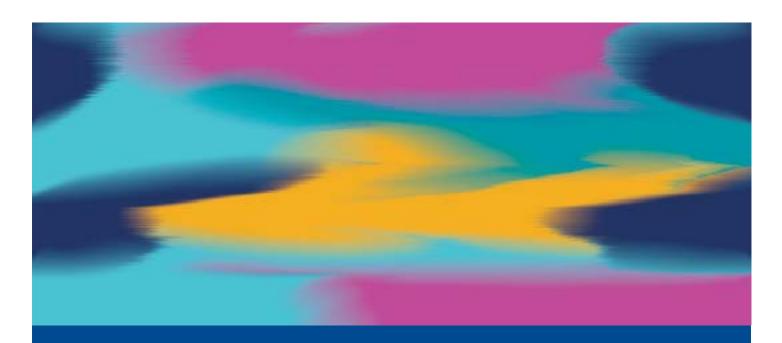**eti**

The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement

Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

An Evaluation Survey of

Creativity Seed Fund
Projects

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

1. Introduction

1.1 The Creativity Seed Fund ('the CSF') was established in 2001, with Executive Programme Funds allocated by the Northern Ireland Executive to help implement the aims of *'Unlocking Creativity'*.

1.2 *'Unlocking Creativity'* was adopted and launched by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), the Department of Education (DE), the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI). Its main purpose was to 'develop the capabilities of all our people for creativity and innovation and so promote and sustain the social, cultural and economic well-being of Northern Ireland'.

1.3 In *'Unlocking Creativity'*, the definition of creativity is given as - **'imaginative activity with outcomes that are both original and of value'.** The aim of *'Unlocking Creativity'*, and by extension of the Creativity Seed Fund, was to **'connect things that had not been previously connected'.**

1.4 The Creativity Unit of DCAL on behalf of the other government departments administered the Creativity Seed Fund. The Fund distributed £2.8m over a three-year period: in 2001/2, fourteen projects received support of £244,000, in 2002/3 forty-seven projects received £946,000 and in 2003/4 35 projects received £1,282,000. The Creativity Unit also spent some money on research into the creative industries.

2. Method of working

2.1 DCAL requested the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) to carry out a retrospective survey of a sample of 25% of those involved in the third year of the Fund. The sample was a representative mixture of educational and business projects,

some chosen by ETI and others by DCAL. A list of the groups surveyed is in an appendix to this report.

2.2   Each member of the ETI team had responsibility for the evaluation of the work of several projects. They read through the original applications from the groups and the monitoring and evaluation plans, and they visited a range of project managers over a three-month period. They focused, where possible, on the outcomes for the young people involved. Because of the retrospective nature of the survey it was not always possible to make contact either with the original project managers or with the young people.

2.3   The aims of the retrospective survey of the Creativity Seed Fund by ETI were -

- to measure the success of these projects against the aims and objectives set out in the application forms and the criteria for giving them funding;

- to assess the influence the projects have had on making young people more creative and more employable;

- to have an overview of the lessons which have been learned for future initiatives; and

- to examine to what extent the work has been sustainable, how the initiative has influenced further support from, or work by, other agencies or departments.

3.   Background

3.1   The Creativity Unit of DCAL administered the CSF on behalf of the four departments that had signed up to *'Unlocking Creativity'*, represented by the inter-departmental Creativity Action Group (now the Creativity Group). The Creativity Action Group examined the applications and made decisions about

which groups would be funded, according to clearly specified criteria. There was a lack of clarity in the planning regarding how the various departments, represented on the Creativity Action Group, might encourage and develop the potential of those groups who successfully achieved their project aims. While it was made very clear to all projects that the CSF was to 'kick start' an idea, some of the projects involved did not have a clear enough exit strategy to ensure the sustainability of their work, if successful.

