

# Joint Oireachtas Committee Report on Utilising the Arts to Combat Disadvantage

## Introduction

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Environment, Culture, and the Gaeltacht reported last year on the issue of utilising the arts to combat disadvantage. The Committee stated that it was 'primarily concerned to ensure social inclusion and ensure that the people most in need of assistance and intervention are targeted and facilitated in participating at a full level in projects organised at community level'. In particular it stated, 'it wants to ensure that allocated funds are adding value and facilitating community involvement and inclusion'. It identified potential for personal benefits to individuals and social benefits to the community from arts and culture initiatives.

The Committee defined cultural inclusion as 'the right for all citizens to participate in the nation's artistic and cultural life – to enjoy art, to make art, to participate in decisions about art'.

## Ideas Explored

The Committee explored a social inclusion rating system for all grants to the arts. This 'would reward projects that specifically promoted social inclusion and combatted disadvantage'. It suggested, 'the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht could establish an appropriate rating system based on the findings of its research on the effectiveness of the arts in reducing social disadvantage and increasing social inclusion'. As a result 'all arts groups would be proactively encouraged to consider their proposals and actions in terms of their social impact'.

The Committee noted that 'the Arts Council has no specific requirement to promote social inclusion through the Arts' and 'that while there is an implicit understanding that many organisations fulfil a very important function in fostering inclusion, no existing organisation incorporates this aim as one of its specific objectives'.

## Relevant Recommendations

**Recommendation One:** Adopt a national policy by which the arts will be recognised as a fundamental means of combating social exclusion and promoting the well-being and inclusion of disadvantaged groups within local communities and at a national level. Give strong consideration to including the level of engagement in the arts as a National Indicator of well-being.

**Recommendation Two:** Develop an adequately funded structure to conduct research into the arts and the efficacy of the arts in promoting social inclusion.

**Recommendation Five:** Establish a cross-departmental committee chaired by an Assistant Secretary in the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht with appropriate research funds, support and structures to identify barriers that exist to participation in the arts at community level by all sectors of society. Charge this committee with working with other Government Departments, encouraging each department to outline its strategy in relation to arts and culture in order to maximise

and understand the contribution of the arts to the wider Government portfolio in general.

**Recommendation Six:** Conduct a comprehensive study of the impact of funding through the arts to combat social disadvantage and promote social inclusion in advance of any major policy changes in this area. Identify the evidence that demonstrates that effective funding in this area does have a significant and positive effect on social inclusion and reducing social disadvantage. The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht should lead the coordination of this research with the assistance of Ireland's third level educational institutions and other relevant stakeholders.

**Recommendation Eight:** Government Departments should only provide arts funding to a local authority after that local authority has given explicit recognition to the arts and declared publicly that it considers the provision of arts services in its area as a core service to the local community.

**Recommendation Ten:** Local authorities and arts partners should develop targeted arts programmes that have legacy and sustainability strategies and that take cognisance of the need to provide opportunities and progression beyond individual projects to participants. While this will not always be possible as for instance in certain once-off events, local authorities and arts partners should operate in accordance with this principle insofar as possible.

**Recommendation Eleven:** Appoint Social Inclusion Officers in all local authorities which do not already have such Officers, authorising them, *inter alia*, to examine county development strategies, corporate plans and other plans devised at local level and to ensure that these include the aim of promoting social inclusion within their area.

**Recommendation Twelve:** Utilise the new Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) which will replace the City and County Development Boards to deliver targeted, well-planned and relevant arts programmes. To facilitate this, provide one or more positions on these Boards to represent and champion the arts.

**Recommendation Fifteen:** Provide specific funding or ring-fence a certain percentage of funding specifically for projects that are geared towards combating social exclusion and bringing the arts to disadvantaged groups. Create a scheme such as 'Arts Inclusive' to which Local Authorities could apply for funding for such a project.

**Recommendation Nineteen:** Ensure that the national and local broadcasting services provide adequate coverage of locally based arts events in all parts of Ireland, including rural Ireland and not just in the major urban centres. These events, which cater for local groups and communities, include such activities as the Scór competitions and local feiseanna, talent competitions and amateur productions.

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*Briefing produced by Blue Drum*

*February 2015*