

NCA Delegation Report: Children and the Arts, 27 July 2000

Introduction

On 27 July 2000, the NCA took a delegation of artists to meet the Arts Minister, Alan Howarth, to discuss Children, Young People and the Arts. The artists attending the meeting were Lynne Reid Banks (children's author), Quentin Blake (illustrator and Children's Laureate), Michael Dalton (Pop-up Theatre Company), Jan Hinde (Yorkshire Youth and Music), Michael Morpurgo (author) and Ruth Till (Rubicon).

Issues Raised

The delegates raised a number of issues with the Minister, including the increasing concern about the number of funded arts projects being led by arts practitioners who are unfamiliar with working with children. Delegates emphasised the need for arts practitioners to be able to establish and maintain their own artistic skills while additionally acquiring the skills needed to deliver workshops, lessons, and appropriate interaction with children and young people. Similarly, they noted that teachers and youth workers should also have the opportunity to gain skills which will allow them to assist in delivering art form provision.

Members of the delegation also expressed their concern about the continuing lack of provision for arts in schools. They noted that the report by the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) had made important recommendations which needed to be implemented if creativity and the imagination were to thrive in a school context. They highlighted the important role that artists play in providing children and young people with opportunities to develop an emotional literacy and pressed the Minister to explain where the Government intended to take the report.

Recommendations

1. The Department should work with the DfEE, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Ofsted and the Teacher Training Agency to ensure that the arts obtain the status that they deserve throughout the education system and in the eyes of the general public.
2. The Department should liaise with the DfEE to ensure that the place of the arts within the school framework is appropriately valued and supported by the provision of appropriate resources.
3. The Department should liaise with the Arts Councils and Regional Arts Boards to agree a mechanism to ensure that artists working with children and young people have appropriate levels of experience to provide high quality arts provision.

Appropriate professional development should be created and financed to enable professional practitioners both within the arts and across other fields to exchange and develop the skills that they require to deliver art form practice to the highest standards.

4. Government departments should work together to provide a source of financial support which would enable arts practitioners to network effectively with other professionals in advance of the commencement of arts projects which have a broad social remit.
5. The DCMS should invest in evaluating the impact of the arts within a broad social context. It should encourage and enable 'social audits' to be conducted so that the value of the arts to education, social services and communities can be appreciated on the basis of empirical evidence.

Ministerial Response

The Minister welcomed the delegates' contributions and thanked them for the passion that they had brought to the debate. He acknowledged that emotional literacy was a major challenge for the current education system because it offered a challenge to the current orthodoxies which had existed in the education system for decades. He agreed that greater value needed to be given to emotion, imagination and creativity – capacities which were essential in order to lead a full and rounded life. The Minister reassured the delegates that the Government was well aware that educational failure carried an enormous price tag and that he and his team sought to quash the heresy amongst a minority of people who thought that education had only related to economic success. The needs of the fully rounded person were at the heart of his concerns. He said that the messages contained within the NACCCE report were being given serious attention by both the DCMS and the DfEE. The Departments were working with each other and with external organisations like the Arts Council of England and the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in order to pursue many of the recommendations made in the report. He assured the delegation that the Government's commitment to the values and the purposes set out in the report was unequivocal. Senior members of the Minister's team discussed a number of the initiatives which the Department had been pursuing as a result of the report's publication. These included negotiations with the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) who had welcomed closer interaction with arts practitioners from across the art form fields on the place of the arts in initial teacher training. The TTA had been holding half-day meetings with art-form practitioners from a wide range of arts disciplines. While the TTA had expressed concern about finding additional time within the initial teacher training curriculum they were addressing the issue with an open mind and recognition that creativity and the arts were an essential part of the teacher development process.

Delegates were assured that the DCMS would continue to promote the issues raised in the NACCCE report with other Government departments. Further work would be undertaken with the TTA, particularly on the development of how artists could assist in developing guidance materials for the initial teacher training process.

The Minister noted that within the £100 million settlement that had emerged for the arts from the spending review, £40 million was designated over two years for the development of Creative Partnerships. While the funding stream would not come into

force until 2002, it would provide the DCMS and its partners with the opportunity to fully prepare for the implementation process.

Delegates congratulated the Minister and his colleagues for securing additional funding for the arts from the Exchequer in the spending review. They noted that the need to provide empirical evidence of the benefit of the arts to society was an increasing requirement for funding security at every level. They felt strongly that the arts were valid in their own right and that no one could begin to quantify the level of joy experienced by children in pursuit of arts activities. However, they recognised the value of being able to make a clear case for the arts in relation to the broad range of contexts that they practised in which ranged from the development of literacy skills in school to work with excluded children on projects focused on social integration.

The Minister agreed with the proposal from delegates that well constructed longitudinal research into the impact of the arts in the variety of contexts would assist in making the case for funding. He noted that during the current process of the development of local authority cultural strategies, many non-arts based departments were openly recognising the value that the arts and cultural sectors were bringing to their own working environments. Opportunities for the implementation of well developed cross-sectoral evaluation systems should occur with the introduction of the Creative Partnerships.

A senior civil servant noted that there were already signs that greater collaboration was occurring between diverse departments of government at local and central levels. In their reader development scheme libraries were increasingly working with a broad range of partners including artists, members of the business community, health practitioners and schools.

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