

Art Education in Wales in the Secondary Sector: An Investigation into Current Concerns and a Recent Initiative

PETER CARTER

University of Wales Institute, Cardiff

ABSTRACT

Although emanating from a common source the statutory requirements for art in the National Curriculum in England and Wales have gradually diverged. This article will consider the current differences and argue the case for art education in Wales to be viewed as a distinct entity. Particular reference will be made to concerns about the provision of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig in art, the status of the subject and perceptions of unwillingness in schools to address contemporary aspects of art. Reports from two major research projects which focused on the state of art education in England and Wales will be reviewed and discussed in the light of their relevance to the situation in Wales. This will be followed by a brief account of a significant Welsh initiative, the Opt For Art Wales project which has tackled these issues. A summary of research evidence from this project will be presented and evaluated. Preliminary evidence suggests that Opt For Art Wales has succeeded in enhancing the quality of art education in Wales insofar as it has provided a large body of pupils with positive and first-hand experiences of contemporary art in Wales and has raised their perceptions of the relevance and status of the subject. Further research is, however, required to investigate the longer-term impact of the project. Recommendations will be made that the full outcomes of the project be researched and disseminated and used to inform and enrich future policy and practice.

Introduction

From the outset the statutory requirements for art in the National Curriculum in Wales differed from those in England. This divergence stems from the differing responses from the respective secretaries of state and from the Curriculum Council for Wales (CCW) and the National Curriculum Council (NCC) in England to the proposals submitted by the (National Curriculum) Art Working Group (DES/Welsh Office, 1991). The main difference concerned the number of attainment targets, two in England and three in Wales, and the requirement in Wales that pupils' study should include 'work by Welsh artists, craftworkers and designers and those who have worked, or who are working in Wales' (CCW, 1992). This divergence was reported at the time in the *Times Educational Supplement* (Nash, 1992) and discussed in 'Manipulation and national culture: the Welsh dimension in art education' (Carter, 1998). Since its introduction the National Curriculum has undergone two major reviews and subsequent modification. The first took place in 1995 and was led by Sir Ron Dearing in England with a similar process taking place in Wales under the direction of the CCW. The second was carried out by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority, Awdurdod Cymwysterau Cwricwlwm Ac Asesu Cymru, (ACCAC) in Wales, and the modifications in each country were implemented as Curriculum 2000 and introduced in September of that year. In each of these successive manifestations the distinctive features of the National Curriculum for art in Wales were emphasized and strengthened. This separate development is, of course, reflected in many other aspects of the provision and governance of education in Wales. This article will focus on the provision of art education within the secondary sector in Wales with special reference to those features of it which might be described as distinctively Welsh.

The requirement for all pupils in Wales to learn about the visual and material culture of Wales has received strong endorsement in Curriculum 2000 (ACCAC, 2000). One feature of this latest version of the National Curriculum is the use of miniature icons to signify the six common requirements. These icons figure in different parts of the various subject orders to denote particular opportunities to deliver specific common requirements. The Curriculum Cymreig icon, a map of Wales, appears in the statutory orders for art at each Key Stage alongside the 'focus statement'. This icon is used alongside the title or focus statement in five subjects out of eleven and the fact that it is included in the orders for art emphasizes the importance attached

Art Education in Wales in the Secondary Sector

to this aspect of art education in Wales. Delivery of the Curriculum Cymreig appears, therefore, to take precedence over 'problem solving', 'numeracy' and 'personal and social education' in art.

There has been a tendency for the Welsh dimension in art education to be associated closely, and in some cases exclusively, with the first strand of art in the National Curriculum in Wales, 'Understanding' (ACCAC, 2000) with a focus on raising pupils' awareness of the visual and material artistic culture of Wales. It is possible, however, to consider wider associations which would also address the third strand, 'investigating'. In this context, specific aims of art education in Wales might be to raise pupils' awareness of the distinctively Welsh aspects of the natural and built environments through visual investigation and recording. This could also enable pupils to tackle and respond to contemporary social and political issues, and the ways in which they affect Wales, in their work in art and design. Altogether, it might be argued, these factors could contribute to the development of pupils' concepts of place and heritage and nurture their sense of belonging to Wales. There is, of course, considerable conceptual diversity regarding the nature of what it means to be Welsh. Pupils' concepts will be influenced by their experiences of different regional environments and communities and the issues which relate to these locations. It should be possible and desirable for schools in Wales, wherever they are situated, to acknowledge and celebrate this diversity within an overarching concept of national identity. An appropriate Welsh art education would, therefore, empower pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding of the creative arts in Wales and the social, cultural and natural stimuli which influence them.

