

Audience building activities for performing arts

The Audit Commission ("Audit") conducted a review of the audience building activities conducted by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department ("LCSD") for performing arts.

2. As part of its profile, LCSD aims to promote performing arts through audience building, venue management and presenting programmes. Organizing audience building activities (e.g. exhibitions, lectures, workshops, training courses and performances) to promote appreciation of performing arts is a crucial part of the work. Six LCSD units are responsible for the work, i.e. Audience Building Office ("ABO"), 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 and music activities), and the Music Office ("MO") grouped under the Libraries and Development Division (for music activities only). In 2015-2016, the six LCSD units organized some 4 700 audience building activities with some one million participants. The direct costs of organizing audience building activities for ABO and MO were \$87 million, but such costs could not be separated from the overall operation costs of other four LCSD units.

3. The Committee noted the following findings from the Director of Audit's Report:

- LCSD had not prepared an overarching annual programme plan on performing arts. Management information on audience building activities organized for each key art form was not being compiled;
- in 2015-2016, ABO commissioned arts groups to conduct 563 audience building activities under its community schemes, and the arts groups reported a total of some 155 000 participants. However, Audit found cases in which the number of participants might not have been counted properly, and LCSD had not issued guidelines on counting the number of participants nor reviewed the head count methodology adopted by arts groups. Many activities were free of charge and conducted in public areas or venues open to the public, and many participants were just passing by or stayed at the activities briefly;
- in 2015-2016, only 222 of 563 audience building activities under community schemes were conducted at LCSD venues as LCSD generally would not offer its venues for conducting activities of the community schemes;

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- in 2015-2016, MO's music training schemes had the highest cost of \$5,981 per person reached,¹ compared to \$1,334 per person for its short-term outreach music interest courses and \$116 per person for its other music activities;
- Music Officer grade staff had used only 36% of their work hours for delivering music training courses and activities, and 64% for administrative and other duties. On the other hand, MO had increased the hiring of part-time instructors to deliver music training to augment music skills not available in MO;
- Audit analyzed the sizes of 609 music training classes organized by MO in 2015-2016, and found that 67 classes (11%) had a very small class size (ranging from one to four trainee(s)) compared with the specified standard class size (mostly ranging from 5 to 10 trainees);
- from 2013-2014 to 2015-2016, MO delivered about 43 000 training sessions under music training schemes and outreach music interest courses per year, which was equivalent to only 29% of the capacity of its 45 training facilities in music centres;²
- Audit found out that in November 2015, 45 MO training facilities were almost unused on weekdays before 4 pm, and their utilization on weekdays after 4 pm and at weekends was only 70%. However, it was not MO's practice to promote the use of training facilities for purposes other than delivering training classes under music training schemes and outreach music interest courses;
- in 2015-2016, LCSD had reduced the number of audience building activities at foyers/piazas of LCSD performing arts venues by 44% because of budget prioritization, New Territories performing venues even stopped organizing such activities in 2016. However, Audit noted that, when collaborating with non-governmental organizations and private sector partners, organizing such activities attracted interested audience and did not always incur additional costs;

¹ For the music training schemes, the cost per person reached represented the annual cost of services provided for training one trainee, which involved the provision of many training sessions (e.g. around 39 one-hour sessions for a trainee who received instrumental training).

² The music centres opened 63.5 hours per week (i.e. from 9:30 am to 8 pm on weekdays and from 9 am to 6 pm during weekends, with a one-hour lunch break). For the 45 training facilities of the music centres (i.e. 40 training rooms and 5 rehearsal rooms), the total annual capacity was 148 590 sessions (i.e. 63.5 × 52 × 45).

- during 2011-2012 to 2015-2016, the utilization rates of minor facilities (e.g. function rooms, rehearsal rooms, practice rooms and studios) in LCSD performing arts venues were only between 47% and 52%;³ and
- although LCSD's Venue Partnership Scheme for performing arts groups helped audience building, 2 of 14 LCSD venues had not been open for partnership application as at June 2016. LCSD also had not taken actions to recruit partners for two other venues to replace those who had withdrawn from the Venue Partnership Scheme in April 2016.

4. The Committee did not hold any public hearing on this subject. Instead, it asked for written responses regarding the way forward for MO, the utilization of MO staff resources in delivering training and music activities, and measures to improve the utilization rates of LCSD performing arts venues and MO training facilities. The replies from **Director of Leisure and Cultural Services** are in *Appendix 42*.

5. The Committee wishes to be kept informed of the progress made in implementing the various recommendations made by Audit.

³ As at June 2016, there were 72 minor facilities in 14 LCSD performing arts venues.