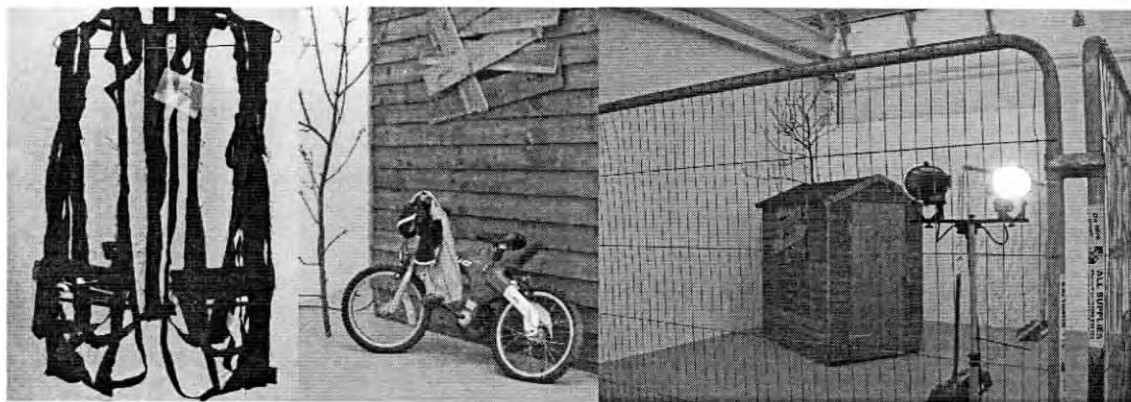


Chapter One: Introduction



1.0 Fine Art 'off-site' modules, the subject of this report, are designed to be self-initiated, community-based projects adapted to local circumstances and needs. They attempt to maximize the use of local expertise and enthusiasm. Their aim is provide opportunities to extend experience and in many cases sample possible career destinations. The *style* of both modules under scrutiny was fundamentally 'extensions of personal practice into challenging new contexts' and this dimension may be captured as core principles:

- working with others;
- developing professionalism;
- flexible context and timescale;
- grounding concepts;
- partnership negotiation/collaboration.

1.1 These five principles underline the complexity of the implementation task faced by module coordinators. However, within these principles individual partnerships evolve and develop a wide range of initiatives (working with children, young adults and the wider community). A central evaluation objective has been to capture that complexity and to provide an overview of the entire implementation process. In order to do so, we have collected data by three means: firstly a scrutiny of the history of these modules; secondly a series of individual case studies, which form the subject of this report, and lastly a collection of samples of personal art practice to identify where connections and synergy occur. As previously indicated, the visual material and summary statements from the students will be published on the university website as faculty based research). Reflection on the history of the modules was thought to provide an overview of the concept/design and implementation. This, in turn, set a qualitative context for subsequent phases of data collection.

1.2 Following the analysis of data collected, we were able to select a representative subset of issues that in turn formed the chapter headings and subject matter of this report.

1.3 In essence the case study respondents tell the story behind the data. The specific intention of the individual case studies were to study the specific experience and reflect on the implementation process as close to the ground as possible. Through the analysis and synthesis of the data, we were able to identify some key issues - and by implication - a number of key learning points for all module stakeholders. We wanted to throw light on some of the overarching questions and challenges that have confronted module coordinators, such as how do partnerships engage students in their initial planning activity? How easy is it to involve partnerships in the evaluation process? What attracts students to particular options? Do staff provide appropriate service? How far have module initiatives reached the desired target

community? How well are students working with diverse communities? How do they know whether partnership staff value their contribution or find it relevant to their needs and circumstances?

1.4 We now provide an account of the way in which we collected our data, including a brief discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the case study approach.

Collecting the data

1.5 At the end of 2007, we invited all students that completed either module in that year (Cohort 1) to contribute their findings to a report. At that stage no research funding was confirmed but interest alone necessitated capturing student satisfaction and related findings. In total a group of 13 indicated their willingness to take part. Somewhat optimistically we thought that all students would wish to take part but in reality participation was on a voluntary basis. Mindful of the fact that we could be missing valuable information from students who were not particularly positive about the module we attempted to persuade others to contribute their findings. In the event this would have changed the nature of the research and required a compulsory element. However, in the light of the developments additional case study areas were therefore not pursued.

1.6 The sample was therefore self selecting, on the basis of a genuine interest in sharing experience. Contributors ranged across a number of variables (e.g. region, rural/urban, schools, further education, small businesses, museums/galleries. Indirectly, the feedback contributed to placement "quality ratings". An account of the projects is set out in the Interim Report at **Appendix 1: Interim Report**.

1.7 We took as our starting point for the topic areas, the issues that emerged in the scrutiny of the history of the modules (e.g. management and governance, staffing, choice and access, etc.). This meant that we could potentially see patterns in the student reported accounts. These observations could form the basis of subsequent interviews with partnership members.

1.8 In affect we took a four-fold approach to each of the case study areas:

- A study of relevant documentation – student proposals/plans
- Semi-structured interviews with the range of students. Questionnaires from Cohort 2 (2008)
- Observations of the placement provision for the project
- Quality of service provided by all stakeholders

1.9 What was evident at an early stage in this research was the need to interview representatives from the various partnerships to gauge a true and accurate picture. Within the restricted time of this small-scale research all we could do was indicate our willingness to pursue this as a second phase of the work in the following academic year (2009/10).

1.10 Our interview complement included 13 respondents (Cohort 1):

- 4 school placements
- 5 museums (Site Specific The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery & IWMN)
- 2 small businesses
- 1 referral unit
- 1 performance

(Cohort 2)

- 4 school placements
- 9 museums (Site Specific The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery & IWMN)
- 2 small businesses
- 2 local authority

1.11 As we indicated above, and as is consistent with the grounded theory approach (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1998), as field worker we were careful not to be seen to be 'outlawing' any of the issues raised by respondents, particularly in light of the diversity of experiences on the part of both staff and students within *and* across modules.

1.12 The time frame for the fieldwork was February 2008 to December 2008. Not surprisingly, given the pressures on module coordinators, the fieldwork phase took longer than envisaged and although the interim phase was completed to deadline by December 2008 there exists extension opportunities beyond phase 1 of this research (**See Appendix 6: Post Script**).

