

# Valuing Voluntary Arts

## SECTION A

- 1. Foreword**
- 2. Dorset and Somerset: The Social and Economic Context**
- 3. Acknowledgements**
- 4. Executive Summary**
- 5. Summary of Recommendations**

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### I. FOREWARD

The Voluntary Arts Network (VAN) was founded in 1992 with the mission to promote participation in the arts and crafts. The phrase "voluntary arts" was coined to describe those arts and crafts that people undertake for self-improvement, social networking and leisure, but not primarily for payment.

The range of art-forms is wide and includes folk, dance, drama, literature, media, music, visual arts, crafts and applied arts, and festivals. These activities take place in a wide range of contexts including individual practice, local clubs and societies, classes and summer schools. Each contains its own opportunities and its own challenges, but the benefits of the voluntary arts to social cohesion, inclusion, lifelong learning and well-being are becoming widely recognised.

Our task is to help individual voluntary artists and craftspeople, local volunteer-led groups and umbrella bodies to find the skills and knowledge they need to fully exploit the benefits of creative participation in the arts.

Our aspiration is that within a generation everyone will have a varied menu of high quality opportunities to practice the arts and crafts - within easy access, at an affordable price, under local democratic control and well supported by an effective infrastructure.

Our belief is that targeted support for the voluntary arts and crafts will bring sustainable benefits to people and communities throughout these islands.

# Valuing Voluntary Arts

## 2. DORSET AND SOMERSET THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

### **Dorset:**

The total population of Dorset (excluding the unitary authorities of Bournemouth and Poole) was recorded as 390,980 in the Census 2001. Around 80% of this population are aged 18 and over. The county has a larger proportion of older people than any other county in England (22% are at retirement age). Owing to the age structure of the population, the county has the lowest birth rate and one of the highest mortality rates in Britain. However, simultaneously, Dorset has one of the highest levels of in-migration in the country, which is ensuring a steady growth in the county's population (7.2% growth from 1991 to 2001). Sturminster Newton is the county's fastest growing town. According to Census 2001, ethnic minorities (including white ethnic minorities) contributed approximately 3% of the Dorset population.

Dorset has one of the lowest household sizes in Britain with an average of 2.15 persons per dwelling. The county is sparsely populated with only 151 persons per square kilometre and is one of the most rural counties in England.

Unemployment (claimants only) in Dorset stood at 1.1% in March 2004, less than half the national average of 2.5%. However, the average annual salary is 15% lower than the national average despite Dorset's house prices being over 20% higher. 2.8% of this housing is recorded as 'second' or 'holiday homes' thus accounting for higher prices and the nature of the population in Dorset.

### ***Implications for the arts:***

#### **Our research found that:**

- there are at least 380 voluntary arts organisations with around 24,000 voluntary artists and craftspeople in Dorset
- these groups provide 20,000 separate opportunities for the people of Dorset to participate in the arts and crafts each year
- there are a minimum of 400,000 attendances at voluntary arts groups sessions per annum
- there are around 650,000 attenders as audiences at voluntary arts events per annum.

#### **Voluntary arts groups in Dorset also have a significant economic impact.**

##### **They:**

- have an annual turnover of at least £2.6 million
- support the local economy by around £1.3 million a year
- spend a minimum of £340,000 a year on venues
- support employment by spending over £650,000 a year on freelance fees.

None of the above takes into account people practising the arts and crafts as individuals who are not members of a group.

# Valuing Voluntary Arts

## Somerset:

The total population of Somerset is 498,093 and has seen a 7.1% growth since 1991. Around 75% (or three-quarters) of this population are aged 18 and over. Like Dorset, Somerset is one of the most rural counties in England. Its largest town, Taunton, has a population of around 60,000. Somerset is even more sparsely populated than Dorset with only 143 persons per square kilometre. South Somerset is the most populated and West Somerset is the least populated district in the county. The proportion of the population that is from ethnic minorities (including white ethnic minority groups) has more than doubled over the past ten years and now stands at 2.7%.

Unemployment (claimants only) in Somerset was at 1.4% in March 2004, well below the national average of 2.5%. However, the average annual salary was 16% lower than the national average. House prices are around 1.6% higher than the national average yet 20% lower than neighbouring Dorset.

