

Young People, Children and the Arts: Summary Policy Paper

PROFILE

The complexity of dealing with young people as a constituency lies in our multiple understandings of this sector. The Arts Council proposes a shift in policy perspective, to embrace the needs of children and young people in a comprehensive, inclusive and integrated fashion.

Two recent documents informing Arts Council policy are *The Participation of Young People in the Arts in Ireland* (Coughlan, 2002) and *A Policy Framework for Education, Community, Outreach* (Council of National Cultural Institutions, 2004). Arts Council policy also takes cognizance of the wider societal trends and issues that exist, and are emerging, for young people in a rapidly changing culture. Legislative and strategic changes demonstrate a shift at governmental level in addressing the needs of young people. This includes an increased professionalisation of services for young people, an expansion of the remit of a number of government departments in relation to young people and an acknowledgement of the need to build-up a substantial body of knowledge in this area in Ireland.

A key shift in Arts Council policy will be to develop a broader understanding of what young people *contribute* to the arts as well as being recipients of a range of arts experiences. We are concerned with developing the cultural literacy of young people *and* their skills as critical consumers of the arts. The extensive consultative process carried out by the Arts Council reveals a sector that is growing, thriving and increasingly confident in challenging static views and assumptions about young peoples' relationship to the arts, the range of activities it embodies and the nature of young people's involvement.

STRENGTHS

- Continuous growth and evolution of arts practices with and for young people by arts organisations and artists working specifically in the area of children and young people's arts.
- More artists and arts organisations, well established in their particular field of work, becoming involved in arts work with young people.
- More young artists, providing opportunities for audiences to engage with art that is contemporary, innovative and ambitious.
- Growing international body of evidence for investment in the arts, as meeting the developmental needs of young people. Shift towards developing greater understanding of the *inherent* values of the arts and their unique contribution to the broader extrinsic outcomes.
- Further validation and understanding of the work through documents such as the CNCI's *Policy Framework for Education, Community, Outreach*.
- NUI Maynooth *Certificate in Youth Arts* and other training initiatives by the National Youth Arts Programme and youth arts resource organisations, e.g., National Association for Youth Drama.
- Increased activity and experimentation across art forms by local authorities (e.g., percent *for art scheme*) and other arts organisations.

- Emergence of new structures for youth at local level and involvement of key statutory agencies, providing excellent opportunities for developing local partnership approaches to arts provision for young people.
- Increased cultural diversity and opportunities for cultural exchange.
- Broader recognition of the need for professional and holistic approach, supporting development of the child both within and outside of the formal education system.
- Emerging opportunities for putting young people and the arts on the Government agenda.
- Formulating a *National Play Policy* (2003) for children; and a *Recreation Policy* for young people aged 12 – 18 years by the National Children's Office.
- Forthcoming, other, Government publications, e.g., by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (youth justice) and the Children's Rights Alliance.

CHALLENGES

- Term 'youth arts' perceived as limiting and reductive, failing to describe the broader range of opportunities for young people to engage with and make art.
- Ambitious work happening in a variety of contexts with young people not being afforded the status it deserves.
- Young artists, as individuals or ensembles, classified in the taxonomy of 'youth' as opposed to being judged on the basis of creative proficiency and artistic merit.
- Continued issue of under-valuing artists and arts organisations who choose to work with children and young people.
- Perceived lack of understanding and connectedness in Arts Council policy in this area *vis-à-vis* policy in other policy areas.
- Need for more dissemination of information, presentation of best practice, training and professional development; related issue is the need for increased supports for agencies currently fulfilling this role.
- Serious challenges in terms of the capacity and opportunity for young people to have a voice in artistic and cultural matters. Phenomena such as 'cultural indifference', highlighted in a 2004 CityArts survey of young people need further exploration and interrogation.
- Need for greater co-ordination at local and national level between government departments and other agencies in researching and further developing opportunities for young people and the arts.
- Continued issue about addressing the needs of disadvantaged young people as highlighted in the National Recreation Policy consultative document.
- Conflicting accounts of 'increased receptiveness'/ 'continued barriers' on the part of arts venues, highlighting the need for venues and building-based arts organisations to develop and articulate a clear policy in relation to young people.
- Over emphasis on the 'hands-on', 'doing and making' in young people's arts programmes, at the expense of developing skills in critical appraisal.

PROPOSED RESPONSES TO THOSE CHALLENGES

- A. Set up a working structure that allows for a holistic, coherent approach *within* the Arts Council in order to advance policy and practice in this area.
- B. Establish a mechanism for conducting age analyses of Arts Council spend on children and young people across the spectrum of art forms and disciplines.

- C. Ensure the work of young artists and youth ensembles are afforded equal opportunity, in terms of assessment processes applied to other clients of the Arts Council.
- D. Fund exemplar models of youth arts practice.
- E. Establish a research brief (ideally with national state agencies) that investigates the participation of and engagement in the arts by young people in Ireland and aims to develop further understanding of the range of practices that are taking place in this field. Involve young people from the outset.
- F. Develop a policy document that separately clarifies the Arts Council's position and priorities on the broad range of circumstances in which children and young people could and should interface with the arts.
- G. Develop an advocacy role that keeps a proactive watching brief on government and other initiatives relating to young people, that develops and presents evidence for greater coherence and investment in this area to the relevant government departments and state agencies.
- H. Continue to support national agencies in expanding and developing their remit in this area, paying particular emphasis to the dissemination of information, critical reflection and professional development of key players in this area.
- I. Promote a local partnership approach, i.e., develop a pilot incentive scheme modelled on the Arts Council's local arts partnership scheme.
- J. Develop incentive funding for initiatives aimed at exploring new ways of engaging young people in the arts.
- K. Work with agencies such as the National Youth Council of Ireland and the National Children's Office on developing real opportunities for young people to have a voice in policy development.
- L. Following its pilot phase, establish a mechanism for ensuring the adoption of appropriate Child Protection and Welfare policies and procedures by client organisations.
- M. Develop a web-based resource of research and information on the arts and young people that links with relevant resource agencies in the field.