

Policy Position Statement

Arts and the Environment

Purpose

This Policy Position Statement (PPS) refers to CIWEM's adopted Vision for promoting more creativity at the heart of environmental policy and action, with the aim of fostering a new resourcefulness of cross-disciplinary thinking and action for today's environmental challenges. It recommends a range of feasible actions.

CIWEM's Position on Arts and the Environment:

1. The arts often help us to understand the environmental problems facing the world, and can bring some of the solutions within reach, on a human scale. They inform, inspire and show how things can be changed. This is vital in generating critical thinking for our management of the environment.
2. CIWEM understands that people do not always respond positively to dire messages about changing climate and dwindling natural resources. An unremitting focus on crisis can produce a negative mind-set. With a creative attitude, however, there are opportunities for new ways of thinking.
3. CIWEM sees synergy between arts and environment agendas as a crucial enrichment of society's responses to the technological, ecological, cultural and moral challenges of the twenty first century, and as an enrichment of people's lives. We welcome the new opportunities this provides to challenge and refine our perceptions, awaken our sensibilities and review and renew our relationship with the environment.
4. The Institution believes that the interdependence of natural, socioeconomic and cultural values and processes needs to be better recognised by taking a "whole systems" approach; and that it is possible and necessary to link skills and insights in better ways across different disciplines in the arts, education, science, technology and management. Combining the best of intuitive, improvisational and non-linear approaches with the methods of science and technology will enrich diversity of thought and action in positive ways.
5. CIWEM wishes to see art and artists being an assumed component of multidisciplinary approaches to environmental solutions, on a par with other disciplines. We expect that sustainable environmental management, individual self-expression and community cultural vibrancy will become much more mutually reinforcing as a result.

CIWEM is the leading independent Chartered professional body for water and environmental professionals, promoting excellence within the sector.

Context

From the Rg Vedas, some of humankind's earliest writings, we find the origins of the word "art", in the word "rta", which refers to the dynamic process by which the whole cosmos continues to be created, virtuously.

There is a notable tradition in the UK of art that relates to the environment, however that is interpreted - for example art using natural materials, the land itself, or being conceptually focused on humankind's physical, spiritual and metaphorical place in the natural world. There are also approaches to science, technology and management that include dimensions of intuition and subjective perception. Only a few institutions and initiatives however have become formally organised around the ways in which artistic creativity and technical environmental management can help each other, on a societal scale.

CIWEM launched a major strategic programme on Arts and the Environment in 2007. Part of the programme includes leading and influencing national policy dialogues on the subject, and building strong new alliances for an increasingly shared agenda. Key advocacy messages and recommended actions are directed at broadening these efforts, and at seeking greater cross-sectoral coherence of policy thinking.

Key Issues and Actions

CIWEM advocates the following approaches and actions to support the achievement of the public interest aims referred to above:

- Engage input from arts practitioners in environmental solution-finding, and appoint artists to relevant multidisciplinary teams
- See issues of creativity and environmental management as less narrowly bounded by the definition of specialist disciplines
- Remember the design, aesthetic and imaginative dimensions in all activities: take a "whole systems" approach
- Raise the profile of artists whose work addresses key themes of environment and sustainability
- Better connect relevant bodies and initiatives, including policy-makers, think tanks, research programmes, education and public awareness
- Work together to enhance relevant capacities of people and organisations, nurture new ways of thinking, and establish new channels of knowledge-sharing across disciplines
- Create new paradigms of sustainability and environmental stewardship that take better account of intangible cultural heritage and facilitate the adoption of ethical values
- Use national policy and funding streams in relation to both the arts and the environment to encourage all these action areas, by supporting new collaborations, facilitating joined-up curricular programmes, and rewarding innovations (eg in research, public consultation, consultancy procurement etc).

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Note: CIWEM Policy Position Statements (PPS) represents the Institution's views on issues at a particular point in time. It is accepted that situations change as research provides new evidence. It should be understood, therefore, that CIWEM PPS's are under constant review, that previously held views may alter and lead to revised PPS's. PPSs are produced as a consensus report and do not represent the view of individual members of CIWEM.