

Visual Artists Ireland Professional Development Programme – Northern Ireland

Evaluation & Future Directions

Liz Lennon. Evaluator. 2011

1 Executive Summary	3
2 Introduction & Evaluation Approach	5
3. Artists at the centre – their professional lives	7
<i>3.1 Introduction</i>	7
<i>3.2 Artists at the centre of the VAI PDP</i>	8
<i>3.3 Artists Responses to the Evaluation Surveys</i>	10
4. Great Practice Principles	15
5. Past to Present – VAI Professional Development Programme	17
<i>5.1 Introduction</i>	17
<i>5.2 How Artists Lives Influence the VAI PDP</i>	17
<i>5.3 VAI PDP - Courses, Critiques & Discussions</i>	18
<i>5.4 VAI PDP – Artists & Facilitators Feedback</i>	19
<i>5.5. VAI PDP – Great Practice Principles</i>	31
6. Past to Present VAI PDP Partnerships	35
<i>6.1 Introduction</i>	35
<i>6.2 VAI PDP Partnerships</i>	35
<i>6.3 VAI PDP Partnerships – Great Practice Principles</i>	36
7. Future Directions – VAI Professional Development Programme	41
<i>7.1 Introduction</i>	41
<i>7.2 Developing the VAI PDP in Northern Ireland</i>	43
<i>7.3 Pricing the VAI PDP</i>	49
<i>7.3 Marketing & Communicating the VAI PDP</i>	49
<i>7.4 Coordinating VAI PDP</i>	50
8. Future Directions - VAI PDP Partnerships	51
<i>8.1 Introduction</i>	51
<i>8.2 - Building & Sustaining the Partnerships</i>	51
9. A VAI PDP Action Plan	53

1 Executive Summary

Visual Artists Ireland commissioned an external evaluation of their Artists Professional Development Programme [PDP] in Northern Ireland.

A number of online surveys were sent to artists, facilitators and VAI PDP partners. The evaluator also interviewed a number of artists and partners as well as VAI Education Officer and VAI CEO.

Both the surveys and interviews revealed a very positive response to the current programme of events that include 1 day face to face workshops; small group critiques and large group discussion events on contemporary arts practice topics.

A large number of artists who responded to the survey indicated that:

- The key barriers to their participation in any form of professional development were distance, time and cost.
- Ongoing professional development is seen as important to nearly all the artists.
- Artists access information, knowledge and skills in a range of ways – from each other formally and informally; from arts and community organisations and through accredited courses; on and offline; and through their own practice in their studios.

Artists attended professional development programmes to:

- 80% to gain information to improve their capacity to earn a living.
- 60% to improve professional networks and meet other artists.

The majority of artists who attended events and responded to the survey indicated that they were happy with all key elements of VAI PDP:

- 100% were satisfied to highly satisfied with their VAI PDP NI experience.
- 96% were happy with VAI pricing and 90% happy with the venues.
- 97% said that trainers were very good to excellent.
- 97% felt the learning content was high.
- 98% said that the VAI PDP NI met their professional development needs.

Artists self assessed their perception of the impact of the VAI PDP NI :

- Satisfaction – 100%
- Knowledge – 38% [a lot]; 62% [somewhat]
- Skills – 19% [considerable]; 67% [some]; 14% [none. Artists added comments that indicated the event they attended wasn't about direct skill development]
- Earning Capacity – 7% [considerable]; 51% [some]; 42% [none. Artists added comments that indicated the event did not directly impact on their earning capacity but could have an indirect effect over time]

When artists were asked their preferred timing for workshops 54% wanted 1 day workshops with 66% indicating they would come to a series of 1 day workshops if they were building on a relevant learning theme. 60% of artists would attend Saturday workshops. 90% were interested in trialling webinars.

Artists indicated the following areas to make the VAI PDP NI even better:

- Create opportunity for artists to meet informally after an event. [update- VAI will be building an hour onto events for artists to chat and network informally]
- Develop a mentoring scheme. [update – VAI will be researching international models of mentoring; skill sharing and peer to peer support networks through 2012]
- More workshops.
- Clearer information on the VAI site. [update – there is now a Northern Ireland stream on the site and other improvements are planned through 2011 and 2012]
- Sessions on career development and progression and how to market and promote work. [update – VAI has committed to developing a Surviving & Thriving as an Artist programme to launch by the end of 2012; they will also develop the Artists Professional Practice Plan template and 2 day workshop described in this report]
- Attract more students. [update – a scheduled series of talks will be developed for 2012 in universities]

There are a number of areas for development identified in this report that the **VAI have already moved to action**:

- Reassessing pricing for non members and providing more rewards for members.
- Create an annual gathering for artists that meets a range of needs identified in this evaluation.
- Create a marketing plan for the VAI PDP.
- Develop a recognition symbol and package for participants and partners.
- Develop clear partnership agreements and plans.
- Redesign the VAI site as an easier to use knowledge space.
- Provide more opportunities for whole of VAI staff communication gatherings and provide more external expertise for areas such as marketing.

VAI PDP's success is based on a range of good practice principles as well as very effective partnerships with organisations across Northern Ireland. Partners indicated that they were very happy with the nature and results of their partnerships with VAI.

The future of VAI PDP in Northern Ireland looks positive. There are opportunities to consolidate and grow the existing programme and develop new events on and offline that will provide artists with very effective professional development opportunities.

The artist is always at the centre of VAI Professional Development Programme focus in the present and into the future.

This report has a number of sections:

1. Executive Summary
2. Introduction & Evaluation Approach
3. Artists at the centre – their professional lives
4. Great Practice Principles
5. Past to Present – VAI Professional Development Programme
6. Past to Present – VAI PDP Partnerships
7. Future Directions – VAI Professional Development Programme
8. Future Directions – VAI PDP Partnerships
9. A VAI PDP Action Plan

2 Introduction & Evaluation Approach

Visual Artists Ireland commissioned an evaluation of their Northern Ireland Artists Professional Development Programme [PDP] with a view to:

- Exploring the views of key stakeholders
- Identifying elements of good practice
- Developing ideas regarding the future potential and direction of the PDP

The evaluation approach taken is underpinned by a number of principles that have been garnered from my 25 years of working in and with organisations:

- **The evaluator is only one piece of the evaluation tapestry** – evaluators bring experience to the process of evaluation as well as data analysis/synthesis and report writing skills. They are responsible for ensuring that as many strands of the story of a programme are brought to the tapestry.
- **People can be experts in their own experience** – people know when processes are working and they often have a lot of good ideas regarding future developments. It's the evaluator's role to respect that experience and find ways to capture people's opinions and suggestions.
- **Evaluations are never objective** – an evaluator is never truly objective and brings their own experience and filters to the process. That's why it's important to involve as many people as possible in the process as well as a range of data collection methods.
- **Qualitative & Quantitative data gathering methods are vital** – numbers without context and background information can be misleading and stories without some sense of numbers and framework can be confusing. When numbers are combined with contextual information then an evaluation begins to have both depth and breadth.
- **The organisations clients/customers are at the core** – if we start with the clients at the centre of the process then everything else can become linked and integrated to that core. Every decision, action and reflection can then be focused on ensuring the best services to meet the needs and strengths of the client. In this case, visual artists are at the core.
- **Great Practice Principles should underpin the process** – it's important to have a sense of the practice principles that inform a programme, process and/or organisation. In this evaluation I created a series of great practice elements for the 2 core areas of the evaluation – The Programme and The Partnerships. These elements were then used in surveys and interviews to gain peoples views of how well [or not] good practice was in place.
- **Evaluations are a vital opportunity to build relationships and test ideas** – an evaluation isn't just about a reflection on the past and present, it is a great opportunity to test potentials and possibilities with people. It's also a time when people can refocus their goals and reengage their enthusiasm and other E Factors [energy; expenditure of a range of resources] for the programme.
- **Evaluation reports are organic documents that can act as action plans** – reports need to be more than a place to list findings. They need to

tell stories; reveal potentials; engage people's enthusiasm ... and provide practical and timely action statements so that the client can act on them.

Evaluation Methods

A range of methods were used to gather the data and information that inform this evaluation report: -

- **Quantitative** – 4 online surveys were created using Survey Monkey. One was sent to VAI PDP Partners in the process and one went to facilitators of sessions. A longer survey was created for artists who had attended VAI PDP sessions and a shorter survey for artists who had not attended. An email was sent to approx 270 artists [people who had enquired about the VAI PDP] explaining the evaluation and inviting them to complete one or other of the artist's surveys. Information from session evaluations as well as other internal data was gathered. 84 artists responded to their 2 surveys.
- **Qualitative** – A series of interviews were conducted with some of the VAI PDP partners; artists who had attended a number of sessions; Monica Flynn [education officer VAI PDP]; and Noel Kelly [Director VAI]. Reports on Artists lives and working conditions in Ireland were also gathered and a small online search regarding other visual arts PDP's was conducted.

I would like to acknowledge and thank all the people who took the time to contribute to this evaluation. Special mention and thanks to Monica Flynn [Education Officer] for all the time she gave to the process. Many thanks to Noel Kelly [VAI CEO] for contextualizing the VAI PDP NI within the VAI future vision.

3. Artists at the centre – their professional lives

3.1 Introduction

Any professional development programme [PDP] needs to be linked to the information, knowledge and skill needs and strengths of artists at every stage of their professional and artistic lives.

There is some debate in terms of how an artist's career can be categorized. Many artists themselves categorise their professional career span as:

- Emerging
- Mid Career
- Established

When an artist has reached these different stages is a matter of some discussion with some people attaching time definitions [e.g. emerging – first 5 years of career] while others attach achievement criteria [e.g. mid career – a number of solo shows; name recognition amongst peers].

It is not the role of this evaluator to define or categorise an artists career, although it would be an interesting topic for an artists gathering and further research.

The 2008 VAI report [*The Social, Economic & Fiscal Status of the Visual Artist in Ireland*](#) provides a useful insight into the professional lives of artists:

- 33% of artists earn less than 10000 euro a year from all their income earning activities, with a further 34% earning up to 25,000 euro.
- Many artists work 2 or 3 part time jobs.
- Lack of time and money are the two core reasons why artists cannot pursue their art full time.
- 74% of artists who had not worked fulltime on their main area of practice said they would like to.
- 72% have no private pension and 45% have no health insurance.
- 76% said their household had been in arrears over the last year while 54% said they saved some money for emergencies.
- 83% could not work as an artist without the added income provided by their partner with 62% of the artists being married or living with a partner.
- 83% of artists say that given the choice [and knowing the reality of life as an artist] they would still choose to be an artist.
- While earning an income was seen as the major difficulty for artists they also felt that gaining a profile and reputation was a major challenge for their professional lives. They also felt that being a professional artist in Ireland was viewed more as a hobby than a career.

3.2 Artists at the centre of the VAI PDP

Visual Artists Ireland [VAI] is the all Ireland body for professional visual artists. They provide resources for artists, initiate artistic projects & publications and act as advocates on behalf of artists.

There are a range of services that VAI provide to their clients:

- [VAI website](#)
- [Artists database](#)
- Artists Professional Development [Programme](#) [PDP]
- [Advocacy](#) on issues that affect artists lives
- [Info Pool](#)
- [Help Desk](#)
- [Equipment & Facilities](#)
- [Discount Scheme](#)
- [Insurance](#)
- [Printed Projects](#)
- [VAN - Visual Artists Newsheet](#)
- E Newsletter - Twice a week
- [The Common Room](#) – online networking for artists
- [VAI blog](#)

Artists are at the heart of VAI mission and VAI PDP ... as they should be.

When an organisation places clients at the centre of its focus then everything should be driven by their needs, capacities and hopes.

There are a number of other core elements needed to ensure that artists remain at the core of VAI PDP.

Programme

Partnership



Practice

Liz Lennon
2011

Practice Principles – Great Practice Principles need to be clarified so they can inform the development of both VAI Professional Development Programme [PDP] and the Partnerships that VAI has created to expand and embed the PDP. These principles will be detailed in Chapter 4.

