

**Y Pwyllgor Deisebau
Petitions Committee**



Ann Jones AM, Chair
Communities, Equality and Local
Government Committee,
National Assembly for Wales,
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Bae Caerdydd / Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd / Cardiff CF99 1NA

Our ref: P-03-317

09 November 2011

Deat Ann

P-04-317 Hijinx Funding for the Arts

The Petitions Committee considered the following petition during its meeting of 1 November.

'Following the disproportionate cut in the revenue funding of Hijinx Theatre we call upon the National Assembly of Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ensure sufficient funding is available so that the exemplary and ground breaking work undertaken by Hijinx is not threatened. This unique Welsh company has spent 30 years developing opportunities for people with learning difficulties to be included at all levels and this cut will result in a serious reduction in their current provision.'

The Committee is aware that the Communities and Culture Committee undertook an inquiry into the Accessibility of Arts and Cultural Activities in Wales in the third Assembly, and feels that this work is highly relevant to the Hijinx petition.

The Committee agreed to write to you to ask whether the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee could do a short piece of work to review the implementation of the recommendations made as a result of the inquiry into the accessibility of arts activities. We appreciate that the Committee has a full programme of work and that there is unlikely to be an opportunity for the whole Committee to look at this area. We therefore agreed to ask whether a task and finish group could be set up to carry out this task

I would be grateful if you could let me know if this is something your Committee may take up.

Yours sincerely,

William

William Powell, AM

Chair, Petitions Committee

Encs: Additional information on petition

- Hijinx Theatre is a professional theatre company founded in 1981 touring high quality productions to small venues throughout Wales and beyond. A large part of our remit is working with learning disabled and general community groups.
- Hijinx endeavour to cast learning disabled actors alongside professionally trained actors whenever possible, creating an inclusive cast and, as there is currently no professional drama training for talented adults with learning disabilities in Wales, this is something we are addressing as a matter of urgency with plans in development to provide such training.
- Hijinx set up the **Odyssey Theatre** project in 1999 – funded by the National Lottery up until 31st March 2011 [**not** part of the revenue grant]. Odyssey is a participatory community group for adults of all abilities who also collaborate with several local organizations Meadowbank Special School (a school for children with severe communication problems) and music students from Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama
- **Odyssey was runner up in the National Lottery Awards, Best Arts Project category in 2009.**
- **Hijinx Outreach** offers workshops and projects to people within the learning disabled community
- **Hijinx Outreach** produces **Unity Festival** - a week-long mixed ability festival of performances, workshops and other activities from companies across the world in collaboration with the WMC and Mencap Cymru - (historically funded through additional fundraising and with revenue grant support for core staff wages and general office costs.)
- Hijinx's revenue grant in 2010/11 is £234,448 + £29,990 lottery funding for Odyssey Theatre project - a figure which represents standstill funding for the last 5 years.
- From 1st April 2011 the grant will be £160,000 to **include** Odyssey. This represents a cut of £74,448 + £29,990 = £104,438
- All ACW Quality Monitoring forms over the past three years have rated the company's work "good" or "excellent"
- ACW's decision flies in the face of the Welsh Assembly Government's priorities and is contrary to the aspirations of it's own Investment Review.
- With the new grant Hijinx will not be able develop work with people with learning disabilities and it represents a radical reduction in the activity currently offered.
- There **will** be staff redundancies and a re-structuring of the company – and a marginalized community will suffer.
- Hijinx are unique and innovative - the only company in Wales who offer professional opportunities to adults with learning disabilities, both as performers and workshop assistants. Hijinx are committed to inclusive working and believe that everyone has something to offer regardless of ability.