1.13 It should be acknowledged that while the case study approach is a central element in much contemporary evaluation literature (Katz and Pinkerton, 2003), it has both strengths and weakness (Mays and Pope, 2000; Lambert and McKeivitt, 2002). Case studies become particularly useful when intended users need to understand a problem, situation, or project in great depth, and they can identify cases rich in needed information – rich in the sense that a great deal can be learned from a few exemplars of the phenomenon of interest. For example, much can be learned about how to improve a project by studying drop-outs or select successes. Such case studies can provide detailed understanding of what is going on and solid grounds for making improvements (Patton, 1997; 288).

1.14 However as Patton (1997) also indicates, it is to be expected that some issues will emerge in some projects, but not necessarily in all projects. In order for this report to do justice to the data collected from the sample, it has been inevitably the case that in some instances we will appear to be only reporting 'one side of the story'. In other words, the fact that an issue emerges on the part of some placement providers in some project does not mean that it will be an issue for other placements or related proposals

1.15 One final consideration in the collection, analysis and presentation of our data was our consistent awareness of the 'boundaries' between our role as evaluators and the role of the module coordination. To a degree there was a conflict of interest here as the researchers have an investment in the initiative. While every effort has been made to preserve validity, we acknowledge that independent evaluation is the ideal and this research represents our best effort.

Presentation of the data

1.16 Given the issues discussed above, as is the case in any type of qualitative case study research, there will be many possible ways of presenting the data. It should be borne in mind that this data was collected from 13 'face to face' interviews with students across the two modules and supplemented by 17 questionnaires for Cohort 2 (late 2008). While the starting point for each of these interviews was the relevant interview schedule (circulated to students one week prior to the timetabled interviews) inevitably, respondents themselves determined the key issues they wanted to highlight. For example, in some cases, geographical location was raised as an issue, which we had to take as a 'given', impacted on the relationships both within the local placement provider and between the module coordination (placement visits/module coordinators). However, in areas where the student sought local or previously known placement locations this did not emerge as a key issue in the interviews. Similarly and inevitably, a number of the proposals were based in areas with a long-standing history of robust, collaborative relationships between the Fine Art department at Staffordshire University and regional museums. This history had very different

implications for the day-to-day experiences of module coordinators in terms of implementing joined up thinking than an area with no prior involvement. Both of these sets of issues contribute to the backdrop of these module initiatives. **(See Appendix 2: Module Evaluation)**

1.17 We have made a conscious decision to reflect in our case study report the implications of these diverse local scenarios and the different emphases given to a range of issues raised by our 13 respondents. However, at the same time, we have been concerned to locate these specific opinions within a wider overview, and to make clear, where appropriate, that they do not represent the views of all stakeholders, even in one module, let alone across both cohorts of students. Therefore, each chapter begins with a general overview of 'what's going on' across the case study areas. We then proceed to highlight the specific issues, which emerged in some of the projects, but may very well not apply to all proposals.

Structure of the report

1.18 The report is intended to contribute insights to a wider learning process for practitioners and policy makers engaged in such modules - *and* in other related community based initiatives, where professionals, volunteers and community members come together to improve experience.

1.19 As we explained above in paragraph 1.1 the structure of this report reflects the same principles that we identified in the early phase of the research. A key purpose of our case studies was to complement, with a qualitative dimension, other success criteria such as grade performance within the module, and to provide an opportunity to discuss more complex issues such as professional conduct and *partnership working*. We believe this has helped us highlight specific implementation issues of wider relevance to the learning and teaching agenda.

1.20 Within each chapter we attempt to:

- a) Report the range of views and ideas put forward by our respondents
- b) Describe, in detail where appropriate, the nature of those opinions and to throw light on individual issues.
- c) Where appropriate, we include brief examples of key observations

1.21 Our study of course documentation provided the simple structure for our interview schedules, and was intended to provide a contextual 'backdrop' for the interviewer/s. Summary transcripts of the interviews are included in the Appendix section of this report (**Appendix 3: Student Evaluation/transcripts**). Additional data was collected through questionnaires for Cohort 2 (2008) - **Appendix 4: Questionnaire Template**.

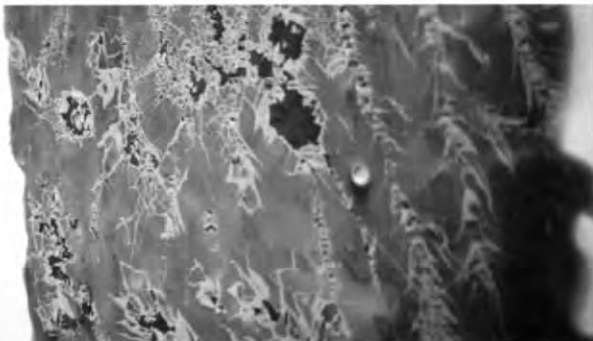
1.22 Finally, we have provided an overview of the context by providing sample pages from the website in **Appendix 5: Web-based data/sample**. This summarises the data we have collected from students with the emphasis placed on their selection of key images and descriptive text. Although the case study material varies in terms of the emphasis and style, they also manifest important similarities. Each of the students responses are supportive of work-based placements therefore, we are confident that our conclusions are relevant to particular career destinations.

1.23 The remaining sections of the report are organised in the following chapters:

- Chapter Two: Module Management and Coordination
- Chapter Three: Staffing and Resources
- Chapter Three: Student Access: Maintaining the Opportunity
- Chapter Four: Conclusions and Learning Points
- Appendix 1 - 6

1.24 As we explained above, our overall intention in this report was to bring the issues to light and reflect on the views at the 'front line'. However, this qualitative data is partial and from a small sample so we envisage monitoring over definitive conclusions.

