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STRATEGIC PLAN 2005-2007

CHAIRPERSON'S STATEMENT

The Fire Station Artists' Studios is a unique facility in Ireland and indeed Europe. In almost fifteen years of transnational activity we have not succeeded in identifying a facility which has the same characteristics and dynamics as the Fire Station. Its uniqueness partly lies in its origins, but also in its Board of Directors' efforts to evolve a mission statement that would reflect its many functions and the reality of its location in the heart of one of the most struggling communities in the city of Dublin.

Its origins began when the Simon Community left the Fire Station for new homes in Ushers Island and nearby Sean McDermott Street. The North Centre City Community Action Project was, at that time, involved in a wide range of activities such as the training of local people for employment, and cultural events such as drama and festivals. They heard that the Artists Association of Ireland were interested in the building and the NCCCAP approached them with a view to developing a partnership to acquire the building for multi-use. The Artists Association refused. But their interest sparked the Arts Council to seek to acquire the building. The Arts Council allocated a substantial amount of money for its refurbishment as a centre for practicing artists. They were approached by the NCCCAP who asked that they be given space in the building to carry out its activities. They refused. The NCCCAP lobbied Dublin City Council to make the lease to the Arts Council conditional on space being made available for local use and on the Arts Council Board to get them to accept a social responsibility to accommodate the NCCCAP.

It was understandably difficult for the Arts Council to come to terms with this request. In order to convince the Arts Council of the credentials of the NCCCAP, they enlisted the aid of well known people that had worked with NCCCAP over the years. The result was that the Arts Council decided that a relationship with the local community through the NCCCAP would be well meritorious.

The Arts Council appointed a Fire Station board made up of its own board members and the director of the NCCCAP Robbie McDonald was appointed overall manager of the project. He was a wise choice. As good as the staff members of the Arts Council were, and as receptive to change as were the individuals on the board, there was a huge difference between the well protected airs of Merrion Square and the heroin drenched environs of Buckingham Street. I remember the first Christmas dinner we had in the Fire Station with the artists sitting with the staff and Board members of both the Fire Station and the NCCCAP, Robbie turned to me and said "Our vision has been realised". Robbie would leave to go to Manorhamilton to manage the Sculpture Centre there.

Tony Sheehan took over as director of the Fire Station Artists' Studios and oversaw a period of consolidation and interaction with the local community. New supports were set up for artists, including training and services and access to computers.

During his time, the board of the Fire station Artists' Studios was transformed and was legally separated from the Arts Council. The transition to autonomy went smoothly with no disruptions to the core functions of the Fire Station. Tony left to take up a position as Community Arts Development Officer with Cork European Capital of Culture.

The board were satisfied that it was accomplishing its core function which was to provide a secure safe healthy environment with supports and services to carry out their work. Some artists chose to live in the area after their residency in the Fire Station and continue an involvement with it.

Despite what we consider to be our ongoing success, going well into our second decade, we were conscious of the changes that had taken place since our first strategic plan was drawn up.

- Given our success in achieving our core function, what other supports and services should we develop for the practicing artists?
- The question of the role of the Arts Council and the related issue of funding only on an annual basis.
- The impact of the physical regeneration of the local area around the Fire Station.
- The arrival of new communities of immigrants into the area and the challenge of cultural diversity.
- Questions about our role in relation to the rights of minority groups, not only to access to the arts but also to practice art.
- Should the Fire Station Artists' Studios act as a catalyst, a sort of academy to encourage young people to encounter the artist locked within them?

It was clear that the Fire Station Artists' Studios were going through a phase of re-forming and of re-inventing without losing focus on the core function. We would clearly need a director to help develop a strategic plan around these issues and to be the champion to implement it.

For various reasons we failed to appoint a director in our first attempt. Róisín Hogan agreed to work part time for a limited period to help develop a new plan suitable to current issues and new artists' needs. This was a critical transition period which she oversaw with clarity and vision.

What was handed over to the new director was a mission statement which we believe reflects the manifold issues affecting an arts facility in the heart of a changing working class community and a strategy to help deal with their issues culturally and artistically. It is a mission statement which we are sure will be visited by many other organisations to help clarify issues surrounding arts practices and concepts of community involvement.

