
Report of the Implementation Group to Minister Jan O’Sullivan T.D. and Minister Heather Humphreys, T.D., April 2015.

1. The Arts-in-Education Charter within a Changing Environment

This is the fourth biannual report from the Implementation Group. We are glad to report continuing progress on the implementation of a range of objectives of the Arts-in-Education Charter. However, we also feel it incumbent in us to draw your attention to obstacles which are impeding progression of our plans for some other objectives.

In the past, arts education and arts-in-education in Ireland suffered from a number of problems. These included a lack of coherent, cohesive, joined-up policy. The administrative frameworks for art-in-education were not aligned. Despite successful initiatives over the years, under resourcing has continued to be a problem. The arts / education agencies involved tended to be compartmentalised and fragmented with little mutual awareness or collaboration. The issue of sustainability has been a constant concern for many agencies involved.

The Arts-in-Education Charter has the potential to greatly help the remediation of such problems. The Implementation Group’s efforts, combined with those of many involved organisations, are already demonstrating signs of significant progress. This report presents an outline of the indices of progress being made, but also highlights policy and resourcing issues which need to be addressed if the potential is to be fully realised.

In the first instance, the issuing of the Charter symbolised an unprecedented initiative whereby the two State departments with responsibility in the area were combining their efforts, in association with the Arts Council, the other key agency with responsibilities in the area, to address a range of policy objectives, identified by them. This is a landmark attempt at joined-up thinking and co-operative policy endeavour. As well as promoting more cohesive policy, this involves the building of administrative bridges for such responsibilities by the three key agencies. We are in the foundation stages of building co-operative, tri-lateral engagement and, if well laid, such foundations can be very beneficial and productive for the future.

Another key problem being addressed successfully is the traditional fragmentation, lack of collaboration and poor mutual awareness. Following Objective 1 of the Charter – “Dialogue and Partnerships”, the Group has engaged in discussions with an extensive range of arts/education organisations in two-way discussions. Information, advice, advocacy, partnership proposals, affirmation of initiatives have nurtured a re-energised sense of purpose and an encouraging degree of partnership and collaboration.

Noteworthy examples of fresh forms of collaboration between relevant agencies is the establishment of Encountering the Arts in Education (ETAI) as an organisation of over thirty agencies, with an agreed Constitution, to be signed in June 2015. The CNCI’s Education, Community and Outreach (ECO) grouping, set up ten years ago in 2004, is now re-energised with a new Policy Framework document agreed in 2015. The Group representatives met ECO to discuss activities and are pleased to report great satisfaction, as per Objective 4.4. The Association of Teacher and Education Centres of Ireland (ATECI), involving thirty regional centres, have established a network for arts partnerships, co-operating with each other and with many arts partners, including the Implementation Group. The Group have been impressed with the scale of ATECI’s arts activities.

These examples are reflective of a remarkable degree of goodwill, co-operation, partnership and positivity which the Group has been encountering in relation to the Charter. It is important that such positivity is nurtured as a national asset. On the other hand, to disappoint raised expectations of a new era for arts-in-education would leave a detrimental legacy, which would be difficult to ameliorate into the future.

It is also the case that through various conferences, and symposia that the Arts-in-Education Charter has been getting a higher public profile as a public policy issue and is forming part of the frame of reference in arts/education public discourse. The memorandum of understanding by both Departments in May 2014, and the intention to incorporate reference to the Charter in the strategic plans of both Departments has helped to reassure the interested public that there is durability in the policy direction in question.

2. Arts-in-Education Portal

A major objective in the Charter was the establishment of a website portal for arts education in Ireland (4.12). The Implementation Group has given detailed attention to the planning and design of such a portal. With the appreciated assistance of experts from a variety of

partnership organisations much progress has been made and we are pleased to state that the portal will be launched on 19 May, in Dublin Castle.