The delivery of the Curriculum Cymreig was problematic in the years following the introduction of the National Curriculum in art, in 1992. This situation, discussed in some detail in 'Manipulation and national culture' (Carter, 1998), was caused by a lack of available and accessible resources together with some scepticism about the existence of a Welsh visual culture. Since then changes and developments regarding the provision of resources have taken place and the situation is much improved. It nevertheless received only faint praise from the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (OHMCI) in their survey of good practice in secondary arts education (1999). The survey is based on a relatively small sample of schools (approximately 10 per cent of secondary schools in Wales) where good practice had already been identified, and is, therefore, not a representative sample. It reports: "The planning and provision . . . for the Cwricwlwm Cymreig is generally sound in the survey schools" (OHMCI, 1999: 2). More recent evidence, however, indicates some

progress may be being made. The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales refers to art in relation to the Cwricwlwm Cymreig in each of the last three years (Estyn, 2001; 2002; 2003). In 2001 it was reported that 'In most schools there is a satisfactory Welsh dimension to the work in subjects such as . . . art'. (2001: 18). The following year's report stated that 'In many . . . art classes pupils have regular opportunities to use Welsh contexts.' (2002: 36), and in the most recent report we find that 'Among the examples of good practice noted this year are; . . . art lessons where pupils study the work of Welsh artists and designers.' (2003: 72). The warmer language used suggests that improvements in practice have occurred but there is still little hard and quantified evidence to support this.

There are other causes for concern, which relate to pupils' perceptions of the importance and relevance of art, and about the nature of art education as it is customarily delivered in schools. A perceived low status for art has been recognized by various observers but is, perhaps, best exemplified by a statement made by OHMCI in the document previously referred to: 'the numbers of pupils opting for arts subjects at KS4 have declined in comparison with the situation ten years ago' (1999; 1). Recent evidence suggests that in Wales fewer pupils undertake the GCSE course in art and design than in England although it seems clear that numbers have declined in both countries. It is tempting to speculate about the reasons for this disparity. Welsh language is, of course, an additional subject in the Key Stage Four curriculum in Wales; Wales has many more small secondary schools which have difficulties in providing a wide range of option choices; and, possibly, scepticism about the existence of a Welsh visual culture may have influenced curricular provision and encouraged negative perceptions about the value of art. Levels of support for art in the two countries may also be a factor.

Negative perceptions about art may be inadvertently encouraged in art lessons in school. Swift and Steers (1999) and Hughes (1998) have raised concerns about orthodoxy in school art education and unwillingness on the part of teachers to engage with contemporary notions of art. They suggest that much art teaching is based on a late nineteenth- or, at best, early twentieth-century concept of art and that school art has little to do with art as it is produced by contemporary practitioners. Research recently carried out in Wales (Cadogan, 2000) tends to support this supposition.

