

# SEOS Annual Report

July 2010



## Welcome

Dear Member,

This year has been my first of a two-year tenure for South East Open Studios as Chairman and I am pleased to have faired the year with the support of our Committee. It is with confidence and professional esteem that I am in a position to say it has been a very successful year; with many firsts, best bits, ideas for developments, sales, connections, friendships made and professional relationships negotiated.

I am also encouraged by a personal satisfaction from participating as a member for the second year. I have appreciated the warmth and generosity I felt from colleagues that I visited or who visited me. Thank you, as it is you, which makes SEOS so great and stand out amongst other Open Studio events. You are the quality and breadth of the offer to our visitors that we all can take immense pride in when someone picks up the guide or visits the website and in turn walks through your doors.

Thank you for your continued support and I look forward to welcoming you next year.

This Annual Report and AGM allows us to present our operations and to receive comments and engage in a dialogue that supports taking the organisation through to another even better year.

Handwritten signature of Rod McIntosh.

Rod McIntosh

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## Contents

1. Executive Summary (to be tabled at AGM)
2. Chairman's Report
3. Treasurer's Report
4. ACO Officer's Report
5. Website Officer's Report
6. Publicity Officer's Report
7. Database Officer's Report
8. Guide Production Report
9. Guide Distribution Report
10. Evaluation Report

## 2. Chairman's Report

At the beginning of the year I asked the Committee to share with me their thoughts as to what SEOS is? What it does and means to them and to our membership.

### Reflection and Visioning

Our mission and values are important drivers for self and for organisations, presenting a present state of being and a set of aspirations.

I was met with words like: artists' organisation run by artists, community, networks, expanding, professionalising, raising awareness and developing profile.

A big ask even of a commercial business. However we are a self-supporting not for profit membership organisation, that upon reflection over the past year attends pretty well to all that it sets itself out to achieve.

It also sets a tone for what is now possible for the organisation, able to weather a year of headline financial doom and gloom and prove year on year its success and value for members and the thousands of visitors.

### Thinking About Our Offers

This year has seen much work within the Committee to clarify our offers to members, with the development of:

- Associate Membership (formerly web entry only, 28 – highest number)
- Commercial Partnership Membership (3)

alongside the individual, shared and groups.

We also thought through an offer that can develop over time and engage a long-term relationship with our other stakeholder group, our visitors.

Through the introduction of the Friends of SEOS scheme we are able to directly contact visitors and engage them with the growing year long activities of members. This in addition will provide an income stream that can be set to re-invest into the offer to Friends through a range of beneficial activities that may provide opportunities for members.

### Quality and Quantity

Our membership represents many positions on the continuum where working towards making a living from ones practice, call it 'professional', may be at one end and everyone else ably represented along it.

With our improved offers and lines of communication, I am pleased to report the highest membership numbers this year 301, a 10% increase on last year.

- There were 106 new members, with many returning members and those stepping from sharing studios to individual membership
- We also have 13 members who have been members since 2002, when the database was introduced
- This year saw our largest number of groups participating (6) and richest mix of artists, makers and designers
- And we have 35 registered new interests in 2011 event to date

2010 Developments have been:

- Early Bird discount for online membership
- Bimonthly Newsletter and Bulletins
- 'Glossary' section in the Guide
- A 'How to Approach and Artist' section in the Guide
- Friends and early release date D/L flier
- Facebook page
- 20 Artists Trails
- More Taster Exhibitions and Auction – raised enough money for 2 Bursaries for 2011
- An Intern to help research a new external database, direct mail facility

### **Not Just 17 Days**

As I have suggested SEOS is the sum of its parts. The SEOS calendar of activities is year long. Phases of:

- Review and Planning - post event and AGM
- Recruitment – artists and makers "call to action"
- Membership Processing – database management
- Website Update and Archiving
- Membership Networks – ACO cluster meetings and newsletter
- Guide Design and Print Design
- Event Publicity – advertising and media packs
- Guide Distribution
- Evaluation and Reporting

Many activities are ongoing, some concurrent and others dependent on the efficiency of a previous activity or team member. The effectiveness of the systems and people managing the systems that enables us to go live in June, every June for the past 14 years has impressed me this year.

The Committee and ACO's that have served with me are an immense asset to the organisation and to you and I wish those leaving us the very best with their next adventure.

