


Ballot Paper

a.n

Vote for the visual arts	

Introduction

The General Election on 12th December is a chance to highlight some of the issues facing members today and make the case for supporting visual artists. Working with you and Artists Council we are continuing to develop our advocacy strategy for the next five years.

We have developed this brief toolkit to help you make the most of the opportunity that the election presents for building greater political and public understanding of the issues we now face.

It sets out some key messages, ideas for communicating those messages and a sample letter/script for using when communicating with candidates.

Messages

What kind of messages work best?

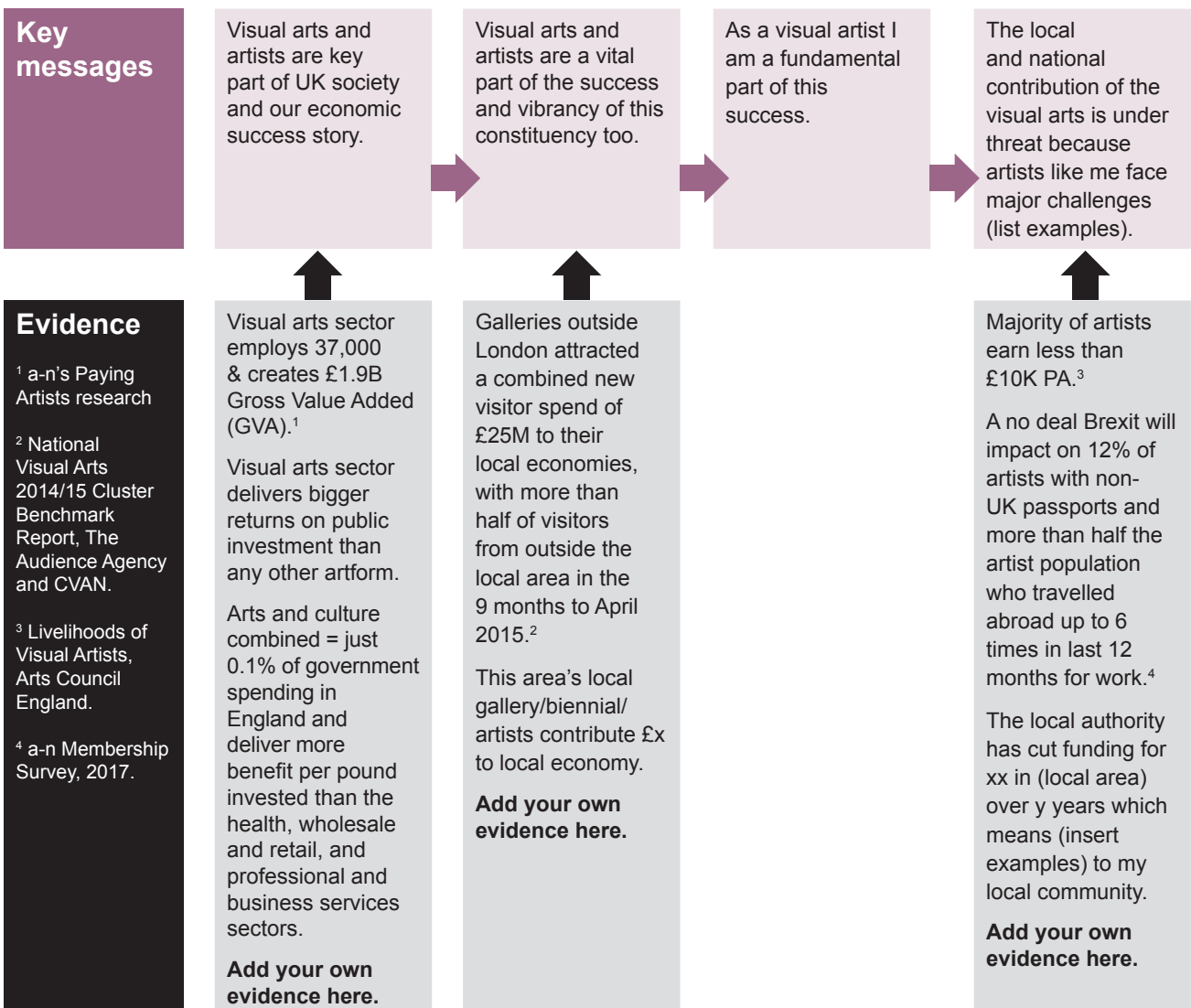
We've identified four key messages which, together, form a simple but strong narrative which makes the case for visual artists by first making the case for visual art itself (see illustration below).

