

# **The Mentoring Development Project**

**An Action Research Project towards a  
Best Practice Model of Arts Mentoring in an All-Ireland Context**

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Developed by Michelle Read and Valerie Bistany  
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From time to time, and in accordance with its responsibility to advise government and consistent with its role as the statutory agency, the Arts Council commissions or otherwise develops reports and studies that provide information and analysis that assists the formation of policies and strategies across the range of the artforms and practices supported by the Council and in related areas with a bearing on the work and functions of the Arts Council. Other studies and reports while not published formally, or adopted formally as policy documents, have value and the Arts Council is keen to share such value with the arts sector and other interested parties.

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### **MDP Pilot Programme Participants**

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### **Individuals**

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### **Organisations**

Abbey Theatre, Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon, Arts Council of England, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Arts Creative Media Enterprise (Merseyside ACME), Association of Irish Composers, Association of Professional Dancers in Ireland, Business2Arts, Clore Leadership Programme, Comhairle – Social Mentor Programme, Contemporary Music Centre, CREATE, Dublin City Council, Clutterbuck Associates, Dublin Fringe Festival, Federation of Music Collectives, Improvised Music Company, Institute for Choreography and Dance, Irish Playwright and Screenwriters Guild, Macnas, Munster Literature Centre, Music Network, Na Píobairí Uilleann Teoranta, National Association for Youth Drama, National Sculpture Factory, Sculpture Society of Ireland (now known as Visual Artists Ireland), Poetry Ireland, Rough Magic Theatre Company, The Fire Station, The Place (London), Theatre Forum, Theatre Shop (now known as the Irish Theatre Institute).

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 The Idea**

The idea for this project was sparked by established playwright Michelle Read, who began to identify a need for specific critical feedback and advice in the process of working on a new play. Michelle's desire for dialogue around her work and the belief that other mid-career artists, across different art forms, might also be seeking such dialogue led her to the realisation that many artists, like herself, may feel similar frustrations but find it hard to define the intervention they seek or, indeed, organise an intervention by themselves.

In spring 2004, Michelle had been to the Varuna House Artists' Residency in Katoomba, Australia, where she first came across the notion of formal mentoring in the arts. The Australia Council for the Arts have encouraged the development of a sophisticated and accessible system of mentoring, clearly documented in *Getting Connected – Making Your Mentorship Work* by Mary Ann Hunter.<sup>1</sup> Michelle identified this as the type of intervention she was looking for and realised that it could be difficult to source suitable mentor practitioners in Ireland because of the lack of information around formal mentoring and therefore the lack of mentor candidates. The Australian document became the impetus for discussions between Michelle and Valerie Bistany, an arts facilitator, on what the possibilities for arts mentoring in Ireland might be. Together they decided to research the idea and see how it might develop, placing specific emphasis on the practising mid-career artist.

To test the viability of this project we “sounded out” a few resource organisations,<sup>2</sup> all of whom expressed their support for the development of a research and pilot programme. With their endorsement, we approached The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon in September 2004 with a proposal to research and develop a best-practice model for mentoring, targeting five art forms.<sup>3</sup> Further to several conversations, we were commissioned to begin the research project. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) came on board as a funding partner during this period, making it an all-island project, and Dublin City Council also contributed funds towards our endeavour. We called it the Mentoring Development Project (MDP).

### **1.2 How To Use This Report**

This abridged report is aimed at providing an insight into the journey that MDP took in developing, delivering and deconstructing an all-island arts mentoring programme. We anticipate that it will be of interest to arts resource organisations, arts officers and administrators and anyone involved in the coordination of the arts in context.<sup>4</sup> Of course, we also hope that it will be of interest to artists. Our aim is that this report will inform the reader and initiate an on-going discussion about mentoring, its merits and its real potential in delivering a compelling yet manageable process for artist development.

The report is split roughly into thirds: the first section explains the context of the pilot programme and discusses the research with specific regard to finding a definition and optimum conditions for

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Ann Hunter, *Getting Connected – Making Your Mentorship Work*, Australia Council for the Arts (2002).

<sup>2</sup> We contacted resource organisations such as The Sculpture Society, Theatre Forum, Theatre Shop and The Fire Station.

<sup>3</sup> The five art forms targeted were dance, theatre, music, literature and visual arts.

<sup>4</sup> For example, arts in schools, health and community settings.

best-practice mentoring. The research outcomes were then used to develop a model of practice, the structures of which are described in Chapter three. The second part illustrates the case studies (three in full and six in edited form) and is written as a narrative to give the reader a sense of the individual processes that each pairing experienced. We made a conscious decision to let the participants tell their story using their own words, hence the emphasis on quotations. The final third focuses on the evaluation process of the programme from start to finish, ending with conclusions and observations with a view to examining its viability and cross-application to differing contexts. The decisions that we made as a result of our chosen methodology – action research – also raised questions regarding key issues such as the design and sustainability of any new model and the sourcing and supporting of mentors. All of these and more are explored in this final section.

## **2. CONTEXT AND RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **2.1 The Terms of Reference**

MDP embarked on this project with a declared interest in contributing to the development of arts mentoring in Ireland. We took the Australian model of the mentor and mentee relationship as a partnership as our starting point, and utilised the definition and guidelines as discussion points in interviews and focus groups.

We also looked at other existing mentoring schemes within Ireland and internationally to develop clear parameters for the pilot project and through this combined research process proposed to:

- define mentoring in an arts context that reflected Ireland north and south
- pilot an approach to mentoring that would
  - target mid-career makers of art, those with a certain degree of achievement and development in a professional sphere
  - focus on conceptual and artistic development of the artist (rather than professional and/or skills-based development)

The first goal acknowledged that no baseline study on mentoring in the arts on this island existed and that the research MDP would be doing would feed the overall project aims. Consideration was given to the unique circumstances that presented themselves in that respect. These were:

- the infrastructure for mentoring in the arts being less well developed in Ireland than in the US, Australia and other EU states
- the geography of Ireland and its unique north/south divide – effectively representing two jurisdictions on one island
- the cross-arts nature of the model. MDP sought to design a generic, flexible structure that could be applied to many art forms
- the focus on the mid-career artist, namely, not an emerging artist. Most mentoring schemes are designed to fill the gap between the graduate artist and the professional artist and MDP recognised that not many options were offered to an artist with experience and some level of recognition
- the financial constrictions of developing a practicable model for mentoring, given the infrastructure limitations
- the dearth of information about arts mentoring in Ireland. The MDP pilot would provide baseline information that would track the mentoring process and be available to be used as a resource for future study and/or implementation

MDP considered itself a short-term research and pilot project that sought to develop a mentoring pilot scheme that upheld best-practice values. This new model would be tested in five art forms – dance, theatre, music, literature and visual arts – and it was anticipated that it would have a flexibility to lend itself satisfactorily to all five. MDP used case-study methodology to test the model and saw the project unfolding in three distinct phases: research, pilot and evaluation.

In the research phase, MDP aimed to:

- look at provision for mentoring in the arts sector
- discover the level of interest/importance and commitment/resources that were attached to the development of mentoring in the arts on the island of Ireland
- find a common definition for mentoring in the arts, if it exists

In the pilot phase, MDP aimed to:

- set up a cross-arts pilot programme based on qualitative case-study methodology in order to test out best-practice structures for mentoring in the arts
- attract eligible mentor and mentee candidates from the five targeted art forms
- develop a model of practice that reflected values of best practice

In the evaluation phase, MDP aimed to:

- assess the pilot according to the parameters we had set out
- analyse the data and describe the processes of mentoring
- draw conclusions and make recommendations about future steps

## **2.2 The Project Timeframe**

Phase 1: Research Phase (January–May 2005)

Phase 2: Pilot Programme (June–November 2005)

Phase 3: Evaluation and Documentation (November–December 2005)

## **2.3 The Research Phase**

The research phase was geared towards discovering the level of interest in mentoring from artists, resource and support organisations. Furthermore, where interest was expressed, MDP needed to gauge the degree to which resource organisations supported mentoring – and whether they were providing or were prepared to provide funds and resources to mentoring initiatives. We have appraised this by:

- interviewing relevant resource organisations
- interviewing individuals with mentoring experience
- sending out a Call for Artists, which was distributed via a variety of arts email newsletters and resource organisation websites
- researching relevant arts reports and websites
- listening to our funders' feedback on policy development in this area

## **2.4 Definition of Mentoring**

### **2.4.1 Desktop Research Findings on a Definition**

As mentioned previously, Mary Ann Hunter's Australia Council for the Arts publication was MDP's preliminary source document in the research. With regard to a definition, we were drawn to the simplicity of its opening statement:

To put it simply, mentoring is a partnership between a more experienced person (the mentor) and someone less experienced (the mentee).<sup>5</sup>

We felt a clear and unambiguous definition for mentoring in an arts context for the island of Ireland was an important basis for this project as well as for future models, thus MDP began its investigations into a definition through a series of interviews with resource organisations and individuals with and without direct mentoring experience. If respondents found the concept of

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<sup>5</sup> Mary Ann Hunter, *Getting Connected – Making Your Mentorship Work*, Australia Council for the Arts (2002), p. 1.

mentoring difficult to define, we found it useful to offer the above definition to provide a context and discussion point.

At the same time, our desktop research revealed there was a patent demarcation in the historic and geographic dimensions of mentoring. David Clutterbuck, a leading researcher and practitioner in the area, contends that the traditional view of a mentor was as a “guide, advisor and career sponsor”, a model that suggests a “top-down” approach where the mentee was selected by the mentor and “taken under his or her wing”. He maintains that this model is still prevalent in the USA; however, Australasia and Europe have espoused a new “empowering model ... one that emphasised empowerment, accountability and mutual learning”.<sup>6</sup>

MDP also recognised the value of informal mentorships and sought to identify the best elements of such relationships. We hoped to be able to recreate conditions to provide an optimum setting in which a formal relationship could thrive. Our research led us to Dr Christine Bennetts’ findings on informal mentoring relationships, where we gleaned that the key factors in a successful informal relationship were longevity (some relationships lasted decades) and a personal connection to one another – a spark. Dr Bennetts’ case studies identify the main component of an informal mentoring relationship as the occurrence of personal growth: “A person who achieves a one-to-one relationship, and one whom the learner identifies as having enabled personal growth to take place.”<sup>7</sup>

Further literature searches revealed a level of commonality when describing typical mentoring relationship traits. In general, there was a consensus that both mentor and mentee “share a common purpose of developing a strong learning relationship”, that the relationship was confidential and that it “has proved to be a very effective way of transferring tacit knowledge”.<sup>8</sup>

The distinction between mentoring and other forms of personal development intervention (such as training, apprenticeship, masterclasses, etc.) are emerging more clearly in the literature in recent years. Coaching, in particular, seems to cause the most confusion. Hilary Dobson, a specialist in executive coaching and leadership development, believes that the difference between them is that mentoring is not “goal directed ... it is not a route to solve specific problems”. She believes that mentors are “guiding from a position of assumed knowledge rather than proactively facilitating another’s process of (self) discovery”.<sup>9</sup>

#### **2.4.2 Interview Findings on a Definition**

Working on the premise that a uniform definition of mentoring in the arts would create clarity, potentially leading to best practice and a wider application, MDP sought to reach consensus on a definition. In point of fact, our interviews with resource organisations and individuals in Ireland threw up confusion rather than clarity. Broadly speaking, we found that there were two types of concept relating to mentoring.

Those who did not have direct or indirect experience of a mentoring relationship used this type of language:

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<sup>6</sup> David Clutterbuck, “The Future of Mentoring”, Clutterbuck Associates (2003), [www.clutterbuckassociates.com](http://www.clutterbuckassociates.com)

<sup>7</sup> Dr Christine Bennetts, “The Aesthetics and Metaphysics of Traditional Mentor Relationships”, paper given at AMTF ’97 “Design for Learning” Third UK Conference on Training in the Arts (1997).

<sup>8</sup> Taylor Clarke Partnership Ltd., “What is Mentoring?” [www.taylorclarke.co.uk](http://www.taylorclarke.co.uk)

<sup>9</sup> Hilary Dobson, “The Distinction between Coaching and Mentoring – And Why It Matters”, [www.alchemyhd.com](http://www.alchemyhd.com)



expert; advising, testing and challenging; professional training; boundaries; dictating the pace should lie with the mentor because the mentor may have the answer – the mentee is the supplicant in any sense; *loco parentis* figure – total respect of the mentee to the mentor.

Those who had direct or indirect experience of a mentoring relationship used this type of language:

collaboration; the outside eye; feedback giver; to push the artist to take risks within a safe framework; support; bouncing board; sounding board; experience and knowledge; wisdom; listen; process based – a safe learning space; where you're at, what you need.<sup>10</sup>

The quotations from interviewees who have had little contact with mentoring suggest that they are thinking of the more traditional top-down model of mentoring, whereas the interviewees who have had contact or knowledge of mentoring are describing the empowering model of mentoring.

Furthermore, those with more experience were able to deconstruct the Australian definition. One commentator queried the implicit notion of common aims and partnership and questioned the setting of goals, which, in his opinion, inhibited the creative process. Another respondent was also critical of the partnership concept and offered an alternative definition that adds more weight to the mentee's needs: "A more experienced person working with a less experienced person in order to attain a specific end on the part of the mentee." Yet another respondent stated: "Mentoring is about an equality of relationship and a private experience." While this last statement is not openly endorsing the idea of partnership, it is accentuating the notion of equal respect between mentee and mentor, with a view to partnership.

One voice in strong support of the empowerment model noted that mentoring had the potential to bring to the fore things that are latent. Referring to his own art form, he remarked that musicians "are often inchoate in terms of their own aspirations. Musicians are paid not to talk."

Discussions on definition often elicited observations about what makes a good mentor. One interviewee alluded to the Socratic role of the mentor as midwife, nurturing the artist to be able to give birth (to their creations) by him or herself. Another correlated a mentor's ability with his or her understanding of what process is and what needs to come out of it. "The process is about the mentor being generous with their knowledge and relationship." A complementary but more active view of the mentor was that he or she was in a position to push the artist to take risks within a safe framework. Yet another interviewee noted the responsibility that a mentor has to articulate his or her own artistic ideas, which could be as useful to the mentor as to their mentee.

All of these views played a strong role in how MDP shaped its own route towards a definition that would hold a common currency in Ireland. It was plain that although the Australian model (or the empowerment model) was adopted as a workable one, its accompanying definition on mentoring was problematic and any new definition would need to take on board the concerns of those with mentoring experience on this island. MDP also needed to consider its own aims in advocating a new definition, namely the advancement of artistic and conceptual development. MDP then progressed into the pilot phase of the programme, with a view that an acceptable working definition of mentoring would emerge as the project unfolded.

### **2.4.3 Research Responses from Resource Organisation**

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<sup>10</sup> All quotations for the rest of the chapter are from interview respondents in discussion with MDP between January and March 2005.

MDP interviewed twenty-four resource organisations or companies, of which twenty-one were exclusively representing or supporting the arts. Sixteen of the twenty-four supported some type of mentoring schemes and all but one described them as formal schemes. The exception, Na Píobairí Uilleann, expressed its ethos as passing on a pursuit of excellence in piping at an early age (though age was not a barrier and mentoring took place for students aged eight to eighty) and that tradition and duty were inherent in passing on the knowledge from generation to generation on a voluntary basis. Though professionally competent in its remit as a resource organisation, Na Píobairí Uilleann saw its approach as being informal and run on a “family” basis.

The other schemes varied widely according to the purpose that mentoring was seen to be fulfilling. MDP gauged the degree to which an organisation was using mentoring against the basic tenets of the Australian model, namely whether there was a one-to-one partnership between the mentor and mentee over a period of time and whether the mentee was leading the relationship.

Using this marker, we found that many organisations used mentoring as a tool to feed another aim. For example, the Clore Leadership Foundation (UK), which runs a year-long scheme aimed at developing leaders, used mentoring as one of the components to support that aim. Others, such as Music Network, engaged a mentor to train and support musician-facilitators to interact with clients in community health settings.<sup>11</sup> Threads, a cross-arts initiative organised by the Dublin Fringe Festival, was a mechanism to create access to artists working in a non-traditional way. The Place (UK), a dance resource organisation and school, has many hybrid schemes with a strong mentoring philosophy in their design; however, they are not purely mentoring schemes – this is recognised in that the mentors are called “outside eyes”.

Other organisations came closer to what MDP would consider “pure” mentoring, but there were missing elements. For example, since 2003 The Fire Station Artists Studio has run three- to five-day workshop programmes<sup>12</sup> with well-known artist-mentors working with artists who are selected by the mentor from their CVs. Although the workshops included some one-to-one sessions with each artist that had a focus and intensity akin to mentoring, the short period of the intervention did not allow a process to develop sufficiently to call it a mentoring relationship. MDP would describe this more as an extended masterclass. The Association of Professional Dancers (APDI) ran a similar, longer scheme<sup>13</sup> of thirty hours over a fortnight aimed at five emerging choreographers. Though the contact time was significant in terms of studio time, the space for reflection between meetings and the mentoring interaction itself was almost certainly too short to allow a process and relationship to develop and mature.

As part of the AbbeyOneHundred programmes, the Abbey Theatre ran a director’s scheme, which seemed to closely observe the values of mentoring. However, the Abbey itself identified issues where mentees expressed dissatisfaction at their level of involvement, suggesting that they were not driving the relationships. It also suggests that this was a top-end scheme that was devised without sufficient consultation with the stakeholders.