We have looked to streamline areas within the Committee and improve systems and will continue to look at cost cutting and efficiency wherever we can.

However I am not aware of many organisations where at 22.45 on Christmas Eve a membership enquiry will be dealt with by a team in such a swift and professionally courteous manner and I would not want to lose this.

### **Shared Responsibility**

The Honorariums for committee members do not reflect the time and expertise that they put into the posts and without an element of voluntarism SEOS would have problems. They do it for more than the money and in return get more than. I thank them.

I thank you too for appreciating this work. We are looking to recruit new Committee Members and I would encourage you to think about how what you put into SEOS can reap greater benefits should you care to step up and join us:

- Experience of a vibrant and responsive Artists Organisations
- Committee/Team work
- Knowledge of the Creative Sector regionally
- Networking

- Career and CV development
- Profile raising

Contact me for an informal discussion, or check the website out for current vacancies.

## **Recession and Future Proofing SEOS**

At the Open Studios Network Conference last year, just a month or so in post, I was surprised at the number of models for financially operating an Open Studio event there were. We were one of a few that received little to no statutory funding supporting our core costs through other sustainable income streams. We were admired and a little envied. I was curious as to why.

This year saw us receive zero Local Authority funding, given early advice many were having their budgets cut. Nationally this has been seen and proven worse than anticipated for many 'grant reliant' organisations. Some of whom I met at the conference and know, I now appreciate their envy was fear of "what if?". Simply answered they cease operations.

We have survived year one of what may look like further years of cuts and withdrawn support for the Arts. I am certain that what we have created over the many years in the shape of SEOS and its' developing service (not shrinkage) is one that can hold us steadfast in further uncertainty.

Our finances are buoyant and we are in a position to look to re-invest:

- Website development
- ACO development and support
- Networking events
- Increase the Publicity/Advertising budget

are a few current ideas circulating. What I am reminded of is to not become complacent. The early September meeting will take forward thoughts and comments from the AGM and along with the Committee we will rigorously look at the operations and priorities for next year and beyond.

## **Year 2**

This year will see the start of a 3-5 year plan for SEOS at Committee and ACO consultation level. This it is anticipated will become a document that drives the Committee and organisation forward, that can be revised and handed between successive Chairman and Committees and be a testament to their year on year achievements. The financial section of the plan will be central to our continued and admired sustainability.

I close this Report with a final thought towards 2011. As we live very much within the information and technology age, what business, industry and commerce are looking towards more and more is the power of innovation and creativity. To set their thinking and operations apart from one another and lead the way in whatever field; to thrive and build for survival.

Let us not forget our core purpose is to showcase our creativity, to innovate and lead in your separate fields and to celebrate the community of SEOS and legacy we have achieved.

### 3. Treasurer's Report

Finance sheets will be provided at the AGM or upon request. Please note that the figures provided are in draft format as they have not yet been examined by the Accountant.

#### Income:

- The SEOS income in 2010 was £30,599. This was an increase (of £1,013) on last year due to raising the membership fee (to help cover the PayPal fee) and having an increase in member numbers.
- We have also added a couple of new income streams - Associated Membership and the Friends of SEOS scheme (this brought in £821).
- As expected, local authority grants have been decreasing steadily each year and in 2010 we received no external funding for the first time.
- Advertising in the guide was also down by 50% on last year and website advertising was down by 85%.
- We used PayPal as the online payment facility this year in place of Google checkout. Although this has a higher fee attached (PayPal 3.43%, Google Checkout 1.67%), they withheld less funds up front and we hoped they would be more reliable than Google Checkout.

#### Expenditure:

- The expenditure in 2010 was £28,720. This is a decrease (of £917) on last year due to less paid officer fees as there were a couple of empty posts, the website costs were kept to a minimum and we were generally frugal keeping in mind the financial climate nationally.
- Producing the guide is the largest expense as it accounts for almost 50% of expenditure.
- The area that has had an increase in investment in 2010 has been in producing printed marketing materials (such as event posters, event flyers, SEOS business cards to give to artists interested in getting involved, flyers to promote the Friends scheme and car stickers).
- Expenses reimbursed to committee members and ACOs also increased in 2010 due to more people claiming for mileage due to increased petrol prices (although the reimbursement rate has remained at £0.40 a mile).