It is rewarding for us that the new director brings with her a freshness and a focus which will invigorate the Fire Station Artists' Studios. Most organisations are always faced with the threat of becoming de-energised institutions, limping along without vision. Significantly, this new energy is symbolised by a change in the Fire Station's new logo.

The board of the Fire Station are proud that we have accepted the challenge to re-invent ourselves without losing focus on our purpose and to have a mission statement, a strategy and as is evident from her enthusiasm, a director to bring us into the future.

Mick Rafferty, Chairperson

INTRODUCTION

The provision of subsidised, secure and well-managed living and working space for professional visual artists has always been at the heart of the Fire Station. With this in mind, the artists and their needs are key to the development of plans, projects and workshops in this strategic plan. Over the next three years the Fire Station Artists' Studios will be entering an exciting phase where, with the feedback gained from artists and art organisations, we are confident in disseminating our experience and expertise both nationally and internationally.

With the benefit of the recently refurbished meeting room and the five extra workstations in the resource area (each with digital media software and sound and video editing suites), Fire Station artists will have access to both a physical platform from which to open up dialogue, and to digital media, an increasingly important tool in the creation of art. It has always been our belief that artists need space and time to develop their ideas and projects, and these new facilities will provide each artist with the opportunity of experimenting, over time, with new digital media.

We at the Fire Station are committed to promoting, developing and facilitating models of good practice within the field of collaborative arts practice. The new meeting facilities will support our commitment to debating the concerns of artists and issues surrounding their practice. And additionally we are committed to the publication of professional art catalogues. Such documentation is vital for providing artists themselves, arts organisations and the wider community with information on new and innovative models and codes of practice.

The Fire Station is a dynamic and vibrant organisation with a clear focus on its future path. I would like to thank Liz Burns, John Carrick and Natasha Molyneux for their invaluable contributions. I would also like to thank everyone who assisted in the production of this report, which has been the result of deep discussion, debate and thought.

Clodagh Kenny, Director

ESTABLISHING A CONTEXT

This plan is the third strategic plan developed by the Fire Station Artists' Studios. The first plan focussed on the emergence of the Fire Station Artists' Studios and on the sustainability of the physical building – embedding it within the local community in which it would exist.

The second plan (2001 – 2003) focussed on the delivery of arts programmes and services in six areas: Studios, Training, International, Disability, Community and Arts Projects.

The social, geographic and cultural contexts in which the Fire Station is positioned have changed immeasurably since its inception. This plan is conceived in a time of complexity and uncertainty. At the time of writing the national Arts Plan has been cast aside and a new Director has been appointed to the Arts Council. Immigrants and asylum seekers have become familiar members of the local community in which the Fire Station is located. Changes in the economic profile of the country have meant that the profile of the young people who participate in the NCCCAP's programmes has changed dramatically. There is continuing debate about the relationship between art and community, an increase in the demand for professionalism and professional development of all cultural workers and the emergence of a new confidence in the arts sector evidenced by the development of resource organisations such as Theatre Forum. There is a stronger sense than ever before that the arts community is asking critical questions about the role and function of art in a time of ongoing uncertainty.

FIRE STATION ARTISTS' STUDIOS IS
A LIVING AND WORKING ENVIRONMENT
WHERE COMMUNITIES OF PROFESSIONAL
PRACTICE, PLACE AND INTEREST
INTERACT; DEVELOPING ARTS
PRACTICES OF EXCEPTIONAL
QUALITY AND INTEGRITY.

This third plan seeks to go beyond the physical boundaries of building and programme to position the Studios to capitalise on the learning that has emerged from 11 years of practice. The Fire Station has developed unique models of contextual arts practice that have resulted in high quality artistic processes and products allied with strong cross boundary relationships.

The research undertaken to develop this plan allowed for robust debate about core relational issues. The needs of key stakeholders were interrogated from myriad positions. Ongoing debate about the relationship between art and community was looked at from the perspective of an organisation that lives this work on a daily basis. At the end of this debate the Board of Directors of the Fire Station emerged with a new mission statement. This statement is an acknowledgement that stakeholder interest does not exist in isolation – but only in relationship.

Fire Station is not attached to traditional notions of community as a geographic location. It views “community” more broadly as any gathering of individuals who come together in support of a concept.

Traditional ways of viewing art and community assume that they are distinct and separate entities and must be brought into relationship with each other. This plan assumes that the relationship between the organisation, its key stakeholders and what it seeks to create and affect are the starting point for all contextual arts practice. The core theme running through the process and outcome of this strategising process is that communities of professional practice, place and interest are what need to be brought into relationship with each other in order for artistic work of excellence to emerge.

