overall for media coverage and cultural shift had not been fully exploited, particularly where projects that had received higher value awards were concerned.

Educational capital

The presentation of the outputs of Sciart projects, through events such as exhibitions, had had considerable educational value for their audiences. The presentations tended to be informative in themselves, often introducing new subject matter and ideas, but they also often involved a more formal educational component. There was a widespread view that artists' communicative abilities had helped to demystify and make more intelligible aspects of contemporary science. A high proportion of both artists and scientists had participated in educational activities associated with their Sciart-funded projects and the scheme had had a positive impact on perceptions of both artists and scientists as communicators and as educators. In this sense the 'two cultures' were shown to have the potential to coexist in a fruitful symbiotic relationship. Interestingly, the participating artists and scientists learnt much about one another's disciplines from their collaborations, but appeared generally not to have gained a high level of new insight into their own.

Innovative capital

As well as fostering innovative outputs, Sciart grants had resulted in the emergence of new processes of working, particularly in terms of artists' practice, and innovation of process was often felt to be as important as the resulting products. The smaller Sciart R&D grants, in particular, had succeeded in fostering experimentation and innovation. The flexible and non-prescriptive conditions associated with the administration of Sciart were valued as having directly contributed to greater levels of risk-taking and thus to innovation, and a perceived 'permission to fail' was seen as a strength of the Sciart scheme. A minority of interviewees felt, however, that the freedom to take risks had perhaps declined in Sciart's later years. It was suggested that artists were more likely to be innovative and to take risks than scientists, but that some scientists had become more open to risk-taking through their association with artists. A small minority of interviewees commented that while innovations had emerged from projects, these had often not been fully capitalised upon and, with further investment, could have led on to the development of products or processes with a wider application. The 'knowledge transfer' implied in this critique was not, however, an explicit aim or intention of the Sciart scheme.

¹ The sense in which 'capital' is intended here draws on the work of sociologist and cultural analyst Pierre Bourdieu. For Bourdieu, capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange, and the term is extended "to all the goods material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation". Harker P. Education and cultural capital. In R Harker, C Mahar, C Wilkes (eds), *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu: The practice of theory*. London: Macmillan Press; 1990. p. 13.

² *The Two Cultures* was an influential Rede Lecture given in May 1959 by the novelist C P Snow, who was also a trained scientist. Snow argued that the 'two cultures' of modern society – the sciences and the humanities – were experiencing a breakdown in communications that was a hindrance to solving many of the problems facing the world. The lecture was subsequently published as *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, and continues to be an important point of reference in discussions of the relationship between the arts and the sciences. It was referred to on a number of occasions during the Sciart evaluation interviews.

Economic capital

The amount of money available through Sciart to support individual arts projects was seen by artists and arts promoters as quite substantial, and the scale of the funding offered (as compared with other arts grants schemes) had immediately encouraged a high volume of project submissions. The existence of Sciart funding had undoubtedly had a significant influence on the genesis and/or the development of many projects. Often Sciart R&D Awards had acted as seed funding, enabling the projects to develop to a point where other funders had been encouraged to invest in their continuance. The high value of Sciart Production Awards had enabled a greater than usual scale of ambition to be considered and realised by artists and arts producers, and had helped to militate against a sense of financial disparity that was perceived to exist between the arts and the sciences. Artists' career opportunities were often enhanced through participation in Sciart projects. However, there was also a strong sense that artists were often not adequately remunerated for their input into projects.

Aesthetic capital

High-quality aesthetic outcomes were found to have resulted from a significant proportion of the projects funded by the Sciart scheme. A review of the artistic outcomes of ten case study projects evidenced widespread dissemination to sizeable audiences, an unusual longevity of audience and professional interest, and positive media and critical review. The venues for display – which might be artistic, scientific, medical and/or historical – inevitably influenced the 'aesthetic' reception of the work. A significant minority of respondents (particularly from the arts sector) expressed concern about the instrumentalisation of the arts in the service of biomedical science, which the Trust was felt to have contributed to. Some artists were concerned that funding the arts for reasons that were not principally to do with the arts could have a detrimental impact on the general development of arts practice. Several interviewees referred to instances of what they described as 'inauthentic' arts projects that they felt had resulted from artists chasing Sciart funding.

