TESS HURSON

Did we do that?

AN EVALUATION OF THE CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN FOUNDATION'S RURAL ARTS AGENCY SCHEME

COMMISSIONED BY THE
CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN FOUNDATION

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Tess Hurson

Published by Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation,
London 1996

Published by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation
98 Portland Place
London
W1N 4ET
Tel: 0171 636 5313

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 903319 72 1

Designed by Susan Clarke for Expression
Printed by Expression Printers Ltd
London N5 1JT

Front cover photograph the Dulverton, Somerset, dramatised walk,
a project funded by the Foundation through Take Art!
Photographer: Piers Rawson

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In memory of my father – a country man and artful

Acknowledgements

This report is a tribute to the enthusiasm and dedication of many people: to the participants whose immense voluntary contribution is the foundation for the achievements of the Scheme, to the agents whose tireless work supported its delivery, to the generosity of the hosting agencies and panels, to the imaginative and resourceful direction of the Scheme by Fiona Ellis, Assistant Director, Arts, at the UK Branch of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, to her predecessor Iain Reid, to the preliminary report of Trevor Bailey and Ian Scott into the state of rural arts, and to the Rural Arts Consultation Group who were responsible for drafting the original guidelines of the Scheme.

Considerable liaison work in the compilation of the report was carried out by Christine Darby at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and I am heartily grateful for her endless patience and courtesy.

Finally, I would like to say a big thank you to all who helped in the evolution of this report. It has been a privilege to have worked on it. What faults there are in the final version must be laid at my own door.

Tess Hurson
Annaghbeg, Co. Tyrone
December 1995

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Acronyms

Action with Communities in Rural England	ACRE
Arts Councils	
Arts Council of England	ACE
Arts Council of Wales	ACW
Scottish Arts Council	SAC
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation	CGF
Local Arts Development Agency	LADA
Regional Arts Association	RAA
Regional Arts Boards	RAB
East Midlands Arts	EMA
North West Arts Board	NWAB
South West Arts	SWA
West Midlands Arts	WMA
Yorkshire and Humberside Arts	YHA
Regional Arts Development Agency	RADA
Rural Community Council	RCC
Rural Development Commission	RDC
Training and Enterprise Council	TEC

Foreword

The population density of Wyoming and South Dakota in the rural USA is about two people per square kilometre. Here in Britain we cling to our island at the rate of more than two hundred and thirty of us per square kilometre. You might expect that, being so physically near one another we might have a better idea of each other's lives and values. But no … we have little notion of what happens beyond our immediate horizons. Metropolitan Britons are particularly oblivious to the quality of life in rural areas. Much has been written in the last few years about the increasing tendency of town dwellers to see and treat the countryside as a large playground in which they expect, and demand to find, colourful rustic characters and characteristics. Meantime the realities of declining rural services, hidden poverty and increasing youth disaffection are also receiving more bewildered media attention. The two pictures can barely be reconciled.

Some advocates for rural England have concentrated on trying to explain it to its urban counterpart; others have opted to try to address rural grievances and improve rural conditions. This report describes how the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation tried to make a contribution to rural welfare through one aspect of its arts programme.

At the Foundation we wanted very much to help rural people rediscover or establish the values and sense of community which appeared to have been both lost and lamented. We realised that significant change required either great sums of money or what used to be called a 'grass roots approach'. While resisting the 'grass roots' terminology on grounds of accidental humour and urban political associations, we chose to adopt a policy in which local people made local choices and decisions about how best the Foundation could help them. This we did by appointing agents with knowledge of specific places to make grants for local arts activities.

For a Foundation based in London to choose agents and delegate its grant-making responsibility to them is unusual and risky. But it seemed the best way to make our programme something other than municipal bounty showered from on high. As will be clear from this report we had to adapt along the way more perhaps than we anticipated. The 'rules' we made at the outset changed with time and experience. The agents, not surprisingly,

challenged our thinking frequently and usually showing the good sense for which we chose them in the first place.

Everything takes longer in the country, not because of some mythical rural dull wittedness beloved of urban humorists, but because of physical distance and mistrust of the motives of the visiting 'townee'. That is why our programme ran for seven years and why we are committed to a few agencies for a further two years. CGF will then cease supporting the Scheme in the hope that it will, in many places, continue on its own momentum, attracting other funders.

It was important to us to have the programme documented and evaluated so that its successes might be emulated by others and in order to warn future grant-makers of pitfalls into which we had stumbled. Therefore we asked Dr Tess Hurson, herself a knowledgeable rural dweller as well as a repected commentator on social and political issues, to write a report on the agency scheme. Her brief was to be critical and constructive. She has followed it admirably but probably her chief criticism of us is that we are now turning our attention elsewhere. Alas to remain too long in one priority area would be a betrayal of the very nature of the Foundation and ultimately to those applicants who expect us to be continually innovative and risk-taking. But we hope that the arguments mustered here will encourage other funders of many types to consider the benefits of such a delegated scheme – benefits not only to the rural activists, but also to the funders themselves who will gain far more than the monetary value of the grants, as the Foundation has done.

Fiona Ellis
formerly Assistant Director, Arts
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, UK branch

Preface

The purposes of the report

It is becoming increasingly clear that the rural world is undergoing profound change. While there has been some improvement in living conditions, there is much cause for concern at the sharp decline in traditional employment and the neglect of the whole rural infrastructure, especially in crucial services like public transport, education, health and housing. The gap between the privileged and the disadvantaged gets ever wider. The city dominates much of our thinking. We are all aware that such problems exist in urban centres, but the complex difficulties of the contemporary rural world are often hidden. The visitor admiring the beauty of the scenery may find it hard to believe that communities are experiencing hardship, neglect and isolation. Our common image of poverty is the urban high rise estate or the run-down city centre. Rural disadvantage is less visible, often dispersed and therefore easier to ignore. Equally, the rural world has great resources and often these are ignored or undervalued.

The UK Branch of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF) was aware of the serious effect of change in rural areas and moved to identify rural poverty as a new funding priority. The question for the Foundation was: how might a policy be developed to assist people change using their own resources at local level.

The Calouste Gulbenkian Rural Arts Agency Scheme was established in 1991 and from January 1996 the Foundation will take on no new commitments under the Scheme. After five years the Foundation considered it important to conduct an independent analysis. The first purpose of this report, therefore, is to inform the Foundation about the strengths and weaknesses of both the policy and practice of the Scheme.

The second purpose of the report is to create an insight into the philosophy and the 'nuts and bolts' of the Scheme for other players in the field of rural arts. A practical handbook, commissioned by the Foundation and published by Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), and derived from the Scheme's work on the ground, further demonstrates the lessons learnt. It is intended that this report and the handbook will assist other players to gain an

insight into the way the Scheme has operated and, thus, to encourage them to take it up.

The third purpose of this report is to celebrate the very significant achievements and benefits of the Rural Arts Agency Scheme. The actual operation of the Scheme has proved that a devolved funding and support system, delivered by a variety of host agencies does work. Since its inception, hundreds of people have participated and there is ample evidence that the experience has enriched creativity, enhanced community development and ratified the importance of a sense of place. In terms of overall spending, the Scheme represents extremely good value for money. To invest £5,000 as part of an advertising campaign, or to fund a consultant, would not be likely to result in such widespread developmental benefits.

CGF has led the way in evolving through the agents, panels and participants a locally delivered model for funding small scale rural arts projects. The work being done by some Rural Arts Development Agencies groups and through the Rural Arts Fund is also worthy of note since these initiatives too demonstrate the effectiveness of decentralised, flexible funding models. The challenge for the players in the rural arts world is to ensure that the groundbreaking work already done is continued and built on. Other players need to recognise the significance of rural community arts work in sustaining and revitalising the rural world.

The language of commitment to rural arts and to models of partnership and integration underlies policy statements from the Rural Development Commission, the Arts Councils and Regional Arts Boards (RABs). While some important work has been done, there is still a major gap between policy and practice at local level.

Statutory agencies, both at national and local level, are funded by rural as well as urban taxpayers; unless there is some real demonstration of faith from these agencies, there is little hope of attracting support from the private sector. Links between the statutory bodies themselves are still generally weak. The voluntary sector has been a great deal more proactive and far-sighted in recognising the value of co-operative approaches – and often with far more limited resources. Statutory, voluntary and private sectors need to work together so that rural people can face the challenges confronting them. The CGF Rural Arts Agency Scheme has shown what can be done. It is now up to others to match that achievement.

A note on methodology

The findings of the report are based mainly on an extensive questionnaire (Appendices 2 & 3) devised by the present writer and circulated to agents in

September 1994. A first draft of the report was circulated to agents in the early spring of 1995 and several very kindly responded with illuminating answers to questions and additional comments. The writer also met a large group of agents at the Foundation headquarters in London to get their views and guidance on the general shape of the study.

A number of face-to-face interviews were also conducted with agents, panels, artists and participants across England and Wales in October 1994 and the information given was incorporated into the questionnaire analysis.

Given the timescale, it was not possible to get responses from every participant but samples of their views were gathered through a questionnaire. I am indebted to agents and panels for managing the administration of this and to the participants for giving up their time to answer my questions.

The Arts Councils of England, Wales and Scotland and Regional Arts Boards in which agencies were located were also contacted and they kindly responded to a number of specific questions relating to their policy on rural arts. Likewise, the main rural players, the Rural Development Commission and ACRE, also gave their views.

Several meetings took place between Fiona Ellis and the writer to clarify various issues arising from the questionnaire and all of the above material has been incorporated within the framework of the questionnaire analysis. Additional helpful material on the background to the Scheme was given by Diana Johnson, Ian Scott, Trevor Bailey and Fiona Ellis.

Tess Hurson

Summary of conclusions and recommendations

General conclusions

The Rural Arts Agency Scheme as a locally-based small-scale projects grant system has contributed significantly to the aesthetic and social development of rural communities.

The models developed through the Scheme should be adopted across Great Britain.

General recommendations

The principal funders of rural development and arts should make much greater efforts to recognise the achievements and benefits of the Scheme and act at national level to develop partnerships, based on their own declared policies, to take over the core funding of the Scheme now that CGF is withdrawing.

The principal funders of rural development and arts should examine seriously how they could act in a more concerted way to address the funding of medium- to long-term development work in support of communities wishing to become involved in rural arts.

The private sector, working in partnerships at both national and local level, should be playing a far more significant role in funding arts in rural areas.

Local bodies such as borough and county councils, educational institutions, independent arts organisations, Citizens' Advice Bureaux, farming organisations, conservation groups, Training and Enterprise Councils and Trusts should be working in partnerships at local level to match core funding from national bodies.

Further recommendations

There should be opportunities for training agents and professionals to link community development, rural development and arts more closely together.

Resources should be invested in developing documentation and standard evaluation and in providing training and guidance for agents, panels and

participants in this field. It is recognised that this report and the forthcoming good practice handbook on rural community arts, commissioned by the Foundation and published by ACRE, are steps in the right direction.

Short induction courses should be offered to new agents, and other mechanisms for skills sharing should be considered.

The allocation of 20% to cover administration should be increased to 25% to take account of the actual workload of agents and this support should be seen as developmental rather than merely administrative. Where appropriate, this allocation should be increased to provide for clerical support where it is not available.

A more flexible two-tier system of grant aid should be introduced. Projects could be classified into large and small; small applications (requests for up to £150) could be handled by the agent without having to convene a meeting of the panel. This would result in a quicker response since panels generally meet only every two months. Larger applications would continue to be assessed by the panels.

Forum and publications should be funded to foster critical debate on the aesthetics of rural community arts.

Recommendations to agents, panels and participants

Agents and panels should periodically (for instance annually) review the promotion of their Schemes, to ensure access for more remote rural communities and other disadvantaged groups within their area and in order to alert changing rural communities to their existence and to clarify guidelines through experience of working the Scheme.

Agents, in liaison with RABs and other appropriate arts bodies, should establish registers of local artists and experts. These registers, regularly updated and well publicised, should be exchanged between agents. The registers should be funded by the relevant local statutory authority for the promotion of employment.

Agents, panels and participants should produce more coherent documentation and more detailed evaluation of the Scheme so that it will become better known and so that new participants can learn from good practice models.

Agents and panels should regularly review the composition of local panels to ensure that all sections of the community have access to the Scheme, particularly the marginalised and disadvantaged.

Participants should give greater consideration to obtaining funding from new sources at local level, using the ACRE handbook as a guide.

1 The background to the Rural Arts Agency Scheme

A new priority for the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

In the late 1980s when the UK Branch of the CGF decided to direct resources towards the worsening conditions of rural areas, it was important initially to try and gain a deeper and more detailed understanding of the problems - and resources - of the rural world, before launching into a new set of policies to help tackle rural disadvantage and celebrate the latent achievements of country people.

The Bailey/Scott Report

For the Foundation's Arts programme this decision led to the commissioning of a report *Rural Arts: A Discussion Document for the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation*. Iain Reid, then Assistant Director (Arts) at the Foundation, chose Ian Scott and Trevor Bailey, whose expertise included wide experience of community development theory and practice as well as arts work in rural areas, to write the report, which the Foundation published in 1989, (*Rural Arts: A Discussion Document for the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation*, London, Trevor Bailey and Ian Scott, eds., Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, UK Branch, London, 1989).

The brief for the Report was:
- to identify issues which are pertinent to the provision and development of arts in rural settings (defining what is meant by rural)
- to identify a range of models of good and/or innovative practice
- to present options to the Foundation for future action.

The Foundation also suggested that, as a means of achieving these objectives, they should contact appropriate people within arts organisations and within other bodies with responsibility for rural resources and development, to take advantage of their knowledge of rural areas and to seek their views on arts development.

Bailey and Scott's most impassioned criticisms centre on the suburbanisation of the rural world and the consequent devaluing of indigenous rural values

because of economic and demographic changes.

> 'The shaming of rural culture out of existence proceeds apace. A quite extravagant lack of understanding, or even perception, of rural perspectives and inheritance is evident in urban-dominated English society and hence in official policies. A sentimental fascination with coffee table rurality adds insult to injury.' (*Rural Arts*, p. 6.).

Among their specific observations about arts in rural areas, Bailey and Scott noted a number of connected problems for people in rural areas who wanted to get involved in arts:

- lack of training for community development people in arts-based skills and vice versa
- difficulties caused by the small scale of rural communities
- cost and difficulty of organising transport
- impossibility of raising adequate sponsorship.

Bailey and Scott emphasise the social function of arts within rural communities, contending that they are – or perhaps more accurately were – integrated with the rest of rural life. Their diagnosis derives from their community development convictions. Bailey and Scott see the re-connection of arts and the rest of rural life as the way forward. The deployment of arts as a vehicle for community development goals is a contingent recommendation.

For CGF, arguably, the most important recommendation made by Bailey and Scott was the proposal to establish some form of locally devolved funding for arts in rural areas.

