

# \*interactions

creative strategies for business

**Arts Council Consultation Process**

**Meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> Level Training**

**15 April 2005**

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Level Training

Friday 15 April 2005, The Arts Council

Stephanie O'Callaghan welcomed the participants to the meeting on behalf of The Arts Council and outlined the basis for the topic under discussion.

### 1. Question for Discussion

The meeting discussed the following question.

- Is there sufficient capacity within the industry to meet the expectations and needs of graduates from third level colleges?

2. In discussing the question, the following emerged.

#### 2.1 What expectations do students have by the time they leave college?

Those in attendance agreed that 3<sup>rd</sup> level education in the arts is not entirely specialist in orientation but rather provides students with a general broad-based education from which students should emerge equipped for a range of career options.

In general, on leaving college, students have unrealistic expectations regarding their future employment in the arts, believing that employment opportunities will be commensurate with those in other areas of the Irish economy in recent years. This often reflects a narrow and conservative, if outdated, view of education as purely an instrument for employment, rather than citizenship, and is based on model of the individual as consumer rather than the generator of capacity. Students need set expectations for themselves beyond either the academy or the market diktats.

Those in attendance suggested that students' expectations need to be managed while they are in college. There is a role and responsibility for educators in supporting graduates to become 'agents' rather than 'clients'. Notwithstanding this, it is important to note some distinctions and anomalies. For example, creative artists have the ability to MAKE their own opportunities in a way that interpretative artists do not. Interpretative artists (actors, directors) do not necessarily have the ability to act as agents in this way, as their employment/engagement fundamentally depends on others. As the employment opportunities for younger actors and directors is decidedly limited,

graduates find it necessary to set up their own production companies to secure work. For graduates of the performing arts, apprenticeship and mentoring opportunities are critical, as at present, opportunities for emerging performing artists to gain practical experience are limited.

In the specific context of arts administration, there are concerns apropos the proliferation of such courses in the apparent absence of any rigorous market research to support a demand for greater supply of graduates. What interventions should be made to highlight or redress this, and are such interventions appropriate?

## **2.2 Mobility outside Ireland**

There was agreement at the meeting that there is significant benefit for students who travel and gain international experiences during their college life; they get to experience new and alternative work and arts practices and often bring new and experimental approaches back to Ireland. That said, in the current context, international exchanges and travel are seldom prioritised, and consequently undervalued. Reassessing and repositioning this as intrinsic to the pedagogical and artistic development of the student is essential.

## **2.3 Philanthropy & building capacity**

Again referencing the Celtic Tiger, while there has been an increase in personal wealth over the past 10 years, there was agreement at the meeting that this has not been reflected in a concomitant rise in philanthropic activity. There has been little exploration of the possibilities that this might offer, and there is little general expertise to offer education and training in this regard.

There was a shared view that a vision is absent from arts education, and this in many respects mirrors a wider societal disconnect with the arts. This is partly a result of the humble expectations of many people in the arts, and an undervaluing of what the arts are and do. A scale of ambition that presents the arts community as passionate, capable, exciting, ambitious and of high self-worth is needed.

Engagement with culture and in the arts is not regarded as a normative in society, yet the arts need to be understood as a living experience. Education and outreach programmes are ostensibly predicated on notions of social inclusion based on models of socioeconomic deprivation, so they reinforce the notion that the arts are outside the norm and distinct from everyday experience.

The entrepreneurial and risk culture that yielded such wealth to the economy is not reflected in people's attitudes to the arts or their consumption patterns and there is surely an opportunity to encourage causal links to how people behave in this regard in the future.

## **2.4 Role of The Arts Council**

There are a number of things that The Arts Council could do – for example –

- facilitate more discussions between arts education providers, plan strategically and advocate for the value of the arts and culture. Such conversations would allow institutions to look at a longer-term vision for arts education and arts development. The Arts Council, as a national cultural institution, would be key to giving this type of network strength.
- collaborate more with education providers to help them to understand their mission around developing or contributing to society, not just the delivery of vocational training (for example, The Arts Council has not been involved in the UCD reorganisation plan). There is currently an enthusiasm for innovation in education and the timing is opportune for The Arts Council to become involved with education institutions.
- related to this is the need for arts education providers to maintain strong links with current arts practice – by way of illustration, nursing schools are intrinsically aligned with medical practice; The Arts Council could help bridge the link to arts practice.
- research into the career trajectory of arts graduates post-college is needed. While this is primarily the responsibility of the education institutions, The Arts Council could be a catalyst and collaborator in this type of work.
- The Arts Council, in a facilitative role as an honest broker, could support a broad church of interests (artists, arts administrators, educators, etc) to come together as a cultural lobby, with a view to influencing the perception of the intrinsic value of the arts and of the impact that culture has on the social and economic wellbeing of the country.