3.2   The projects were asked to give due regard to fair employment and equal opportunities issues when they received their funding. In many of the projects visited by ETI, there was clear evidence of inclusivity, sometimes overtly through working with pupils from Special Schools or through work with ethnic communities; at other times the inclusive nature of the work developed with the project.

> **From the application form**
> *Monitoring and evaluation – 'The applicant is asked to work with the Creativity Unit gathering information and facilitating visits during the project so that the rate of implementation can be monitored, success of the project evaluated and impact on the objectives of the CSF assessed'*

3.3   All projects had to submit a monitoring and evaluation plan to the Creativity Unit when drawing down the first tranche of funding, and as they applied for further instalments of their funding. The Creativity Unit was 'entitled to inspect the project and all (financial) documents relating to it.' The projects presented regular updates to the Unit about the development of their work. There is considerable variation in the quality of the evaluations. In some cases, the evaluation is confined to a description of the stage at which the project was; in the best practice, there is rigorous monitoring of the project's work, with appropriate adjustments where necessary. Because of the

unexpected element within creativity, the project sometimes took a different turn based on the experience of the participants or of developments within their work. This reflects the importance of building flexibility into programmes related to creativity.

> **From the application form**
> *'Projects should also note that they may be subject to external evaluation and full assistance and cooperation with external evaluators is essential.'*

3.4   The main evaluation, by the DCAL Creativity Unit, involved a perusal of the monitoring and evaluation plans and updates provided by the projects. An officer of the Creativity Unit, who kept in regular contact with all grant recipients, visited most of the projects. The main evidence, in most of the projects, was the end product, which took several forms, including videos, showcases and innovative websites. While the majority of the projects achieved their aims, the CSF would have benefited greatly from more rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures, with regular up-dates to the four interested Departments, including information about how a particular project might require future support or development. For example, one project has revealed the need for particular training to be developed in a specialist area which would benefit their industry. The findings of this project have important implications for education and training.

4.   Visiting the projects

> *"Creativity can be developed – young people need more opportunities like these".*
>   *A facilitator*

4.1   All of the projects, involved in the survey, acknowledged that without the funding from CSF, it would not have been possible

to start off their initiative, nor consequently to seek, and in many cases obtain, funding from other sources.

4.2   Those managing the various projects or initiatives were clear about their objectives; they consistently reviewed these objectives during the project and, in some cases, there was a change in direction, based on the reports and the experience of the young people. Much of the success of a majority of the projects surveyed is due to the enthusiasm and dedication of those leading them, and their clear intention to encourage and support the young people, with whom they came into contact.

4.3   A majority of the projects in the survey established clear links between industry and schools, or provided young people with the opportunity to develop skills that would complement and extend their academic learning.

4.4   In the most successful of the projects there was development through partnership with other organisations, such as the Education and Library Boards or the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). Those in charge of the projects were able to bring a variety of partners together and monitor their growth in the understanding of the aims of the project.

> *'you don't have to be smart to be creative'*
>   *A participant*

4.5   In many of the projects, the process which the young people went through, developed their skills usually, but not exclusively, in information and communications technology (ICT) – and often at a very advanced level. A constant theme running through all the feedback from project managers and young people alike is the increase in confidence – 'a personal journey' is a commonly used phrase. They learned new skills, for example in making radio packages, films or developing digital skills, but they also learned to harness their creativity by

working through the process of turning an original creative idea into a reality, and learning how to work within a financial and time budget. In one particular case, the young people now understand the realities of 'documentary making for real'. Whereas the project work in CSF had completely free, open choices with regard to content, they are now being commissioned to tell other people's stories while drawing on the skills developed through the programme to generate income for their organisation.

> *(the CSF project)* **"brought us into a different environment and a different production process."**
> *A facilitator*

4.6 For many of the young people, there was the challenge, and often the success, of overcoming their fear of failure; they worked with highly skilled professionals from the worlds of industry, ICT and the Arts. They encouraged the young people in new ways of learning. There was fun and enjoyment for all concerned, they built up new friendships and they learned to work as a team. They also learned to take, and to give, criticism.

