

# YOUTH ARTS – TOWARDS A SHARED STRATEGY

## Responses to Consultation

### Introduction

The consultation paper was distributed and made known through websites – Youth Music and Arts Council England and through youth arts networks, from 1 July. Responses were requested by 8 August 2003. 85 responses were received. The responses from the questionnaires have been collated, so I am pleased to present a summary below:

### Summary in Brief

#### 1) Issues on which there is broad consensus:

- Giving youth arts a lead role in the delivery of a new Young People's fund
- Supporting a network of development agencies
- Establishing a co-ordinated approach to making the case
- Developing a common framework for quality assurance

#### 2) Issues on which conflicting views were expressed:

- Using the shorthand term "Youth Arts"
- Creating a mechanism for coordinating and supporting youth arts development

### 'Profile' of Respondents

- Majority are direct providers of arts activities
- 11 indicate their principal role is providing specific development and/or network support in or beyond their region
- Over half of the total offer some degree of support services for youth arts
- 20 work in a single arts discipline (5 dance, 4 theatre, 6 music, 3 visual arts/craft, 2 film/video)
- 67% of the direct providers cite music as one of the disciplines included in their multi-arts provision
- Over half have more than 10 years' operational experience; 9 have less than 3 years experience
- 42 reach 100+ young people through their consultation mechanisms
- Over half have provided information on the effects of their work to Government and/or funding bodies during the last 5 years

### Summary of responses

In developing a shared youth arts strategy, respondents were asked to indicate if the following issues should be priorities and to give their views on the proposals made for each of the priorities: -

- supporting a network of development agencies
- establishing a coordinated approach to making the case (i.e. advocacy/lobbying)
- developing a common framework for quality assurance

Respondents agreed overwhelmingly that the three issues identified should be regarded as priorities.

Overall, the proposals were widely welcome – deemed to be sensible and practical. Additional comments/points made:

### **Development agencies**

- Criteria for development agencies would need careful thought
- Welcome proposal – provided the network is not solely comprised of the usual suspects
- The selection process should be completely transparent
- There needs to be dedicated staff in these organisations to take on the work who do not push their own agendas
- The development agencies should have a commitment to support a wide range of art forms
- Hopefully this network would help to ensure equity and streamline information and grant giving and also result in a better understanding across the arts of the differences between the arts and the different ways they engage young people
- Local access is a vital part of all arts provision. Support should be given to the sub-county structural level to deliver high quality provision at an efficient low cost
- There is a need for coherent/stable infrastructure for the support, development and advocacy of youth arts at the highest levels
- Development agencies should be organisations who have shown they can think strategically as well as being involved actively in youth arts practice
- They should provide a framework accessible to users, providers and funders
- Do not overlook important contribution of many arts organisations and the history of good practice
- Many useful networks are already in place – build on these rather than duplicate thereby making best use of existing resources and minimising bureaucracy
- As many and varied a number of organisations as possible should be encouraged to network together in a partnership thereby encouraging diversity and inclusion resulting in better understanding/knowledge learning from one another. Any extra funding should be targeted at these network activities rather than at the individual organisations.
- Clearly differentiate development agency activity from direct youth arts delivery activity to avoid conflicts of interest
- Focus on the kinds of support appropriate to different age groups instead of focusing on art forms
- Consider a well-resourced national development agency rather than just the network of agencies

- Be aware of the widening gap between the largest and the smallest organisations when making the 'best into beacons'. Funding must be accompanied by clear strategies to support local networks
- There is a need for clarity about the role that local authorities play in this area
- Consider the development of centres of learning excellence in youth arts
- Long-term investment is essential

### **Making the Case**

- High profile/heavyweight advocacy is essential
- Use a recognised system for gathering research and evidence so that projects can be compared and evidence built up consistently; adopting common evaluation processes would be helpful
- A review of current evidence would provide a good starting point
- Evaluation documentation is duplicated year on year – a system for collating evidence is imperative
- Do not under-estimate the cost of evidence gathering, research and advocacy
- Ensure that research/evidence from young people themselves is heard
- Provide incentives for young people to participate in the consultation process
- Important to collect evidence that demonstrates both the social value of youth arts and the artistic/personal value to the participants
- Recognition of the need for flexible and self generated performance indicators
- Mount showcase events, demonstrating high quality youth arts in appropriate contexts; suggestion made to establish a county-wide youth arts festival
- Essential to make the case for access for the arts as central to children and young people's development – particularly social and emotional
- Important to make the case that youth arts are valuable in their own right and not simply to comply with non-arts government agendas
- There is a need for a clear appreciation of arts for arts' sake and arts as a tool for other aims. This is all part of placing the arts and creativity at the centre of approaches to working with young people
- A strong youth arts alliance is needed to advocate at the highest levels on behalf of all youth arts
- Important to guard against a uniformity of approach which could breed cynicism and discourage innovation

