

Progress Report on the Arts in Education Charter-(3rd Report)

Introduction

On behalf of the Implementation Group I reiterate congratulations to Ministers O'Sullivan and Humphreys on their appointments and assure them of the whole-hearted efforts of the Group in realising the Charter's objectives.

Since our last report, the Memorandum of Understanding has been signed by both Departments. The Group welcomes this as an assurance to all involved parties of the sustained commitment of both Departments towards achieving the aspirations of the Charter.

Meetings

Since making our last report, in April 2014, the Implementation Group has met seven times.

The following is a summary of the Group's activities and reflections over the period April to September 2014, with regard to the commitments set out in chapter 4 of the Charter.

4.1 Dialogue and Partnership

From its inception the Group has engaged in meetings with key agencies in the arts and education sectors and has had communications with, and submissions from a range of interested groups. The Group is pleased to report that there continues to be a great support and enthusiasm for the Charter and there is a strong desire among agencies to be actively involved in the realisation of the commitments. The Group has noted and welcomed a spirit of collaboration and co-operation between agencies. People's expectations have been raised by the Charter and the Group considers it vital for the well-being of the sector that the hopes and aspirations come to fruition.

4.2 Wider Education Agenda

As part of engaging in the wider education agenda, members of the Group have continued to participate in public conferences/symposia, relevant to their work. These included the Annual Conference of the Education and Training Boards (April 2014), the Symposium on the Arts-in-Education and Higher Education (May 2014), Arts Exhibition (Cavan, June 2014), "Schools and Creativity" in the National Gallery (September 2014), "Creative Engagement" National Museum (Oct 2014). Members also held meetings with personnel of the HEA and UCD relating to on-going projects.

4.4. Outreach at the National Cultural Centres

The Implementation Group has been in regular contact with the NCI's and, in particular with ECO, which is a member of the Encountering the Arts in Ireland (ETAI). Despite cutbacks and staff shortages, it is the view of the Group that the NCIs have been proactive in the arts-in-education area and have maintained linkages with educational agencies such as the NCCA. Improved national economic indicators should herald greater support for ECO's efforts.

4.5 Information and Advice

The Group fully supports the Ministers' acknowledgement in the Charter of the "need for information, advice and dissemination" and many of its efforts are directed to this end. Much of the data in the mapping exercise of all arts-in-education activities throughout the country has been collected, and work is afoot on the best way of co-ordinating and presenting it. The Group is hoping to get some resources so that professional assistance may be recruited so that the presentation of the material may be presented to the optimal effect and in a manner which is user-friendly. It is considered that such a directory of all arts-in-education activity will be of major benefit to teachers and artists. It's also envisaged that geographical locations where poor provision exists at present will be highlighted, leading to remedial action being undertaken.

Now that the post of Education and Young Peoples Officer is being filled by the Arts Council it is hoped that a revision of the Artists in Schools Guidelines can be updated for contemporary circumstances.

4.6 Sustaining Good Practice

A major initiative under this commitment has been the inauguration in summer of 2014 of a three phase Teacher/Artist Partnership Initiative Summer Course programme. This multi-layered plan involves building the capacities of artists and teachers in promoting arts-in-education. This significant initiative has been designed to involve collaboration between ATECI, ACAE and ETAI and between DES and DAHG. It is a Department of Education and Skills led initiative through ATECI and is administered by The Education Centre, Tralee on behalf of the Network and TES/DES. This initiative is co-funded by the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Phase 1 of the course which is approved by the DES Inspectorate took place in Laois Education Centre in August 2014. Teachers and artists were matched across the five art forms of Visual Arts and Crafts, Music, Dance, Drama and Literature. A research component has been built into the programme in Phase 2 of the initiative. Participants exhibited an extraordinary openness to the exploratory nature of the course, engaging wholeheartedly with the course material and with each other and were eager to

experiment and learn. Based on the participants' evaluations, this summer course was a positive experience for all concerned. Phase 2 of this initiative which involves “in-school” implementation and a research project is underway and will be completed in January/February 2015. Planning for the development of the 2015 Summer Course will include points made in evaluations and feedback in addition to the research evaluation findings from Phases 1 & 2. This programme will expand in an incremental way and foster a new cultural synergy of effort.

The dissemination of good practice is also being nurtured by initiatives of groups such as the ETAI, the Ark Cultural Centre for children and the Colleges of Education, with all of whom the Group has cooperated.

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 the Education and Training Boards 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 agree 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 institutes 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 NCI's seeking data on such research activity. The issue was further explained at the Arts-in-Education and Higher Education Symposium in June. A great deal of material has been collected. Discussions have taken place with HEA personnel and staff in the UCD Arts Archives Department on optimal ways of co-ordinating and presenting the material. Some financial resources are required to engage professional help to bring the project to a satisfactory outcome. By its nature the material will need to be continually updated. The research data bank should be of major value to policymakers, future researchers, staff in education institutions, and would be another innovative achievement for the arts in Irish society.

4.10 Capital Provision

On behalf of the Implementation Group, the Chairman wrote to the Secretary of the Department of Education and Skills setting out three recommendations as to how as to how this commitment might be

effected, and brought to the consciousness of involved parties. The Group has indicated its readiness to meet and discuss these recommendations if desired.

4.11 National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

The Implementation Group has established a partnership understanding with the NCCA in relation to promoting arts in education. Constructive relationships have also been established between the Arts Council and the NCCA on the interface of the arts with curriculum policy and practice.

