

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION PAPER

June 2005

Arts in Schools

CONTEXT

The arts are fundamental to the achievement of two central functions of education – nurturing the innate creativity of children and young people and the development of their understanding of themselves and the complexities of the world in which they live.

The Arts Council has been involved in arts-in-education for over twenty-five years. Advocacy has been key to this involvement, both in bringing the arts into schools contexts and towards the development and delivery of a comprehensive arts education curriculum. The Arts Council continues to support the arts within formal education through tailored schemes and awards and, indirectly, through funding to arts organisations for their education and outreach programmes. Since 2002, Council has developed a particular focus on arts-in-schools.

The Arts Council values working in partnership, as a means of achieving common goals. Its work with the Department of Education and Science both elucidates and informs an understanding of areas of common interest and shared responsibilities. The Department of Education and Science carries a statutory responsibility in providing every child with an arts education. Complementary to this, the Arts Council has a role and responsibility in ensuring that this arts education is infused with high artistic and aesthetic standards.

The Arts Council seeks to ensure that the child has the best possible quality engagement with and experience of the arts. Artists and arts organisations are integral to this process, affording the child opportunities for in-depth and diverse experiences of the arts. The Council acknowledges its role in supporting arts partnerships within schools. The introduction of arts curricula into first and second-level schools has brought an increase in the number of artists and arts organisations working with schools. Findings from research highlight the benefits that flow to both the arts and schools communities from arts-in-schools' collaborations.

Council values and supports research that looks at the collaborative practices of arts-in-schools initiatives. Now is an opportune time, as revised and new arts curricula are being introduced to schools, to communicate the findings of this research to those working in the education system, in order to stress the value, and validate, arts-in-schools' work. This exchange of knowledge and learning will facilitate greater 'joined-up-thinking' in policy development and in allocation of resources to arts-in-schools programmes.

The Council recognises the role it has in validating artists' and arts organisations' engagement with schools and is mindful of the importance of making explicit the many different ways in which art is made. The artist takes on a distinctive, many-sided function when working with schools - creator, researcher, inquirer, educator, and facilitator. Artists choosing to work within schools refer to this function as part of, and not separate from, other areas of their arts practice, informing both the development and practice of their artform.

Broader policy developments and external influences that inform the Arts Council's role and responsibility in arts-in-schools contexts include the following:

- The affirmation by the Department of Education and Science of the centrality of the arts within education, particularly during compulsory schooling.
- The policy framework developed by the Education, Community, Outreach Working Group of the Council of National Cultural Institutions, which asserts the institution-wide value of education, community and outreach and the need to integrate this discipline into the ethos of the ten national cultural institutions, including the Arts Council.
- The acknowledgement in the National Children's Strategy that access to and participation in the arts are necessary for child development.
- The recognition, within the international frame of democratic entitlements (UNESCO), of the cultural right of access to and participation in the arts.
- The growing body of national and international research documenting the value of partnerships between artists, arts organisations and schools.
- New arts curricula at first-level and second-level, resulting in more schools seeking help from the arts sector.
- The growth in the number of artists and arts organisations working with schools. In 2003 the Arts Council supported 136 arts organisations with arts-in-schools' programmes, increasing to 153 in 2004. All ten national cultural institutions and most of the local authorities have school programmes.
- The increase in the number of non-arts organisations and government departments engaging artists and arts organisations to work with schools.

Key issues and needs

- There are variable standards in the quality of arts practice in collaborations between arts and school communities. There are a number of reasons underlying this including: the lack of guiding principles and procedural guidelines to support these partnerships; the absence of professional development and training for artists and arts organisations; the lack of equivalent training for teachers; a lack of resources to support high-quality artistic experiences.
- There have been few opportunities for artists and arts organisations to network or interact with others working in this field.
- There is a need for a more co-ordinated approach, at local and national levels between government departments and other agencies, to support arts-in-schools.
- A feasibility study entitled *A National System of Local Music Education Services*, prepared by Music Network, identifies gaps in music education provision in Ireland. It recommends a cost-effective model to service these gaps, based on the co-ordination of local resources supported by a partnership of key players at local and national levels. The Department of Education and Science has already funded three vocational education committees wishing to implement these recommendations and has sought support from the Arts Council in enlarging and expanding upon this investment. There is potential for the model to be the basis for wider provision of arts education across other artform areas.