All of the above schemes have elements of mentoring, as we define it, in varying degrees, but it appears that there is a confusion with terminology, or simply that the organisation is unclear about a title for their facilitator and “mentor” often seems to fit the bill. MDP would contend that

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<sup>11</sup> This was a good example of hub mentoring, where one mentor interacts with several mentees at once. However there is a strong training aspect to this model.

<sup>12</sup> See [www.firestation.ie](http://www.firestation.ie)

<sup>13</sup> The Irish Choreographers’ New Works Platform.

training, internship or masterclass would better describe some of these schemes than the term “mentoring”.

Organisations that did run mentoring schemes in keeping with our parameters included the Munster Literature Centre, which ran a sixteen-week programme for four mentee and four mentor poets and was a scheme that operated very informally after the initial matching process. The Institute for Choreography and Dance (ICD) has run several intensive one-to-one mentoring programmes for mid-career choreographers that have been inventive in approach and well documented.<sup>14</sup> Rough Magic Theatre Company has run two incarnations of its Seeds project, the first aimed at emerging writers, the second adding on emerging directors. Seeds developed a flexibility in making changes from one model to another that reflected the directors’ needs.<sup>15</sup> The latter two schemes have low-key product-based outcomes built into them: the ICD scheme had an end-of-scheme “sharing” with an invited audience, and the Seeds programmes had a rehearsed reading of the new scripts and presented low-budget productions of the plays directed by mentees as part of the Dublin Fringe Festival.

Of the resource organisations that were not exclusively arts focused, both the Clore Leadership Foundation (CLF) and the Comhairle Social Mentor Programme (CSMP) had well-thought-out structures and systems of coordination and support for their participants. CLF mentors were approached by the organisation according to who it was felt would best suit the mentee’s needs. CSMP developed its panel of volunteer mentors by referral or by personal call from a selection panel. This model was created to assist small businesses in developing skills that would improve strategic growth or to assist businesses in crisis.

A common feature of all formal mentoring schemes seemed to be that, although the structures were formal, once mentor and mentee had met, they were allowed to proceed unimpeded by the third-party organisation and, in many cases, were able to develop relationships that were personal and informal in nature.

#### **2.4.4 Findings from the Desktop Research**

MDP’s initial inspiration came from Mary Ann Hunter’s Australia Council for the Arts report, which describes itself as a handbook that “aims to recognise and encourage mentoring as a significant professional development strategy and to identify as many different approaches to mentoring as possible”.<sup>16</sup> Focusing primarily on the needs of emerging artists, or those at a crossroads, and their respective mentors, it is also designed to inform arts organisation that manage or are interested in starting up mentoring schemes. This was a benchmark document for MDP in that, in addition to describing the variety of mentoring relationships, it also offered best practice guidelines, advice on effective mentoring and an overview of Australian arts organisations offering arts mentoring schemes.

We pursued the Australian theme by researching the Young Artists Mentoring Programme (YAMP) and SPARK, two mentoring schemes aimed at emerging artists in Queensland. In these formal schemes, the scheme organiser or “third party” assisted in finding a mentor where

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<sup>14</sup> Finola Cronin, “Righting Dance – Time out”, Institute of Choreography and Dance, Firkin Crane (1999), unpublished report; and Diana Theodores, *Writing Dance Righting Dance: Articulations on a Choreographic Process*, Firkin Crane (2000).

<sup>15</sup> Seeds 3 is currently underway and has targeted playwrights and directors as in previous programmes and expanded their target groups to include designers (set, lighting and costume), composers and producers. Though they are taking participants on the basis of their applications, the aim is for the selected mentees to work collaboratively towards production of new work.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Ann Hunter, *Getting Connected – Making Your Mentorship Work*, Australia Council for the Arts (2002) p. vii.

necessary, then provided an induction, guidelines and support to both the self-selected and the matched pairings. The mentee would be offered business training, showcase opportunities and, in some cases, funding to complete a project. As they were aimed at young artists, these models<sup>17</sup> focused on the creative as well as the professional development of the artist, aiming to “fast-track” arts careers over the nine-month intervention period and also to provide the challenge of working towards a project outcome or showcase. Their guiding ethos was firmly based on the notion of partnership. “Effective mentoring relationships are reciprocal; both parties gain access to information, ideas and ways of doing things.”<sup>18</sup>

We came to realise that mentoring is utilised for many purposes and that the higher the profile of the scheme, such as the Rolex Mentor-Protégé Scheme, the more likely it is that it will be a “high end” programme, whereby the focus is on the mentor rather than the mentee. The name of the scheme also suggests a dependent relationship, where the protégé is upwards-looking at the mentor.

By contrast, Daniel J. Socolow, director of the MacArthur Fellows Programme, does not see the benefits of mentoring. The MacArthur Fellows Programme, perhaps the most prestigious of its kind, is opposed to mentoring, arguing that it goes against the “no strings” character of the fellowship, which offers one “extraordinarily creative” individual a bursary of \$500,000 to exercise their talent. In response to a request from The National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, UK (NESTA) for a comment on the mentoring component of their programme, Socolow expressed his strong view that mentoring lifts responsibility from the recipient:

It is from this experience that I strongly urge you to reduce (at worst) or drop altogether (at best) the mentor and mentoring features of your program. I really believe that these hold back the very creativity you seek to nurture. Individual creativity was never fostered by committee, and the mentoring structures you have developed are far more likely to impede and retard creativity than to seed it.<sup>19</sup>

It is our contention that where individuals are in receipt of such a distinction (and bursary), it is very likely that they are already at a point in their artistic career where mentoring would be of no apparent benefit to them. However, the argument that “truly creative people do not need crutches of this kind”<sup>20</sup> is upheld for only a tiny minority of practicing artists – the reality in Ireland and Northern Ireland is that most artists find it difficult to earn a living from their practice (and to remain a professional artist) and any support and development interventions are eagerly sought.<sup>21</sup>

By contrast, organisations such as ETA (Empowering the Artist, UK) define their focus as mentoring support “to makers who have established their practice but who want to ‘stand back’ and reconsider the future direction of their work, or where their work lies (critically, nationally, internationally)”.<sup>22</sup> Other programmes also focused on the mentees’ needs, such as the Common

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<sup>17</sup> YAMP became the national model for Australian arts mentoring.

<sup>18</sup> YAMP Information and Application Form (2005) [www.yaq.org.au](http://www.yaq.org.au)

<sup>19</sup> Daniel J. Socolow, “Mentoring is a Waste of Time”, letter to NESTA Fellowship Director Venu Dhupa (source: Theresa Beattie at The Place, London, UK).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Annabel Jackson Associates, *Research into Support for the Individual Artist*, The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon and The Arts Council of Northern Ireland (1998). The gist of this report points to issues in which artists could benefit from further support.

<sup>22</sup> Making Mentors Scheme Guidelines, ETA, [www.eta-art.co.uk](http://www.eta-art.co.uk)

Purpose mentoring programme<sup>23</sup> and the Merseyside Arts Creative Media Enterprise (ACME) scheme, which was devised to provide a “non-solution focused sounding board”<sup>24</sup> to its target mentee group. The latter scheme had a formalised structure that included a contract, guidelines and an evaluation form, which we found very useful as a guide when devising our own materials.

In terms of interest on this island, mentoring has been mooted as a development option for a number of years. *The Creative Imperative* makes a number of points that prepare the ground by stating that “in order to foster the creation of a thriving artistic economy, arts organisations should be encouraged to increase their commitment to new work”<sup>25</sup> and that “the Arts Councils should co-operate with other relevant agencies, including local authorities, to improve employment opportunities for artists ... and help artists to acquire ... the identification of relevant training opportunities and, if they do not exist, encourage appropriate agencies to provide them.”<sup>26</sup>

However, the report is heedful of the different interests that exist in the funding of artists and states that “any attempt to ‘instrumentalise’ the work of the latter is likely to be counterproductive”.<sup>27</sup> (This warning was later taken on board in the design of the MDP project in allowing mentees the freedom over content and process in the development of their projects and mentorships.) The Annabel Jackson Associates report, a predecessor to the Everitt report, juxtaposes the statement somewhat by reflecting that resource organisations felt that “without a programme, structure or guidance, some individuals will not develop on their own”.<sup>28</sup>

More specific to visual artists, the *Feasibility Study into a National Training Provision for Artists Working in 3D* outlines the possible conceptual and technical benefits to an emerging artist of working with a mentor. The report also demarcates mentoring as a good tool for a cross-discipline approach to the development of ideas and concepts and, in particular, describes the objectives of DasArts, a third-level theatre programme in the Netherlands that “actively encourages relationships between students and mentors of other disciplines”.<sup>29</sup>

Later reports, such as the Moller Report (2002) initiated by An Chomhairle Ealaíon, looked at three or four commissions and projects and at how they impacted on artists’ development, recommending that “a relationship of trust needs individual attention; artists should have access to experts with whom they can interrogate their practice and identify their practical career needs”.<sup>30</sup> The *Strategy for the Development of the Arts in the Gaeltacht 2005–2009* specifically outlines a strategy that states that partnership organisations will implement a pilot programme to deliver mentoring supports to Gaeltacht-based artists and arts organisations.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The mentee we interviewed from this programme had an email relationship with a UK mentor selected by her employers to best suit her needs. While this mentor was not of her choosing, she came to appreciate the wisdom of the decision, based on his ability to stretch her beyond her comfort zone.

<sup>24</sup> Wes Wilkie of Merseyside ACME in a telephone conversation.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Everitt, *The Creative Imperative*, The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon and The Arts Council of Northern Ireland (February 2000), p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>28</sup> Annabel Jackson Associates, *Research into Support for the Individual Artist*, The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon and The Arts Council of Northern Ireland (1998).

<sup>29</sup> Annette Clancy and Ruirí Ó Cuív, *Feasibility Study into a National Training Provision for Artists Working in 3D*, commissioned by Firestation Artists’ Studio, Leitrim Sculpture Factory and the National Sculpture Factory, Cork (2000), Chapter 16.

<sup>30</sup> Belinda Moller, *Relationship between the Arts Council and the Artist: Evaluation of Projects and Commissions*, Arts Council (2002), p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> *Strategy for the Development of the Arts in the Gaeltacht 2005–2009*, Arts Council (October 2004).

Although these and other reports point to a growing acknowledgement of the role that mentoring could have in the development of artists, the references are piecemeal, suggesting that these reports are reflecting the national trend and are also suffering from a lack of clarity as to the definition and unique characteristics of mentoring. Subsequently, there is little cohesiveness in a unified strategy towards the promotion of mentoring as a development option.

#### **2.4.5 Findings Regarding Funders' Policy Development on Mentoring**

Since the third Arts Plan (2002–2006), the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon has provided several schemes by which an artist may apply for mentoring support. It introduced the Professional Development and Training Award in 2002 (which included the appendage of “Strand 1” in 2003). Strand 2 of this award was introduced in 2004; it supported short courses and informal training including mentoring. In 2005, Strand 2 was subsumed into the Travel and Mobility Award and thus replaced. The criteria for the Travel and Mobility Award make mention of mentoring as an artist development option but this is directed at international mentorships only and is limited to six months.<sup>32</sup>

The primary support for the individual artist since 1999 has been the Bursary Scheme, a generic award offered to progress artists' practice and, latterly, to underpin professional development. The adaptable nature of the award reflects artists' changing development needs and, currently, is the one that artists can access to help fund informal mentoring arrangements.

Both arts councils are currently in a phase of policy development, with both presenting a discernible interest in the development of the artist. The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon has recently published its goals for 2006–2010 and an accompanying strategy document<sup>33</sup> that details a commitment to reforming funding programmes “to make them more suited to artists' known and emerging needs” and to “establish the professional development needs of artists within each artform and areas of arts practice, and put in place a programme for meeting them”.<sup>34</sup> Specifically, the documents outline developing mentoring programmes as initiatives for dance and theatre,<sup>35</sup> supporting mentoring schemes for arts in schools<sup>36</sup> and mention mentoring in context for music<sup>37</sup> and the participatory arts.<sup>38</sup>

ACNI ran a scheme entitled the Professional Training Scheme,<sup>39</sup> which was open to mentoring initiatives; the scheme was offered for two years in 2002–3 but was cut due to the low number of applications. It was expressed that this may have been to do with the lack of clarity regarding eligibility and the purpose of the award. The new ACNI draft strategy was announced in August 2006 and is currently considering responses arising from a public consultation process.

#### **2.4.6 Conclusions of the Research Phase**

The research phase allowed MDP to pinpoint key features in the differing philosophies in running formal mentoring schemes and also to absorb the best qualities of an informal mentoring

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<sup>32</sup> *Support for Artists '06 – A Guide for Individuals to Arts Council Bursaries, January to June 2006*, The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon (2006), p. 11. Another initiative aimed at overseas partnerships was the International Directing Mentoring Award offered in 2004.

<sup>33</sup> *Partnership for the Arts and Partnership for the Arts in Practice: 2006–2008*, Arts Council/An Comhairle Ealaíon (December 2005).

<sup>34</sup> *Partnership for the Arts*, Arts Council/An Comhairle Ealaíon (December 2005), p. 19.

<sup>35</sup> *Partnership for the Arts in Practice: 2006–2008*, Arts Council/An Comhairle Ealaíon (December 2005), pp. 13, 33.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>39</sup> The scheme was run under the umbrella of the Support for Individual Artists Programme (SIAP).

arrangement. The following summarises this learning and begins to delineate the optimum conditions for an arts mentoring scheme in an all-Ireland context.

#### ***2.4.6.1 Clarity of Purpose***

MDP had suspected that clear programme parameters were crucial for applicants to be certain that a mentoring relationship was right for them at this period in their lives. Ultimately, we felt that the success of a mentoring relationship would be reliant on the commitment and level of expectation of the partners. Most of the research was implicit in this area, in that few schemes included evaluation as part of the process; however, the desktop research revealed a strong bias to this approach.

There is a strong correlation between clarity of purpose for the mentoring scheme and that of the relationship. Equally, there is a strong correlation between clarity of purpose and clarity of role expectations between mentor and mentee and the delivery of successful outcomes for both parties.<sup>40</sup>

#### ***2.4.6.2 Artistic Freedom***

A feature of sustainable artist mentoring schemes seems to be the non-directive stance that third-party organisations take in encouraging the mentee to define his or her own needs and to design their area of focus or project accordingly. In some schemes, mainly those aimed at emerging artists, there appears to be an outcome emphasis, such as a showcase or a public reading etc., which seems to “fast-track” project outcomes; however, it is not clear what the effect of this may be compared to a programme without an outcome deadline.

#### ***2.4.6.3 Matching Arrangements***

How a mentor and mentee come together varied enormously from arts to business settings and from formal to informal settings. Generally speaking, arts mentoring, particularly formal schemes, favoured meeting the mentee’s needs by matching him or her to an appropriate mentor. (The exceptions seemed to be in the high-profile models, where well-known mentors were targeted.) In business models, the third-party matching organisation tended to be more prescriptive and usually assigned a mentor to a mentee or mentee organisation. In an informal match, the mentee almost always approached the mentor. In Australia, where mentoring is well established, a mentor and mentee might apply jointly to a mentoring organisation. Overall, the happiest arrangements seemed to be where the mentee had some degree of participation in selecting their mentor.

#### ***2.4.6.4 Structure***

There is a varying degree of structure in running mentoring programmes, largely dependent on policy commitment to the idea and budget. Where mentoring is seen to play a large developmental role in an organisation, the structure of its mentoring programme appears to be well formed, well funded and generally has a life beyond the once-off experiment.

Informal arrangements may have loose agreed terms of reference as regards the purpose and time span of a given relationship, but rarely are these arrangements formalised.<sup>41</sup> It was generally

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<sup>40</sup> Prof. David Clutterbuck, “Designing and Sustaining a Mentoring Programme”, Clutterbuck Associates (2005), [www.clutterbuckassociates.com](http://www.clutterbuckassociates.com)

<sup>41</sup> However, an awareness of the process can encourage voluntary formalisation. A mentee on the NESTA fellowship programme who was conscious of the perception that mentoring may promote a “culture of reliance and dependency” discovered that “by formalising the relationship, we have focused more explicitly on setting longer-term targets and developing a strategy to achieve them”. This approach proved to be productive and rewarding. Stephen O’Hear, “Should Mentoring be a Formality?”, [www.ohear.net](http://www.ohear.net)

agreed that the optimum conditions for a successful mentoring arrangement are where the structure and goals are clearly defined (formalised) but that the relationship itself is informal.

A formal structure is essential, because it provides meaning and direction to the relationships and support where necessary. But individual relationships will flourish best when allowed to operate as informally as possible. Successful formal relationships very frequently go on to become successful informal ones.<sup>42</sup>

#### **2.4.6.5 Evaluation**

An integrated system of evaluation built into the scheme at its inception was emerging as a key factor contributing to the success of a scheme and which allowed for improvements in the next phase. However, the degree of rigour taken in matching objectives to evaluative structures was found to be variable, and in many cases evaluation was an afterthought. Our research indicates that appraisal or a system of feedback (in both formal and informal settings) is essential for the continuity and development of a new growth area such as mentoring. In programmes where evaluation is a key part of the structure, some mentoring programmes have continued beyond a once-off trial into on-going, sustainable schemes.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Prof. David Clutterbuck, "How Formal Should Your Mentoring Programme Be?", Clutterbuck Associates (2005). [www.clutterbuckassociates.com](http://www.clutterbuckassociates.com)

<sup>43</sup> For example, Rough Magic's Seeds project and many of the Australian programmes described in Chapter 7 of the Mary Ann Hunter document.