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). For this initiative they collaborated, developed and presented a series of professional development workshops for teachers to support engagement with arts and learning in junior cycle. The workshops embody the principles and key skills which underpin the new Framework for Junior Cycle and provide teachers with practical, creative methodologies to use in their classroom. This initiative was guided by the principles expressed in the Arts in Education Charter. Workshops were offered to teachers of English. These respond to the statements of learning and learning outcomes for English and provide a fresh approach to teaching drama extracts, film Shakespeare and critical engagement with multi modal texts. These unique workshops were co facilitated by JCT Advisors and respected artists /art facilitators in the world of theatre and film. They combine approaches employed by professionals working in the arts with innovative teaching and learning in junior cycle. The workshops took place in March 2014 at regional spread of Education Centres.

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. To progress the project the Group has established and assembled an Arts in Education Portal Advisory Committee (AiE Portal Advisory Committee), with the necessary expertise, to act as steering group for the project.

The Group has agreed the following Mission Statement for the Arts in Education Portal:

Ireland's AiE Portal will be the key national digital repository of arts and education practice for current and future generations. Through high quality, user-friendly and artistically satisfying structures it will be dedicated to bringing about innovation in arts-in-education and arts education practice through long-term and embedded interaction between creative practitioners and educators, thus unlocking the creativity of people both inside and outside of formal education. It will:

- Promote a common understanding among all stakeholders of the importance of arts-in-education and arts education to the development of individual capabilities.
- Facilitate and enhance inter-professional cooperation and collaboration and enhance and enrich partnerships in designing classroom and education environments where the combination of knowledge, innovation and creativity is seamless in the students' expression of learning.
- Be a virtual access point connecting a cross-section of professionals across the arts and education and will make enhanced best practice resources available to all potential beneficiaries.
- Provide a platform through which good collaborative practice in arts-in-education and arts education will be supported, developed and enhanced.
- Act as an advocate for children and young people with respect to their rights to access good quality arts experiences in all domains of their lives and will be centred on student engagement by way of rich and authentic learning for the 21st century.
- Feature the voices and unique perspectives of children/students on the arts as a critical element of education.
- Provide an accessible path to enable all users to reach every aspect of arts-in-education both in Ireland and internationally and will contribute to developing arts understanding and creativity both within and outside the education curricula, thus supporting life-long learning.
- Be relevant to public arts practice, artists and arts groups and to the general public.

Following a recent procurement process an agency has been appointed to plan the provision of Content Development and Project Management services for an Arts in Education Website in consultation with the Arts in Education Portal Advisory Committee. Initial planning meetings have been held with the agency and a series of regional consultative meetings are planned over the coming weeks.

4.13 Local Arts Education Partnerships (LAEPs)

The Group had a position paper prepared on "Local Arts in Education Partnership Development ". It has been discussing the optimal process through which a system of LAEPs might be established. It has had discussions with representatives of Local Arts Officers and the matter was raised at the Spring Conference of Education and Training Boards. It is planned to progress reflection and discussion on the LAEPs in the medium term with a view to proposing a template for action.

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 HEI's, to seven, (Ch.4 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. Significant support for Artists Residencies was in evidence at the Arts and Higher Education Conference in May 2014. The Group welcomes the recent launch by the Arts Council of "Culturefox", a free online arts events guide.

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.

Having considered a commissioned paper "Arts Rich Awards Programme", the Group went on to design a model for ARIS, which it felt would best promote the aspirations and objectives of the initiative.

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 Group has considered the logistics of operating the ARIS model, and put costings on the organisational dimensions. Discussions have begun with a potential private sector sponsor for the scheme. The Group hopes that the ARIS initiative can be commenced early in 2015.

4.18 Music Generation

The Group has held discussions with Music Generation and a good understanding has been established on the role and activities of Music Generation. The Group is very gratified with the achievements of Music Generation, and communication lines remain open.

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". The Implementation Group is keenly concerned to address this issue. As a result of its mapping exercise it is expected that such areas will be highlighted and action undertaken to address weak, or no provision of arts-in-education in such areas. When the LAEP's are in place, they will greatly assist the more universal availability of arts-in-education activities. The close engagement with the Charter of the regional Education Centres will also be of assistance in this regard.

Conclusion

The summary of the work of the Implementation Group and associated partners, indicates that much action has been initiated to promote the range of commitments set out in the Charter. While it is very much work in progress, the Group has been anxious to lay sure foundations for sustainable action into the future on the various commitments. The Group is pleased to record the continuing high level of interest, support and goodwill which exists in the artistic and education world towards the achievements of the Charter's aims. Yet, the Group repeats the view expressed in its last report "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".

While action on all the commitments is important the Group highlighted a number of key initiatives which now need to be brought into tangible activity and be seen to contribute to the changing scenario for the arts-in-education. A great deal of the preparatory groundwork has been done on these but their development over the next months is crucial to support raised public expectations.

Areas of priority for the Implementation Group are the achievement of the following:-

- The arts-in-education Portal website
- The Arts Rich School Scheme
- Mapping/ Directions of all arts-in-education activities in existence
- Co-ordination/ presentation of the research data on arts-in-education
- Up-dating of the Artists Schools Guidelines
- Development of the Local Arts-in-Education Partnerships
- Sustaining the Teacher/Artist Programme in arts-in-education for artists and teachers

The combined impact of the successful launch of these initiatives, over the medium term, would be of historic significance in changing the landscape for arts-in-education in Ireland. The potential is of enormous value in achieving the Ministers' aspirations, and, if successful, will be regarded as a landmark achievement. There are challenges in bringing such a range of initiatives to fruition, but the prize of success is well worth the effort. Hopefully, improved national economic circumstances may free up some necessary financial resources to supplement the significant degree of voluntary effort being devoted to the Arts –in-Education Charter.

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Chairperson of the Implementation Group

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