

“Striking the Right Note”

Music Education Partnerships

FEEDBACK FROM BREAKOUT SESSIONS

18 April 2007

GROUP 1 – NATIONAL MUSIC EDUCATION COUNCIL

Role and Remit

The group agreed that the national Music Education Council would need to be carefully structured so as not to duplicate various systems in place at present. Its roles and remit would include:

- Acting as the core support establishment for music education in Ireland, and addressing music education at all levels (including links with 3rd level institutions)
- Overseeing roll-out of MEPs around the country, via allocation of funding from Government
- Ensuring de-fragmentation and consolidation of local resources
- Role in evaluating local MEPs
- Regulatory quality assurance role – MEPs should be required to register with the Council in order to access national funding
- Gathering and disseminating relevant information nationally and internationally
- Ensuring the application of best practice principles that are appropriate to the Irish context
- Advocacy function - promoting the value of music socially, educationally and financially
- Advisory role to Government

Key issues associated with establishment of national Music Education Council

- People working within the Council need to include those working within the education system
- Funding for the Music Education Council should come from the Department of Education and Science via Department of Finance
- If the remit of the national structure were to be widened to encompass all artforms, the specific needs of music education could be neglected, and the overall impact diluted.
- Possible reduction of funding to music
- Understanding and perception of what music education is about. Could possibly be narrowed into the classics and this could be problematic

Ensuring effective communication mechanisms

- Look at existing models in other Departments e.g. Teagasc and Dept of Agriculture
- There would need to be effective 2-way communication mechanisms in place between the Music Education Council and MEPs

Value of a national Music Education Council

- Providing interpretation of effective international models of music education
- Providing a conduit for experiences at local level – allowing MEPs to learn from each other
- It would enable networking between arts and education sectors to take place at a high level on an ongoing basis
- It would provide an effective means of identifying key issues for Government in relation to music education

Role of Music Education Council in providing evaluation, ensuring quality and consistency among MEPs

- Music Education Council would establish registration criteria for MEPs
- The Music Education Council would produce a Code of Practice and ongoing Continuing Professional Development for its registered members
- Evaluation and quality management linked to reporting requirements/disbursement of national funding
- Consistency of services measured through policy

GROUP 2 – EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

How would MEPs ensure social cohesion/inclusion?

- Tuition fees should be standardised as there is currently huge inconsistency from region to region.
- Scholarships should be available to ensure equity across socio-economic backgrounds.
- MEPs should prioritise employment of music tutors/educationalists – not just administrators/managers
- Social cohesion should be addressed through practical support for practitioners – e.g. training music tutors to work effectively in a classroom environment/in group teaching contexts
- The sector should make a conscious effort to move away from volunteerism. However, it was acknowledged that private schools are very dependent on volunteerism, and therefore this would be much more difficult for them.
- City and county availability; provision should take place across both rural and urban regions

Curriculum development

- Specialist music curriculum support needs to be available across the school system
- Need for primary educators to be trained to work effectively alongside professional musicians, and vice versa
- Music technology-based resources should be more widely accessible

- The transition between primary and post-primary needs to be planned for and effectively managed
- Codes of practice for the relationship between the musician in the classroom and the teacher should be established and disseminated to all relevant parties.

3rd level institutions

- More optional training is needed to enable prospective performing musicians to work effectively in schools/community contexts, as part of professional practice modules (e.g. as takes place at undergraduate level in Cork School of Music)
- Instrumental teachers need to be trained in pedagogical issues and education management
- Greater exposure to the parameters of the school curricula is required
- The full range of professional opportunities for musicians needs to be expressed and outlined to 3rd level music students while at college

Support for exceptional talent

- The rural/urban divide is an issue, and the situation in Cork/Dublin differs from the rest of the country – e.g. a case was cited of a Galway-based student travelling on a weekly basis to Cork School of Music on a scholarship. Scholarships should also take into account travelling expenses for students such as this.
- An alternative would be to enable specialist tutors to travel to rural areas as needed (peripatetic)
- As the model becomes more established, more highly trained musicians and music tutors/educationalists will begin relocating to other parts of Ireland
- A broad access programme is required to identify exceptional talent (e.g. via the curriculum support strand referring on students for scholarships to instrumental/vocal tuition service strand)
- The local MEP teachers should play a role in helping to support the parents of students with exceptional talent, to enable them to make informed choices about their child's music education progression.

