

Valuing Voluntary Arts

SECTION C

CHAPTER SIX

The Future of the Voluntary Arts

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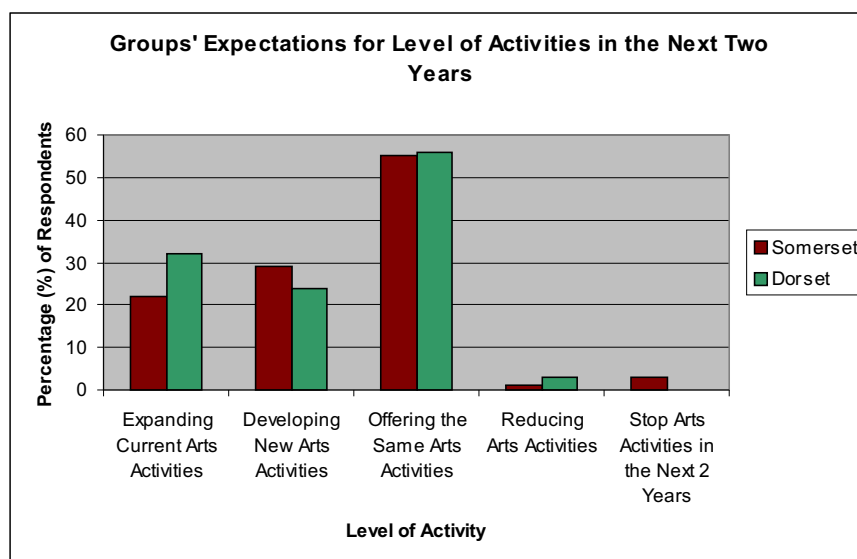
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A. Expected Levels of Expansion and Development

Only just half of respondent groups stated that they will be offering the same arts activities in the next two years (55% in Somerset and 56% in Dorset). 51% of groups in Somerset and 56% in Dorset stated that they will be expanding current arts activities or developing new ones. These reported percentages are considerably lower than in Northern Ireland in which nearly two-thirds stated they would be experiencing some kind of development or expansion. In Somerset and Dorset, almost half of groups will show no progress at all.

However, the percentage of those actually reducing or stopping activities is very similar to those found in Northern Ireland. 3% of Dorset respondents and 1% of those in Somerset will be reducing arts activities. However, 3% in Somerset stated that they will be stopping arts activities altogether in the next two years.

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B. Issues Important to Groups

Groups were asked to identify the issues they believed would be important to their arts work over the next two years. With weighted scores, by far the most important issues to Somerset's respondents were improved venue facilities. In Northern Ireland this factor was reported to be the fifth most important factor below recruiting and keeping volunteers.

The ability to attract a wider range of people was viewed to be of greatest significance in Dorset, coming third in Somerset. This supports the findings in Northern Ireland in which this was deemed to be the second most significant factor. In both counties the aim to attract bigger audiences was second on the agenda.

Somerset placed almost equal value on recruiting and keeping volunteers as funding for more events. In Dorset, a much higher value was placed on volunteers with funding for events still being deemed to be of importance. In Northern Ireland, funding was felt to be the most important issue facing groups.