74% of housing in Somerset is owner-occupied and 7% is council-rented. Somerset's average household size is 2.31, which is one of the lowest in Britain but equal to that of the South West region.

## *Implications for the arts:*

### **Our research found that:**

- there are at least 550 voluntary arts organisations with over 29,000 voluntary artists and craftspeople in Somerset
- these groups provide 27,000 separate opportunities for the people of Somerset to participate in the arts and crafts each year
- there are a minimum of 600,000 attendances at voluntary arts groups sessions per annum
- there are well over a million attenders as audiences at voluntary arts events per annum.

### **Voluntary arts groups in Somerset also have a significant economic impact.**

#### **They:**

- have an annual turnover of over £4 million
- support the local economy by around £1.1 million a year
- spend over £700,000 a year on venues
- support employment by spending over £1.3 million a year on freelance fees.

None of the above takes into account people practising the arts and crafts as individuals who are not members of a group.

# Valuing Voluntary Arts

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# Valuing Voluntary Arts

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# Valuing Voluntary Arts

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Bindy Wollen - Western Region, Society of Bookbinders

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# Valuing Voluntary Arts

## 4. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Our research found that:

#### Dorset

there are at least 380 voluntary arts organisations with around 24,000 voluntary artists and craftspeople in Dorset  
these groups provide 20,000 separate opportunities for the people of Dorset to participate in the arts and crafts each year  
there are a minimum of 400,000 attendances at voluntary arts groups sessions per annum  
there are around 650,000 attenders as audiences at voluntary arts events per annum.

Voluntary arts groups in Dorset also have a significant economic impact. They:

have an annual turnover of at least £2.6 million  
support the local economy by around £1.3 million a year  
spend a minimum of £340,000 a year on venues  
support employment by spending over £650,000 a year on freelance fees.

None of the above takes into account people practising the arts and crafts as individuals who are not members of a group.

#### Somerset

there are at least 550 voluntary arts organisations with over 29,000 voluntary artists and craftspeople in Somerset  
these groups provide 27,000 separate opportunities for the people of Somerset to participate in the arts and crafts each year  
there are a minimum of 600,000 attendances at voluntary arts groups sessions per annum  
there are well over a million attenders as audiences at voluntary arts events per annum.

Voluntary arts groups in Somerset also have a significant economic impact. They:

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# Valuing Voluntary Arts

## Chapter Summaries

### Chapter 1: The Level and Nature of Participation

- The greatest involvement in any art form recorded by respondents was in Performing Arts. 67% in Dorset and 71% in Somerset recorded this as a main arts focus. The greatest proportion were pursuing musical activities.
- The proportion of respondents involved in literature activities was 70% greater in Dorset than in Somerset.
- In both counties one third of all respondent groups act to promote the arts as well as providing opportunities to participate and experience the arts.
- The majority of groups in Somerset formed between 1970 and 1989 compared to post 1990 in Dorset.
- The majority of groups were unincorporated associations (52% in Somerset; 60% in Dorset).
- 80% of groups in each county operate under their own constitution or that of a parent body.
- 10% of respondents formed in order to pursue community/welfare work and now use art as part of that work. The utilisation of the arts in this way began, for all groups, in the 1990s.
- 75% of groups are open to all. The most common specialist provision in Somerset was for older people. In contrast the majority of reported specialist provision in Dorset was for children and youth.

### Chapter 2: Membership and Opportunities for Participation

- 8% of members in Somerset and 10% in Dorset were reported to have disabilities.
- The greatest percentage of members in Dorset (47%) and in Somerset (40%) were retired. In Dorset this was equal to the proportion of members who were in employment.
- The age spectrum of members in Somerset reflects the age of the population with few disparities. In Dorset the over 65s represent a third greater proportion of voluntary arts groups members than they do in the population as a whole.
- 75% of respondents in Somerset reported finding it easy or fairly easy to attract members compared to 46% in Dorset.

# Valuing Voluntary Arts

- 7% of groups in Dorset and 16% in Somerset reported having reached their capacity, with not enough places for those who want to join.
- The total number of opportunities to experience the arts provided by respondents in Dorset was 3,588 and 3,971 in Somerset. On average each group provides 52 opportunities per year in Dorset and 49 in Somerset.

