

Second Report of Implementation Group for the Arts in Education Charter

Introduction

- **Change in Composition**

On the 18th October, 2013, Minister Quinn sent a letter to the Chairperson informing him that he was nominating Ms. Katie Sweeney, who had a keen interest and track record in Arts-in-Education, as a replacement for Dr. Alan Wall, on the Group.

- **Meetings**

Since presenting its first formal report to Ministers Deenihan and Quinn on 3 September 2013, the Implementation Group has met on nine occasions, up to 14 April 2014.

The following is a summary of its activities and reflection, over the period September 2013 to April 2014, with regard to the Arts-in-Education Charter Commitments, set out in Chapter 4 of the Charter.

4.1 Dialogue and Partnership

Bearing in mind the Charter's strong commitment to dialogue and partnership with stakeholders, the Implementation Group has continued the process of holding meetings with and receiving submissions from key agencies. These included:

- The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).
 - The Teaching Council
 - Department of Children and Youth Affairs
 - Music Generation
 - Representatives of Colleges of Education
 - The Ark – Cultural Centre for Children.
- The Group has also engaged in correspondence with agencies such as “Fresh Film” Limerick.

- As was the case with the earlier range of meetings with arts-in-education groups, the agencies met with recently expressed a warm welcome for the Charter and expressed positive attitudes of engagement and co-operation with its aims. The Group has formed the impression that there is an appetite and enthusiasm in the relevant sectors for the aspirations expressed in the Charter, and that there is a desire to be directly involved in being partners in their realisation.

4.2 Wider Education Agenda

Through dialogue with various agencies, understanding has been nurtured “that investment in Arts-in-Education practice is not achieved at the expense of growing other complementary arts and education practices in formal, non-formal and informal settings” (Ch. p. 12).

As part of engaging in the “wider education agenda”, the Group has contributed to and participated in events such as the “Schools: Access to Culture Conference” in the National Gallery (28 September 2013); the “Creative Engagement Exhibition in Collins Barracks (5 October 2013); “Education and the Arts Colloquy” of the NCFA in Galway (12 February 2014). The Chairman is scheduled to address the Annual Conference of the Education and Training Boards on 30 April 2014, and both he and Ms. Orlaith McBride are scheduled speakers at the Symposium of the Arts-in-Education and Higher Education on 9 May 2014.

4.3 Education Agenda in Arts Organisation

The Implementation Group was informed that the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht held a successful meeting with Aosdana representatives in October 2013. Arising from the report of that meeting the Group considers that it might be helpful if it proposed an alternative wording for the PSED proposal contained in the Charter (p. 12) and submit this for consideration to Ministers Deenihan and Quinn, in line with its remit “advise the Ministers on updating and improving the Charter”, (p. 20).

4.4 Outreach and Education at the National Cultural Centres

Contact and dialogue have been established with the NCIs, in particular with the Education, Community and Outreach (ECU) sector. Despite budget cutbacks, being experienced for a number of years by the NCIs, it is the view of the Implementation Group that the institutions are continuing their efforts to promote the ECO activities. The Group considers that the NCIs

have been sustaining their commitment to providing a range of events and activities towards arts-in-education. The hope is that their somewhat attenuated efforts, due to budgetary and staffing constraints, may soon be strengthened and developed in the context of improved national economic circumstances. The Group considers that it is important that the enthusiasm and high aspirations of the ECO initiative of 2004 can be re-invigorated so that the CNIs' key role in promoting arts-in-education may be realised to its full potential.

4.5 and 4.6 Information and Advice, and Sustaining Good Practice

The Charter states that "Resources like the Arts in Schools Directory and the Artists – Schools Guidelines will be updated" (p. 14). The Implementation Group has been considering the best means of providing updated information and guidance on arts-in-education activities. A Mapping Exercise is well underway to give up-to-date overview of the myriad of arts-in-education activities now available throughout the country. The process of compilation is still afoot and every effort is being made to make it as comprehensive and user friendly as possible. It is expected that work will be completed within the next few months and the Mapping made publicly available in the autumn. The Arts Council is planning a review of the Artists in School Guidelines to suit contemporary circumstances.

Meanwhile the dissemination of good practice in arts-in-education is being nurtured through much greater collaboration now existing between agencies such as the ETAI, ACAE, ATECI. The new spirit of networking and co-operation between arts-in-education agencies bodes well for the sharing of best practice in arts-in-education activity.

4.7 School Policies

The Group's discussions with representatives of the NCCA, the Schools' Inspectorate, the Teaching Council, the Colleges of Education, the NAPD, the IPPN, the Association of Education Centres and have highlighted the importance of placing arts activities and arts-in-education events central to school policies and to the life of school communities. All agencies expressed their active support for this emphasis, and agreed to use their respective good offices in promoting this aim. As school planning and school self-evaluation becomes embedded in the culture of Irish schools, arts education and arts-in-education should be consciously integrated into pupils' experience.