### **3. PILOT PROGRAMME FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 Devising a Best-Practice Model and Structure**

Using a combination of action research and case-study methodology to initiate the pilot phase of the project, MDP developed the groundwork by using different measures to equip ourselves with the necessary skills and to include stakeholders in the design of the best-practice model. These included: the Call for Artists, which gave insight into why an artist might need a mentor and why a mentor might wish to mentor; engaging our own mentor for guidance and support; attending a mediation course to up-skill ourselves as a third party; and holding a mentors' forum to consult with experienced mentors and to invite their analysis and learn about their processes as mentors. Also, the application forms that we developed asked for detailed information from applicant mentors and mentees regarding their preferred options and methods of working with each other. We were seeking to discover the optimum conditions for good mentoring to occur and what needed to happen to meet their expressed needs. When the participants were selected, we invited them to attend an induction day where they all met each other and discussed, amended and enlarged on the proposed guidelines. All of the above elements contributed significantly to the eventual structure and process of the model of practice.

MDP initially anticipated facilitating and monitoring eight case studies (sixteen-plus participants),<sup>44</sup> including a cross-arts pairing,<sup>45</sup> two Northern Irish pairings, an international pairing and a national pairing, covering all of the art forms identified as part of the research. Clearly, these models had the potential to overlap but this would be dependent on the response from potential participants.

#### **3.2 The Application Procedure**

In the research phase, it was necessary to test the level of interest in mentoring – hence the Call for Artists, which generated “expressions of interest” from artists. While this fulfilled research needs, the “expressions” alone were not sufficiently comparable for us to be able to select participants. We found it essential to design an application form that would be equitable to all mentees and that would also allow us to amass quantitative information, which would inform us about applicant preferences on issues of a practical nature. Two guiding principles helped us in the design of the form.

First, the form needed to establish whether the mentee was eligible according to the original criteria. These were: level of experience as a professional artist; art form; geographic location; and the “project” to be pursued with a mentor. The latter requirement looked for the mentee to discuss their project qualitatively. It was very important to MDP that mentees had a clear idea about their project and why they needed a mentor’s guidance.

Second, and of equal relevance to the programme structure, MDP needed to find out how applicants wanted to be mentored. The type of quantitative questions asked, for example, were about the applicant’s availability over the contact period, how far they were willing to travel to a meeting and if they were willing to contribute to their mentor’s fee. These and other questions

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<sup>44</sup> A variation on the “one on one” model is “hub” or “circle” mentoring, where one mentor works with a small group of mentees.

<sup>45</sup> We hoped that one of our case studies would include a mentor and mentee pairing that came from different disciplines.

were asked in a tick-box format, which gave the applicant limited choices of response and therefore made it easier for us to assess general trends in our applicant sample.

An unanticipated outcome was the high number of mentors that answered the Call for Artists. MDP welcomed this development, as it indicated a level of philanthropic desire to share expertise between artists. It prompted us to make the decision to select our mentors from that cohort group rather than look elsewhere. To that end, MDP designed a mentors' information sheet, which largely mirrored the relevant parts of the mentees' application form and also asked about the mentors' pedagogic experience.

### **3.3 The Selection of Pilot Project Participants**

At our mentors' forum, MDP polled the mentors and discovered that most mentors preferred to be selected, either by the mentee or by MDP. Those that wished to choose for themselves cited a need to be useful to the mentee and felt that only they could decide their own suitability to a prospective mentee. All of the mentors were united in a recognition of facilitating the best interests of the mentee. Hence, a three-way solution was suggested, whereby both parties were given the opportunity to select each other, as follows.

#### **3.3.1 First Shortlist – MDP Selected**

MDP prepared an initial shortlist of mentees based on the criteria previously identified. MDP selected mentors from a list of mentors that had applied to the programme, in an effort to find suitable matches using specific art-form practice and/or subject matter or areas of special interest to identify a potential match.

#### **3.3.2 Second Shortlist – Mentor Selected**

The first shortlist of mentee applications was shown to relevant mentors for their perusal. The suitable mentor was then sent the selected mentees' applications and Curriculum Vitae – generally no more than three mentee applicants to each relevant mentor. The mentor then made comments and/or a decision on their preferred mentee *and ranked them in order of preference*.

#### **3.3.3 Third Shortlist – Mentee Selected**

The final stage of the selection process was where a mentee who had been selected as a first choice by a mentor had a chance to assess whether he or she would like to work with that mentor. The mentee was sent the mentor's CV and/or biography details and, if they had been sent more than one, was asked to make a decision, *ranking his or her preferred mentor in order*. As with the mentor, the mentee may have had more than one choice. Once the mentee's decision was made and the pairing had selected one another as a first-preference match, MDP provided contact information, and an introductory phone call to the mentor was arranged.

### **3.4 The MDP Pilot Participants**

By following through with this selection procedure, we attained twelve first-preference matches and selected nine pairings that best reflected the criteria we had set out for the project. Of the first eight, two pairings had self-selected and applied jointly to MDP. They were selected for a number of reasons: there was little representation in their particular art form; their application was strong; and the fact that they had self-selected prior to the pilot was an interesting selection model in itself. The ninth pairing was added afterwards because of the above and also for additional factors that were of particular interest: the Irish mentee was based in Paris; she was working towards a

specific commission in Wexford; and the project was very short term and subsequently required a shorter mentoring intervention period than the other candidates.

The MDP pilot participants were:

<b>Mentee</b>	<b>Mentor</b>	<b>Art form</b>	<b>Discipline</b>	<b>Geography</b>
Male	Male	Music	New Art music	Dublin–Dublin
Female	Female	Visual Arts	Sculpture	Paris (based)–Dublin
Female	Female	Literature	Children’s writing	Dublin–Meath
Female	Female	Theatre	Period theatre adaptation	Dublin–Dublin
Female	Female	Visual Arts	Painting	Kildare–Kilkenny
Female	Male	Theatre	Comedy playwriting	Dublin–Dublin
Female	Female	Visual Arts	Drawing/printmaking	Dublin–Belfast
Male	Male	Dance	Choreography	Dublin–Paris
Female	Female and Male	Visual Arts/Cross Arts	Performance installation	Dublin–Cork/Devon (UK)

MDP attained (and exceeded) the target of eight case studies in the five designated areas (theatre, dance, music, literature and visual arts), as well as one international pairing and one cross-arts pairing. The latter is particularly interesting because the mentee had two mentors, co-artistic directors of an interdisciplinary company, with one mentor in Ireland and the other in England. We had aimed at two pairings with participants from Northern Ireland and ended up with only one; however, we were conscious that two other mentors were originally from Northern Ireland and were now living in Dublin.

### **3.5 Induction (9 June 2005)**

Once mentor and mentee had been successfully paired, all parties were invited to an induction day approximately a fortnight after the end of the selection procedure. That afternoon meeting was deemed to be an important part of the process by MDP, in that participants were to meet each other and us, in many cases, for the first time. Of the sixteen candidates, thirteen were available to attend the induction day in the Abbey Theatre rehearsal room.

The primary purpose of the induction was to create a standard and ethos for the programme that participants would help to create and shape. Prior to the selection process, MDP developed a series of templates ranging from application material to an induction pack.<sup>46</sup> MDP had prepared two information packs for mentors and mentees respectively, which included the following:

- guidelines for mentor/mentee with regard to their own roles and responsibilities within the relationship
- a frequently asked questions (FAQ) sheet that anticipated some of the questions that might arise during the course of the pilot

<sup>46</sup> This was revised and updated to include contributions from the participants on the induction day.

- a contract, where aspirational and concrete goals were to be negotiated and articulated (and which included a schedule of meeting dates)
- a periodic feedback form to be filled in and returned to MDP following each face-to-face meeting
- a peer contact sheet, should they wish to initiate a peer support network

After general introductions and a short description of MDP's evolution, the mentors and mentees were split into two groups to discuss and add to the proposed guidelines prepared by MDP, which were shared in a plenary session. The pairs were then given time to meet independently and to discuss and fill in their contracts. Once the contracts were signed, we came back into a large group for final questions and a formal sending off.

### **3.6 The Mentoring Phase (9 June–7 November 2005)**

After induction, the pairings were left to organise themselves without further intervention. They were aware that MDP was in the background for support, if they should need it, and kept in touch with us through a variety of means (telephone, email etc.) but most regularly through the periodic feedback form,<sup>47</sup> which each participant filled in following every face-to-face meeting. This simple A4 evaluation sheet consisted largely of quantitative (tick-box) questions with two qualitative process questions. MDP occasionally rang participants at the beginning of the process to check in with them and ensure that all was well.

#### **3.6.1 The Mentoring Process**

The mentoring process took a different shape for each pairing. MDP had facilitated the initial process by providing a frequently asked questions (FAQ) sheet that anticipated issues that may arise. The FAQ addressed issues of responsibilities and potential conflict as well as practical, administrative and budgetary issues. It was a priority for MDP that, in the first instance, the participants would take responsibility for naming and raising the issue of conflict in their pairings. If no solution was found at that point, then MDP was available to mediate. Regardless of the outcome, it was made clear that any participant was free to opt out of the programme at any time. As it turned out, mediation was not necessary for any pairing, although participants were appreciative of MDP's support when they needed to discuss personal issues relating to the project.

#### **3.6.2 Practical and Financial Considerations**

At the outset of the programme, MDP recognised that, for reasons of professional validation and to create the right setting for a formal mentoring relationship, mentors would need to be remunerated. After talking with our own mentor, we decided that in order for the relationship to start on a mutually professional basis, mentees would be asked to offer a contribution towards their mentors' fee (a minimum of €30 for the entire programme). We also reflected that, as a pilot programme, we should make every effort to reflect circumstances that would be realistic for others who might wish to duplicate this model in the future.

Further to feedback from the mentors' forum, MDP offered a mentors' honorarium fee of €100 per face-to-face meeting, based on meetings lasting approximately two hours.<sup>48</sup> This fee was intended to reflect the mentors' capabilities, experience and commitment to the mentoring process but was deliberately not a large enough sum to attract any mentor commercially.

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<sup>47</sup> The periodic feedback form was developed with input from participants at the mentors' forum.

<sup>48</sup> This figure was loosely based on the standard assistant-lecturer (part-time) hourly rate.

In addition, each pairing was allocated their individual travel budget for the contact period. These sums varied according to the distance travelled between the pairings. In the minimum case budget, Dublin-based pairings were allocated €40, and in the maximum case budget, the Paris–Dublin pairing was allocated €800. Pairs were asked to manage their own travel budgets, keeping us informed of any changes or other issues.

### **3.7 Evaluation – A Summary of the Data Collection Process and Methodology**

In keeping with action research methodology, the project operated on a basis of continual assessment, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data to feed into the final report.<sup>49</sup> The data generated throughout the project timeline varied both in content and form according to where the pairings were in the process.

#### **3.7.1 The Guidelines**

The purpose of the guidelines was twofold. First, apart from clarity of definition of the roles, MDP wanted to send out a signal as to the ethos and spirit that we hoped the participants would adopt and make their own. Second, MDP was seeking to use good practice in asking the participants to help formulate the guidelines and, in so doing, giving them some ownership in the process.

#### **3.7.2 The Contract**

Participants also signed a simple contract where they agreed dates for their six meetings and completed a joint statement that defined one aspirational and one concrete goal for the following five months of contact. The purpose of the contract was practical: MDP wished to take a snapshot of where the pairings saw themselves at the inception of the mentoring period. However, the act of jointly agreeing goals for the next six months focused their thinking over that timeframe and proved to be an effective marker of the mentees' development, as can be seen later in this report. The contract introduced enough formality to the process to encourage participants to participate fully, without being daunting or overly official in nature.

#### **3.7.3 The Periodic Feedback Forms and Workbook**

Once the project was up and running, participants filled in evaluation forms following each face-to-face meeting, and mentees were asked to keep a workbook that focused on the process of their creative development within the mentoring relationship. Similarly, mentors were asked to record their planning and process notes.

#### **3.7.4 Final Evaluation**

At the end of the case-study period, MDP held a three-part format of evaluation based on interviews:

- The pairs interviews: designed to provide a snapshot of where they found themselves at the end of the mentoring process, to glean a joint reaction of the journey they had gone on together and to prepare them for the evaluation process
- The wrap-up meeting: a whole-group evaluation session formulated to discuss commonalities and differences in approaches, styles, methodology and outcomes of the mentoring process as seen from a mentor's or mentee's point of view
- The individual interviews: in-depth interviews designed to uncover individual experiences and processes

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<sup>49</sup> This document is an abridged version of the report submitted to the Arts Councils in March 2006.

The benefit of a three-part evaluation is that it gave participants a chance to evolve from being inside the process to looking at themselves outside it, in a self-reflecting mode. The time lapse between interviews allowed new insights to settle and to be expressed more succinctly each time.

### **3.8 Role of the Third Party**

As described above, MDP had four main functions during the period of the pilot programme:

- designing the structure
- setting up and monitoring the case studies
- supporting the participants
- evaluating the programme

In addition to the practical aspects of running the programme, MDP's intent was also to act as a support to the pairings without interfering in their individual processes. This was made clear to the participants by encouraging them to contact us at any stage, on any query, should the need arise.

In turn, our own mentor, Marieva Coughlan, had the skills to guide us in asking ourselves goal-oriented questions and in helping us to formulate strategies to answer those questions. In the same way as the MDP mentees were experiencing a mentoring process, we too felt that we would benefit from a supportive practitioner who was not embedded in the process and would be able to provide an overview where needed.

## 4. DESCRIPTION OF THE PILOT PROJECT – Case Studies

### 4.1 Individual Case Studies

This chapter qualitatively portrays three case studies in full, commenting on:

- the project/aims of the mentee
- the contract agreed between the mentee and mentor
- the meetings, timeline and travel budget
- the relationship
- the outcomes of the mentoring relationship in respect of:
  - the stated project aims
  - the hot-housing effect of the mentoring process
  - professional development

These case studies were chosen for their contrast in art form, mentor/mentee relationship and mentor styles of approach. Due to the restrictions of this report, we have edited the remaining six case studies to give a flavour of the unique quality and richness of each pairing's journey. Each case study includes original quotations, although pseudonyms are used to honour the confidentiality clause that MDP has agreed with the participants.

### 4.2 Case Study 1 – Dance

**Mentor G (George)** is a French choreographer, a dancer and a father with considerable international experience and is Paris-based. He is currently working in the French Ministry of Culture in the areas of dance development and evaluation.

**Mentee H (Harry)** is an established Irish choreographer with his own Dublin-based dance company.

Harry described his project thus:

I wish to develop and consolidate the template for structuring my work; harnessing and developing the appropriate material through an analysis of my work methods by an appropriate mentor which can evolve into an ongoing dialogue on my choreographic practice.

I wish to have dialogue as choreographer with an experienced and wise dancer/teacher who has participated in the creation of many major works. The dialogue would focus on the creative process involved in creating a work, the use of the trained eye, how to look, how to recognise, to fuse mixed disciplines and bring the discourse on my work to the level of dance discourse in better resourced environments.

#### **4.2.1 Contract**

The contract stated that “this process is a witnessing by the mentor of the mentee in relation to the production of choreographic material; witnessing the rapport between the dancers and choreographer during the process; his method of questioning his material and how this questioning is received by the dancers and the idea carried through their physical comportment”.

#### **4.2.2 Meetings, Timeline and Travel Budget**

Harry and George had approached MDP as a self-selected unit. George had been in Dublin the previous year and acted as mentor in a short-term professional-choreographer-development

scheme.<sup>50</sup> Harry met him, saw the results of his engagement with several dancers and struck up a conversation that continued sporadically over the year until the mentee saw the MDP Call for Artists. For Harry, it was a timely opportunity to formalise the relationship, and for his mentor, who had seen videos of Harry's work, it was an opportunity to work with an Irish artist in a more intensive way, pushing the boundaries of his previous mentoring experiences.

This pairing agreed to have four meetings over the contact period, timing the meetings to coincide with rehearsal periods and performances. Consequently, their meetings were approximately six weeks apart, with the mentor coming to the mentee's venue three out of the four times and the mentee visiting Paris once. The nature of the mentoring and of the art form played a large role in determining the contact hours, which were always over six hours per meeting, extending to fourteen hours in the second meeting. The mentor came from Paris and stayed for at least two days, sometimes three, observing Harry and his company of dancers during the process of devising or rehearsals. The mentor's style and the nature of the mentoring demanded this type of extended observation in order for him to be effective to his mentee's needs.

MDP was mindful of the higher than average costs that this international pairing would require and allotted them a travel budget of €800. It was agreed in advance that this would be the ceiling on travel costs and expenses. The mentee, through the resources of his company, was able to cover additional travel expenses and accommodation. This arrangement was acceptable to all parties and worked well.

#### **4.2.3 Relationship**

Harry and George were not strangers to one another when entering the project and yet had not worked directly together. Harry also knew of George's level of experience and reputation prior to their first meeting. They had a mutual understanding of what was needed from the mentoring relationship and were able to articulate that clearly to one another.

The nature of choreography meant that the mentor needed to be in the room while the creation process was emerging with the dancers, adding another potentially intrusive dynamic. However, George's intent was to melt into the background – he aimed to act as an “active witness”:<sup>51</sup>

He never enforced himself as a teacher or coach but sat discreetly in the rehearsal room. On the first day we put out a chair for him in a prominent position – so he could see well – but he just took himself off to a corner and we soon forgot he was there.

For George, his interest in the project was both personal and academic. His work in France is strongly connected to the development of choreographers and dance companies, and that invariably broaches the territory of assessment of work by the relevant funding bodies. As well as his liking for Harry's work and vision, he was interested in developing a methodology of observation of practice to assist in this respect.