### **Common Framework for Quality Assurance**

- Consider an 'artsmark' for youth arts organisations
- A common framework would be difficult as youth services have their own quality assurance procedures
- A framework has already been developed for youth and community sector work (Foundation for Community Dance/Sound Sense)
- Development of the standards of practice in youth arts would be very welcome
- Recognise the need for a common training framework to ensure high quality practitioners across the country

- The framework could be continually reviewed by a standing conference on the arts for children and young people
- Training of emerging practitioners needs to be over a sustained amount of time (at least one year)
- Framework must be able to validate different modes of learning and the different routes that professionals working in this field might have taken to get to the same agreed ends
- There is a need for professional development for youth arts project managers/officers/administrators not just practitioners
- Network other groups into the proposed development agencies to form clusters; this could provide the infrastructure for delivering and promoting a common approach to high quality arts delivery. Investment in time and training would be needed to nurture these clusters.
- One of the main challenges facing the sector is a perceived lack of professionalism amongst practitioners
- There is a need to strike the balance between being unnecessarily prescriptive and being so broad as to be meaningless
- With regard to qualifications and professional status of practitioners, concern that volunteers currently involved in youth arts provisions may be excluded or exclude themselves
- Build on existing formal sector accreditation, but include recognised informal sector accreditation
- The development agency Artsworld is developing significant training, which could usefully be offered more widely. With more funding, Artsworld could be organising and coordinating evaluation materials nationally. They are providing a common framework for quality assurance, although there is no onus on anyone to subscribe to this. [N.B. This comment is from an Oxfordshire consortium.]
- Regional fora for sharing good practice would be positive
- Framework should include training and pathways for young people who want to go on to work in the youth arts sector

### **Youth Arts in Context of Young People's Lottery Fund**

Respondents were unanimous in recommending a lead role for youth arts in the delivery of a new Young People's Fund. Comments ranged as follows:

- Youth arts should be equal top with other arenas in the fund
- Youth arts should be a substantial player, given the impact of the arts on a wide range of community issues
- Youth arts should have a key role, but not separate from other forms of youth work
- Promote youth arts as an enjoyable leisure activity with real meaning to them
- Youth arts is an emerging sector and needs to be nurtured carefully and separately from e.g. sports or information technology; however joined up thinking with other areas would be positive
- A significant part of any youth fund should be given over to creative opportunities rather than arguing specifically for a youth arts category
- Youth Arts should work in partnership with other sectors with a strategic approach according to different needs in different areas of the country

- Youth arts funding should have both a project (revenue) and a capital focus. Young people and youth arts providers should be consulted in the process of establishing the fund
- People with proven experience in the field of specific art forms within youth arts should be involved in the distribution of any such funds and the drawing up of criteria
- It would be good to have funding available to help equip and provide practical support to aid organisations to grow and develop
- A procedure similar to the Millennium Fund could be adopted – i.e. designated organisations could distribute grants to voluntary groups within specified criteria
- It will be important to make clear distinctions between the criteria for the Young People's Lottery fund, Arts Council England's grants for the Arts Scheme, Awards for All and Youth Music's. There is potential for each of these funds rejecting applications because they see them as more relevant for one of the others
- Funds should be specifically targeted at work which opens up a wider level of understanding about diversity through creative interventions
- Funding should support cross arts activities

### **Mechanism for Coordinating & Supporting Youth Arts Development**

Suggestions range from a single national agency or umbrella body to an alliance of organisations that could coordinate strategic support nationally (and be able to straddle youth work and the arts with complete credibility), to a specialist directorate in Arts Council England, with several permutations in between. On the whole, respondents do not assume that a single national agency/body would necessarily incorporate a funding role. However, the issue of securing an adequate level of funding for all youth arts is indicated (either explicitly or implicitly) as an essential objective.

Other comments included:

In addition to the development organisations, there could be a representative professional umbrella organisation with a remit to advocate, provide professional development, carry out research and identify funding opportunities. A good model for the needs of the youth arts sector is the Arts in Education Roundtable in New York ([www.nycaieroundtable.org](http://www.nycaieroundtable.org))

A specific lottery stream where funds for youth arts could capitalise on the recognised benefits the arts provide in individual fulfilment, life skills and inclusion and as a gateway to careers

The adoption of a similar model to the one in place for language education – the "Association for Language Learning" (ALL) - whereby all language subjects join forces to speak with one voice, undertaking lobby work, responding to government policy, being consulted on language matters, providing a one-stop shop for the press with its own website, annual conference and exhibition

A network committee of people with representatives from different regions and significant input from young people. Ideally each development

organisation would have representatives on the network committee with overall responsibility for feeding back to their regions and funders

A well-known organisation, easily accessible with well publicised ways of applying for grants or training. Not too much paperwork or report writing.

Possibility of developing a federal approach amongst some of the key agencies

Investigate the mechanisms for supporting community and participatory arts at the same time to ensure that maximum benefits and best value approaches are found to support access to participatory arts post 25 as well as pre 25

Bring pressure in a concerted and coherent way to release central and local authority funding to specially support youth arts

### **“Youth Arts” – Is This Shorthand Acceptable?**

32 respondents indicated they were comfortable with the shorthand, 10 were opposed.