Whatever messages you use, they should be:

Local – candidates will not be interested in issues which are primarily national in outlook or which relate to other constituencies.

Evidence-based – wherever possible use evidence to support your points. The illustration below highlights some sector statistics that you could use but you will need to spend a little time looking for specific local stats eg. visitor and visitor spend stats for local gallery; value of local tourism industry/ cultural sector. If you can't find what you want on local council or gallery websites, check out websites with breakdowns for different regions.

Broad impact – messages will be much more compelling for politicians if you can demonstrate the impact the support/lack of support has on a broader local community rather than the career of an individual artist. If you can't directly connect yourself to a successful local venue/event, you can simply say that you are a key part of the visual arts ecology which supports this success.



General points for getting your messages across:

- Engage influencers on their own terms. This means a small bit of research to identify what their interests/proposed policies/pressure points are – as well as some work to understand as much as you can about the wider context for local artists.
- Use whatever local statistics and information you can get to reinforce your argument. It can be hard getting local statistics at the best of times but constituency boundaries are not necessarily aligned with council boundaries. The trick is to simply find as much as you can eg focus on main council area – or part of it – within the constituency. Having some evidence – even if it just covers part of the area – is better than having no evidence.
- Don't give up – if at first you don't get any response from the people you have contacted, follow up with a phone call – they are busy and may just need prompting. Or try contacting them through social media.

Getting messages across

Check the websites of your local authority and the main political parties for candidate details. Then study the specific manifestos of local candidates (and even speak to them), find out which is most likely to support the issues you are interested in (soft Brexit, increased public spending on arts, championing payment of artists etc).

Write to local candidates

Adapt the letter for candidates in this pack to your local area, making the local case for supporting visual artists as strongly as possible – think about the work you do in schools and in participatory settings and how you benefit a wide range of local people in a wide range of ways. It's worth checking out manifestos for main parties to see what – if anything – they say about the arts/culture.

Organise a local publicity event

a-n members have shown their creativity and energy in the past by staging high profile awareness-raising events (for example, as part of the Paying Artists campaign). Speak to other artists in your local networks about ideas which you could help promote your 'Vote for visual arts' message.

Hit Twitter

Make the most of Twitter and other social media to promote your messages about the national and local value of visual artists, the challenges they face and your thoughts on the candidates most likely to promote your case. Follow the main candidates, join their discussions to promote your messages. Try and create a structured schedule of tweets of your own, drip feeding statistics which support the four key messages.

Look for local hustings events

Some candidates may be hosting or attending hustings events so look out for the opportunity to publicly challenge them on their views and discuss policies which impact on the key issues facing visual artists today.