Rural Arts Consultation Group

CGF then widened out consultation and brought together a group of experts representing the main rural players. The group conducted a number of interviews with national and regional arts and rural organisations. Trevor Bailey also took part in the meetings.

The consultation group drew attention to the profound changes which were taking place in rural society; unemployment, reduced services, demographic changes. Local distinctiveness, they argued, was threatened and people were not valuing the local as they should. The group saw the arts as an important means of strengthening country communities, drawing together traditional forms of creativity, and newer forms such as video.

Among their main recommendations were:

1 That the Foundation adopt the following policy:

> '… to give support to projects which use activities and skills in their broadest definition to help rural communities strengthen themselves. It will

particularly favour those which link with social, economic, or environmental interests to celebrate, campaign for, re-establish or affirm a culture in a forward looking manner.'

2 That the Foundation create two new grant categories:
- Applications for grants in support of locally devised and controlled projects in all types of rural communities
- Applications to become the Foundation's agents at local level and to seek out, encourage, and allocate devolved funds to smaller initiatives on a pilot project basis

3 That the Foundation produce a specific leaflet on Arts in Rural Areas

4 That the Foundation's officer(s) may find it useful to refer to a list of criteria drawn up by the consultation group (working party).

The group also recommended that a small, short-lived advisory panel should be set up to guide the Foundation during the first one or two years of the Scheme. They recommended that CGF consider a number of initiatives under three key categories of (1) money and other resources (2) exchanges and connections (3) information and lobbying.

The setting up of the Rural Arts Agency Scheme

The Foundation was particularly impressed with the group's recommendation that the best method of delivering grants at a scale likely to be really useful for rural areas was through agents 'on the ground'. At the Durham Pride of Place Conference (1990) and through its own leaflets and entries in grant guides, the Foundation advertised its interest in recruiting suitable agents to deliver a locally-based Scheme.

At this time only the broadest of principles had been identified for the choosing and briefing of the agents. Fortuitously, the first three candidates to offer themselves as 'guinea-pigs' operated in organisations which were different in size and structure, so the Foundation asked them to try out various rules and methods for disbursing grants and to advise on ways in which the Scheme could be modified. Each received a grant of £5,000, of which up to £1,000 (ie 20%) could be spent on additional administrative expenditure incurred as a result of the Scheme. Travel could be included, but not salaries. The balance would be given out in grants of between £50 and £100. The help of these three initial agents was invaluable and rapidly gave the Scheme the features which it still retains.

At the time of writing there were 17 active agencies, mostly in England, but there was one agency in Scotland and another in Wales. It may be noted that some new agencies have since been established in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Agents work in a variety of contexts including rural development, community arts bodies, independent arts organisations and Local Authorities. Most agencies operate within the framework of a panel, generally five or six people who represent different local interests and know the area well: for example, Local Authorities, community colleges, rural development bodies, community education bodies and local arts development agencies.

Fiona Ellis, who was Assistant Director (Arts) when the Scheme was set up, explains the evolving philosophy of the Foundation in a series of letters to other bodies:

> 'We intended to help small rural communities regain their sense of pride and also a sense of community cohesiveness. The arts would be the tool by which people who had perhaps not worked together before came together as a team and learned team-building skills … We also put a considerable emphasis on obtaining as high quality an outcome as possible.'
>
> 'Our policy is to encourage people to devise their own arts projects which would restore that sense of pride. It is an important factor that the projects are 'owned' and controlled by the participants and not by professional community artists who sometimes parachute into a village full of good intentions and then leave everyone flat when they go off to the next challenge. Thus the group would be strengthened and would go on to new ventures.'
>
> 'It became apparent, both from the research which we did before setting up the policy and from the applications which we got as a result of it, that very small sums of money needed to be distributed, perhaps as little as £50 or so. Anything larger than this might wash away a project which was really quite local and robust if kept small … Obviously we could not contemplate dispersing such tiny sums with any kind of monitoring or control [nationally], so we set up a series of agencies in different parts of the country who distributed these modest amounts on our behalf. What happens now is that potential agents apply to the Foundation and are thoroughly researched before being taken on. They are [nearly] all arts organisations [and have] good local contacts and are already supported for their salaries and office costs by a Regional Arts Association, Local Authority [or other regional based body, for example, Cynefin, The Festival of the Countryside in Wales] … They [the agents] can choose between applications and can dispense sums of between £50 and £500. Sometimes they offer advice, guidance, or other forms of professional help, rather than actually providing money … The rules have changed enormously since we began. Indeed, I would say that the hallmark of the Scheme has been flexibility.'

As guidelines for agents evolved, flexibility remained an important feature.

The Foundation commendably resisted the temptation to define 'arts' too narrowly. There is an implicit recognition that urban 'high art' values would be too restrictive to encompass the potential range and function of culture in rural areas. Similarly, CGF recognised the dangers of unfamiliar terms:

> 'The 'arts' are more of a problem; cultural activity is a better working term, but may mean little to the consumer or applicant. The usual gamut of arts, performing and visual, is included, as are crafts like wood-carving, weaving, etc. and the new media arts, like video making, radio broadcasting etc …'

However, the Foundation makes it clear from the outset that 'the principal thrust of the policy is not community development.' (*Guidelines for Rural Agents*, May, 1994). CGF concedes that any good arts project will lead to a degree of community or social change or enhancement, but insists that the aesthetic or creative imperative is what they wish to fund:

> 'The critical factor is that the creative content should be central and the ambition to make that creative side as good as possible. Second rate art as a mere tool of community service is of no interest to us and … of doubtful value to the people involved. Of course, risks can be taken. Not every project will be wonderful, but may have the potential and the aspiration to be so. However, not every project has to be artistically 'innovative' – in a totally dead area, any artistic activity … could be a sign of life and innovation.' (*Guidelines for Rural Agents*)

As we shall see, the actual practice of the Scheme is based upon a strong community development ethos and approach, though this does not necessarily imply a departure from the Foundation's guidelines.

Two further general points set out in the guidelines are worthy of note here; projects should, if possible, affirm 'a sense of place' and projects looking at the present or future are more to be favoured than those which hark back to the past. These two criteria have given rise to much debate, both singly and in conjunction. It is perhaps worth re-stating the Foundation's own special dispensation 'We have used the theme 'a sense of place' but where it is an obstacle to development it need not be observed' (*Guidelines for Rural Agents*).

Finally, agents are exhorted to look for 'sustainability or continuity' and also for 'new alliances' . For example, a link between the WI and a photography club could be fostered, or a brand-new group invited to undertake a project. There is clearly a better chance of continuity where there are new alliances or new groups, formed specifically to develop a long-term programme. The Foundation here, I think, registers a mature awareness that it cannot fund rural arts indefinitely but might be able to kick-start activities which could grow to sufficient strength to command further assistance from the other

players in the rural and arts fields. The Scheme, then, is designed to raise the profile of rural arts so that this currently under-funded area receives greater attention and consequently greater funding.

Between 1991 and March 1994 (the period for which total figures were available at the time of writing) 158 projects were funded through the Rural Arts Agency Scheme. A total of £51,663 was disbursed in project grants by March 1994. The total spend on the Scheme, including administration allocation to host agencies, was £94,000 by the end of 1994. By December 1995 the total spend was £549,440.

2 From theory to practice – views from agents and participants

1 The terrain

The character of the rural areas

All of the areas contain dispersed rural populations as well as small towns, villages, or hamlets. Many agents use the Rural Development Commission's demographic benchmark of 10,000 people or fewer as constituting a 'rural' area. Projects in centres with more than 10,000 people are generally not funded.

The Scheme, therefore, operates in a variety of rural situations; market towns, villages, colliery towns and, to some extent, in dispersed farming settlements. However, the Scheme may not be reaching the most isolated and disadvantaged communities, though there are models of good practice. In Gloucestershire, for instance, a textile project was devised involving a number of older people living in isolated areas. They worked on individual sections of a communal wallhanging in their own homes and then came together on an occasional basis to consolidate and review progress.

Other agencies should review the distribution of the Scheme in their areas to ensure that the remoter communities have access to the Scheme.

Who applies?

With regard to common characteristics among those who apply to the Scheme, there is no 'typical' applicant in terms of occupation, socio-economic background or age. Some groups are completely new, others have been in existence for some time. Some are arts groups, some are community development groups, some focus on a special interest like the environment or elderly people. It is interesting to note that in some areas, project instigators are predominantly women (Lancashire, Mid Wales and Shropshire and to some extent Somerset). We may conclude, however, that most projects involve both men and women.

In Mid Wales and South Lakeland applications come mostly from 'local' people as distinct from incomers. Elsewhere, it would appear that both incomers and local people are involved. The Somerset agency comments that incomers 'do tend to take the lead'. However, as several agents point out,

definitions of 'incomer' or 'newcomer' are hard to arrive at. In some parts of the country, someone living 30 years in an area would be regarded as an 'incomer'.

The relationship between incomer and indigenous population is blurred by the lack of a common understanding as to what constitutes each of these categories. Nevertheless, the comments of some agents implicitly recognise that there are perceived differences between incomers and indigenous people, however unscientific the base. It is clear that some incomers use participation in rural arts schemes as a way of becoming integrated with the population which is already there. Some incomers do not want to integrate at all; some local people do not wish to include incomers and some incomers wish to impose their own cultural values. In many cases, incomers come from quite privileged backgrounds and may be seen as a threat to local people.

The lack of a specific pattern is testimony to the wide-ranging appeal of the Scheme itself and a demonstration of the effort put in by agents to promote and undertake development work across a wide cross-section of the rural community.

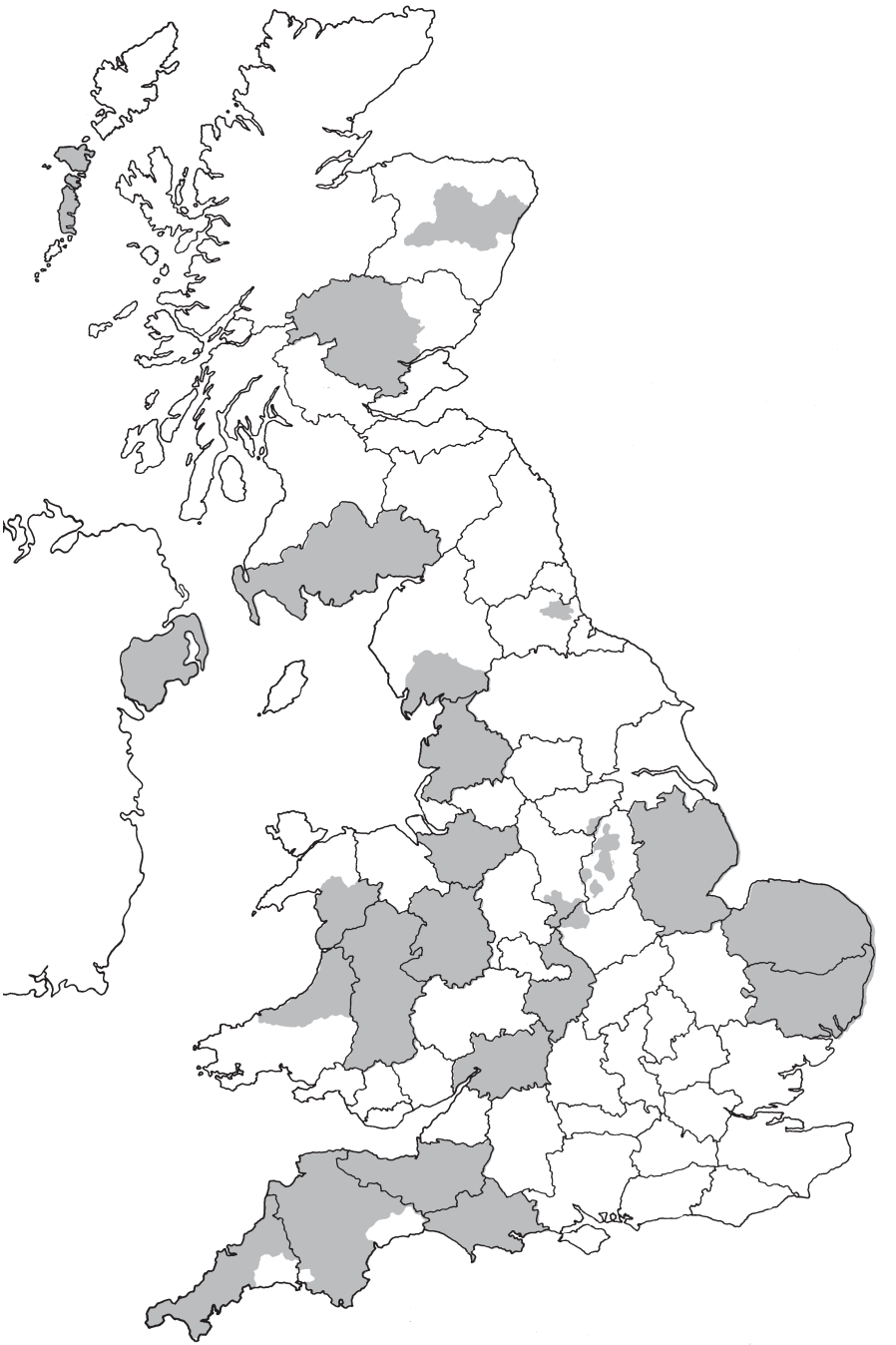
In terms of exclusion of certain groups, it should be noted that no real evidence was forthcoming from agents on the numbers of unemployed people involved or other especially disadvantaged groups: for example, single mothers, ex-prisoners or disabled people. None of the agents commented on whether or not there were people from ethnic minorities involved.

Some agents are already very aware of the need to ensure that the more disadvantaged people in the community are encouraged to participate. All agents should regularly monitor the profile of participants to check that all sections are properly represented. Where possible, agents should alert development workers to the particular needs and resources of disadvantaged groups so that support can be targeted more effectively.

2 The projects

Between 1991 and March 1994 some 158 projects were funded. Using this as a sample period, it is possible to give a comprehensive overview of projects. I will be turning to questions of aesthetics later and simply wish to indicate here the spectrum of subjects and art forms. It is worth noting that some projects combine at least two art forms, for example, music and theatre, or videos which incorporate storytelling. The covered breakdown is given on page 24.