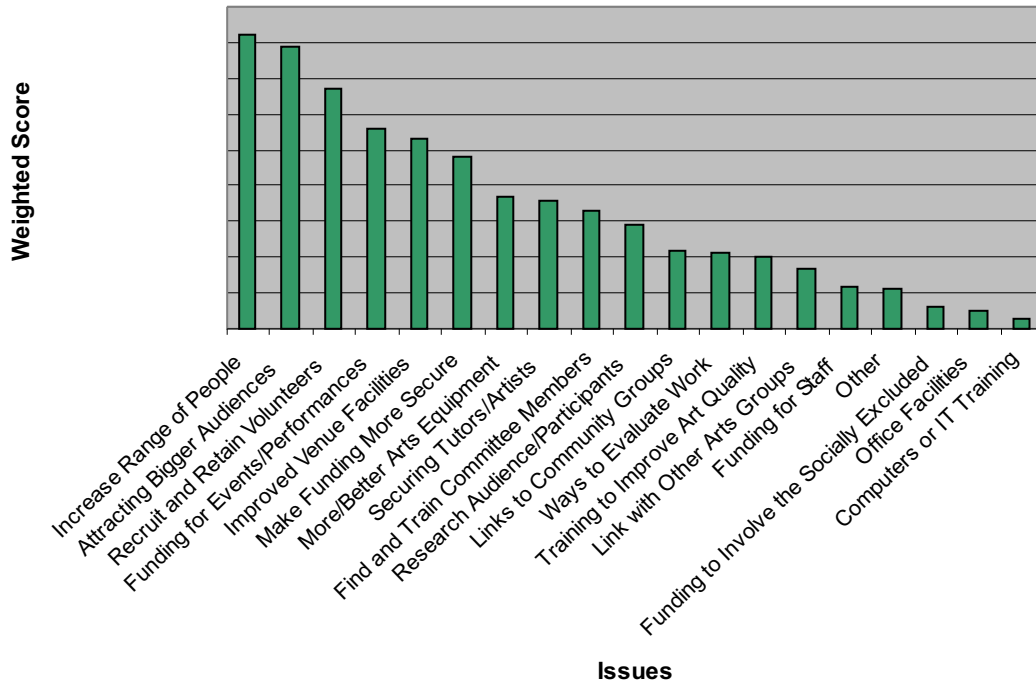
In Dorset, other issues felt to be important were the greater involvement of youth in the group, funding for special projects and better publicity.

Both counties placed very little value on better office facilities, IT training and staff funding. This could be deemed to be a reflection on the organisational situation of the majority of respondents. The majority were run almost entirely by volunteers using their own homes as correspondence addresses and therefore the base for the group.

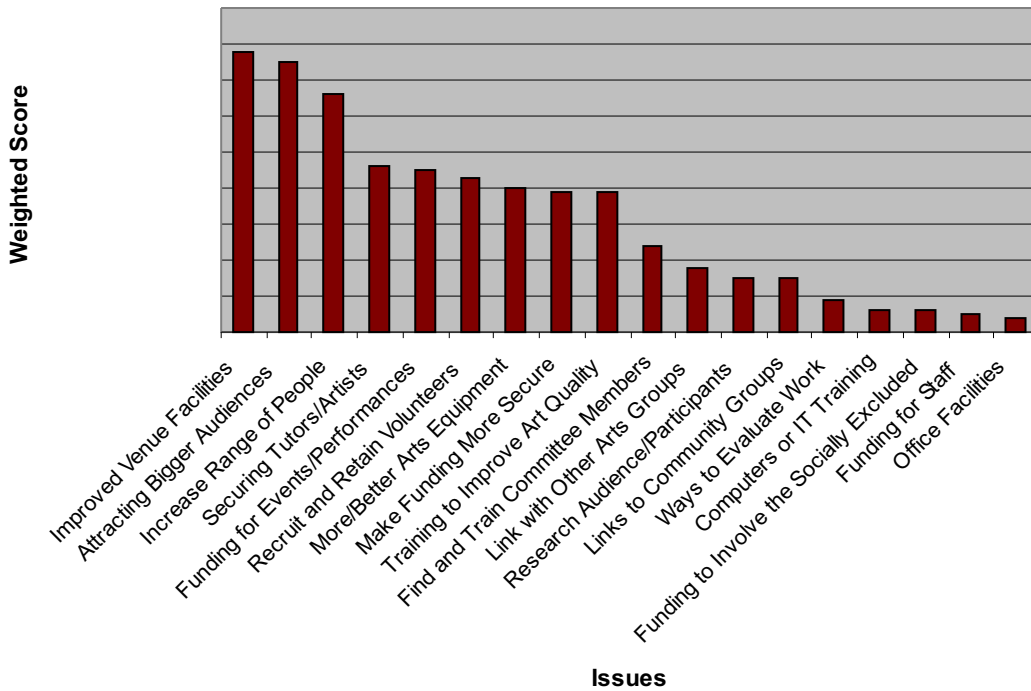
Considering the positive feelings, particularly in Dorset, shown towards attracting a wider range of people to their groups, it seems disappointing that groups have not linked this to the aim to gain funding to enable greater involvement by the socially excluded. In both counties, this was reported to have extremely little value in terms of groups' development over the next two years.

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**Dorset: Issues Important to Respondent Group
(Weighted Score)**



**Somerset: Issues Important to Respondent Group
(Weighted Score)**



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C. Issues Important to the Development of the Sector

When thinking about issues important to the voluntary arts sector as a whole, as noted in the audience section, both counties' respondents felt that attracting younger people would be of greatest significance.