Emerging partnership policy

- It is important that an MEP's policies are student-centred and based on existing good practice
- Policy should translate into long-term strategic plan at local level
- Policy objectives and strategies should be set in relation to artistic programming, partnership, Continuing Professional Development of tutoring staff, etc.
- Policy should include means of raising awareness at local level of the value of music education, and the services of the MEP

GROUP 3 – ADMINISTRATION ISSUES

Infrastructure

- A Music Development Manager/Coordinator should be established in each county probably within remit of VEC to ensure recognition and sustainability of each local MEP
- Premises – community resources – utilise resources in existence. It was acknowledged that the VECs have good countywide infrastructure, good care taking facilities, etc.
- Between them the key drivers at local level should work towards developing a sustainable infrastructure for music education in the region. Ideally, this should include provision of contracts, permanence and DES recognition for all staff.

Tutors

- Solid recruitment process, selection, interview, appointment, Garda vetting
- Policy guidelines and training for working with children should be provided
- At national level, the issue of contracts for tutors must be addressed – should be consistent from region to region
- Qualifications and pay scales are key issues. Currently in VEC-operated music teaching programmes an instrumental/vocal teaching diploma is not recognised to the same level as a qualified classroom teacher. There are similar difficulties facing international tutors relocating to Ireland – issues of equivalence.
- Access to teachers will present difficulties in the immediate term. More full-time positions required, as part-time tutors may not be willing to travel to teach for only a few hours in a rural MEP.

Entry to MEP

- Entry should be accessible for all – not just based on ability to pay; talent, etc.
- Need to build support/buy-in for music education among parents and teachers at local level

Identification of talent

- Comprehensive music training provision needs to be in place from primary level onwards in order to ensure identification and encouragement of talent
- Deal with issues relating to talented individuals on a case-by-case basis

Progress and management

- Tutor feedback will be crucial to ensuring that students are facilitated to progress effectively through the MEP system
- At national level an MEP curriculum/syllabus should be devised for local implementation/adaptation
- Ensemble/choral and grúpaí training needs to be provided as an essential part of the MEP service

GROUP 4 – PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Key partners

- There is a need to deepen understanding at local level about the possibilities presented via the MEP model
- The identification of key partners and facilitation of joint planning is important (there was some lack of understanding as to what a local authority Arts Officer's role could be within this process)
- There is a need to rejuvenate arts and education committees on a regional basis
- MEPs need to be sensitive to/embrace of existing structures, and flexible in approach – one size should not fit all
- The MEP should have a steering committee remit

Maintaining motivation

- The MEP should maintain an appropriate balance between being representative of all key local groups/sectors on the one-hand, and ensuring that it is a tight, proactive and effective structure on the other hand.
- Each MEP should be funded to recruit a Music Education Officer with appropriate skills to access other funding sources. They should be sensitive to local political issues in terms of the work of existing local groups and organisations, and private service providers. This needs to be the Music Education Officer's sole concern – additional administrative backup should be provided to take care of the logistics around timetabling, etc.
- The Music Education Officer should be seen as independent/an honest broker, outside of any existing local music "camps". Their focus should be on providing a joined-up model of local music education.
- An up to date database or directory of key information (i.e. local music organisations and music education services) needs to be established as a resource to emerging MEPs.
- The group felt that the approach of forming local partnerships first, in the hope that funding will follow, was feasible.
- The group felt that the seminar provided an important networking opportunity - further similar days would be welcome
- There was agreement that the DES needs to be brought in and encouraged to be more proactive; it was suggested that the local Music Education Officer positions could be co-funded by DES and Arts Council.
- The CAP Leader programme was cited as a possible additional funding route to be explored.

Local needs/next steps

- Local music/arts organisations have to have input at MEP level
- It was acknowledged that there has been momentum at local level around this issue, with lead organisations already working to developing their own partnerships rather than waiting for national policy implementation to catch up. This momentum needs to go further, and local awareness building, networking and advocacy needs to take place with key local partners.
- The critical next step is to bring the DES on board and make them buy into the national implementation of the MEP model. It was acknowledged by the group

that the Arts Council has an advocacy role to play in bringing this about, but the group wondered if the DES would be willing to be led by the Arts Council.