Art Education in Wales in the Secondary Sector

The state and status of art education

Two reports have been published recently concerned with the current situation in art education in England and Wales. Both have been based on large-scale research programmes and both are supported and endorsed by respected professional institutions. The first and most comprehensive of these is entitled *Arts Education in Secondary Schools: Effects and Effectiveness* and was published by the National Foundation for Educational Research (Harland et al., 2000). It is commonly referred to as the Harland Report, after its main author. The second report is the 'Survey of art and design resources in primary and secondary schools'. It was compiled by Rogers, Edwards and Steers on behalf of Artworks (The National Children's Art Awards) and was published by the National Society for Education in Art and Design (NSEAD) in its newsletter *A'N'D* in autumn 2001 (Rogers et al., 2001). Although the research population sampled in both surveys includes Welsh elements, both reports tend to adopt, perhaps inevitably, an Anglocentric stance. The primary data used in the Harland Report came from five case studies based on field work in five secondary schools. Of these only one, 'a small rural and bilingual school', was Welsh. Secondary data was obtained from the NFER's Quantitative Analysis for Self Evaluation (QUASE) service. No distinction is made in the report between the English and Welsh contexts of the evidence base. For example, no reference is made to pupils' performances in GCSE Welsh although performance in GCSE English is frequently referred to. The Artworks/NSEAD report was based on responses to a questionnaire mailed to all secondary schools in England and Wales and which received an 8.4 per cent response. Although responses were received from 145 LEAs, 30 per cent of responses came from just thirteen LEAs, all of them English (Rogers et al., 2001). This report also makes little attempt to differentiate the English and Welsh contexts, but it seems implicit that the majority of responses came from English sources and that conclusions, therefore, reflect predominantly the situation in England. There is no suggestion that either report is inaccurate. Both, in fact, make very welcome and necessary contributions in a relatively neglected area. Harland, in his interim report, noted that 'the UK research literature on the effects of arts education . . . is not very extensive. The absence of a comprehensive and empirically based theoretical framework for conceptualizing such effects is particularly noticeable' (1998: 1). Furlong and White (2002) also note the lack of research in this area in Wales. In their analysis of educational research projects in Wales during the period 1998–2000, they state that most curriculum-based projects focused on the core subjects

and, apart from one small project each in history and music 'Most other curriculum areas appeared to have no research funding at all over the last three years.' (2002: 26) What is necessary, however, is research literature which recognizes the distinctively national characteristics of art education provision in Wales, in terms of the problems faced and the attempts made to address these.

It would be reasonable to assume that the circumstances which constrain the provision of effective arts education across the UK are also faced, to a greater or lesser extent, in Wales. Harland makes particular note of a lack of relevance perceived by some pupils in some arts provision (2001: 571). He also notes that, although 'some schools can achieve high quality provision . . . the picture is less than satisfactory for the majority of schools and pupils.' (p.572). The Artworks/NSEAD report includes as Key Points that 'annual spending on art and design consumable materials has deteriorated significantly over the last six years' and that 'less than half of primary and secondary schools organise visits and residencies by artists and designers or collaborate with local galleries', (Rogers et al., 2001: 14). Concern about resources can also be discerned in the Annual Reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales in the last three years (Estyn, 2001; 2002; 2003). In 2001 resources in secondary schools in general were described as 'satisfactory rather than good' (2001: 28), whilst in the following year there were 'shortages in some subjects' (2002: 48) in two thirds of the secondary schools inspected. The most recent report identifies art specifically, stating that there are 'still some shortages in art' (2003: 42).

If these concerns are set alongside the comments made by OHMCI, previously quoted, about the decline in numbers opting for art in Key Stage Four, and the criticisms of Swift and Steers (1999) and Hughes (1998) about the orthodoxy and perceived irrelevance of much school-based art, the current state of art education might well appear parlous. It is, therefore, pertinent and timely to consider a recent art education initiative in Wales which has attempted, both directly and indirectly, to address these concerns.

Opt For Art Wales

The Opt For Art Wales¹ project operated from 1995 until 2000. One of its two central aims was to encourage more pupils to opt for art at Key Stage Four. The other aim was to provide pupils in years eight and nine with positive, relevant and inspirational experiences of art. Opt For Art Wales

Art Education in Wales in the Secondary Sector

consisted of a number of individual projects in which secondary school art departments combined with Welsh art galleries and agencies and practising artists.