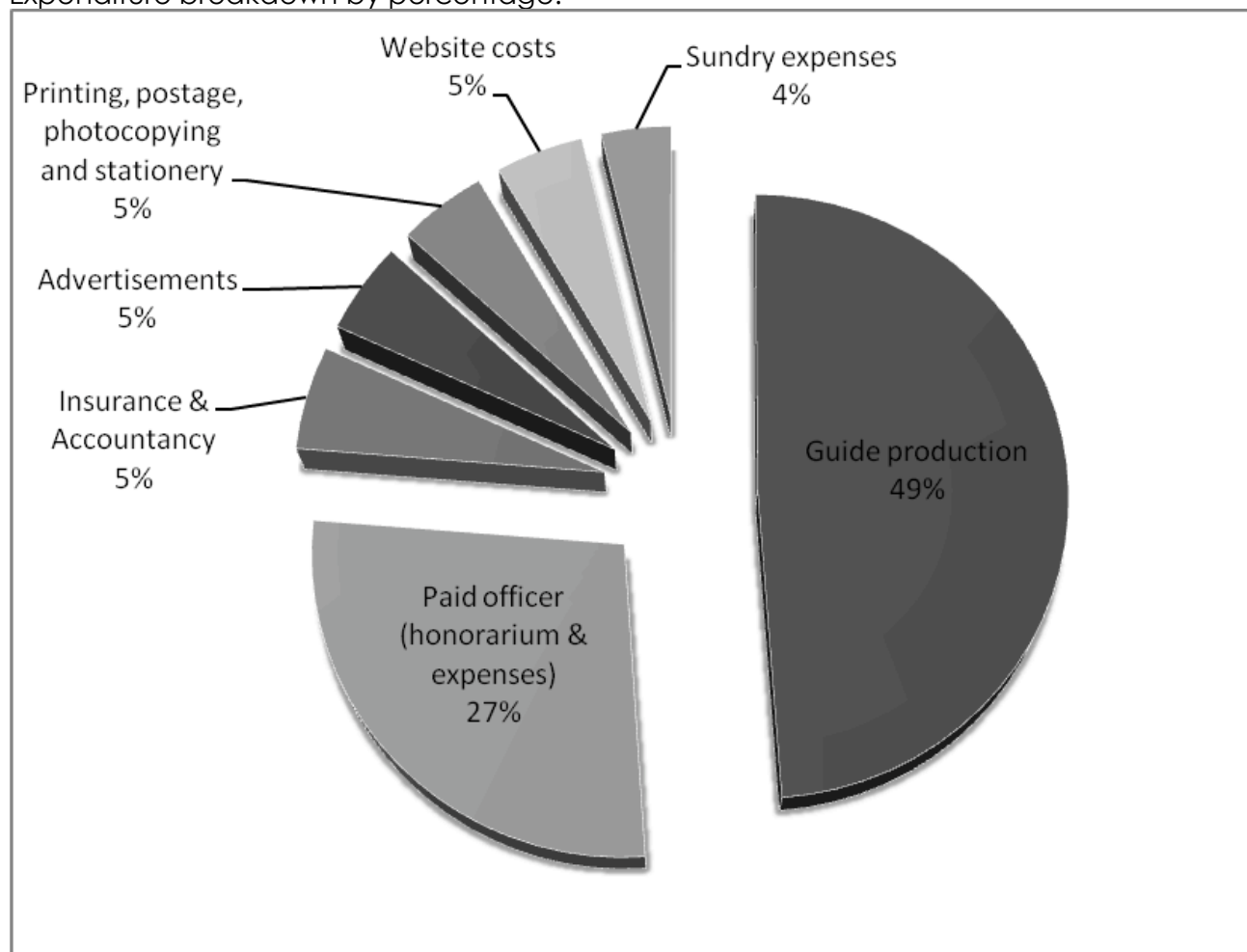
This year we changed from a paper ledger to a computerised ledger. This has improved accuracy and efficiency of managing the data to provide reports for the committee. Next year this will be further improved upon to speed up and simplify producing reports and year-end figures.