Chapter Two: Module Management and Coordination



2.0 This chapter focuses on the issue of module management, the nature and quality of which is central to the continuity of appropriate provision. Opportunities for working as Artists-in-Residence as an aspect of BA Fine Art study is not unique, but over years, students at Staffordshire have had significant enrichment options. Government initiatives over recent years have championed 'Creativity' and work related experience (e.g. All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education, DFEE and subsequent developments in Vocational Diplomas etc. Government initiatives, which seeks to change and improve educational opportunities by the introduction of new ways of working are gaining momentum ' To me the essence of creativity and cultural education is that individuals, in this case young people, find their own creativity/cultural 'voice', develop skills to service this, engage with others with a view to participating in society. It has to be an active engagement' Pauline Tambling, Director of Education and Training, Arts Council of England, 1999). Such new approaches pose significant challenges for the tasks of management as they raise expectations from students who have progressed to degree courses from current and emerging courses (school/further education). At the level of the individual students they arguably need a sense of ownership of goals and beyond that involve significant adjustments in patterns of collaboration and co-operation.

2.1 The 'style' of the management of these modules is therefore fundamental to levels of satisfaction. We have summarized this data under the following four headings:

- Perception of the modules ('ethos')
- Module leaders (characteristics and qualities)
- Partnership members/ relationships
- Learning points

Perception of the Modules

2.2 Each module has a clearly defined philosophy and aims to engage students beyond their studio practice. These module descriptors and guidance materials are crucial in the negotiation process and all potential partnerships use the material to establish a common understanding of the expectations. We wanted to explore the way in which all partnerships saw/see the ethos of the modules. Our respondents are currently identified through the end of project evaluations and are briefly sampled here:

Placement mentors

2.3 While overall expectations reflected a commitment to the modules placement staff appreciated that all developments pose challenges for all:

- *“but the time in school is really too short”*
- *“this proved to be an excellent opportunity to try out teaching”*
- *“time keeping was an initial problem as the preparation required was miscalculated”*
- *“very good relationship with staff and pupils”*

[sample from School respondents]

Established partnerships supporting students each year felt that greater scope existed for 'closer working', "the planning of the sessions was good and the students really were enthused and keen to make the project work" (Maria Smith Formal Learning Manager IWMN).

View from the Front-line

2.4 Informal and unsystematic opinions/views from partnership placements appeared similar overall to those of module coordinators, both in terms of the themes, which emerged from their responses as well as the priority they allocated to respective issues.

- The prospect of providing coherent and detailed proposals was one of the most frequently cited reasons that people had for involvement;
- Respondents cited the desire to break away from prescriptive methods of working by identifying 'fresh thinking', 'experimental activity' as the main benefit in hosting students.
- Traditional ways of providing the curriculum has limitation. One Teacher explained, *“I had seen children move from passive learning to experimental investigation...”* (Primary School Mentor)
- Respondents believed the modules represented a way in which “the familiar or predictable could be revisited...” (Museum Mentor)
- Could students (BA Fine Art) address diverse communities and challenging behaviour? *“how do you implement a project with limited knowledge of pedagogy or behaviour management?”* (Head teacher Primary school)

The role of a Module Coordinator

2.5 The task of managing an 'off-site' module is a challenging one and involves a wide range of activity. This may include:

- Ensuring that the proposals match the expectations;
- Developing and enhancing existing provision by working in collaboration with established professionals;
- Supporting placement staff;
- Checking appropriate opportunities and risks;
- Continuing a dialogue - consultation and development of projects with the chosen community.

2.6 All of these tasks require a high degree of flexibility and determination. For some student confidence in social environments was an issue, as was the prevalence of dyslexia (over the two Cohorts of students in the research sample up to 25 % had been diagnosed at some level on the scale). A more accurate figure can be extracted from the records but the significance is that this appeared to be a growing trend with the current Level 2 year group requesting assessment for Learning Support Agreements.

2.7 Exploring the variety of proposals and identifying appropriate strategies required a high degree of student professionalism in order to be effective in delivering this initiative. Placement mentors needed to possess, at the very least, project planning, management and development experience. In this section however, we explored the views of staff as to the characteristics that make a "good" mentor. Most of the comments from placement respondents were relatively unspecific about the virtues of the modules and understandably focused on the individual student. However, some comments could be seen to be especially relevant to module management, who must learn to sensitively support, in some cases, less than confident students. This may mean, in some cases, that staff expect even more flexibility, openness and commitment to supporting them in their new role.

The Partnership

2.8 In the context of this study, we use the word 'partnership' to denote the strategic and organisational collaborative arrangements, which are forging – or not - in the process of implementing placements. However, in the context of the modules, partnership has two connotations. On the one hand, it refers to the formal arrangements in order to host a student placement. At the same time it refers to a '*partnership way of working*' with a range of potential outcomes. This latter sense is difficult to separate from the idea of working together. Thus, the key questions in this section are:

- What do module partnerships look like? Is there a generic connection?
- How are they working? (e.g. no formal contract or role specification). Are they working in partnership with the module coordinator at the university?

2.9 Can we identify a particular partnership style(s), which appear(s) to be associated with the more 'established' providers? ('established' in the sense of being used each year: example Site Specific museum placements)

How are Partnerships working?

2.10 Partnerships, in most cases are informal and flexible on both sides (students/host placement). However, considerations include the following tasks:

- Agreeing a placement;
- Identifying a lead contact (placement mentor);
- Coordinating and modifying development plans (proposals);
- Providing strategic direction for the project;
- Clarity of purpose;
- Commitment to the notion of student 'ownership';

Partnership history

2.11 In some cases partnerships have a strong local history of collaborative working. Here we have an indication a pre-existing understanding in the area of the need for the sort of partnership envisaged in the module. Conversely the absence of such collaboration may well be seen as a more fragmented way of working. Reassuringly, there was no evidence to suggest that student choice adversely affected outcomes.

2.12 The Site Specific Module was been running for nearly ten years and it was devised and developed around the expertise of staff members Liz Lemon and Phil Sayers. Liz brought to the task her long experience in the field of Public Art installation and permanently sited sculptural works and Phil Sayers contributed his extensive experience of working, often in response to

particular collections, Art Galleries and Museums. The original concept included work within we 'non art venues' and the assessable element of the module was and is a proposal document outlining ideas for a possible commission. More specifically, the module is run in two semesters with the first one focussed on 'making a proposal' and for those continuing on the Site Specific module, they develop their artworks either as workshop propositions or refining work for temporary exhibition/installation.