The extent of the Rural Arts Agency Scheme at December 1995



The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Rural Arts Agents at December 1995

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The projects

Performing arts		
Drama (including community plays)	22	
Video	9	
Film	1	
Radio	1	
Storytelling (including oral history work)	5	
Instrumental music	7	
Dance	4	
Mix of song and music	4	
Singing	5	
Mime	1	
Circus	1	
Puppet theatre	2	
Pageant	1	
Literature	3	
Total	**66**	**41.77%**
Visual arts/crafts		
Collage (mostly parish maps)	12	
Building (playgrounds etc.)	2	
Ceramics	6	
Needlecraft	3	
Craft sculpture	1	
Basket-making	1	
Weaving	2	
Pottery	2	
Model-making	1	
Woodcrafts	7	
Photography	6	
Mural	5	
Other/unspecified	6	
Sculpture	3	
Costume/ Banner-making	5	
Masks/lanterns	2	
Poster	1	
Stencilling	1	
Silk screen printing	2	
Wallhanging/panel	6	
Sculpture trails	2	
Total	**76**	**48.10%**
Mixed media	**16**	**10.12%**

It is clear from these lists that the Scheme has succeeded in supporting a very wide spectrum of arts activities. A good variety of topics is also evident, including environment, history, mental health, women's lives, industry and families under stress. The changing role of agriculture or any mention of agriculture-related themes is almost completely absent. More work actively to encourage farming communities would, therefore, need to be done. On balance, however, the agents have done an excellent job in fulfilling the Foundation's policy.

Projects funded and unfunded

There is no discernible pattern in the ratio of successful to unsuccessful applications, though there is a tendency to reject a higher proportion than are accepted. Particular agents and their panels filter out applications at various stages.

It is evident from the comments of both agents and participants that a number of applications are successful because of development work; it may be the case that development work is also responsible for the filtering of applications. Where there is little arts development work there are, in fact, fewer applications. In some areas a rural arts project worker is not replaced and in others no arts worker has ever been appointed.

While there is little evidence of a 'honeypot effect', since the Scheme is relatively new, agents do need to be mindful of the danger of the more sophisticated and well-resourced applicants cornering the Scheme.

Duration of projects

While the duration of projects can vary within agencies and across agencies from one week to two years, it is clear that a substantial proportion take a number of months and, in some cases, run into years. This, I think, is testimony to the agents' emphasis on the importance of patient development.

The contribution of professional artists

Most agencies encourage the use of professional artists. The participant survey also indicates support for the use of professionals. At least 50% of all projects have professional artists associated with them. In several cases agents state that all or nearly all of their projects use professionals. In one agency 'professional input' is sometimes a condition of grant aid. The general feeling among professionals is that professionals should be used where appropriate and at the group's instigation and that there should not be an obligation on groups to use professionals. This accords with CGF's own view.

The definition of what constitutes a 'professional artist' in rural areas is quite wide. One agent summarises the situation: 'It is important to note that artists

are not only individual freelancers but also community arts groups, environmental arts groups etc.' The role of the professional artist within the project is, evidently, highly various.

The general feeling among agents is that using a professional artist improves the quality of the final product. Participants, in their questionnaire response, were divided on this issue with 60% stating that projects benefited from using professionals. Participants noted that professionals engendered a very positive creative sense and passed on new skills. Of those who did not think that using a professional artist helped the project, one group noted that by not using such a resource they were able to limit costs and encourage contributions from a wide range of people. Another group said they did not use a professional artist because there was not one available. I would conclude, therefore, that groups find professional artists a help and when they are not used it is because of cost or lack of availability.

The more experienced and skilful community artists will have acquired community development and social skills. However, there is little formal training provision which combines arts and community development skills. I would recommend, therefore, that Regional Arts Boards (RABs) explore the development of such provision with rural development bodies and training and educational institutions.

What is the 'on the ground' availability of professional artists? There is no uniform situation among the agencies. One agency notes that they have a register of community artists and though work on this is not complete, there is evidence to indicate that professionals are available but under-used. By contrast, two other agencies believe that the 'gene pool' of local professional artists may well be too small, particularly for very specialised work. This in, turn, may have an effect on how innovative or imitative a project can be.

All agents, perhaps working in liaison with RABs and drawing on their own experience of projects which have revealed local talent, should draw up an artists/experts register for their own area. Such a register should be publicised regularly to ensure that both new community groups and new artists in the area are made aware of it. Training and Enterprise Councils or the local Department for Education and Employment body should underwrite the cost, since the register would assist professional artists to gain employment.

It should be pointed out that the original conception of the Scheme was to generate arts from local people and there are clearly dangers as well as benefits where professionals are used. In addition, RABs deploy professionals and the Scheme did set out to achieve something different or complementary to the work of the RABs. The extent to which professional artists are used is somewhat complicated by the structure of some agencies; sometimes CGF

grant aid has been packaged with other sources of funding within a more general Rural Arts Fund. Where this is the case, the professional element may, in fact, be funded by a source other than CGF.

The question then arises: should CGF have directed extra resources towards professional fees or should this be left to other bodies, for example, RABs or a ringfenced fund directly from the Arts Councils of England, Scotland and Wales? Such funding should come from the Arts Councils and RABs. CGF is not at the end of the day a professional arts organisation charged with a statutory responsibility. It has already done much to stimulate rural arts and it is arguable that the hundreds of projects would simply not have taken place otherwise. But it is unfair to expect the Foundation to bear the cost of the professional support needed to create a flourishing voluntary arts scene in rural areas.

Innovation and aesthetic standards

How aesthetic standards are arrived at is, of course, a big question. It may be that an aesthetic based upon essentially urban 'high art' canons is now out of date in both urban and rural contexts. Furthermore, it can be argued that art functions in a rural context as an integrated element of society rather than as a separate 'specialist' activity that only privileged people can have access to.

Rural society is now much more complex and rural arts are often a compound of classical 'high art' with traditional aesthetics and popular culture, especially among younger people.

It is, I think worth stating the proposition that good practice creates good aesthetics; a different kind of aesthetics, a different set of critical values may emerge from the kind of work being done through this kind of Scheme. I do not wish to make excessive claims for the Rural Arts Agency Scheme, but simply to register the point that new values do not always come from the centre. It is not simply a question of projects conforming to a set of externally created aesthetic values, but equally a question of recognising the intrinsic validity of what is there within rural societies.

I would recommend that funders, in co-operation with arts bodies, arts practitioners and educationalists, consider funding symposia or publications focusing on these crucial aesthetic questions.

The training and education dimension

Almost all projects have what one agent describes as a 'broad educational element'. In practice, projects often combine people who have some experience of a particular arts activity with those who have not. Several projects are also carried out by a group who have a special skill, like weaving, who extend their skills and gain new insights into their community and into the process of

making art through working together, sometimes with professional animation.

Community development skills – co-operative approaches, the learning of new organisational, promotional and budgeting skills – are all important benefits which undoubtedly strengthen a sense of place and community, partly by developing new alliances within an area. CGF's guidelines state that the primary aim of the Scheme is not community development itself. Nonetheless, community development can be seen as important 'added value' to the arts development created through the projects.

It should be noted that several agents have echoed the call made in the Bailey/Scott Report for better training of those working in the rural arts field at local level. Agents would be keen to avail themselves of training in relation to the general operation of the Scheme itself. This is something which future funders should support, perhaps arranging for short courses to assist the agents to improve their understanding of the policy and practice of the Scheme. The agents themselves represent a wide variety of skills and areas of expertise, and they should be able to share these skills. The practical difficulties of gathering together widely dispersed and very busy people have to be borne in mind, but perhaps regional delivery would help to overcome this.

Funding sources

Projects are financed mainly through 'funding packages', though CGF has been the sole funder on occasion, especially for small projects. Characteristically, the other funding sources are, in order of importance: RABs (sometimes as block funding to the agency), district and borough councils, county councils, parish councils, Rural Action, community councils, private sponsorship and help in kind. It should be emphasised that not all agencies get funding from each of these bodies; indeed most agencies receive support from only one or two of them. I will examine the role of other funders in Chapter Four.

3 The work of the agents

Agents and their panels

Nearly all agents are involved in some sort of collective decision-making process and nearly all draw in representatives from outside bodies to constitute their panels. How well do these panels reflect local interests? Local Authorities have representation on a number of panels. RABs and arts agencies are also well represented. Rural agencies are less in evidence. There is no obvious private sector representation and there would appear to be no non-arts bodies from the voluntary sector (eg Age Concern, tenants' associations, the churches). Rural interest groups (eg Farmers' Union, conservation groups) do

not appear to be represented nor, with the exception of one agency, do education/training providers appear to be on panels. There is no evidence to indicate that there is any conscious representation of particularly vulnerable groups like the unemployed, disabled people or isolated elderly people. Perhaps most significantly, no panels would appear to include representation from among those local people who have sought funding – though the practical difficulties of this need to be considered.

I do acknowledge the validity of one agent's comment that panel members often wear a number of different hats, but conclude that some panels need to consider whether or not they are sufficiently representative of the range of interests within any rural area, partly because this helps to ensure the percolation of the Scheme throughout the community – especially to people who would not normally be associated with arts – and partly because such representation may also be a lifeline to new sources of funding for projects.

One mechanism for achieving this is to 'refresh' the panel from time to time through gradual replacement. Too much chopping and changing is, of course, not conducive to a smooth operation and panels need to be kept to manageable proportions. Furthermore, delicate balances have to be arrived at between representativeness on the one hand and on the other the ability and willingness to work hard and bring to bear an appropriate blend of skills. There can be problems too if some of the panel are paid by their own organisation to attend and some are attending in a voluntary capacity. This may be something that panels could argue for as part of their overall administration costs. Another approach is to second particular people from time to time if there is felt to be a gap in expertise or knowledge.

Circulating information about the Scheme

A majority of agencies write and design their leaflets 'in-house'. To make leaflets more effective a balance must be struck between a number of requirements. The text needs to be clear and concise and at a comprehensible pitch; it also needs to be 'approachable' rather than a rewrite of the ten commandments but at the same time not so indiscriminately welcoming that it elicits floods of applications which cannot meet the criteria. Ideally, design should not be, as one agent puts it 'too glossy' but on the other hand, not so homely and self-effacing that people simply ignore it. Cost is one factor and time another; it may be much more efficient for agents who are not gifted in writing or design to turn the job over to local writers and designers – who might, in any case, be glad of the work.

There is no mention made by any of the agents of market testing or piloting of leaflets before they are distributed wholesale. Some agencies have revamped their leaflets and it is clear that this process of critical analysis has resulted in

fresh interest in the Scheme. All agencies should regularly (perhaps yearly) review their promotional literature and pilot test revised versions before releasing into general circulation.

Some agencies also use posters and, if these are attractive and concise, they can be a very important tool in giving the Scheme profile and creating a bit of a buzz about it. I recommend greater use of posters. This does not necessarily have to cost a lot of money; competitions could be organised within the community to design a poster, with some modest incentive.

Circulation obviously varies from one agency to another, depending on what networks and key players are in situ. It is notable that a majority of agents (about 60%) use libraries. In-house magazines are also a well-used conduit, as are parish councils. Other networks used by at least three agencies are: village hall committees, Women's Institutes, community councils, voluntary organisation networks and community groups. Other outlets include: community magazines, arts officers, rural post offices (an imaginative one), district councils, arts association members, arts venues, individuals, the Youth Service, community education centres, churches and arts organisations. Due note should be taken by agents that if they are working in a multicultural environment, all ethnic groups should be on the circulation list.

Only a few agencies specifically mention circulating information to rural bodies such as the Federation of Young Farmers, conservation and environment groups, though some information does come through this channel as certain agencies are supported anyway by Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) or the Rural Development Commission.

Agents do not mention the circulation of information to statutory bodies, the private sector or special needs groups like the unemployed (through social workers and DSS offices), disabled people and senior citizens. There would appear to be, therefore, some serious gaps in circulation which need to be addressed by agents and panels at local level.

About 50% of agents indicate that they also use the local press as a vehicle for letting people know about the Scheme. Two used radio, which in many rural areas is an excellent conduit and generally very accessible. Agents should consider making more use of this resource, especially if they can develop little 'packages' which feature participants. Word of mouth and personal contact are also cited by some agents as effective channels of circulation.

One agency advertised the Scheme in a local newspaper. There is no doubt that advertising does have an impact, but it is often prohibitively expensive for agencies. A few agents got up exhibitions, roadshows or information evenings and while this takes time and effort and sometimes can be costly to organise, it

does give people a very immediate sense of what the Scheme is about and allows them to ask questions. In the end such events may also save some development time, but they must be well publicised to be effective and it needs to be recognised that some people in rural communities – especially disabled and elderly people, parents with small children, or people living in isolated areas with transport difficulties may find it difficult to come along to workshops or other communal events. The venues for such events also need to be carefully chosen to ensure a spread of people; for example, some won't go to pubs, some won't go to church buildings and some buildings are physically inaccessible. Agents should consider getting a local personality on board to help endorse the Scheme through the media or events, though they need to be wary of large fees charged for such appearances.

Circulation of information about the Scheme at regional and national level is patchy. Occasionally a general article does appear, for example in ACRE's *Rural Digest*. While there is an argument that circulating information about a local Scheme at national or regional level is a waste of time, such organisations may have branches or representatives at local level, not yet discovered by agents. Furthermore, there may well be indirect benefits in making larger-scale organisations aware of the existence of the Scheme; for example, in negotiating additional or alternative funding for it.

There should be a more strategic approach towards the targeting of promotional literature so that the whole range of rural players operating at a larger scale and at more local level, are, at the very least, reminded again of its existence. This could form part of the larger mission of finding other bodies willing to take over the funding of the Scheme. Further discussion of the future of the Scheme will be taken up in the concluding sections of this report.

Rates of response to the Scheme

Evidence here suggests that response tended to be highest when the Scheme was first launched, with an initial surge of applications. Doubtless, as some agents recognise, this is due in large part to the publicity generated around the launch.

However, other factors affect the rate of response, notably the presence or absence of development support. Where development is removed, the rate of applications tends to be reduced. In a number of agencies such support is precarious at the best of times as development workers are often employed on short-term contracts. Where there is a strong commitment to the promotion of the Scheme, or development support is available, it is clear that the result is a proactive rather than a reactive approach.

Processing time for applications

Most agents indicate that decisions are reached within one month, though some take up to two and a half months. Bearing in mind that panels usually have to be brought together to make the decisions, this seems to be an impressive turnaround time.

It is worth noting that some agents have devised special provision either for urgent projects or/and for projects requiring very small grants. This filtering system should be adopted across the Scheme.

One agent remarks that many projects 'disqualify themselves immediately', presumably because the agent and the panel have developed the expertise to select out projects which definitely do not meet the CGF criteria. Certainly, experience in working the Scheme will create more confidence among agents and will, consequently, reduce bottlenecks in decision-making.

Agents' time spent on the Scheme

On average, agents spend 30 days each year working on the Scheme; the range is from 12 to 50 days, but most agents are in the upper end of the range. The amount of time spent depends upon a number of variables; access to administrative back-up, geographical area covered; the amount of time agents can spare from their other work, their own particular modus operandi, the effectiveness of their panel, the rate of applications in their locale and their own interpretation of the guidelines. There was a feeling of frustration among agents, ranging from wistfulness to exasperation about the amount of time they could give (through some combination of the variables above) as distinct from the amount of time they would wish to give.