We are in a healthy position financially going into the next SEOS year with £10,935 in the bank to cover expenditure until the next wave of income in January. We also have the surplus from 2008 in the reserve account as a contingency fund. We will have some funds available next year to look at development options and reinvestment into SEOS, but we will need to be cautious of increased expenditure in 2011 considering the financial climate and the reliance on membership fees as our main source of income.

**Hazel Addley - Treasurer**

## South East Open Studios – Expenditure Analysis 2009/10

Expenditure breakdown by percentage:



<b>Expenditure (2009/10)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>£95 Fee</b>	<b>£105 Fee</b>
Guide production	49%	£46.44	£51.33
Paid officer (honarium & expenses)	27%	£26.00	£28.73
Insurance & Accountancy	6%	£5.29	£5.84
Advertisements	5%	£4.70	£5.20
Printing, postage, photocopying and stationery	5%	£4.54	£5.02
Website costs	5%	£4.49	£4.96
Sundry expenses	4%	£3.55	£3.92

The figures above are the £95 early-bird fee and the £105 full fee broken down by expenditure. This shows where the funds are allocated per membership fee.

## 4. ACO Officer's Report

One of the most important aspects of Open Studios outside and during the 2 week event is networking between artists.

This is one of the major functions of my committee role.

My communication with ACOs is almost exclusively via email, the systems we have in place work smoothly.

However there are always problems to sort out in particular during the application period, thankfully this year, all these were resolved with more direct communication.

We are hoping to organize a meeting in the autumn for ACOs which will help to define their role and enable a discussion and sharing of ideas and practices.

At the stage where we welcome artists to SEOS, there is a need to inform all applicants of the basic service they can expect from their ACO and what input THEY can make in helping their ACO to assist success in their area.

We are reluctant to demand more of ACOs who already put a lot of time and effort in on behalf of their artists in return for free entry.

Trails have developed even further this year and we believe these are an extra not a 'right'. SEOS cannot afford the funds to produce these. Artists who have the necessary skills to produce an acceptable trail must be encouraged to help with this.

Despite the economic downturn, I have been pleasantly surprised from my feedback and lack of complaints by the number of artists who have enjoyed a successful event this year.

Over half our areas have seen artist numbers increase, Maidstone with a record 15 extra. The addition of more groups have contributed towards our increased membership.

However we are failing to attract new artists in outlying areas to the North and East this may be partly due to new localised Open Studio events starting up.

Next year, we are happy to welcome Ciara Healy who will take over from Fiona Bell in the East Grinstead/Crowborough area.

So far we are in need of someone to replace Christine Angell in the Bromley / Dartford / Gravesend area.

Also three of us, Janet Aldis, Tish Tunstall and I have been managing two areas each which is not an ideal situation.

My thanks go out to all 12 ACOs for all their work this year.

**Felicity Flutter – ACO Officer**

## 5. Website Officer's Report

After last years' event a few minor changes were made to the online application form, mainly the removal of unnecessary questions on the survey page. The form then went live on the 1st December as scheduled, with four entrants signing up on the first day.

During sign-up, only a few problems were encountered; two members were unable to reach the payment page and one member was asked to pay the wrong fee. Both problems were quickly corrected. Our apologies to those members affected.

There was also the strange case of the disappearing entry. One day it was there, the next it had gone! After a few emails and phone calls, we discovered an artist had updated his own and another artist's entry at the same time. Because both were done during the same session one update overwrote the other resulting in one duplicate entry. Case solved! We hope to prevent this possibility in the future, but for now please only update one entry when you log in during the self-edit period, preferably your own!

The rise in online entry continues; 72% of individual entries were made online, 18% by post, with many taking advantage of our early-bird discount.

Other types of membership increased this year. There are 42 Group Members and our new membership categories, Commercial and Collaborative Partnerships, attracted three entries in their first year. We also have 28 Associate Members, the highest so far.

During the event, 20 art trails were available from our download page. They covered large parts of the SEOS area. From website statistics and conversations with visitors, I know the trails are popular. Well done to all those who supplied them.

The current website was designed four years ago and has been in operation since December 2006. Many new features have been added and cosmetic changes made. But in internet terms, four years is a very long time, the web has moved on and our site is looking a little dated.

Because of this we are proposing a completely new look for 2011. We intend to retain most of the existing features and facilities, and perhaps add a few new ones. Members will be asked for any changes or additions they would like to see and the final update will be subject to committee approval.

