

Local Authorities and the Arts

Appointing an Arts
Officer: Guidelines for
Local Authorities

Supporting the Arts

Since 1973, the Arts Council and local authorities have supported the arts in a variety of ways. Key to this approach since 1985 has been the appointment of an arts officer within the local authority structure.

There have been many changes in the past thirteen years, both in the arts and in local government, and much has been achieved by the partnership between local authorities and the Arts Council. The arts have emerged as central to integrated local development.

It is now timely to take a new approach, to build on these achievements and to ensure that the system of partnership works within the changed environment of the late 1990s.

This new approach to development is based on the work of the Review Group on Local Authorities and the Arts, a joint initiative of the City and County Managers' Association and the Arts Council, and is described fully in the document *Local Authorities and the Arts; A New Approach to Partnership*.

These guidelines are intended to describe best practice in the appointment of a local authority arts officer within the context of this new approach.

A New Approach

A fundamental element underpinning the new approach is the negotiation of a formal agreement between the Arts Council and each local authority. This agreement precedes the decision to appoint an arts officer

Formal Agreement

1. Based on available information, the local authority will set out its overall plan for development, and indicate the place of the arts within this overall plan. A statement of intent will be prepared along these lines.
2. The Arts Council will set out in response a statement of its development objectives, indicating the particular emphasis relevant to the local authority area.
3. A common agenda will be agreed, along with indicative priorities for arts development.
4. The best mechanisms to enable these priorities to be addressed will be agreed. These may include the appointment of an arts officer, among other initiatives.

Arts Officer Appointment

1. If an arts officer is to be appointed, the various roles and responsibilities of the arts officer, the reporting manager and support personnel will be agreed in the context of the specific needs of the local authority area.
2. A job description and a person specification are then generated based on these specific roles and responsibilities.
3. A phased recruitment process is then set in train, following best established recruitment practice. The Arts Council will provide a number of resource documents to inform this process.
4. If the appointment is not a first-time appointment, the arts officer post will initially be offered at Grade VI.

5. Contractual Arrangements

A three-year contract will be offered initially.

A formal review is to take place after two years. The conditions and parameters of this review are to be agreed prior to appointment, and a set of guidelines to be issued setting out the terms of this review. On the basis of the review, the first contract may be extended or renewed.

It is proposed that a five year contract is offered thereafter

It is recommended that the local authority considers a long term or permanent commitment to the post of arts officer

Reporting Arrangements

It is proposed that the arts officer report to a senior multi-functional officer within the local authority

When changes in local authority structures are complete, it is recommended that the arts officer report to the appropriate Director of Services.

Funding Arrangements

The Arts Council and the local authority will agree each partner's contribution towards salary for an arts officer post at the start of a contract period. The arrangements will remain in place for the period of the contract, and then will be reviewed.

Funding for programme and other activities will be negotiated annually on the basis of an agreed plan for arts development.

Other supports

Pension arrangements and provision for training and professional development on a regular basis will be part of the ongoing support to the arts officer post.

Characteristics of Best Practice

The Review Group examined a range of best practice within local authorities. The findings suggest that arts development is generally most successful where:

- a. Arts activities and development are clearly linked to the overall strategy and planning cycle of the local authority.
- b. There is a clear understanding of the role of the arts within the local authority, and of the local authority's role within the arts community.
- c. The arts officer is well integrated into the structure of the local authority.
- d. The arts officer reports to a senior multi-functional officer.
- e. The arts programme is well supported by management and has access to support staff.
- f. There are good communications with the arts community within the local authority area, at national level and internationally.
- g. A high level of artistic expertise is available to support the local authority's work.