- There is a clear demand for an information and advice service for artists and teachers working together in schools. The Arts Council is currently the sole provider of such a service.
- There is a rich body of research into and evaluation of arts-in-schools' work. Little has been done to collate and share this intelligence, resulting in endless re-inventing of the wheel and waste of resources. It is essential that the Arts Council articulates clearly the findings from this research – particularly to the Department of Education and Science.
- Research is needed into the impact that 'engagement with schools' has on artists' practice. There is also a dearth of longitudinal research into the impact of the artist and of arts organisations on the artistic and aesthetic development of the child.
- There is a widely held view that artists are undervalued in this area of practice. The Arts Council needs to make more robust, in policy and in practice, its support for artists who engage in collaborative work with schools.
- There is a lack of resources available to the arts community, preventing quality partnerships and engagement with the school community. This is compounded by several factors, among them the following: variable rates of pay; a lack of standardised terms-and-conditions of work and contracts-of-employment; limited opportunities to improve practice and engage in critical reflection.
- While the Arts Council openly advocates for seamlessness between arts and education, where both strands can influence each other and provide for enriching developmental work, in fact education too often tends to be peripheral to the organisation's vision. It is essential that this situation changes.
- The Arts Council must assist in providing a clear career path for education personnel, as professionals in arts organisations.

WHAT MIGHT BE DONE, BY THE ARTS COUNCIL AND OTHERS

- Advocate for the arts in education, targeting key government departments, especially the Department of Education and Science, in collaboration with partners in the arts and education communities. This advocacy role will embrace an active promotion of arts values to politicians, civil servants, parents, tax-payers, aiming to demonstrate that investment in arts-in-education not only enriches the quality of life of the participants but makes good economic sense in helping to forestall at least some social ills.
- Disseminate the fruits of the large and diffuse body of research which is available in this area. Utilise the findings from action-based research and studies into collaborative work involving artists, arts organisations and schools. Use this data as a tool to advocate high-quality engagement with the artist, the arts organisation and with artwork in the holistic development of the child both at school and outside. Identify models of best practice in arts-in-schools' practice and promulgate them among the arts and school communities. Share the research findings internally within the Arts Council to inform policy and practice.
- Carry out further research into the impact of arts-in-schools' partnerships on the artist and the child. This will involve collaborating with artists, arts organisations, the Department of Education and Science and the National Council of Cultural Institutions. This kind of collaborative approach is characterised by *Arts Formations*, a research project that the Arts Council, the Irish Museum of Modern Art and the

Abbey Theatre are together engaged in, focusing on the relationship between the artist, the child and the teacher as they make art together in the classroom.

- Establish a partnership to examine the recommendations of the feasibility study, *A National System of Local Music Education Services*. Key partners will include Music Network and the Department of Education and Science.
- Target resources at professional development and training opportunities for artists and key personnel in arts organisations. This will involve dialogue with teacher-training colleges, H.Dip.Ed. programme heads and education centres, to achieve complementarity in approaches to training. Part of this initiative will involve research into a suitable mentoring scheme to enable artists to learn and to acquire skills.
- Establish networks for artists and arts organisations which will enable them to learn from each others' practices, share professional expertise, and gain insights into examples of excellence which can influence their own work.
- Create a funding programme which will enable the arts and education sectors to work collaboratively. This will be based on guidelines currently being developed in *Towards Best Practice*, a project which emerged from discussions between the Arts Council and the Department of Education and Science. The absence of clear guidelines to support quality interaction between arts and school communities was identified in these discussions as an area of common concern that both organisations would address collaboratively.
- Research the feasibility of an information and advice service for those in the arts-in-schools' community.