

Arts group workshop: summary report

The workshop discussions were in two parts involving approximately 60 people, with the Assistant Minister attending the first session and the Minister the second.

The focus was the department's need to develop separate policy for arts and heritage in the light of the Cultural Strategy, and the reality that the increased resources envisaged by the strategy were unlikely to be available in the immediate future.

Participants divided into five groups and were invited to consider a number of questions, leading towards what they regarded as key issues to address in an arts policy adopted by government but linked to, and driven by, the needs of the community.

The following is a digest of the principal points made or those common to more than one group.

The arts play an important role in how we are perceived. How do we currently view ourselves and the profile of the arts?

- Some identified an apparent conflict between the high level of arts activity within the Island and the perception that the arts had a low profile; particularly relating to the external perception of the Island where it was thought the arts were unlikely to feature highly.
- One group described the arts as effectively constituting an 'island' within Jersey; they should be more closely connected to wider cultural scene in Island life.
- Nevertheless, all groups identified a wide range of events which reflected positively on the image of the Island and which should be recognised as making a broad contribution to the cultural landscape.
- More than one group expressed the view that the 'value' of the arts in terms of community enrichment was not sufficiently widely understood; another drew attention to the economic contribution of a thriving arts sector.

- The view was expressed that Jersey was suffering a loss of cultural identity; its language and literature were cited as examples of areas of the arts which received insufficient attention but which constituted part of a unique identity.
- It was felt that the number of people interested, or involved, in the arts was not widely recognised with the result that the arts received a lower priority than they should on government's agenda.
- There was a strong view that the arts were capable of exerting a strong influence for social good and that some of the traditional principles of taking the arts to as wide an audience as possible should be more strongly espoused.
- Equally, attention was drawn to the need, while taking the arts to a broad audience, to avoid the tendency to 'dumb down'.
- Some groups suggested that there was a danger of too much going on and that audience development, rather than provision of additional events or activity, was an important goal.

Is there scope for greater working together to achieve more? If so, in what areas?

- The majority of groups drew attention to the need for closer co-operation between those involved in the arts locally, whether venues or individual organisations.
- A number of groups expressed the view that a clearer voice for the arts was needed to counteract the practical problem that many individual organisations were preoccupied with ensuring the own survival.
- Recurrent messages were the need for wider championing of the arts and co-ordination of what was happening locally. Specific suggestions included: a comprehensive calendar of arts events for the Island and better methods of communicating among local groups - a central news board was suggested.
- It was widely agreed that the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture had to receive a strong and positive message from the arts community. Further thought should be given to the source of such leadership; it was suggested that the arts needed a higher profile within the department.
- There was support for linking the box offices of the main venues to ease access to tickets and information on-line.

Are the arts facilities currently provided adequate? Do we have what we need?

- The majority of groups expressed the view that there was a clear need for a sense of direction in relation to cultural facilities. Concern was expressed over the maintenance of existing buildings, in particular St James whose use was compromised by its condition.
- There was a need to ensure that proper arrangements were in place to ensure that the fabric of existing buildings was properly maintained.
- It was suggested that if St James could not be properly restored for cultural use, it could be sold with the proceeds being applied either to providing better facilities at the Arts Centre or enhancing provision at Fort Regent's Gloucester Hall (for larger events).

What support to the sector is required to develop the arts? On what basis should such support be given?

- It was recognised that the Jersey Arts Trust was the body charged with giving support to local individuals and organisations and that the Trust made grants available by a fair and transparent process.
- However, concern was expressed at the ability of smaller community groups to meet their current costs, and there was a call to undertake further work on the basis that grants were available. A comparison with support for sporting bodies/individuals was suggested.
- In relation to funding priorities, the view was expressed that the arts did not enjoy the prominence they should in government's agenda.
- One group advocated seeking private patronage to address any shortfall in funding.

What key issues should a States arts policy address?

- An audit of cultural facilities followed by a clear statement of the importance of maintaining them and provision of the necessary financial support.
- Co-ordination of cultural activity including an up-to-date cultural website and on-line ticketing facilities.
- Expansion of percentage for art policy with proceeds able to be used for non-permanent, as well as permanent, projects.
- The need to embrace both youth culture and also 'traditional' forms of cultural activity.

- Consideration of broadening our cultural outlook through programmes celebrating the culture of other nationalities resident in Jersey.
- Consideration of fiscal measures to encourage creative individuals in Jersey.
- The re-introduction of a Festival to raise the profile of the arts and to assist in drawing visitors to the Island.
- The possibility of securing a proportion of funding from the Lottery to support arts projects.
- The need to devise strategies to keep creative students in Jersey or encourage them back after university.
- The pursuit of ways to involve local artists in States-generated work – for instance, using local artists in States' publications.