Scientific capital

The communication of scientific research and ideas, and of general messages about the scientific profession, was felt to have been achieved by a significant number of Sciart-funded projects. It was not generally felt, however, that Sciart projects had contributed to a shift or development in scientific processes or outcomes. Sciart had helped to more closely connect the cultures of art and science, though this connection was perceived to have had greater benefits for the arts than for science. Scientists often commented that their involvement in Sciart projects had helped to generate a more reflexive awareness of the wider context for their work. A number of scientists also testified that their involvement with artists had encouraged them to adopt a more speculative approach to their research and as a result of participating in Sciart projects some scientists felt that they were more prepared to take risks. Working alongside the arts had helped to make science more accessible to the public, and had thus improved scientific communication. It was suggested that artists had, in some cases, helped to improve a perceived 'image problem' ascribed to scientists and to the scientific profession.

Ethical capital

Artists working on Sciart projects were felt to have acted as a proxy for the public, opening up scientific practices to a wider gaze. By bringing into the public domain new perspectives on the work that was being conducted in laboratories and other places of science, it was suggested that artists were, in effect, acting as the 'public's representative'. A significant aspect of the artists' contribution to 'public engagement with science' was thus as independent scrutinisers – asking questions and provoking insights that might not otherwise be possible, either from the perspective of the general public or from within the scientific community itself.

Catalytic capital

There was a strong perception that Sciart had helped to remove the barriers to cross-disciplinary collaboration and had made it easier for more arts–science collaborations to happen in the future. This was partly because of the legacy of example that it had given rise to. There were reputational benefits both to artists and to scientists from having their activities funded by the Wellcome Trust. There was also clear evidence of Sciart being a catalyst for ongoing collaborations and innovations. Many of the new collaborations that had emerged during Sciart's lifespan had been sustained well beyond the initial period of funding. It was clear that Sciart funding had incentivised a significant number of artists to orient their practice towards the sciences, perhaps for the first time. This was a mixed blessing as it was felt to have encouraged 'inauthentic' proposals from some artists. As well as fostering and incubating new collaborations between artists and scientists, Sciart funding had been the catalyst for many other new relationships to develop: with arts promoters and arts venues, with colleagues and peers, and with public and professional audiences.

Personal capital

A number of personal gains were reported. A significant minority of the science interviewees reported that working with an artist had enabled them to rediscover a creative dimension that had, to some degree, been 'sacrificed' because of the professional protocols and conventions that were involved in being a scientist. Some of the scientists said that their participation in a Sciart project had represented a significant milestone that had had profound and positive effects on either their career development or their personal and professional sense of self. In some cases, scientists had become active collaborators in the artistic process, which had led to a personal sense of achievement. Artists had felt stimulated and challenged by the opportunity to work with scientists and within scientific contexts, and had often emerged from Sciart projects feeling more confident about their professional capabilities and standing.

Social capital

Many of those questioned felt that the lure of Sciart funding had provided a positive incentive and stimulus for artists to enter into exploratory discussions and more focused negotiations with scientists. Many of the professional and social relationships that began as science and art collaborations had continued after the Sciart funding had stopped. The Sciart scheme itself and the discursive events organised around it had provided a valuable meeting point, felt previously to have been lacking, around which a community of people with an interest in the science and art field were able to come together. A number of Sciart

projects had provided opportunities for medical researchers and healthcare professionals to meet and converse with patients and representatives of patients' groups, which had led to new opportunities for mutual understanding.