Above all, I'm interested in how Harry functions rather than in his development. He is quick at linking one proposition to another. If he lingers, at times, over one scene, or at this phase in the work, he tries multiple possibilities. The status of each proposition can be very different: choreographic; non-choreographic; dramatic; pictorial; musical etc. He opens out avenues and while he markers intentions or choreographic phrases, he doesn't seek to

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<sup>50</sup> The Irish Choreographers New Works Platform organised and run by the Association of Professional Dancers in Ireland (APDI).

<sup>51</sup> “*remoin actif*” – a term coined by George that has held great currency for MDP.



develop them, preferring to come back to them at a later stage. In terms of creative technique, it's a method of producing material while delaying the process of writing.

Harry was working on the development of a piece using professional dancers and non-dancers, a process that he began two years ago. He describes this way of working as a breakthrough in his development. Nevertheless, he was very aware of the context in which he was working and had a strong sense that he was developing non-linear, non-narrative ideas in isolation from the norms in the Irish dance world. He had approached George because "his experience was so vast and unarguable that it did give me complete trust in that what he was doing came from a genuine learned knowledge – he'd earned his stripes". Though impressed by his mentor, Harry did not find him intimidating and said that they had had some very robust conversations. Working in French was challenging but forced them both to be clearer in their language. Harry noted that had either of them been fluent in the other's language then "maybe not every word would sink in to the same degree".

Though his presence was muted, George was nevertheless a supportive figure for the mentee choreographer, who was at his most vulnerable in the act of creation – particularly in this piece, where he was taking considerable risks.

Meanwhile, George was developing his methodology of observation and non-directive questioning in an attempt to offer a way for the mentee to observe his own practice with greater clarity and from a new perspective. He describes how he gave feedback from the first two sessions:

The discussions with Harry are occasions for asking specific questions in order to distinguish between situations which are of primary interest from those that are not. The amount of feedback is high until the experience of the mentoring inscribes itself into the process. The intention was not to influence Harry's work but to offer the possibility that Harry would sometimes observe his own personal workings (as an artist).

For Harry, the process and dialogue have focused him on an "original creative question and to remember to keep asking the question". To use his own metaphor, George held up a mirror to Harry's practice and allowed him the freedom to explore within a supportive framework.

#### **4.2.4 Outcomes of the Mentoring Relationship**

In terms of direct output, the mentee choreographed and presented a new piece of work, which he toured for several weeks across the country. The impact of the mentoring relationship on this is both subtle and manifest. Harry notes that he didn't think he would have ended up with such a large, disparate cast. "George's comments and [our] discussions led me to think that I should pursue what I'd started. The research and the workshop became the piece – it became a piece about making a piece." Inspired by his mentor's use of research and his encouragement to be self-reflective, Harry's choreographic methodology had been influenced.

The work George and I have done together – his kind of observation and the way I interacted with that, has made a base and put a new sense of awareness in place for me ... I feel more clear in my choices, more aware of what I have within my palette and to trust my own creative language and recognise it ... I have made discoveries in retrospect and now have a deeper understanding of my previous work through these discussions.

Equally, he discovered that the discussions "continue to reverberate and provoke both a fluid state of mind but an obstinacy if necessary to defend what I feel needs to be defended".

When asked if the work had speeded up his output, Harry replied yes and that, although he has always worked quickly, the expectations on both sides made him “more efficient in getting to and keeping to the point without digressions”.

### **4.3 Case Study 2 – Theatre I**

**Mentor L (Lorna)** is an experienced playwright, teacher and lecturer, originally from Belfast but now Dublin-based. She is also a mother of grown-up children.

**Mentee M (Mel)** is a performer and co-director of a well-received small-scale theatre company. She is experienced in co-devising her own work and is Dublin-based.

Mel described her project in this way:

My aim is to complete the first draft of a stage play. This will be a contemporary play based on the Jacobean drama *The Changeling* ... however, I would view my play as being inspired by rather than adapted from *The Changeling*. I have always been drawn towards the extremism, grotesquery and sexual politics of Jacobean Tragedy. I am interested in exploring these areas in a contemporary setting, in both narrative and form. The big challenge for me will be to leave the supportive and fertile environment of collaboration and go solo. This prospect is both exciting and daunting. I would hope that a mentoring partnership would enable me to make this transition successfully. Dramatic writing is a career strand that I have wanted to develop for some time and I see this pilot and mentoring relationship as an opportunity to take the “bull by the horns”.

#### **4.3.1 Contract**

The contract stated that the pairing agreed “to explore character, image and story as a way into a first draft”.

#### **4.3.2 Meetings, Timeline and Travel Budget**

This pairing agreed to have six meetings. They always met in a neutral venue, except once when they met at the mentor’s home. The time between meetings was largely dictated by work commitments and holidays, with the gaps being longer in the summer (about four to six weeks apart), shortening to fortnightly meetings in the autumn.

Both mentor and mentee were Dublin-based and were allotted a travel budget of €60.

#### **4.3.3 Relationship**

The ties that drew this pairing together were clear to see: Mel was looking to write her first script and was keen to set it in a historical setting using a specific text for inspiration. Her mentor, Lorna, had much experience in playwriting for the genre, along with her experience as a mentor, teacher and lecturer. However, it seemed that Mel moved tentatively into the relationship, partly because of her natural reserve and partly because of the strength of Lorna’s personality:

I wasn’t unnerved by her expertise but my mentor is very forthright – it’s something I ultimately like, but it can be a bit unnerving, particularly at the beginning.

Another factor that played a large part in the relationship was that both were busy and Mel was touring during the contact period and had little “head space” and much “trepidation” about starting to write. Lorna was not unaware of these factors and reflects:

I think Mel held back with me – I think she’s quite a shy person. She was doing so many other things.

Mel was fully cognisant that she was having trouble beginning and found it hard to be articulate in meetings, feeling that she needed to be “decoded”. Lorna responded to her with advice and suggestions and, Mel notes, “some really good responses to work that I gave her”. Consequently, Mel felt Lorna led the meetings with Mel steering away from areas that weren’t of interest to her.

It did work for me and she did respond to my needs. There was a point when I remembered the mentees were supposed to be leading the relationship and I realised I wasn’t and then I forgot about that and that was a relief.

By the third session, Mel had begun to produce work and receive very positive responses from Lorna. She had begun to engage with the process of writing and to ask herself fundamental questions about the working conditions of an artist. Both recognised that writing was a skill and a craft that needed to be taught, a particularly difficult task within the timeframe of the pilot programme. Mel was impatient with herself and kept changing her expectations: “I kept coming up against myself.” Lorna gauged that teaching was the correct strategy to use and Mel accepted that she had a lot to learn quickly.

I did feel I was being taught but not in any typical way. I felt I was being given food.

When asked about her mentoring style, Lorna described how at the beginning she did as much talking as Mel in a question-and-answer style, but as the project progressed she became more of a listener. She also noted that she spent a lot of time preparing for the meetings:

When I did my preparations for each meeting I was very conscious of leaving space for her. The prep involved a lot of reflection and a lot of me thinking about my own practice as an example and working model for Mel. She would then ask me questions on my work and reflect on it.

As well as sharing her own practice and work, Lorna and Mel had “broad informed discussions” about other theatre productions, genres and ways of presenting work. They also discussed work that Mel had previously sent by email.

Always conscious of both the external and internal pressures that Mel was under, by their third session Lorna talked to Mel about revising and scaling down their original goal to make the process more manageable for her. Once this was agreed between them, the effect of “letting Mel ‘off the hook’ gave a mental shift and freed Mel up” to pursue her original goal. This paradoxical but positive reaction is testimony to the mentor’s skill and the mentee’s determination. A smaller challenge became unacceptable to the mentee and she drove herself out of her rut.

Another key moment for the mentee was when she had generated enough material for the mentor to help her begin to structure her play:

Suddenly I have boundaries and limitations and it’s fabulous, writing has become so much easier, more possible, more enjoyable! This was a big learning curve for me, working with Lorna on the structure. I have learned how great it is to have a structure; also, how hard I find it to create one ... I have found that I tend to jettison ideas too quickly, then get downhearted about too many blind alleys. These have been valuable things to learn! Also, I have, for almost the first time, had some full days to devote to writing.

By the end of the mentoring project, Mel's schedule had become less hectic and she was able to devote more time to writing. She began to see the results of her efforts:

I could feel my writing muscles and skills improving as I went and this gave me a sense of empowerment and possibility and confidence. Time and practice and a useful structure make all the difference. This now feels like something I can do.

Looking back on the relationship, Lorna reflects that Mel had been a challenging mentee – she had terrific ability and imagination but her lack of self-belief had been a major hurdle for them. Lorna's ability to gauge the pace and adapt herself to her mentee's needs were instrumental in moving Mel forward:

A lot of the work together, the tasks set, were designed to bring her, at her own pace to a point where she could believe in her own writing and take pleasure from the doing of it. She has come a very long way in the last three meetings and now has a spring in her creative step!

#### **4.3.4 Outcomes of the Mentoring Relationship**

In terms of material outcomes, the mentee is approximately two-thirds of the way towards the first draft of an original play. By September she had produced her own body of work and had moved further away from her inspirational text, *The Changeling*. She planned to continue to work on the piece and decided to apply for bursary funding to enable her to continue a formal relationship with her mentor.

As regards personal development, Mel describes the “journey” as an emotional one:

How I was judging myself and what I was judging myself on had changed – the journey was full of highs and lows and despair and light. The experience was way more emotional than skill-based but I still learnt some skills along the way. I thought I might come out with a huge body of material – my initial goals were to get writing and to write something – I ended up having to go through a lot of beginnings and I wondered if I'd actually end up with anything, which I eventually did.

Perhaps the biggest learning curve for her was finding her own formula, her own special set of optimum conditions to start writing. She learned to organise her multi-faceted life to allow for uninterrupted writing time and found that developing a structure was greatly enabling in seeing the whole piece and working towards an end. All of these new insights, she credits to her mentor's skill and perception. At the pairs interview Mel told Lorna:

That's a big thing you gave to me – asking the right questions to yourself. Interrogating your skill – the craft is being able to ask the right questions.

For Lorna, too, the relationship has impacted on her own practice and also has developed her skills as a mentor:

It forced me to articulate out loud things that I knew. I'm writing at the moment – so when you're articulating out loud it has an impact on your own work. I was seeing her strengths that were perhaps different strengths from mine – her character creation was particularly dynamic. I have been challenged because I suppose I made assumptions that given her theatrical background my mentee's progress into a script would happen more quickly ... There was a lot of hours spent building foundations ... not just in the craft of writing or creating character or plot but in the very simple things like how to set up a template for a script, how to organise one's day, how to move forward when there is a block in the writing.

By the end of the contact time Lorna was able to reflect that she took great pleasure in seeing the progress in her mentee's work and the strong sense of ownership that accompanied it.

#### **4.4 Case Study 3 – Visual Arts I**

**Mentor N (Noeleen)** is a practising painter with a good deal of teaching and lecturing experience. She is mother of grown-up children and is based in Kilkenny.

**Mentee O (Orla)** is an architect-turned-visual artist and has been painting professionally for the past three years in Kildare, where she lives.

Orla was very brief in her project description:

Planning, production and showing a cohesive body of work in a professional manner.

However, she did add information at the end of her application. Identifying herself as a practising professional artist, she described her credentials and requested mentoring as a way to “further my personal artistic development”.

In further conversations with Orla, MDP ascertained that she was interested in the process and evaluation of mentoring with a solo show as an end point. Her individual pieces had been well received but she was working in isolation. She was seeking a mentor as a guide as she developed and produced a body of new work for an exhibition in November 2005.

##### **4.4.1 Contract**

The contract stated that the pairing agreed to have “positive, fruitful conversations towards mentee's first solo show”.

##### **4.4.2 Meetings, Timeline and Travel Budget**

Noeleen and Orla met for the first time in Dublin at the induction day. They agreed to have six meetings. This pairing developed their own unique ritual during their meetings: they would generally meet just before lunch, where the mentee would present new work to the mentor, who would not comment at that point. They would eat together without discussing the work directly, then after lunch they would take their time to unravel ideas, discussing all aspects of the new paintings, always with the ultimate goal of the exhibition in mind. All in all, their meetings generally lasted four to five hours.

The travel budget allocated to this pairing was €180.

##### **4.4.3 Relationship**

Having been selected by two mentors as their first preference choice, and after considering information sent to her by MDP, Orla was quite clear that she wanted Noeleen as her mentor. However, when they met on the induction day, Orla found Noeleen “forceful” and dismissive of the subject matter of her work. She felt put down and considered her options: in the past, she had a tendency to be tenacious and to see projects through regardless of how they affected her personally, but recently she had decided to say “no” more frequently. However, she had very much wanted to be part of the mentoring project and felt it was something she needed at this point in her career. She made the decision to try to sort it out and invited her mentor for a meal and had a long, frank chat with her. The content of the induction proved invaluable in helping her come to this decision, particularly where MDP suggested strongly that the relationship be mentee-led and to name their differences by talking openly to each other.

The guidelines were crucial in giving me the permission and providing me with the language to say what I needed to say ... you're far more likely to stay in a room when you've got the key to get out.

Noeleen was not unaware of what was beginning to emerge at the outset of this relationship. She describes her thoughts:

That was my dilemma at the beginning i.e. how frank I could be? How strong was she? It was really difficult trying to figure out what I could say as a complete stranger. How to not demolish her and yet be critical and constructive. At this point she invited me to come and eat – the famous moment. We sorted all this out. It was tough and rocky – it might have fallen apart at this point but it was Orla's maturity and your guidelines that helped us work it out.

Noeleen acknowledged Orla's highly developed skills in drawing and graphics, but also saw that the absence of formal artistic training meant she lacked knowledge of how the art world functioned. Noeleen was also sensitive to the bad experiences that Orla had had as an architectural student and noticed that, after their initial false start, Orla had a need to test her.

I felt in the first two meetings Orla was testing me. Once she did trust me she was amazingly quick at taking things up. After her initial suspicion and need to question ... she was able to quickly take on board anything I had to say that was relevant to her practice. It was never a problem with skills, it was an issue of the language of art and the mores of practice.

By the second meeting Noeleen had identified two areas of growth that she could work on with Orla. The first was the area of professional practice. The second was the question of how to reach inwards. She diagnosed that Orla was adept at working externally as an architect but wasn't tapping into herself internally as an artist. After the induction day, Noeleen adapted to the new circumstances by allowing Orla to set the pace, always offering suggestions by way of her own and others' practice. In some of the early meetings the pair visited exhibitions as a way of developing a shared visual language. They also met at Noeleen's studio, which had a profound effect on Orla, not only in helping her to trust her mentor, but also in showing her some techniques that she began to use herself. As Noeleen notes, these were tasks "which I didn't think I was setting".

Henceforward the relationship grew and developed. The following description from Orla of a typical session also reveals the growth in their interactions:

Noeleen evaluated the work and pointed out areas where I should take more care ... She is very frank and open. I found this was positive because I now understood where she was coming from – I also attended her exhibition in Thomastown.

Noeleen explained what happened between meetings:

We spoke a little and emailed a little – not much. On the whole we worked in the meetings. The way Orla works is to have the conversation, work and then bring stuff back. She wasn't needy outside that. Perhaps I was giving out those signals that I didn't want a needy person (because I was so busy myself). I do think our interchanges were clean – no emotional baggage and the same with work – there weren't things left hanging. Things always reached a conclusion ... I think that we were both experienced and had a work ethic helped enormously.

By the middle of the summer, having hunted high and low for a suitable studio space, Orla was in trouble. She had a deadline of November to produce a body of work – the exhibition space was booked. Noeleen suggested she apply for some time in the Tyrone Guthrie Centre and helped her in her application by acting as a referee. This was instrumental in Orla being awarded a month's workspace in Annaghmakerrig.

Orla's time in Annaghmakerrig was a hugely liberating experience for her, allowing her the time to produce work ("time was expanded – each day felt like two or three days") and to meet and interact with other artists from different disciplines in a mutually supportive atmosphere.

#### **4.4.4 Outcomes of the Mentoring Relationship**

This pairing's achievements go well beyond their stated aims of "fruitful conversations" towards a solo show or even the mentee's initial goal of making and producing a solo show. Certainly all of this was achieved, but the learning that took place for both mentor and mentee was the real fruit of this encounter. For the mentee her learning curve was swift, dramatic and largely creative in nature: she changed the way she painted, a departure that was positively affirmed by others at the end of the process:

All of the pieces were created during mentoring time for exhibition. The access to Tyrone Guthrie was absolutely key in getting the work done. It allowed me to completely shift from equine painting ... Some people viewing at the exhibition felt it was a positive broadening of my work.

Noeleen's impact on Orla's work practice is apparent "because my subject matter changed and that has an effect on everything, materials, style – I threw everything up in the air and saw what came down". In particular, Noeleen's sharing of her own practice at the initial stages developed trust. Recognising her own difficulties in distinguishing between "teacher" and "mentor", Noeleen began to see her role as "senior artist to emerging artist".

Though Orla had a clear deadline for her goal, both are agreed that the mentoring process was instrumental in hot-housing, enriching and speeding up the outcome.

**Orla:** Setting goals targets and having both time and physical space was crucial to achieving the goal of producing a body of work.

**Noeleen:** Definitely, unequivocally. Also speeded her up in terms of developing quality.

The contact with Orla also had an effect on Noeleen's practice in that it raised questions for her own work in the future. Though Orla's exhibition was not as cohesive as Noeleen would have wished, she acknowledges the distance that Orla has gone in her practice and that "as with all of us in creative endeavour, our mental understanding often runs far ahead of our practice, and that our mental understanding is for future practice".