The SICAP Module was originally designed and developed in response to student demand. Here previous members of the Fine Art department (Neil Powell, now Director of Undergraduate Studies at Norwich School of Art & Design and Jenny Sherrell, original Course Leader, now retirement) coordinated these 'off-site' placements.

2.13 Interviews with students and follow up sessions with partners yielded some positive views about existing and developing partnership work in the area. One teacher proudly noted that, *"We will maintain contact with this student as she progresses through teacher training as there may well be a future post for such a strong candidate"* Head of Art, Secondary School.

2.14 Thus, key respondents tended to voice positive outcomes and acknowledged 'strength' in the relationships. A Youth Group Leader summed it up succinctly: *"[we] struggle against the lack of investment in opportunities for young offenders and while BA students have limited knowledge of these difficulties they appear to empathise well and understand social alienation"*. (Care Officer, Buckinghamshire)

Clarity of purpose

2.15 Another aspect of partnership success relates to clarity and realism of purpose. In other words, partners need to consider whether they have sufficient common ground to work together, both in terms of a broad set of shared understanding as well as more specific aims and objectives. In addition, are the proposals agreed upon by the partnership achievable and realistic? We will consider these issues in turn.

2.16 One of the messages emerging from our data is the need for all the stakeholders in the partnership to be clear about the basis of their involvement, the parameters of their responsibilities and their relationship - both with the project - and with each other. Is there any real partnership in the sense of sharing experience across the membership?

2.17 Furthermore, we found in acknowledgements from partnerships (post-placement evaluations) some evidence that over 80% would value further opportunities to collaborate.

2.18 While we certainly found two projects where respondents did make a link between their institutions, in many other projects, there was no such virtuous circle.

2.19 However, other respondents cited the absence of such clarity in relation to problems around accountability. One partnership coordinator said, *"There is a tension as to how you build on the partnership, we would value a rolling programme of student placements"* (Head of Art, Wolverhampton Grammar School)

2.20 In conclusion, while the building blocks of partnership are important, in reality a series of outside factors inevitably impact on the process of maintaining/sustaining contact with placement providers. While the element of student 'free choice' exists the establishment of a linked network of placements is unlikely to be secured.

Commitment and ownership

2.21 Commitment and ownership at every level are essential to a successful partnership. We found considerable evidence, as touched on above, of the commitment and indeed passionate support for the modules at the level of individual staff members. Similarly we found an equal pattern of commitment at the highest organisational levels, for example, a managing director of a small business in Cheshire commented “we have found the whole experience immensely valuable and staff continue to talk about the work produced and the relationship between an artist and the materials we produce (John Dison, MD EarthBorn plc)

2.22 There appeared to be two discernible influences, with the capacity to impact positively and/or negatively on placements. There needed to be a dynamic relationship between the proposal (detailed plans/intentions) and the personal qualities of the student (interpersonal skills/confidence).

2.23 However, in spite of these variations in approach, there was evidence of a broadly positive overall view that if a student cared enough to make a personal contact/selection and target a placement then the prospects were generally good.

2.24 Strong support within the placement was crucial to the development of many projects. In three projects, there was evidence of a very strong and supportive community, whose members were very keen to be involved at every level.

2.25 It is difficult to draw overarching conclusions from the collection of placement evaluations. It is, however, a reasonable assumption that there will be providers operating in a very positive, efficient and effective way while inevitably the reverse will be true in others. Module participants express mostly positive views across the diversity of placements. However, it is clear that feelings of commitment and ownership are important in boosting confidence and securing positive outcomes.

Developing and maintaining trust among partners

2.26 The need for successful partnership working is both self-evident and elusive. The development and maintenance of trust on the part of both partnership mentors and module coordinators is probably the basis for the most successful and enduring partnerships. At whatever level – organisational, professional, individual – mutual trust increases the chances for strong partnership.

2.27 In developing ‘trust’, it was important that each partner’s contribution was equally recognised and valued. We noted a commitment to partnership by all members and individuals in that they seemed to share a common respect for the particular community. This sense of trust and mutual respect resulted in a good atmosphere and enhanced motivation.

2.28 Some students felt a little under supported by the partnership, leading to feelings of disaffection and exclusion from some aspects of the role (e.g. access to staff meetings (schools) relevance of personal studio practice etc.) “*The staff did not take any interest in my personal studio work*” was a sentiment expressed by one student. Another remarked, “*The role seemed more about assessment than experimentation (Secondary School)*.”

2.29 Given the complexity of working with so many partners, it is not surprising that module coordinators may at times be hindered by what can seem over ambitious plans. For example, our colleague at IWMN found it difficult initially to provide as the event in 2007 was largely a drop-in activity and directed at the casual visitor during the half term break and was not held in the formal learning area where the 2008 sessions were held. The 2007 activity was essentially a trial run as this particular placement mentor had taken over from a previous staff member who had moved

on. The relationship needed to be reestablished and she was, in a sense, testing on our ability to deliver. As a result of the success of the 'drop in event', the initiative is now advertised in their brochure and distributed widely. Although no funding was available in 2008, a more formal partnership was been secured for 2008. More specifically she was willing to put the module in the calendar of Educational events for schools and colleges, providing a week slot at the start of October each year and reviewed on a yearly basis.

2.30 While all stakeholders acknowledged the inevitability of tasks such as close monitoring and feedback sessions many placements needed considerable pressure to return evaluations before the project assessment deadlines. The least popular was the task was the requirement to provide recorded feedback (evaluation of the project). Placement respondents expressed some resentment at the amount of time they had to allocate for 'monitoring activity' (i.e. responding to request for information from module coordinators). In addition, we found evidence (reflected in the limited numbers of completed local evaluations) that the majority of projects had been successful and required no further endorsement.

2.31 The issue of 'setting *targets*' appeared in responses from some schools with a premium on developing, almost as an antidote, shared clarity of purpose, trust, commitment and ownership.

Working in Partnership

2.32 In this section we will look at how 'local' and regional providers may work together to support students. More distant placements may well make use of the website material to be developed. As highlighted earlier, one of the most frequently cited 'positive' comments on the ethos of modules was the nature of the negotiation and modification of working practices.