A pilot project took place in 1995–6. Its background, nature and outcomes were fully documented and published in *Opt For Art, A Project Linking Art Galleries and Secondary Schools in Wales* (Meager, 1996) and only summary details will, therefore, be provided here. The pilot involved eight secondary schools, one from each of the LEAs in Wales at that time. On the basis of the quality and success of the individual projects, the efficiency of the organization and the very positive responses from the participants, particularly pupils, bids were submitted to a variety of funding agencies for financial support for a much larger and more ambitious version of Opt For Art. Significant financial support was forthcoming and by July 1997 it was possible to begin planning the main project which was to operate from September 1997 to July 2000. In each of three academic years thirty schools would be selected to participate in Opt For Art projects. In each school the entire year-eight or year-nine cohort had to be involved. All secondary schools in Wales were circulated with information about the pilot project and were invited to submit proposals for individual projects designed to be appropriate to each school's circumstances, situation and location. In every case projects involved close collaborative links between the school art departments, professional artists and art galleries or agencies. In three years eighty-eight schools took part in the main project. If this number is added to the eight involved in the pilot and to the nine who took part in some projects that were arranged in 1996–7, 105 secondary schools out of 229 in Wales, over 45 per cent, were involved in Opt For Art Wales. This is a significant and influential proportion.

The selection of schools to participate was carried out by a subcommittee of the Opt For Art Wales Steering Group. Selection was based on the quality of the proposals tendered. In fact, no school was denied access to the Opt For Art experience although modifications were suggested to some proposals and not all schools received the level of funding that was sought.

Proposals were received from schools in all parts of Wales. Inevitably, the distribution of projects was influenced by demographic densities and more projects took place in south Wales than in mid, north or west Wales. Participant schools also represented the range of Welsh secondary schools; Anglican, Catholic, Welsh-medium, comprehensive, grammar and special schools were all included.

Each school was linked with a Welsh art gallery or related agency. In order to take part in the project each gallery had to have an education officer to assist

in the planning and co-ordination of projects. It was noted that, during the three years in which the main project operated, there was a steady and gradual increase in the number of galleries that included an education officer on their staff (in either a full-time or part-time capacity). In some cases galleries employed a freelance consultant to work on projects. There was considerable variation in the type and scale of the art galleries. Some were large prestigious buildings that fulfilled a national function. Others were smaller multi-purpose museums which combined displays of art with other museum services. Some were dedicated to a particular art form such as photography. Certain galleries were located in community arts centres and libraries. Traditional art galleries were sometimes considered to be inappropriate settings for pupils' study, for example, in projects which focused on computer-generated graphics or site-specific sculpture. In such cases pupils worked in a virtual gallery environment or on location. Art galleries were distributed throughout Wales. Schools teamed up with galleries which served their own areas. In less densely populated parts of the country, however, pupils had to travel considerable distances to their designated gallery and the cost of travel and the timing of the journeys were important factors which needed to be addressed when projects were planned and funds allocated. Despite such operational difficulties no school or gallery was excluded from the project because of its geographical situation.

In the great majority of cases art galleries exhibited examples of Welsh art, either from their permanent collections or in temporary touring exhibitions. The pupils who took part in Opt For Art Wales, several thousand of them, therefore received first-hand experiences of Welsh art. For many of them, a distinctive aspect of Welsh art, either traditional or, more frequently, contemporary was the particular focus of their work.

In each and every planned project pupils worked with practising artists. This was a fundamental requirement of Opt For Art Wales. In a minority of cases the roles of artist and gallery education officer were combined. In many projects the artists who had created the work exhibited were able to work directly with pupils. In other projects, for example those where the focus of study was more historical or traditional, the chosen artists were able to interpret and explain the work with regard to contemporary Welsh material and visual culture. The great majority of artists who worked in the Opt For Art projects were either Welsh by birth or by their choice of residence.

The term 'artist' was interpreted broadly to encompass the full spectrum of art, craft and design activities and processes. A very wide range of individual specialisms were demonstrated, including fine and applied arts and traditional and contemporary processes and concepts.

Art Education in Wales in the Secondary Sector

Outcomes

Opt For Art Wales has made a significant contribution to the quality of provision of art education within the secondary sector in Wales. The significance of the contribution is based not only on the scale of the project (it touched the lives of several thousand Welsh pupils) but on its very nature insofar as it attempted to address the concerns previously discussed. At the least it raised pupils' awareness of Welsh art through first-hand engagement and there is strong evidence to indicate that it did more than this by increasing their knowledge and understanding (see Fig. 1). It has enhanced the status of art in the minds of many pupils (see Fig. 2) and, very possibly in the estimation of curriculum managers.

