

AUDIENCE BUILDING ACTIVITIES FOR PERFORMING ARTS

Executive Summary

1. Under “Programme 4: Performing Arts” of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD)’s Controlling Officer’s Report, the LCSD aims to promote performing and film arts through audience building, venue management and presenting programmes. The six LCSD units responsible for the work are five offices/sections (i.e. Audience Building Office, Urban Venues Section, New Territories Venues Section, Cultural Presentations Section and Festivals Office) grouped under the Performing Arts Division (for all forms of performing arts including music activities), and the Music Office grouped under the Libraries and Development Division (for music activities only). Audience building is a crucial part of the work, aiming to promote appreciation of performing arts among the general public. Audience building activities include exhibitions, lectures, workshops, training courses and performances. In 2015-16, the six LCSD units organised some 4,700 audience building activities, with some one million participants. The direct costs of organising audience building activities for the Audience Building Office and the Music Office totalled \$87 million in 2015-16, while such costs could not be separated from the overall operation costs of the other four LCSD units. The Audit Commission (Audit) has recently conducted a review of the LCSD’s audience building activities for performing arts.

Planning of audience building activities

2. *Scope for improving planning of audience building activities.* The LCSD receives submissions of programme proposals by arts groups and other parties. The relevant LCSD units assess these proposals to select suitable ones (including audience building activities) to be included in their annual programme plans. Since January 2007, a Programme and Development Committee, comprising a non-official chairperson, an ex-officio member and 11 non-official members and supported by six panels of experts on different art forms, has been established to advise the LCSD on performing arts programme presentation strategies and annual programme plans including audience building. Audit noted that: (a) the LCSD’s annual overall programme plan on performing arts had incorporated only the

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activities of the five offices/sections under the Performing Arts Division but not the Music Office under the Libraries and Development Division; (b) while a Programme and Development Committee had been established to advise the LCSD on strategies for audience building, the Music Office, Urban Venues Section and New Territories Venues Section had not sought advice from the Committee in preparing their annual programme plans; and (c) the LCSD had not compiled management information regularly for audience building activities organised for each key art form and participants' feedback (paras. 1.7, 1.8, 2.3 to 2.8 and 2.11).

Audience building activities of the Audience Building Office

3. *Inadequacies in counting number of participants.* The Audience Building Office organises audience building activities at community and school levels in cooperation with arts groups and educational institutions. In 2015-16, it organised 1,008 audience building activities at a cost (staff costs and direct expenditures) of \$26.9 million. Of the 563 activities under its community schemes, 39% (222 activities) were conducted at LCSD venues. The arts groups commissioned to conduct the activities reported a total of some 155,000 participants. Many activities were free and conducted in public areas or venues open to the public. Many participants appeared to be just passing by or only stayed at the activities briefly. The LCSD had not issued guidelines on counting the number of participants. It also had not reviewed the head count methodology adopted by arts groups. Audit case studies showed that the arts groups concerned might not have counted the number of participants properly (paras. 3.2 to 3.7 and 3.10).

4. *Decrease in number of participants in school schemes.* In 2015-16, some 63,000 students participated in the audience building activities organised by the Audience Building Office under its school schemes, down 37% from 99,506 in 2011-12. Audit noted that the number of schools participating in the schemes were down 21% from 801 to 634 during the period. Reasons for schools not participating in the schemes included inconvenient event times. As at July 2016, of the 1,139 primary, secondary and special schools in Hong Kong, 93 (8%) schools had never participated in the schemes (paras. 3.15 to 3.18).

Audience building activities of the Music Office

5. The Music Office was established by the Government in 1977. In 1995, it was transferred to the former Municipal Councils. In 2000, upon dissolution of the Councils, it came under the LCSD's management, pending transfer to the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts as recommended by a consultancy study in 1999. In August 2015, the Government decided that the Music Office should continue to be managed under the LCSD as a long-term arrangement. Since its establishment in 1977, the objective of the Music Office has been to promote knowledge and appreciation of music in the community (paras. 4.2 to 4.5, 4.9 and 4.11).

6. *Need to evaluate cost-effectiveness.* The Music Office takes a three-pronged approach to audience building. Its extensive music training schemes (for young people aged 6 to 23) and outreach music interest courses (for people of all ages) actively train people to play and understand music while its other music activities (such as exhibitions and concerts) attract and provide opportunities for people to appreciate music. In 2015-16, the music training schemes incurred the highest cost of \$37.5 million (representing 62% of the Music Office's total cost of \$60.5 million). Because training under the music training schemes is provided on a yearly basis involving many training sessions (e.g. around 39 one-hour sessions for a trainee who received instrumental training), the music training schemes costed \$5,981 per person reached, compared to \$1,334 per person for the short-term outreach music interest courses and \$116 per person for other music activities. The Music Office's training and music activities were delivered by the Music Officer grade staff. However, Audit noted that the Music Officer grade staff had used only 36% of their work hours for delivering music training courses and other music activities, and 64% for administrative and other duties. On the other hand, the Music Office had increased the hiring of part-time instructors to deliver music training to augment music skills not available in the Music Office. Many training classes of the Music Office had a very small class size (e.g. only 1 trainee) compared with the specified standard class size (e.g. 5 to 10 trainees). This had also contributed to the higher cost of the training and audience building activities of the Music Office (paras. 4.13 to 4.15, 4.20 to 4.23, 4.25 and 4.26).

