Community arts

The Report of the Community Arts Working Party
June 1974

The Arts Council of Great Britain
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Preface from the Chairman of the Arts Council

During the last few years, the Council has received an increasing number of applications through its Experimental Projects Committee and its panels for the support of community arts activities. Following a seminar on this subject held at the ICA in the autumn of 1973, the Council decided to set up a small working party whose task was essentially to examine the nature of community arts activities in this country and to advise the Council on what should be the extent of its own role and involvement in this development. The Council has no doubt that the emergence of community arts work involving as it does a fresh approach in encouraging people, especially young people, to exercise their creative talents in the widest sense is something of considerable significance in many areas; what has been less clear is the validity of their claim for subsidy specifically from the Arts Council.

Under Professor Harold Baldry's chairmanship, the working party has prepared this report, which was recently presented to the Council. The Council has welcomed the report, and our decision to publish it was made not only because the Council has accepted the report in principle, but because of the clarity and insight with which Professor Baldry and his colleagues have been able to analyse a matter which presents special problems of definition and assessment. I hope that it will on this account alone be of some use to local authorities and other individuals and organisations with an interest in community arts work.

The Arts Council has agreed that a new panel or committee should be established as soon as adequate funds can be made available to justify such a step. In co-operation with the Regional Arts Associations, the new committee would consider financial and other assistance to community arts organisations, and the necessary administrative arrangements will be made to service such a committee. I must, however, sound a note of caution with regard to the recommendations in the report concerning finance. It is envisaged in chapter 7 that the Council might set aside some £250,000 in 1975/6 to be spent on community
arts in England, together with further sums for Scotland and Wales which would of course be at the discretion of the Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils respectively. The Council's present situation is that its grant-in-aid for the current financial year has not been enough to keep pace with inflation. We have therefore had to limit quite severely both the subsidies we give to individuals and organisations and those for directly promoted activities. At the present time, we do not know what our grant-in-aid for 1975/6 will be, but against the background of the present economic climate, we may be faced with a similar situation next year. Unless the Council sees a considerable improvement in its Government grant in real terms, it may well be impossible to provide the sums proposed in the report. Nevertheless, in evaluating priorities for the next financial year, the Council will have in mind the working party's recommendation that some additional finance should be made available to community arts, and that this should be administered along the lines proposed in the report for a two year period, after which our policy would again be reviewed. We shall of course use the arguments presented in this report in our negotiations with the Department of Education and Science and with local authorities, when discussing future levels of subsidy and support for the arts throughout the country.

Patrick Gibson

1 Introduction

1.1 The Community Arts Working Party was set up by the Arts Council of Great Britain on 28th November 1973 with the following terms of reference:

a. To consider the future role of the Arts Council in relation to community arts' activities in Great Britain; and to examine in particular the extent to which the Arts Council should be directly involved in the subsidising of community arts work.

b. To consider the relationship between experimental work and community arts' projects and to advise the Council as to whether a clear distinction needs to be drawn between these two fields of activity or whether they can appropriately be considered together when assessing applications and subsidy needs.

c. To review the constitution and role of the Experimental Projects Committee and to make recommendations for the future administration of subsidy in the light of the foregoing.

1.2 The membership of the Working Party has been as follows:

Professor H C Baldry (ACGB and Regional Committee) Chairman
Lady Casson (ACGB and Regional Committee)
Mr Michael Dawson (Director, Yorkshire Arts Association)
Mr Alexander Dunbar (Director, Scottish Arts Council)
Mr Maurice Gilmour (County Drama Adviser, Leicestershire)
Mr Albert Hunt (Drama Panel)
Mr James Morris (ACGB and Scottish Arts Council)
Mr Henry Nyman (Welsh Arts Council)
Mr Aneurin Thomas (Director, Welsh Arts Council)
Mrs Marina Vaizey (Art Panel)
Mr Peter Williams (ACGB and Regional Committee)
The Officer servicing the Working Party was Mr John Buston of the Regional Department, whose skill in driving a mini-bus has been a valuable additional asset.

1.3 The working Party has visited a number of community arts groups in London, Leeds and Bradford and also the South Hill Park Arts Centre at Bracknell. Joint discussions have been held with representatives of other organisations concerned with support for community arts; with spokesmen for work connected with community arts in other countries; with the Directors of the Regional Arts Associations; and with the London Association of Community Theatre Groups and the Association of London Independent Videogroups. Eleven meetings have been held in all. The Working Party has also received numerous documents and written communications. The report commissioned by the Arts Council from Mr Rufus Harris became available only at the beginning of May and was not as helpful as had been hoped. A list of groups or individuals consulted and documents received is given in Appendix 1.

1.4 As its investigations proceeded the Working Party found itself obliged to go beyond its original terms of reference and its report is somewhat more wide-ranging than was originally contemplated; but it has endeavoured to include an answer to all questions with which it was asked to deal.