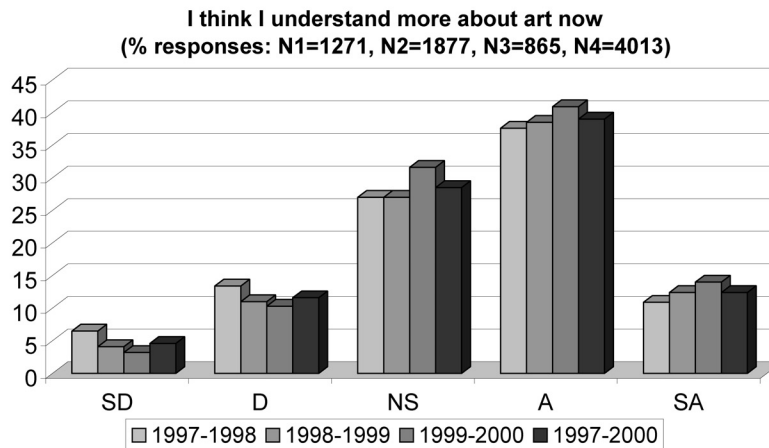


Fig. 1:
Evidence of participants' enhanced understanding of art

In part this has been achieved by the emphasis that the project placed on providing current information about career opportunities in art, craft and design. Throughout, all pupil participants were routinely provided with a set of three specially designed cards containing comprehensive information about careers in art, craft and design. In the majority of projects pupils were involved with contemporary art and, in many instances, worked with the artists themselves. Evidence suggests that many pupils already had positive attitudes

to much contemporary art, but also indicates that the Opt For Art project made significant contributions to the development and extension of them (see Fig. 3). This addresses directly and successfully some of the concerns previously discussed regarding the orthodoxy of much school art and pupils' perceptions that the subject lacks currency and relevance. The great majority of participants stated that the activities which they were engaged in during the project were quite different to the work they would have normally done in school (see Fig. 4).

This project has changed my feelings about art for the better
 (% responses: N1=1278, N2=1953, N3=874, N4=4105)

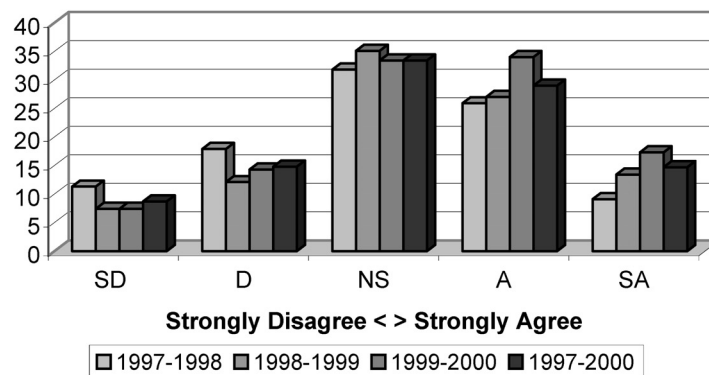
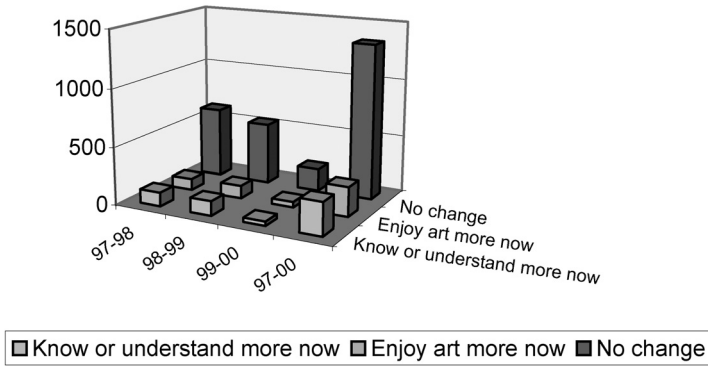