2.33 Many staff, when asked about their initial expectations of working with the students, expressed very positive views about the potential for sharing good practice and the positive effects this might have on disadvantaged communities. *"The fact that this student was diagnosed as dyslexic and had trouble 'fitting in as a child' proved to be an excellent role model for some of our pupils who struggle to succeed against the odds" Head teacher, Primary School* .

2.34 Some of the more considerable hurdles for module managers to overcome included building and sharing learning opportunities. *"I find in some specific cases it has built self-confidence in the students and their growing awareness of the need to be professional in their attitude and responsibility for their practice. ...Stephen Boyd, Level 3 Manager*

2.35 Overall, respondents liked the idea of working in teams. They appreciated the exciting prospects for sharing good practice, working in new ways and developing a network, however tenuous. Despite the support for the module, respondents have also highlighted some important hurdles to effective joint working. Time allocation (too short) and the sustainability of modules was an issue (how can a project be further developed beyond the placement/proposal).

Summary

2.36 This chapter has focused on a variety of issues related to the management of the modules. We have explored the structure and organisation of the partnership as a specific entity but much remains to be done in further capturing opinion. Some of the main points are as follows:

2.37 At a strategic level placement mentors reported predominantly positive views of the modules and the philosophy.

2.38 The role of a Module Coordinators is multi-faceted and challenging and colleagues in the network appreciated the time constraints.

2.39 Partnership staff were supportive, flexible, approachable and motivated according to students and indeed the module coordinators.

2.40 In terms of partnership working, some providers have strong histories of collaborative working. Strong feelings of commitment, ownership and trust among partners appeared to be important factors contributing to overall module success

2.41 Enthusiasm for the partnership among members appeared overall to maximise the implementation success of projects. This is true even where radical changes had been made to proposals.

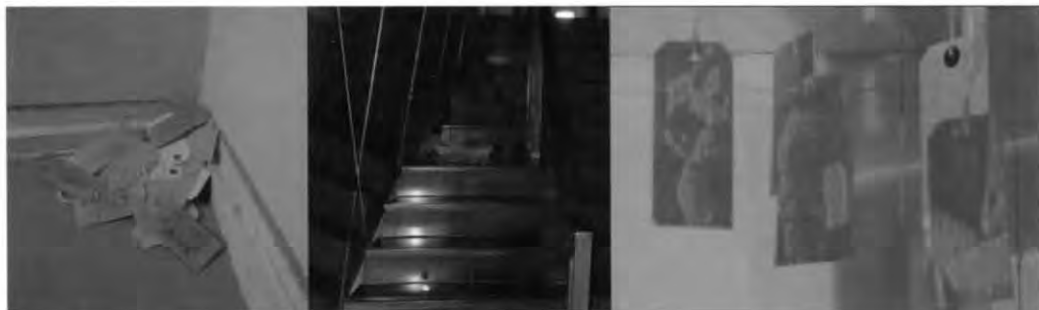
2.42 We now provide a number of learning points that have emerged from this discussion.

Learning points

- Historical relationships with local providers (e.g. Museums, etc.) come as a 'given', and may have positive or negative characteristics depending on the proposal and execution of the initiative. However, whatever the circumstances colleagues recognised this as the case and took strategic action to develop and implement their proposals accordingly. Given the opportunity to build on past experience, extension and supplementary projects had been generated at these museums and on occasions students participated beyond the module deadline and in some cases beyond the completion of their BA studies.
- There was scope for more clearly defined protocols in respect of the relationship between the partnership members with some form of 'memorandum of cooperation' built in to ensure an early return of placement evaluation.
- However, the successful establishment of commitment and ownership may be at risk if protocols were too specific or binding.
- Flexibility in timetabling arrangements had served to ameliorate bureaucratic arrangements within placements and had served to support effective partnership working and decision-making. Where specific requirements could not be helped, these were built into revised proposals.
- Partnership mentors needed to be sensitive to the different professional cultures and should not assume that enthusiasm for joint working is of itself sufficient to evolve a united, coherent project.
- Module coordinators could benefit from consistently reviewing their management structures with a view to maximising contributions for the student placement.

Chapter Three: Staffing and Resources

Caveat: Reporting on staffing and resources is a contentious issue here as the authors of this report are the staff (in concert with their partnership members) and the primary resource for the modules



3.0 The retention of the quantity and deployment of staff members in these modules is fundamental to their success. Many of the issues which emerged in this chapter recur throughout the main body of the report, particularly in the context of discussions about access to support, use of resources, relationships between professional groups, and most clearly in arrangements for management. However, this chapter puts the spotlight on the subject of staffing and resources in its own right.

3.1 The staffing arrangements for the modules vary. Generally they comprise two members of a staff with specific knowledge and experience of negotiating with outside agencies. Where projects are outside of the region students deliver their own modified and adapted proposals, supported by on-line access to their tutor. This virtual tutoring is particularly strong for in the SICAP module as contact hours are very few (total 30 hours in 2009). Where the projects are further modified by placement visits the proposal itself may need radical change to secure mutually beneficial outcomes. Given that these modules only employ a very small core staff it is essential to secure adequate partnership support.

3.2 This chapter focuses on two key issues, which emerged around the staffing arrangements for module support:

- Staffing levels and skills;
- Part-time working;

Staffing levels and skills

3.3 In this section, we concentrate on the views of staff members and others on the question of whether the modules are viable in terms of hours and aspirations. Staff for this role, arguably, needed high levels of personal skills, particularly the ability to relate to and empathise with partnership colleagues. They also need the ability to work on their own initiative and to develop new approaches. Perhaps most importantly they also need to be able to use what may be high level and appropriate professional skills in new environments. This can be challenging for some well-qualified and experienced staff, who are used to working in an environment where everyone has a shared understanding both of the nature of the problems they are dealing with, and of the institutional structures and hierarchies that support them. Individual staff members working in the modules may be the only person with their particular background, and they may be supporting projects where the placement has a particular professional approach and terminology (museum,

hospital, business, referral unit etc.). This requirement to integrate into a new team and a new way of working was demanding for both student and staff.

3.4 Systematic and detailed feedback from placements is, at present, at an early stage and what we have is largely anecdotal reference and the content of project evaluations. All respondents across the case study collection appear satisfied, even enthusiastic, about working in this capacity, as was highlighted in the previous chapter.