2 A new development in the arts

2.1 During recent years a new development has emerged in some industrial countries, now known in Britain as ‘community arts’. Its origins and history, which go back to the early sixties, are briefly summarised in Appendix 2. The Working Party appointed by the Arts Council to study this development was offered many definitions of ‘community arts’, but found none of them completely satisfactory. We believe, however, that while the search for definition is probably futile, it is possible to pick out certain features which together add up to a distinctive picture.

2.2 The key element in this picture is an individual or group of individuals, perhaps best describable by the word commonly used for them in France, ‘animateurs’. They are likely to form themselves into an organisation of variable size and complexity, with a name and sometimes even with a constitution. They are also likely to have a place which they use as a base for their activities, and which they may call an ‘arts centre’ or ‘resource centre’. The importance of this place for their work and the extent to which their activities happen there is variable; but they are never solely concerned with bringing people into it: to a greater or lesser degree they carry their work into the environment of the community itself – streets, pubs and the like. What matters most is not an organisational form, nor bricks and mortar, but the commitment and dedication of the individuals involved.

2.3 ‘Community artists’ are distinguishable not by the techniques they use, although some (e.g. video, inflatables) are specially suited to their purposes, but by their attitude towards the place of their activities in the life of society. Their primary concern is their impact on a community and their relationship with it: by assisting those with whom they make contact to become more aware of their situation and of their own creative powers, and by providing them with the facilities they need to make use of their abilities, they hope to widen and deepen the sensibilities of the community in which they work and so to enrich its existence. To a
varying degree they see this as a means of change, whether psychological, social or political, within the community. They seek to bring about this increased awareness and creativity by involving the community in the activities they promote; and because children are most easily involved they often work to a large extent with children and hope through this to involve the adults as well. They therefore differ from practisers of the more established arts in that they are chiefly concerned with a process rather than a finished product; a many-sided process including craft, sport, etc, in which the ‘artistic’ element is variable and often not clearly distinguishable from the rest. They nevertheless claim that their ‘tilling of the cultural soil’ must in time bring its own harvest, and that its fruits will include new artistic activity and creation, as well as increased appreciation of the arts, among sections of society which at present regard the arts with indifference or even hostility.

2.4 The ‘community’ with which they are concerned is usually, but not necessarily, the population of a limited geographical area or ‘neighbourhood’. Some of their activities, however, may be extended further afield, and a ‘resource centre’ may serve a much wider region. The problems presented by this aspect of their work are discussed later in the report (5.5).

3 Should the Arts Council be involved?

3.1 The Working Party formed the impression that community artists are in most cases rendering a service to society and deserve public help, financial and otherwise. They complain with some justification that, because their activities do not fall within the administrative limits of any one official source of aid, they are in danger of getting support from none. The question before the Working Party, however, was whether their work has any relevance to the aims of bodies set up to assist and subsidise the arts, such as the Arts Council and the Regional Arts Associations; in particular, whether the Arts Council itself should be involved.

3.2 To the familiar question ‘Is it art?’ the Working Party could find no simple answer. The question itself takes for granted concepts not applicable in the sphere with which we were dealing. Each of its three apparently simple words implies an assumption – that the matter under discussion is an existing object rather than a developing potentiality, a thing rather than a process, and that ‘art’ is a permanent definable reality rather than a term whose meaning has varied in the past and will vary in the future. The Working Party thought it wiser to approach the problem by considering how community arts, as described in the previous section, is related to the aims for which the Council was established, as stated in clause 3 of its charter.

3.3 Clause 3 (a) of the charter reads: ‘to develop and improve the knowledge, understanding and practice of the arts’. It is difficult to predict how far community arts will contribute to the fulfilment of this aim, especially if ‘the arts’ is interpreted to mean those forms of art which are already established. Many community artists are in revolt against the accepted forms, as other innovators have been before them, and the majority are not primarily concerned with improving knowledge or understanding of our artistic heritage or traditions, or with practice of the arts leading to a product that can be judged by normally accepted standards. On the other hand they argue that they are developing the
practice of the arts, and that their work has an 'artistic potential' which makes it a possible growth point from which new techniques and new product may emerge. It is difficult to judge the validity of this claim. Although much of their work may prove to be ephemeral, some of it may have results which, whatever is thought of them now, will be regarded in future years as advances in the sphere of the arts. The Working Party feels that at the least, the possibility is one which the Arts Council should not ignore.

3.4 Clause 3 (b) of the charter reads: 'to increase the accessibility of the arts to the public throughout Great Britain'. Most community artists are not concerned with increasing the accessibility of the arts in the traditional sense, e.g. by performances of Shakespeare or visits to art galleries, but their aim of involving wider sections of the public in artistic activity does seem to come within the spirit of this clause; indeed they would claim that they are doing something to promote this object of the Council in areas and among strata of society where otherwise it could have no hope of fulfilment, and that thereby they are helping to make the phrase 'throughout Great Britain' more of a reality than it is at present. If their success in carrying out this aim is often most marked among young people, they argue that work with this age group is of the greatest importance for the future. The Working Party, while aware that the results they achieve are variable, believes that they are making a contribution which the Council under clause 3 (b) has good reason to support.