Judging from the responses of both agents and participants, the amount of time allocated to each project is, not surprisingly, highly variable and depends largely on the nature of the project. A very rough average would be perhaps 2-3 hours per project, but this figure must be read cautiously as it does not take into account the amount of time spent on processing projects which clearly do not fall within CGF guidelines, as well as time spent on projects which need working up.

The sample survey of participants indicated that almost all projects were visited at least once by the agent or a member of the panel. Additional contact and support by telephone was also reported as common. Given the rural locale and the distances involved, this method seems very sensible, though one hesitates to ask for a phone account from the hosting agencies, lest the shock be too much. I suspect agents have also increased their own home phone bills fairly substantially in the course of their duty.

Over and above this time spent on specific projects agents are also

contributing time preparing reports, documenting panel and CGF meetings and reviewing the Scheme. All agents keep some kind of documentation of the Scheme, including photographs, written reports to CGF, evaluation forms and some put together exhibitions.

In some cases, additional time needs to be added in to cover back-up administration carried out either by agents or their colleagues. Roughly 50% of the agencies indicate that they have administrative help, which I take to be assistance with the clerical processing of applications, and this should be added to the total amount of time spent on the Scheme. Where no administrative assistance is available, it should be recognised that this puts an additional, sometimes quite heavy, burden on agents.

One agent comments that if they were working at normal Arts Council consultancy rates (£300 per day), the administration fee would be more like £9,000 than £1,000 (20% of the total allocation of £5,000 per year for the Scheme). While there is merit in this point in that it highlights the 'real' cost of development work, nonetheless, the Scheme as envisaged by CGF is primarily a vehicle for devolving project funding to local rural communities. Theoretically, then the funding is viewed as a source of money which can be woven into the pattern of support already being offered by the host agency, rather than as an entirely separate and time-consuming activity. About 50% of agents think the time actually spent on the Scheme exceeds their initial expectations, the other 50% do not, or feel the reality matches their expectations.

There is a clear message here that at least half the agents are having to extend their initial expectations and work planning and may, as a result, be under greater pressure in their own job. Though there is no tone of annoyance registered, I think this has more to do with the gallantry of the agents than anything else. More exact quantification of time may help agents to arrive at a more precise set of expectations. The current 20% allocated to cover administration could be increased, to 25%, in recognition of the heavier than expected workload on agents, particularly in providing development support.

Development work in support of projects

Development work to support the working up of projects is undertaken by almost all agents and is seen by them as crucial. In most cases development work is done by agents, panels or associated bodies they have managed to forge links with in the following areas: disseminating information to clients on alternative sources of funding, working with clients to develop the aesthetic side of their project, and working with clients to develop the organisational side of projects.

The questionnaire to participants indicated that they all received help with

basic information, that 90% were assisted to fill in the application form, and that slightly less than half were helped to develop the project idea. About one-third were given help with the artistic side, while two-thirds were helped with the organisational side. About 80% were also supported in identifying other funding sources.

Almost all agents believe that development work is beneficial and even essential, and that it does result in better projects. They feel that such work leads to the production of more innovative projects, the building of trust between artist and community, and the incentive to community groups to undertake further projects. I would endorse the view of the agents.

The major rural and arts players should look seriously at how they could complement and continue the investment of project funding, by matching funding for development work. Such development work does not necessarily have to be done by a whole new team of specialists, but rather through using rural and community development and arts practitioners, and indeed, previous participants in the Scheme at local level. The emphasis I have put earlier on training to integrate the different skills required would facilitate the actual practice of integration.

Documentation and evaluation

Agents submit yearly general reviews of their Schemes. While agents are not snowed under by detailed documentation from participants, in the preparation of this report I have received a quite considerable volume of material both from agents and from participants. It would be accurate, however, to say that both the volume and quality of documentation is uneven. Given the relatively modest level of grant aid, it would be unfair and unrealistic to expect extensive analysis from either agents or participants. Nevertheless, good documentation is vital to the success of the Scheme in terms of raising its profile, providing models of good practice and as a method of demonstrating that the Scheme justifies the Foundation's investment in it.

Some agents actively encourage groups to document and indeed ringfence a proportion of the project budget for this purpose. This principle should be adopted by all agents. The types of documentation currently supplied include photographs, written reports, formal evaluation reports and scrapbooks. The forthcoming handbook will provide practical guidance on how to produce good documentation both during and after projects, and should help participants, agents and panels with this vital aspect of the Scheme.

In relation to evaluation, deeper and more regular analysis of the Scheme needs to be carried out by participants (and the wider community), by panels and agents and, while it is still involved, by the funding body. The last of these may be said to be represented by this report. The annual reviews which the

agents and panels have sent to CGF and the periodic meetings which take place between agents and the Foundation have been important components in an overall evaluation. Joint evaluations between neighbouring agencies has also been used and one agency very intriguingly mentioned that they intend to co-organise an event with a neighbouring agency to which project participants will be invited and which will have as its main focus an evaluation of the two agencies.

There is, however, a feeling among agents that a more systematic and coherent form of evaluation is needed. I endorse their view that the creation of a standard methodology or 'template' would greatly enhance the evaluation process. Exchange work between all agencies is an excellent idea; if a standard form could be devised, exchange could then build on a basis of shared understanding about evaluation goals and methods.

The barometers which agents currently use could be incorporated into a coherent evaluation system; such factors as comparison between years, comparison between the number of projects funded, by other agents and the CGF Scheme, comparison of time/effort spent on projects by other agents, take-up rate, 'outcome' of projects, 'achievement' of projects, the number of projects funded as against the number of projects which are applied for, effectiveness of publicity (ie the number of people who have heard of CGF).

With regard to evaluation by the participants and the wider community, it should be acknowledged that, just as agents and panels may not be necessarily endowed with the skills and knowledge to carry out effective analysis, so too participants may not have these techniques before they begin projects. The forthcoming handbook will offer advice about the practice of evaluation. An accessible evaluation form should be devised in conjunction with an evaluation form for agents. It is not practical to offer training to every project, but clear guidelines for undertaking the evaluation could be distributed with the form.

3 An analysis of sample projects

1 Successful projects

Castle Cary Collage
A local group, The Friends of Ansford Community School, wanted to develop stronger bonds with the local community. It initiated a project involving a local artist working with children and adults from the town to create a collage of the town; in all some 36 people participated. Workshops were held to co-ordinate the making of the picture. The group researched the buildings it wished to portray. The finished panel is sited in the Market House and 10,000 postcards were made of it.

Crawshawbooth Women for Women Music Workshop
The initiative for this project came from a women's group which had been meeting for some time at the Crawshawbooth Village Centre. Its community worker, employed by Lancashire County Council's Youth and Community Service, helped it organise a 'taster' day, after which it decided on the format and aims for the project. The aims were to provide opportunities and a sense of community identity for the group; to explore the medium of music; to integrate women with disabilities, and to learn practical skills which could be used to benefit the community's future development. The group invited other women from the village to join it. It received a lot of help and support from the community worker, who assisted it in finding funding from a number of sources and identified a self-employed community arts worker to lead a series of workshops. The women devised a song about their lives and community. Many had no experience of playing instruments, but they greatly enjoyed learning. They put together a 'group' which concentrated on percussion, but also included electric guitars, keyboards and so on. The workshops were a great success and led to a performance, video and recording. Some 25 women were involved and the community worker made a video of the performance. One of the people invited to the performance was from a local recording studio and he invited the women to go along and record their song.

Gathering Voices
This was an extremely enjoyable and challenging project involving 20 people

from across Powys who participated in a weekend of creative voice work with the renowned tutor Frankie Armstrong. One participant described the situation which existed in his village:

> 'We did have a hundred-strong male voice choir, but there's nothing now to persuade people that they've got voices, that they could be involved and that their contribution would be valued.'

The project was, in turn, the catalyst for a further project 'Impulse to sing', which six community singing groups are developing, each with its own distinct 'voice', or 'songline' rooted in a shared sense of belonging to a local place.

Great Torrington Furze Dance
A local arts group re-introduced a traditional and very beautiful dance during the Great Torrington May Fair celebrations. The project finally involved all manner of people. Soon afterwards, the Town Council wrote to the group asking them to continue the dance on an annual basis. In what is perceived by the agent as a very conservative area, this was considered a major breakthrough.

Hamar Nights, Publication Project, Shetland
The project was based around the publication of a book called *Hamar Nights* by Unst Writers' Group. Every member of the group submitted at least one piece of writing each month for general discussion and criticism. The best of the material was collated into a small 'good quality' publication.

Heartbeat Song Group Project, Suffolk
The Suffolk Agency helped with the setting-up costs of publicity and supported a Norwich based singer who had inspired a group of women who live in isolated rural villages to get together in the first place. The group has developed its own individual dynamism and particular sound. It holds fortnightly meetings and has achieved a high level of aesthetic and interpretative merit. Here is its own testimony from its evaluation report:

> 'Unknown or hidden talents have emerged as we work towards performance; … some people can now conduct the group, others sing solo, some of us teach the songs in schools and in our homes to our children … our voices have been released from the constraints of sheet music … from the memories of school choirs and from competitive singing …'

History of the RAF, Performance Project, Norfolk
The project is based on an examination of the RAF base at Swanton Morley. It involves oral history and considers what could happen on the site when the RAF moves out in 1996.

Hope Parish Map Project, Shropshire
This project is typical of many in the area and it was created by a very small rural community. The project provided a focus for the community and a high percentage of local people was involved. The people of the place took great pride in what they have done. They created a textile 'map' for the village hall. The local postman took photographs (in black and white) of everyone in the village and put together little write-ups on each. A leaflet was made about the map. The village hall was opened over a weekend and displays were produced about the map, the photographs, the local school and the local footpaths. The people then organised a parish walk which was well attended over the two-day event.

Llanfyllin Tapestry Group, mid Wales
This project involves women learning how to embroider local places of interest, including their own favourites, within a large oak frame. It is a closely knit community and the group's purpose is to contribute to the celebration of the 700th anniversary of the town's market charter.

Stencilling Project, Cumbria
The project, which brought together a completely new group was very exciting aesthetically because it used an unusual art form – stencilling. The project arose out of an arts festival. A small group of people wanted to follow up stencilling; they got together and organised a six-week series of classes, ending with workshops culminating in the finished piece, a stencil of the People's Hall in Sedbergh. The project, a stencil of the townscape, reflected a sense of place very well. Being located in the village hall it was very accessible and was liked by a wide cross-section of the community.

Swimbridge Church Kneeler Project, Devon
The project involved 100 local people of all ages. Most of them were non-church goers. They designed and created their own tapestry kneelers, alongside a professional artist. Each design had to have some local significance. The whole project was carefully monitored and planned and the quality of the kneelers was quite exceptional. It was a wonderful 'public art' project, as the church is always open and the kneelers are on permanent display. The project attracted a lot of publicity locally.

Conclusions
'Best practice' projects, as identified by agents, display some or all off the following features:

Open to local community
A number of projects are praised for the way in which the wider community

beyond the organising group was brought in or involved. It is interesting to note that this was done in a number of ways; for example, by the inclusion in the catalyst group of a well-known and 'mobile' figure in the community, the local postman. One suspects that even the dogs exchanged their legendary truculence towards uniformed personnel for a friendly lick of the camera. Another group, involving isolated disabled women, reached out to others beyond the new circle that it had formed. Local decision-makers played an important part in widening involvement by allowing unusual or extended opening of public buildings.

Good planning and a defined focus
These were also key factors. Groups took time to arrive at what they most wanted to do before throwing the project open to the wider community. This clearly created credibility for them and by being able to present a clear idea, they made the involvement and acceptance by others a lot easier.

Development support
Community development support and artistic support were also identified as important components in the success of projects. Self-evaluation by groups, no doubt assisted by development support, is clearly an ideal follow-up and is itself an aspect of the group's development.

Unusual ideas or art forms
These also featured as the key to success in some projects. The choice of stencilling, an under-used but relatively accessible medium, was imaginative, as was the revival of an old traditional 'pagan' dance in Devon.

Imaginative processes
The Heartbeat Song Group in Suffolk displayed great ingenuity in disseminating its project through teaching its songs in schools and to its own children. This is an idea well worth adopting and replicating.

Engagement with local issues
This was another of the X factors for success and was particularly well illustrated by the Norfolk video project on the RAF site which not only tracked the history of the place, itself unusual, which inevitably would have reached well beyond the particular locale towards the international wartime experiences of some of those interviewed, but also examined what the future of the RAF base could be. This, I am sure, sponsored some interesting proposals and encouraged local people to look forward as well as backwards and to focus on their own locale as well as on wider horizons.

Tangible product

Actual or tangible product was achieved by all the best-practice projects listed. While it would be invidious and misleading to over-emphasise product over process, nonetheless the satisfaction not only of the group but of the wider community may well be greatly enhanced when a project results in a product of some kind, whether it be a play or a performance or a book or a set of kneelers. Here is something that the whole community can take a pride in, can see as an image of themselves which may well challenge their sense of inferiority, their belief that their place had nothing special to express. While the economic 'value adding' may not rank high compared to the output of Glaxo or Ford, it is, nonetheless, undeniable.

Critical skills

Finally, the development of critical skills is a crucial ingredient in raising the aesthetic standard of projects and complements the evaluative community development dimension. The publication produced by Shetland writers was not merely an anthology of work gathered up from round the place, but the product of careful learning and honing over a considerable period of time.

2 Less successful projects

Good fun – but fish and frogs?

A dozen school-aged children (out of school hours) wearing masks and dancing along to 'The Ugly Duckling' pretended to be fish and frogs in the local river. The agent is of the opinion that the participants enjoyed themselves, but it was early on in his experience of the Scheme when his grasp of the criteria was somewhat tenuous.

Planning permission causes problems

This project involved groups based at a day centre, working with a group of professional artists to design and create an area which was to incorporate artwork in a park setting. This was an opportunity for adults with learning difficulties to create permanent public artwork. This was a very ambitious project, which was genuinely trying to reach more disadvantaged sections of the community. It had commendably succeeded in raising a large budget funded from many different sources. The problems occurred when, after the project had started, permission to place the work in a public space was refused by the borough council, which also turned down the funding application. This was a problem for the host agency because it had agreed the funding, but had not actually handed over the money. It spent a lot of time and effort trying to get information about the changes to the project brought about by the above decisions. It felt it needed to be sure that the amount of money it had agreed

was now suitable. Eventually, after a couple of months, the project did go ahead, with the work being placed in the garden of the day centre. Although the project was scaled down, the agency felt that the grant it had agreed was still relevant.

Illness stops play
One project never got off the ground. They had a good proposal, good ideas, but when the main player fell ill, they just couldn't carry on … and had to repay the grant.

Appearances deceptive
One group totally misrepresented what it was doing and thus appeared to meet the criteria. Later the group 'proudly informed' the agency that it had proceeded to implement something quite different.