## Chapter 3: Public Events and the Audience

- Respondent groups provided 545 public events per year in Somerset and 538 in Dorset. An average (median) of 4 per group.
- Over 75% of groups in Somerset stated that they find it easy or fairly easy to sell tickets for public events. This compares to 54% in Dorset.
- The under 18 age group are considerably underrepresented in voluntary arts audiences. In both counties they comprise half the proportion of the audience than they do in the population as a whole. The capacity of a group to take on a larger audience was deemed to be the greatest obstacle to increasing audience size.
- A lack of suitable venues was deemed to be a significant restriction on increasing audience sizes by 44% of Somerset's respondents.
- 42% of groups in Dorset felt that a shortage of volunteers was preventing their group from increasing audience sizes.
- Despite a lack of widespread direct interest in audience and participant research, responses to questions regarding audience levels revealed groups feelings that a greater audience could be reached through improved marketing.

## Chapter 4: The Financial Resources

- The majority of groups (63%, Dorset; 69%, Somerset) reported an annual turnover of under £6,000.
- 53% of groups in Dorset and 66% of groups in Somerset do not receive any funding.
- Those involved in literature were the least sure of receiving future funding in Somerset, yet they were the surest in Dorset.
- The most common funders were the District Councils, followed by National and Regional Umbrella Bodies.
- Arts Council England was reported to provide funding to 6% of respondent groups in Somerset and 8% of respondent groups in Dorset.

## Valuing Voluntary Arts

- Events charges and ticket sales were the greatest source of income in Somerset.
- The greatest source of income in Dorset was deemed to be contributions noted in the 'other' category. These included gift aid, revenue from equipment hire and programme advertisements.
- 29% of groups in Somerset and 38% in Dorset reported receiving some form of support in kind.
- Four times as many literature groups in Somerset than in Dorset reported that they do not receive any support in kind.
- The total income from subscription for those groups on the contact database is assumed to be £309,288 in Somerset compared to £327,848 in Dorset.
- The total income from events charges and ticket sales for those on the database is assumed to be £1,194,968 in Somerset and £784,615 in Dorset.
- Freelance staff was reported to be the greatest area of expenditure for the sector as a whole (32% of spending in Somerset; 25% in Dorset).
- Venue and premises hire was the second largest expense for the sector in Somerset, and third largest in Dorset.
- 55% of sector spending in Dorset and 62% in Somerset supports local services and providers. This amounts to £1,115,243 in Somerset and £1,315,185 in Dorset for those on the database.

### Chapter 5: Sources of Support

- Over half (57%, Somerset; 51%, Dorset) of all respondents stated that they are a member of an umbrella body, network or support agency.
- Overall groups involved in Visual Arts were the least likely to belong to an umbrella body.
- The provision of support, information and advice were deemed to be the most valued umbrella body services. This was recorded by 44% of those with a membership.
- 32% of Dorset's and 26% of Somerset's total respondent base stated that they do not see umbrella bodies as being any use to them.
- 68% of respondents in Dorset, and 53% in Somerset, stated an umbrella body or support agency as their first choice to turn to for advice. The next most common place to turn was to 'others in the business'.

# Valuing Voluntary Arts

- Libraries, on the whole, are not recognised as a source of advice and information for the sector. However, the Somerset Performing Arts Library was an exception as it was noted by a number of groups. In addition, a number of respondents to the questionnaire were sourced from the library's membership list.

## Chapter 6: The Future of the Voluntary Arts

- Over half (51%, Somerset; 56% Dorset) of respondents stated that they aim to be expanding current activities or developing new ones in the next two years.
- Somerset respondents felt that improved venue facilities would be the most significant factor to the success of their art works over the next two years.
- Dorset respondents felt that the ability to attract a wider range of people would be of greatest significance to their arts work in the next two years.
- Attracting bigger audiences was deemed to be of second most significance to group development in both counties.
- Attracting younger people was deemed to be of greatest significance to the development of the sector in both counties.
- A support body in the southwest, a body to speak up for the voluntary arts and links with local councils were felt to be of next highest importance to the development and success of the sector over the next two years.
- 56% of groups in Somerset and 59% in Dorset stated that they have had contact with their local arts officer (LGAO) over the last twelve months.
- Nearly 33% more literature groups in Dorset than in Somerset reported contact with an LGAO in the last twelve months.

