

Dear Mr. Wyn Jones,

**re. Petition P-03-311 - Spectacle Theatre.**

I attach two responses to the request from the new Petitions Committee regarding the Arts Council Letter, dated 20th. April 2011. One is from Mr. Steve Davis, the Business Development Manager and Producer of Spectacle Theatre, and the other from myself as one of the petition organisers for the 'Friends of Spectacle Theatre'.

I will be grateful for an acknowledgement that you have received this email and the attachments.

Thank you.

Michael Jones.

26th. September 2011.

Dear Mr. Powell,

Re: Petition P-03-311 Spectacle Theatre - Response from the 'Friends of Spectacle Theatre' to the Arts Council of Wales letter, dated 20th. April 2011, as requested by the Petitions Committee.

Thank you for inviting a response to the above matter, recently discussed by the Petitions Committee.

As on previous occasions, I forwarded your correspondence to Spectacle Theatre for their response, and attach the reply from Mr. Steve Davis, the Business Development Manager and Producer of the company. His far more informed, experienced and first-hand response, reflects the present views of the company.

As also explained to the previous committee, none of the 'Friends of Spectacle Theatre' group have direct, professional links to the company, but recent participation in a community play and other projects, over a number of years (one member for over twenty years), revealed the depth of dedication, experience and expertise of this well respected, 32 year-old company. We became dismayed when the Arts Council of Wales withdrew their funding in 2010, hence we petitioned the Assembly to attempt to ensure continued funding.

It is pleasing that the Arts Council is currently addressing the potential opportunities for children and younger people in the arts *per se*. However, the broad-brush content of the letter, even with the balanced reporting of some criticisms of their proposed strategy, makes it difficult to comment upon without a deeper, more considered analysis. For example, how many individuals and organisations did not respond to the Arts Council's investigation? How quantitatively and qualitatively different will any new strategy be from what already exists or existed?

Additionally, page eight of the Arts Council's preliminary review document, 'Changing Lives', contains a categorical statement that the issue around the investment review will not be revisited. This seems an affront to the thousands of petition signatories who recorded their concerns. Crucially, the issue that arose from the review remains, namely the claim that some criteria were changed during the process, without prior consultation, creating a seemingly inequitable funding opportunity for the theatres involved. There still appears to be no explanation to justify why such a decision may have been made, and why those companies negatively affected by the investment review were deemed sufficiently different from those retained by, or added to, the Arts Council portfolio. It seems that until this is satisfactorily addressed and resolved, there will remain, rightly or wrongly, questions about fairness.

Personally, arriving from a relatively naive perspective, I find it astonishing that such an apparent paradigm shift in the Arts Council philosophy and policy regarding the investment process, appears not to have been thoroughly and clearly mapped and documented from its inception by, for example, minutes of meetings. How are decisions achieved and subsequently recorded and implemented by such an influential organisation? While appreciating the principle of 'arms length', surely this should not equate to near omnipotence.

The horticultural analogy indicated by the previous Heritage Minister, that the Arts Council should take a radical, root and branch approach to the arts investment review, has witnessed the apparent 'digging-up' of a very long-established, fruitful and flourishing theatre network. What will such a fertile system be replaced with, when some

of what is suggested in the Arts Council strategy, may already have been, or was intended to be, undertaken before the review began?

Yours sincerely,

Michael Jones  
(Petition organiser for 'Friends of Spectacle Theatre').

26th. September 2011.

Dear Mr. Powell,

Re: Petition P-03-311 Spectacle Theatre - Response from Spectacle Theatre to the Arts Council of Wales letter, dated 20th. April 2011, as requested by the Petitions Committee.

I have had a few thoughts about the letter from Nick Capaldi

He prefaces his letter that it is only a 'flavour'. The letter does not have any real substance and, in many ways, is misleading. For example, he states on page five that Spectacle and Gwent continue to exist. He also states that 'Gwent are more advanced of the two'. What does this mean? I do not believe he has any idea of what Spectacle are doing. How can he make any comparison between the companies?

When he says we 'continue to exist', what does this mean? Is he trying to say the organisation is still in operation as it was previously?

He also says we are 'exploring options to play a new role in future'. He then says he has provided funds for both organisations to do this. We are exploring options, but have had no discussion with Mr Capaldi. The options we are exploring, are about the defence of young peoples' entitlement to arts provision where they live. These options are about ensuring that Theatre in Education, and theatre for the most disadvantaged communities, continues to have a place in Wales. In fact we would align ourselves with the 'critical voices' about withdrawal of funding from Theatre in Education, on page two of his letter. He makes no comment about this except to record it. Does he really want us to think of this as a *fait accompli*?

It is worth reminding ourselves that not only was it a withdrawal of funding, it was an abandonment of a ten year Theatre in Education strategy without any consultation, or replacement strategy.

Spectacle continues to exist by struggling to hold on to the idea that

- Young people have cultural entitlements equal to that of any adult.
- People have the entitlement to access Theatre within their own community.
- People are entitled to Theatre Arts of the highest quality, irrespective of socioeconomic, educational or geographical barriers.

We don't exist except as a group of artists who are fighting to recreate an organisation that is capable of delivering the above ideas.

On page two, he talks about 'working with the children and young peoples' partnerships who have responsibility for the child poverty agenda'. He also mentions 'links to the single plans for children and young people'. Spectacle was a perfect example of an arts organisation that was placed to deliver this work. In fact all of the future examples he cites for young peoples' provision, are what Spectacle was already providing, or attempting to provide, in partnership.

The more time goes on I feel that Mr Capaldi had an agenda and, irrespective of what was said or done, he would have carried out that agenda.

He has destroyed provision, and talks of replacing it with new provision. It is very difficult to replace the connections built over thirty years; the experience, knowledge and trust offered to a community arts company. At least we have support from colleagues and organisations that support the ideas above, and we are going to make a fist of it to defend those ideas.

If you want more please feel free to ask.

Steve Davis.

Steve Davis

Business Development Manager / Producer - Spectacle Theatre