Negative loss capital

It was clear from the case study interviews that virtually all of the projects in receipt of Sciart funding would have either struggled to proceed at all without Sciart support or been severely restricted in what they were able to deliver. Undoubtedly, an enormous capacity for generating new artwork and for fostering interdisciplinary collaboration would have been lost had the Sciart scheme not occurred. The evaluation showed that considerable innovations, new explorative processes and methods of working, and interesting outcomes had occurred that had attracted high levels of public and media interest. Many of these would not have been possible without some dedicated funding to sow the seeds of research and collaboration. While many people felt that, in its original guise, Sciart had served its purpose and had been appropriately wound down, there was felt still to be a vital need for an innovative and flexible funding scheme that would support artists and scientists to work together.

In summary, Sciart had generated a strong brand name and had enabled innovative, creative practice to flourish, often with high-quality outcomes. While some respondents pointed to areas where improvements could be made, the overall findings suggest that Sciart was an influential grants scheme that had achieved high-level impacts. It was generally agreed that those impacts were more pronounced in and on the field of the arts than the sciences.

Recommendations

In response to these findings, recommendations in five key areas have been identified and summarised. Below each set of recommendations is the Wellcome Trust's response to this guidance.

1. Budgets and finances

- The Trust should continue to support artists to work with scientists, scientific contexts and subjects.
- The Trust should continue to provide guidelines regarding rates of pay for artists, which should be promoted and adhered to.
- The Trust should continue to support lower-value grants to encourage early-stage speculative projects and emergent practitioners to enter the science-art field.
- The grants administration process should remain open and flexible to allow for innovation and risk-taking.
- Coordination between funding bodies could increase overall impact.

Wellcome Trust response

Building on the strengths of Sciart and continuing our investment in this area, we launched the Arts Awards in 2007 to fund arts projects that investigate biomedical science through collaborations with the scientific world. Since then, we have

funded over 100 projects to a value of £3 million. In addition, with the opening of Wellcome Collection, a public exhibition and event space that explores medicine, life and art, we have strengthened our commitment to exploring the cross-disciplinary nature of the world of medicine and how science impacts on people's lives.

The Arts Awards scheme continues to fund early-stage projects through its smaller grants as well as production-based applications. Projects can apply for research and development funds to support the establishment of interdisciplinary collaborations and the development of experimental work. In fact, the criteria of the Arts Awards have been broadened to ensure that we encourage a range of innovative methods and new models of practice.

The programme was developed over a period of time in consultation with other funders in the area of arts and science, to ensure that our funding strategy supports complementary areas of artistic practice. We also aim to maintain and strengthen our links with other funding bodies to ensure that our work continues to be relevant and innovative. Many of our projects are part-funded with other organisations and where partnerships are appropriate we will work together to maximise impact.

In terms of fees, we continue to provide guidelines for this. Our committees are sensitive to this issue in their discussion of budget proposals.

2. Presentation, performance and public engagement

- A discretionary contingency fund could be used to extend the reach of projects that had proved their success.
- The Trust should consider how it can generate more awareness of, in particular, its higher-value awards, perhaps through an annual awards event or ceremony.
- Sciart is better known through a few isolated individual projects, rather than as a concerted body of work. The Trust should develop selected case studies to raise public and professional awareness of outcomes achieved by a wider range of Sciart-funded projects.
- Potentially receptive audience groups have not yet been introduced to Sciart-funded work. Such groups should be researched and strategies developed to encourage their attendance and participation.

Wellcome Trust response

The Arts Awards and other public engagement schemes now have extension funding available to grantholders that can be used to extend and maximise the impact of awarded projects. We are also investigating and piloting new initiatives for showcasing and extending successful projects. For example, between November 2009 and June 2010, a season of events around the theme of 'Identity' are being held across the country to complement Wellcome Collection's exhibition and events programme on the same subject. This season is made up of projects we have funded on this theme and aims to extend the impact of these projects and help them to reach new audiences.