The new look website will go online in December and will reflect the vibrant and dynamic organisation SEOS has become.

**Paul Williams – Website Officer**

## 6. Publicity Officer's Report

### Advertising

Approximately £5 of each membership fee goes on advertising. Last year I looked into the cost of broadening the advertising to the newspapers. The costs would increase membership fees by an additional £41.20 each. To just increase advert size to ¼ in the magazines advertised in this year we would be looking at a budget of at least £4,400 which would be an additional cost of approx £15 per artist.

The advertising budget was £1,500 and I spent just under this by negotiating with advertisers for reduced rates where possible. I continued with last years' policy of focusing on local magazine advertising as the adverts would have a longer shelf life and also advertised in Galleries magazine which is aimed at art buyers. Some adverts were also placed in arts based magazines but I kept this to a minimum because I felt it was important to target art buyers.

The reason the budget for advertising is small is because our research last year showed that the highest proportion of visitors came through either the guide or invitation.

One option for the future might be advertising on Facebook which can be targeted to specific types of people. This can be a combination of age, geographical, interests etc.

No advertising revenue was spent on recruiting artists as most call for artists in arts magazines are free.

### Publicity

An extensive list of national newspapers, magazines and TV were sent press releases. In the run up to SEOS I posted guides to all the local papers and TV stations along with a press release. Press releases were also sent to local radio. We had some interest from BBC Radio Kent but didn't manage to get as far as an interview even though I chased up my contact.

The SEOS preview exhibition in Ashford attracted good press coverage and we were so close to getting Kaddy Lee-Preston involved. Rod was filmed for Kent TV. I contacted Kaddy to see if she would be interested in being body cast or would like to film body casting at Rod's studio on the first day of open studios. Sadly we didn't get a response from Kaddy or other TV stations who were offered this opportunity.

I few years ago I gained TV coverage for SEOS at the recruitment of artists stage and have previously been interviewed on local radio during SEOS. I am sure we should start to get more TV and radio coverage in the next year or so.

As part of a personal project I contacted a local free publication and offered them series of articles on SEOS artists taking part in the Ashford area. These articles ran in The Village Directory in April, May and June. So far feedback on this was that one artist did get a visitor through the article. This artist felt that it was important to continue with this type of article as it raised local awareness. It is not financially feasible for the SEOS publicity officer to under take such a task for each area. However, it might be an idea for an artist from each area who has an interest in developing their writing skills to look into doing something similar next year.

I also worked on free internet coverage and linked in with Countryside 2010 which coincided with the first week of SEOS.

## **Facebook**

On Facebook I have set up a page and closed down the group. The advantage of a page is that you can monitor activity on the page and get a better idea of demographics. So far this seems to be well received with fans growing at a steady pace and has reached 133 fans. Updates are placed on the page at regular intervals which feed into the fans home pages and thus giving SEOS a continued presence.

The next stage could be to set up a Twitter account. The Facebook page status updates could feed automatically into Twitter. This is all part of the new phenomenon of viral marketing.

Having been on the committee since 2004 and publicity officer since 2005 with one year out it is now time for me to pass on the role to someone with fresh ideas and wish them luck.

**Liz Garnett – Publicity Officer**

## 7. Database Officer's Report

The year started well with a record amount of 86 new people expressing an interest in joining the 2010 event. Subsequently, 106 new members joined, against 121 non-returning members from 2009, making an overall total of 302, another record number.

The application process was smoother than in previous years thanks to improvements made to the website and applicants getting used to the online application form.

We had a few teething problems with online payments, which created more work, especially for our Website Editor. We apologise again to members who encountered problems and we hope that next year will run more easily.

A few memorable entries made their marks in our memories, as some members unwittingly decided to push the software to its limits and got us somewhat puzzled as to what they were trying to do, but all was resolved in the end.

Special thanks go to members who are not computer savvy, but had a go at filling the application form online, which is our preferred method; practice makes perfect, so do try again for next year!

Once again, we noticed that the majority of errors and bother encountered by applicants could have been avoided if people took the time to carefully read the instructions given to them prior to applying. The excellent document entitled "How to apply online" is worth downloading and reading thoroughly prior to logging in. It contains all the advice needed to ensure a smooth operation. People should also read carefully the email messages they receive after applying online. However, if things really go wrong especially with the payment side, do pick up the phone to me or Paul immediately and we will help you out.