3.5 It seems clear from these considerations that the Arts Council should be involved, and would indeed fail to carry out its duties under the charter if it did not give some support to community arts. The Working Party further believes that the Council should not only accept involvement, but be seen to be involved. In the past few years the Council has given assistance through one channel or another to many organisations or individuals whose work can reasonably be regarded as falling within community arts. The Working Party suggests that more open support would not only be in accord with the charter and simplify some of the Council’s administrative machinery, but would also make it clearer to the general public that the Council is not so preoccupied with the established arts or so 'elitist' as is sometimes alleged.

3.6 At the same time it must be recognised that the activities of community artists, despite the name, are not only artistic, and that their work must therefore also concern other bodies through which public subsidy and other assistance is channelled: education, social welfare, sport, ‘leisure or ‘recreation’ in general. These could be concerned either at national or at local authority level, or both: because most community arts activities are local, the position of local authorities in this matter is especially important. Consultation and perhaps co-operation with these other bodies would fall within the third of the Council’s objects, stated in clause 3 (c) of the charter: ‘to advise and co-operate with Departments of our Government, local authorities and other bodies on any matters concerned whether directly or indirectly with the foregoing objects’. The Working Party’s views on methods of such consultation and co-operation, and also on the part which could be played by the Regional Arts Associations, will be discussed in section six of the report.

3.7 If it is accepted that the Arts Council should be involved in support for community arts, a number of questions arise which have to be answered before this decision can be given effect. These questions fall under four main heads, to which the rest of this report will be devoted:

a Should the Council recognise a category to be called ‘community arts’?

b If so, what should be included in this category?

c What administrative machinery is required?

d What amount of financial aid is likely to be necessary?

The sections which follow apply primarily to the support of community arts in England. In Scotland and Wales the situation and the problems involved are in some ways different. Further reference will be made to them at a later stage (6.11).
4 A new category?

4.1 Because the Arts Council's mechanism for supporting the arts involves the grouping of comparable items into categories (drama, music, etc), the problem arises whether the activities known as 'community arts' are sufficiently comparable with each other, and sufficiently different from others dealt with by the Council, to be placed for the purpose of assessment in a single category separate from those through which the Council and its Panels already operate. The Working Party has come to the conclusion that they do form such a category, although like others accepted by the Arts Council it embraces a wide spectrum and inevitably there are some marginal cases. We regard the name 'community arts' as far from perfect; it is open to a variety of interpretations and does not adequately cover the range of activities of which it is used. Nevertheless it brings out better than any other phrase in current usage the central characteristic of these activities; and it will therefore be used in the rest of this report as the name of the category which the Working Party has in mind.

4.2 Our main reason for believing that community arts should be treated as a separate category will be apparent from the description already given in section two. The concern of community artists with process rather than product, with the effect of their work on the community rather than the achievement of standards acceptable to specialists in the various art forms, sharply differentiates their aims and activities, and consequently the criteria by which they should be assessed, from those expected in the other categories through which the Council operates. In addition there are several other ways in which community arts work cuts across distinctions and patterns of thought which underlie most of the Council's work.

4.3 It cuts across the distinction between particular art forms. Although individual members of a community arts group may have specialist training and/or experience, as a group they pay little or no attention to the boundaries between art forms, and their work is often consciously multi-media.

4.4 It cuts across the distinction between professional and amateur. Individuals with professional training and/or experience work in close collaboration with others (often part-time volunteers) who have none, so that a group of community artists cannot be labelled 'professional' or 'amateur'. Nor can the distinction be made in terms of payment: members of a group may be paid a subsistence (or less than subsistence) wage, or may exist on their own resources or on social security.

4.5 The division between experimental and non-experimental is also scarcely applicable. It is true that some of the activities of community arts groups owe much to recent experimentation in technique and materials. But much of what they do uses concepts and methods which are very old; and to call the whole of their work 'experimental' would be false, except in the sense that it is unusual and its outcome is unpredictable. Our terms of reference asked us 'to consider the relationship between experimental work and community arts projects'. The answer seems to be that while community arts work may be described as 'experimental' in a loose and very general sense, a great deal of current experimentation in the arts neither belongs to the category of community arts nor is in any way associated with it. We believe that to make 'experiment' the distinctive feature of an administrative category, as was done in creating the Experimental Projects Committee, is a mistake. Where a new technique or form is used by community artists in the course of their work, it should be regarded as falling within the community arts category. Otherwise experiments within one of the accepted art forms should be dealt with by the specialist Panel concerned, with the assistance, if it is thought desirable, of an appropriate sub-committee such as the Experimental Drama Committee; while multi-media experiments outside community arts should be handled by a separate committee, perhaps the recently established Performance Art Committee with suitably adjusted terms of reference.
5 What should be included?

5.1 The question ‘what should be included in the community arts category?’ cannot be decided only on grounds of principle. The borders of this category, as of others, are unclear, and the fixing of them for practical purposes must be determined partly by considerations of administrative effectiveness.