This factor was deemed to be of great importance in Northern Ireland, second only to a voluntary arts support body. Although the sector appears to be doing well to attract members in their teens, respondents recognised that youth were under represented in their audiences. A large proportion of respondents were concerned by this issue and realise the need to develop youth audience levels in the sector as whole.

Of second importance was the development of a voluntary arts support body for the south west and a body to speak up for the voluntary arts.

This supports the comments of those respondents, already members of umbrella bodies, who feel that the information, support and advice provided by umbrellas is of great value to their group.

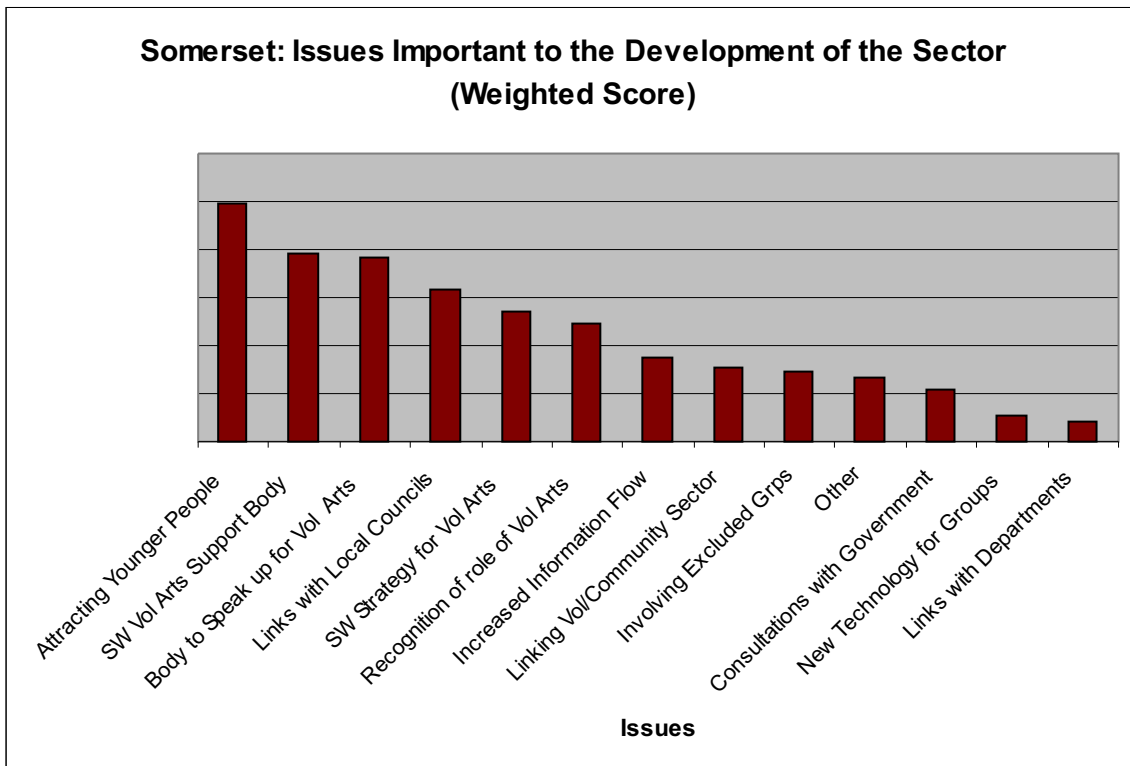
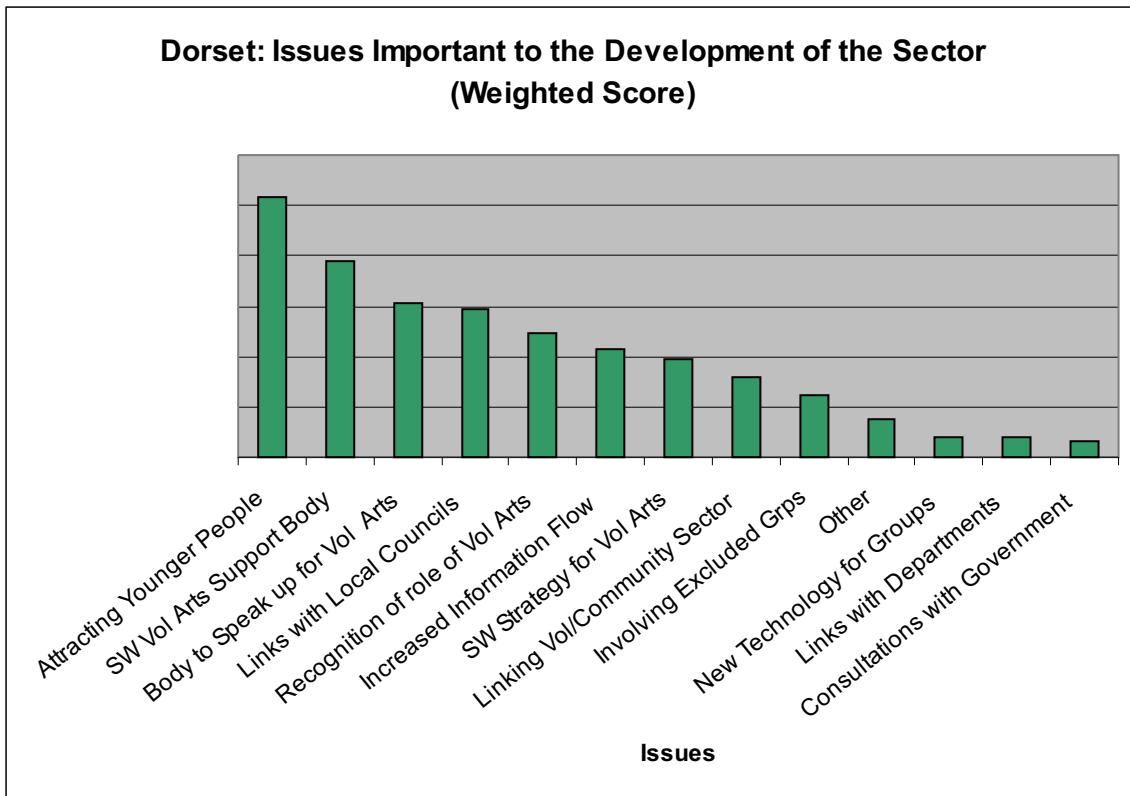
Groups also showed interest in the aim to build better links with local councils. This was felt to be of greater importance by groups in this study than by those in Northern Ireland in which this factor was outside of the top five.