Although we allow a 72 hour correction period following the online application, it is recommended that people use it for emergency correction only and not for making major alterations or gradual filling in. The best practice is if the entry is filled in and paid for in one go, just like any online purchase of goods or services, so do have all the information ready, included your image and payment method, before going online.

Finally, remember that SEOS is not just for June, so if you have enjoyed your event and your visits to other studios, do spread the word around during the rest of the year and help us recruit new members. Give out our little business cards entitled "Interested in joining SEOS next year?" or ask people to contact me directly.

**Dominique Morgan - Database Officer**

## 8. Guide Production Report

This has been my second year as guide editor, so I had a better idea of what to expect, what needed changing and how to make the production process run more smoothly. The data base that is created from all your entries is put to more use each year. Most importantly, it gives me all the information that goes into your guide entry, but it now automatically separates artists into ACO areas and will give me an index of types of work shown at each studio.

The database also places each artist on a map by their postcode which means that I can accurately transfer the positions onto the guide maps. Numbering the artist is still down to me as we haven't yet worked out a way of doing it automatically. The design for this year's guide cover was a little different. I wanted to retain some of the look of previous covers but also introduce an idea that we may explore further next year. What we would like is to encourage SEOS artists to interpret the paint tube logo in their own medium and style and these images could be used for the cover and inside guide and possibly for advertising. We haven't decided how this is going to work and I may be jumping the gun a bit, but look out for further information in the autumn newsletters.

This year we have tried to make the guide more visitor friendly by adding a glossary which explains some of the processes that artists use to create their work and a section giving visitors ideas on how to get the most out of their studio visits. I have also, due to popular demand, reinstated the alphabetical index, but I have also retained the index by medium which I hope visitors find useful.

As artist numbers were up again this year, we increased the number of guides from 28,000 to 31,500, but with a bit of negotiation and arm twisting, the printers agreed that they would print the extra 3500 for the same price as last year.

Part of the Guide Editors job is to find advertisers for the guide. As you may have noticed there weren't as many this year. This, I think, is mainly due to the economic situation at the moment, but also I don't have enough time to dedicate to this because the busiest period for guide production is exactly the same time that I should be drumming up the advertising, hence we're looking for someone to become our Guide Advertising Officer.

I've enjoyed my second year as Guide Editor and would be happy to continue if re-elected.

**Terry Ayling – Guide Editor**

## 9. Guide Distribution Report

This year's guide distribution went well as in previous years. We had 31,500 guides printed and in round figures 14,000 of these went to artists and ACOs, 1,500 went to Local Government Offices, 1,500 went to Tourist Information Offices, 700 went to non centralised libraries, 350 went to advertisers and 7,000 extra guides were requested for area use. 5,500 guides were sent to libraries via the Library Distribution Service. As in previous years I asked for feedback from the libraries and about 10 libraries asked for their figures to be decreased for next year and about 4 asked for an increase. If anybody visits a library prior to the event and does not see any guides and none are available on request please advise me as they do not always contact me.

We have about 200 guides left over centrally and about 650 were left over in various studios or with the ACOs so next year I hope to reduce the number to avoid this wastage. However we do not want the number cut too fine or it will be counter productive as about 27% of all visitors come from the guide.

**Charlotte Rice – Guide Distributor**

# 10. Evaluation Report

## **Artists.**

The artists' feedback is explained in the pie charts. These are based on the results from 155 artists in 94 locations. The visitor numbers are displayed on the two graphs, one shows the total number of visitors and the other shows this total broken down into age categories. The figures are skewed by the 3 and 4 June 2010 because these openings were mostly preview evenings. The artists' comments were mixed and a full list of these will be available on the website.

## **Visitors.**

The visitor feedback is pretty well explained by the pie charts and is the result of 272 replies. The only information that cannot be shown on a pie chart is the number of studios visited. The average visitor visited approximately five artists but the range of visits was between 1 and 81. Most of the visitors lefts comments along the lines of "this is excellent" and "great to the see the artist at work". Again a full list of comments will be available on the website.

**Charlotte Rice - Evaluator**