Programme – VAI PDP is the core programme providing knowledge and skill development to visual artists in Northern Ireland. The Artists PDP is one of a range of services provided by VAI. The PDP currently provides learning and knowledge exchange opportunities through:

- A series of one day face to face seminars run in different parts of Northern Ireland. Each seminar can accommodate up to 15 people.
- Opportunities to meet and critique work.
- Larger half day presentations & discussions on a range of topics related to arts practice

Partnerships – VAI PDP could not happen in Northern Ireland without the participation of a range of partners. Partners have included:

- Arts Council NI
- Belfast Exposed - Belfast
- Digital Arts Studio- Belfast
- CAF [now merged with New Belfast Community Arts Initiative]
- Ards Art Centre - Newtownards
- Ards District Council - Newtownards
- Fermanagh District Council Arts Office
- The Void – Derry
- Strule Arts Centre – Omagh District Council
- Paragon Studios – Belfast
- Play Resource - Belfast

3.3 Artists Responses to the Evaluation Surveys

The responses to the 2 artist surveys in this evaluation were:

- 70 responses from artists who had attended VAI PDP sessions.
- 14 from artists who had not attended any VAI PDP sessions.

Gender of Artists

Nearly 80% of survey respondents who had attended VAI PDP sessions were women. The 14 respondents who hadn't attended VAI PDP sessions had a similar gender split.

Years as a professional artist

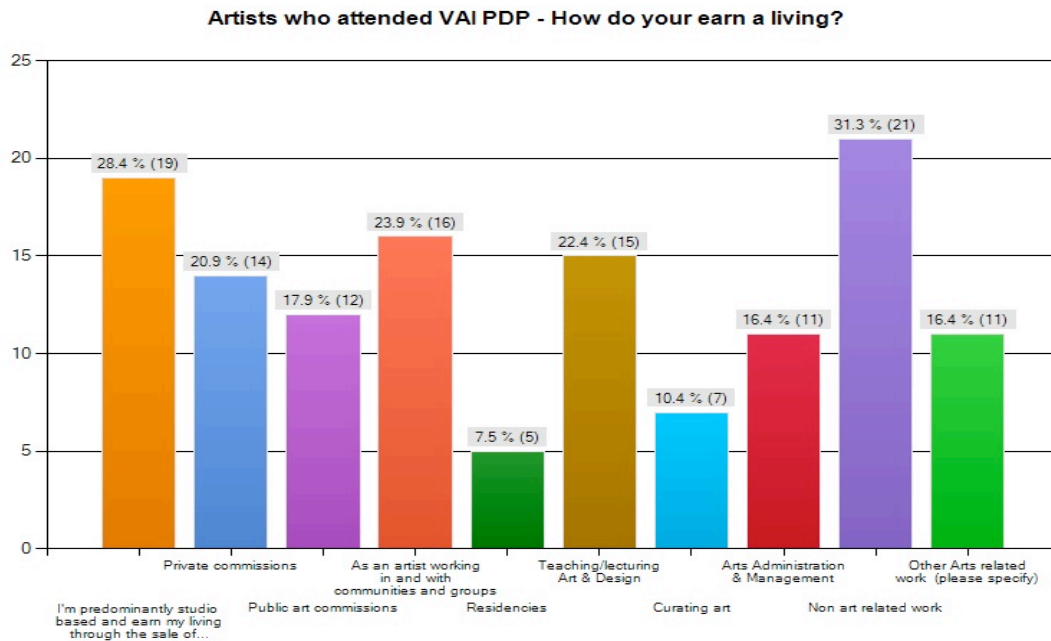
Number of years as an artist	Artists who attended VAI PDP	Artists who hadn't attended VAI PDP
0 - 5	17 [24%]	6 [43%]
6 -15	24 [34%]	2 [14%]
16 - 25	9 [13%]	5 [36%]
25+	13 [19%]	1 [7%]
NA	7 [10%]	0
Total	70	14

Membership of VAI

50% of artists who attended VAI PDP in Northern Ireland were members of VAI. The 35 people who aren't members gave the following reasons for non membership:

- Haven't got round to it - 15
- Can't afford it – 8
- No reason – 3
- Not a practising artist - 3
- Don't know the benefits of joining - 2
- Intend to join but just look at Opportunities on the VAI site - 1
- Mostly interested in the E Bulletin and you don't need to be a member to get it – 1
- Don't have an Arts Degree – 1
- Unable to attend events - 1

How Artists earn a living

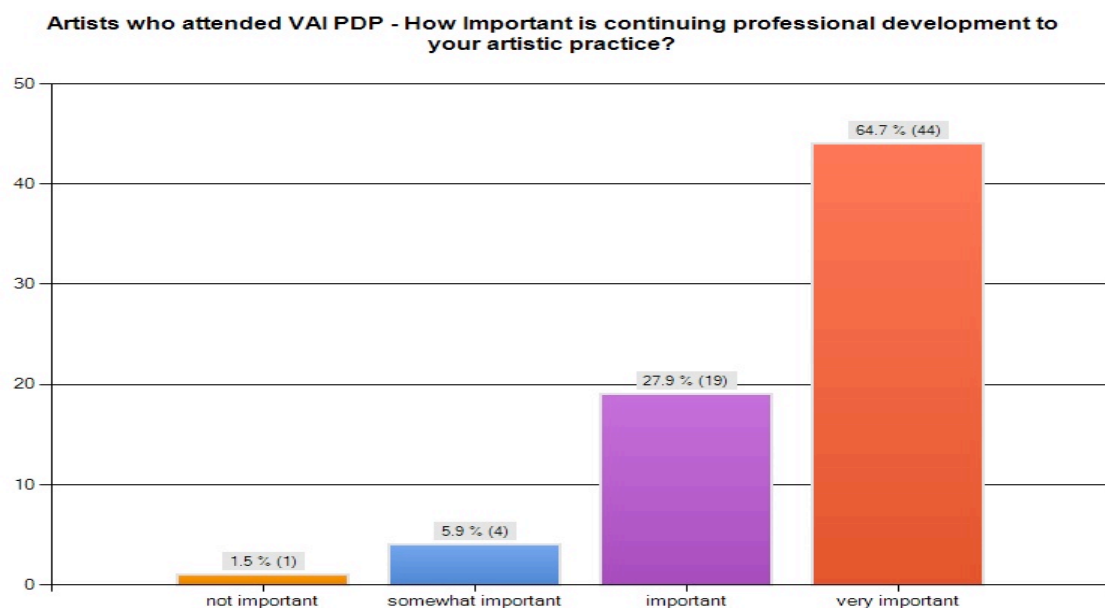


The results of this question mirrors the findings of other national surveys. It shows that artists earn a living through a range of arts and non-related arts jobs.

28.4% of the 70 artists said they earned their living predominantly from the sale of their art, while 31.3% earned some of their living through non art related work activities.

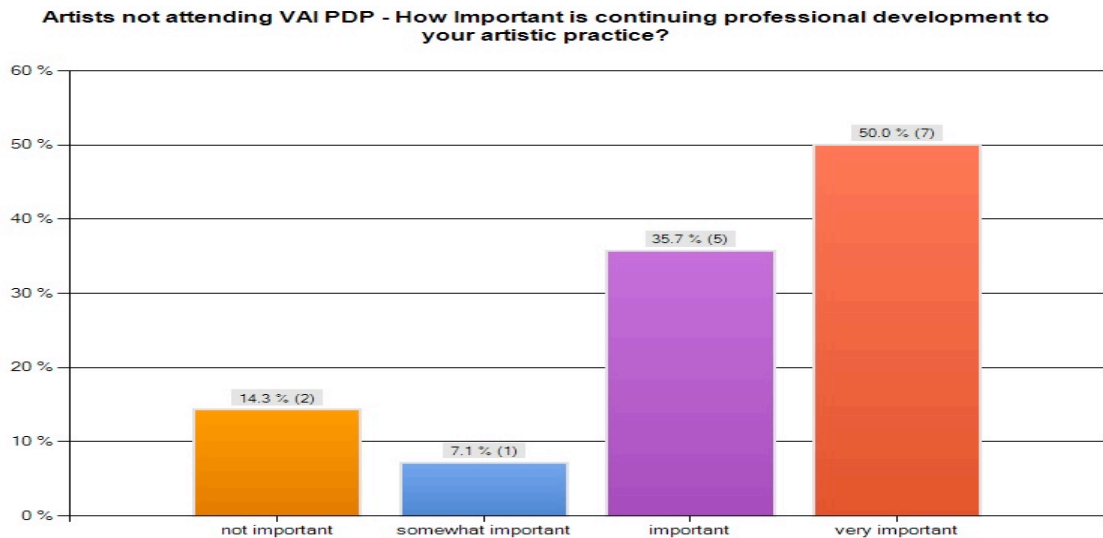
Nearly a quarter of artists earn a living by teaching and lecturing in the arts and/or as an artist working in and with communities.

Importance of Continued Professional Development



VAI Professional Development Programme NI – Evaluation & Future Directions

92.6% [63] of artists who attended VAI PDP felt that professional development was important to very important for their artistic practice.



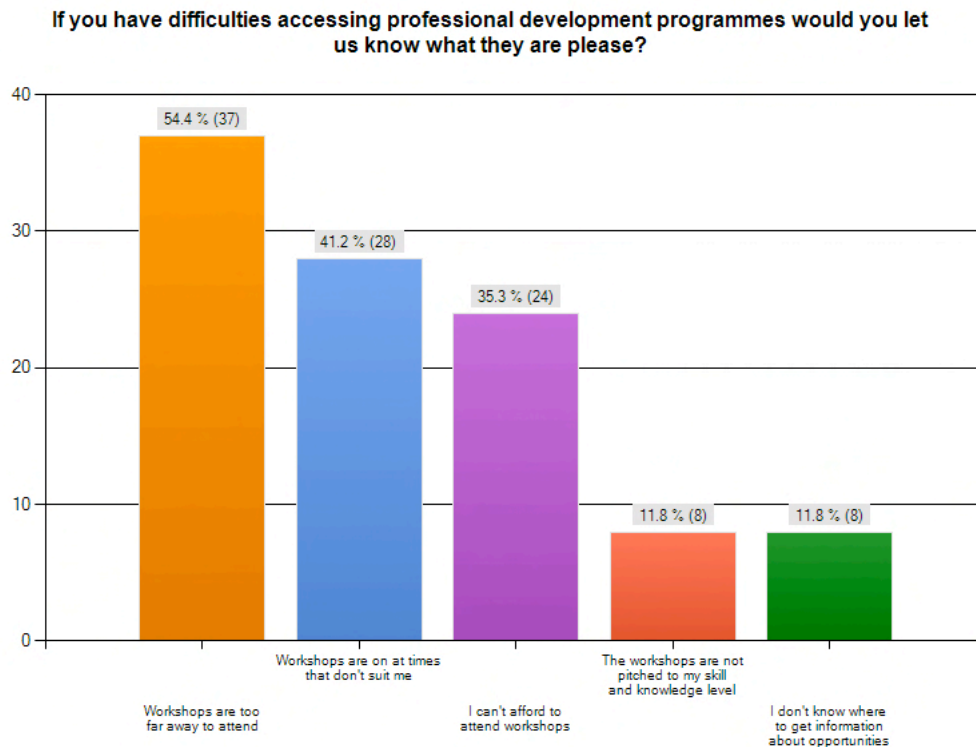
85.7% [12] people who completed the survey and had not attended VAI PDP said that continuing professional development was important or very important to them.

Ease of access to professional development opportunities

	Very Easy	Easy	Not Easy	Difficult	V. Difficult
Artists who have attended VAI PDP	1.5%	26.9%	55.7%	13.4%	1.5%
Artists Who have not attended VAI PDP	0	14.3%	71.4%	28.6%	0

The majority of artists stated that it was not easy/difficult to access professional opportunities to develop their artistic practice.