4.9 Research

The Implementation Group has circulated all higher education institutions with a request to supply information on research which has been undertaken with a relevance to arts education and arts-in-education. The Group has also contacted some other agencies such as IMMA seeking data on such research activity. The request for research will be further promoted by the Chairman in his address to the Arts-in-Education – Higher Education Symposium on 9th May. The compilation of a research database will then be completed and will be disseminated to the interested public. The compilation will include all forms of such research, including action-based research.

4.11 National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

The Group has held discussions with the NCCA and the Arts Council and was pleased to note that both agencies have developed a collaborative partnership. This ensures that the Arts Council is consulted about arts education issues, as appropriate. Both agencies have already collaborated on projects such as the JCT – PALS joint initiative – (Junior Cycle for Teachers – Performing Arts Learning Support). They have also devised a series of CPD workshops for JCT-Film.

4.12 Resource Sharing – Portal Site

The Implementation Group has given a good deal of attention to the establishment of a Portal on-line Site for arts-in-education. It regards this as a major project arising from the Charter, with much long-term potential. So that this potential can be realised, the Group sees it as crucial that careful planning goes into its design, construction and operation. Roundtable discussions have taken place with stakeholders on the Portal. The experience and advice of the PDST and the directors of portals such as SCOILNET and the Arts and Health website have also been drawn upon. A feasibility study on the Portal was commissioned from Ms Deborah Dignam, who presented an Interim Report to the Group in December. She presented her final report, “Curation Creation Communication” to the Group in January 2014.

The Group has been impressed with the concept and proposed plan for the Arts-Education Portal. The flavour of the report may be caught from the following quotation from the conclusion of the Report:

The portal has the potential to be a world-class leader in digital communication in the arts and education space and is an opportunity to highlight globally, the wealth of expertise of practice in Ireland.

Initially the portal should be a gateway to arts and education practice in Ireland. It should have a contemporary look and feel and be an exemplary resource of relevant and useful content for its designated users. Through a process of user testing and a user centred iterative build, the portal could become a repository for current practice and an archive for existing practice. By adopting a strategic incremental content management plan, in line with user growth, subsequent user engagement should deepen.

To progress the project the Group is in the process of assembling an advisory committee (AiE Portal Development Advisory Committee), with the necessary expertise, to act as a steering group for the project. It is also planned to recruit a Project Director (Manager) for the development of the portal in the near future. It is hoped to have the Arts Education Portal in operation early in 2015. It is expected that the Portal, when fully operational, will provide a boost to many elements of the Charter. It should be a landmark development for arts education and the arts in education, and be flexible enough to adapt to evolving technological changes.

4.13 Arts Education Partnerships

The Implementation Group is examining a position paper on “Local Arts in Education Partnership Development”, prepared by one of its members, Ms. Katie Sweeney. It has arranged to invite a number of Local Arts Officers to a meeting on 28 April to discuss aspects of it, and to help plan the way forward. The issue will also be raised at the Annual Conference of the ETBs, on 30 April. The Group aims to have a plan prepared for the establishment of the Local Arts in Education Partnership in the medium future, as envisaged by the Charter (p. 16).

4.14 Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate

The Group’s discussions with the NCCA and the School Inspectorate, in particular, focussed on the opportunities provided by new curricular policies and lines of development for school communities for the inclusion of arts education as an integral part of pupils’ experience in school.

4.16 The Arts Council

The Arts Council has taken a very proactive role and involved engagement with the Arts-in-Education Charter. Despite funding and staffing cutbacks it is endeavouring to sustain support for as many as possible of the arts-in-education initiatives, many pioneered by itself, which it has a track record in supporting. The Group is particularly pleased that the Council has now extended the artists' residencies in College of Education and HEIs, to seven, (Ch. p. 17). The response to the Residencies has been very impressive and has nurtured a higher sense of awareness among teacher education students of the potential value and modes of pupil involvement in arts education.

4.17 Arts Rich Schools (ARIS)

As with the Portal Website for the arts-in-education, the Implementation Group places a high valuation on the potential of the ARIS scheme to arouse interest among school communities in cultivating the arts as a desired feature of school life.

The Charter envisages a scheme which “will incentivise and recognise these schools (primary and part-primary) which, in a range of ways, make the arts a key part of school life and place the arts centrally within the life of the school community” (Ch. p. 17).

The Group has given a good deal of thought and discussion as to the type of ARIS project which would yield the most satisfactory results. The issue was discussed at a roundtable discussion of stakeholders. To help its reflections further the group commissioned a discussion document, “Arts Rich Awards Programme” from Ms. Anne Marie Herron. She presented this document in December 2013, and engaged in discussion on it with the Group.

The Group favours a scheme which will be open to all schools, but not run on a highly competitive basis between schools. Rather, it considers that the designation ‘Arts Rich School’ should be based on endeavour and improvement within each school as it starts from its own baseline and seeks to improve on its existing provision. This allows all schools, whatever their status and circumstance, to take part in the initiative. It will be open to primary and post primary schools, both mainstream and special needs, large and small, in urban and rural communities. Each school will set realistic targets that it can attain, given its existing resources, challenges and limitations.