We could have been a contender
The Human Punch and Judy show failed to happen. It was postponed and then cancelled because of the group's own politics and dynamics. The project was ambitious, hoping to connect problems faced by newcomers to the village with a 'moral' interpretation of a well known and traditional story. It is regrettable that the project failed, but the group had gone a long way down the track before disbanding. The agent sees this as an incidental but beneficial form of developmental progress.

Great expectations
An agency recommended an arts practitioner to help on the costumes and sets for a village pageant. The organisers' expectations of what one person could achieve in one day were pretty unrealistic and both they and the artist were left feeling frustrated and 'ripped off'.

Paramount ideas
A summer playscheme video project was successful in that it achieved its objectives. However, the quality of the finished project left a bit to be desired.

Conclusions

Lost horizons – the gap between expectation and final reality
The most common project problem would appear to be a gap between initial expectation and 'finished' project. One particular difficulty highlighted was mutual disappointment between professional artist and group over what could be achieved in a limited block of time. This would have been obviated by some kind of pre-workshop meeting between artist and group. This approach, often used by community artists in Northern Ireland, not only makes for a

realism about what can be done within a limited time scale, but also promotes a far more integrated situation where the group has a better sense of participation and the artist avoids imposing his/her own ideas while at the same time trying to enhance the critical and aesthetic character of the project. It also seems to me that a one-day workshop would, for most projects, be insufficient to make for a meaningful educational exercise. It may be that funding constraints do not allow for more sustained development, but if this is the case, a series of shorter workshops, allowing for mutual trust and confidence to be built up, would, I think, be more effective.

Lack of planning and focus

Taking the time to undertake proper planning and resisting the impulse to rush into quick-fix projects would have avoided problems here. It is worth bearing in mind that agents generally acknowledge that good projects take time and are prepared to be patient, even though their final 'tally' might not look hugely impressive to others.

Unanticipated extraneous difficulties

These might be, for example, planning permission or other forms of licensing. Many voluntary groups are not familiar with legislation and sometimes it can be assumed that 'somebody is dealing with that bit' when in fact they are not. It can also happen that Local Authorities or others can request compliance with unusual regulations. The sorting out of such matters can take a lot of time and effort, can also be very costly and usually winds up having to be done by 'professionals' of one sort or another. It may be an idea to insert into all application forms a little clause drawing attention to the possibility that projects may need special permission and a few examples given, perhaps drawn up with advice from local planners, police or others who are likely to have specialist knowledge of such matters.

Unanticipated internal problems

Some projects can fall victim to bad luck; a key player falls ill, a group disbands because of internal dissension or some catastrophe befalls their meeting centre or the equipment that they are using. Making contingency plans by trying to ensure that the success of the project does not depend too heavily on one individual can help avoid this kind of problem. Good community development practice is an important instrument in giving groups the skills and knowledge to work as a team. The whole area of insurance needs to be carefully considered. Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) and the Community Development Foundation can help with advice on this.

False descriptions

Only one case of what would appear to be deliberate disingenousness is recorded. No evidence is put forward to suggest that the agency had the grant repaid. Again, perhaps a clause to protect the agencies a little more should be inserted in applications, though it would have to be recognised that the legal game which might have to be played to recover what is relatively small claim stuff, may not be worth the effort. A bit of publicity to embarrass the offending party might be the answer in some cases, but this always has to be weighed against the overall credibility of the host agency and indeed of CGF. 'Gotcha' style headlines in the local (never mind the national) press are obviously to be eschewed; but groups intentionally misrepresenting their project applications should not be allowed to get away scot-free.

The freeze factor

Some projects, even after a lengthy planning and gestation period just do not 'happen'. While this can be enormously disappointing for all those involved as well as for the agency, one agent's stoic view is that such projects are valuable, nonetheless, in showing the skills which have been realised and the process of development which has been undertaken, and they should not be discounted.

It is a difficult balance for an agency to achieve between being, on the one hand, sufficently supportive of such projects so that they are able to analyse and learn from their experience and, hopefully, move into another project and on the other hand not being so laid back that local people think that the whole Scheme is money for old rope. The temptation to take the money and run, or stand still, has to be acknowledged, even though I do not get the impression that such malpractice is widespread or deliberate. As one agent notes, the Scheme, perhaps by definition, involves some risk taking. That, however, is part of its integrity. This particular problem of 'bucking at the gate' also underscores the need for developmental time and support – from whatever source, so that the freeze factor or the loss of the head of steam or the over working of a idea can be recognised and some effort made to re-orient.

4 The wider picture – the role of other bodies

1 Other agencies funding rural community arts at local level

In a few agencies, Gulbenkian funding forms part of a compound funding pool, specifically reserved for rural arts and drawing resources from a variety of sources. Many agency panels contain representatives from among the other players including Local Authorities, educational bodies and Regional Arts Boards (RABs). In this sense, other players are contributing time and expertise to the Scheme. Beyond this support, which, it must be said is uneven throughout the country, other players also offer help to rural arts; almost all agents work in areas where there is at least some other form of support available. More often than not this is in the form of project funding rather than developmental backing (for example, through the funding of arts officers or rural arts officers). The breakdown is as follows:

Community Councils (Rural Action Fund): Lancashire, Norfolk

Parish Councils: Devon, Somerset (occasional)

Arts agencies: Arts Info in Suffolk (information), Suffolk Dance (developmental work)

Regional Arts Boards: East Midlands Arts in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, Eastern Arts Board in Norfolk, Lincolnshire and Suffolk, North West Arts Board in Lancashire and Cheshire and the Mid-Pennines, West Midland Arts in Shropshire, South West Arts in Somerset and Gloucestershire

Borough and District Councils: Mid Pennines (Rossendale Borough Council); Suffolk (St Edmundsbury Borough Council, Forest Heath and Babergh); Devon (North Devon, Torridge); Cheshire (Chester, Crewe and Nantwich, Congleton, Holton, Macclesfield, Vale Royal) Local Authorities in Somerset, in Lancashire, in Shropshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Nottinghamshire

County Councils: in Lancashire, Leicestershire, Shropshire, Gloucestershire, Suffolk, Cheshire, Lincolnshire and Norfolk

Trusts: Groundwork Trust in Lancashire and Cheshire (occasional), Foundation for Sports and Arts in Mid Wales, small Trusts in Devon

Voluntary bodies: Voluntary Action in Cumbria

Rural Agencies: Rural Development Commission in Somerset, Rural Action in Cheshire (occasional)

European Commission/European Union: LEADER Programme in Tamar, Devon (programme now finished) and in Mid Wales

Arts Councils: Arts Council of Wales in Mid Wales

Private sector: no support recorded

Others: Aldeburgh Foundation in Suffolk (an organisation which carries out its own education projects, usually linked to concerts and other events that it is presenting). In one case, the agent noted that help was available for promotion of the agency Scheme and in one case an agent noted that art skills development help was available.

It is also notable that private sponsorship and mainline statutory assistance does not figure at all. Rural bodies and parish councils do not seem to figure prominently as players, though it should be emphasised that a small number of agencies are, in fact, hosted by Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) Suffolk and Rural Community Councils (RCCs) in Shropshire.

Partnerships

About 50% of agencies work in what they define as partnerships; the local panel itself is seen as a partnership by at least one agent, but others imply that partnership needs to have a strategic dimension where those involved come together to plan rural community arts. Responses from agents indicate that this is not common practice. There is, for example, in Cheshire a Rural Arts Forum which appears to have a strategic role, but the CGF Scheme has, as yet, no formal link with it. The Gloucestershire agency would seem to be the only one which has a fairly developed partnership worked out with other players.

Art Shape in Gloucestershire has succeeded in putting a three-year partnership together after 'a lot of frustration'. It took over a year and a half to forge the links. According to the agency, the results are already beginning to show not only in the rural arts context, but in piloting a consortium approach to development in a 'context of diminishing local arts resources and an adjustment in arts funding and structural support patterns.' The partnership involves a number of arts organisations in the Gloucestershire area and is dedicated to 'promoting the development of grass roots rural arts activity.' The partnership is specifically linked into the CGF agency; the partners see as a key objective 'the deployment of support and grant resources to people in rural areas, initiating projects within the criteria established by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's rural grants policy.'

GRASS, as the partnership is named, is also committed to creating connections with community associations at local level. Part of its focus is also to develop new regional and national resources to support long-term development work. Monitoring and evaluation is another role as is the sharing of models of practice from other areas, sharing the expertise of artists and professional arts organisations with local people and providing assistance to them. Liaison and strategic planning with Local Authorities, South West Arts and CGF is a further important objective. In terms of its planned work, GRASS intends to initiate and implement annual arts development projects aimed at sharing models of practice, providing advice to local groups and enabling local people to collaborate periodically in county-wide initiatives in partnership with others.

Agents offered a wide range of views about the other players in the rural community arts scene, indicating that the levels and type of support are very uneven. Most agents focused their comments on Local Authorities. Some are regarded as helpful, others are not. A number of agents suggest that the Rural Development Commission should be involved more vigorously. Agricultural groups, libraries and health authorities were also cited as potential players by agents. The reasons advanced for lack of partnership support are lack of time and/or indifference on the part of other players. A further factor in many areas is certainly lack of resources stemming, in turn, from a weak commitment to rural arts.

On the related question of support from other players, over 50% of established agencies felt that there was no adequate system of assistance. Of the agents who were satisfied with the level of support, two commended the host organisations for the agency itself; a district council and an independent arts organisation. One agent noted that she was trying to create a system of support; seeing this, implicitly, as a key task for the agency.

2 Other players

Given the scope of this report, it was not practical to contact Local Authorities, parish councils and all the other locally-based players to hear their views on their own role and the potential for building partnerships. However, given the plain fact that many political decisions and funding allocations are made at national and regional level, we did ask the Arts Councils, Regional Arts Boards, the Rural Development Commission and ACRE for their comments.

Arts Councils

The Arts Council of England

The Arts Council of England (ACE) does not have a rural policy as such, preferring this to be part of the responsibility of the 10 Regional Arts Boards (RABs). In its response, ACE included a copy of the chapter on rural and urban arts taken from its strategic document, *A Creative Future* (ACE, London, 1993). The section on rural arts merits a mere three pages, hardly a testimony to its importance in the view of the Council. The conception of the rural world adumbrated is somewhat generalistic and a shade Arcadian; nonetheless ACE does commendably commit itself to ensuring, in partnership with others, that "its policies for arts support are relevant to the needs of the less mobile groups in rural areas".

ACE takes note of the contribution of the Gulbenkian Scheme and comments that the devolved Scheme 'may provide a model for adoption by the funding system'. The report also states that the funding system should co-operate with the rural development agencies at national, regional and local level on arts plans which develop the relationship between the arts and other social, cultural and economic issues. ACE is currently undertaking a geographical analysis of arts expenditure at sub-regional level. This will provide figures on Local Authority spend, though as ACE points out, such analysis does raise further issues; audiences for events in rural locations may be attracted from urban areas and vice versa. The analysis does not provide for any separation of participative and touring spending.

However admirable the exhortation is, ACE should act much more vigorously at national level and via the RABs to encourage partnerships proactively by dedicating resources to that goal, particularly in the areas of training and promotion.

Though the recommendations of a report on rural arts produced by Sally Stote in 1989 do not, sadly, appear to have been taken up by ACE, they are worth reiterating here in summary:

- The Arts Council should consult regularly with the national organisations concerned with rural areas to offer expertise; to exchange information; and to help towards a more integrated approach to rural development. Consideration should be given as to whether a 'Rural Forum' would be the best approach.
- The Arts Council should encourage the Regional Arts Associations (RAAs), Local Authorities and Rural Community Councils to develop a 'small-step growth strategy for rural areas which would be seen as a process of consolidating and extending local initiatives'.

- The Arts Council and RAAs should consider an injection of funds into more jointly-funded posts with specific responsibilities for development of the arts in rural areas, including pilot projects which address the needs of rural provision. (*Think Rural Act Now: A Report for the Arts Council on the Arts in Rural Areas*, Sally Stote (ed.) Arts Council of England, London, 1989) p.23.

Arts Council of Wales/Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru

The Arts Council of Wales (Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru (ACW/CCC) did not, historically, have a specific rural arts policy. Recently, however, the Welsh Arts Council and the three RAAs in Wales have merged to form the new Arts Council of Wales and many of the community arts schemes set up by the RAAs have been adopted by the new body. As much of Wales is rural, many of these schemes operate in a rural context.

ACW/CCC administers a grant of approximately £84,000 to support the Wales Craft Forum. Theatre in education, amateur arts and festivals are also supported (approximately £250,000 each year for festivals).

ACW/CCC has identified improved access and participation as its primary long-term objectives.

Since there are no RABs now in Wales, the agency in Wales, hosted by Cynefin/Festival of the Countryside is given some core funding from ACW/CCC. There is no indication that the CGF Scheme is specifically funded, but funding of the host agency is certainly a step in the right direction.

Scottish Arts Council

The Shetland Agency is not offered core support from the Scottish Arts Council (SAC). There is no RAB on Shetland, but the agency gets core support from the Shetland Islands Council.

It is one of SAC's priorities to increase the availability of the arts throughout Scotland, and that, according to the Council, is generally taken to mean increasing arts provision beyond what is known as the Central Belt (the Edinburgh/Glasgow axis).

Apart from supporting touring, artist-in-residence programmes and local organisations promoting the arts, SAC has also funded development posts, for example in the Highlands and Islands.

A particularly interesting development in the context of this report is that the Council is also in the process of funding a booklet on the impact of arts in rural areas which is specifically intended as an advocacy document for Local Authorities.

SAC also supports community-led rural based activities, for example, the Feísean (Gaelic Festivals movement) and funds small promoters developing traditional arts festivals, generally run on a voluntary basis.

While there would appear to be a certain philosophical support for rural arts, it is questionable whether or not SAC understands the significance of the CGF Scheme per se. SAC's work with Local Authorities on advocacy may result in greater understanding and support for arts at local level.

Regional Arts Boards

The RABs were of great assistance when the Scheme was being set up and officers in each of the agencies played a significant role in establishing initial contacts between CGF and potential agencies.

Several RABs were kind enough to respond to requests for information about their current involvement in rural arts. Here is a summary of their replies:

North West Arts

North West Arts (NWAB) gives core support to the Cheshire, Lancashire and Mid-Pennine agencies. It has had a key role in supporting the establishment of CGF agencies. NWAB does have a formal rural arts policy. The recommendations of *Going with the Grain*, a report produced by Diana Johnson, were adopted by NWAB at the end of 1992 (*Going with the Grain: A Report on the Arts in the Rural North West*, Diana Johnson (ed.), NWAB, Manchester, 1992). The report highlights the importance of consultation and devolution and stresses the importance of the role of animateurs in local arts development. The development of partnerships is also viewed as a critical factor. The report recommends the creation of partnerships not only with artists and arts organisations, but with Local Authorities, rural agencies and neighbouring RABs. The specific role of the Gulbenkian Foundation is recognised, as are the potential benefits for rural arts from the Rural Action Initiative. A special Rural Partnership/Challenge budget is also recommended. Better information and training are further priorities within the policy.

