Arts in Health. Does it work?
Discuss with specific examples.

Arts in health is a relatively new activity and has expanded rapidly in the recent years. There is a variety of approaches, and a variety of projects, including participative arts, therapeutic arts, health promotion, community development, environmental enhancement, exhibitions and performances, staff development, etc. (Angus, 2002, p.4). Although the evaluation of such programmes is very difficult and it is impossible to generalise about the elements that are essential to their success, there is much evidence that the arts can “make a significant contribution to improving the lives, health and wellbeing of patients, service users and carers, as well as those who work in health and the arts.” (ACE, 2007, p. 5).

Some people might dismiss the arts as simply add-on activities, which have little place in a modern, technically-focused healthcare system. Sceptics raise the question whether art should be used to tackle difficult social issues and suggest that we should return to the original function of art which was purely aesthetic. Although in the recent years, DCMS and the Department of Health have set up a joint working group to look at areas of common interest as arts and health (ACE, 2007, p. 13), there has been criticism about the spending of public money on such a controversial sector as arts in health. Critics assume that the evaluation of the benefits of arts in health is very problematic, the results are very questionable and public funds would be better spent on something more tangible, such as new medical equipment and services. For them arts in health is a minority activity with no place in mainstream healthcare and should not go further than placing “pictures on walls” (ACE, 2007, p. 12).

We believe that this is far from being the case. Arts were never used exclusively for aesthetic reasons and they always served social purposes. The distinction between the past and the present is that the social issues and needs have changed and the arts had to adjust to the demands of today's society. Moreover, this is reflected in hundreds of research projects, organisations and individuals which reveal the effectiveness and value of arts and health initiatives, and the benefits they bring to patients. In a review published by HEA (1999, p. 3) it is stated that the above benefits are not derived from