

# \*interactions

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**Arts Council Consultation Process**

**Meeting on Music Education**

**15 April 2005**

## **Music Education**

**Friday 15 April 2005, 10.30am – 1.30pm, Irish Museum of Modern Art**

Séamus Crimmins welcomed the participants to the meeting on behalf of The Arts Council and Fergus Sheil introduced the specific issues for discussion.

### **1. Question for discussion**

The meeting discussed the following question:

What is The Arts Council's role in the promotion of a national system of music education provision (as recommended in the Music Network feasibility study)?

What are the pathways into the profession/professional training/ongoing development and retraining?

### **2. In discussing the question, the following emerged.**

#### **2.1 National system for music education**

The meeting began with a broad discussion around the impact of the Music Network feasibility study (A National System of Local Music Education Services) and the current situation with 3 pilot projects happening around the country (Dublin, Donegal and Limerick). Whilst the decision to support 1 year of pilot projects was welcomed by all in the room, the consensus was that this was not an effective response to the recommendations made in the Music Network report. The pilots are being funded and managed through the Department of Education and Science (€100,000 project grant with €20,000 for purchase of instruments). The National Committee has not been established to oversee the project and the Department has acted unilaterally, without advice and support from Music Network or The Arts Council.

Some concerns were expressed about the apparent lack of transparency in selecting the 3 regions for the pilots and the perceived lack of commitment (1 year as opposed to the 3 years normally required for development projects). It was suggested that The Arts Council was invited to become involved in the pilot scheme after the selection was made and the 3 projects had been initiated. Whilst The Arts Council clearly understood the importance of its potential role in this project, it seems that communication has not been effective between the

two. Questions raised by The Arts Council regarding selection, capacity and resourcing, and evaluation, before making a commitment to the project, have not yet been addressed.

The consensus in the meeting was that the main role for The Arts Council is as an advocate for the importance of a national system of music education, with relevant government Departments, most notably the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and the Department of Education and Science. The information is available as to how it should or could be done within the Irish system. However, it was suggested that The Arts Council has a major role to play in terms of acting as an advocate for the concept of arts in education.

Within the meeting, there were broadly agreed principles as to what constituted a meaningful national system of music education provision starting with primary schools teachers integrating music and the primary curriculum. This clearly has repercussions for teacher training. The peripatetic system is very valuable – however, at primary level, it was suggested that full integration of music is essential. At secondary level, it is essential that specialist music teachers are appointed and that they are not always the first to go when there are budget restrictions.

Again there was agreement that The Arts Council should not play a direct role in this provision. If this is to be sustainable and properly resourced it must be embedded within the education system. There was also general agreement that no one currently has the financial resources, not alone the human resources, to fully adopt the recommendations on the Music Network report, and that the most important next step would be for the key players – National Association of School Principals, Music Network, The Arts Council, Department of Education and Science, Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism – to work together to advocate for this system to be supported and resourced.

There was also a request from the meeting that musical education would be considered in all its aspects within this national system and that it would be inclusive of traditional practices, composing, and popular music and not just limited to classical performance.

One of the main issues arising for The Arts Council in terms of the new strategy is how it will resource itself to fulfil this advocacy role.

## **2.2 Pathways into the profession and ongoing development**

It was agreed that there are many opportunities for individuals to have a music education and to access music tuition up to the age of 18. Most of these are through private schools

and involve the individual paying tuition fees. There are a few schemes that allow young people to access more expensive instruments. The general feeling was that it is really unnecessary for children to go outside Ireland to get tuition up to this stage. At third level, it is generally necessary to go outside the country – to London, Manchester, Glasgow or Birmingham. Whilst this was thought to be regrettable, there was acceptance that there is not sufficient critical mass in Ireland to warrant the establishment of a Music Conservatoire. It was also recognised that, by going abroad, there are many advantages for students in terms of nascent musicians mixing with other musicians and hearing/experiencing new approaches to making work.

### **2.3 The role of The Arts Council**

It was agreed that awards offered by The Arts Council should be open to more musical styles and should allow opportunities for those who are working within a group to challenge their practice and evaluate. In addition, awards allowing reflection on practice (eg for those who design projects in music) would be welcomed. There was a suggestion that there should be specific educational grants offered to teachers to encourage skills development, however, again this is ideologically in the remit of the Department of Education and Science, rather than The Arts Council.

It was also suggested that The Arts Council could play a role in developing understanding of the role of music education and music educators: it can also provide advice and support to individuals and perhaps advise about mentoring programmes. In addition, The Arts Council can assist with research and gathering information that supports the case.

Finally, The Arts Council might perhaps consider awareness raising about the role of the arts in general through showcasing work. There are very many interesting examples of music in education projects happening constantly (many funded by The Arts Council directly or through wards to organisations) that are not known to anyone outside of the particular school.