3.5 Generally, it appeared to be the case that partnerships institutions had personnel that could operate in the role of module mentors and that they had the right mix of appropriate skill and the sensitivity to support even the less confident students.

3.6 Some specific issues raised in respect of staff include:

- Juggling their time between conflicting demands
- Module competition. All level 2 modules are competing with each other to secure viable student numbers. As a consequence students selection of module may change several times after module numbers are circulated and prevarication can result in very late notice of contract requirements for part-time hourly paid staff and/or the haemorrhage of student numbers once a module placement has commenced.

Part-time working

3.7 Both modules have only one part-time member of staff. Related issues revolve around paid hours and the relationship of these to virtual tutoring and on-line/on-demand access. In the absence of a commitment to a rolling programme of particular modules it is difficult to promote the status and value of these modules or plan for a degree of continuity

3.8 Colleagues in placement institutions see and appreciate the advantageous of staff who work part-time (practicing artists/ other roles outside of the university) They see how staff themselves benefit from the stimulus of working in different environments, and how this cross-fertilisation feeds back to the overall student experience. They are sometimes unsure as to were the modules fit in the broader promotion of the Fine Art course and while other Artist-in Residence programmes exist elsewhere they see a lost opportunity in publicizing the range and diversity of opportunity as part of the course literature and recruitment strategy. Building trust and a reputation in this field was thought to matter in the wider promotion of the work through the specialist literature and related research.

3.9 The benefits of part-time working do come at an operational cost, in that students may not always be able to see the same person or access immediate support. This said, the electronic communication option has received favourable student comment.

3.10 Staff working on the modules clearly felt that it gave them the flexibility to organise their work around other projects and commitments. A 15-credit module equates to a relatively small time allocation.

3.11 However, there exists a frustration in not being part of a team (no requirement to attend meetings) and the consequent feeling of isolation (peripheral/superfluous)

3.12 However, it did not always work well. Some staff felt that they had divided loyalties, which could come into conflict. Sometimes colleagues, in dual roles, failed to recognise that they could only handle a partial workload in each.

3.13 The issue of staff turnover is an important one for the modules because it has had the benefit of one of its members being a passionate advocate of closely monitored 'off site' projects (Site Specific) for over 10 years. SICAP, in contrast, has had a change of staff in the last three years and there is a genuine interest in maintaining its dynamic potential through reenergized students' interest in each annual cycle. Continuity in the direction of these modules has been secured in recent years with a consensus across both modules related to - ways of working, team support and creative opportunities.

3.14 Significantly, these modules are competing with others from within the department (Fine Art) and the university so the task for staff is to secure the commitment. Once student proposals and placements were identified retention and completion rates were good.

3.15 The perceived benefits for the staff in placements (Mentors) feature higher as supporting an intrinsic interest in the role and the challenge of the work acts as a positive motivator for both student and mentor. But the time limited nature of the module makes them less attractive for some colleagues wishing to develop the relationship with the department/university.

Issues

- Competition from other modules militates against early planning arrangements
- Bureaucratic delays, decisions on staff hours, payments etc
- Staff on fixed-term contracts often feel peripheral and disposable.

3.16 While detailed scrutiny of the partnership is scheduled for 2009/10 we are aware of the fact that if something is working well it is often not noticed, and not mentioned in conversations with interviewers.

Summary

3.17 Staffing is a complex task for managers. Projects operate at the interface between the hierarchies of different institutions. Staff needed to foster a common understanding. The staff, with their diverse backgrounds, had to work as a team in order to share information and to share skills. However, opportunities to share and develop strategic plans (between module coordinators) are few owing to the limited time allocation.

3.18 Many placement mentors appear enthusiastic about the quality of support from staff.

3.19 In the future it may be advantageous to consider the potential for student research (MA/Mphil courses) as one way of running along side current staff and ensure the continuation of opportunities and creative initiatives in Fine Art courses.

Learning points

- Working in these modules can be complex for both professionally qualified staff and placement mentors. Professionals are having to re-interpret a role against a backdrop of changed expectations. It is important neither to underestimate these challenges nor to ignore them.
- A related challenge is the accommodation of the professional judgment of placement mentors and ensuring that this is built into the assignment assessment.
- There are undoubted tensions between the placement task (intervention) and the requirement to evidence the experience as a written/illustrated report (SICAP). While the value is acknowledged the dyslexic students face the greater challenge. Feedback on this and other issues is ongoing.

- Many of the skills needed by mentors are in short supply both nationally and locally so every effort has been made to draw on this specialist knowledge.
- The issue of resources is relevant to the evaluation of the modules as indicated above. The first obvious question is whether these modules are offering value for money in terms of following the principles of efficiency, economy and effectiveness in their operations. The second is sustainability as these modules are under pressure due in part to other module options being added to the Level 2 options.
- Although the case studies were structured to provide evidence on both of these questions, resource issues were not the main emphasis of any of the interviews. This means that the issue is not necessarily covered in depth, and therefore the answers provided can only be regarded as suggestive rather than definitive.
- The evidence on both questions was generally positive. There was very little evidence that other modules attracted more funding. On the contrary, all options seemed to be under the same pressure to demonstrate viability by achieving target numbers.
- On the question of the use of resources for the module the only additional dimension that related to module coordinators was the need for travel allowances to visit students when on placement. The cost of this was however offset by the fact that almost 50% were out of the region (distances over 50 miles) and some placements took place at weekends and evenings. In these cases no visits were made but in every case this was clearly articulated with the host institutions prior to the placement with contact details exchanges to secure the level of support.

Partnership working

3.20 Supporting partnerships required a range of contact that has been generally underestimated. The Module Coordinator for SICAP corresponds with each partnership institution in the form of an official letter; this is supplemented by making available a personal email to facilitate monitoring. Visits took place, where possible, and further correspondence was dispatched to ensure feedback in the form of a paper based record (evaluation). Placement mentors are encouraged to share the content of any evaluative report with the student as every effort is made to accommodate these findings in the assessment process.

3.21 We generally had enough funding to do the kind of things the modules required but this modest provision limited planning meetings and the envisaged merger of the modules (validation requirements etc.)

