

PROFILE

The Arts Council acknowledges the rich and diverse ways in which artists and arts organisations interact with different publics within the education arena. Learning is a lifelong process within formal and non-formal educational and other settings. Within this context, the Arts Council seeks to support the arts in education on a continuum from early childhood through to late adulthood.

For over twenty-five years the Arts Council has been supporting artists and arts organisations to work in a variety of education settings, directly through supports for artists and indirectly through the work of arts organisations and local authorities. In addition, the Council fulfils a key role in initiating and supporting areas of work within the ever changing field of practice within arts and education, in particular in the area of research.

In 2002, the Arts Council made a decision to focus on arts in primary and post-primary schools. The rationale for this concentration centers on the role of the school as a fundamental learning site in providing for children and young people's education in the arts during their most formative years. Schools cater for a large school going population in the country representing all socio-economic and culturally diverse backgrounds, and provide opportunities for fruitful partnerships between the child, artist, arts organisation, teacher, parent, school and wider community. School based arts in education partnerships provide opportunities for strategic links between the Arts Council and national policy makers, in particular the Department of Education and Science (DES).

For the purposes of this paper, arts in education practice involves an artist and/or arts organisation, from across the range of art forms and arts practices, collaborating with the child, the teacher, the parent and wider school community in the making, viewing and interpreting of art during the school day. This collaboration generally takes place within the school and/or in an arts venue. This unique process of engagement with the arts has proven effective in stimulating and enriching the child's creative and imaginative self and provides expression for the child's range of intelligences. The artist fulfils a multifaceted role when engaging with educators and children as creator, researcher and facilitator. In this partnership, the artist complements the role of the educator whose primary responsibility is the delivery of the arts curriculum.

The Arts Council recognizes that artists' engagement with schools forms a significant part of contemporary arts practice, providing a fertile context for innovation and enrichment of artists' practice and art form. Furthermore, the Arts Council accepts that this field of arts practice is a distinct discipline that requires specialist skills, knowledge and experience in order to ensure in depth arts experiences and quality of engagement.

STRENGTHS

- A number of exemplary artists and arts organisations in Ireland are engaging in significant work in this field of arts practice. The Arts Council has played a valuable role in supporting this work over the years.

- A significant body of national and international research exists which highlights the positive impact of participation in arts in education on the all participants including the artist, arts organisation, school and wider community.
- At national level the Council of National Cultural Institutions, of which the Arts Council is a member, has developed a policy framework for Education Community and Outreach programmes.
- The centrality of the arts, particularly during compulsory schooling, is clearly stated within Department of Education and Science's education policy, and the recommendations made by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment around senior cycle reform provides great potential for realizing this policy at post primary level.
- The acknowledgement in the National Children's Strategy (Department of Health and Children) that access to and participation in the arts are necessary for child development.
- *Towards Best Practice*, an initiative to develop guidelines and principles for good practice around arts in schools, illustrates the value and effectiveness of the DES, the Arts Council and other key partners working in collaboration to improve standards and quality of practice in arts in schools.
- The feasibility study entitled *A National System of Local Music Education Services Report* outlines a clear and cost effective framework for bringing together partners involved in arts in education at local and national levels. This study proposes a model to address gaps in music education and has serious potential to be extended to other art forms.
- The recognition, within the United Nations Convention on Human Rights, of the rights of the child to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

CHALLENGES

- There is a need for greater integration of education within the overall policies and work programmes of arts organisations and the Arts Council.
- The Arts Council needs to make explicit through policy and practice its support for artists and arts organisations engaged in arts in education.
- There is no formal structure to facilitate co-ordination and joined up thinking within and between government departments and other partners involved in arts in education at local and national levels.
- There is limited provision of professional development and training opportunities for artists and arts organisations and few opportunities to share expertise and learning.
- There is a clear demand for a comprehensive information and advice service to support artists and arts organisations working in this field.
- There exists a need to analyse, collate and share key findings from existing national and international research in making the case for arts in education and in order to identify gaps in research.

- There is a strong case for the Arts Council to continue a focus on arts in schools. However, the scope of arts in education needs to be extended so that learning across the continuum from early childhood to adulthood is addressed.

PROPOSED RESPONSES TO THOSE CHALLENGES

- A. Analyse, collate and share key findings from national and international research. This material will be used as a basis for advocating the value, effects and effectiveness of a comprehensive arts-in-education experience and the distinctive contributions made by artists and arts organisations. In its capacity as a learning organisation, the Arts Council will target policy-makers and key influencers within its own organisation and the wider arts and education arenas.
- B. Provide appropriate resources and incentives for artists and arts organisations working in formal and non-formal education settings in order to improve quality of practice.
- C. Facilitate the implementation of the recommendations within the study *A National System of Local Music Education Service*, through a multi-agency partnership at local and national levels.
- D. Ensure that all art forms are addressed equally within local arts partnerships.
- E. Enhance professional development opportunities for artists and arts organisations by auditing needs and existing provision; by supporting training opportunities in partnership with third level and other training institutions; by supporting mentoring schemes; by facilitating networking and other opportunities for dialogue and sharing of skills and experience.
- F. Establish a comprehensive information and advice service through the provision of a web based resource to include, for example, best practice case studies, principles and guidelines and key research findings.
- G. Further develop and support initiatives such as artists' residencies in schools, artists' visits to schools, and loan of Arts Council collection, including the main collection, to schools.