It is against this background that the Fire Station publishes its third strategic plan.

LEARNING

The learning emerging from the experience of designing and delivering a programme of work shaped by two strategic plans is summarised below. This learning shaped the discussions that took place with stakeholders within and without the organisation about the future strategic direction of the organisation.

The Fire Station:

- Has delivered on over 95% of the actions undertaken in the previous plan.
- Has developed sophisticated models of contextual arts practice, which have yet to be disseminated widely among an international community of practitioners.
- Delivers on its core activity to a high level and with considerable success.
- Has commissioned developmental and artistic processes of high quality that have been favourably received by all who have participated.
- Needs to undergo a period of consolidation where it can actively learn from its experience, disseminate that learning to a wider community of practitioners and use the emergent knowledge as a base for designing new ways of working in the future.

KEY POLICY AREAS

Building on the learning from the previous two strategic plans, the Fire Station will design and deliver strategies in three key policy areas. These three policy areas have been identified through consultation, evaluation, review and an assessment of the needs of the various communities in which the Fire Station lives and works. They are also designed to build on existing good practice and to position the organisation to disseminate its distinct model of contextual arts practice with a view to impacting on policy formation and models of engagement. Each policy area is supported by key strategic objectives and direct actions.

The key policy areas are:

INVESTMENT

ADVOCACY

DISSEMINATION

POLICY AREA 1 / INVESTMENT

GOAL

The Fire Station will invest in the physical, artistic, conceptual and community relationships in which it is engaged.

SUPPORTING OBJECTIVES

The Fire Station will:

- Engage in a process of re-imagining the physical space as a living and working environment for artists. Capital and infrastructural considerations will be attended to alongside a re-imagining of the Fire Station as a cultural enterprise in terms of branding, marketing and communication.
- Continue to create and deliver new and relevant models of professional development for practising artists, seeking to position itself as the training and professional development centre for professional artists in Ireland.
- Continue to commission and curate artistic work of excellence.
- Encourage the emergence of professional arts practice from and with the local communities in which it is placed.

DIRECT ACTIONS

- Investment will be made in upgrading the Information Technology available to artists with supporting on-site expertise.
- The capital development needs of the Studios will be researched and scoped. A fund raising drive will be initiated.
- The existing professional development programme for artists will be continued and expanded. New interventions will be researched, resourced and delivered.
- The curatorial vision of the Fire Station will be documented and disseminated.
- The Studios will continue to commission artistic work that speaks to and about the communities in which it is engaged.
- The Fire Station will encourage its local communities to view a career in the arts as a viable career option by creating opportunities for professional practice to emerge.

POLICY AREA 2 / ADVOCACY

GOAL

The Fire Station Artists' Studios will be an advocate for contextual arts practice within the communities in which it works. It will be an influencer in the areas of arts policy and practice, professional arts development and local community engagement.

SUPPORTING OBJECTIVES

The Fire Station:

- Has amassed an impressive body of experience in the area of contextual arts practice, which it will archive and disseminate.
- Will use its position of influence to advocate locally, nationally and internationally for the positioning of artistic practice in a wide range of community contexts.
- Will seek to influence national arts policy in the area of contextual arts practice.
- Will, through its programme of work, seek to develop and champion ongoing practitioner development.

DIRECT ACTIONS

- Encourage local community organisations to develop arts policies.
- Develop a visibility within national and international policy arenas through case and paper presentation.
- Continue to develop models of excellence in contextual arts practice.
- Continue to commission work and processes of excellence.
- Continue to document, archive and disseminate the learning gained from the key areas of work.

POLICY AREA 3 / DISSEMINATION

GOAL

The Fire Station Artists' Studios will document, evaluate and disseminate models of good practice in the area of contextual arts practice.

SUPPORTING OBJECTIVES

The Fire Station will:

- Seek publishing and disseminating opportunities nationally and internationally.
- Develop policies in the area of art in contextual practice and disseminate its model of practice.
- Create dialogical opportunities for practitioners through the commissioning of artistic processes and products.

DIRECT ACTIONS

- The Fire Station will organise professional seminars and symposia to create dialogical opportunities for communities of professional practice.
- A “resource room” will be created to facilitate internal communication within the community of artists resident in the studios.
- Documentary processes will be enhanced and upgraded.