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# Valuing Voluntary Arts

## Conclusions and Recommendations

1. The voluntary arts sector provides a very wide range of participatory artform and craft opportunities. These deserve much wider recognition.

### **Recommendation**

The County Councils should welcome and celebrate the range of this endeavour. They should consider, for example, civic receptions for voluntary arts activists during Volunteers Week.

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2. The strongest difference in artform patterns between Dorset and Somerset is in literature. There is much more activity of great breadth in Dorset which seems to be largely due to the presence of a literature officer.

### **Recommendation**

Somerset County Council should seriously consider the appointment of a literature officer.

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3. There is a considerable participation deficit among those not in work, including unemployed people and those looking after the home/family.

### **Recommendation**

Further work should be undertaken to ascertain if this deficit can be redressed and if so, how.

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4. There is considerable competition between groups for audiences and venues, which is wasteful of time and effort as well as reducing cohesion in the sector.

### **Recommendation**

Existing and any new support agencies should prioritise action to promote co-operation and collaboration between groups.

Funders should give sympathetic consideration to supporting such projects.

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5. There is considerable lack of audience research in the sector and although this is a low priority for the responding groups it remains a potentially serious barrier to development.

### **Recommendation**

Consideration should be given to funding audience research in the voluntary arts sector.

## Valuing Voluntary Arts

6. There is a serious under-representation of under 18s both as participants and as audiences for the voluntary arts.

### **Recommendation**

Arts Council England should consider how to empower local voluntary arts groups to work with young people, for example funding the interface between local groups and schools. Comparisons with "Step into Sport" may be instructive as may the YAVA(\*see footnote) project in Northern Ireland, funded by the National Lottery through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

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7. Capacity building for the sector is urgently needed.

### **Recommendation**

Funders should urgently consider ways to support capacity building at local, county and regional levels. This should include support for cultural volunteering.

Priority should be given to further research into the organisational capacity of groups, in particular the numbers and profile of volunteers and paid staff and the current perceived strengths and weaknesses of groups.

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8. The lack of venues is a serious problem, more so in Somerset than Dorset.

### **Recommendation**

Both Councils should urgently consider availability and pricing of venues as part of a strategic approach to supporting local voluntary arts activity.

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9. Visual arts groups are least well supported by umbrella bodies, but all artforms would benefit from the appropriate umbrella bodies being more closely engaged.

### **Recommendation**

Voluntary Arts England should work with national umbrella bodies to ensure that groups are made aware of the full range of available support.

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*\*Including Young Adults in the North Region is the focus of YAVAnorth (Young Adults and Voluntary Arts North Region). YAVA is a project to involve more young adults (16-25) in arts groups in Co. Antrim. The project stems from the research which found that participation in the region is less than half the average for Northern Ireland and that participation by young adults falls sharply on leaving formal education. The aim is to link young adults to existing voluntary arts groups by working with local groups and by making direct contact with young adults in places they currently work, rest and play.*

# Valuing Voluntary Arts

**10.** The most important issues for groups are:

## **Dorset:**

- 1) Increasing Range of People
- 2) Attracting Bigger Audiences
- 3) Recruit and Retain Volunteers
- 4) Funding for Events/Performances
- 5) Improved Venue Facilities
- 6) Make Funding More Secure
- 7) More/Better Arts Equipment
- 8) Securing Tutors/Artists
- 9) Find and Train Committee Members
- 10) Research Audience/Participants

## **Somerset:**

- 1) Improved Venue Facilities
- 2) Attracting Bigger Audiences
- 3) Increasing Range of People
- 4) Securing Tutors/Artists
- 5) Funding for Events/Performances
- 6) Recruit and Retain Volunteers
- 7) More/Better Arts Equipment
- 8) Make Funding More Secure
- 9) Training to Improve Art Quality
- 10) Find and Train Committee Members

## **Recommendation**

The councils should consider how best these may be addressed in partnership, as appropriate, with ACE SW and VAN/VA England.

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**11.** The most important issues for the sector are seen to be:

[top seven from issues important to development of sector tables]

Attracting Younger People  
SW Voluntary Arts Support Body  
Body to Speak up for the Voluntary Arts  
Links with Local Councils  
SW Strategy for Voluntary Arts  
Recognition of the Role of Voluntary Arts  
Increased Information Flow

## **Recommendation**

ACE SW and VAN/VA England should urgently consider a strategic framework within which these needs may be met.