There is no evidence of how this partnership policy has been put into practice from the Gulbenkian agencies within the remit of NWAB.

West Midland Arts

West Midlands Arts, gives core support to the Shropshire agency and was very helpful in making contacts with prospective agents when the Scheme was in its early stages. WMA has committed itself to a rural arts strategy on the basis of a report commissioned in 1991 *(From Mountain to Motorway; The Arts in the Rural West Midlands*, Doff Pollard (ed.), WMA, Birmingham, 1991). This is

an important document and may well be useful as another model which could be adapted for other RABs. WMA endorsed the recommendations of the report, the most important of which is probably the aim of creating a framework specifically for rural arts. There may be some danger of ironing the highly distinctive and localised character out of rural arts for the sake of a perfectly co-ordinated system, which after all, would have to impose itself over what is already there. We live in an era where 'the system' is held in high administrative esteem; the tail could wind up wagging the dog. Nonetheless, greater attention to rural arts, backed up by realistic funding and practical co-operation at local as well as regional level would surely be a step forward.

Among the agreed recommendations in the report, there is a strong emphasis on partnership and a rural initiative Scheme, aimed at raising the profile of arts in rural areas, attracting partners not just as funders but for their contribution to arts activities. Partnership is also advocated with such rural agencies as the Rural Development Commission and the National Rivers Authority, and with rural community development organisations such as Youth Services, Rural Community Councils and environmental initiatives.

Again, there is no evidence of how this rural arts policy connects with the CGF Scheme.

East Midlands Arts

East Midlands Arts (EMA) gives core support to the Mantle Arts Agency in Leicestershire, and the Western Area Agency in Nottinghamshire. It reported that they do not have a specific rural arts policy, but that it funds many local arts development agencies in rural areas. They also support arts officer posts in rural areas.

Their total investment this year is £108,785, 17% of their total budget. EMA also deals with project funding in education and training and encourages clusters of institutions to work together and apply for funds. A high proportion of this funding, it states, will also go to rural areas.

Yorkshire and Humberside Arts

There are, as yet no CGF agencies in this area. Yorkshire and Humberside Arts (YHA) does have a rural arts policy. This policy was developed from a consultation day organised by YHA. There is a strong emphasis on local empowerment and a recognition of the needs of different rural communities. As in the other policies, partnership is welcomed; here the list includes very locally-based organisations like Women's Institutes, Young Farmers' clubs, parish councils and the private sector as well as regional and national rural and arts agencies. Significantly, YHA declares that its own policy development will reflect the views of those wishing to develop policies for the arts in rural

areas. Like NWAB, YHA commits itself to providing opportunities for those involved in rural arts to come together on a regular basis. YHA also promises to support a rural arts post in partnership with Humberside County Council and Humberside Rural Community Council.

YHA estimates that it will spend a total of around £425,000 this year. Like most RABs, YHA has no specific rural arts budget head, so it is difficult to separate the rural spend from the rest of the budget. Nonetheless, according to CGF, YHA does a lot of locally-based work within its region, similar in spirit to that of the Rural Arts Agency Scheme.

South West Arts

The South West Arts (SWA) region contains four agencies; Artsreach in Dorset, Take Art in Somerset, Art Shape in Gloucestershire and the Beaford Arts Centre in Devon. SWA offers core support to the Somerset Agency and Art Shape. SWA is in the process of developing a rural arts policy. The region is predominantly rural; some 58% of the land surface is classified as such. A specific rural policy did not, therefore, seem appropriate until recently when strongly urban policies were developed to serve the needs of major cities like Bristol.

In trying to devise a rural arts policy SWA has asked some important and fundamental questions about the definition of rural arts: should rural arts, for example, include experimental arts which happen to be located in the countryside; should urban-based community arts teams who are sometimes active in rural hinterlands be included?

SWA has also piloted a scheme to encourage arts elements within Rural Action projects in Dorset which will be extended to Devon and Cornwall, subject to negotiation. This sounds like a very promising initiative which could meaningfully connect rural and arts agendas.

Eastern Board

The Eastern Board gives core support to the Lincolnshire Agency, the Norfolk Agency and the Suffolk Agency. No documentation has been received from this Board.

Northern Arts

Northern Arts contains the South Lakeland Agency in Cumbria. It does not have a specific rural arts policy as it devolves its funding for participatory, community and amateur arts to Local Arts Development Agencies (LADAs) of which there are 32 within the Northern region. There is no evidence that it gives core support to the Cumbria Agency either directly or through LADAs.

Northern Arts estimates that it spends approximately £230,000 annually on

rural arts projects. Of this some £95,000 is spent on participative arts in rural areas.

Conclusion
While the drawing up of specific rural arts policies is greatly to be welcomed, it is difficult to know how this translates on the ground into action and funding. More powerful aesthetic and political interests may press heavily upon budgets and staff time. Partnership has its price; practical, locally deliverable co-operation between all the players is a very daunting challenge, especially when we remember that arts and rural community development are very far from the top of the national fiscal agenda.

The fashion is for big flagship projects, impressive buildings, the blazoned photo opportunity and the 30-second sound bite. The whole concept of decentralisation is difficult to put into practice in a political system that is highly centralised. Integration and partnership operate best within a decentralised model where all partners share control. As I have observed earlier, there are signs in recent policy documents from major arts and rural players that the limitations of a compartmented, centralised approach are being recognised.

Rural bodies

Rural Development Commission
The Commission grants aid to arts-based projects around the country. The Commission states that the purpose of its grants is not to fund the arts in rural areas, which it sees as the responsibility of other bodies, but through such projects to fulfil its remit to help the rural economy, encourage community development and support voluntary activity.

So, for example, the Commission might support arts-based projects which aim to stimulate wider awareness of the importance of the arts and help overcome isolation within and between rural communities. It might also support projects which incorporate a programme of education or outreach activity or consider the job creation potential of larger schemes, such as the Tate of the West. It would, in addition, try to ensure that arts events receiving Commission help were accessible to the general public, to disabled visitors and to those with children.

The Commission also tries to ensure that other organisations recognise the importance of tailoring the delivery of such services to match rural circumstances. It recognises such factors as providing schemes with simple application procedures, the need to allow for lower levels of partnership funding; and the smaller scale of rural projects and their reliance, in many cases, on voluntary input. The Commission also urges arts bodies to monitor

uptake of grants to ensure that rural areas receive their fair share of the funds available.

Action with Communities in Rural England

ACRE states that its contribution to rural arts in the past five years has included the publication of *Arts in Village Halls*, with financial support from the Arts Council; the collection of examples of rural arts initiatives (and production of a bibliography for the Arts Council), support for RRCs undertaking work on rural arts provision; and community development through arts initiatives.

Jeremy Fennell, Head of Rural Policy at ACRE at the time of writing, argues that there is a need for a funding programme to promote rural arts. He believes that initiatives by various RABs to fund dedicated rural arts workers has helped RCCs in their core role of developing local communities through participation, self-help, needs analyses and problem solving, above all in partnership with other bodies. He believes that such initiatives have unlocked new resources for community action, have strengthened the capacity for the community to respond and have given individuals confidence to develop other initiatives in their communities.

The key issue, according to ACRE, is that rural communities need support to develop such initiatives; historically such support has been provided primarily by RRCs on a range of issues, usually achieved through core funding packages from Local Authorities and central government bodies such as the Rural Development Commission.

ACRE argues that if rural arts provision is to be taken seriously by the key national (and regional) agencies, funding needs to be explicitly available for developing rural communities through local initiatives. ACRE feels that it helps to have national funding delegated to an appropriate level, either regionally or to Local Authorities at county/district scale.

ACRE also believes that there is a need to incorporate some of the issues and processes of rural community development into training for those involved more generally within arts and community development work nationally and regionally. The experience of community arts workers currently or recently employed by RCCs, is according to ACRE, a useful source to draw on in relation to appropriate training.

ACRE has a national role in supporting very local initiatives undertaken in association with, or supported by, RCC members and it has developed dedicated funding in two specific areas. Rural Action is a comprehensive programme of support for community development through environmental action and CountryWork is a delegated grants fund for charitable initiatives

that support or create employment in rural areas.

Significantly, ACRE expects that it could maintain a similar fund to support local arts work. ACRE is limited constitutionally, however, to funding initiatives within England.

Of all the bodies who responded, ACRE's vision seems closest in spirit to that of the Rural Arts Agency Scheme. The picture on the ground, as reflected by agents would not, however, create the impression that practice always follows policy. It should be said that where linkages have taken place between the Scheme and ACRE at local level, the results are very promising. ACRE now has models upon which it can argue the case for more resources to its own core funder, the Rural Development Commission.

The expectation, expressed by ACRE, that it could maintain a fund similar to the CGF agency Scheme is extremely welcome and should act as a spur to other players to produce matching funding. The main drawback, as ACRE points out, is that it is limited constitutionally to operating only in England. Other bodies such as the Rural Forums in Scotland and Wales and the Rural Community Network (funded by the Rural Development Council) in Northern Ireland, could consider how they might act as complementary funders in their respective countries. The equivalent arts funders in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should also be freeing matching funding to their rural development bodies.

This would leave a situation where the local players, borough and district councils, local branches of government departments, rural interest groups who have funding and Trusts would, in turn, match the core funding from the regional and national players.

5 General reflections – a strategic view of the Scheme

1 Advantages of the agency Scheme

Local, devolved structure

Clearly emerging as the most important advantage of the Scheme for the agents and participants is its devolved, local character. 'Bottom-up' or community decision-making and the opportunity to encourage empowerment were cited as related advantages. The availability of funding in rural areas was also regarded as an important advantage in itself, especially in a context where so little else seems to be available.

Flexibility

Almost as significant for agents and participants is the linked feature of flexibility. The Scheme is praised for its low level of bureaucracy. A decentralised structure is a welcome alternative to the complicated and bureaucratic methods of delivery sometimes characterising arts funding.

Development support

Both agents and participants overwhelmingly endorsed the importance of making available advice and guidance to applicants. The supporting role of panels as a group of people who know their own communities well is also regarded as an advantage. The message from agents is clear: money in itself, even if theoretically accessible, is of little use without the information, education and training work which 'translates' the Scheme for local communities.

Community development ethos

It is difficult to assess just how much structured community development takes place and, contingently, how much of this is carried out by the agents rather than by others operating in tandem with the Scheme. It might be more accurate to suggest that agents bring to their work a community development ethos; they are aware of the value of such goals as community cohesion, the creation of new skills, empowerment, the opportunity to work with professionals on their own terms, and the opening up of society in rural areas.

The emphasis on the local would appear to necessitate a bottom up, non-

paternalistic process approach; the community development ethos is, almost by definition, only really realised within a spatial context that is bounded and local rather than all-embracing. Such an approach was viewed by some agents as an important challenge to the pattern of imposed approaches to arts development.

The Scheme is viewed by both agents and participants as being an important catalyst to local (place-specific) arts and community development. Again, the linkage between community development as the approach and arts development as the subject is evident. This does not, I think, compromise CGF's emphasis on the primary function of the Scheme as an instrument of local arts development, but denotes the appropriateness of a bottom-up, process-based, community development methodology. It is surely a further advantage, and an argument for the priming role which culture and arts have to play in preparing communities for self-regeneration, that there may well be 'value added' community development outcomes; for example, the focus in certain projects on issues such as housing or health or the subsequent involvement of project participants in social and economic development work.

While it may be argued that community development as an approach and as a goal is worthwhile in all sorts of societies, it is worth reminding ourselves that its sphere of priority is the disadvantaged community. Agents drew attention to the disadvantaged character of rural areas; the Scheme was praised for its targeting of money to places which otherwise would receive very little arts funding. Other agents saw CGF's channelling of arts funding to rural areas as part of their wider awareness of the compound difficulties facing country people; in this sense the Scheme was viewed as paradigmatic, a challenge to other players in the rural and arts fields, both at local and regional level.

There was little mention of rural development among agents' responses, nor how arts and community development relate to its specific goals. This is not to suggest that agents are not aware of rural development and the particular issues that concern rural people. Undoubtedly, more work, at a number of levels, needs to be done to draw arts, community development and rural development agendas – and personnel – more closely together. Agents themselves, it should be remembered from their comments on other players, are very keen that just such partnerships are forged.

Aesthetic enhancement

The agency Scheme was seen by both agents and participants as an important stimulus to the development and expansion of aesthetic horizons, for individuals, for groups and for the larger community. In some places arts activities happened where there had been little tradition of art work, in others a particular tradition like choral singing was revived and given a new

contemporary form. Other key features noted by agents and participants were the accessibility of the Scheme to arts people who had not previously been much involved in the arts, and the anchorage or focus gained from developing ideas and imaginative responses to local places.

Some agents suggested that the Scheme was beneficial in enabling people to create things they didn't think they could. Given that rural people lack confidence about their abilities, partly because of a certain urban (politically and culturally dominant) notion of what constitutes aesthetic value, the Scheme is important in supporting rural communities to have more faith in themselves. In many cases also, the particular arts activities are new to participants since many traditional skills have been lost and it is to be expected that they will take time to get accustomed to new arts skills and a methodology that in its very democracy is strange to them.

Let us take an example. On a visit to a project supported by the agency Scheme in Wales, I asked some of the participants what they thought of their final product – a mixed media wallhanging in a day centre. One elderly woman told me that she knew very well how to quilt, but had never encountered the idea of a semi-abstract tapestry made by 20 people which combines needlecraft, collage and woodwork. Initial reactions from participants to the final compound ranged from mild demur to alarm. As one lady very plainly put the matter: "It takes a bit of getting used to, but we like it now." Accustomed to plying a fine needle as a girl, she was, as we spoke, wielding a blow lamp to create low-relief wood panels.

Much of our cultural baggage, and hence our aesthetic standards, are conditioned by urban high art values, so that it is hardly surprising that agents are at times in some difficulty as to how to measure the aesthetic benefits of the Scheme. As is the case with economics, alternative aesthetics are still a very underarticulated field and much more serious attention needs to be given to the understanding of rural arts as a distinctive and valid contender. There is much beyond what we might call the Classical High Art Tradition, an essentially privileged canon that leaves out an enormous amount, not only about what constitutes art but about who constitutes the artist within societies.

Economic benefits

Though certain economic benefits were declared by a small number of agents, there was no quantification or specification. This may be because such benefits – even if they were measured – are not in the foreground of most agents' minds. Perhaps agents are right to be sceptical, as most of them are, about such indicators of success. Nonetheless, the costing of voluntary effort and the economic spin-off of collective arts activities in rural areas should not be underestimated.

A recent conference on the Economy and the Arts in Dublin (December 1994) concluded that arts generated more employment than Information Technology. It may be countered that Information Technology is hardly one of the highest employers, either in Ireland or in England. A health warning should perhaps be attached to such tricksy claims, while recognising the validity of the general thrust.