5.2 The total number of those in Britain who claim to be full-time community artists remains unknown to us, in spite of various attempts to arrive at a figure. Mr Rufus Harris produced a directory which contains 68 items, not all of which are groups or individuals engaged in community arts; but it is clear from other sources that this list is incomplete. A composite list drawn up by the recently formed Association of Community Artists includes 149 groups and organisations and 14 individuals, but it is open to question whether all of these should be regarded as operating in the field of community arts. Our general impression is that the number is much higher in urban areas, and especially in London, than elsewhere; and that the overall total is not so high as is sometimes supposed. On the other hand it is true that under present circumstances the would-be community artist is commonly faced with conditions of work and accommodation and with financial difficulties which make it hard for him even to survive. We recognise that to undertake such a life requires a dedication likely to be found only in a few; and that if more money and better conditions were available the number might be greatly increased. The same consideration applies to the size of the groups and organisations involved. At present some are large, whereas the majority are limited to a few full-time workers assisted by a varying number of part-time volunteers; but improved pay and conditions might well result in the growth of some of these units to a larger and more effective size. Our conclusion on this difficult question of numbers is that only if some financial and other assistance becomes available and claims for this are carefully scrutinised will any reasonably accurate quantification become possible.

5.3 The problem is further complicated by the consideration that a number of organisations or groups already known to the Arts Council and/or the Regional Arts Associations, and in some cases receiving support from them, could reasonably and conveniently be included in the category under discussion, whether or not they wish their activities to be known to the general public as ‘community arts’.

5.4 The Working Party believes that some of the arts centres which seek assistance from the Arts Council have as their primary function aims sufficiently similar to those of community arts groups for the two to be classed together for the purpose of assessment. They also are concerned with encouraging members of the community to participate in creative activity, and with providing them with the facilities for doing so. There is indeed no clear dividing line between work of this type done largely in the open and similar activity in arts centres, but rather a continuous spectrum in which the importance of a physical base and how far operations are conducted within or outside it varies according to the local situation and the methods used. On the other hand it is true that the term ‘arts centre’ is currently applied to a great variety of institutions, including many whose aims and methods are remote from those of community arts. We suggest that one of the first tasks of any body set up by the Council to deal with community arts should be to decide which arts centres now supported by the Council should be brought within the community arts category.

5.5 A difficult question is presented by groups which do not confine their activities to one geographical area, but are either completely nomadic or spend much of their time on visits to places away from their main base. Some of these are theatre groups, while others use various forms and techniques. Must the ‘community’ in which community artists work be limited to a particular ‘neighbourhood’? After much discussion of this point the Working Party has come to the conclusion that the answer lies not in geographical considerations, but in the purpose and nature of the work done. In order to generate increased awareness and involvement in the people of any area, community artists need to work among them for a considerable period, and for this reason their dominant role is likely to be local, although the size of their locality may vary. But they may also achieve valuable results by working for a time elsewhere or in some cases even by paying a short visit, provided that their objective is to start something which can be followed up and given
some lasting effect by people on the spot. We feel that this emphasis on objective must be closely adhered to, and only where this objective is clearly dominant should a group be included in the community arts category. Where it is not dominant, our view is that the matter should be dealt with by one of the specialist Panels: the majority of travelling theatre groups, for example, should be retained within the province of the Drama Panel and DALTA, although particular cases will require careful consideration. Again it seems desirable that any body established to deal with community arts should include among its first topics for discussion, probably in consultation with representatives of the Drama Panel and Department, the question how far groups not limited to one area should be regarded as engaged in community arts activity.

5.6 In sum, we suggest that the answer to the question 'what should be included?' lies in the objective of the group or individual concerned, and in the appropriateness of judging their work by its effect on the community rather than by the standard of an end-product. Even when this has been said, some difficult cases will remain: a community arts group, for example, may function at times entirely as an experimental and/or touring theatre company. Whether they should be considered under one head or the other, or perhaps in exceptional instances under two, is a question requiring careful examination in each case. To ensure allocation to the right category, it will clearly be advisable that any body set up by the Arts Council to deal with community arts should include some representation from some of the specialist Panels, and that its meetings should be attended by officers from the relevant specialist Departments.

6 Administrative machinery

6.1 As has been pointed out in an earlier section (3.6), much of the work of many community artists belongs to spheres other than those which concern the Arts Council, and public support for these aspects of their activities should come from other sources. One suggestion discussed by the Working Party was that a special fund should be set up, perhaps by the Government through the Department of Education and Science, to be administered by a combined committee including Arts representation along with members qualified to pass judgement from other points of view, such as education or social welfare. We rejected this proposal on the ground that it lacks the flexibility which the situation requires, and in particular because the system proposed is over-centralised. We believe that what is needed is not one source of assistance at one level, but the provision of support, if it is merited, through whatever channels are appropriate in each case and at whatever level or combination of levels is most suitable. There should of course be as much consultation and co-operation as possible between the various sources involved; and the prospects of this might be improved if the training of social workers included an element concerned with the place of the arts in the life and welfare of the community.