> *"I have learnt to embrace failure - learn from it and do better next time. I used to be quite a negative person; now I understand that failure isn't such a bad thing. I can't do any worse next time round but I can do better"*
> *A participant*

> *"I could see a tangible difference in the pupils' confidence and the way they presented themselves by the end of the workshop."*
> *A business partner*

5. Strengths and Areas for Improvement

5.1   Overall strengths:

- The raised awareness of what the young people can achieve through encouraging more creative thinking;

- The value of ICT as a tool to support creativity;

- The innovation and the widening of the vision of the young people, and in some cases their teachers, working alongside artists and other professionals;

- The open-ended learning and teaching approaches which facilitated the development of the young people's ideas

- The partnerships which have formed with industry professionals, ELBs, CCEA and schools

- The creative approach, which the programme brought to the management thinking in some schools;

- The positive creative response of the young people;

- The high standard of the work produced by the young people;

- Those projects that developed successfully the young people's and teachers' skills in a different type of learning;

- The career possibilities, which have been highlighted to young people;

- The clear aims and thoughtful management of many of the programmes;

- Those projects which successfully built in meaningful evaluation throughout;

- The contribution to the wider debate on curriculum change;

- The young people's developing knowledge of the importance of the quality of product, target audience, and the relationship between the creative idea and the realistic cost

- The transferable skills acquired by many of the young people;

- The inclusive aspect of a significant number of the projects.

> *(it)* ***"has helped me to mix with other people who we wouldn't have otherwise mixed with, there is such a variety of talent and religions involved and we are meeting some people from all over Northern Ireland"***
> *A participant*

5.2 Overall areas for improvement

- More opportunities for a greater number of young people and the involvement of more educational institutions;

- More secure funding to allow projects to build on from year to year;

- More effective support for tutors, industry professionals as they begin work with different audiences of young people;

- The greater involvement of industry;

- An easier means of mainstreaming successful ideas;

- Meeting the increased demand for resources and the re-training of teachers in a different way of working;

- Extending the successful provision to more young disadvantaged people.

5.3   The lessons which have been learned for future initiatives

- Partnerships must be based on the developing needs of the young people and the arrangements must be flexible enough to be able to accommodate change as the needs of the young people change;

- The strengths of the different learning models should be shared between projects as the initiative develops;

- All projects should have the benefit of rigorous on-going evaluation and review;

- Hardware and software must be in place with appropriate technical support;

- This type of programme should be offered to younger children and should involve peer education models;

- Value for money needs to be monitored by, or on behalf of, the four stake-holding departments.

> *"When the project came to DCAL for funding, it was a summer club. Now it has increased staff, is sustainable and 'supporting the dreams' of some 400-500 young people."*
>
> *A facilitator*

6. Conclusion

6.1 The Creativity Seed Fund was a positive and, in many ways, successful response to moving the aims and objectives of *'Unlocking Creativity'* forward. The Creativity Unit within DCAL were totally committed to the aims and objectives of Creativity Seed Fund; they administered the fund efficiently and effectively on behalf of the four stake-holding departments. While a number of the projects have been able to sustain their work through those departments, there still remains important lessons to be learned by all concerned with the Creativity Seed Fund initiative. Above all else, the success of the initiative lies in the important and worthwhile opportunities it afforded the participants in the various projects to develop their creativity.

> *"It was good to have the Creativity Seed Fund to try out some ideas which are somewhat different from the norm, to learn from them and consequently to inform change in the curriculum and in teaching methods."*
>
> *A facilitator*

Projects visited in the
Creativity Seed Fund evaluation

Banjax

BBC Blast NI

Children's Express

Creative Connections

Dreamlab

Globalclub

Making Music Workshop

My Music

Rhythmix NI

An Evaluation Survey of
Creativity Seed Fund Projects