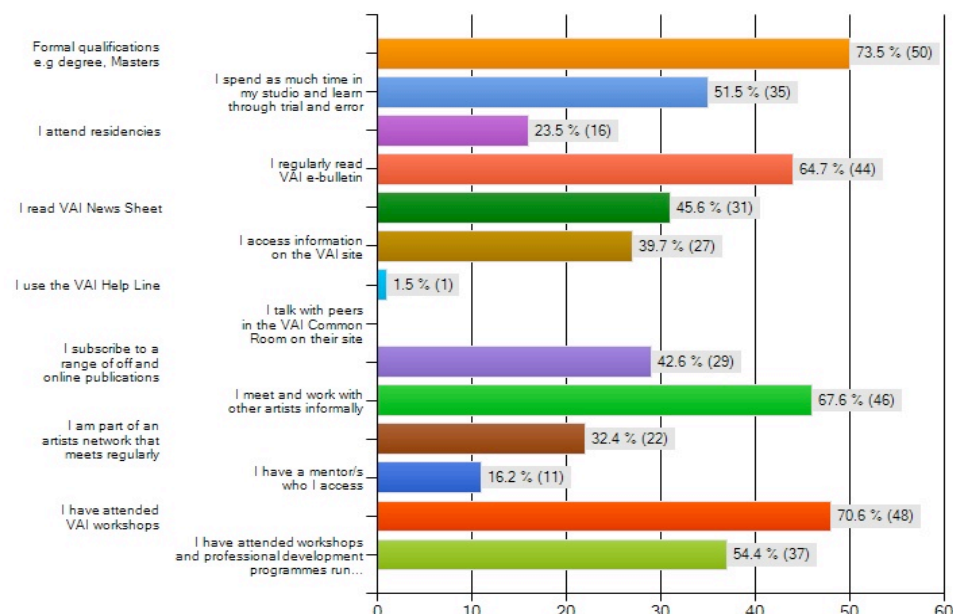
Key Barriers to accessing professional development opportunities



The 3 key barriers to participation in professional development opportunities are distance, time and money.

Range of professional development opportunities accessed in order to develop artistic practice

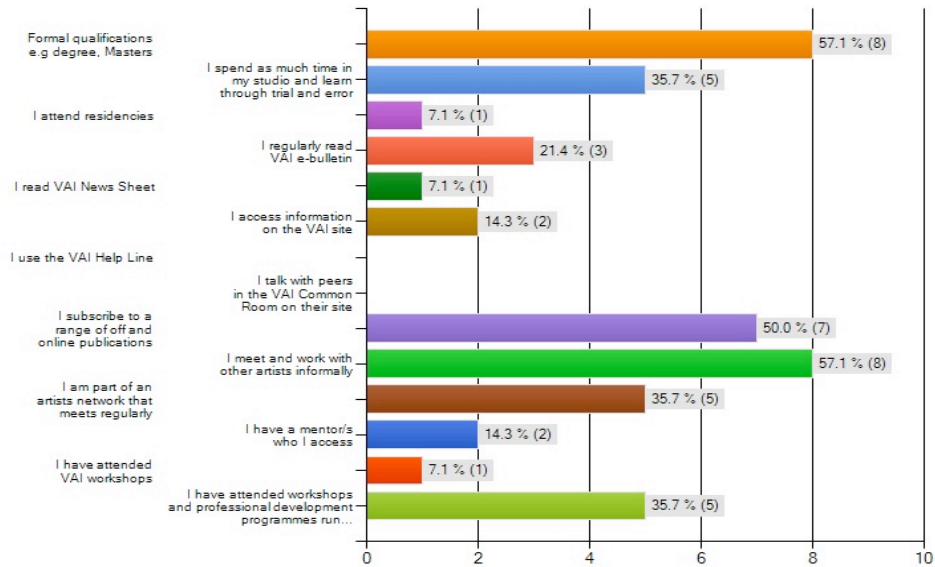
Artists attending VAI PDP - What kind of professional opportunities have you accessed to develop your artistic practice?



VAI Professional Development Programme NI – Evaluation & Future Directions

Many of the VAI services [e Bulletin; VAI site; VAN] are used by artists to develop their practice and nearly 70% said they meet and work informally with other artists. Not all artists completed this question.

Artists not attending VAI PDP - What kind of professional opportunities have you accessed to develop your artistic practice?



4. Great Practice Principles

In every process there are often conscious and unconscious principles that guide our practice.

When people work together there is a need to make those practice principles more explicit to avoid potential confusion and conflict.

I've called these **Great Practice Principles** because I believe that it's important to aspire beyond the easy and extend our reach.

These principles are underpinned by values that are learner/participant centred and based on the need to involve and explore the perspectives of a range of people and organisations.

The elements of each Great Practice Principle can be adapted to each situation – whether it be the development of an even better VAI Professional Development Programme or the creation of a productive partnership process.



Liz Lennon
2011

Context - It's all about taking the time to understand the spaces that people exist in – the context of their lives.

All the people and organisations involved with VAI and VAI PDP specifically are immersed and affected by their environments – be they – economic, political, learning, organisational, social, creative, spiritual, philosophical etc.

And these environments are governed by one constant – change.

Clarity - When someone is confused, mistaken and/or assuming something about another person, organisation, process, programme, idea ... then there's a need to move to clarity.

In any process there are a range of complex elements that require clarity in order for progress to be made – needs, strengths, dreams, roles, principles, plans, actions, timing, responsibilities, structures, reflection, progress.

Commitment - It's vital that people regularly explore the nature, depth and breadth of their commitment to a process and then share it with anyone that is involved.

Individuals and organisations will have a range of different skills, ideas, money, time, buildings, people, equipment, information, experience, networks, supports etc that they are willing and able to commit to a process, programme and/or project.

Communication - If people don't communicate with themselves and others then the potential for confusion and conflict rises.

Effective communication will be – timely, ongoing, process and solution focused, and involve a range of methods and forms of contact.

Creativity - This is all about being open to a range of mindsets and approaches ... exploring ideas/solutions in different ways ... taking risks ... being afraid, exhilarated and resilient.

Coordination - There's always a need for a framework within which people can explore and be creative. These Principles and some form of Organic Action Plan can act as a map for all the individuals working together.

Collaboration - It's the synergies that happen when people work together that can excite a process ... all the strengths, differences, challenges and visions that become evident. All the other principles will inform the collaborative process.

Celebration - There's a need to stop along the way to reflect, mark and celebrate progress ... even if it's not going the way everyone planned [and nothing ever goes as planned!].

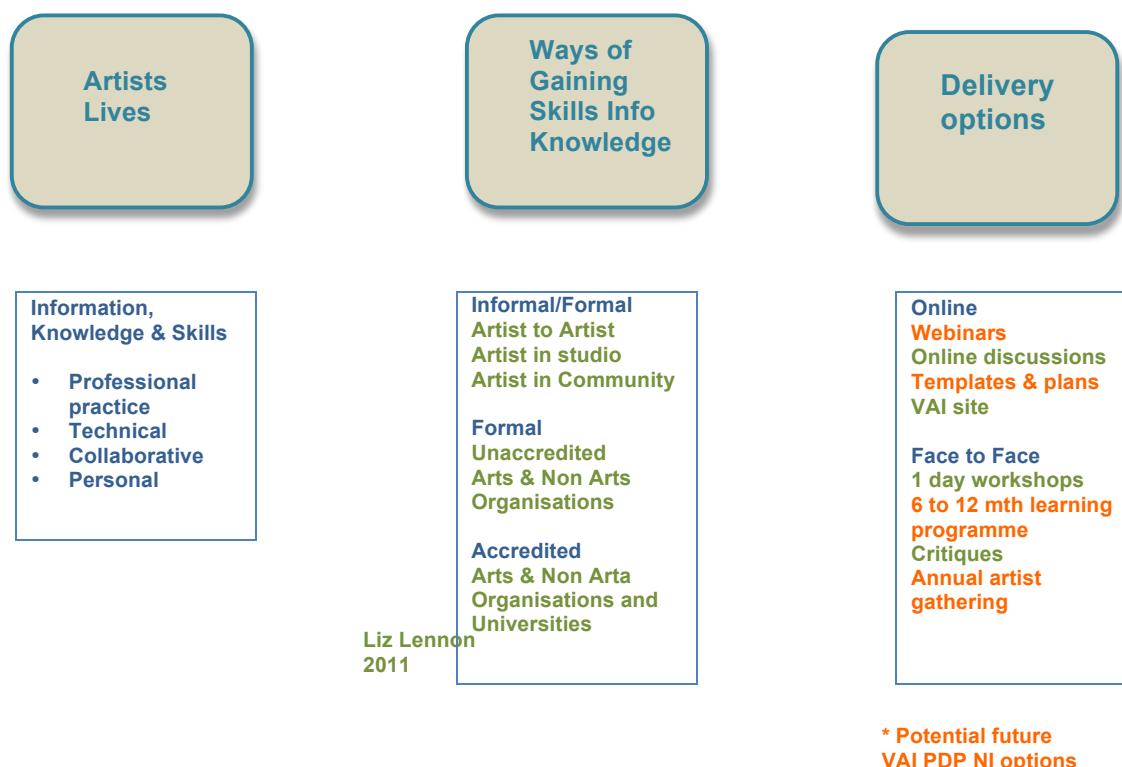
5. Past to Present – VAI Professional Development Programme

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the past and present of the VAI Professional Development Programme in terms of:

- How artists lives directly influence the development of the VAI PDP
- Feedback from artists and facilitators regarding the outcomes and impact of the VAI PDP
- An exploration of the VAI PDP against the great practice principles

5.2 How Artists Lives Influence the VAI PDP



Artists have many professional development needs that can be placed under the 4 themes above: - technical, professional practice, collaboration and personal.

VAI PDP is only one of many ways that artists gain skills. They engage in informal contact with other artists as well as more formalised artist led networking. Arts and non arts organisations provide a range of unaccredited as well as formally accredited learning opportunities to artists.

Artists professional development needs directly inform VAI PDP in terms of the content and forms of delivery of all its events. The diagram lists a range of present and potential options.

5.3VAI PDP - Courses, Critiques & Discussions

Here is some information on VAI Professional Development Programme:

- The professional development programme is a combination of face to face workshops; small group critiques and large group discussion events. The workshops are not only about skill development but also peer to peer networking and information/knowledge spaces.
- The workshops usually run for a day during the week.
- Workshops are run each year with a break in July and August.
- Workshops cover a range of technical and professional practice topics .
- Workshops have been run in a number of venues across Northern Ireland - Ards Arts Centre, Newtownards; Belfast Exposed, Belfast; Catalyst Arts, Belfast; Community Arts Forum, Belfast; Beat Initiative, Belfast (with CAF); Computer Club House Belfast (with CAF); Digital Art Studios, Belfast; Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast; Higher Bridges Gallery, Clinton Centre, Enniskillen; Strule Arts Centre, Omagh; The VOID, Derry.
- The facilitators are very experienced and some are artists.
- On average a workshop will have 6 to 8 attendees. There is a capacity for 15.
- In 2010 there were 137 attendances. From January to June 2011 there were 128 individual attendances.
- There are different workshop prices for VAI members and non-members.
- The workshop programme is available on the VAI site as well as the e Bulletin. There is also a mailing list consisting of previous participants and interested organisations.
- Partners in a particular workshop will promote it to their networks.
- Facilitators are given a letter of agreement when they agree to teach a workshop.
- There are set pay scales for facilitators and anyone involved in the discussion events.
- Each workshop has an evaluation worksheet for each artist at the end of the day.
- Critiques are organized a few times a year for up to 6 artists and have covered topics such as: - painting, photography, and multi media.
- Discussion events are run 2 times a year and attract a large audience.

5.4 VAI PDP – Artists & Facilitators Feedback

This section provides a series of diagrams and comments from the surveys sent to artists who attended the VAI PDP in the last few years. Seventy artists responded to the survey.

The majority of artists rated the PDP very highly and indicated that the events they had attended were of a high quality; had increased their knowledge and skills and had some level of impact on their earning capacity as artists.

This section provides a quick summary of artists responses as well as more detailed data. Artists written comments on a range of topics regarding VAI PDP have been included in boxes.