6.2 Support for the artistic element in community arts work should, therefore, be dealt with separately from its other aspects; but the Working Party believes that rarely, if ever, should it be solely or even principally the responsibility of the Arts Council. Because the aim of this kind of activity is to have an effect on one (or sometimes more than one) local community, it must be seen largely as a local matter, with which the local authorities and the Regional Arts Associations should be especially concerned. Our feeling is that in this sphere more than any other partnership between the local authorities, the Regional Arts Associations and the Arts Council is desirable, and indeed essential.

6.3 Some of the new local authorities are already supporting community arts, in the wide sense in which we have described it, through leisure
committees or other channels. This is a welcome development, which may lead in time to general acceptance of the idea that provision of opportunity for the involvement of all sections of the community in the arts should become a service organised by local authorities and paid for by the ratepayer, no less than libraries and museums. In the meantime both the Arts Council and the Regional Arts Associations can do much by giving a lead in this direction and by providing information and advice.

6.4 The Working Party has been especially concerned with the role of the Regional Arts Associations, which for several reasons should be able to play a major part. The Associations are well acquainted with the local situations and problems in their areas, and therefore are in a good position to give advice on local projects and to assess their financial and other needs. They are also used to working in co-operation with local authorities, who are strongly represented on their committees, and with other bodies which have some commitment to the community. On the other hand the Working Party gathered from a meeting with regional directors and other representatives that the Associations differ greatly in both their acquaintance with community arts activities and their attitude towards them. A few, notably the Greater London Arts Association, devote a large part of their income and time to the promotion or assistance of community arts projects, although not always under that name. Others, while sometimes aiding activities which the Working Party would classify as community arts, make little or no use of the term and give such projects no special place in their grant-aiding machinery. No Regional Arts Association has a community arts officer. It can indeed reasonably be argued that Regional Arts Associations have no need to distinguish between categories to the extent required in the operations of such a large and complex organisation as the Arts Council.

6.5 The Working Party's conclusion is that although the Regional Arts Associations have a very important role in this area of activity, provision for community arts should not be left entirely to them, but the Arts Council itself should play a part in close co-operation with them. We base this view on several grounds. While the Associations' interest in this kind of activity remains so uneven, it seems fairer to community artists that they should be able to turn, if necessary, to a national body. In some cases it is easier for the Arts Council than a Regional Arts Association to overcome an initial local prejudice. A few of the organis-
concerned with community arts, and in particular on the provision of assistance of all kinds, financial or otherwise, to those involved in community arts activities. One of its first tasks might be to decide which organisations or individuals already in receipt of aid from the Council should in future be regarded as belonging to the community arts category (cf 5.3, 5.4, 5.5). Further topics requiring its early attention would be the collection and dissemination of information about community arts work both in this country and abroad; the compilation of a list of possible sources of support for community arts (cf 7.4); a study of the legal status of community arts organisations and the legal problems they face; and the feasibility of providing some form of training for workers in this field.

6.9 To ensure efficient servicing of the proposed Panel and execution of its decisions we recommend the appointment of a Community Arts Officer in the Regional Department, who could establish and maintain close contact with community arts groups throughout the country, as well as with Regional Arts Associations and local authorities in so far as they are concerned with community arts. Alternatively, if the Department’s officer strength were increased by one, the work could be shared between several members of its staff. It is clear that the Regional Department’s present staff is insufficient to undertake this extra burden without the appointment of an additional officer.

6.10 The Working Party recognises that setting up a Community Arts Panel would have consequences affecting the work, and possibly even the existence, of some present committees or sub-committees of the Council or its other Panels. But as already stated (3.5), we believe that the results would be a simplification of the present administrative machinery, and would help to clarify the Council’s position and remove some widespread misconceptions of its attitude and aims.

6.11 The proposals so far made in this section are primarily concerned with support for community arts in England. The situation in Scotland and Wales is somewhat different. Some projects or groups which could loosely be considered as community arts have been grant-aided by both Councils. The Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils, however, being smaller organisations, do not have demarcation problems between art forms and departments to the same degree as the Arts Council of Great Britain operating in London. Moreover while there are three Regional Arts Associations in Wales, in Scotland Regional Arts Associations do not exist, although the Scottish Arts Council is currently considering proposals for such Associations as well as other ideas connected with regional development and the reorganisation of local government. The Working Party appreciates these differences and recommends that the Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils be asked to consider appropriate means of supporting community arts in the light of this report.
7 Financial aid

7.1 It will be clear from the preceding section that the administrative machinery we propose has other important functions besides those concerned with finance. We now turn to the subject of financial support for community arts.

7.2 It is characteristic of community arts enterprises that although they may sometimes attract large audiences, they receive a low financial return, whether in fees or ‘box-office’, for most of their activities; much of what they do is given free. Consequently a high proportion of their income must come from other sources.