7. *Under-utilisation of music centres.* The Music Office had five music centres located at different districts, with sizes ranging from 643 to 1,916 square metres. Key training facilities of the music centres included a total of 40 training rooms and 5 rehearsal rooms. Audit estimated that the number of training sessions delivered each year under the Music Office's music training schemes and outreach

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music interest courses was equivalent to only 29% of the capacity of the 45 training facilities. For example, the training facilities in November 2015 were almost unused (utilisation rate of 3%) on weekdays before 4 p.m. and around 70% utilised after 4 p.m. and at weekends. As many arts groups were unable to secure venues for staging audience building activities, there might be scope for using these training facilities (paras. 3.9, 3.10 and 4.38 to 4.40).

8. ***Way forward for the Music Office.*** The LCSD did not have an overarching annual programme plan for promoting appreciation of performing arts (see para. 2(a) above). While the extensive music training schemes organised by the Music Office could be complementary to the other audience building activities of the LCSD, they were unique within the LCSD. With the Government's decision in August 2015 to continue to manage the Music Office under the LCSD as a long-term arrangement, the LCSD needs to determine the way forward for the Music Office in relation to other performing arts activities of the LCSD (paras. 4.9 and 4.46).

Audience building activities of Urban and New Territories Venues Sections

9. ***Decrease in number of participants.*** The Urban Venues Section and the New Territories Venues Section each manage seven performing arts venues. In addition, the two Sections organise free audience building activities, including performances at foyers and piazzas, and other venue activities (e.g. guided tours), and provide free use of venues to arts groups for organising audience building activities. While foyer and piazza activities had attracted the largest number of participants per activity, the LCSD had reduced the number of such activities considerably from 139 in 2014-15 to 78 in 2015-16 because of the need to prioritise its budgets. This resulted in an 18% drop in the total number of participants in the audience building activities of the two venues sections, from 399,000 in 2014-15 to 326,000 in 2015-16. Audit case study indicated that, when collaborating with non-governmental organisations and private sector partners, organising foyer and piazza activities attracted interested audience and did not always incur additional costs (paras. 5.2 and 5.5 to 5.8).

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10. ***Scope for using minor facilities for audience building activities.*** The 14 LCSD performing arts venues have a total of 72 minor facilities (e.g. rehearsal rooms), with a total seating capacity of 5,400 people. During 2011-12 to 2015-16, the utilisation of these minor facilities in urban venues were between 37% and 42%, and the utilisation of the New Territories venues were between 61% and 63%. As many arts groups were unable to secure venues for staging audience building activities, there might be scope for using these minor facilities (paras. 3.9, 3.10 and 5.11 to 5.13).

11. ***Opportunities in building audience through Venue Partnership Scheme.*** The Venue Partnership Scheme was implemented by the LCSD at most of its performing arts venues and aims to foster a partnership between the performing arts venues and performing arts groups with the objectives of enhancing the artistic image and character of the venue and its partner, enlarging the audience base, optimising usage of facilities, developing venue-based marketing strategies, facilitating arts sponsorship, and encouraging community involvement. Under the Venue Partnership Scheme, arts groups may apply for the priority use of performing arts venues of the LCSD. Audit found that: (a) 2 of the 14 LCSD performing arts venues had not been open for partnership application; and (b) the LCSD had not taken action to recruit partners for 2 other venues to replace those who had withdrawn (paras. 5.16, 5.17 and 5.21).

Audit recommendations

12. **Audit recommendations are made in the respective sections of this Audit Report. Only the key ones are highlighted in this Executive Summary. Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services should:**

Planning of audience building activities

- (a) **make good use of the expertise of the Programme and Development Committee in preparing annual programme plans of the Music Office and the Urban and New Territories Venues Sections (para. 2.12(a));**
- (b) **prepare an overarching annual programme plan on performing arts covering all relevant offices/sections (para. 2.12(b));**

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- (c) compile management information on audience building activities organised for each key art form and on participants' feedback on the activities regularly (para. 2.12(c) and (d));

Audience building activities of the Audience Building Office

- (d) provide arts groups clear guidelines on counting the number of participants in audience building activities under community schemes, and ensure compliance with the guidelines (para. 3.13(a));
- (e) explore ways to help arts groups in securing venues for audience building activities under community schemes, including assigning more LCSD venues for their use (para. 3.13(c));
- (f) review the adequacy of the school schemes in catering for the needs of schools and students, and take measures to improve the participation of schools and students in school schemes (para. 3.20);

Audience building activities of the Music Office

- (g) in formulating long-term strategies and plans for the Music Office, review the allocation of resources to different types of activities to ensure that its objective is achieved cost-effectively (para. 4.28(a));
- (h) review the skill mix and the actual duties performed by the Music Officer grade staff, and consider rationalising/enhancing the Music Office workforce as appropriate (para. 4.28(b) and (c));
- (i) consider setting minimum class sizes for the Music Office's training courses, and establishing a mechanism for consolidating/cancelling classes falling short of minimum sizes (para. 4.28(d));
- (j) take measures to improve the utilisation of the five music centres of the Music Office (e.g. using them for audience building activities of other LCSD units) (para. 4.42(b));
- (k) review the role of the Music Office in relation to other LCSD performing arts promotion activities, with a view to better aligning the work of the Music Office with that of the LCSD and attaining synergy in promoting appreciation of performing arts more cost-effectively (para. 4.50(a));

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Audience building activities of Urban and New Territories Venues Sections

- (l) review the impact of reducing foyer and piazza activities on audience building, and explore areas where the cost-effectiveness of foyer and piazza activities could be further improved (para. 5.9);
- (m) explore measures to improve the utilisation of minor facilities of performing arts venues, including assigning suitable facilities for use in audience building activities (para. 5.14); and
- (n) take measures to improve the implementation of the Venue Partnership Scheme (para. 5.22).

Response from the Government

13. The Director of Leisure and Cultural Services generally accepts the audit recommendations.