- Explore the LEADER programme as a possible means of additional funding, and identify how this might best be accessed.

GROUP 5 – EXISTING PROVISION

The group acknowledged that current levels of music education activity, and funding models vary widely around the country – e.g. some have VEC or local authority support, others are completely self-financing.

Partnership

- It is important that all schools be granted access to MEP curriculum support services, and that all existing music schools be offered the option of providing services via the MEPs
- It is also important that existing education providers and agencies be invited to join local MEP partnership
- New schools of music are being created all the time – duplication of effort can be an issue, and so coordination and strategic planning via the local MEP is very important
- Qualifications are a key issue of concern; while some instrumental tutors are excellent and may have very relevant qualifications, not all qualifications are recognised; accreditation should be based on prior experience.
- Teaching Council needs to support all MEP teachers, including instrumental/vocal tutors
- Establishment of Music Education Council should help to address qualifications issues.

Incorporation of existing provision

- MEPs should incorporate existing music education service providers (where appropriate – not all would wish to engage)
- The group recognised the need for diversity in MEP provision
- Music Education Council is needed to take into account planning on a national basis to ensure co-ordinated approach to provision at all levels
- Existing music schools use different examinations syllabi; some do not work towards exams, but instead towards performances, and some offer a mixture of the two – MEPs need to take this into account in planning their services.
- MEPs should be facilitated to support each other.
- Sharing of best practice would be useful, as would the creation of a template/guidelines to address common needs
- The group was impressed by the Sligo MEP's plans to seek 3rd level accreditation for both classroom teachers and professional musicians undergoing training to work together in the delivery of the primary school music curriculum. The group felt that MEPs elsewhere should seek to offer accreditation of this sort as an incentive to teachers and musicians to pursue this collaborative approach.

General requirements

- The national system should take into account music education provision across all strands, from junior to 3rd level/postgraduate.
- MEPs need to provide structured curriculum support in music to all schools
- In relation to outreach programmes taking place in schools there is a need for storage facilities for visiting professional musicians
- There was agreement that Music Network/MEWG should issue a call for the establishment of the national Music Education Council
- Music Network/MEWG should enable schools of music to register an interest if they wish to lend their services to MEPs
- 10 potential partners should be considered for a new phase of pilot funding from the DES

GROUP 6 - ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT

Key agencies

- Advocacy is required at national, regional and local levels. National target bodies/initiatives should include the National Children's Office; National Development Plan; Department of Education and Science; Office of Social Inclusion; National Parents' Council; umbrella bodies for VECs, CDBs, etc. At local level, VECs, local authorities, CDBs, Education Centres and existing service providers (i.e. key members of MEPs) need to buy into the model, begin to mobilise, and start advocating for funding.
- In the run-up to the election, politicians are in their constituencies – all parties attending the seminar need to advocate to schools, parents, member groups etc. to encourage local politicians to take message back to Government

How

- Advocacy is about a marriage of agendas. Therefore, how best can we get our message across in a way that resonates with current policy objectives? We need to address the current opportunity politically.
- The group acknowledged that music education is important but tends not to be an item at the top of people's agenda in terms of local needs – how can we change this in a collective way?
- National Association of Directors of VECs; National Arts Officers' Association; CDB umbrella group – Music Network/MEWG to present to these key groups as potential advocates both nationally and locally.
- Music Network/MEWG should prepare a flexible presentation stating the case for the full implementation of the feasibility study's recommended national system of MEPs. The presentation should be adaptable for local use by MEPs, and flexible enough to appeal to a range of audiences
- There was agreement that the most compelling means of stating the case for music education is by facilitating policy makers to experience the work themselves.
- The group unanimously supported the adoption of the social inclusion agenda as a core argument in making the case for funding for MEPs. Music education

should be viewed/communicated as an entitlement, and subsidies/scholarships should be provided to students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

- Gifted and talented students must also be supported and facilitated through MEPs.

Supports required

- Local bodies should be facilitated to meet and examine the resources already at their disposal; use this as a means of going forward.
- Develop generic flexible presentation as an advocacy tool
- Existing music and music education umbrella bodies should be encouraged to mobilise their members to demand the establishment of an MEP for their area from local politicians in the run-up to the election.