Fig. 2:
The effect of the project on pupils' attitudes to art

The claims made on behalf of the Opt For Art Wales project are substantiated by evidence. All of the pupil participants were invited to complete an evaluation. The evaluation questionnaire, designed in consultation with the NFER, contained thirty-two questions organized into four categories. These covered pupils' attitudes to art, their response to the art seen during their gallery experience and to the related workshop activities, and finally, to the impact the project had made on them. Pupils' evaluative responses were processed by the NFER and a summary of these is to be published in the *engage review* journal (Carter, 2002). These responses were predominantly positive.

Art Education in Wales in the Secondary Sector

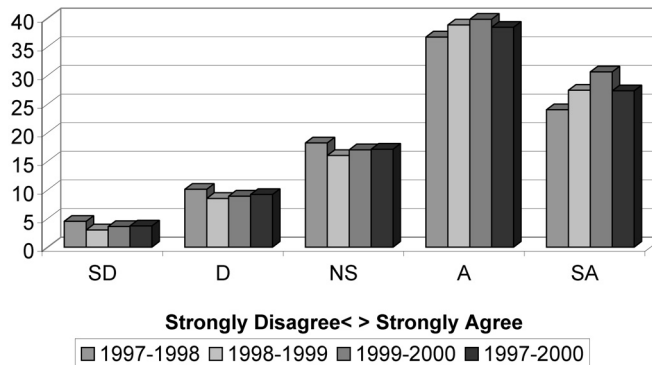
Participants views about contemporary art (totals)



**Fig. 3:
The effect of Opt For Art on pupils' views of contemporary art**

(Note: this was an optional, open question and in all three years many respondents declined the opportunity to express a view. The relatively high number of pupils saying that their views had not changed does not necessarily indicate negative attitudes.)

**I did work that I would not normally do in school
(% responses, N1=1245, N2=1921, N3=848, N4=4018)**



**Fig. 4:
Evidence that Opt for Art did not adopt traditional approaches to art education**

In all, responses were received from over a third of participant pupils and over half of the individual projects. This provides a substantial evidence base, comparable in scale to both of the research programmes discussed in the previous section. In addition to this, individual project reports were published on the Opt For Art website (www.arteducation.co.uk/optforart). Opt For Art Wales can thus be claimed to be a model of effective and innovative practice in art education on the basis of its demonstrable outcomes, a claim which receives some support from references to the project in recent publications, (DfEE, 1999; OHMCI, 1999). The evidence is, however, based on immediate responses. Pupils' evaluations and project reports were completed immediately after the projects had taken place. As such, because of the relatively short timescale, they can only be a partial measure of the overall success. In 1999 OHMCI commented that 'The Opt For Art scheme for Y8 and Y9 pupils . . . has a wide impact on schools over recent years although it has yet to effect an increase in the overall numbers opting for GCSE courses in art' (OHMCI, 1999, p.41).

At the time when this comment was made few of the pupil participants in the project would have made option choices, so little discernible increase could be expected. Nevertheless, the medium- to long-term success of the project would have to be judged, to some extent at least, on the extent to which it influenced pupils to continue their study of art into Key Stage Four. Year eight pupils who participated in the project in its final year would be in year ten now and, if they had opted for art, would take their GCSE examination in 2003. The first pupil participants, those involved in the pilot project in 1995-6, would have taken their GCSE examinations in 1999. If Opt For Art Wales has had a positive influence on pupils' perceptions of art, some increase might be expected in the percentages of cohorts taking GCSE art and design between 1998 and 2003, by comparison with similar figures from the previous five years. If any analysis could focus on those schools who had been involved in Opt For Art Wales, and compare this data with that from schools which had not been involved, more precise information about the medium to long-term influence might be produced.