The opposers indicated the following:-

- For many, “youth” denotes age 11+ and cannot include children as young as 3 nor young people in full adult relationships
- The term ‘youth’ is often used to describe young men particularly those involved in juvenile nuisance and disorder
- “Youth” is commonly used to denote a particular stage of growth, relationships and social/economical status
- Wary if “youth arts” is used to denote arts in schools, arts for young audiences etc.
- For many, “youth arts” implies a crusading sense of working with socially disadvantaged groups; this is a hugely important part of the work but the terminology does not adequately cover the full range of the spectrum.
- The term “youth arts” can be deemed not to be inclusive
- Use of the word “arts” sounds ‘elitist’; can conjure up a ‘wishy washy image of people who do not have proper jobs’

Alternative terminology was suggested – “arts and young people”, “arts for young people”, “arts with young people”, “extra arts”, “out of school arts”, “young creativity”, “Creative Opportunities (CrOp)”. It was also suggested that young people be canvassed for an appropriate “label” or adopt “youth arts” but re-market the label. The main distinction respondents want to establish is that youth arts denotes arts work with children and young people outside of a school/formal education context.

### **Additional Observations**

Respondents also made additional observations including:

- Youth arts covers a wide age range and diverse ways in which children and young people engage with the arts – consider mapping practice in, say, 3 distinct age bands, and develop linked but distinct policy for each

- Pigeon-holing young people into an age bracket might limit their potential to express as individuals rather than as a stereotype
- Involvement needs to begin at birth and regular engagement opportunities socially must be available throughout a person's life into adulthood for it to become part of the value system of an individual
- Young adults (20 – 24) are an important area for much youth work and should not be excluded from this work
- Develop ways to recognise and accredit the life skills acquired by young people involved with the arts (e.g. teamwork, communication and presentation skills, project management, negotiating skills, etc.)
- Secure long term funding for youth arts
- Safeguard existing arts provision in schools while developing properly funded informal youth arts provision available to all young people
- Young people, not just the professionals, need to see the breadth of what youth arts covers – create/support more opportunities for young people to share experiences across the arts
- Showcasing and profiling youth arts at a regional and national level would celebrate the diversity of young achievers and their achievements across the arts
- Integrate the work of young people into established, mainstream celebrations
- Youth Music and Arts Council England guidelines favour new activities where they have never happened before – this is excellent and very commendable. But there are many youngsters who access activities which have been poorly funded for years – such provision is never rewarded in funding terms
- Any youth arts policy should allow for both the support and development of distinct art from practice, and new and emerging, often interdisciplinary arts
- All too often the arts are used to “rescue” young people that the “system” has already failed; if the arts are so useful, they should be used as a primary resource in education, youth service and leisure – not just called in as a last resort
- Providers of youth arts need to consider how they can make their activities accessible to young, disabled and deaf young people in both impairment specific and integrated settings
- An additional priority should be taking a central role in continuing to lobby for the importance of the arts as a whole as well as of youth arts in particular
- Youth arts can play an important role in tackling stereotyping, challenging attitudes and increasing awareness of issues (disability, race and sexuality)
- The complexity of youth arts should be uppermost in strategic planning with recognition of differing types of work/relationships with arts organisations being appropriate for different age groups
- We should use gatekeepers to groups of young people more effectively and encourage and allow leisure arts activities to become a part of a wider community life even if some activity is particularly targeted at young people
- We need to use arts providers with professional workers more effectively as a local infrastructure

- Investment in IT is necessary in the youth arts sector as a key vehicle for networking, information gathering, disseminating good practice, profile-raising and reaching young people; develop electronic networks through new and existing web sites; explore opportunities for virtual celebration events via the internet
- In developing a youth arts strategy it is crucial that the potential for spontaneity and local flexibility in responding to young people's needs is not lost
- In developing a youth arts strategy there needs to be further consideration of the relationship between the youth arts sector and the arts education sector in terms of advocacy
- Similarly, there is a need for a far greater understanding to be built between the youth arts sector and the youth sector generally and a wider acceptance and understanding of what "arts" is
- As a result of a coordinated youth arts strategy young people should:
  - gain in increased and improved opportunities to participate and develop art forms particularly with the informal sector
  - benefit from an improved service affecting their career development and leisure time
  - have access to a conduit for information about/signposting to a variety of arts activities locally, regionally and further afield and go on to be the future of arts in this country
  - be educated about a healthier lifestyle through the arts
  - come together on a regular basis across areas and/or art forms to share their work and ideas

### **Conclusion**

This paper is intended to be useful to disseminate and stimulate further discussion within the sector, to inform policy makers and funders including Arts Council England and the New Opportunities Fund and inform the Board's discussions and decisions about Youth Music's future relationship with youth arts.

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