7.3 A few community arts organisations have succeeded in making themselves partially self-financing by supplying goods (e.g. books) or services (e.g. the use of video equipment). Others might be able to follow their example if information on the methods they use were made available. To investigate this aspect and pass on the results of his enquiries could be one of the functions of a Community Arts Officer.

7.4 It is obviously desirable that community artists should be aware of all the possible sources to which they may turn for subsidy. The Working Party found that these are more numerous than is sometimes realised. As stated earlier (6.8), a full list should be compiled and advice on this subject should be made widely available.

7.5 As has already been emphasised (6.3), the local authorities have a large part to play in this matter, and in time may become the chief financial backers of community arts work. Here again there is need for a better supply of information, whether from the Arts Council or the Regional Arts Associations, on the way in which approaches to local authorities may be made.

7.6 All these are means of improving the difficult financial situation in which community artists find themselves. The Working Party, however, has been mainly concerned with the provision of subsidy by the Arts Council and Regional Arts Associations, and in particular with three questions: the mechanism for allocating such subsidy, the methods of assessment, and the total amount likely to be involved.

7.7.1 A number of organisations likely to come within the community arts category are already subsidised by the Council. If this subsidy is thought by the Community Arts Panel to be justified, it should presumably be maintained or enlarged, subject to the understanding that the provision of aid may, as in other categories, be transferred to the appropriate Regional Arts Association by agreement of all the parties concerned, or replaced by support from the local authority or some other source. Similarly the Regional Arts Associations will wish to continue financing the organisations or individuals they already assist.

7.7.2 Where new expenditure is needed in order to support groups or projects which are new or not hitherto subsidised, the Working Party recommends that the normal practice should be for those concerned to approach the Regional Arts Association, which, if unable to provide sufficient subsidy from its own funds, should be able to apply to the Community Arts Panel for money for this purpose over and above its normal allocation. At the same time we believe, for reasons already stated (6.5), that for the present it should be possible for community arts applicants not aided by a Regional Arts Association to make a direct application to the Community Arts Panel for subsidy, which could be given either to one applicant or jointly to more than one. In all cases the relevant Regional Arts Association would be consulted before an award is made. The amount awarded in each instance would vary according to the needs and programme of work put forward by the applicant and often would be given with reference to only part of his activities.

7.7.3 We recommend that all revenue grants made should be seminal awards normally given for a limited period, in the hope that in time other subsidy would be obtained from elsewhere, for example from the local authority or industry. An initial Arts Council award, if successful, should encourage the local authority to provide support. The local authority should be informed when a grant is made, and where feasible it should be urged to contribute matching funds.
7.7.4 In addition to awards determined by the Community Arts Panel, in some cases 'Housing the Arts' grants may be justified in order to help a group to establish a base for its operations.

7.8 Initial assessment of the value of a community arts project will be difficult, for the key factor in forming a judgment is one which cannot be known in advance – the effect on the local community. The award of a grant, in this sphere even more than in others, will be an act of faith, and it will therefore be especially important that the initial decision should be followed throughout the period of subsidy by continuous assessment of the success with which the grant is used. As this can be evaluated only by enquiry and observation on the spot, visits to the localities concerned should be paid wherever possible by the Community Arts Officer and by members of the Community Arts Panel; and they must consult the Regional Arts Association and to a large extent rely on its verdict, even where the grant arises from an application made direct to the Council.

7.9 The question of the total subsidy which should be recommended for community arts also presents special difficulties. In considering this problem the Working Party has kept in mind the point already emphasised (6.2, 6.3, 7.5, 7.7.3), that any adequate funding of community arts activities must come chiefly from local or regional sources and above all from the local authorities; provision of financial aid on the scale likely to be required, if community arts work continues to develop, cannot come mainly from the Arts Council, nor do we believe that it should. In seeking a figure for an Arts Council allocation for 1975/6, two elements have to be considered: the sum needed for activities which are now supported by the Council under other heads, but would be transferred under the new arrangements to Community Arts, and the amount to be recommended for work not hitherto subsidised. The minimum figure to enable the former to continue at the present level will be the aggregate of their present subsidy plus some allowance for inflation; and although this cannot be determined without further research and discussion, it seems likely to be in the region of £150,000. For an estimate of the sum which might be awarded to support activities not previously subsidised, the Working Party has had no better guidelines than its rough idea of the size of the problem and its slight hopes as to what amount may be possible. Although in a better financial climate a much larger sum might well have been proposed, we recom-

mand that £250,000 be set aside for this purpose to be spent in England in 1975/6, together with appropriate amounts for Scotland and Wales. The Council's total direct subsidy expenditure on community arts in England would then be something like £400,000. Our proposal would increase the fraction of the Council's total budget spent on all activities in the community arts category from less that 1% to little more than 2%.