As a busy artist, a big positive discovery for Noeleen was that the mentoring never infringed on her own career, a tacit feature of this particular relationship that complimented the mentoring process:

It didn't affect my output, I didn't put my practice on hold at all. I had five shows this summer and so I was right in the middle of my dilemmas and Orla found this good – she could see at any one moment what I was going through. I found it lovely that my practice was not just relevant but additive. In my teaching, my practice had to be put to one side – with Orla I never had to apologise for being busy with my work.

Perhaps the recurring theme in this relationship is that this pairing had to struggle to find a way of working that was mutually acceptable to both. Orla credits MDP in playing the supporting role:

I felt that we had to work to make the connection, Noeleen and I, and we had to develop the language. I felt that the support I had from MDP was very positive and at all stages I felt connected and that I had access to both of you.

Noeleen concurs and notes that, for her, the interpersonal process was instructive in light of her teaching background and compelled her to evolve in her role as a mentor.

Here I met a very evolved human being, who clearly had a professional maturity in her previous profession, but who wasn't my equal in this professional aspect. That was in a way the most difficult aspect – I had to try to maintain an equality of respect while having travelled further along the road in this discipline. This grew increasingly easier as the relationship developed.

#### **4.5 Case Study 4 – Literature**

**Mentor A (Alice)** is a published novelist with an interest and experience in writing workshops in the community. She is a working mother of grown-up children and lives in Dublin.  
**Mentee B (Bella)** is a non-native poet, also published, and now settled in a country town in Meath. She is a working mother of three small children.

With the mentee transitioning from poetry to fiction, the pairing agreed “to work on the beginnings of a novel geared towards the twelve-to-fifteen-year age range”. The pairing found they had an immediate rapport, both having had similar experiences as emigrant artists trying to work creatively whilst raising a young family. The mentor understood her mentee’s “overwhelming fear” of the task in hand and found strategies to reassure her:

**Alice:** What we agreed to was a (weekly) progress report and then Bella would send me some work. The first part of the meeting then was responding to the work.

**Bella:** Then Alice noticed the material was drying up, also I was constantly revising existing material. I got stuck. I got discouraged but I didn't want to waste the opportunity so I wrote a short story.

**Alice:** [Laughing] It was kind of a rebellion. That was the turning point – the point when we moved away from the novel.

**Bella:** I wrote two finished short stories instead. I have these two stories and the beginning of my novel. There are two elements to my development: craft and process. We spent a lot of time early on exploring craft such as character sketches and timeline which are very important when you're dealing with the length of prose but not something I would have been familiar with from poetry. Process is about having a totally different mind-set to write prose. I had to shift my thinking.

**Alice:** It's about being expansive with the material – how do you draw the material out rather than reduce and diminish it.

**Bella:** Alice showed me how to ask questions – of the characters and of my own ideas.

This extract illustrates the ease, genuine respect and liking the pairing had for one another. It also gives an indication of the content of discussions at meetings – clearly the work was of a practical nature, but was not purely skills-based: they were immersed in territory where the conceptual and the technical collide. Finally, the extract highlights an incident where the mentee decided to shift direction away from her original intent (the novel) to another prose form (the short story), one that she felt more comfortable with at this point in her development.



It was clear that at every stage the mentor kept the mentee's changing needs uppermost in her mind and adapted herself to respond to the evolving relationship. When she felt Bella was "overstretched" they recognised the practical limitations and agreed "not to get too hung up on 'results'". Bella went on to write seven short stories instead of her novel and is attempting another novel for early readers.

#### **4.6 Case Study 5 – Music**

**Mentor C** (Cian) is professional composer of new art music, well known in that circuit. Originally from Derry, he is a teacher and lecturer of music in Dublin.  
**Mentee D** (Derek) is a Dublin-based music student in his final year at university; however, he has been composing and performing his own work professionally for three years.

The pairing agreed "to work on a composition (large scale) for orchestra and voice. A multi movement work based on a poem by Eavan Boland ['The Famine Road'] where one verse represents a movement of the symphonic work." This pairing had self-selected prior to approaching MDP as a unit. The mentee had approached the mentor after hearing his work and his lecture at his university. The mentor agreed to take him on after seeing his work, suggesting the MDP project as a way of financing the relationship.

The relationship was undoubtedly one which centred on the mentor's supervision of the mentee's emerging work, imparting his knowledge of other composers and guiding him with practical and technical advice towards the planning and orchestration of a major piece. Research was a key component in the pairings' working style. In almost every session, one or other of the pairing commented on the potency of one or several musical references in relation to that session's work. Indeed, it was an area of primary concern to Derek:

The reason I approached him as opposed to anyone else was because I knew how rigorous and technical he was in the way he worked. When he lectured I was impressed by how much research he talked about before he even started writing. I was really attracted both to the way he wrote music and the result. I really like his work and his working method.

Cian, who had much experience in mentoring students in summer schools and other short-term situations, found this relationship to be more intensive:

The intensity of the mentoring initiated a more conceptual discussion than [with] someone in a student situation ... There was more walking around the problems and exploring possibilities. With students when teaching you wouldn't do this because you don't want to overwhelm with possibilities, but Derek is a bright guy, he's like a sponge and this was one composer talking to another, not teaching ... he was by no means a *tabula rasa*.

As regards outcome, Derek composed twelve minutes of a half-hour piece for a full orchestra and was pleased with how Cian had helped him systematically refine his compositional practice:

if you only write with your ear, on the piano, structure can "go out the window" ... Cian has very strong ideas of what is good or bad music or good or bad practice. All his arguments were backed up by other composers and material (good and bad). He rooted out for me what I was trying to do and gave me practical advice [about] what instruments and players can and can't do. He was trying to get me out of the habit of writing stuff that was too difficult to perform. To maybe write for specific musicians – make it more achievable, practical.

#### **4.7 Case Study 6 – Visual Arts II**

**Mentor E (Ellen)** is a professional visual artist, specialising in sculpture and drawing. Originally from the UK, she is now living in Belfast. She is a working artist, lecturer and mother.

**Mentee F (Fiona)** is a visual artist who is returning to art practice after a period of absence. She is also a mother and is Dublin-based.

Ellen and Fiona were very at ease with one another from their first meeting at the induction and found they had a good deal in common, practically and emotionally, both having suffered family bereavements in and around the contact period. As Fiona was re-engaging with her practice, they agreed “to look at content/define content; to look at other tools, body engagement; to invite exploration; to look at/make provisional work”. They also agreed on an aspirational goal, which was “to shift from an artistic rut into motion”.

Thus the dialogue was more internally focused initially and became more practical and task-based as Ellen dispelled Fiona’s initial anxiety about the process of developing work by providing a variety of strategies to get started “without ever telling me what to do”. The mentor seemed particularly adroit in finding language, references and materials that would strike the right note:

I found this “third eye”, this objectivity that the mentor brings, a really useful way to get a handle on what you are about – specifically it helps shift perspectives.

With the mentee making artistic progress, the process was enlarged to take in some of the more practical aspects of the professional conditions of being an artist. On the fourth session, the mentee travelled to Belfast to see her mentor’s studio and local galleries and was introduced to other artists and potentially useful contacts. She came to see her mentor as a role model. Ellen noted that it was beneficial for Fiona “to be able to make comparisons with her own situation”. In this regard, Ellen articulated that they were both recipients of the process in that:

Being involved in the project did in a way stir up some issues about art practice and, due to other circumstances, I am currently feeling at a sort of crossroads in terms of where the work will go next, so I guess this did in a way bring these concerns to the fore. Fundamentally art is about communication, and the mentoring relationship encourages you to come with an open mind in order to help this person.

#### **4.8 Case Study 7 – Visual Arts III**

**Mentors I (Ian) and J (Jean)** run an interdisciplinary arts company based in Cork. Ian specialises in the areas of music and sound and is based in England; Jean’s area of specialisation is choreography – she is Cork-based and has recently become a mother.

**Mentee K (Karen)** is a visual artist working in video and photography who was on a long-term residency with a Dublin artists’ studio.

This relationship was perhaps the most complex in the pilot programme owing to a number of factors: the first was that the mentee was working with two mentors with different areas of specialisation but both possessing a deep understanding of interdisciplinary art; the second was the geographic spread – Devon (UK), Cork and Dublin – and the logistics involved in coordinating meetings; the third and perhaps most significant factor was that the mentee’s need was expressed as a transition that impacted directly on her everyday life.

To explain this clearly it is vital to illustrate that the artist was living in her working space as an artist-in-residence for a period of two years and was halfway through this residency at the start of the pilot programme. Her daily routine, the decisions she made and her lifestyle were all dictated by her environment, which doubled as her studio and her personal space. The closeness of her working and personal environment had impacted on her negatively and she recognised a need to reclaim her experiences and ideas as “valid reasons for the work”.

Consequently, their contract stated that the mentee and her two mentors agreed to “concentrate on looking at works in progress (rather than at specific shows or particular goals) and ... [to] look at related issues of professional development”.

Initially, the conversations affirmed the mentee’s need to own her work and to defend and “sit by it”. By the third session, the mentors stumbled upon what appeared to be Karen’s core issue – something that she may not have realised herself at the time:

This was quite a surprising session, as we went from talking about a specific project she is working on, to talking about just how she operates on a daily basis. We ended the session by asking Karen to prepare an “ideal day” timetable, to see if she could develop some structure in her work. This seems to go to the core of the questions and problems she came to us with, and opens up quite a deep and personal dialogue that is mutually beneficial. We talked about how doing/making is often the key to unlocking questions and doubts, and that this needed to be a daily process.

This interrogation of her daily routine became the underlying aim of her project. She articulated a need for structure and focus to her meetings with the mentors – an overt expression of that aim – and the mentors became a sounding board for her shifting needs, offering practical tasks that were sometimes heeded, sometimes not, but always given due consideration prior to coming to a decision. The process of thinking through those suggestions served the purpose intended.

Asking is enough to start an internal dialogue and to be more aware if I start to drift and to take more responsibility in my work.

Meanwhile, a more practical element of mentoring was put into practice on Karen’s site-specific piece where Ian (who, through circumstances, became Karen’s chief mentor) gave advice and skills-based support. Interestingly, both parties expressed a relief that there was now a tangible focus to the mentoring. When technical issues marred her vision and expectations of the piece, Karen was able to talk to Ian to vent her frustrations.

For Karen, it appears that the mentoring gave her permission to challenge her views by interrogating her practice with the safety net of the relationship behind her:

It allowed me to ask questions to myself. It gave me an environment to challenge my own work in, with Ian and Jean as reflectors.

#### **4.9 Case Study 8 – Theatre II**

**Mentor P (Philip)** is a playwright and performer and co-director of a well-respected small-scale theatre company based in Dublin.

**Mentee R (Rosa)** is a stand-up comedienne and is also Dublin-based.

The contract stated that the pairing agreed “to develop work into a performance piece. This will be notated in some way.” They further agreed “to develop confidence in the work”.

At the outset, what was striking about this pairing was their different personalities: Rosa is sharp and witty in a self-deprecating way and paradoxically strong-minded and lacking in self-confidence. By contrast, Philip is calm, thoughtful and self-assured. It was perhaps this contrast that made the relationship blossom – Philip’s serenity became a natural antidote to Rosa’s anxious spirit.

Rosa had begun the project with a body of comedy material arising from her work as a stand-up comic and part-time journalist. Philip identified that the challenge would be the reworking and shaping of that material into a coherent whole. As he learned more about Rosa’s working style, he also realised that initially she needed clarity and leadership and ensured that they agreed on tasks and expectations for the next meeting. As her confidence and trust in him grew, he encouraged her to take the lead, motivating her to take charge.

Though her natural inclination was to be negative about her own work, and uninspired between meetings, she felt that she was benefiting from the process:

My mentor is good at picking up on my weaknesses such as my indecision and fear of making a wrong choice. This affects my ability to handle planning and structure – he suggested committing to making a choice even if it is the “wrong” one. “Start and you can always change.” Encouraged me to place everything carefully in a definite way, with confidence.

Philip’s skills at discerning Rosa’s concerns and framing his responses with great sensitivity allowed her to shape them and own them. His subtle understanding of his mentee’s underlying contradictions surfaced in a way that made Rosa feel heard, supported and that her concerns were being taken seriously. He had a very clear vision of himself as a mentor-observer with Rosa as “the sole trader”.

I thought it was a good working relationship because I felt very neutral, like a neutral observer – it felt business-like. I mean we got on very well personally but in the meetings we were both very focused ... Rosa was good at providing me with material and so I had a lot to be getting on with, then every now and then there would be a philosophical debate about the content ... and that was good too. I did feel like a consultant – I think that’s a good word.

With hindsight, Philip reflected that the project had changed through the process. “I had envisaged rehearsals – some performance element, but because of the nature of meetings we focused on script.” A major outcome for Rosa was when Philip diagnosed a need for her to structure her material to give “an overview of her show – less in her own head, more on paper”. Though initially resistant to losing the fluidity that comes with stand-up comedy, she came around to the strategy, wrote a full script and “got a glimpse of doing the show as a reality ... and it was exciting”.

#### **4.10 Case Study 9 – Visual Arts IV**

**Mentor S (Susan)** is a sculptor and lecturer based in Dublin who has experience of informal mentoring of her students.

**Mentee T (Tess)** is an Irish visual artist working in sculpture and who is based in Paris.

This case study was selected specifically because of its short stated timeframe. The mentee already had a piece of public art underway, due for presentation in late July. MDP took on this case study to see the impact of a short-term intervention.

As Tess's public art project was imminent, we wholly expected the meetings to take place during the project time, and indeed two meetings did: the first in Dublin, after a personal induction by MDP, and the second on site in Wexford, where the mentor spent half a day visiting the two exhibition sites and helping the mentee in preparations for the opening. However, the pairing agreed to meet again much later in October, which suggested that they were looking beyond the stated project aims. From their subsequent comments on the timeframe, it is clear to MDP that they would have preferred six months and six meetings.

Their contract began with the statement "things are open to change through discussion and mutual consent, as the relationship develops". They were immediately conscious of being peers, and this was reflected throughout the process. They noted that the mentor's role was to help the mentee "gain a critical distance" from her work and also give her professional support in the areas of process recording, documentation and PR. They also addressed the area of trust and confidentiality and the desire "to be fed from the experience".

This pairing approached each other cautiously, conscious of their late entry into the programme and their short time together, but also aware of each other's personal styles. Respect for one another was evident from the start; however, the timing of their encounter, the "telescoped" contact time and their similar ages and experiences saw them struggling to define the relationship and to find a way of working together. Susan, in particular, was unsure of how she could be of use to Tess:

Tess's piece of work was very much evolved as we met for the first time – so I was wondering how I could play out a mentor role, without actually diverting her from a process that was very much in production and acutely timed ... I also realised that Tess is a person who goes slowly whereas I am a speedy type, so I tried to slow down and not dash off in directions as I am inclined to do.

However, Susan quickly discovered that she was most useful in helping Tess to promote her work effectively and drew on her network of contacts to do so, both during and after the installation. Tess was appreciative and affirmed that her mentor's input was a positive intervention:

Susan is very professional and motivated to provide the best mentoring relationship possible. She is very much tuned in to my individual situation and is good at getting the balance between spontaneously throwing out responses and ideas and providing a more measured response.

Insights were gained on both sides: while Tess felt that she did achieve her expectations of the mentoring relationship, she remarked that "at the end of the day we were both very much peers and could only bring the relationship so far" and in another context she would seek "an artist who has more experience in exposing in galleries and ideally international experience". These comments pointed to her evolving needs as an artist and suggest that the mentoring encounter has helped to provide her with strategies and ideas to better articulate her future artistic needs.

For her mentor, Susan, the learning curve was equally steep. As a lecturer, she found that the role of mentor required her to relate to her mentee in a different way than she would with her students. The fact that she also saw Tess as her peer made her more aware of the way she framed her input and this approach has had a profound effect on her thinking:

I tried to listen carefully and make observations not judgements. I questioned some of her thought processes and I think gave her a chance to argue her point, underpin and affirm her thinking, so I feel this was useful. I was also aware that my facilitation and lecturing role is not the same as those you use mentoring a peer so I am aware that I have to adapt to a new methodology – I found the written structures and information given to me by the research project to be very useful in this regard.

Because of the peer-to-peer nature of the relationship, this mentoring encounter had strong components of partnership and mutual learning and effectively demonstrated another model of mentoring that merits further consideration.

## **5. EVALUATION**

From the outset, MDP's stated research style was action research. Therefore, we gathered information and developed materials as we went along. We also recognised that consultation with stakeholders would be a key feature to the development of the programme and ensured that they were consulted prior to the start of the pilot programme (the mentors' forum), during the pilot (the induction day) and at its conclusion (the wrap-up meeting).

### **5.1 Methodology**

A combination of methods was employed to gather qualitative and quantitative data and we developed data-collection templates and formats accordingly. Qualitative data was gathered from the contract goals, the mentees' workbooks, the group meetings and the sets of structured interviews. In our capacity as the third party, we also were able to assess the participants' progress qualitatively, by way of face-to-face meetings, telephone conversations and email contact. While also providing us with qualitative material, the application, induction day and periodic feedback forms were largely designed to provide quantitative data for analysis.