3.22 There were some suggestions, mainly from students that given the lack of financial support they need to build in what could be done with the resources available, rather than identifying materials that were clearly unaffordable.

3.23 Most projects delivered by students attracted small amounts of funding which was balanced against likely returns/outcomes.

3.24 There was no evidence that these modules were funded differently to others on offer in the department.

3.25 Partnership working had resource implications and this needed to be monitored.

3.26 If the current module provision discontinued it could not easily be replicated as it stands without additional funding. However, the nature of the modules are experimental, and not everything that students propose or implement was successful in terms of end products. Worthy

outcomes and appropriate use of resources could, and often were judged on other criteria – such as 'process'.

3.27 The disparity of resources available to students was been evident in the placement choices with clearly small businesses, private schools having more extensive budgets.

Learning Points

- The generally positive views were tempered by occasionally the disparity of the resources available to students. This said, funding only followed strong proposals, tactful bidding and a strength in presentation.
- It is perhaps worth looking more closely at the modestly resourced projects to see what lessons, if any, could be learned about how to deliver a cheaper, more restrained project that secures quality outcomes.

Chapter Four: Student Access- Maintaining the Opportunity



4.0 It is of course, difficult to separate the question of 'access' from the question of 'responsibility', because, by definition, when we talk about 'access' in the context of the modules, we are primarily talking about *access to a range of responsibilities*, even if some responsibilities are more intense, tangible and have a higher profile within the projects. The inter-relationship between project activity to *facilitate access*, and the *provision of responsibility* is therefore a complex one, and we have found it helpful to think in terms of a 'continuum of access', which we present below. It appeared that the best-established collaborations were actively deploying their efforts at each and every point on the continuum. In addition, they acknowledged that there may be different ways in which students wanted to explore the related responsibilities,

4.1 Firstly we describe our findings in respect of student *access (continuum)*. Secondly we present the main types of responsibility and give appropriate examples, drawn from our case studies.

Continuum of access/reach

4.2 This continuum has a number of points, which, while overlapping and not necessarily exclusive, represent the main 'linkage' points with students.

- a) Making initial plans (proposals)— this is the first point on the continuum and represents the first potential opportunity for students to engage in speculative ideas. It embraces diverse efforts on the part of students, including searches for likely host institutions, letter writing; face-to-face outreach contact and attending community events (where appropriate).
- b) 'Introduction' to the module requirements – this second point on the continuum is the structured framework and reflects the work undertaken by module leaders to introduce the potential. It is not enough to merely inform students as they need ways to contextualize/model the opportunity. Some students may be reluctant, or feel that the module is not for them. The success of these modules is based on making a real link between ideas and the range of requirements.

Reaching the student community

4.3 Modules harness both informal and formal means to promote and publicise their activities. Some of these informal means are "opportunistic", word-of-mouth, cascaded exchanges from the previous year's student experiences. However, this background reporting from peers was important catalyst in terms of opening up the possibilities. Module Coordinators (Leaders) needed to use different methods to 'get the word out', and indeed, findings from our case study areas support the need for more exemplification of projects, previously undertaken.

4.4 All the case study materials rely heavily upon outreach activity in order to promote awareness and identify possible challenges. Some of this outreach activity is 'informal', and draws on knowledge of past projects and the emphasis on autonomy in driving a project.

4.5 Promoting awareness of the modules activities is closely tied into the wider dissemination of past case studies and initiatives and much work still needs to be done in this area.

4.6 This dissemination can be an effective tool in helping to design proposals.

4.7 Guidance has evolved, ranging from prescribing specific methods of consultation to encouraging a more loosely structured approach.

4.8 The data provided clear evidence of a diverse and reasonably sustained attempt to reach all the relevant students. Students needed to be 'risk takers', and have an inventive, creative impulse to realize an idea or experience.

4.9 Over the duration of the project and usually when collective strategies are being discussed, some students expressed difficulty in travelling to the university for meetings. This problem sometimes being compounded by the distances: *"I thought more of the individual support than the group sharing activities, just as well as I missed a number of the early meetings"*

4.10 Domestic commitments, and to a degree travelling, emerged as an area of concern amongst the mature students. In all cases 'costs' were a consideration but this was usually provided for in an ad-hoc way, through accessing placement funds or personally supplementing the budget to secure best outcome.

4.11 In nearly half of the Cohort responses we identified some degree of tension between the freedom and the constraints (accountability) associated with the project.

Summary

4.12 This chapter has briefly indicated the way in which the modules succeed – or not – in *reaching* their target student population. We have described the way in which access is facilitated through a continuum of activity, which starts with the promotion of an opportunity and finishes with a critical analysis of the project undertaken. We have identified the personal qualities required (experimental inquisitiveness), which can initially make individual members hard to reach. Having touched on the way in which value/quality may be acknowledged through various personality traits, i.e. friendly, accessible, skilled and professional we see a typology ranging from the autonomous, facilitated to the conditional.

Learning points

- In order to maximise student access to modules staff have to think in the long term and build in ways of capturing material that may relate to these experiences beyond the completion of placements (career pathways and post course destinations).
- Students are discerning and do not, as is sometimes assumed, have stereotypical views about personal (Fine Art) practice and applied creative activity (vocational element). Many saw a link between their studio practice and the 'off-site' project. In this sense they needed staff with 'experience' regarding the interface between Fine Art practice and vocation application.
- Sometimes professional expertise was essential in making connections but this did not mean that they (students) did not value it being delivered by placement mentors.
- Module Coordinators and Placement Mentors needed to develop a consistent and uniform policy on the balance between the critical/contextual dimension (using specialist knowledge) and the practical activities (processes).
- Students wanted to be able to access and use the 'issues' that interest them and conduct the related activity in a secure environment (guidance/support).
- Projects undertaken by students currently operate against a set of constraints/restrictions – in that each idea had consequences and considerations for new audiences and participants (age, experience, appropriateness etc. boundaries and requirements e.g. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. Policy makers (module coordinators) needed to look again at the relevance of these boundary restrictions in the context of short-term placements.
- Given that these modules are not funded (beyond staffing hours), the trace and record of the events exists largely through students good will, in that they provide the account/ image banks etc.) Although the modules generally have adequate resources to operate at this level, additional funds would strengthen the quality of provision.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Learning Points



5.0 This report has focused on the implementation of two Fine Art modules. The research was instigated to identify and secure information related to the quality features in the hope that what was unearthed as valuable could be retained. There exists some uncertainty about the future for all the module options and this adds to a general unease in making proposals for the future.