And this points up the problematics of any measurement of economic benefit. Two of the most commonly used indices of economic benefit are money spent in an area and jobs created. In the case of the CGF agency Scheme, the level of grant aid and the corresponding revenue generated, given the unit production costs of arts activity and the relatively small 'customer base', is unlikely to cause a steep parabola in the nation's wealth. Turning to the criteria of jobs created, the rural arts projects sponsored by the Scheme are conducted almost entirely by community groups working on a voluntary basis; therefore few jobs are created beyond the often part-time or short-term jobs of arts and development workers, the importance of which at the local level of the rural economy are not to be dismissed, but which, at national aggregate level are hardly likely to be seen as having a significant impact.

However, the emphasis of traditional economics on a crude matrix – based on the merely quantifiable – may, in fact, be largely irrelevant. The divorce of imagination and economics has led us to a blind alley where process is cut off from product, creativity from administrative maintenance.

As the Irish Minister for the Arts said:

> 'Business itself has something to learn from artists. By their nature artists ... are inventive, resourceful and self-reliant. These are all qualities which small entrepreneurs in the wider community are encouraged to emulate.' (Speech by the Minister for Arts, Culture and Gaeltacht, Michael D Higgins, TD, at the launch in Dublin on 3 November 1994 of a *Report on the Employment and Economic Significance of the Cultural Industries in Ireland*, (Anne O'Connell and Joe Durcan, eds. Coopers and Lybrand, Dublin, 1994).

Many arts and community development practitioners have, of course been advancing the need for a new vision for some time and indeed have been, with progressive thinkers like Michael D Higgins, at the cutting edge in shaping a new outlook.

And there are, after all, other models for a more holistic view of arts and society. Looking at traditional rural society itself, it is clear that a person's achievement was not measured primarily in terms of either product or process, but in terms of the integration of product and process; people spoke not just about how much corn a farmer would sow but how artfully he could sow it. And that same farmer, or another, would be judged on *how* he could recite a

poem or handle a bow, not on *how many* poems he could say or compose.

I would not want to suggest that rural society was idyllic; in many respects it was and is repressive and conservative. There are areas where there is no tradition of arts and culture, or that tradition has long been forgotten. Nonetheless, there is much to be learned from the value invested in skills not normally regarded as 'artistic'; the recognition that skill has to do with continuous and patient experiential learning; with process. The lack of separation between arts and non-arts skills has been to a greater or lesser extent swept aside in favour of a much narrower mass production ethos that is, ironically, in any case, unfitted to the actual facts of an increasingly microbased economy.

I am not arguing for atavism, Luddism or any kind of neo-Fabianism, but rather for a view of and from rural culture that is, forward looking and imaginatively challenging to urban policy makers. The past need not be a death trap and the rural world need not be subjected to urban fantasies of Arcadia nor even Cold Comfort Farm.

The economic neglect of rural areas has resulted, it could be argued, from an overemphasis on quantity, standardisation and centralisation. These are values unsuited to rural life and, indeed perhaps to contemporary urban life. A cast of mind which sees the case for support in terms of a payback by quantity and conformity to an abstract 'system' is unlikely to move quickly towards a more progressive view unless vigorously persuaded so to do.

Furthermore, the rural areas are coming to be seen as the recreational inheritance of urban dwellers. With rights of way, as any country person will tell you, come responsibilities beyond closing gates and taking home the Kentucky Fried Chicken boxes. It is time that urban centres shouldered their share. The argument for a concerted vision at local, regional and national level, becomes, therefore, an imperative if rural communities are to be rewarded for latently prizing a holistic, imaginative and avant-garde view of economics.

Social benefits

Agents, proceeding, as they were, from the somewhat more firmly established taxonomy of community development, were able to assert the social benefits of the Scheme with greater confidence. Benefits cited included: the contribution of the Scheme to social cohesion, to bridge-building and a sense of belonging. Many agents and participants were of the view that the Scheme developed social and organisational skills as well as art skills. Others saw the main social benefit in challenging social inequality by the targeting of resources towards disadvantaged areas, especially crucial, as one agent observed, 'because of the dramatic population changes within some rural communities' where disadvantage could easily become invisible. Another noted that the Scheme

was a form of 'value adding' to communities. Yet others saw the Scheme as a catalyst for further arts activities or other forms of development. And, not to be underestimated in terms of understanding one of the fundamental qualities of community based arts, the Scheme succeeded in enabling participants and the wider community to have fun, or as we say in Ireland, 'a bit of crack'; mind-altering, but more or less legal.

A few examples given by agents and participants illustrate the social benefits; the making of a parish map at Castle Cary took place in a local conservation club and brought previously separated sections of the community together. Children and adults worked together on a mosaic at Curry Rivel and afterwards people wanted to create mosaics in a local home for the elderly. A dance project in Stroud gave performances to raise money for charity.

Appropriate level of funding

The general consensus is that the level is about right, though there are dissenting voices. It may be observed that the amount of time agents can spend working on the Scheme may well affect the amount of funding they can actually disburse, regardless of the level of need. Some agents suggest a two-tier fund to allow for flexibility in funding larger as well as smaller projects. Smaller grants – say up to £150 – could be processed directly by the agent; larger grants would be decided by the whole panel. This would speed up and simplify the application process. There is certainly some merit to this suggestion and I would recommend that it be adopted in future for the Scheme.

One agent also suggested that a portion of funding should also be reserved for documentation, particularly good-quality photographic documentation which can be very expensive. Some agents have managed to persuade their host organisation or another funder to carry this cost. As I have argued earlier, it is desirable, given the comments of agents about the importance of raising the profile of the Scheme, that a realistic sum of money be allowed to agents (in addition to their grant allocation) to ensure that good quality photographic and other documentation is forthcoming.

Integrity of CGF as funder

Finally, CGF's independence as a Trust was seen as a definite advantage, presumably because as a source of funding it was not subject to the exigencies of statutory budgets and was therefore viewed as politically independent. The Foundation was, contingently, credited with a certain consistency and integrity.

The initiative of the Foundation was commended as a 'challenge to other players in the rural and arts world'. The Scheme was seen as making an

important contribution to redressing imbalances in regional funding sources. Others believe, and rightly so, that CGF has created a model capable of being replicated nationally.

Agents noted, as an advantage of the Scheme, that it has raised the profile of rural arts. The Scheme has succeeded in one of its most important objectives, albeit that the extent of that success is difficult to measure. In this sense the Scheme has, for agents, brought advantages to CGF itself, enhancing its profile and reputation as a Trust. This is by no means a cynical conclusion; if the Scheme does not raise awareness and respect in CGF, there is little prospect for the Foundation being able to argue a convincing funding case to others.

However, as many agents pragmatically recognise, no matter how golden (ethically and financially) the goose may be, the Foundation, like any other Trust, cannot guarantee infinite fecundity. Most Trusts, CGF included, operate within an ethos where funding goals must needs change after a period of 'prioritising'. The support is there in the first instance as an instrument for raising the profile of a certain cause through demonstrating the positive benefits which can be accrued through a reasonable measure of assistance, in the hope that as a result other players will consider it more seriously within their own agenda. To put it another way, Trust funding can serve an extremely important catalytic role in focusing attention not only on the problems of neglected sections of society, but on their latent resources. As a consequence, the disadvantaged can move a bit nearer the mainstreams of policy and funding.

Other benefits

Other benefits of the Scheme, for the agents, included: the raising of the profile of arts locally and nationally which could be part of a strategic approach to rural arts development, and the manner in which the Scheme enabled people to learn about the place they live in – for example, to become aware of its lack of facilities for disabled people.

Others saw as an important benefit the opportunity created by the Scheme for agents to develop new partnerships between local funders. Certainly, while the forging of partnerships is still in its infancy in most agencies, the crucial task of co-operative working has begun in many places.

End products, as well as process, were seen as valuable; a video, a parish map, a piece of music which were tangible legacies, some with economic value. Better environments, perhaps due to the creation of a piece of public art in an otherwise unprepossessing locale, were also cited. The state of affairs, brought about by the Scheme, where enthusiastic local people do not have to subsidise their own projects completely, was another benefit listed.

One agent summarised succinctly a latent theme running through the general attitude of her colleagues to the Scheme: 'It challenges us to be positive'.

2 Disadvantages of the agency Scheme

Restrictive criteria

For the agents, by far the greatest disadvantage of the Scheme is the restriction on who can participate as predicated by the guidelines. This, in a context of very limited alternative sources of funding for rural arts at local level, is a natural enough complaint and elsewhere, in their detailed comments on guidelines, agents recognise that while this may be poor consolation for their deprived communities, Schemes must have guidelines, and therefore, regrettably, exclusions (however they may argue about the particular exclusions). The alternative is a fast siphoning of CGF's limited resources, with the added danger that the more advanced or 'professional' groups, rather than the most disadvantaged, may get first to what money there is.

Low level of funding

Some agents complain that there is never enough money. If the criteria were less restrictive there would, of course, be even less money. CGF's experience is that they have not had demands for increases in funding. Agents may argue that they do not ask for more because they are aware that the Foundation has set down certain limits to the amounts they can receive. It can be argued that Schemes, especially Trust-funded programmes, have a kind of natural ceiling; the actual volume of projects coming forward for funding, as documented elsewhere in this report, would seem, when averaged out, to support this view. In other words, the volume does not change drastically from one year to the next unless there are other specific factors at work, for example, the presence or absence of a development worker. In fact, there tends to be a tailing off after the initial year in the volume of applications.

However, such evidence needs to be viewed with caution. Agents are aware that they have only a limited sum available and so gear their selection to meet that sum, rather than the level of need or demand within their particular area. In addition, some agencies have effective support systems which enable them to embed the CGF Scheme within larger and less restricted programmes. Some agents help projects to locate other sources of funding to make up the package they need to operate the project. The appropriateness of the level of CGF funding is, therefore, masked and hence difficult to measure. Conversely, the particular context of the agency may not be such that it can connect easily with other systems of support, for example, development funding or skills training. So a situation may result where, with the best will in the world on

the part of the agents to get funding to their local communities, the CGF grant aid may actually be underspent.

Another agent felt that more work could have been done by the Foundation to obtain European funding for the Scheme. There is some merit in this criticism, but it should be borne in mind that, apart from the constraints on CGF mentioned above, not all areas would be able to benefit from European Structural Funds and even if they were, there is a limited timescale here too.

One further question relates to finance. One agent sees as a disadvantage CGF's lack of recognition of the real costs involved in delivering the Scheme. By this is meant, I think, the 'invisible' contribution made by the host agency and, in some cases by other players who support the Scheme in kind through core funding or development work or matching project funding. The comment is an important one in that it highlights the fact that a lot more money is actually spent on rural arts than is set down statistically. It can be argued that the presence of the CGF Scheme acts as an important lever to some further arts spending in rural areas, though other players may equally argue that their work acts as the lever on CGF.

I think there is no doubt that CGF is extremely appreciative of the contribution of the host agencies, and indeed of other players funding or supporting rural arts in kind. But the real extent of this contribution needs to be quantified in order to use this to persuade those who are not yet on side that it is time they shared the burden with those who have already given so much, often without recognition or praise.

The contribution of the project participants in the provision of rural arts and the raising of the profile of, and understanding of, rural arts is a very significant part of that quantification. It is easy to regard project participants as merely passive consumers of scarce funding; hundreds of groups, thousands of individuals, voluntarily give up their time to enhance their communities, to stimulate culture and development in their own localities. Nobody pays them, and yet without these individuals and groups there would be much less vitality in rural communities, to say nothing of the economic benefits they draw into their local areas through their projects.

Lack of recognition of development work

Many agents see a latent connection between development work and funding. They can fund only what they or others have had time to develop. If there were more development money available, more projects would be coming forward for funding.

The conventional wisdom in community development and arts work would seem to be that it is unwise to allocate huge sums of money to small groups

when they are just starting out. While there is certainly evidence to suggest that the convention is wise, this is as much to do with the reluctance of funders to risk large sums on unknown quantities as it is to the lack of demand for large sums by participants; who are after all, conditioned to expect that they must tailor their project to suit the purses of the funders rather than their own aspirations. If large and consistent sums of money were available, might it be that the necessary training and education towards imaginative ideas, skills development and project management would occur? This, it could be argued, is why the professional arts become professional. The question is not raised mischievously but rather to point up a more radical view of the connection between art and economics.

The professional arts have greater prestige, because they are professional, and can therefore command greater resources. The greater their resources, the more powerful is their political influence. There are two ways out of this charmed circle; one is gradually to professionalise the marginal arts and usher them towards the centre. Inevitably, something and somebody has to move out to make room, doubtless, accompanied by strongly worded declamations from vested interests and purists who would view such derogation from the grass roots, voluntary character of marginal arts as disastrous. Alternatively, those within the circle leave their fixed positions and begin to learn from the marginal, and by implication, share more resources. It might be contended that, in the past, the occupants at the centre tended to regard the margins primarily as a source of inspiration or adjunctive material (off to Devon/Derry/Dornock for a quick raid on the inarticulate, back for afternoon tea). I am suggesting a rather more evenly balanced exchange. This in turn, might provoke more than passing attention by other players in the rural field, who, grasping the heightened seriousness and dynamism of rural arts, may increase their investment. In other words, new partnerships, mutually supportive, could emerge.

The question of agents' time is, like the question of the level of funding, a complex one. Some agents see the limitation on the time they can spend on the Scheme, even given extensions of the time they thought they would be spending, as a disadvantage. Elsewhere in their responses, agents express their strong conviction in the potential of the Scheme and, equally, their frustration that they cannot do more to develop it because of constraints on time. This is a situation not easy of solution. CGF does allocate a figure towards administration for the host agency, but it can only expect so much from the agents; they do, after all, have other work pressing upon them. The real solution would be more likely to lie in a substantially increased level of participation and support from other players, including those in the arts world, resulting in either more co-ordinated commitment to the Scheme or

the development of similar Schemes by other players which would help take the pressure off the agents.

However, we need to bear in mind here one agent's view that the Scheme has a low profile and status nationally. While this would not appear to be the general view, we must nonetheless ask why other players are not more supportive. Perhaps agents are asking for the sun and moon and other players, both locally and nationally, are doing what they can, or perhaps CGF needs to be more vigorous in its national promotion of the Scheme; Trusts tend to be over modest, a failing that can rarely be laid at the door of statutory bodies and the private sector. If the Scheme had a higher profile it would, as a result, be easier to lobby other players, positively to play their part.

Exhortations to duty and responsibility are sometimes easy to refute with the argument that we would if we could but we don't have the funds. Why they don't have the funds for rural arts and do have the funds for certain other budget items, is, of course, a difficult question (pointing angrily to a senior official's swanky car as he laments fiscal constraint will not necessarily render that official any more open-handed). Demonstrable success, on the other hand, is likely to be more persuasive. This would help to address another agent's dismay that no major body is likely to take up the Scheme; its disadvantage being its lack of transferability.