Our website also features selected projects as case studies in its 'Achievements and impact' section. We hope to expand on the number of case studies published and will feature the studies from this evaluation on the website with this report. The redeveloped Wellcome Collection website includes examples of

grant-funded activity that relate to the venue's themes in order to engage new online audiences.

3. Project management and quality monitoring

- The project managers of future science–arts schemes should capitalise on their knowledge of this niche field to play a proactive advisory role, where appropriate, in the development of projects.
- The project manager should coordinate and fund events that help to bring potentially interested participants and partners together.
- Project administration procedures should ensure that the monitoring and reporting requirements for lower-value grants are as light-touch as possible.
- Peer-review assessors of proposals should continue to be periodically rotated, or replaced, to ensure that the decision-making process does not stagnate.
- Quality-monitoring guidelines that encourage reflection on both process and outcomes should be developed for use by project partners.

Wellcome Trust response

In recent years, we have encouraged our funding teams to take an increasingly proactive 'grant-making' approach to our programmes both prior to application and after awards have been made.

Scheme advisers not only support applicants during the pre-application stage but also coordinate events and networks to encourage people interested in this area to collaborate, such as application workshops, grantholder days and themed seminar days. For example, our Creative Encounters project developed a number of events and resources for people working with young people on arts and science projects, which are now showcased on our website and through the Science Learning Centres portal.

All projects are assigned a project monitor from the start, whose role it is to advise the partners through the project. The emphasis of this role is on guidance and support rather than intensive monitoring. Projects are required to submit a brief interim report and a comprehensive final report, which should detail the process undertaken and reflect on what worked and what could be improved. We also provide evaluation guidelines at application stage to help applicants plan how they will reflect on and evaluate the success of their project.

The Arts Awards scheme has a large and continually growing pool of reviewers who are experts in their fields. In addition, we research and contact new assessors where an application warrants it. Our committees are carefully selected and updated on an annual basis. We often use existing grantholders to review applications who have additional knowledge of the intricacies of making an arts and science project successful.

4. Partnership and collaboration

- Targeted dissemination to scientists and to scientific institutions of information exemplifying the benefits of working with artists should be considered.

- Targeted dissemination to scientists of information exemplifying the outcomes and processes involved in successful science–arts projects should be considered.
- Care should be taken at the proposal assessment stage to ensure that the principal project participants have the appropriate level of ownership of the project and have been involved in its planning.
- The Trust should play a more direct role in brokering partnerships.
- Previous grantholders could be assigned to inexperienced or higher-risk projects as mentors or 'critical friends'.
- As well as encouraging collaboration between individual artists and scientists, the Trust should continue to support artists to work with scientific institutions, or subject matter. A liberal interpretation should be applied to the concept 'biomedical science'.

Wellcome Trust response

We have a strong support network for our funded scientists through our Researcher Support programme, which provides training and professional development for scientists interested in taking part in public engagement activities. The support team can also help artists to find scientists working in a relevant area to their project. Arts Awards advisers in collaboration with the support team are currently investigating new approaches to encouraging scientists to become involved in arts projects, in addition to running existing events and brokering activities. We also hold grantholder events each year to help to develop an arts and science community whose members can support each other and help to develop new working relationships.

Genuine collaborative partnerships are part of the criteria by which applications are assessed. We request that all collaborators formally express their involvement in the project at application stage. The decision-making committee may also request that a mentor be assigned to the project if it is felt to be beneficial to the project.

5. Risk-taking and innovation

- The Trust should continue to encourage speculative R&D-type proposals, where applicants are not required to pre-define their project outcomes.
- Learning materials based on innovative Sciart projects should be developed for dissemination to training academies for artists and scientists.

Wellcome Trust response

The Arts Awards continue to provide support for R&D proposals to encourage new collaborations, experimentation and the development of new ideas.

As mentioned above, we hope to expand on developmental activities and resources that will support participants in developing new arts and science projects.