Underpinning the development of the portal is a strong and implicit shared belief amongst the advisory group members and stakeholders in the intrinsic value of the arts in the lives of children. The portal – through the content that it shares – will have a role in advocating this value. The portal will reflect best current practice that is taking place in Ireland. Our vision is to establish a structure through which the arts and education community can be developed, and as such, the launch of the portal on 19 May 2015, represents just a beginning. From here, the content will develop through continued support and building of the community both on and offline. The site will highlight and underline the key principles of good collaborative practice. The aim is to make the portal the key national digital resource of arts and education practice in Ireland. It will provide a platform through which good collaboration practice in arts-in-education and arts education will be supported, developed and enhanced.

Submissions for the portal will be invited on an ongoing basis. Templates and guidelines have been drawn up to assist those who wish to make a submission. A communications strategy is planned which will outline ways for the Portal Editor to maintain ongoing dialogue and communication with the arts/education community. Quality of content will be a key guiding criterion. When in operation, the Portal will provide an unprecedented opportunity for young people throughout the country to engage productively with arts-in-education.

3. Sustaining Good Practice (4.6)

The Implementation Group is acutely aware of the central role of teachers and artists, separately and in combination, in the promotion of arts education and arts-in-education. Thus, it has given a good deal of attention to achieving Objective 4.6 – “Sustaining Good Practice.” Here we outline some of the developments underway:-

- The recent changes in teacher education courses, in terms of duration and content, provide a more congenial context for attention to arts education, than in the past. The Group has been in contact with Colleges of Education, advocating greater scope for this dimension of initial teacher education.
- In this context, and in line with Objective 4.16, the Arts Council has provided six artists’ residences to the Colleges of Education. While a formal evaluation impact of these residencies has not yet been completed, the anecdotal and experiential

indications reflect a major and catalytic influence on teacher education students at this formative stage of their careers, with potential long-term impact for arts education.

- A major development in modern teacher education is the concept of it being a lifelong process. As with other professions, engagement with continuing professional development (CPD) is now accepted as a norm, and will be a requirement for sustained registration by the Teaching Council. Operating in alignment with this, the Implementation Group launched a major CPD initiative in 2014, for teachers and artists – “Exploring Teacher / Artist Partnership.”

This initiative explores Teacher/Artist partnership as a model of continuing professional development (CPD) for supporting and enhancing arts education. It gives practical expression to the potential that exists to create, foster and develop these partnerships in innovative ways and highlights the importance of supporting arts-in-education partnerships through professional development to create high quality arts experiences in school communities. The research aspect of the initiative will contribute new perspectives on understanding how these teacher/artist partnerships develop practices to potentially transform their approaches to arts education. A significant value of the initiative is the degree of collaboration it has nurtured in its first two phases. These have involved collaboration combining the expertise of the Association of Teachers’ / Education Centres in Ireland (ATECI) representing thirty Education Centres, Encountering the Arts Ireland (ETAI) representing more than thirty arts and education agencies and the Association for Creativity in Arts Education (ACAE) representing individual teachers and support service personnel with a particular interest in the arts and arts education. It can only be developed as a model if artists are active participants in the professional development provision with the teachers. The Partnership of Teacher and Artist is the essential element in the model. As an initial pilot summer courses are going ahead with 6 lead teachers /artists pairing. This pilot will be evaluated in September 2015 for consideration in terms of wider role out subject to the availability of resources.

This involvement is opening a new landscape for artists and deepening the culture for the arts for all young citizens. The investment in teachers is enabling greater student and school community engagement in the arts across the curriculum. Teacher partnerships provide not only an effective enriching encounter with students but are

also a nucleus for further promotion and development within existing schools and in non-participating schools. Public support for the arts will ultimately be enriched by these school-base/student centred approaches. The training is not a once-off event. Teachers and artists will promote and radiate this structure and process to their colleagues, repeating and improving the programme into the future.