A quick summary of artists responses:

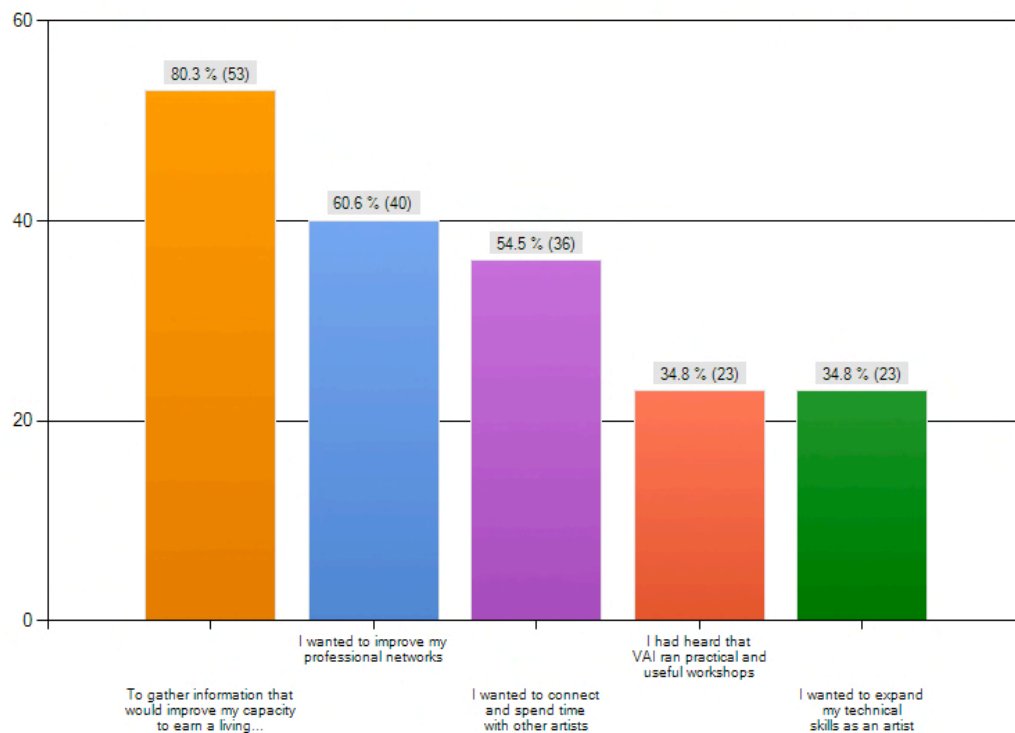
- The VAI PDP mailing list & VAI e bulletin are the main ways that artists find out about the events. Other information avenues are local arts officer; other arts organisations and other artists.
- Over 80% of artists attended the VAI PDP so they could gather information to improve their capacity to earn a living.
- 60% of artists attended because they want to improve their professional networks and spend time with other artists.
- 35% of artists wanted to improve their technical skills.
- Geography was a real barrier to participation for 54% of artists who would like to attend VAI PDP. Time [41%] and money [35%] were the other key barriers to participation.
- There were very high approval ratings from artists who had attended VAI PDP events on a range of good practice elements. The majority of people [71%] felt they received clear information from VAI before events with 84% of artists feeling they could contact VAI if they had any clarifying questions or comments.
- 96% of artists attending VAI PDP events felt that the price was reasonable; the venue was suitable [90%]; the timing was good [91%]; the facilitators knew their topic [97%]; and the content quality was high [97%].
- 98% of artists felt that the VAI PDP met their needs with 97% saying they enjoyed the opportunity to interact with other artists.
- Only 55% of artists totally agreed that the written information provided was useful.
- 67.7% of artists were very satisfied with their experience of VAI PDP events with a further 33.3% saying they were satisfied. No artists indicated dissatisfaction.
- 38% said that their knowledge increased a lot with a further 62% stating that their knowledge had increased somewhat after attending a VAI PDP event.
- 19% of artists said they gained considerable skills development as a result of attending the VAI PDP events with a further 67% saying they had some skills development. 14% said they experienced no skills development. Artists saw certain events as resulting in information rather than skill gains and that was why they attended.

VAI Professional Development Programme NI – Evaluation & Future Directions

- 51% said VAI PDP had some impact on their earning capacity and 7% said it had a considerable impact in their earning capacity. 42% said that the VAI PDP had no impact on their earning capacity. Many of the 42% indicated that the event they attended may not have had a direct impact on their earning capacity but they felt it gave them information and knowledge to improve their professional practice. Others said that it was too early to know the impact.
- The most popular delivery methods were – a series of 1 day workshops that build on an area of practice [66.7%]; workshops on Saturdays [60.6%]; 1 day workshop during the week [54.5%]; with one day gatherings of artists and evening workshops in the high 40's. Nearly 40% of artists said they would be interested in short 2 hour discussion debates on contemporary art practice. 2 day and 2 day residential workshops were the least popular.

Artist's reasons for attending VAI PDP

Why did you decide to attend Visual Artists Ireland workshops and discussion events?



Sample of Comments from Artists attending VAI PDP events

... Delighted to have a course on my doorstep and on a Saturday. Good to learn about networking and researching your own art school.

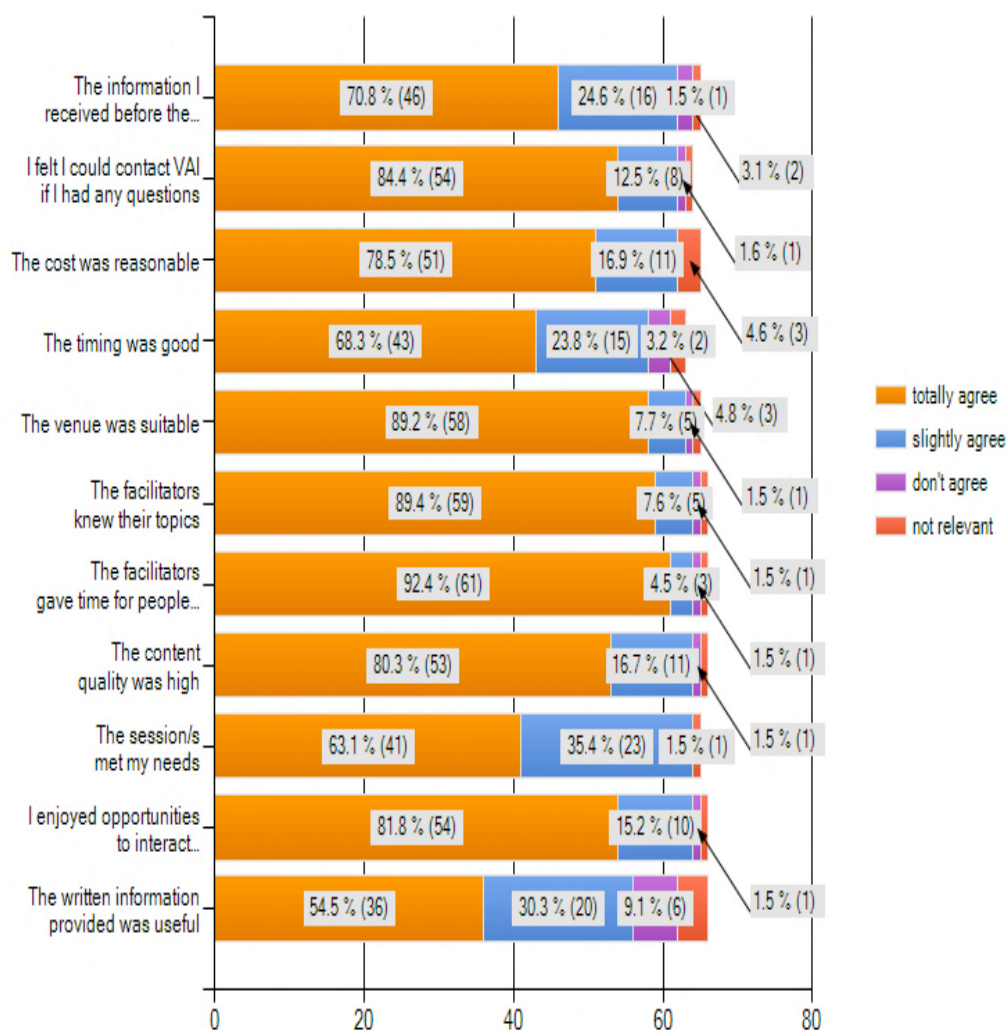
They provide a very good practical insight into related areas of working as an artist. For instance, the workshop on social media recently held in Belfast was excellent and was very informative. I learned a lot at this course.

I have real difficulty in placing a price upon my paintings and photographs and wanted to get some advice on how to arrive at a realistic pricing. The workshop I attended did help but I felt that although the content was really well presented ... it might have been more applicable to city artists rather than rural or provincial artists.

The Proposal Workshop was excellent and specific to what we were covering in college. I just felt it would be beneficial to compare the two and I was very impressed with VAI.

Experience of the Workshop/ Event

The following statements explore your experience of the workshops/discussion events that you attended.



There are high levels of satisfaction on all areas of good practice regarding the development of the VAI professional development programme. There is a need to improve the availability of relevant written information and explore expanding high demand workshops to 2 days.

Sample of Comments from Artists who attended VAI PDP Events

- It is so stimulating and refreshing to meet other artists and to hear what their obstacles are. You realise that you are not alone as a struggling artist.
- Most of the information provided was excellent and in 95% of cases backup information was provided. I feel that perhaps a more practical session in actually going through step by step the process of using; for example, twitter - facebook - would be beneficial. I think maybe a lot of people may not engage as perhaps they presume that a working knowledge of the social networks is a requirement.
- Would have liked the event to be longer, so that things could have been discussed in more detail.
- The introduction to the topics proved very interesting; I felt that networks were developed, promoting confidence when contracting professional bodies.
- I liked it when others didn't turn up, it gave me more of a one to one experience
- I attended the workshop on selling and archiving media works and found it excellent. I only attended one other VAI workshop (this may have been quite some time ago) where there was a slight mix-up re two different advertised start times and I missed a lot of the important info, as I travelled quite a distance I wasn't so happy. But generally my experience has been very good.
- I attended a one day workshop on writing artist statements with Kerry McCall. I found her to be an excellent facilitator and it was a useful experience. However there was a lot of information to cover and the workshop could have done with a second day.
- Maybe a more detailed description of what will happen on each workshop would be useful when choosing which workshops to attend.
- Sometimes the timings of the sessions were wrong or differed to website hard to attend as I am studying at college too and work weekends (like most students) - look into wed afternoons (all northern colleges have half days on wed) Artists provided no written information etc. though getting free source magazine was great
- I think it would be great if some notes were available online from the workshop as there was a lot of information discussed. It could be accessed via a password link from the VAI website or forward in an email perhaps.
- Any of the sessions I have been to have proved very worthwhile. I usually just pick those that are specific to me or a current project or problem and always gain the insight or information I need.

Satisfaction with Workshop/Events Experience

Sample of Comments from Artists who attended VAI PDP Events

I would have liked the event to be longer, so that people would have had a chance to get to know other artists having the same problems and experiences.

All in all, the recent events in Belfast and Newtownards that I have attended have been very worthwhile.

Because of the issues around earning a living it is a challenge to dedicate oneself to arts practice, work and fulfil other family commitments. Would it be possible to have informal meetings, facilitated by people who understand this aspect - perhaps because they have gone through it recently - and willing to openly chat/deal with this. If it were to happen every 3 months to start with that would create a new energy, and Connect people together another bonus.

Artists Knowledge Development

Sample of Comments from Artists attending VAI PDP events

I attended a workshop looking at a case study in Scotland that was very interesting. I needed more time to follow up in greater detail - I was not able to invest this time unfortunately.

I already knew a bit so I was going for professional perspective but I did learn a lot extra about topics I was interested in

Seeing how other artist's work on varying levels was insightful

Artists Skill Development

Sample of Comments from Artists who attended VAI PDP Events

The information gave direction, highlighting career possibilities, which will influence my goals and practice for years to come.

I intend to use the information I have gained in future proposals. I found the workshop with Sherrie Driver superb and I would attend other workshops taken by her.

It was more about letting me know what gaps I had, that I have to build upon in the future.

