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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Providing Inspection Services for
**Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of an Inspection

**The Nerve Centre
Derry**

Inspected: March 2007

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Nerve Centre is a multi-media arts centre established in 1990 in Derry. It brings popular music, film, video, animation and interactive multimedia together under one roof and offers young people a wide range of cultural programmes, vocational training courses, weekly concerts and flagship events such as the annual Foyle Film Festival. The centre is a major regional hub for the creative industries in Northern Ireland, producing films, videos, music recordings, interactive multimedia content and major regional websites.

1.2 In 2003 seed funding of £95,000 from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and matched funding from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) Creativity Seed Fund, enabled the Nerve Centre to establish a dedicated Creative Learning Centre next door to the original centre. It is currently one of the three Creative Learning Centres established to encourage and support the use of digital technology in formal and non-formal education. The centre has state-of-the-art digital facilities and provides technology and skills in digital literacy to offer a broad range of creative opportunities for different age groups and ability levels in schools, youth centres and community groups.

1.3 The Nerve Centre is jointly managed by its Chief Executive and the Director of Strategy (the Director). There are five full-time staff: a Project Director, a Programme Manager, two animation trainers and a multi-media trainer. It offers three types of programme under the aegis of the Children and Young People Funding Package (CYPFP), the Hamlyn Foundation and Community Relations.

2. METHOD OF WORKING

2.1 The Education and Training Inspectorate was commissioned by DCAL to evaluate and report on the Nerve Centre. In March 2007 a team of five specialist inspectors visited a range of activities identified in collaboration with the Nerve Centre to represent the three main types of programme provided in the centre and in schools.

Case Study 1

A group of post-primary teachers from a range of curriculum areas and with different experiences in digital animation were given the opportunity in a two-day course to take photographs of the city of Derry and to manipulate the photographs to present a montage. With clear instructions and a helpful manual they were able to develop their techniques and ideas through story-boarding; they were also able to relate what they had learned to their particular subject area and potential use in the classroom.

3. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

3.1 The Nerve Centre has many strengths which include:

- the well-earned reputation it has built up since its inception for supporting young people in different community settings, and in both formal and non-formal educational settings, through the promotion of the moving image, music and innovative digital technologies;

- the enthusiastic, visionary and informed leadership of the Director who has worked hard to develop and promote the work of the centre and of digital literacy in the interests of young people;
- the access for young people and their teachers and leaders to state-of-the-art facilities and to a range of creative activities which allows them to develop further their skills in digital technology and literacy and, in turn, to enhance the provision for the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum;
- the clear evidence that the course participants, both young people and adults, enjoy and benefit from the sessions which introduce them to the creative technologies;
- the professional expertise and knowledge of the trainers, the good relationships they have built up with a range of schools, organisations and leaders and their good, and at times excellent, interaction with the young people;
- the useful links with the various curricula which the Nerve Centre is identifying and the innovative ways of working which they are developing in partnership with school, youth and community groups;
- the examples of productive learning and teaching sessions with good pace, appropriate materials and the full engagement of the learners, both young people and adults; and
- the benefits to community relations of working together on projects of common interest which include learning about the local environment.

Case Study 2

In a cross-community project, pupils from two schools selected a location in their community and carried out appropriate research. Supported by the Nerve Centre staff, they created a script and a story-board, made digital still photos of their location and created a 30 second sequence of photographs, for which they recorded the script in either Irish or English. The Nerve Centre staff provided high quality filming support in each location and worked with the pupils to edit the segments and record the commentary resulting in products which would enhance the Tourist Board website. The pupils were provided with significant opportunities to make decisions and to apply their learning, across a wide range of curriculum and learning areas. The pupils benefited from the work, formed good relationships with each other and worked collaboratively in productive, knowledgeable and enjoyable ways. The project was jointly funded by the CYPFP and the Rural Development Council.

3.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- to have a clear understanding of the intended outcomes of a session or project with appropriately costed deployment of staff, joint planning and a more overt link to the work of the receiving organisation and the appropriate curriculum;

- to set up more robust methods of monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision to ensure that there is consistency of delivery and that the training sessions are meeting the needs of the participants adequately; and
- to continue to ensure that the programmes are inclusive and ‘value for money’ by attracting more organisations as planned and by working more closely with the teachers and leaders to increase retention figures.

4. **CONCLUSION**

4.1 The quality of the work in this organisation is good. It has demonstrated many strengths in fulfilling the terms of its remit in supporting the educational needs of the groups with which it works; the areas for improvement need to be addressed if the organisation is to meet as fully as possible the terms of its remit.

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