EVALUATION

POLICY AREA 1 / INVESTMENT

GOAL

The Fire Station will invest in the physical, artistic, conceptual and community relationships in which it is engaged.

INDICATORS FOR SUCCESS

- Feasibility study completed into capital development of studio and work-space for artists.
- New strategic relationships developed with communities of professional practice.
- Professional development programme consolidated and developed to meet emerging needs of practicing artists.
- Investment in upgrading of digital and IT equipment and on site support.
- Increase in numbers of artists participating in professional development programmes and using the workshop space.
- Positive feedback from residents and participants on professional development programmes.

POLICY AREA 2 / ADVOCACY

GOAL

The Fire Station Artists' Studios will be an advocate for contextual arts practice within the communities in which it works. It will be an influencer in the areas of arts policy and practice, professional arts development and local community engagement.

INDICATORS FOR SUCCESS

- Public and identifiable profile for the Fire Station in the area of arts policy development.
- Evidence of local community organisations embracing a professional arts remit as a result of partnership with the Fire Station.
- Commissioning process and art work of exceptional quality.

POLICY AREA 3 / DISSEMINATION

GOAL

The Fire Station Artists' Studios will document, evaluate and disseminate models of good practice in the area of contextual arts practice.

INDICATORS FOR SUCCESS

- Commissioning and/or facilitating dialogical processes
e.g. symposia, conferences.
- Ongoing internal and external evaluation processes.
- Availability of archived material and policy statements via web based and published formats.
- Numbers of organisations and individuals engaged in dialogue with the Fire Station.

**INVESTMENT
ADVOCACY
DISSEMINATION**

BOARD

Róisín Hogan
Pauline Kane
Peter Kearns
Brian Kennedy
Mel McGiobuin
Michael Rafferty (Chairperson)
Gemma Tipton
Ger Power

STAFF

Clodagh Kenny – Director/Company Secretary
Liz Burns – Development Manager, Art in the Community
John Carrick – Workshop Manager
Natasha Molyneux – Administrator

POLICY AREAS / GOALS

2005 ACTIONS

2006 ACTIONS

2007 ACTIONS

INVESTMENT

The Fire Station will invest in the physical, artistic, conceptual and community relationships in which it is engaged.

Engine Room
Conversion complete.

Resource Room & Board
Room refurbished.

Computer &
software purchased.

Research into International
Arts Commission commenced.

Artist's publication.

Part time technical manager
for resource area appointed.

Commissioned art work with a
collaborative/participatory/
community element.

Feasibility study into capital
development commissioned.

Computer/software
continually upgraded.

New professional development
programmes for artists will be
continued and expanded.

New interventions researched,
resourced and delivered.

Commissioned art work with a
collaborative/participatory/
community element.

2005 – 2007 plan evaluated
Strategy for new plan created,
consultation process initiated.

Feasibility study completed.

ADVOCACY

Fire Station Artists' Studios will be an advocate for contextual arts practice within the communities in which it works. It will be an influencer in the areas of arts policy and practice, professional arts development and local community engagement.

Regular Fireside talks in
Fire Station.

New digital media
workshops on and off site.

New contextual arts
practice workshops.

Links with local community
strengthened and developed
to assist the emergence of
art programmes.

Continued commissioning
of work and processes
of excellence.

Regular Fireside talks in
Fire Station.

Case and paper
presentation by Director
and Development Manager.

Local communities
encouraged to develop
arts policies.

Continued commissioning
of work and processes
of excellence.

Regular Fireside talks in
Fire Station.

Case and paper
presentation by Director
and Development Manager.

Local communities
encouraged to develop
arts policies.

Continued commissioning
of work and processes
of excellence.

DISSEMINATION

Fire Station Artists' Studios will document, evaluate and disseminate models of good practice in the area of contextual arts practice.

Two publications of past
projects disseminated.

Made in Fire station
publication/CD.

New website and logo.

Symposia/conference
organised.

Continued investment in and
upgrading of website.

Resource room upgraded and
integrated into the
organisation.

All work documented and
made available via
web/published sources.

Conference/symposia
completed.

Continued investment in and
upgrading of website.

Resource room upgraded and
integrated into the
organisation.

All work documented and
made available via
web/published sources.