Certainly, but also in conjunction with other resources such as networking, informal conversation, formal feedback from panels, various projects / group initiatives organized by myself and/or others.

Artist's capacity to earn a living

Sample of Comments from Artists attending VAI PDP events

At some point I would like to apply for funding and for the NY residency so yes these by extension could improve my cv and job prospects that may improve my earning capacity.

Hasn't as yet but will when I set up an on line selling website

Although the information didn't have a direct impact on my earning capacity, it highlighted avenues of action that, potentially, will greatly improve my career.

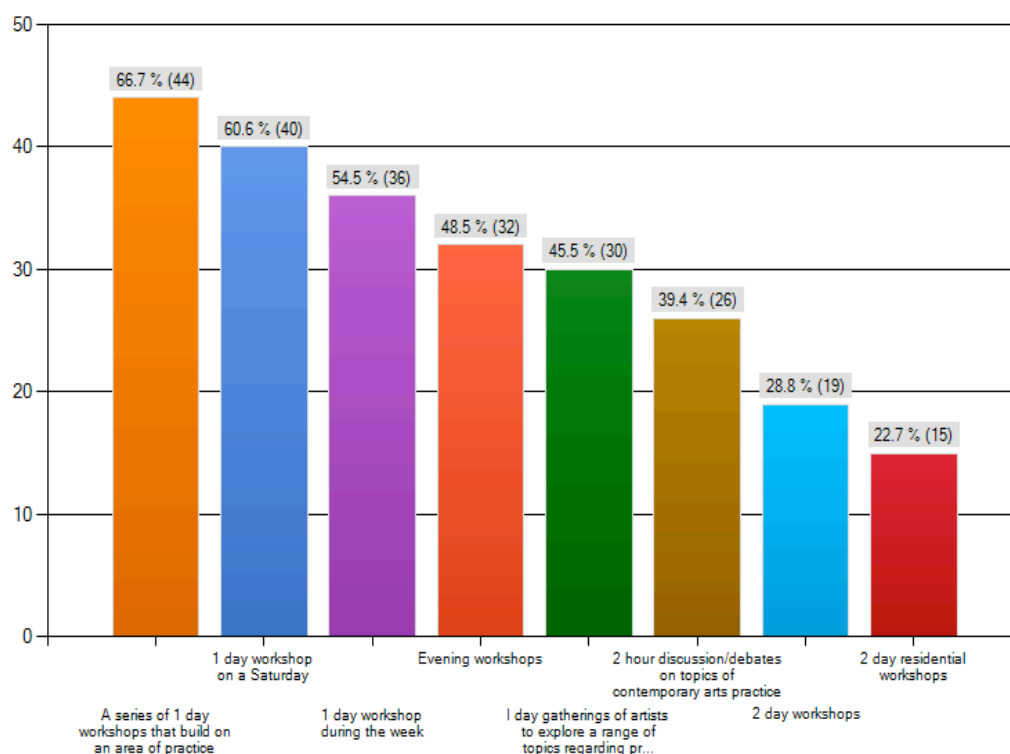
I feel it is to early to say if it will impact, I would have a more realistic answer in six months time.

There has been a greater impact on significantly developing my practice and awareness of potential opportunities more than an economic impact

... the info and workshop gave me a confidence to do other work that may help my earning capacity.

Delivery Options for the VAI PDP

There are so many different ways that the professional development training programme can be delivered. Would you pick the top 4 that you would be most likely to attend



A series of one day workshops that build on practice; 1 day workshops; evening workshops and 1 day gatherings of artists were the top choices for delivery of VAI PDP events.

Sample of Comments from Artists attending VAI PDP

Have attended several workshops held on week days - but it is difficult to get time out from my job

I think, once I know there are workshops happening I can plan on time to attend and compromise.

Perhaps the two day event would allow more intense interaction between practitioners and course providers and other artists and would also facilitate more opportunity for more in-depth question and answer sessions

It is very difficult to find a solution to this issue - it depends on each group's situation and can vary quite a lot from one location to the next.

Interest in participating in Webinars

81% of artists were interested to very interested in participating in webinars. 19% were not interested in webinars as a learning tool.

The power of a short webinar is that it can overcome the core barriers to participation to learning opportunities identified by artists:

Geography – you can participate in your home

Timing – webinars can be saved and watched anytime

Cost – most webinars are offered free or for a very small fee

Key information topics could be offered in short and sharp sessions across a year and linked to face to face workshops as well as other learning needs.

Webinars are online events that are usually timed to last an hour. They can be used to:

- Provide short and sharp information on topics of interest.
- Connect people who have difficulty attending events because of distance.
- Deliver information/knowledge in a series of bite sized chunks at a free to low cost.
- Have different participation functionalities so people can comment and ask questions online during a session.
- Include live video of the presenter and usually powerpoints of the presentation.
- Webinar presentations can be saved and watched at any time.

Sligo Institute of Technology Distance Learning Department is an example of excellent practice regarding webinars. This short [webinar](http://connect.itsligo.ie/p93703837/) [http://connect.itsligo.ie/p93703837/] from Sligo IT provides an overview on the cost/benefits of using webinars as part of an overall blended learning strategy.

Sample of Comments from Artists who attended VAI PDP

I have tried webinars on photography in the past. The sound doesn't always work but you could input questions in a box to the side which is then passed on. Not 100pc satisfactory but better then nothing.

This sounds like an excellent opportunity to interact and learn at the same time and at a person's own timeframe.

Artists often learn from each other while attending such training sessions... While this is a good idea, it cannot substitute the benefits of meeting face to face.

How could the VAI PDP be even better?

- Artists wanted opportunities to meet and interact with other artists during and after the formal sessions.
- More workshops, more often and located around Northern Ireland.
- Develop a mentoring scheme.
- A process to help make all the information available on sites more usable so that artists could make informed decisions regarding further education; marketing and career development.
- Sessions on career development and progression and how to market and promote work.
- Attract more students to join VAI and attend VAI PDP events.

More! More workshops covering the things needed at every level of professional development - from developing a portfolio to contacting galleries to developing personal style and self critique to developing a strong practice and how to apply for grants - I know you do these already but the more the better

It would be nice to have some specific practical photography based workshops and workshops dealing with publication programs such as inDesign.

Possibly a mentor scheme. If you try to get on an artists panel there is a lot of criteria that has to be covered before applying. E.g. working in the community, doing workshops/residencies. Is there any type of joining up of experiences to improve chances of getting this type of work or developing in this direction?

On a personal level, I would like to be able to access more specific information on opportunities to study not necessarily in Ireland but also abroad - with advice on the more suitable courses available. Its difficult to access suitability by just going through the list of courses available. Also, type of programme, which would tailor advice to individual artists on career development and progression, would be of great benefit.

When advertising the workshops, give clear indication of what the topics will be

Perhaps some follow up sessions on the same topics in say 3 or 6 months time.

I think most of the workshops provided were very good, if I took on board even 50% of the professional development I gained I would be better for it as an emerging artist. The job now is putting it into practice. My only suggestion would be an informal workshop involving artists and curators discussing work.

Artist's views on information, knowledge and skills they would like to see the VAI PDP cover

- Digital, information technology and social media to promote and record work.
- Networking & critiqueing events.
- Managing all the professional aspects [finances, taxes, marketing, networking etc] of developing an artistic career.
- Working in and with different communities.

Setting up a small business

Making cross border connections

Training for digital communication media - to access information, communicate and promote work and record work.

The course on public galleries was useful. More courses on promoting your work, critique and researching your art school.

Career development in specific areas such as working as an artist in specific areas such as school projects/community projects ... Step by step guide to using various social media from beginners to advanced stages.

Peer review by major figures in international art

Advice on applying for commission work/working with the public and artist in residence. Help with how to plan workshops with public/groups

Informal meetings and perhaps formal discussion about what collaborations are needed by us - artists - to engage proactively with others. Networking events

More sessions on business related issues - income tax, vat, marketing, legal issues - copyright, droit de suite case studies illustrating difficult situations that have arisen for artists. Networking in action workshops where networking would be the main objective rather than a by product,

The VAI has covered most. I just haven't been able to get to them though finance or time. Would like to see them

I would love to see a collaboration between VAI and all art students in the first 18months after they finish a degree course and begin to set up business.

Facilitator's experience of VAI PDP

- Over 80% of facilitators were happy with the clarity of communication with the VAI when they were designing their workshops, with 12% saying it was fair.
- 80% of facilitators felt the venues were good to excellent with 20% saying they were fair.
- Opinions varied regarding the quality of the technical equipment [27% excellent; 40% good; 27% fair and 6 % bad].
- 82% of facilitators had a very good to excellent experience with the participants with 12 % saying they had a good experience and 6% saying it was fair.
- 14% said they didn't have enough time to cover content with 86% saying they had enough time.
- Overall all but 1 of the facilitators felt that the support they received from the VAI was good to excellent.

Sample of Comments from Facilitators

Overall the organisation was excellent. Unfortunately some of the technical provisions at the space were not working well.

No problem - very professional relationship in all areas

I had a good experience of working as a facilitator for VAI in 2010 and an even better experience in 2011 so am very happy with their approach and support. The experience improved with familiarity.

Facilitators Experience presenting Webinars

- 4 of the 16 facilitators who responded to the survey had presented webinars.
- 15 of the facilitators were interested in participating in any webinar pilots developed by the VAI.

I am interested in using all forms of online communication, podcasts, webinars etc to make the most of these training sessions.

These could be recorded and participants could access at any time

Not sure ... I would like the challenge

5.5. VAI PDP – Great Practice Principles



Liz Lennon
2011

Context

VAI Professional Development Programme in Northern Ireland has been developed within a range of contexts:

- Artist's professional lives and their skill, knowledge & information strengths and needs.
- The capacity and availability of partners to help deliver workshops/critiques/discussion events in a range of geographic areas across Northern Ireland.
- The VAI resource capacity - staff, budgets, venues etc.
- The VAI vision and planned future directions.
- The broader arts and funding environment in Northern Ireland.

VAI PDP has done very well to work within all these contexts and has been able to maintain funding; expand the programme of events outside of Belfast with the help of different partners; and stay relevant to many artists to attend the events [as can be seen by the very positive survey results].

Every one of these contexts is in a state of change and transformation so certain resilience, patience and persistence will be needed as VAI PDP itself transforms within these spaces.

Clarity

VAI PDP has a clear mandate to provide professional development opportunities across Ireland. The Education Officer has taken time and effort to clarify:

- Artist's professional needs and strengths.
- Core content and delivery for all the PDP events.
- Expectations regarding facilitators.
- All the myriad technical and process activities needed to deliver the PDP.
- And answer the many queries from artists attending events.

Through all the surveys and interviews people responded very positively to the way the Education Officer and VAI responded to their questions and feedback.

What is less clear to an outsider is how the different roles and activities within VAI affect and are affected by VAI PDP. There are obvious and less obvious potentials for role and activity synergies within VAI and VAI PDP for the future. This is a very positive and exciting opportunity and should be explored by the VAI CEO and staff.

Commitment

The commitment of the Education Officer to the development and delivery of VAI PDP is outstanding and all the people interviewed stated how much they appreciated her work. It is also clear that the CEO of VAI is deeply committed to VAI PDP and sees it as a core part of VAI's future direction.

The commitment of other VAI staff to VAI PDP is strong if less formalized. All the roles in VAI have some form of connection, though more implicit than explicit, with VAI PDP.

The commitment of partners to VAI PDP is also to be commended as they provide venues, marketing, staff time, equipment, money and other resources to events.

With the potential transformation of VAI PDP there will need to be a range of discussions within VAI and with VAI PDP partners to explore and decide the nature, depth and breadth of commitment required and available.

Communication

Communication about VAI PDP happens in a number of ways:

- VAI e bulletin; site; and mailing list were the most utilised by artists completing the survey.
- Artists also found out about VAI PDP from VAI PDP partners; arts officer; or another artist.

VAI site is a font of information and VAI PDP can be found in the Education area. While the information is clear there is a need to explore how the written communication could be improved and made more attractive.