There are, however, some difficulties connected with any attempt to establish a simplistic causal relationship between pupils' involvement with this project and the numbers opting for art at Key Stage Four. Too many local factors could have influenced pupils' choices, such as internal changes to a school's staffing and timetables. The project could be regarded as successful if it had encouraged pupils' interest in art beyond their school life, for example by personal practice or visiting exhibitions and galleries. Equally or, arguably,

Art Education in Wales in the Secondary Sector

more important indicators to inform any longer-term evaluation, would be the extent of influence that this project had on art teachers, curriculum managers, art galleries, school administrators, the inspectorate, LEA advisors, politicians and external agencies. It would be interesting and useful to discover whether, and to what extent, Opt For Art Wales has changed perceptions and attitudes concerning effective practice in art education in the secondary sector and whether the optimism generated by the early, very positive evidence is justified in the longer term.

In conclusion, two recent research reports, (Harland et al., 2000 and Rogers, Edwards and Steers, 2001) raised concerns about the provision of art education in the UK. Evidence from the Estyn (Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales) suggests that these concerns also apply in Wales. The Opt For Art – Wales project addressed these concerns and, on the evidence available at present, seems to provide a model of effective contemporary art education. It is recommended that further research is needed in the field of art education in Wales and, in particular, about the medium- and long-term outcomes of Opt For Art – Wales in order better to inform and enhance future policy, practice and provision.

E-mail: pcarter@uwic.ac.uk

Notes

- ¹ Opt For Art Wales is an *engage* project. *engage* is the National Association for Gallery Education, Charity No. 1028746. Opt For Art received support from the Lottery Fund and the Arts Council of Wales.

References

- ACCAC (2000). *Art in the National Curriculum in Wales*.
- Cadogan, J. (2000). 'Orthodoxy in Art Education at Key Stage Three', unpublished M. Ed. dissertation, UWIC.
- Carter, P. (1998). 'Manipulation and national culture: the Welsh dimension in art education', *Journal of Art and Design Education*, 17, (2).
- Carter, P. (2002). 'Opt For Art – a summary of pupils' responses', *Engage plus – Opt for Art*, London, Cornerhouse Publications.
- CCW (1992). *Art in the National Curriculum: Non-Statutory Guidance for Teachers*, Cardiff, HMSO.

The Welsh Journal of Education 12 (2) 2003

- Department for Education and Employment (1999). *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education*, Report of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, Sudbury, DfEE Publications.
- DES/Welsh Office (1991). *Art for Ages 5–14*, London, HMSO.
- Estyn (2001). *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, 1999–2000*, Cardiff, Estyn.
- Estyn (2002). *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, 2000–2001*, Cardiff, Estyn.
- Estyn (2003). *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, 2001–2002*, Cardiff, Estyn.
- Furlong, J. and White, P. (2002). *Educational Research Capacity in Wales – A Review*, Cardiff University School of Social Sciences.
- Harland, J. et al. (1998). *The Effects and Effectiveness of Arts Education in Schools*, interim report, Slough, NFER.
- Harland, J. et al. (2000). *Arts Education in Secondary Education: Effects and Effectiveness*, The Harland Report, Slough, NFER.
- Hughes, A. (1998). 'Reconceptualising the art curriculum', *Journal of Art and Design Education*, 17 (1), 41–9.
- Meager, N. (ed.) (1996). *Opt For Art – A Project Linking Art Galleries and Secondary Schools in Wales*, Blackwood, Pensord Press.
- Nash, I. (1992). 'Clarke calms tempers', *Times Educational Supplement*, 31 January 1992.
- OHMCI (1999). *Art Drama and Music at Key Stages Three and Four*, Cardiff, OHMCI.
- Rogers, R., Edwards, S., and Steers, J. (2001). 'Survey of art and design resources in primary and secondary schools' (The Artworks/NSEAD Report), in *A'N'D*, Autumn 2001 issue, the newsletter of the National Society for Education in Art and Design.
- Swift, J., and Steers, J. (1999). 'A manifesto for art in schools', *Journal of Art and Design Education*, 18 (1).
- www.arteducation.co.uk/optforart 'Opt For Art projects – Welsh art galleries – secondary schools in Wales' (site accessed 17 May 2002).