### **5.2 Preparation for the Pilot Programme**

The preparation for the pilot programme started with the preliminary research and ended with the induction day, at which point the formal mentoring phase began. This section describes the outcomes of the pre-mentoring phase. During this phase MDP issued a Call for Artists via resource organisations' email newsletters and the press. The Call for Artists had a dual intent: to gauge interest in arts mentoring and to begin to source candidates for the pilot programme.

#### **5.2.1 Application Form**

As described in Chapter 2, MDP initially asked for expressions of interest, which generated 113 responses from both mentees and mentors within the application deadline and 9 after the closing date. We developed a form that would give a clear indication of the mentees' needs regarding the programme, while allowing data to be gathered about how those applicants would like to see the programme progress. Applicants were asked for the following details: art form; years of experience; why they want a mentor; synopsis of their project; by whom they would like to be mentored and to identify a mentor or mentor type, if appropriate; any previous mentoring experience; ranking of ideal practical arrangements and contact type;<sup>52</sup> willingness to contribute towards mentor's fee; any other information; and how they heard about MDP.

Similarly, the potential mentors were asked to fill in a mentor's information form, which largely mirrored the mentee's form except that the mentor was asked about their mentoring and/or pedagogic experience instead of a project.

Of the sixty mentee enquiries, thirty-five applied to the programme formally, and of the twenty-five mentor enquiries, twenty-one applied formally. We were interested in why just 58 per cent of the mentees carried on to the next stage and we asked some why they had opted out. Responses varied from personal reasons to timing clashes, but the most illuminating responses were from mentees who, upon receiving application information, decided that they weren't ready for a

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<sup>52</sup> That is, monthly and daily availability; number of meetings; willingness to travel; face-to-face meetings, email/telephone meetings or both.

mentoring relationship. This points to the fact that the FAQ sheet and the application procedure are key to helping the mentee define and articulate their need not only to the programme but also to themselves.

We were also encouraged by the high level of commitment displayed by potential mentors: we had not anticipated such a large number of mentor interest, of which 84 per cent became formal applicants. Of the mentors who didn't apply formally (and who were contactable), time limitations was the main reason given for not pursuing the project.

### **5.2.2 Data from Applicants**

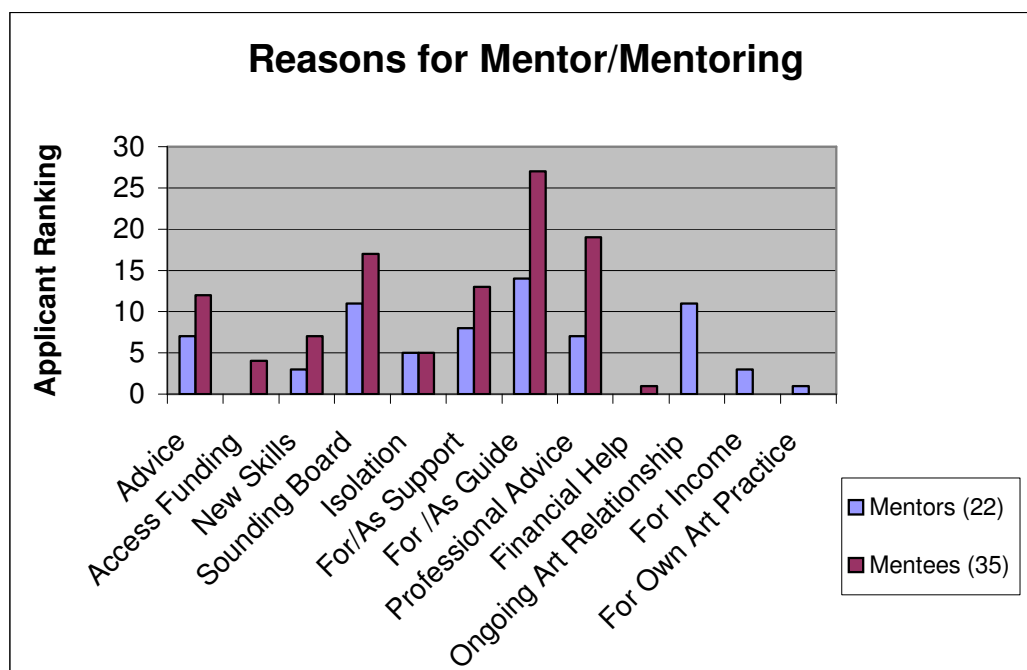
Level of experience: Most MDP applicant mentees had between three and ten years of professional experience, with only three having fifteen or more years as professional artists. With one exception, MDP mentors had at least ten years of professional experience – half had between fifteen and twenty years, and five had more than twenty years. All mentors without exception said that they had pedagogic experience. Most mentees had no previous mentoring experience but of the seven who had, five had been on formal schemes. By contrast, two-thirds of mentors said that they had experience of mentoring (as mentors) but only five of those had done so on a formal scheme. The majority of mentor experience had been in informal mentoring.

Reasons for seeking a mentor or for mentoring: Looking at the top three answers given by mentees for seeking a mentor:

- 77 per cent said as a guide to their creative practice
- 54 per cent said to advise them in their professional practice
- 49 per cent said to act as a sounding board for ideas

Of MDP mentors, 67 per cent agreed with the mentees' top answer, in that they saw their chief role as acting as a guide – but interestingly 50 per cent said they would like to initiate an ongoing artistic relationship. This was a clear indication of the attention that mentors were willing to pay to nurture the relationship beyond the life of the project. Also at 50 per cent was the mentors' recognition of their role as a sounding board. All in all, mentors and mentees had a strong sense of what they wanted and a similar vision for how they imagined a mentoring relationship.





Preference of mentor or mentee: Two-thirds of mentees said they would prefer to be mentored by someone in their own art form area. Nearly two-thirds of mentees preferred their mentor to be working on similar themes, ideas and processes (content) to themselves. One-third specified that their mentors ideally would be working in a similar way (medium) as themselves. Over two-thirds of mentees had a strong idea of whom they would like to mentor them and about one-third could name a specific person. Mentors were split as to whether the mentee should be a known or unknown person to them, but two-thirds felt that mentees should be working with similar content to themselves and half also felt that they should be working within a similar medium. Three-quarters of mentors did not have a strong view of whom that mentee should be and only two mentors had a specific mentee in mind.

### 5.2.3 The Selection Process

The selection of candidates for the pilot programme took shape in several stages. The first was a pre-selection phase where all application forms were scanned for eligibility according to the criteria that MDP had set out in the initial stages of the project.<sup>53</sup>

The next task was to cross-reference the needs of the mentees with the area of specialisation of the mentors to see if there were possible matches. Because of the high number and high standard of applicant mentors, MDP took the decision that, in the main, it would not be necessary to source mentors outside of this group. In the visual arts, mentors tended to have a particular skills base (e.g. painting or print-making). The same comments apply to literature. However, many of the mentees in these areas were also quite specific about what discipline they wanted their mentor to come from, and this seemed to reflect the needs of these particular art forms.

Of the thirty-five formal mentee applications, MDP shortlisted on the basis of the original criteria, then filtered that group down further if there was no suitable mentor for them within the applicant

<sup>53</sup> These were a focus on creative/conceptual development for mid-career professional artists (three or more years), representing five art forms and a geographic spread.

mentor group. This left twenty-two potential mentees. Of the twenty-two suitable mentors, we found that eighteen could be potentially matched with mentees' declared projects – the remaining four had expressed a mentoring interest in an area of specialisation that was not requested by any mentee.

### ***5.2.3.1 Final Selection of MDP Mentees and Mentors***

Arising from feedback at the mentors' forum, MDP developed and implemented the selection procedure described in Chapter 3. This resulted in twelve first-preference matches. As MDP could only accommodate nine case studies, we needed to reapply the selection criteria in a more stringent fashion to make a final decision. That decision was made largely on the basis of an over-representation of pairings in theatre and visual arts. (It is important to state that the art forms represented in the case studies were in direct proportion to the demand from the prospective mentees, with the majority of applications coming from the visual arts sector.) Geography was also a factor, and finally there was a measure of qualitative and budgetary assessment based on the overall requirements of the pilot programme.

#### *a) Sourcing of Mentors*

During the selection procedure, MDP explored the model of sourcing specific mentors identified by some mentees in their applications. This experience led MDP to believe that sourcing mentors is a valuable and necessary exercise where the mentee has a clear, specific need for a named mentor. However the "cold calling" aspect of that encounter requires a long lead-in time for the mentor to become familiar with the concept of mentoring as we are defining it and to evaluate themselves in terms of their own capabilities, availability and commitment level as a mentor. It also led MDP to dwell on the significant advantage of having mentors who have already been through that process themselves and are willingly putting themselves forward as mentors.

#### *b) Special Cases – Music and a Short-term Project*

There were few eligible applicants from any music discipline. We accepted Cian and Derek based on a shift in our assessment. Although Derek was a student, Cian's endorsement of him and the fact that they had approached MDP together convinced us of the value of taking this pairing on within the programme.

Another pairing that MDP was interested in was a visual arts pairing where the contact period requested was only three months. We were curious as to the impact of such a short intervention; however, we felt that we could not afford to take it on. It was the mentor's initiative in contacting us and debating the idea that made us reverse the decision.

This flexibility, to assess art forms according to their different needs, is, we feel, integral to any mentoring programme.

### **5.2.4 The Induction Process**

The induction day was organised to fulfil several functions:

- to introduce the MDP, participants and the pairings to one other
- to clarify mentor and mentee roles and responsibilities by jointly developing guidelines
- to make MDP's role clear as the third party
- to allow the pairings time to negotiate their contract
- to welcome participants on the programme and wish them well

Therefore, the afternoon was designed accordingly, using a combination of small group work (in mentor or mentee groupings) and plenary sessions to keep the focus sharp and interactive.

MDP circulated an evaluation form after the induction day and received the following very positive feedback based on twelve of the thirteen attendees. The following comments give a flavour of participant reaction:

my experience of that afternoon was very positive and it was good to begin to get a feel of the programme we are involved in and to meet others on the same journey ... a necessary kicking-off point and beautifully run.<sup>54</sup>

I found this day more valuable than completing the form suggests. It was interesting to gain a perspective on the other projects, and especially to see ... the shared enthusiasm.<sup>55</sup>

I came away feeling not restricted, not over documented, not overwhelmed but centred and valued for at least trying to do what I do, and encouraged and supported.<sup>56</sup>

### **5.3 Outcomes of the Mentoring Phase**

#### **5.3.1 The Mentoring Process**

The mentoring process is the heart of a mentoring relationship: it is how the mentor and mentee interact to develop and pump life into the mentee's project. If we consider the growth of the relationship between pairings to be a reflection of their journey, then the data suggests that there were three distinct phases in that journey, each phase typically lasting about two sessions.<sup>57</sup> The first, as mentioned earlier, was an introductory phase; the second was a transitional phase and the last was a concluding phase. For most, work was generated in all of these phases in varying degrees.

##### ***5.3.1.1 The Introductory (Getting-to-Know-You) Phase***

Most of the MDP participants did not know one another. In the early meetings, personality played a certain role – some participants were reserved, others more forthright – but all entered the programme in a generous, cooperative spirit. The programme structure offered a professional credo that was acknowledged and upheld. This lessened the impact of personality and increased the possibilities of progress in a more business-like fashion.

Some pairings developed a “spark” at the induction day and others didn't. It is safe to say that most pairings needed to time to get to know one another, both in terms of the project aims and in personal terms. For both parties, this phase was essential towards building trust. For the mentors in particular, there was a consciousness that it was up to their mentee to set the pace:

We were strangers – to know just what questions [to ask], what not to ask, I needed time to gauge that. It's important not to rush that. If she had expressed more immediate needs the pace would have brisker, but I felt that she needed someone to bounce ideas off and with a connection outside of her usual sphere.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Mentee in an email dated 5 July 2005.

<sup>55</sup> Mentor on induction evaluation form.

<sup>56</sup> Mentee in an email dated 13 June 2005.

<sup>57</sup> Between six and ten weeks.

<sup>58</sup> Mentor in individual interview.

At this early stage, all of the participants were focused on the creative and conceptual development of their respective projects: they were looking for the shape that the project might take and were exploring the range of options. The mentees perceived that they needed to take preparatory measures to help them to focus on the hard job of work ahead of them. Interestingly, the mentors felt their focus was on the mentee and their project – not on the practical issues. During this phase, they were listening intently to the mentee (who was mostly chatting and experience-sharing), trying to “read between the lines”, get a real sense of their mentee’s needs and give feedback accordingly.

Most mentors at some point in the pilot programme did set tasks, but there was an openness in the way that this was offered that allowed the mentee a freedom of choice:

I would say that the vast majority of our methodology was conversation-based (which feels like a much more mature, equal arrangement) although we occasionally set “tasks” for Karen – most of which she didn’t actually do. This was fine, because the task itself informed her practice and work, and her choice not to do it, or to do it in a different way.<sup>59</sup>

### ***5.3.1.2 The Transitional Phase***

In terms of individual processes, the path that each pairing took was largely reflective of the mentee’s project and of the art form through which the project progressed.

Where the mentee’s project had a tangible outcome, and where they were working with the written form (i.e. writing or composing), there is evidence of similar processes at work between mentor and mentee pairings. Typically, there would be an agenda for each meeting (agreed at the previous meeting) that would provide the topics for discussion or exploration.

Where the mentee’s project was less tangible, and particularly where an aspirational goal had been identified, the mentoring process was more fluid, conversational and sometimes focused on tasks that helped to develop the mentee’s ideas and decision-making processes. These projects tended to be non-verbal in form (visual arts and dance), where the mentee was engaging in developing an internal dialogue with their practice.

However, two visual artists had stated concrete aims – namely working towards exhibition. What would be characteristic of both was that though they were working with ideas, those ideas took on a tangible form – this provided a focus for the conversations between mentor and mentee.

Just after the halfway point in the project (between the third and fourth meetings) there was a remarkable turnaround, where the mentees were listening and talking about their projects as their highest priorities. This indicates a move from the conceptual thinking to the practical “doing” and this is backed up with strategies that mentors offered.

### ***5.3.1.3 The Concluding Phase***

By the final phase, the mentoring relationship was well established and was beginning to wind down. There is a notable synergy in the pairings’ foci of interaction by the fifth session, where the creative, the practical and the social all converge. For the mentors too, this is a cathartic period: the data suggests that as their understanding of the mentee grew, they saw the mentee’s creative goals in the wider context of his or her development. They also noted a sharp increase in the amount of time spent on professional practice.

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<sup>59</sup> Ian in individual interview.

By the end of the process, the mentees were firmly in the driving seat of their project, talking about it with a confidence that comes from having produced results. Accordingly, the mentors seem to step back at this point and allow the mentees to fully exploit their last encounter.

#### ***5.3.1.4 Working within Formal Boundaries and a Timeframe***

The selection and induction processes before the start of the pilot gave the participants a working knowledge of the programme and its formality seemed to provide the security of individual boundaries being protected. No participants commented on feeling negative pressure or interference from MDP during the process. Many mentees commented that the discipline of regularly filling in the periodic evaluation form was a useful task to aid the development of self-reflection, as was their workbook. A mentor comments:

I've been on both sides of mentoring informally – emotional baggage came with it. I've mentored before for long periods and they ran on with no specific end. I liked this because there was a very clear, clean agreement. The fact the mentor was remunerated made it very formal. It made it more difficult at the beginning because we didn't know each other but in the long term it was good.

The main areas of consensus between participants were that the timeframe was too short and an extension would have allowed them to get more work done,<sup>60</sup> and that the summer time was not conducive to this kind of intensive engagement, as the late evenings and holidays diverted attention from the work. Many thought that a programme running the length of a typical academic year (September to May) was the ideal in terms of both time and commitment. However, an interesting caveat emerged in their reflections: that six sessions was still adequate within this longer timeframe, as time would become compressed regardless – what was needed was a larger breathing space between meetings to get more work done.

#### ***5.3.1.5 Outcomes***

It is important to reiterate that in devising the project MDP recognised that the mentoring of artists in the field of creative and conceptual development is a long-term process and the participants were aware that there were no outcome expectations as regards the pilot programme. The setting of goals was formalised in the contract but MDP made it clear that these were always open to interpretations or changes. Therefore, the fact that there were many significant and varied outcomes within the short timeframe of the programme was both surprising and gratifying.

##### *a) Project Outcomes*

In terms of tangible project outcomes, the mentees produced a full-length one-woman comedy script; twelve minutes of a thirty-minute full orchestral piece; two-thirds of an original script; a full body of paintings that had its own exhibition immediately after the mentoring period; a new choreographed dance piece that toured the country during the contact period; seven short stories and the beginnings of a short novel for children.

No less substantially, two visual artists were mentored through a transitional stage, where one was re-emerging, after a long absence, from a sense of stagnation to a re-engagement with her art practice, and the other was exploring her own internal dialogue and working towards developing a more performative approach to her work. Both felt they were helped in moving towards their goals.

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<sup>60</sup> The optimum time expressed varied from seven months to two years.

Did the mentoring process “hot-house” their goals and to what extent? Of the eight pairings that responded to this question, seven of them answered an emphatic yes. Rosa and Derek mentioned that the setting of targets was instrumental in attaining their final outcome. Both talked about the consistent efforts they made to write at least two or three times a week. Orla concurred:

Setting goals targets and having both time and physical space was crucial to achieving the goal of producing a body of work.

Her mentor noted that the process “also speeded her up in terms of developing quality”.

For Bella, the initial slow down when she was struggling with her novel contrasted with a creative burst after she and Alice agreed to change her goals to writing short stories. She then wrote seven in less than four months. Harry always felt he worked quickly but noticed that expectations on both sides made him “more efficient in getting to and keeping to the point without digressions”.