When an artist books an event there is an opportunity for them to complete an Expectations form so that the event can be made as relevant as possible. This information is shared with the facilitators. Not everyone provides this information

as some artists don't make the decision to attend [or withdraw] until the last minute.

There is a need to broaden and deepen the communication efforts of VAI PDP [and VAI] specifically to emerging and graduate artists in Northern Ireland. The colleges are a key target.

Many of VAI staff are part time and there are constraints on what they can do.

How VAI staff work and communicate together regarding a range of activities and their roles will need to be explored so that information, research, education, advocacy, membership activities can become even more effective. These activities feed into each other and staff will need more opportunities to plan and strategise together.

Creativity

There are real resource constraints on the nature, depth and breadth of any future VAI PDP in Northern Ireland and creativity is needed to explore the range of inward resource investment opportunities.

Resources [people, venues, equipment, time, ideas & money] can be accessed a number of ways:

- Through a barter and exchange of any of the resources
- For free as a donation, pro bono effort, CSR [corporate social responsibility] activity or in kind sponsorship
- Corporate sponsorship
- Government funding

There is a real need to rattle the cage and scare/excite ourselves a little at the resource potentials beyond money.

And creativity is needed as VAI explores all the different ways VAI PDP could be developed and delivered.

Everyone involved will need to take time and space to forage and play with ideas and possibilities ... create 'and' connections rather than 'either/or' ... try different perspectives ... and keep the artist at the heart of the exploration.

Coordination

The coordination efforts of the Education Officer are excellent. Partners, artists and facilitators felt that the programme was coordinated well and that the Education Officer made herself promptly available to deal with any emerging issues. She also attends as many VAI PDP events in Northern Ireland as possible to talk with artists and facilitators and gain a sense of the ongoing quality of the programme.

Coordination between partners works well, particularly with older partnerships as the workers have familiarized themselves with each other's organisational contexts and clarified and communicated on a number of events. The chances of coordination slipups can happen in new partnerships because people are still developing trust and an understanding about how each person and organisation works.

Coordination between VAI workers tends to be informal. There are now 2 part time VAI workers in NI and their work will be critical to VAI PDP and VAI broadly. There will be a need to create more formalized times and spaces for the VAI team to coordinate their roles and activities.

Collaboration

Without the collaborative efforts of VAI with its partners, the VAI PDP would not exist in its present great quality state.

Everyone is working together on a shared goal that results in very good quality professional development events for artists.

Artists themselves appreciate the results of these collaborative efforts as can be seen by all the positive feedback in the surveys.

One of the reasons artists attend VAI PDP is to meet other artists and make professional connections. There is a need to create, provide and support a range of informal as well as formal opportunities for artists to meet.

Nearly 70% of artists who completed the online survey stated that they met and worked informally with other artists as a form of professional development.

How opportunities for artists to meet are developed needs to be explored.

Celebration

Celebrations can be big and bright as well as quiet and contemplative. VAI PDP with its partners needs to stop and mark the excellent progress to date before it makes the next leap and transformation in 2012.

Opportunities to reflect, evaluate, plan and acknowledge progress need to be created ... and celebrated.

The VAI PDP partner gathering in the autumn to review and progress this report would be an excellent opportunity to also celebrate the past to present of VAI PDP.

6.Past to Present VAI PDP Partnerships

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is all about exploring the past and present of the VAI Professional Development Programme in terms against the great practice principles.

6.2 VAI PDP Partnerships

VAI PDP partnerships in Northern Ireland have included:

- Arts Council NI
- Belfast Exposed - Belfast
- Digital Arts Studio- Belfast
- CAF [now merged with New Belfast Community Arts Initiative]
- Ards Art Centre - Newtownards
- Ards District Council - Newtownards
- Fermanagh District Council Arts Office
- The Void – Derry
- Strule Arts Centre – Omagh District Council
- Paragon Studios - Belfast
- Play Resource – Belfast

The nature, length and extent of each partnership differs and includes:

- Funding support
- Provision of venues and equipment
- Co presenting workshops, critiques and discussions
- Providing facilitators
- Providing venues
- Promoting VAI PDP to partner clients and networks
- Promoting partner programmes through VAI outlets [e.g. e newsletter]

Partnerships are essential because:

- They can work to each members strengths and assets
- There is the potential to leverage and work with a broader range of people
- The resource burden can be shared
- Working with a range of organisations can build a base of ideas and actions

6.3 VAI PDP Partnerships – Great Practice Principles



Liz Lennon
2011

This section will explore how VAI PDP partnerships currently operate within the different Great Practice Principles.

In the main the partnerships are working very well and partner survey and interview responses were very positive. Many partners mentioned the hard work and very positive relationship they had with VAI Education Officer who coordinates and develops the programme across Ireland.

There are a few challenges and opportunities that could further enhance great practice in terms of VAI PDP partnerships:

- Provide opportunities for all the partners to meet and discuss their inputs and ideas for the future of VAI PDP and partnership process.
- It takes time to build positive and trusting partnerships and one partner has had to withdraw as their organisation has been merged with another. A new partnership process and agreement will need to be established.
- There are gaps in the partnership in terms of a partner from a university.
- Partnerships on long term PDP projects will need an agreed written agreement that covers areas such as roles; responsibilities; resourcing; planning; action and evaluation.

VAI Professional Development Programme NI – Evaluation & Future Directions

- It would be useful to invite some core facilitators and frequent artist participants to give their views and ideas. This evaluation process enabled that process as well as the workshop evaluation sheets used at the end of each session.

Six partners responded to the online survey specifically designed for them. This is their feedback regarding their VAI PDP partnership: -

- While 5 of the partners felt that there was a clear vision, principles and goals driving the PDP, 1 felt the clarity was low.
- All partners felt that artists professional needs were identified although how well that was done ranged from good [3], very good [2] to excellent [1].
- 3 partners felt that the VAI PDP was well promoted to a good level and the other 3 felt it was promoted to a very good level.
- 5 of the 6 partners felt that experienced facilitators were used while 1 gave that element a Fair rating.
- 5 partners stated that they felt programme evaluations were used to very good or excellent usage to inform the VAI PDP. One partner indicated it was Fair.

Context

All the partners work within Northern Ireland and in the arts sector so they are affected by changes and developments within that sector. One partner has been merged with another community arts organisation as a result of policy funding changes in the ACNI.

Each organisation works with a range of target groups although some have a more specific remit [e.g. Belfast Exposed - photography; Digital Arts Centre – IT and multi media]. These organisations have a specialist skills base and offer professional development opportunities that have benefited the VAI PDP.

In terms of Professional Development Programmes, the partners are placed in the Informal Unaccredited Arts Organisations space. That is, they all deliver workshops and activities that are unaccredited. There are currently no partners in the accredited spaces or Formal/Informal Artist Spaces.

Informal Artist to Artist	Formal Artist to Artist	Informal [unaccredited] Non Arts Organisations	Informal [unaccredited] Arts Organisations	Formal [accredited] Non Arts Organisations	Formal [accredited] Arts Organisations
e.g. studio visits online pub/café/home	e.g. artist led networks artist led residencies	e.g. 1 day computer or business course	e.g. VAI, BX, DAS, District Councils Arts Offices	e.g. university courses ECDL Accredited IT courses	Difficult for small organisations to afford the time & money needed

Clarity

Partners were clear about why they had decided to work with VAI on its professional development programme:

To develop an artist training and development programme

To help us develop staff and pool of freelance artists- specifically to raise numbers of suitably qualified artists available to us to deliver community arts and photography courses. To broadly support the career development (and opportunities) for visual artists in NI

It seemed like an opportune time to collaborate with VAI since the exhibition was all about recognising emerging artists and looking at ways to support and promote artists working in Northern Ireland.

Xxx District Council's Arts Office role is to mentor and develop the arts community with advocacy and we see Visual Artists Ireland to be a key player in facilitating outreach training for us - the courses VAI run are great for local artists and cultural entrepreneurs.

To develop skills of professional artists in the area, to promote VAI, attempt to develop further membership, develop awareness of arts centre in the region.

There is also a need for any partners in a partnership to be clear about the benefits they hope to derive from the process. Partners mentioned a number of added value benefits that they had gained as a result of their partnership in VAI PDP:

The expertise in Visual Arts and Artists development and the financial input to these events

High standard of content and facilitators. Administration is outsourced. Supports audience development.

Our work with VAI is very valuable to us. It has linked us more with the Dublin/ Republic of Ireland art world and opened up a wider range of speakers/ participants to our events. We have been able to pool resources to split costs of running professional development events and have been able to promote our organisation through VAI's marketing channels ... knowledge and expertise of VAI staff.

Delivery of Arts Plan key aims and objectives in regards to strengthening existing solidarity networks for artists within the county. Training our cultural community to grow independently with direct mentoring from VAI. Provided xxxx District Council with new consultancy expertise in various areas to do with professional practice for local artists

Specific, tailored, short courses delivered by skilled facilitators in a local centre.

Link into VAI networks 2. Access to VAI members 3. Sharing of ideas in terms of session content 4. Access to all Ireland networks 5. The support of delivering with a partner.

Commitment

Levels of commitment vary within the partnerships due to a number of factors:

- The older partnerships have built a level of trust and experience that has increased their willingness to commit more resources to the process. New partners need time to get to know each other, clarify expectations and try a few activities together.
- Partners have access to different amounts of resources and commit accordingly.
- Each partner is affected by changes, development and new directions that are happening within their own organisations. This can have a direct impact on what and how partners can commit to VAI PDP.

Communication

The VAI Education Officer is the main contact with nearly all the partners and the CEO of VAI is the key contact to one or two.

All the partners were very happy with the nature and amount of communication they had with VAI. The VAI Education Officer often travels from Dublin to Northern Ireland to attend workshops, critiques and discussion events and partners appreciated this.

Currently there have been no opportunities for all the partners to gather and share information and ideas about VAI PDP as a group.

Creativity

The partners involved in VAI PDP have open and creative mindsets in terms of the ways they approach issues and opportunities that present themselves.

The gap in creative opportunity for VAI PDP partnership is that there has not been a gathering of all the partners to explore the future potentials of VAI PDP. A gathering is scheduled for Autumn 2011.

Coordination

VAI Education Officer coordinates VAI PDP in Northern Ireland with assistance from other VAI colleagues.

As mentioned previously, VAI Education Officer coordinates individually with each partner organisation depending on the event. Each partner agrees on their roles, actions, timing and responsibilities.

Because VAI Education Officer has built strong communication channels between herself and each partner any coordination glitches are usually resolved quickly and positively.

Opportunities could be created within the partnership to create a broader coordination process on specific projects that involved more than one partner.

There are no formal partner agreements.

Collaboration

Opportunities for collaboration by partners have currently been focused on:

- Development and delivery of professional workshops
- Development and delivery of opportunities for critiques of work
- Development and delivery of larger artist group debates and discussions

As VAI PDP develops in 2011 and into 2012 there will be new opportunities for collaboration with current and new partners.

New collaborations will require formal spaces and time to clarify the nature, extent and responsibilities for the partners involved.

Celebration

There is a need to create time and space for partners to reflect and celebrate progress and developments in VAI PDP.

Informal and formal spaces to connect are important in building trust and respect between partners.

7.Future Directions – VAI Professional Development Programme

7.1 Introduction

This chapter and the next are exciting because they begin to provide a sense of the opportunities and possibilities for VAI PDP in Northern Ireland over the next few years.

The previous chapters gave a sense of what all the key stakeholders felt about VAI PDP and in the main the feedback was extremely positive. People felt that:

- Their needs were taken into account and they were listened to when they contacted VAI Education Officer.
- The programme was of a high quality on a lot of good practice indicators.
- Information on VAI PDP events was available in a range of formats.
- The facilitators were of a high quality.
- The programme was becoming available in a number of places in Northern Ireland.
- Artists felt they were receiving quality information that was increasing their knowledge and skills, and to some extent, their income earning capacity.
- Artists enjoyed the opportunity to meet other artists.