7.10 Small though this increase is, we appreciate that in the present financial circumstances it may be difficult for the Council to find even the modest sum which we propose. If this is so, we recommend that an approach be made to the Minister for the Arts for an additional grant of £250,000, with appropriate additions for Scotland and Wales, to be spent on community arts in 1975/6 in accordance with the proposals put forward in this report. As a large proportion of this sum would be spent through the Regional Arts Associations, and all of it administered in close cooperation with them, such an additional grant would be in line with the allowance of special monies for the development of regional work in 1973/4 and 1974/5.

7.11 The Working Party recognises that the allocation of even this small amount to community arts in 1975/6 may in subsequent years lead in one way or another to increased expenditure by the Arts Council, even though most of the support needed is provided from other sources. The award of new grants may be required while some 1975/6 awards are continued; organisations or individuals already supported may put forward additional needs which the Community Arts Panel regards as legitimate; and extra money may have to be given to a Regional Arts Association which takes over the financing of a project for which the Panel made an initial seminonal award. In short, what we propose may prove to be the thin end of a considerable wedge. The Working Party feels that this should be so, and that the possibility is not a valid objection to what we recommend. In its nature community arts activity is not static, with needs to be met by a fixed and unchanging allocation. It and its needs will either increase or disappear. If community arts is not a growth point for the arts, it will wither away, or be seen to be irrelevant to the development of the arts. But if it is a growth point it must be allowed and indeed encouraged to grow with the help of public support, whether from the Arts Council, the Regional Arts Associations, or the local authorities. Throughout its investigations the Working Party has been conscious of discussing a development with an uncertain future.
which only time and experience will reveal; and for this reason we have
avoided proposing any change, such as the establishment of a new De-
partment, which cannot easily be reversed. With the same point in mind
we recommend that if our proposals are accepted and put into action,
the situation be reviewed by the Council after the arrangements made
have been in operation for two years. We submit, however, that the
Council will make a move which may be important for the advance and
spread of the arts in Britain if it now takes the initial steps which we re-
commend.

8 Summary of principal recommendations

8.1 That a Community Arts Panel be established, which will be serviced by
the Regional Department and will work in co-operation with the
Regional Arts Associations (6.6–8).

8.2 That an additional officer be appointed in the Regional Department so
that it can deal with community arts matters (6.9).

8.3 That the Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils be asked to consider
appropriate means of supporting community arts in the light of this
report (6.11).

8.4 That £250,000, with appropriate additions for Scotland and Wales, be
allocated to new expenditure on community arts in 1975/6, and that, if
necessary, an approach be made to the Minister for the Arts to obtain an
additional grant for this purpose (7.9–10).

8.5 That any arrangements made for the support of community arts be
reviewed by the Council after they have been in operation for two
years (7.11).
Appendix I

List of meetings, visits and documents received
1 List of visits and meetings

31 January  Arts Centres Working Party (which members of the Community Arts Working Party attended) to meet representatives from Arts Centres, including ICA; Round House; Midland Arts Centre, Cannon Hill; Great George’s Project, Liverpool; South Hill Park, Bracknell; Hull Arts Centre.

7 February  First meeting.

20 February  Visit to Common Stock, Inter-Action and The Combination.

26 February  Seminar to discuss Community Arts and its need for subsidy. Present: Mr James Saunders (Chairman, GLAA Drama Panel) Mr Anthony Wraight and Mr Richard Mills (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation) Mr G K Sandiford (Home Office – Urban Aid) Mr Tom Andrews (Community Arts Officer, London Borough of Camden) Miss Barbara Deller (DES)

11/12 March  Meeting at Leeds with visits to Interplay and Play Space (Bradford), and interviews with Welfare State, Open House Bentham and Carolyn Goorney.

27 March  Meeting to discuss ground so far covered and things still to be done.


23 April  Seminar to discuss Community Arts work overseas. Present: Mr Botbol (UNESCO) Mrs Starke Meyer (US National Endowment for the Arts) Mr Hubert Kirchjassner (Remscheid Academy, Germany) M Jean-Loup Bourget and M Leon Joseph (French Embassy) Mr Graham Woodruff and Miss Catherine Mackerras (Telford New Town Project) Mr Peter Oliver (Oval House) Mr Nigel Leach (Bath Arts Workshop)

1 May  Visit to South Hill Park, Bracknell.

10 May  Meeting with representatives of the Regional Arts Associations. Present: Mr Christopher Rye (RAA) Mr Mike Hussey (EMAA) Mr Harry West (GLAA) Miss Sally Stote (Lincs. & South Humberside Arts) Mr Peter Bevan (AAA) Mr Ian Clarke (NA) Mr Alex Schouvaloff (NWAA) Mr Bernard Jacobson and Mr Chris Kerr (SAA) Mr Peter Carpenter (SEA) Mr Ian Watson (SWA) Mr John Murphy (WMA) Mrs Nina Hibbin (YAIA) Miss Jenny Wilson (Mid Pennine Association for the Arts)

28 May  Meeting with Mr Edward Lucie-Smith to discuss the constitution and role of the Experimental Projects Committee. First consideration of Draft Report.