- The Group is also supportive of the Arts in Junior Cycle initiative by the Arts Council and the JCT of the DES, and has benefitted from first-hand reports from the directors of this CPD project. The Arts in Junior Cycle is focused on promoting the possibilities for arts education provided by the Framework for Junior Cycle. To date, the teachers and artists engaged in Arts in Junior Cycle have been most positive regarding its value and benefits. The first-hand involvement of a range of skilled and experienced artists has been of great benefit to teachers.
- The Implementation Group is also cognisant and supportive of the CPD work for teachers and artists being provided by agencies such as The Ark. As well as providing opportunities for artists in a range of the arts to sensitise and attune their artistic creations to the learning susceptibilities of children at different stages of development from 2 to 12 years old, the ARK also provides specially designed CPD courses for teachers in the arts education, in association with artists and skilled practitioners.

4. Local Arts Education Partnerships (LAEPs) (4.13)

In line with Objective 4.13 – Arts Education Partnerships, Group members have had meetings with ETBs on Local Arts Education partnerships. Already in 2014, the Cavan Monaghan ETB has established its LAEP. In a report to the Implementation Group, the CEO and Arts personnel gave an impressive report on its initiation, structure and programming. The Group has designed a possible model for LAEPs which may be of help to other ETBs. At present, the Group understands that five other ETBs are considering their approaches for partnerships. The view of the Group is that it should play a supportive and facilitating role towards local initiative, recognising the value of flexibility, and that a one size might not be best for all contexts. The Group has had meetings with representatives of local Arts Officers, and will keep lines of partnership open.

5. Arts Rich Schools (ARIS) (4.17)

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 Group researched and designed a scheme which would be open to all types of school, but not run on a highly competitive basis. The Group has considered the logistics of operating this ARIS model and the costs of running the scheme based on other award schemes in schools.

It had been hoped to obtain a sponsor to support the scheme. To date this has not proved possible. The proposed model cannot proceed unless the proper resources are made available over a number of years. Further discussion on this scheme will have to be deferred until the issue of resources is addressed. It is estimated that a total overall budget of €1m would be required to run a scheme for a 5 years period. If a sponsor is secured the expectation would be that it would make a contribution towards the overall costs.

6. Mapping Arts-in-Education Provisions (4.5, 4.19)

In line with Objectives 4.5 – “Information and Advice” and 4.19 – “New Provision”, the Group, as indicated in earlier reports, has been engaged on a mapping process of relevant arts education and arts-in-education activities all over the country. The Group considered that this would help address a major lacuna of the past - inadequate information and communication on the arts facilities and opportunities available. A key aim of this process was also to identify geographic locations where little or no provision was available, with a view to remediation. The Group’s aim is to categorise and upload the material collected for the benefit of many interested parties. [In the absence of some financial resources to progress the initiative, progress is stalled. If resources were made available, the Portal would provide a valuable opportunity for the incorporation of the mapping process.]

7. Research on the Arts-in-Education (4.9)

A similar fate has befallen the Group’s efforts to establish a register of research on arts-in-education. Data has been gathered from a variety of sources, but it needs some expertise to categorise it, co-ordinate it and structure it in an appropriate form for public usage. With this in view, the Group has had been in contact with a range of agencies such as the H.E.A., RIAN, university library personnel but, to date, no resolution has been found. Some financial

resources are needed to engage the professional expertise to carry forward the project to a satisfactory outcome.

8. Conclusion

Thus, while the report incorporates a report of progress on many fronts and on a more enabling environment for arts education and arts-in-education, the problems being encountered in bringing a number of the Charter's objectives to successful conclusion need attention. The difficulties facing the ARIS, Mapping, and Research projects, and, to some extent, the Teacher-Artist Partnership in CPD highlight the continuing problem of under resourcing of arts education. To ensure that objectives of the Charter are realisable and credible, the necessary resources need to be made available. The amounts are not formidable, but their provision is strategically essential.

The Group notes the Points of Alignment Report of 2008, in particular, the administrative structures recommended by the Committee for the Arts and Education, and the associated funding recommendations. The report emerged from a vast amount of research, consultation with stakeholders and invited inputs from experts, but resources were not available to deliver it. In terms of recovery in the wider economy, and the expectation that there will be some incremental improvement in resources available to the public sector in future years, the Group considers that elements of this report may be worth revisiting for future development of Arts and Education.