There are a few challenges/opportunities to explore:

- **Barriers to Participation** - Nearly 2/3 of artists said that it wasn't easy to access professional development opportunities with 50% saying that distance was the major problem and 45% saying that timing of the events was an issue. Thirty five percent of artists said that they couldn't afford to attend workshops. These rating were not specifically about VAI PDP but they would be factors affecting many artists capacity to attend events.
- **Expanding networking & socialising** - Artists attend professional development events to: - build their information, knowledge & skill base; network to improve professional opportunities; and meet with other artists. All VAI PDP events provide some opportunities to do all these things and there is a need to explore how the networking and socializing aspect could be expanded.
- **Written Information Packs** - While artists felt that all aspects of VAI PDP events met a high standard there is room for improvement in terms of the information pack they receive at events.
- **Marketing VAI PDP** - The information and marketing of VAI PDP events certainly attracts artists and there is a need to further improve this area.
- **Target Markets** - There is a need to further expand the nature and extent that VAI PDP is marketed to emerging artists, particularly graduating students.
- **VAI PDP Offerings** - While the existing VAI PDP is excellent there is a need to expand the nature, range and extent of offerings to decrease the barriers to participation and reflect the changing learning needs of visual artists.

- **VAI PDP Pricing** - The pricing of the programme needs to be revised to reflect the realities of resourcing and reward VAI members.
- **VAI Membership** - Currently 50% of artists who attend VAI PDP events are non-members and their reasons for not being members have more to do with motivation than anything else. There is a need to further clarify the member offerings and communicate benefits.
- **Recognition & Accreditation** - None of VAI PDP workshops are accredited. Accrediting workshops is a lengthy and expensive process and may not be the best way to focus the VAI resources in the short term. There is a need though to explore recognition opportunities for workshops.
- **VAI site as a knowledge space** - VAI site provides a wealth of information to visual artists. It's this very wealth that can create confusion. There is a need to further explore how key learning information can be organized and accessed on the site so it becomes a clearer Learning & Knowledge Space.
- **VAI Staffing** - VAI organisation is not large and many of the workers are employed part time. Currently, the Education Officer works a 3 day week and manages to develop and deliver the PDP across Ireland and maintain partnerships. There is a need to explore how the staffing roles and activities in VAI can be more synergized in order to maximize the effectiveness of their excellent staff.
- **Supporting VAI Staff** - A small organisation such as VAI has real challenges to face in terms of specific expertise in HR, Marketing & Information/Knowledge management. It does not have the economy of scale or budget to have HR, marketing and IT departments. It does a good job within the current staff skill pool but there may be a need to invite specifically skilled people to help with areas of organisational development in order to ensure that VAI supports it's staff and continues to deliver quality services to visual artists in Ireland.

None of these challenges are insurmountable. The next sections of this report provide a range of ideas for meeting the challenges.

What will be needed are an investment of 'E' Factors by VAI board & staff and VAI PDP partners. What are 'E' Factors?

- Expenditure of time, money, technology, facilities & people
- Effort, Engagement & Enthusiasm

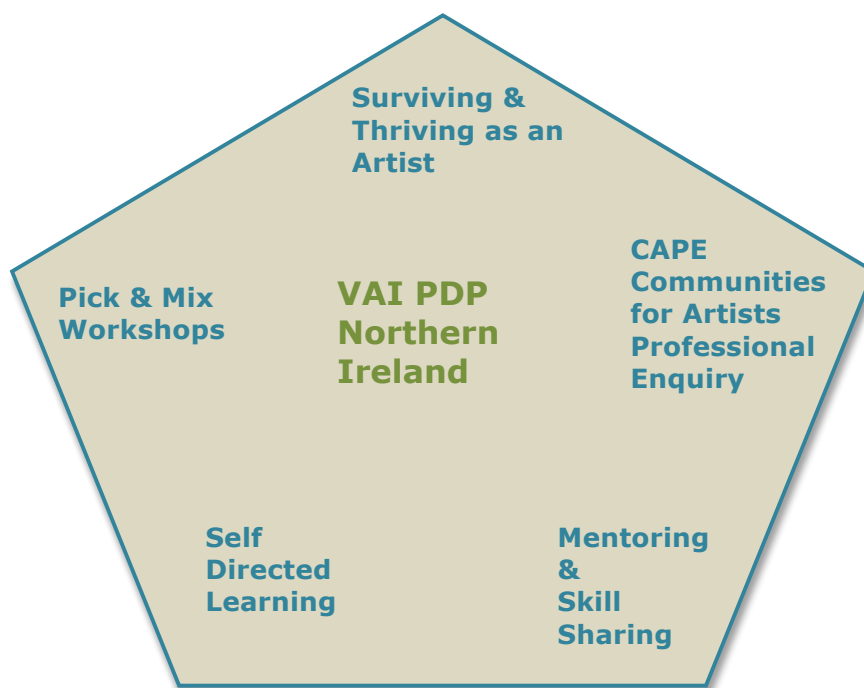
7.2 Developing the VAI PDP in Northern Ireland

Artist at the centre – Transforming the learning opportunities

VAI PDP in Northern Ireland is a success in its present form and there is a range of exciting possibilities in terms of future.

The artists needs, strengths and range of experience must be at the centre of any future developments of VAI PDP.

There are a multitude of possibilities regarding the form that VAI PDP NI could take. As a starting point the diagram below reveals a blended learning approach that reflects the range of perspectives, feedback and comments in this report.



Each of the potential 5 elements meet a range of artists professional development needs and will require:

- Further discussion within VAI and with VAI PDP partners
- The development of a specific action plan with resourcing needs and opportunities
- A reimagining and transformation regarding the way VAI as an organisation works

Creating these opportunities will take time and will require all elements of Great Professional Practice to drive the transformation.

Pick & Mix Workshops

The existing programme of workshops has been very successful and should continue with a few additions:

- Workshop topics will be organized under the 4 professional practice skill and knowledge areas - Technical; Professional; Collaborative; Personal.
- Where possible [reliant on demand and resource availability] popular workshops will be repeated in different Northern Ireland locations and at different times of the year.
- Writing proposals and using social media to promote work appear to be 2 very popular topics that need more than one day and could be augmented with webinars.
- Webinars will be developed to provide short 1 to 2 hour information sessions on topics identified by artists and partners [e.g. insurance; tax etc].
- The costing, training and timing of webinars will be further researched in 2011.
- Webinars will also be used to reinforce learning in workshops where additional information may be needed but people can't afford to attend face to face.
- All webinars will be recorded and saved onto VAI site so that people can watch/listen to them in their own time.
- Artists will be asked to complete an Expectations Form as part of their online VAI PDP registration.
- Information packs will be developed by facilitators for all sessions and include – key learning notes; examples of good organisations, sites and publications with links.
- A VAI Recognition sheet will be developed that details the key content, information and learning delivered in the workshops. It will be given to artists for use in their cv/resume.
- Develop a workshop template and ask facilitators to complete.
- Utilise the database to record key information for future data analysis and evaluations.
- The VAI needs to discuss these potential developments with partners in their autumn meeting.

Timing: - Aim to have the Pick & Mix programme ready for 2012

Surviving & Thriving as an Artist

This will be a completely new programme that will be led by VAI in potential partnership with the ACNI and other partners.

It has the potential to provide a cohesive professional learning programme to **artist members of VAI** who are willing to commit the time and energy.

It will be a:

- Long term learning programme over 10 to 16 months.
- Involve blended learning methods [i.e. face to face; individual and online].

VAI Professional Development Programme NI – Evaluation & Future Directions

- Provide an action learning process on a range of topics that artists have identified as critical to their professional practice.
- Involve artists forming learning hives to practice key elements of the learning collaboratively. Results of the collaboration will be directly linked to the area of interest the learning hives work in – e.g. one group may create a pop up exhibition; another group may work with a community group; another may create an event.
- Result in a range of useful tools [e.g. artist professional practice plan; residency application; portfolio] that artists can use to enhance their practice.
- Involve mentors and webinars to support learning.
- Include a range of networking activities.

The exact shape of this programme needs to be discussed by VAI and Arts Council Northern Ireland who have indicated an interest in discussing the feasibility of the project.

Timing: Initial meeting in early Autumn 2011 between VAI & ACNI. If seen to be feasible then aim to begin the programme in September/October 2012. [update - VAI committed to developing this programme as a priority].

CAPE [Communities for Artists Professional Enquiry]

Many artists said they wanted more opportunities to meet other artists; network for professional purposes; and participate in critiques.

The VAI PDP already does some of this through their:

- Critique sessions.
- Open discussion events.

These existing events are very popular and could be further developed by:

- Taping discussions and making them available as podcasts on VAI site.
- Exploring different ways of facilitating discussions that go beyond panel discussions.

Some of the artists involved in critique sessions decided to continue to meet and VAI supported their efforts by providing a venue to meet.

The recent work of VAI NI workers in holding gatherings is another good start in developing peer-to-peer networks and providing a communication channel regarding a range of topics to and from the VAI.

VAI and their partners need to explore how they could support artist led peer to peer learning and knowledge sharing.

Developing and sustaining networks is not an easy job and peer-to-peer ones can be even more difficult. There is an existing peer-to-peer network of performance artists that works well in Belfast and their experiences could be very useful.

Timing: already started. Discussion needed within VAI and with their partners about a longer term strategy to develop peer-to-peer networks.

Mentoring & Skill Sharing

A number of artists said that mentoring would help their professional practice.

An informal mentoring process appears to have resulted between some of the facilitators and their participants. This is the result of either the facilitator offering or the participant asking and feedback from artists the evaluator talked with showed how beneficial it had been.

Peer to peer skill sharing is also a useful professional development practice and has been developed formally and informally in many countries and has included barter.

Timing: In the first instance research into models and feasibility of artist mentoring and skill sharing programmes needs to be conducted before any decision is made by VAI to commit resources to developing it. Research conducted through 2011 and 2012.

Self Directed Learning

Artists stated that they often just needed clear, practical and timely information to make informed decisions about their professional practice.

There are 2 key ways that VAI PDP can help:

- **Artists Plan** - There's a lot to do and often artists [like most people] can get caught in the day to day and feel stressed that they aren't achieving their professional goals. Some people don't know what their options are; where their career is progressing; and what resources [internal & external] are needed to make things happen.

Some form of online process and plan template could help individual artists. This could be augmented through the use of the Common Room on VAI site to provide peer-to-peer advice and support.

A 2 day Artists Professional Planning Day could also be developed to support artists to develop their plans and provide support to each other.

Timing: - Explore feasibility of developing online planning process and template. 2011. Run Artists Planning 2 day Workshop in 2012. [update – VAI committed to developing the template and the 2 day workshop in 2012]

- **Knowledge Management** – Artists are looking for information that they can use to make decisions and although there's a lot of information on VAI site and it's all very useful ... some of it is buried.

The site needs further enhancement if it is to be an even more useful information and knowledge tool. For example, images [particularly in the artists database] and enhanced search capabilities would be very useful. Basically, an artist needs to be able to go to the VAI site and find information easily without clicking in and out of pages and pages of information. A space to show new and updated information is needed.

Timing: review what is needed [plug ins and some internal design architecture] to make the VAI site a true knowledge and information space. 2011 into early 2012.

Input into the VAI PDP design

There is a need to create and provide a range of ways that artists, facilitators, VAI staff/board and partners can input into VAI PDP design on an ongoing basis.

This evaluation process has provided that opportunity and could be repeated every 2 years.

The CAPE process could provide channels of communication by artists as well as the Common Room on the site and the evaluations at VAI PDP events.

Resourcing the VAI PDP

All the elements of the above potential programme need to be discussed and developed within VAI and with VAI PDP partners in order to have a clear idea of the resource needs.

Different elements of the programme could be developed through 2011 and to the end of 2012 to ensure that time pressures do not affect the quality of the new VAI PDP offerings in Northern Ireland.

It is also vital that VAI be supported in accessing resources [money, people, venues, equipment etc] from sources other than the arts sector.

Providing quality Facilitators

Many artists commented on the high quality of the facilitators. VAI PDP does have a facilitator panel that is open on an ongoing basis.