However, for mentor Ian, the answer to the hot-housing question was an emphatic “No. That was certainly not a goal.”

#### *b) Professional Development Outcomes*

Most mentees did have outcomes that directly affected their professional standing as a result of the mentoring intervention, but for most, professional development was a natural by-product of working on the creative and conceptual.

In the first category were Orla and Bella. Orla produced a body of work, organised and hung her paintings and sold at least eight of them. She also altered the nature of her work. Her subject matter changed, as did her materials and style of painting – it was a substantial outcome for her.

Bella, too, benefited financially through sheer will and determination. About halfway through the contact period, and with her mentor boosting her confidence, she “banged on doors” at the local school until she was offered the running of an adult course in creative writing, which she taught for two terms.

For Fiona and Karen, professional development came as part and parcel of their work on themselves as artists. Both were exploring their internal ways of tapping into the creative, and that naturally led to conversations with their respective mentors about presentation and production options. A greater awareness of this type of development was made clearer to Fiona following her trip to her mentor’s studio, where she also met other Northern Irish artists. For Karen, her professional experience in performative art grew as she tackled difficult issues with her site-specific project.

For most other mentees, professional development had a lower priority but was an underlying presence throughout the mentoring relationship – for the mentors it became a renewed priority towards the end. However, professional development was not a “one-way street”. Many of the mentors commented on how the encounter had impacted on their own practice. Some, like Noeleen and Susan, commented on how they had learned to adapt from a teaching to a mentoring mode, a process which they felt would be helpful in future work.

Theatre mentors Philip and Lorna felt that the relationship reflected itself on their own practice. Philip found that working with a comedy script was much looser and less structured than in theatre – he enjoyed the experience and felt that it would influence his future work. Lorna

commented that the experience forced her to articulate her methods and ideas and that this out-loud process of reflecting had an impact on her current work.

Ellen, a visual arts mentor, felt that the encounter reinforced the creative condition for any artist:

Her issues were very much about engaging as an artist and questioning herself, those are also very much my issues, it's what I do. This engagement has to be somewhat meaningful.

George was the only mentor to have a direct professional development outcome arising from his mentoring relationship with Harry. Seeing himself as an “active witness”, his approach was to document Harry’s working process and his own interactions as mentor. This forty-page document is now being considered as the basis of a methodological framework for the observation and assessment of dance within his funding organisation in France.

### *c) Personal Development Outcomes*

There is little doubt that the mentoring relationship boosted all of the mentees’ confidence levels and affirmed the mentors in their role as the supporting player in that respect. In some cases, this alone made an outstanding difference to the mentee’s sense of possibility in his or her own ability<sup>61</sup> – for others, the sense of confidence was quietly rooted in the work itself. In spite of her unrelenting pessimism towards her work, Rosa felt a sense of achievement at finally conquering her resistance to structuring her material and now knows that she can do it again.

Karen felt that an impact on her personal development was inevitable because she lived in her workspace and “my art practices are linked totally to my life”. However, she too wrestled with the notion of taking responsibility for and “owning” her own work.

Mentor Susan found watching Tess negotiate her project interesting because she was very different to her. As the pairing got to know one another better, the relationship became more balanced, more like a partnership, with a two-way learning process. Susan recalls:

Because we were working on her document, I was very impressed with how she introduced it into her work. I took a leaf out of her book – she made me aware of using a part of the budget for public art to build in money for a publication.

An expression of the impact of these relationships can perhaps be demonstrated by the sense of commitment that the pairings felt towards one another. Two pairings applied for funding to carry on with their projects and/or the mentoring relationship. Two mentees applied jointly for a cross-arts project. Most of the pairings are still in intermittent contact, where mentors continue to support their mentee informally.

## **5.3.2 Comparative Evaluation**

Though there were many similarities in how the mentoring relationships functioned regardless of art form, there is little doubt that the differences and restrictions of each art form played a role in determining the efficacy of this strategy for artistic development.

### **5.3.2.1 Space**

The visual artists found that access to suitable studio space was essential, not only for the work to be produced, but also for it to be seen by the mentor. In two of the four pairings, the mentee

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<sup>61</sup> For example, Bella sought and found work in her new field of writing.

visited the mentor's space most often; in another pairing the mentor came to the mentee's studio all but one time; and in the last the pairings met each other in various spaces.

For the composers, they found that a space with a piano and a board on which to notate was essential. The one time they went to the mentor's home, they found it unsuitable for their purposes.

The writers (theatre and literature) were the most adaptable in terms of their meeting places. They usually met in quiet public places such as art-gallery or museum cafés; however, one pairing found that they needed to rehearse and the mentor sourced a suitable space. This pairing did feel that space could be an issue for scriptwriting.

The choreographers, evidently, needed a dedicated rehearsal space. In this instance, the mentee was able to provide that himself; however, this may not always be the case.

#### **5.3.2.2 Distance**

All of the four visual arts pairings lived at least fifty miles apart, and in three cases in different jurisdictions.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, there were budgetary, scheduling and logistical considerations that influenced the encounters. Orla, for example, was restricted to showing Noeleen as many paintings as she could fit into her car. Tess, based in Paris, travelled to Dublin each time. Fiona only visited her mentor's studio once, whereas Karen, who had two mentors, usually travelled to Cork to see them. Her mentor noted that though the distance seemed to be a factor, proximity may not have helped:

Perhaps if Karen's studio had been just around the corner, or even in the same city, we might have spent more time – although I'm not sure this would have gained anything.

The composers and most of the writers were Dublin-based, so distance was not an issue. Only Bella, who lived in Meath, usually travelled into Dublin by bus for her meetings, apart from one, when Alice travelled to her.

The choreographers had to negotiate their meetings carefully because of the distance and also because of their busy schedules and the length of meetings that the art form and mentoring style required. In fact, because of easy and cost-effective air links, distance was less of an issue than accommodation and expenses.

#### **5.3.2.3 Contact Time**

It seems evident that face-to-face meetings were by far the most effective form of contact between mentor and mentee – MDP feel that these meetings were the crux of the relationships and that six meetings was deemed to be the right number for the timeline of the programme.

The visual artists had a varied approach, depending on the project. The more outcome-based the project, the more likely it was that a good proportion of the day would be taken up with a meeting. Even the more conversation-based projects worked best when the pairings met, and the meetings usually lasted approximately two to three hours. Due to circumstances beyond anyone's control, Karen's last two meetings were held by telephone, and though this was not ideal, the contact was still crucial to her, as she was ending her site-specific performative piece and valued being able to debrief with Ian.

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<sup>62</sup> Belfast and Paris.



The composers' contact time was strictly between one and a quarter to one and a half hours per session. They both found the contact to be so intensive in regard to the type of work they were engaged in that this was totally adequate.

The writers, too, seemed to find that approximately two hours was more than adequate for their needs (largely because much of the work occurred in the interim preparation period).

The choreographers deviated from the norm by a great margin, in that George would come to see Harry at work over at least two or three days. In the early sessions, during rehearsals, he would spend up to fourteen hours observing and talking to Harry. After the piece had toured, the contact time decreased to two to three hours. The nature of the art form and of George's mentoring style called for prolonged mentoring over short periods of time.

#### **5.3.2.4 Interim Time**

In terms of art-form specifics, the in-between-meeting level of contact was significantly higher for writers (theatre and literature) than for visual artists, composers or choreographers. There were email exchanges of material and information between mentee and mentor, and perhaps agenda-setting interaction – usually between three and five days prior to the next meeting. The visual artists with less tangible projects also had a greater degree of communication between meetings than those with more concrete objectives.

Loosely speaking, the data suggests that non-verbal art forms can support a form of periodic mentoring that is not as intensive outside of the contact sessions. However, it must be stressed that each project was unique in its requirements and needs and that in all cases the mentors responded accordingly.

What is significant is that mentors from all art forms mentioned that, regardless of the level of contact between meetings, the mentee was present in the mentor's mind throughout the programme period. Working on their own practice often sparked ideas and feedback that they would pass on to their mentee at the next contact. The intensity of the relationship that many described was constant both away from and during meetings – which indicates the level of commitment and generosity that mentors gave their mentees.

#### **5.3.2.5 Special Considerations**

In conclusion to this section, it is possible to ascertain that in some art forms mentoring is not possible unless minimum conditions can be provided. Namely, for dance and the visual arts mentoring cannot occur unless a suitable studio space is available. Size of space is also an issue and will have a direct bearing on the size or capacity of the piece created.

Space for theatre becomes an issue if rehearsal is required, such as where the mentee is being mentored *in situ* (e.g. devising) or, as in the case of our pairing Philip and Rosa, towards the end of the scriptwriting period. Equally, for composing the size of the space is of minimal consideration but the space needs to be properly equipped to accommodate the mentoring intervention.

Distance is not necessarily an issue, provided that other conditions are met. These include: access to a suitable space; adequate scheduling; adequate budgeting; and appropriate planning to make best use of the contact time. In fact, dance in particular seems to lend itself to long-distance mentoring, where concentrated periods of time are devoted exclusively to the mentoring interaction. Distance only becomes an issue when there is a lack of clarity or commitment with either partner or where personal events take either partner's attention away from the relationship.

The key factor in all of the mentoring relationships described in this project is the face-to-face contact meetings, where the physical presence of mentor and mentee can allow the relationship to become personalised with all the senses engaged, as reflected in interviews with the participants.

### **5.3.3 Practical and Financial Considerations**

#### ***5.3.3.1 Mentees' Contribution***

Mentees were asked to contribute a minimum of €30 towards their mentor's fee. Of the nine, two paid the minimum amount, two paid €60 and the rest paid between €90 and €120. When asked whether they were happy with the amount they paid, all said they were happy to contribute and, if they could have afforded it, would have contributed more; however, there were a variety of responses as to the amount.

Because MDP had linked the contribution sum directly to the mentoring fee, some picked up on this point and felt that, ideally, they would have liked to contribute between a third and a half of the total fee. One mentee would have liked to cover it all. Another mentee made a connection with the fee and the mentee's level of commitment and reflected, "€30 felt too small and therefore too small a commitment."

All mentees recognised that the value of the mentoring could not be equated to a financial sum, *per se*, but that, whatever the contribution, the relationship was worth "a lot more". However, what came out strongly at the wrap-up meeting was that there are artists for whom even the minimum amount is a struggle to contribute.

Mentees noted that being funded creates motivation and brings an expectation of "delivering results", which can be seen positively. However, they noted the risk of "messaging up" and wondered about the funding consequences in the event that a mentee doesn't "deliver" a concrete outcome.

#### ***5.3.3.2 Mentors' Fee***

Most mentors felt their fee was at an adequate level for the contact sessions, though they mentioned that it could be a little higher. However, many mentors pointed out that there was no recompense for the time given over to the process and noted the complication of calculating a fee if based on actual time spent within the mentoring process.

Some mentors attempted to answer that question by suggesting an hourly (rather than a per session) rate. Mention was made that the group meetings could also be paid. One mentor had more definite views and felt that a mentor's own work is "put on hold to a certain extent" and that therefore the rate should properly reflect and respect the time and professionalism given over to the task.

A few mentors reflected on the enjoyment and the learning factor. For one mentor, there was sometimes a sense of wonder at getting paid to talk about the thing about which he was most passionate. For another, she found that as the relationship developed and became collegiate, the notion of payment became strange to her.

I don't think [the fee] reflected the amount of work you do, but I was happy because it was a learning experience for me for a start and I also got a lot of enjoyment out of it. It's

comparative to doing a session with a youth theatre – you don't teach youth theatre to make money – there's an element of fun and philanthropy.

#### **5.3.3.3 Cost per Pairing**

By the end of the programme, MDP was able to ascertain that the overall average cost, inclusive of fees, travel and administrative costs, was €4000/sterling £2760 per pairing. Exclusive of administrative costs and salaries, the average per-pairing cost worked out at €700/£476 (which consisted of mentor fees and travel costs).

### **5.3.4 The Role of the Third Party in Facilitating the Structure**

This section will discuss the facilitation aspects of MDP's role outside the development of the mentoring structure and implementation of the pilot programme.

#### **5.3.4.1 The Preliminary Selection of Projects**

Because of the necessity of uniformity in the format of the application form, MDP realised the danger of discounting ideal candidates for the programme simply because of a lack of articulation about their projects on the form. To this end, we initiated a series of conversations by telephone and email with many of the candidates in order to question their need for a mentor and (through the questioning process) to help them develop and articulate their thinking. Sometimes this "teasing out" process was repeated two or three times until we were confident that the potential mentee had a real mentoring need.

#### **5.3.4.2 Conducting Group Meetings**

These meetings, namely the Induction and Wrap-Up Meetings, were carefully designed to be interactive, using small group task-based activities to fulfil several purposes: to allow all participants a chance to be heard; to gather baseline information and opinions in their mentor and mentee groupings; and to allow the participants time to get to know one another in a low focus setting.

MDP's role during these meetings was largely to coordinate, to ask the initial questions, to help clarify and generally to facilitate a process that we hoped was as instructive to the participants as it was to us. Indeed, many MDP participants commented on how they would have liked more whole-group opportunities for sharing and networking, had time and budget allowed.

#### **5.3.4.3 Supporting the Participants**

We have outlined the intensive contact that MDP had initially with potential participants, and later with the actual pairings, and how the style of that contact changed to a hands-off approach once the pairings had entered the mentoring process. However, MDP remained quietly in the background for support and advice, if needed. Without being systematic, MDP made more phone calls to some participants than to others – a level of intuition was exercised to support those that we felt would appreciate the contact. One mentee remarked:

I liked the calls from MDP in between. I don't think you should abandon people till the end of the programme.

Another way we found to stay in touch with the group as a whole was via an email newsletter, which offered news and issues that we wanted to share and discuss with them. We treated the participants as stakeholders throughout the process and sought their ideas and feedback to develop the model to best effect.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS**

Our intent in this chapter is to deduce directly from the programme outcomes by interpreting, asking questions and considering the programme's potential with regard to the transferability of the MDP model into other contexts.<sup>63</sup>

MDP used the Australian model as a starting template, espoused the theory of aiming for partnership and devised a framework that upheld the premise that an informal relationship within a formal structure works best. In light of this background, MDP formulated the following conclusions by asking the question: "If this model were to be replicated, what would be kept and what would be changed?"

### **6.1 Definition of Mentoring**

One of MDP's research aims was to attempt to find a cohesive definition for arts mentoring; however, we found that widespread disparity suggested a necessity to bring clarity into the current thinking under one banner. To that end, MDP adapted and expanded the Australian definition to devise our own working definition:

Arts mentoring is a relationship of mutual respect between a more experienced artist (the mentor) and a less experienced artist (the mentee), where emphasis is placed on process. It is a two-way relationship, where the mentee's role is to drive the process and the mentor's role is to respond as an active witness to the mentee's artistic development.

We feel that this definition describes the relationship, the two participants and their role within the relationship. It is a long definition but, we hope, one that leaves little room for misunderstanding and allows room for individual interpretation. It is our contention that this definition would be a useful starting point for all of those interested in mentoring to gather behind.

### **6.2 Action Research as a Methodology**

As a pilot programme with action research as its *modus operandi*, MDP found that the flexibility offered by this methodology was ideal in adapting the programme to the criteria of the project and to the needs of the participants.

MDP developed the structure of the pilot programme in consultation with its stakeholders – this level of engagement with relevant observers and participants informed us in shaping a clear vision for the programme and helped us to formulate template materials. Rigorous preparation resulted in unambiguous programme objectives; it is our contention that as a consequence of the consultation and induction processes, MDP participants took ownership of the programme. Clear parameters inspire confidence and MDP found that participants were largely able to negotiate their own trouble spots in their pairings.

MDP found that the development of the scheme took considerably longer than was anticipated, largely due to time needed to develop strategies that reflected feedback and observations made by

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<sup>63</sup> These contexts may be art-form specific or arts within a particular setting, e.g. disability arts, arts and health, arts in schools, participatory arts, youth arts, arts administration etc.

stakeholders. Consequently, MDP strongly advises that time for comprehensive preparation must not be underestimated by a third-party organisation wishing to develop a new scheme.

Naturally, assessment was built into the programme as an essential tool for evaluation of the programme but, significantly, we discovered that it was also intrinsic to the participants' own sense of self-observation throughout the mentoring process. Another mentoring scheme may not require as much detail as MDP needed in terms of evaluative structures – however, we would maintain that some form of on-going self-assessment and a final evaluation are integral to mentoring programmes, not only to assist the process, but also to help to improve it in future incarnations.

One of the main findings of this project was that, though mentoring can operate in the short term and can produce significant outcomes, the real impact of mentoring cannot be measured immediately after a mentoring intervention. Mentoring is a long-term process whereby the qualitative influence of a mentor on a mentee in helping them to actively develop their practice may not make itself visible for a significant period of time.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, MDP maintains that the tracking of participants is an indispensable element in learning about the long-term impact of mentoring. Accordingly, we have built this factor into the existing programme and obtained participants' permission to track them for up to two years. Again, this may not be so crucial in an on-going scheme, especially if participants are part of a community where continuous assessment can take place.

### **6.3 The Criteria**

In its Call for Artists, MDP specified that applicants needed to be professional artists seeking conceptual and creative development. As the applications came in, the notion of creative and conceptual development became a point of clarity between MDP and its potential participants – the strong level of response to the advertisement suggests that this was an appropriate and timely proposal.