The focus of the Arts Rich Award Programme is on supporting schools in their endeavours and on encouraging them to enhance and enrich arts experiences for students both as artists and as audiences. It also seeks to reward schools for their effort and initiative as they build on their existing achievements and aspire to a level of arts provision of which they can be proud. It is intended that the Arts Rich Awards programme for Irish schools will show awareness and appreciation of schools' continuing commitment to the implementation of the arts curriculum, and of the enthusiasm of teachers in promoting the arts and in engaging children in a variety of arts activities.

The Implementation Group has been considering various scheme models whose modus operandi might be adapted for the ARIS scheme. The Group has expectations, that resources will be available to underpin the administrative, organisational and award processes. It is hoped that the ARIS scheme will be in operation by spring 2015. The Group's discussions with the IPPN and the NAPD were encouraging about ARIS, provided that the scheme devised is not too onerous on school leaders.

4.19 New Provision

The Charter expresses a desire "to foster new provision, especially in parts of the country with little or no arts-in-education service" (Ch. p. 18). The Implementation Group hopes that its Mapping exercise underway, and the Local Arts-in-Education Partnership, when developed, will greatly assist in addressing this identified need. The engagement of the regional Education Centres with the purposes of the Charter should also be of help in addressing the needs of schools in geographic locations with inadequate arts-in-education provision.

Engagement with the Arts-in-Education – Higher Education Symposium

Following the initiative of Ministers Deenihan and Quinn, a major symposium is being organised for the 9th May, in Croke Park, Dublin, to profile the arts-in-education role being played by higher education institutions. While not strictly within the remit of the Charter, the Implementation Group was pleased to assist the planning of the Symposium. Two members of the Group are scheduled as speakers at the Symposium where the role of the Charter and some of the Group's activities relevant to higher education will be highlighted. Focus will also be placed on the potential of the EU's "Creative Europe" scheme for the promotion of arts education into the future.

Conclusion

This summary of the work of the Implementation Group since September 2013 indicates that action is afoot towards realising the “Commitments” in the nineteen sections of Chapter 4 of the Charter. While it is very much ‘work in progress’, the Group is pleased to report that it has encountered widespread interest, enthusiasm and support for the Charter’s implementation. There is a stirring of hope, expectation and achievement at all levels of the education system – early childhood, primary, post-primary and higher education – for the arts-in-education. This would suggest that despite the unpropitious national economic circumstances, the initiative of Ministers Deenihan and Quinn in launching the Charter in January 2013 was timely and is meeting an appetite for arts education and arts-in-education. While good beginnings and foundations are being laid, sustained commitment, focused attention, co-operative endeavour and improved resources will be required to achieve the culture change, which has long been sought, regarding the place of the arts in the holistic development of Irish young people.

The Implementation Group is now convinced that there is a climate of support for and an invigorated awareness of the value of the arts in educational experience. While this is to be greatly welcomed, it also involves a serious responsibility. Expectations have been raised which have to be delivered on, or the disillusion which would emerge from failure would breed a cynicism that would be difficult to counter into the future.

The Implementation Group is of the view that this new bridge which the Charter represents between the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht and the Department of Education and Skills needs to be an inbuilt, organic feature of their relationship into the future. It is this novel partnership between these two key agencies which has been a major source of hope to many educators, artists and interested organisations, who have long sought such a relationship. The goodwill garnered by the Charter is a necessary ingredient in the way ahead, but it needs to be nurtured and not be taken for granted. The response to the Charter indicates that there is a potential, which over a number of years, can greatly change the landscape for arts education and arts-in-education. A framework of permanency to the co-operative relationship of both Departments in support of the Art-in-Education Charter and its future development would be re-assuring and affirmative for all interested parties.

The Implementation Group, working in co-operation with all interested parties, looks forward to shaping this reformed future for arts education. The cultivation of qualities such as creativity, artistic appreciation, imaginative exploration, experimental initiative, empathic awareness, which exposure to, and participation in the arts help to form, are valuable elements of our young citizens' development for their individual benefit as well as for their social participation.

The Implementation Group is very impressed with the range of talent over the whole spectrum of the arts which is available to be better harnessed for these educational purposes. Sharing a heritage which is renowned for its artistic achievement, Ireland is fortunate to have a great pool of artistic talent willing and able to engage more extensively in arts-in-education activities. While a great deal of admirable work has been, and is being done for arts education, there is a general consensus that the full potential is not being harvested. The time would seem right to make a breakthrough, with individuals and agencies working collaboratively and with the active support of both Government Departments. The Implementation Group views the *Arts in Education Charter* as a catalyst in this process.

Ar aghaidh linn.

John Coolahan

Chairman of Arts in Education Charter

Implementation Group

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