

## Nigel Lynn: in the chair

**Jonathan Ives talks to Nigel Lynn about CLOA's role and his ambitions for his term of office as CLOA chair.**

The Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association has long been established within the sport, leisure and culture sector as the professional body for the most senior of local government officers. As its name implies, CLOA seeks to bring together those with great experience to serve as a cross-cultural body able to operate within a national policy environment. It sees government ministers and senior civil servants, government departments and national agencies as its natural constituency. Membership is open to any individual who might fit the bill as a "senior strategic leader responsible for the delivery of a range of cultural areas". The organisation describes its role as working "with central government and other national organisations to influence the development of national policies, lobby for positive change and provide a peer-support network".

Among those working within the wider leisure sector CLOA has a reputation as an organisation that goes about its business quietly but effectively. Most would acknowledge that while CLOA may not be seen as the most dynamic of institutions it has consistently demonstrated itself to be one of the most influential organisations within the sector. With political change in the wind and a new attitude to public spending already prevalent, the sport, leisure and culture sector is likely to be required to embrace both innovation and entrenchment in the short and medium term. Given this scenario, it seemed appropriate to ask Nigel Lynn, now in the first year of his two-year stint as CLOA's chair, whether CLOA's role had changed.

"The main thing for CLOA is influence," Lynn said. "In our work with partners that's undoubtedly our main role. Second is the support and advice you can get from other members. It is certainly something I found invaluable when I first became an officer looking after more than one area. The whole thing about CLOA is that link with people who oversee other areas of the profession rather than just one. When you get things given to you that you don't necessarily have direct experience of, this link to other people can be invaluable. It has been for me and I'm sure it is for others."

This principle of finding links among peers is a theme of CLOA's approach. The organisation works closely with the Local Government Association, providing expert input to the LGA culture board and more recently assisting with the development of the LGA cultural conference. CLOA also provides the secretariat to the National Culture Forum, the umbrella organisation of professional bodies in the cultural field formed in 2005 at CLOA's instigation, and works closely with the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA). Links with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport are also strong.

"We work with the DCMS and have very close links with Andy Burnham," Lynn said. "He's now moved onto health, which gives us an advantage of having a contact there but that will obviously be subject to the election. We would want to maintain that connection and establish new contacts, either with the current government or the future government next year. We are already in discussion with some shadow ministers to take that forward."

Beyond these organisational partnerships CLOA is also aware of the need to maintain their regular work of consultation and policy development. It is, Lynn explained, an area that repays vigilance: "For example, there wasn't a single person from local government involved in writing the recent public health commissioning report yet it has a massive importance for local authorities in terms of how we promote health and exercise, sport, 2012, etc. The public health board were not realising that wider view of how they need to involve local authorities. We are constantly trying to remind people through CLOA of the importance of our sector."



Nigel Lynn: CLOA chair

**"The basis of CLOA's membership is people who have managed a variety of different services in the cultural sector."**

This, Lynn explained, is one of the fundamental principles of CLOA's policy work: trying to influence the change process as early as possible, often before policy reaches the consultation stage: "That's our main aim and it is something that is very difficult to do in terms of timing but it is something we've been successful with in the past and I want to make sure that continues."

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Lynn recognises that ensuring CLOA is recognised as the organisation that can provide this expertise is a factor: "It is very important that the government and government agencies understand what CLOA is all about and I think in the past they didn't particularly. Although CLOA has been going a long time, I don't think we had a high profile. I think the work Anne Gosse did last year as chair really helped to raise that profile and get us more in the face of ministers and government officers. We need to continue to do that because when an issue comes up, rather than reinventing the wheel or going to the wrong source of information they can talk to a group of people that have that wealth of knowledge and can point them in the right direction."

The other face of CLOA's operational coin is the service it provides to its members. Lynn ran down the list of methods by which CLOA members are able to develop their knowledge and experience: briefing papers, conferences, personal contacts, email networks, fringe meetings, opportunities to share good practice. "People learn from a variety of sources and it is that variety we try to offer as an organisation," he said. "The basis of CLOA's membership is people who have managed a variety of different services in the cultural sector."

Given the machinations of the professional bodies that have traditionally provided education and training services to the cross-cultural sector, how does Lynn assess the state of continuing professional development within the sector? "We feel that CPD is integral to the future of culture," he said. "That's why we've worked with the IDeA on the Passion for Excellence document, which was really about raising the levels of skills to take us forward. It is also there in the training days that we work on with other organisations as well. But it is also about raising the capacity of individuals. The National Culture Forum Leading Learning programme is an example that we realise that we need to improve the capacity and capability of individuals in the sector to make sure that in the future we are driving culture in the right direction and that we are not forgotten as a sector."

Having touched on the issue of other professional bodies and in light of the role that CLOA had been invited to play in the proposed but ultimately ill-fated merger of the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management (ILAM), the Institute of Sport and Recreation Management (ISRM) and the National Association for Sports Development (NASD), it seemed appropriate to ask about the nature of CLOA's relationship with the current incarnations of these two organisations. Are there any formal links? Lynn tripped lightly across what was once very delicate ground.

"Not formal," he said. "The main thing would be through the NCF. They are members and we think there is a role for individual organisations within the sector that have different roles. I was at the ISPAL conference representing CLOA but we feel that CLOA is in a different market, a different area. We're looking at a much wider sector of culture as a whole but I think there is a role for us all."

Is there any sense, whether of relief or regret, within CLOA now that it could have played a different role in that discussion? "We were obviously very close to the situation as it was going on and we were aware of it," Lynn said. "We didn't feel that it was an issue for us, to be honest. It was something that those organisations needed to go through. I had been a member of ILAM previously so I understood where it had come from and where it was going but CLOA is for individuals that have a wide remit in culture as a whole and want to influence things at the highest level. I think it is horses for courses and I don't think we are in competition with one another."

As with all CLOA chairs, Lynn will be in post for two years, which gives him time to formulate a plan and pursue it through to delivery. Items on his 'to do' list at the moment include working with the IDeA on a consultation paper looking at the role of culture and sport in supporting adult social care, the encouragement of culture's links with the health sector via the commissioning process, continuing to develop CLOA's relationship with the LGA and making sure that CLOA's profile remains high.

"That profile is really about the way we work with people," he said, "being

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honest and clear about what we can provide, the timescale we can provide it, almost like a service level agreement, bearing in mind that all the members within CLOA are volunteers.”

He agreed it is a difficult time in which to be asking people to volunteer: “It is and it is very hard to divide your time up. A few of us are lucky enough to be in organisations that can see the benefits of working outside your normal remit because it brings things you learn back into the organisation. I think that is a very forward-thinking way of looking at how you can spare people’s time to be involved in something like CLOA. We have a very active executive which goes right across the board in terms of experience, the organisations they work for, the geography, their levels of ability, the private and the public sector. All in all, that executive is what drives CLOA forward in terms of how we change things for the future.”

Having made a careful note of this message, *The Leisure Review* left Mr Lynn to tackle the jobs in hand.

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