## Valuing Voluntary Arts

- 12.** The public library system is not currently seen as a place for support or information for groups.

**Recommendation**

The Library Services should urgently examine their information services and the promotion of them to the sector.

VAN and VA England should urgently engage with the library services to ensure rich content is available to local groups and to help in promoting this widely.

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- 13.** There is a healthy expectation of growth in provision of activities through voluntary arts groups.

**Recommendation**

A strategic approach by ACE SW and the Councils needs to be taken in order to ensure that these expectations can be successfully met.

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- 14.** Support from local authorities is much appreciated by groups, but needs to be more readily available.

**Recommendation**

The Councils should review the level of support to the sector and ensure that sufficient council staff are enabled to deliver support in cost-effective ways. VAN and Voluntary Arts England should work closely with the Councils to ensure that VAN support material is readily available.

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# Valuing Voluntary Arts

## 4. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recognition

The findings of this report - and in particular the contribution made by the voluntary arts to the social and economic well-being of the counties - should be highlighted in the community planning process to assist in the development of local cultural projects.

The County and District Councils should welcome and celebrate the wide range of participatory artform and craft endeavour. For example, civic receptions for voluntary arts activists during Volunteers Week 2005 could be held regularly.

Regional cultural planners should ensure that there is an efficient interface between them and the voluntary arts sector. Voluntary Arts England should consider how it might assist this.

### Capacity building

Funders ought to consider urgently ways to support capacity building at local, county and regional levels. This should include support for cultural volunteering.

Arts Council England should consider how to empower local voluntary arts groups to work with young people. For example, funding the interface between local groups and schools, or creating a discrete strand of creative partnerships. Comparisons with 'Step into Sport' may be instructive as may the YAVA\* project in Northern Ireland, funded by the National Lottery through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

### Support and Development

Somerset County Council should seriously consider the appointment of a literature officer.

Existing and any new support agencies should prioritise action to promote co-operation and collaboration between groups (voluntary arts and others). Funders should give sympathetic consideration to supporting such projects.

Voluntary Arts England should work with national umbrella bodies to ensure that groups are made aware of the full range of available support.

VAN and Voluntary Arts England should engage sooner rather than later with the Library Services to ensure information on voluntary arts opportunities is available to local groups and to help in promoting this widely.

Successful models of sub-regional networks should be examined and, where appropriate, adopted for areas without this support.

VAN and Voluntary Arts England should work closely with local authorities to ensure that VAN support material is readily available.

# Valuing Voluntary Arts

## Securing the Future

Local authorities should review the level of support to the sector and ensure that sufficient staff are enabled to deliver this support in cost effective ways.

The sector needs to consider how changing patterns of participation - e.g. purchase rather than membership - may be catered for in the future.

Both ACE SW and the local authorities need to take a strategic approach to ensure that the anticipated growth in voluntary arts activity can be successfully met.

## Knowledge Base

Priority should be given to further research into the organisational capacity of groups, in particular the numbers and profile of volunteers and paid staff and the current perceived strengths and weaknesses of groups.

ACE and Voluntary Arts England should discuss the extension of this research throughout the region and country.

Further work should be undertaken to ascertain whether or not the low participation of those not in work (unemployed people and home/family makers/carers) can be redressed and if so, how.

Consideration should be given to funding audience research in the voluntary arts sector.

## Finance and Funding

All the local authorities should urgently consider availability and pricing of venues as part of a strategic approach to supporting local voluntary arts activity.

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***\*Including Young Adults in the North Region is the focus of YAVAnorth (Young Adults and Voluntary Arts North Region)***

YAVA is a project to involve more young adults (16-25) in arts groups in Co. Antrim. The project stems from the research which found that participation in the region is less than half the average for Northern Ireland and that participation by young adults falls sharply on leaving formal education. The aim is to link young adults to existing voluntary arts groups by working with local groups and by making direct contact with young adults in places they currently work, rest and play.

## **Valuing Voluntary Arts**

**"We are a small group who would like more members.."**

**" We desperately need a support network for the county .."**

**"We have the support of Wells County Council and supporters. This enables the band to continue.**

**Sadly, however, the rehearsal room excludes the disabled as it is accessed via a flight of stairs in a listed building.."**