Lack of partnerships

Another agent cites as a disadvantage the failure to work out a set of partnerships (to carry the Scheme beyond CGF's limited timescale) at the inception. Most successful partnerships have evolved over quite a long period of time (two or three years), and partners will only go on contributing because they see the demonstrable advantages of being involved in a particular Scheme with practical, realistic goals and where trust, mutual benefit and credibility have been built. Part of the rationale for having an agency Scheme in the first place is, I assume, because CGF recognised that it had neither the resources nor the expertise at local level to formulate partnerships. Its role should be to persuade the key players to decant the resources down through the system to local level. Agents themselves are best placed to facilitate the particular working out of the partnerships.

6 The future of the Scheme – conclusions

1 From present to future

Does the Scheme have a future?

Perhaps surprisingly, not one agent indicated any desire to stop being an agent. The Scheme is seen as a vocation rather than a burdensome task. This should certainly be a great source of encouragement to both clients and CGF and, I believe, bears witness in a very clear way to the dedication of the agents and their unwillingness to deprive their own constituents of the Scheme, even though they are well aware of the difficulties in operating it.

Some agents suggest continuance with modifications, and one agent argues that it is only as a long term Scheme that the real potential would be realised. We need to remind ourselves that real development takes time and that the Scheme has not been operating for very long. All the more reason, then, that CGF's funding should be taken over by other bodies; the real potential would then be realised.

Key features of the ideal agency Scheme

The key features identified by agents are:

Localised or devolved structure

- devolved, localised structure reflecting local needs
- good knowledge of local community
- driven by local people
- strong local profile

Flexible, unbureaucratic approach

- flexibility and adaptability, lack of bureaucracy
- quick response

Developmental support from agents

- the ability to provide support and advice, for example, through personal interviews with all applicants

Higher funding

- higher grant ceiling
- more funding for documentation

- recognition that workers need to be paid for development time/support
- commission basis for administering the Scheme

Strategic partnership approach with other players
- interfaced strategy at county level between players
- plural funding
- coherent, representative panel structure
- more time for research and development

Slightly less restrictive criteria
- slightly less restrictive guidelines, for example, to include youth

Integrity
- faithfulness to original aspirations

Perhaps reassuringly, the actual CGF Scheme for agents closely mirrors in its priorities what agents describe as the ideal, even though they would like to see a few of its disadvantages redressed. So, for instance, there could be a little more money and (paid) development time to spend both with participants and in working to forge funding partnerships, which would be planned more strategically, thus removing some of the hand-to-mouth character of many of the current operations. They would also welcome more generously framed criteria.

None of the agents calls for a radical rethink of the agency Scheme, but rather for the continuance of it with some minor structural modifications. Most of these would, I believe, be relatively easy to implement. The area of greatest difficulty is of course the development and in some cases creation of funding and policy partnerships at a level sufficiently local to satisfy the devolutionist ethos of the Scheme, but at a strategic enough level to be able to tap into the kind of funding needed.

On the face of it, the actual amount needed in the average agency is about £5,000 per year; not a huge sum when looked at from the Brobdignagian regional perspective, but perhaps quite huge viewed from the Lilliput of the parish council.

Regional bodies, national players like the Rural Development Commission and the private sector may respond that if they were once to become involved the demand would soon mushroom to proportions that they simply could not sustain. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that the experience of CGF has not reflected this. Applications to become agents have not flooded over the desk, nor have agents demanded here, or in private negotiations with CGF, vast increases in their budgets.

While, as I have argued above, a lot more money targeted towards redressing the imbalances between urban and rural funding could make a significant

long-term difference, at the very least the current level of expenditure could be achieved by relatively modest outlay by sources other than CGF, who, after all, has initiated the Scheme, monitored, supported and refined it.

The total financial contribution to the Scheme at the end of 1994 was £94,000. The projected expenditure by the end of 1996 will be in the region of £555,000. This, I believe, constitutes a pretty vigorous kick-start and would, I suspect, bear favourable comparison with funding for rural arts by other bodies.

2 Strategic options

Partnership

Agents are all agreed that the Scheme should continue for as long as possible and should be phased out gradually rather than suddenly stopped. This view is no doubt influenced by a certain pessimism among them about the willingness of others to take up the baton carried so steadfastly by CGF.

In general, agents favour a multiple (inter-agency) funding approach. The most frequently cited partners were Regional Arts Boards with county and district councils. A number of agents also favoured involvement by rural development bodies, though alert to the possible overbalancing of the Scheme towards social objectives at the expense of aesthetic objectives. The two, of course are not inherently contradictory in rural society as I have tried to argue, quite the contrary is the case.

One agent suggested other partners; or example the European Union or the National Lottery if sufficient project and development funds could be ringfenced from the overwhelming bias towards capital-based projects, or as a complementary capital funding source to project and development funding from other sources.

One model suggested by two of the agents was the Rural Action Initiative, which is structurally inter-agency in character and has, for agents, the added attraction of a 12.5% fee to agents. CGF and the other players should examine this model seriously.

A persuading role for CGF?

Over 50% of agents believe that CGF should adopt a lobbying role to try and persuade other bodies and organisations to take over the Scheme. Around 40% think that this report (and the good practice handbook) are important instruments for informing and perhaps influencing other potential players through demonstrating the advantages and benefits of the Scheme as an evolving model of good practice and as a catalyst for arts development.

Conclusion

This report has, I believe, demonstrated how a locally devolved rural community arts Scheme operates. That the various models evolved by each agency function with a very considerable degree of success illustrates clearly that such a concept not only works but is creating a legacy of real benefit to rural communities.

I have presented an analysis of the Scheme, incorporating the criticisms of both agents and participants. I have not attempted to hide its deficiencies. None of those involved in the working of the Scheme are in any way complacent about it. There is room for improvement, and I have tried to identify adjustments which would render the Scheme more effective. But the overwhelming consensus among agents, panels and participants is that the Scheme should continue with minor rather than major reform.

Does the Scheme have a future beyond CGF's funding? It is clear from the evidence presented that it should, for it is excellent value for money. Furthermore, the evidence clearly indicates that it should be extended to cover the whole of rural Britain. If the Scheme is to have a future, the stated support of rural arts at policy level must be converted into practice, both at national and local level. The Scheme's great virtues are its unique local character and therefore its flexibility in responding to local circumstances and the needs of local people. Therefore, local models of partnerships and integration need to be built to match a regional and national commitment.

The working operation of the Scheme has shown that there is no evidence to support the view that any particular local body is necessarily best able to deliver the Scheme. Sometimes the Local Authority is the best choice, sometimes the Rural Community Council, sometimes an independent arts organisation; the permutations are very numerous. CGF has wisely left it to those who are on the ground to select themselves. This does not, however, remove the responsibility from other local bodies. Indeed they should be far more willing to recognise that the lead or host organisation needs support. And again, this is not merely an exhortation to duty, but rather a call to appreciate the very positive benefits of becoming involved in local partnerships. Where such models have been developed, life becomes easier as a result, and also more imaginative. And local people reap the rewards.

Rural communities must help themselves and they can only do so by pulling together. Arts activities, properly supported, hugely enhance the sustainability of the rural world. New alliances, drawing on the whole range of actors in a rural community, focused around arts, can in turn create models for integration in other realms.

It would indeed be a tragedy if the exciting challenges posed by the Scheme

were not to be met. If the rural world is to survive as a living place, those beyond it as well as those within it must demonstrate their faith in its validity. We have the talent; let's flaunt it.

Appendix 1 Composition of Rural Arts Consultation Group

The Venerable Richard Lewis *Archdeacon of Ludlow and member of Archbishops' Commission on Rural Areas*

Alistair Anderson *Folk musician*

Sarah Buchanan *Head, Rural Unit, National Council for Voluntary Organisations*

Sue Clifford *Founder, Common Ground*

Eirwen Hopkins *Welsh Language Theatre Director*

Arwel Jones *Director, Mid Wales Festival of the Countryside (Cynefin)*

Chrissie Poulter *Head, Expressive Arts, Accrington and Rossendale College*

Clive Redshaw *Assistant Director of Planning, North Kesteven District Council*

Helen Thomson *Rural Development Commission*

John Watt *Highlands and Islands Development Board*

Diana Johnson *Freelance Arts Consultant*

Appendix 2 Questionnaire to agents

Name of agent

Address, telephone and fax

1 The terrain

(a) Where is your agency based?

(b) What is the size of the area you work in as an agent?

(c) What is the nature of your terrain? (dispersed population, village/town, mixed)

(d) Do your clients have any common characteristics? (indigenous, incomers, social class, age profile, occupation)

(e) How long has the Scheme been operating in your 'patch'?

2 Projects funded (and not funded)

(a) How many projects do you fund each year? (give breakdown for each year, if applicable)

(b) How many projects do you turn down? (breakdown as above)

(c) Is there a 'honeypot effect' in your area (are the same or similar projects applying each year?)

(d) Are there any common characteristics throughout the projects? (eg by art form, methodology)

(e) Are the projects generally innovative or imitative?

(f) Are the projects of as high a standard aesthetically as you would wish?

(g) Are the projects generated mainly by community/voluntary groups or by artists?

(h) How many of your projects have a 'professional' artist associated with them?

(i) How many of your projects have a training or educational element ? If so, please give examples

(j) Is there an average timescale or can this vary widely? Please comment

(k) Is 'a sense of place' reflected? If so how? (see also 3)

(l) How do the clients document their projects? (Is there a gap between what they are asked to do and what they really do?)

(m) How do clients evaluate their projects? (would there be any recording of methodology, best practice, hiccups and obstacles)

(n) Are the projects normally funded by CGF alone or by a consortium of funders? (please specify)

3 Your work as an agent

(a) How much time do you spend working on the Scheme each year (per week, per month, whichever is most relevant)

(b) How much time would you allocate to each application (or does this depend entirely on the particular project?)

(c) Does this exceed your initial expectations? If so by how much?

(d) Do you undertake any development work in your role as agent?

(e) If so, is this in the area of:
disseminating and processing information to clients on funding (eg other sources of funding)
working with clients to develop the aesthetic side of the project
working with clients to develop the organisational side
(Please feel free to comment)

(f) If you are undertaking development work, do you feel this results in better projects?

(g) Do you think CGF recognises sufficiently the shift (since the nineteenth century) in the disbursement of Trust funding from 'giving' to 'empowering'/self help ? (What was traditionally 'administration' may now be 'development')

(h) Are there ways in which CGF should be responding and is not? (see also 4)

(i) How do you decide who gets funding; describe your own local mechanism (eg panel made up of …, meeting every …)

(j) How long does it take for an application to be processed?

(k) How do you circulate information about the Scheme? (please indicate also whether you write and design the leaflet in-house or farm this out to a professional designer/copywriter, and rationale and cost of this)

(l) To whom do you circulate the information? Has this changed during your time?

(m) What is the rate of response? Has this changed during your time?

(n) Do you find the guidelines constricting or ambivalent? If so, how do you respond to this?

(o) Do you have any secretarial/administrative assistance in running the Scheme?

(p) How do you document the Scheme?

(q) How do you evaluate the success of the Scheme?

(r) Would you wish to continue being an agent? If not why not? (Your organisation may not be suitable, or you may feel a two or three year span is long enough)

(s) How would the Scheme continue if you were not there?

4 Who else is involved?

(a) Who else is funding/developing rural arts in your 'patch' (please specify what kind of help they give)

(b) Do you work through any kind of partnership approach?

(c) What is your view of the other players (please be frank! and use extra sheets, if necessary, to applaud or criticise)

(d) Do you think there are potential players who are not yet 'on side'?

(e) If so, why are they not? (This may well be because you do not have the development time to get them onto the pitch, never mind onto the same team)

(f) Do you feel there is an adequate system of support in your area for what you are doing? (please comment)

(g) Do you think CGF has a role to play here?

5 General observations

(a) What do you think are the greatest disadvantages of the Agency Scheme?

(b) What do you think are its greatest advantages?

(c) What do you think is the role of community development/rural development in the Scheme?

(d) What are the economic benefits of the Scheme? (and who benefits?)

(e) What are the aesthetic benefits of the Scheme (and who benefits?)

(f) What are the social benefits of the Scheme? (and who benefits?)

(g) Are there any other benefits? (if so, please list)

(h) Is the level of CGF funding appropriate?

(i) What is the best project (highly groovy, deeply meaningful, aesthetically dynamite/classically beautiful) you have funded? (describe the project briefly in terms of content, location, who was involved, methodology; please feel free to attach a case study)

(j) What is the worst (accident waiting for place to happen) project you have ever funded (as above)

6 If we ruled the world – the future for the Scheme

(a) Does the Scheme have a future? short-term, mid-term, long-term?

(b) Should CGF continue to support the Scheme and for how long?

(c) What would be the key features of your ideal Agency Scheme?

(d) If CGF had to shift its funding priorities, how would you envisage the Scheme continuing, if at all? (please indicate potential partners, methodology)

(e) How do you think CGF should proceed if it had to shift funding priorities? What role could it play in passing on the Scheme and the lessons gained and to whom should the Foundation be talking?

Please feel free to comment on any other issues not covered by the above questions.

We are extremely grateful to you for participating in this questionnaire.

Appendix 3 Questionnaire to participants

1 How did you find out about the Scheme?

2 How often have you participated in the Scheme?

3 Did the CGF agent help you with:
   (a) basic information
   (b) filling in the form
   (c) developing the idea for the project
   (d) the artistic side of the project
   (e) the organisational side of the project
   (f) getting other sources of funding (please indicate whether or not you got other sources of funding besides the grant from the Gulbenkian Foundation).

4 How much time did the agent spend working with your group (indicate if there was more than one session with your group)?

5 Did you have any professional artists working with your project?
   If yes:
   (a) What did you think of them?
   (b) Did you feel that the artist took over or encouraged you to learn new skills?
   (c) Did you think the project benefited from having an artist working with you?

   If not:
   (d) Why? (did no-one suggest it or did the group decide not to use an artist or was an artist not available)
   (e) Do you think the project would have benefited from using an artist? If so how?

6 Would you do another project?

7 What do you think were the best and worst features of your project?

8 What do you think are the best and worst features of the Agency Scheme?

9 Were you satisfied with the help you got from the agent?

10 Please describe your project as fully as possible:

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Did we do that?

An evaluation of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's Rural Arts Agency Scheme

'At the Foundation we wanted very much to help rural people rediscover or establish the values and sense of community which appeared to have been both lost and lamented. We realised that significant change required either great sums of money or what used to be called a "grass roots approach". While resisting the "grass roots" terminology on grounds of accidental humour and urban political associations, we chose to adopt a policy in which local people made local choices and decisions about how best the Foundation could help them. This we did by appointing agents with knowledge of specific places to make grants for local arts activities.'

Fiona Ellis
formerly Assistant Director, Arts
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, UK branch

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£4.95

ISBN 0-903319-72-1

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