Send an 'open' letter to local media

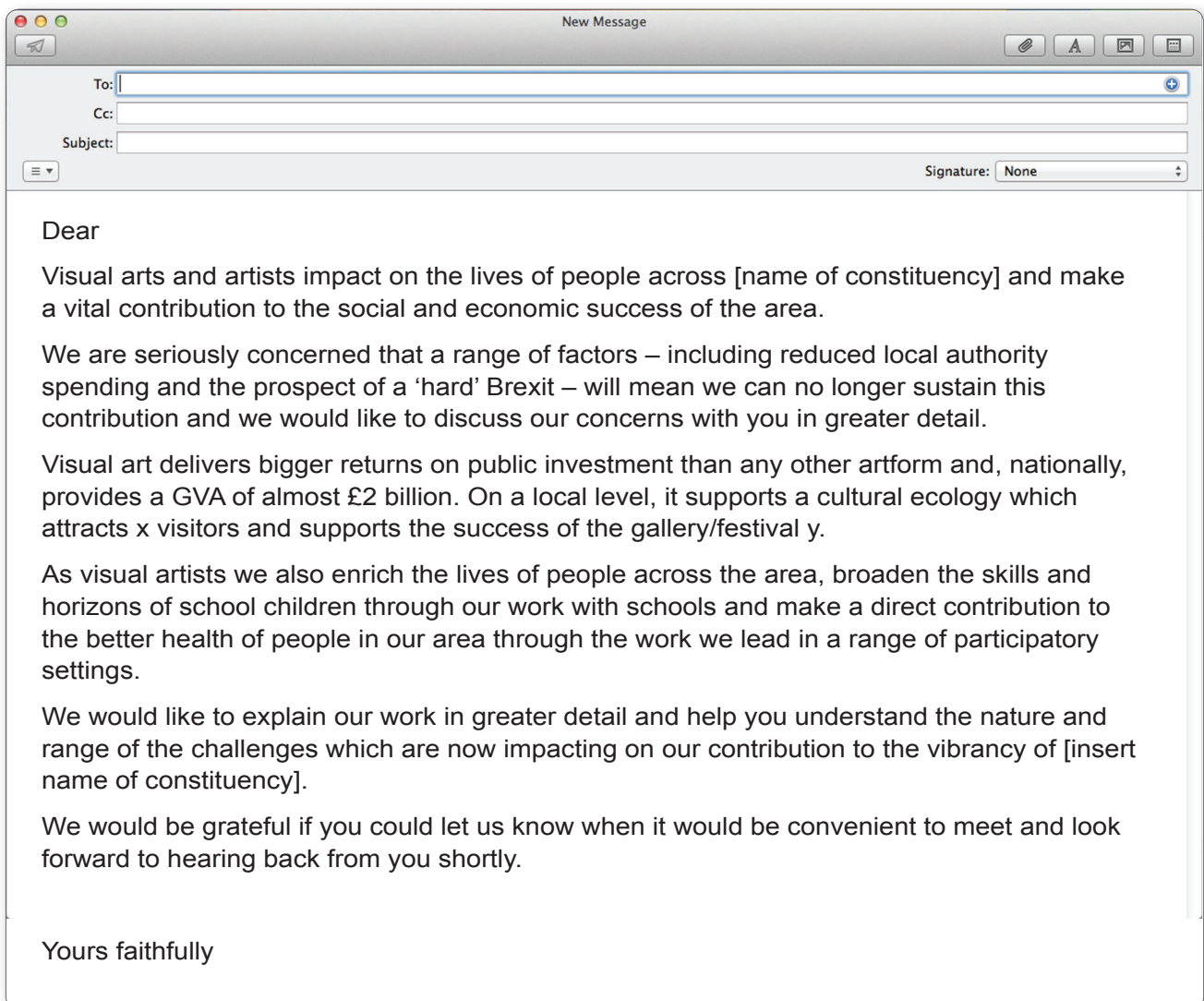
Adapt the draft letter in this pack, get a group of local artists to sign it and send it in to your local newspaper as an open letter to all election candidates. Newspaper websites will give details about how to submit letters to them.

Get a plan

Try and build as many of the above activities as possible into a plan which covers the period up to 12th December – advocacy is an iterative process and you need to find as many different opportunities as you can to get your messages across and make sure they stick!

Sample letter for election candidates

The following letter is simply a one-size-fits-all template. You will make it stronger and more compelling by inserting local statistics and by demonstrating an understanding of the candidate's own manifesto priorities/showing how your own interests can help realise his/her own political ambitions. Finally, where possible send a hard copy of your letter as well as an email version – it makes it harder for candidates to deny receiving it!



The image shows a screenshot of an email client window titled "New Message". The window has a header bar with standard window controls (red, yellow, green buttons) and a toolbar with icons for undo, bold, insert link, and insert image. Below the header, there are fields for "To:", "Cc:", and "Subject:". The "Signature:" field is set to "None". The main body of the email contains the following text:

Dear

Visual arts and artists impact on the lives of people across [name of constituency] and make a vital contribution to the social and economic success of the area.

We are seriously concerned that a range of factors – including reduced local authority spending and the prospect of a 'hard' Brexit – will mean we can no longer sustain this contribution and we would like to discuss our concerns with you in greater detail.

Visual art delivers bigger returns on public investment than any other artform and, nationally, provides a GVA of almost £2 billion. On a local level, it supports a cultural ecology which attracts x visitors and supports the success of the gallery/festival y.

As visual artists we also enrich the lives of people across the area, broaden the skills and horizons of school children through our work with schools and make a direct contribution to the better health of people in our area through the work we lead in a range of participatory settings.

We would like to explain our work in greater detail and help you understand the nature and range of the challenges which are now impacting on our contribution to the vibrancy of [insert name of constituency].

We would be grateful if you could let us know when it would be convenient to meet and look forward to hearing back from you shortly.

Yours faithfully

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