Just over half of all respondent groups in both counties stated that they have had contact with their local arts officer in the last 12 months. The value placed on links with the council reported here reveals the value placed on this contact and the wish of other groups to have this contact.

This ties in with the comments regarding support in the previous section in which groups felt that more staff was needed in order to increase the opportunity to gain this valued contact with council arts staff.

Viewed to be of least importance to respondents in Somerset was building links with departments. In Dorset, opportunities to consult with government were deemed to be of least significance.

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When commenting on this section groups tended to focus on members, funding and venues as the key development points for the future. However, other issues brought up by respondents in Somerset included more exhibitions and training, increasing the accessibility of funding application forms, and better sign posting for venues to encourage greater attendance particularly in grasping the tourism market. Some groups felt that they were unable to keep up with the increases in venue hire costs, including venues they felt were built and maintained by their community.

Ideas put forward by Dorset's respondents included a support body to help specifically with publicity and marketing. Groups also linked the concern over attracting younger people to the importance of passing on arts and crafts skills ensuring traditional skills do not die out.

D. Contact with Local Government Arts Officers

Similar proportions of respondents in the counties stated that they had had contact with their local council arts officer in the last 12 months (56% Dorset, 59% Somerset). All art forms showed a majority had had contact.

The art forms with the most contact in Somerset were Visual arts in which 71% stated they had contact and cross-form with 67%.

In Dorset, all responding cross form groups reported contact along with 90% of literature groups. This is 30% more than literature groups in Somerset. This difference may be due to the appointment of an officer specifically for literature in Dorset.

Visual arts in Dorset had the same level of contact as in Somerset. Groups involved in the performing arts in Dorset had least contact (51% contact).

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CHAPTER SUMMARY 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 arts 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 one third more literature groups in Dorset than in Somerset reported contact with an LGAO in the last twelve months.

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6. Wimborne Community Theatre, Knowlton