There is a need to further develop a number of areas regarding facilitators:

- When the new VAI PDP is decided then a call for facilitators is needed. It would also be useful to draw on the experience and networks of the VAI PDP partners to build a base of specifically experienced facilitators.
- A template for facilitators to describe the content and process of their workshops is needed as well as a brief resume of their experience. This can then be placed on VAI site so that other organisations can access them.
- Facilitators will need to provide some form of information package for all workshops. This can be as simple as a page with key organisation, sites and publications.
- A gathering of facilitators who have provided workshops on a consistent basis needs to be convened so they can input on the report and add their suggestions.

Timing: - Facilitator gathering – autumn 2011.

Recognition & Accreditation of the VAI PDP

Accreditation processes take years and are a strong drain on an organisations time, energy, staff and money. VAI Education Officer and CEO have both been involved in exploring this area and will continue to do so.

Regardless of the decisions made by VAI about accreditation, there is another form of acknowledgement that is not used enough for learning processes – some form of Recognition.

If VAI PDP and its partners agree on the quality standards needed to develop and deliver a learning programme, and put them in place, then they can create a Recognised By VAI & Partners identifier for their activities. It can then become a recognised standard for learning programmes delivered by VAI and partners. Also,

VAI Professional Development Programme NI – Evaluation & Future Directions

each artist should receive a sheet detailing the content and core learning for any workshop they attend so they can use it in their cv.

7.3 Pricing the VAI PDP

50% of people who attend the VAI PDP in Northern Ireland are not members. There is a need to explore a more coherent price offering for members and non-members of the VAI.

VAI offers a vast range of services to visual artists [members and non members] across Ireland. There is a need to provide more incentives for people to become and stay members as well as refining and communicating the benefits of VAI membership to a range of artists.

In terms of the VAI PDP there are a range of pricing opportunities in the future that need to be explored:

Free to everyone – access to VAI site information for self directed learning; many of the CAPE [Community for Artists Professional Enquiry] activities will be free; skill sharing may have free elements.

Cost to Non members – currently there is very little difference in the price paid by VAI members and non-members to attend workshops and other VAI PDP events. If a workshop costs a member £20 then it should cost a non-member £40. An incentive to a non member to join VAI could be offered when they book a workshop – perhaps £15 of the workshop fee going towards their membership fee.

Cheaper Cost to Members – VAI provides a range of discounts opportunities to members and they might need to be promoted more often.

Access only to Members – Members should be rewarded for being members of VAI. Access to the Surviving & Thriving as an Artist programme should only be open to VAI artist members.

Timing – Pricing decisions made in 2011. [update: non members pricing has been increased for the Autumn 2011 programme. Other pricing incentives for members and non members are being explored in the broader context of a membership plan]

7.3 Marketing & Communicating the VAI PDP

The current marketing of VAI PDP in Northern Ireland needs to be revamped. There is a need to create punchier and clearer titles and descriptions of VAI PDP offerings.

The way VAI PDP is presented on VAI site needs to be improved, starting with a new Title – instead of Education it is Professional Development Programme.

Marketing of VAI PDP to graduate and emerging artists needs to be more focused.

Timing: An overall marketing and promotion plan needs to be developed for VAI PDP for 2012. This will need some outside expertise/support.

7.4 Coordinating VAI PDP

Creating synergies within VAI

VAI is a relatively small organisation with many of its staff working part time.

The demands of the work mean that people are often focused and working on their own area. All these areas overlap in some way and impact and can be impacted upon by VAI PDP. VAI PDP is one of the core activities that has direct contact with large groups of VAI constituency – visual artists.

All the activities and roles within VAI flow in and out of VAI PDP in some way.

For example, 50% of people who currently attend VAI PDP events are not members. Actions can be developed to encourage these people to become members by clearly communicating benefits and providing incentives to join. In order for this to happen the Education Officer and the Membership Officer need to work together to decide how this will happen.

There are 2 VAI Northern Ireland workers and they need to have the opportunity to work more closely with the Education Officer as there is the potential for considerable overlap between their roles within the future VAI PDP.

There is a need to more clearly synergise the activities, roles and responsibilities of VAI workers by:

- Working to an overall organisation action plan
- Working to VAI PDP plan
- Creating opportunities for staff to meet, reflect, discuss and plan their roles and responsibilities in terms of VAI PDP. This is particularly important in terms of VAI Education officer and the work of the 2 VAI staff in Northern Ireland.

While VAI staff are all committed to their work they cannot be expected to hold all the expertise needed to be part of a successful organisation. In terms of VAI PDP there will be a need to engage some timely external marketing expertise.

There were many positive comments about the work of VAI Education Officer and she does a great job providing VAI PDP across Ireland on a part time basis.

It is clear that some form of assistance is needed if this position is to encompass the potentials for the new VAI PDP in Northern Ireland. Some of the key actions can be shared within the current VAI staff. When this is decided there may still be a need for a part time assistant to the Education Officer.

It also may be timely to review the actual title of the Education Officer. The work is to develop and deliver a Professional Development Programme for visual artists. Perhaps the work title should reflect the work – Professional Development Officer.

Timing: - VAI CEO, board and staff need to discuss and explore the implications of the potential new VAI PDP on how they work together. Staff have the opportunity to gather and be presented with the findings of this report in late August/early September and begin the discussions

around how they can work more effectively to help achieve the PDP. [update: Board have accepted key recommendations and staff gathering held on September 14 with agreement to have more gatherings over the next 6 months].

8. Future Directions - VAI PDP Partnerships

8.1 Introduction

The partnerships developed by VAI Education Officer & VAI CEO have added real value to VAI PDP in Northern Ireland in terms of additional resourcing; increased promotion; access to artists; and delivery of a programme that is meeting artist's professional development needs.

As with all partnerships there are challenges:

- The changing context of the arts funding/policy sector in Northern Ireland has affected VAI PDP partners and means that new partnerships will need to be developed.
- There are gaps in potential partnership opportunities including a partner from a university.
- VAI PDP partners have never met collectively and this is a missed opportunity that will be seized in the autumn.
- VAI PDP has the potential to meet more of the professional development needs of artists and this will mean forming new partnerships and renegotiating old ones. In this process some form of formal partnership agreements will be needed.

8.2 - Building & Sustaining the Partnerships

There are a number of potential actions that could be taken in terms VAI PDP Partnerships:

- **Partner plans** – in the changing resourcing environment it is vital that VAI PDP be aware of the plans of each partner and their impact on the programme. VAI can then decide where to best allocate its resources and synergise/leverage with partners resources.
- **Existing partners** – there is a need to sustain the positive relationships that currently exist with VAI PDP partners. This will happen if people work to the 8 Great Practice Principles and really are clear about their expectations, commitment, roles & responsibilities and resource capacities.
- **New partners** – new partners will need to be sought to achieve the new VAI PDP. Art Quest in London is a new partner and there will need to be a clear process of relationship building and action planning. A university partner will need to be invited so that there can be an exploration of the potential links between VAI PDP [and other arts organisations PDP's] and more formal accredited learning pathways. Artists and facilitators as partners were explored in the previous chapter.
- **Partner gatherings** – a gathering of all VAI PDP partners needs to be convened in late August/ early September to present, explore and discuss this report. 2 gatherings could be held a year to explore how to improve VAI PDP.

- **Partner agreements** – some of the new recommended VAI PDP initiatives will involve strong commitments from partners. It would be useful to communicate and create partnership agreements that clarified key elements of engagement and resourcing.
- **Partners Professional Development** – there's no reason why the 2 or 3 Partners Gatherings could not include opportunities to provide peer to peer support as well as inviting external expertise sharing.
- **VAI PDP resourcing/role** – VAI needs to be supported as it works to access the relevant resources to develop and deliver the new VAI PDP. This will be a key function of the partnership process.
- **VAI PDP Celebration** – there is a real need for people to stop, take stock and celebrate how the partnerships and VAI PDP has progressed and will develop. Informal opportunities to interact also provide real spaces for relationship and trust building. The 2 or 3 Partners Gatherings should include time after the meeting for some form of informal contact.

9. A VAI PDP Action Plan

There's a lot of information in this report and the Action Plan table is one way of bringing all the key actions together

Key Actions	August – December 2011	January – April 2012	May – August 2012	September – December 2012
VAI PDP				
Pick & Mix 1. Organise under 4 Themes 2. Explore high demand events & explore feasibility of repeating 3. Decided which high demand events need 2 days 4. Facilitator input into VAI PDP design 5. Integrate webinar plans into VAI PDP programme for late 2012 6. Ensure database is structured to hold relevant data 7. Develop facilitator session sheet for key information on each event 8. Build in a social/networking hour after each event 9. Develop a follow up protocol 10. Store key event data re: numbers and feedback	A lot of these actions will need to be decided in this time block so the programme can be ready to market in early 2012	Run VAI PDP	Run VAI PDP	Run VAI PDP
Webinar 1. Research the scope, scale and content of including webinars within the VAI PDP. Draw on internal VAI expertise 2. If webinars feasible then build into later 2012 PDP	Can be done in this block of time.		Build in Webinars	Build in Webinars
Surviving & Thriving as an Artist 1. Meeting with ACNI, VAI and relevant partners to explore scope, scale, content & resourcing of a programme 2. If feasible then gain resources, develop partnerships and design the programme	Meeting Late August/Early September for 4 hours	Resource & Design Programme	Market and Source Coordinator, facilitators, mentors & artist participants	Begin programme September October
CAPE – Communities for Artists Professional Enquiry 1. Explore content & direction of current critique and discussion events with VAI PDP partners and within VAI 2. Develop a plan for peer to peer networks that can be on and offline 3. Build CAPE into the VAI PDP marketing	Partner Gathering and VAI Staff Gathering	Ongoing development of CAPE	Ongoing development of CAPE	Ongoing development of CAPE
Mentoring & Skill Sharing 1. Research national & international options regarding mentoring & skill sharing programmes and then decide feasibility of VAI developing such projects	Conduct research using internal resources	Complete feasibility research		
Self Directed Learning 1. Develop Artists Plan Template 2. Design 2 day Artists Plan workshop	Begin site discussions at staff gathering	Template designed	Market plan and workshop	Run 2 day workshop

VAI Professional Development Programme NI – Evaluation & Future Directions

Key Actions	August – December 2011	January – April 2012	May – August 2012	September December 2012
Pricing PDP 1. Review pricing of VAI PDP 2. Review Membership in terms of offerings and marketing 3. Have member only VAI PDP offerings	Decision made before new programme marketed			
Marketing PDP 1. Revamp VAI PDP written marketing on the site and in emails 2. Develop and build the mailing list and key data so it can be segmented when needed 3. Bring in some external marketing expertise and support to VAI PDP 4. Promote the achievements of the VAI PDP [and other VAI activities] to the membership on and offline 5. Revamp VAI site functionality and architecture as a more usable knowledge management space	Done during the design of the new VAI PDP for 2012			
Recognition & Accreditation 1. VAI continue to explore recognition and accreditation options for elements of the VAI PDP	ongoing	ongoing	ongoing	ongoing
Coordination PDP within VAI 1. Present this report to a gathering of VAI staff for their feedback 2. Explore what new synergies and ways of working are needed within the VAI to ensure the new VAI PDP is realised 3. Create a process for staff to collaborate and coordinate more effectively where roles and activities cross over 4. Celebrate the work	Initial staff gathering in September for a day and have a social gathering afterwards	Staff meet face to face and online throughout 2012 to maintain collaboration, coordination, communication		
VAI PDP Partnerships				
New Partnerships 1. Develop some form of short written document that highlights the key elements of good process for new partnerships. 2. Continue discussions with Art Quest regarding what can be included in the 2012 VAI PDP	Create in this time block			
Partnership Gatherings 1. VAI convene 2 partnership gatherings a year in Belfast for all the partners 2. create spaces to network, socialise & celebrate work	Late August/Sept present report and facilitate discussions	Partner Gathering March		Partner Gathering September
Partnerships PDP 1. Identify topics and people [internal and external] for 2012 Gatherings				
Partnership Agreements 1. Research and develop key elements of a written partnership agreement	Create in this time block			