3 June  Second consideration of Draft Report.
2 Documents received

‘Community Arts in Great Britain’ – a report by Rufus Harris submitted May 1974.

A memo to the Community Arts Working Party – Albert Hunt.

Summary of the Community Arts Group Seminar held at the ICA on 28th and 29th November 1973.


New Activities Committee – Alternative set of recommendations and introduction by the Chairman and J W Lambert.

New Activities and the Community Sub-Committee report ‘to investigate the relation between Arts and the Social Services, Community Development, Education and Youth Work’.


1974 Directory of Community Artists (prepared by the Association of Community Artists).

Association of Community Artists’ National Survey of Community Arts/Theatre Groups/Projects and their financial needs.


Report on investigation into touring theatre provision for rural areas of the West Midlands – Sue Dunderdale, February 1974.

Report on community theatre submitted by the GLAA.

Granby Festival 1973 – a report by Peter Dodd and Chris Elphick.


Various submissions from Ed Berman.


Welfare State – descriptive material.


Proposal for a faculty of community arts linked with an arts centre in Bradford.

An outline of the proposed Community Arts Project in Telford New Town – Graham Woodruff and Catherine Mackerras.

Merseyside Visual Communications Unit – a report by Colin Wilkinson.


Video in Community Development – Centre for Advanced TV Studies 1972.


‘Animation a Montbeliard projects pour 1973/74’ – Jean Hurstel.

‘Art, Entertainment and Education’ – a paper by James Saunders.


‘Community Arts: Where does the social service end and the art begin’ – Chris Kerr, Southern Arts.

Appendix 2

Brief summary of developments related to community arts since 1962
1 In 1962 the Traverse Bookshop in Edinburgh developed its activities to include a coffee bar and a performance area where it began to present, on a very small scale, experimental theatre and mixed-media productions.

2 By 1966 the enthusiasm for this type of activity had spread to London. The basement of Better Books in Charing Cross Road was converted for similar use, and many of the artists now working professionally under the banner of ‘experimental drama’ and ‘experimental projects’ began their careers in this small room, e.g. The People Show.

3 By July 1967, Jim Haynes had opened the Arts Lab in Drury Lane. This was no longer one small room, but a collection of rooms which he divided into cinema, performance areas, coffee bar, bookshop, studios, gallery, etc. It attracted a new youthful audience and presented work that otherwise would not have been seen in London. The emphasis was on experiment and innovation among the young. The enthusiasm for this new attitude to ‘art’ spread remarkably, not only amongst those already interested in the traditional arts, but to those previously shy of involvement.

4 The Round House, which was beginning to be used professionally, was hired by UFO, who – on the crest of a popular boom – organised a whole series of very successful concerts of rock and mixed-media.

5 The Middle Earth, which was a basement warehouse in Covent Garden, also opened up along similar lines.

6 This ‘underground’ movement developed its own magazines, films, theatre, music, and conventions. A whole era of semi-professional experimental youth-orientated activities sprang up on a scale that London had not seen before.

7 Smaller arts labs opened in Birmingham, Brighton, Beckenham, Halifax, Liverpool and Cambridge, and organisations capable of organising similar activities set themselves up in most major cities. They were loosely organised and concentrated all their activities towards encouragement of new work.

8 The young audiences which were attracted to these ventures brought with them new social problems – drugs, housing, unemployment, etc – which the organisers, with rare courage, tried sympathetically to understand and cope with, e.g. BIT.

9 The Arts Lab in London applied for grants from the Arts Council but eventually had to close through financial difficulties. The pressure from all these new applications became so intense that in 1969 the Arts Council formed a special New Activities Committee to advise it on these applications. To assess the work taking place ‘out of London’ it set up several ‘regional gatherings’ or ‘festivals’, the effects of which are in some areas still identifiable.

10 The New Activities Committee met on the 22nd July 1969 for its first meeting. There were eventually twelve and the composition of the Committee and its methods of work were subject to change. Its last meeting was on the 16th April 1970. The New Activities Report went to Council on the 27th May with an alternative set of recommendations prepared by the Chairman, Mr Michael Astor, and the Vice-Chairman, Mr Jack Lambert. The main Report was endorsed by eighteen members of the committee, and its recommendations were endorsed by fourteen members of the committee.

11 However, it was the Chairman’s recommendations that were eventually adopted by the Council, and an Experimental Projects Committee was set up, which first met on the 11th November 1970. Thereafter it met thirty-one times, the last meeting being on the 14th December 1973. By then the projects considered by that committee seemed mainly to come under two categories which could be described as Performance Art and Community Arts.

12 Most of the other activities had been absorbed, not always happily, by Experimental Drama, Arts Centres, Art Panel, DALTA, Small Scale
Touring, the Contemporary Music network, the Literature Panel's Small Print Fund, and the Regional Arts Associations.

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Performance Art has been taken under the wing of the Art Panel, and in February 1974 the Council set up a new working party under the chairmanship of Professor Baldry to investigate Community Arts.