5.1 However the underpinning knowledge and value base of both modules and the relationship with partnership providers remains relatively unchanged, as do the issues and challenges which are likely to face policy makers and practitioners in delivering such opportunities. The questions we set out to explore in our case studies were therefore likely to have relevance beyond these modules to the continuing availability of off-site working.

5.2 This chapter provides a summary of our main findings across all of the themes, which have emerged from our data analysis. These themes are crucial to the successful implementation of the modules. Taken together, they constitute a picture of the 'real life' day-to-day, which we present in this report. They take account of the perceptions of students, of university staff, of staff in placements and of a broader context of feedback (past students, other university staff etc.).

5.3 In addition, we identify two over-arching topics, which are fundamental to the future survival of the modules. These topics are firstly, *partnership working*, which reflects the broader culture of working across agencies, professions and engaging with the government's emphasis on social policy (inclusion) and other educational initiatives – and secondly, the general opportunity for undergraduate students in a climate of choice and enterprise.

An overview of development 2006-2009

5.4 The observations and findings that we have described in this report constitute a representative sub-set of the module experiences of two cohorts of students in their level 2 Fine Art course 2006/7, 2007-8, but we assume that the issues raised and the experiences described have relevance beyond the sample.

5.5 There is overwhelming evidence of widespread enthusiasm for the concepts enshrined in the module descriptors. This enthusiasm manifests itself on the part of the majority of stakeholders involved in these projects. By stakeholders we mean university staff, staff in placements, participants in the various activities and the broader beyond the Fine Art course (career destinations/MA courses etc.). With this set of positive views as a backdrop, we now identify some key points in respect of the modules.

Management and Governance

5.6 Joined up working is much easier to achieve with projects that have pre-existing relationships with pro-active networks of placements (recommendation/track record);

5.7 Clear roles and responsibilities must be in place for staff, in order to facilitate collaborative working. This appeared to be easier to achieve where staff were part of a rolling programme of placements (continuity) rather than initiating new partnerships for each set of new students. Some implementation tasks obviously proved especially difficult if students dropped the module after securing placement arrangements.

5.8 Projects that had deliberately developed in a slow and steady manner (e.g Site Specific detailed proposals) placed a greater emphasis on the 'proposal' element with possible student placements emerging as extension tasks (beyond the module intervention)

5.9 Designing, managing and delivering proposals proved complex for some projects, whether it involved making appropriate provision for extremely challenging groups (e.g. referral units, PRU) or managing staff who have very fixed ideas on delivery and outcome;

5.10 There was fairly widespread appreciation, across the partnership, for the flexible and accommodating negotiation in supporting students and this necessitated sensitive management and patience.

Staffing and Resources

5.11 One of the challenges facing Module Coordinators was that there were often tensions related to the future viability of modules and this impacted on projected planning. Significantly, there was the whole issue of amalgamating the two modules and preparing material for the revalidation. Uncertainty in this regard had further delayed this option until 2010 at the earliest.

5.12 The time commitments, for individuals working across different course components could create conflicting management pressures and loyalties. These tensions also existed to a lesser extent with visiting hourly paid staff who needed to maximize the contact time with the department (administration tasks).

5.13 Another problem with staff collaboration was that module coordinators did not necessarily have control over the timing and overlay of delivery. Differences in the part time contacted days of the week for each module could militate against best use of the time in the university (strategic planning)

5.14 Where overall professional development was concerned, we found no particular interest from outside of the module, other than the obvious benefits of conducting and disseminating this small scale research. Staff attitudes towards research were generally positive, although some felt that more research training was needed to extend the Fine Art profile in reflecting on practice.

Student Access: Maintaining the Opportunity Conclusion (Lessons learned about partnership working and 'off-site' experience)

5.15 The scope for this initial research enquiry was limited, in that the sample from two cohorts of students would be small. However, every effort was made to extend the information gathering to the partnership providers but this task required more time and needed to be undertaken with access to career destinations and tracking of past students.

5.16 Further discussion and information gathering needed to be in place to explore the relationship between our own findings and aspects of existing knowledge about 'partnership' in the context of artists in residence. In other words what, if any, further insights can be derived to facilitate best use of the data collection in the next phase of this work?

5.17 There is an increasing body of research and evaluation findings relevant to 'Creativity', about the effectiveness of its development and the relationship with 'deep thinking skills'. (See, Sternberg, R (Eds) 1999).

5.18 While much of this literature has tended to be descriptive, rather than to focus on outcomes, research points to a range of advantages for interested parties. (See Creative Industries Mapping Document, Dept of Culture, Media and Sport, HMSO, London 1998) and Csikszentmihalyi.M, 1996)

5.19 In addition to data on specific aspects of creative engagement there is emerging evidence is emerging evidence of the importance of a range of digital tools and environments. These include targeted virtual tutoring and data exchange/support platforms (See, Craig Harris (Eds), New Media Artists and Scientists Collaboration in Craig Harris, 2002 and Linda Candy, Creativity and Cognition, 2007 Washington USA).

5.20 One common link between many of these aspirations is the need to *work in partnership*.

5.21 Our research confirms that developing and running these modules is a challenging task. It involves maintaining strategic relationships with partnership institutions which have their own priorities, and which need to serve their respective communities, not just those within a small geographical area. It involved negotiating between diverse interest groups with different backgrounds and knowledge bases and resolving any tensions between them. It involved ensuring that students had access to support by engaging the most important aspect of all: their studio practice. Where partnership mentors are closely involved with module coordinators, students had the best chance of success as enthusiasm is reinforced.

5.22 A greater challenge was to attract the initial student interest and to encourage and support their work outside of the 'studio'. Once fully committed to the module, and this could take persistent effort on the part of staff – students became the best ambassadors for the module and the communities they may serve. This in turn made it more likely that other students (Level 1) might appreciate the opportunity to use their creative skills in the existing or hybridized modules.



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