Though the emphasis was on creative development, we questioned the degree to which professional and personal issues leaked into the creative process. There was an inevitability that this would happen – and, indeed, for some artists an exploration of themselves as professional artists enhanced rather than eclipsed the creative mentoring process. MDP found that in many cases the creative, professional and personal lives of a practising artist are enmeshed and it is difficult to draw a line between where the professional and personal stops and the creative starts. Ultimately, for all participants, the process was not diverted from its creative focus.

Therefore, was it helpful (and did it matter) that MDP specified creative development in particular? We found that, in our case, creative development was a key goal and defining it as such helped the mentee to focus on the creative aspects of their projects. It was also an essential feature in helping the mentor to understand the project and to frame his or her support within it.

In terms of cross-application to other schemes, MDP strongly maintains that clarity of programme objectives is an indispensable part in setting up any new scheme. If the third party is clear about its goals, then that clarity will transmit itself throughout all subsequent applications of those goals. As regards who defines the criteria, there is much room for different models to be tested.

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<sup>64</sup> This was borne out by MDP mentees who found it difficult to assess whether the mentoring had changed their practice – particularly where the pairing considered themselves peers or partners in the relationship.

Examples of two such models could be a top-down model (where the third party defines the target group and area of development) or a bottom-up approach (where a pairing approaches a mentoring scheme with a project) – there is flexibility for variations between these schemes, but all schemes need to build in time for negotiation of the project focus. If a new scheme is aiming for artist development, then the focus ought not be on a tangible outcome (e.g. a script) and should allow participants to name their own goals and form their own expectations of outcome.

## **6.4 The Structure of the Pilot**

### **6.4.1 Sourcing Mentees and Mentors**

MDP sent out a general Call for Artists and was very successful in attracting both mentors and mentees – which, in turn, led to the decision to select MDP mentors from the applicant group. Was this a true reflection of the level of interest and philanthropy from prospective mentors or was this a one-off? MDP recognises that mentors are the key resource in a mentoring relationship and it may be a long time before a mentee re-enters the process as a mentor. Therefore, this format for attracting participants merits re-testing. It may be that it works on a national level but in more regional or specialised schemes other formats for sourcing of participants may need to be developed.

In sourcing mentees MDP specified that the programme was aimed at mid-career artists, but we found that it was unrealistic to be inflexible in this regard, particularly in certain art forms, such as music. We discovered that where artists were in transition (either from one art form to another or within their own field) they expressed some of the needs of an emerging artist. However, in some cases, their own expertise was useful in that they had already developed a language with which to develop and communicate their ideas.

Another point of consideration is profile. Any programme that opens itself out to all artists will not necessarily have high-profile mentors in its first incarnation – it is more likely to be at a grass-roots level and may develop a higher profile in due course. MDP found that some potential mentees had very high expectations of whom potential mentors might be – naming well-known international artists on their application forms. Our own time constraints and the high quality of mentor applicants disinclined us from attempting to source mentors externally. However, the issue of mentee expectation is an interesting one and led MDP to the conclusion that a new programme would need to know why it is delivering mentoring as a development intervention – it would need to assess at what level it wished to operate and how it would source mentors to meet those requirements.

Any sustainable scheme will need to develop and expand its mentor base if it is to develop its profile. It may, therefore, need to source particular mentors to the scheme according to mentees' needs or the programme's need. This raises some issues: who are the stakeholders in a new scheme? Do mentors wish to be part of a "bank"? And if so, what happens to those who are not selected? In the event that a mentee specifies a particular mentor, what is the best strategy for sourcing that mentor? All of these questions merit further research.

### **6.4.2 The Application Procedure**

In this programme, we included a pre-application process where potential applicants sent in expressions of interest. In a new programme, provided that the programme aims are clear, this step could be omitted. However, it was a useful process for us as it demonstrated a clear interest in an arts mentoring scheme and an organisation may wish to test the waters in this way.

Following the expression-of-interest stage, it was necessary for applicants to fill in a formal application. This form asked many quantitative questions that may not be relevant to another programme; however, the third-party organisation may wish to design data-specific questions to inform their own programme growth. MDP would encourage third parties to begin collating quantitative data in the initiation stages of a new programme.

Finally, and most importantly, the third party may need to spend some time interacting with applicants to “tease out” projects. This is an essential part of defining the project and in making clear the expectations of the mentee.

### **6.5 The Selection Procedure**

In designing this model, MDP made the conscious choice not to interview potential participants. This was largely to do with limited resources, but equally we wanted to develop a cost-effective model that would reflect authentic conditions. We also felt strongly that, in principle, a third party could not “judge” who would be an effective mentor for a particular mentee (and vice versa) and that we needed to find a mechanism to allow them both input in this respect. The selection procedure (based on a principle of limited self-selection) allowed for a level of inclusion and ownership of this process. However, this model is only practicable where there are complementary mentors to meet the mentees’ needs. Were we fortunate in this respect? If this model were to run on a regular basis then there would need to be a developing mentor pool.

MDP mentors came on to the programme on the basis of strong credentials and telephone and email interactions with us and, ultimately, on the basis of trust. Their active desire to be included on the programme was significant. We felt that we were dealing with professional adults that would be able to critique their mentee sensitively – and that the mentee would be robust enough to respond creatively to that input. This was a reasonable assertion to make in the case of MDP, as we had targeted mid-career artists; however, emergent artists may need more third-party support in vetting suitable mentors at the outset.

Some participants came to MDP as a pairing and we wondered whether this would have any quantifiable impact on the relationship. The pairings in question had already gone some way through the “getting to know you” phase; however, we found that this was not hugely significant as they did not, in fact, know each other well. It may be that such pairings were more invested in the relationship because they made the choice of mentor; however, there is no evidence that the process of mentoring was in any way enhanced.

In MDP, we had some excellent mentor applicants whose skills were not in demand by the applicant mentee group and therefore who were not selected for the project. This begs the question: in an on-going scheme, should or could a programme actively seek to source a suitable mentee for an accomplished mentor?

### **6.6 Cohort Group Meetings**

The induction and wrap-up meetings were an essential element for both MDP and participants in clarifying roles and boundaries and in providing a formal sense of closure to the programme. Ideally, participants would have preferred a full day to allow for greater unstructured time together to debrief, network and, perhaps, to collaborate.

MDP's research brief necessitated an end-of-programme meeting; however, another third-party scheme may find that they can omit this – the essential components are the induction day and on-going third-party support – though a final meeting would be advisable. In a longer scheme, an interim meeting may be useful for participants to network and to get to know one another in their mentor-mentee groups.

## **6.7 Observations on the Mentoring Relationships**

### **6.7.1 Impact of the Programme Structure**

Overall, the structure appeared to be successful for the participants on different levels: the formality of the framework and time boundaries gave the process a professionalism and credence to which the participants responded positively. The spaces between meetings encouraged creative introspection within the pairings and “hot-housed” the process to an extent that over 80 per cent of participants felt that their output was accelerated and enhanced. Ultimately, the process gave them an understanding of formal and informal mentoring and offered the option for pairings to pursue their relationship further – on an informal basis.

Using the guidelines to negotiate their own working interaction, the pairings developed individual process styles according to their needs, space and time. It was at this juncture that art-form differences may have had an impact on how pairings structured themselves. Outcomes of the comparative evaluation suggest that most of the pairings stayed within the group norms – the notable exception was the choreographers, who vastly exceeded the usual contact time due to the demands of the art form and due to the mentor's unobtrusive style of mentoring as observation.

While it is possible to say that the MDP programme enabled all of our mentees to have significant concrete, professional and personal outcomes, where the mentee's focus was on a shift in artistic practice, concrete outcomes were captured in mentees' workbooks. The converse was generally true: where the output was predominantly material, there is less evidence of a workbook and in its stead scripts, paintings and compositions have been produced. Therefore, it can be deduced that the workbook provided a tangible outlet for those mentees working on areas of purely conceptual development, and the written articulation of their processes proved to be a positive method of self-enquiry and of logging their thoughts. Though not all mentees took to the workbook, MDP would recommend it highly as a tool for exploring ideas and gaining perspective – this would apply in any context.

### **6.7.2 Mentoring Styles**

How did the mentors mentor? In the first instance, it was by closely listening to and observing how their mentee was expressing their needs and finding their own unique response to the perceived demand. One mentee perceived this process metaphorically:

The mentor met your needs almost like protoplasm, they graft around you and support you in any number of ways: it could be philosophical, practical, emotional.

A significant discovery about mentoring styles was that effective mentoring is about a flexibility of response on the part of the mentor, appropriate to the mentee's needs at any given time. Mentoring styles named in the study encompassed listening, observing, encouraging, chatting, teaching, setting tasks, coaching, consulting, advising, giving feedback, sharing practice, giving illustrations and evaluating work. From a third party's perspective, once mentors had identified the key differences between, for example, teaching and mentoring, they were able to select the most effective strategy from this range of intervention styles. In instances where mentees were



“blocked”, the mentors released the pressures of outcome, which, in the MDP case studies, was an accurate diagnosis of how to respond at that time.

MDP had encouraged the mentees to drive the relationship, and this gave the mentees the confidence to view the relationship with a degree of parity and to act accordingly. Our study showed that where mentees accepted their mentors’ suggestions, they did not do so blindly. Indeed, some mentees discarded the suggestions or adopted them at a later stage, but all gave the input serious thought before coming to a decision. This is a typical example of the sort of interchange that fed and challenged the relationships. Ultimately, the process was one of building trust by observing professional standards; the formal boundaries became the safety net that enabled and accelerated the growth of trust between the pairings as they began to know each other better.

An adjacent theme was to do with structure. Many mentees identified a need to structure their work but a lack of will or expertise to do so. The mentors were able to prioritise and recommend a structure accordingly and to support the mentee in its implementation. Seeing an idea, script or music phrase placed logically in a context was a hugely satisfying prospect for the mentees and gave them a boost of confidence in their own abilities. Therefore, where mentees can see significant visible results arising from their efforts within the mentoring relationship, there is a dual reward of reaching a goal in a public context – even if the public is their mentor alone. It is this witnessing by the mentor that seems to have a particular potency in producing outcomes.

### **6.7.3 Reciprocity**

There is also considerable evidence that, while the mentoring process is focused on the mentee, the mentor stands to benefit from the encounter too. Some mentors found that the process of articulating their own experience was a useful one – it was perhaps their first time to reflect aloud on the invisible aspects of their practice. Equally, the very act of working intensively with another individual with different personal style, views and personality is in itself a learning curve. However, the fact that he or she was also an artist brought their influence to bear on the mentor’s thinking. Many mentors have commented on the two-way aspect of the process as parity of esteem grows and the pairings’ relationship begins to edge towards partnership – in some cases faster than others. One mentor notes that her mentee’s issues are still very much her issues as an artist, which is what makes the engagement meaningful. Perhaps it is fair to say that, in some shape or form, this comment is true for all of our mentors, who have either been at the place where their mentee is or are still there, tackling those issues from a different perspective.

Another common theme running through the contact period was that the life of an artist is not neatly segmented into compartments and there is much interlacing of personal and artistic life in the creation of ideas. This was reflected in the mentoring process for all artists, whether they were working on the purely conceptual or on more tangible goals and whether they were mentor or mentee. The effect of the programme was to put a positive stress on the participants to organise their working practice to gain the maximum benefit from the mentoring encounter.

## **6.8 Cost-Effectiveness of the Pilot Programme**

Using the MDP framework as a template, a mentoring programme can be facilitated by an existing organisation for approximately €700/£476 per pairing, excluding administrative and salary costs. Other costs to consider are studio or venue hire. While this is clearly a cost-effective artist development option, it requires the organisation to assign a staff member as the dedicated coordinator for the programme and to ensure that this new brief is reflected in his or her overall

responsibilities. It is important that a coordinator is not taking on a mentoring scheme as an addition to a regular workload, but that time is built in to properly accommodate the scheme without overburdening staff – as a rule of thumb, we would recommend approximately one hour per week per pairing to prepare, monitor and evaluate the programme and to support the participants effectively

Where organisations are small and where there is interest in developing an on-going scheme, then it may be more effective to take on a dedicated person on a part-time basis for a limited period to initiate and run the first scheme. While this may be more expensive in the short term, it could prove to be a more efficient strategy in the long run.

In the case of MDP, which was not linked to any organisation, the gross cost of the programme came in at just under €4000/£2760 per pairing (including administrative and salary costs) and could be considered good value for money if measured against a comparable artist training or development programme running over a similar time period. However, a unique and inimitable characteristic of mentoring is its focus on one-to-one interaction, the intensity and effects of which are hard to quantify in financial terms.

### **6.9 Considerations for the Future**

While a suitable space is a prerequisite for most art forms, distance need not be an issue, provided that suitable preparations have been made. This is good news for the development of mentoring into the international arena. However, different art forms have different needs and what the programme has uncovered is that there is no reason why international mentoring cannot flourish, provided that adequate budgeting and planning are in place.

In this programme, MDP attempted to explore the idea of a cross-discipline mentorship. When we asked participants whether it was important that a mentor came from their area of discipline, most were very clear in saying yes, a mentor needed the same language and experience of a rigour of practice as the mentee. If these conditions were not met then the specifics of the discipline and the skill-base would be difficult to negotiate. However, MDP envisages that as mentoring develops and mentors' skills-base expands, there would be merit in revisiting this idea. In certain scenarios, we see that where a mentor's skills *as a mentor* are sufficiently fine-tuned (and, of course, depending on the mentee's need) a mentor from a different discipline may have a valuable alternative experience to offer a mentee.

Finally, if we are to consider mentors as the primary resource in a mentoring relationship, then equally we are compelled to look at ways to support mentor development. When we asked mentors if they would have liked some training, most responded that training was perhaps not the appropriate support, given that each mentoring relationship was so individual and that it was a learning journey in itself. However, many suggested that some form of peer support might be useful to open up the discussion on mentoring and to share experiences and information. To that end, a third party might facilitate a peer-mentor forum, a mentors' website or an email discussion on approaches and process.

### **6.10 Role of the Third Party in Facilitating the Structure**

### **Third-Party Coordinated Schemes – Parameters of Best Practice**

MDP explored the concept of designing a best-practice model of formal mentoring (operated by a third party) that might have cross-application in different contexts. To that end, MDP draws the following recommendations with respect to the development of another such scheme:

#### ***Third-Party Managed:***

Any formal mentoring programme or scheme aimed at facilitating several mentees at once should be organised and managed by a third-party organisation.

#### ***Partnership:***

A best-practice model for such a scheme or programme should reflect values of partnership in its conception (i.e. in consultation between the third party and its stakeholders) and within the programme itself (i.e. between the individual pairings in their interactions).

#### ***Clear Goals and Objectives:***

The key component to the success of a mentoring programme is clarity in defining programme goals and objectives (e.g., whether the programme is developmentally driven; or whether it is outcome-based; or whether it is aimed at a specific target group).

#### ***Formal Structure–Informal Process:***

An informal process within a formal structure works best. Individual pairings should be given the freedom to create their own content and process within the programme definition, to articulate their own “contract” and to be left to progress without third-party intercession.

#### ***Participant Self-Assessment and Third-Party Evaluation:***

Self-assessment and evaluation are key components of a mentoring intervention. Self-assessment throughout the contact period is integral to the process in allowing participants to observe their own practice in a reflective mode and to integrate those observations into the process. A final evaluation gives closure to the formal process, de-briefs the participants and allows a third party to consider outcomes.

#### ***Post-Programme Tracking:***

Where self-assessment and evaluation can deliver short-term outcomes, the tracking of participants after the programme ends can illuminate the long-term impact of mentoring as a development strategy. MDP maintains that tracking is a key factor for any scheme that wishes to learn about the continuing influence that a mentoring relationship has on an individual artist.

#### ***Third-Party Coordination and Support:***

Any programme will need to be managed closely and carefully by the organising third party and should include opportunities for the participants to network (via induction and other group meetings). This management will need to have a fluidity and a “lightness of touch” that reflects the different relationships and contracts created by the various mentee/mentor pairings on the scheme.

#### ***Designated Contact Person:***

In any existing organisation setting up a mentoring programme, the programme should be overseen and managed by someone with a designated responsibility for the scheme and who can act as a lead contact for participants.

#### ***Optimum Timeframe:***

The timescale of a mentoring programme may vary between six months and two years, depending on the programme goals. Less than six months is not recommended. MDP has found that nine months, running parallel to the academic year, was the preferred choice for most participants.

Overall, any third party will achieve its aims by having a clear vision for their programme and by providing a context and an ethos that its participants can understand and accept as their own. By fostering a professional standard that permeates the programme, a third party can positively support and encourage its participants towards their goals.

### **6.11 Supporting Partners**

MDP is very grateful for the support of certain individuals without whom this project would have been a great deal poorer. Special thanks go to Paul Johnson of The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon for his immediate enthusiasm for our project and his steadfast support and faith in our abilities; Graeme Stevenson of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland for championing our cause there, thereby making it an all-island project; Jack Gilligan of Dublin City Council for his backing – both financial and in kind; Janice McAdam and all at the Abbey Theatre for kindly making their rehearsal room available to us for meetings; Peter McLoughlin and the National Association for Youth Drama for loaning and delivering materials for those meetings; and Sían Cunningham and Emma Dunne for their efforts in seeing this report through to publication. A special word of thanks goes to our mentor, Marieva Coughlan, for her logic, wisdom and unswerving encouragement. We would also like to acknowledge and thank MDP supporters and stakeholders who helped us in our research, advised us and fed into the process of developing our model of practice.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the MDP mentors and mentees who selflessly committed themselves to the process both professionally and emotionally and who gave us such a wealth of experiences and materials from which to learn. Thank you for your support and trust in us.

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