

Task and Finish Group on Participation in the Arts

Response from engage Cymru

1) Which groups of people participate in your organisations arts activities?

engage Cymru is a membership organisation with 60 members in Wales, made up of gallery staff, artists, academics and local authority officers. We work strategically with galleries, local authorities, ACW and WG to deliver work to break down barriers to galleries and visual arts. engage Cymru is project funded by ACW.

engage Cymru has four key areas of work:-

- Research projects and activities
- Advocacy
- Sharing of practice through training and events
- Publications

We support galleries to deliver formal and informal gallery education to all groups, including :-

- School children of all ages, including early years
- Young people who are NEET, or who are likely to become NEET
- Older people (socially isolated)

We are currently delivering far reaching projects which focus on:

- Young people (NEETS) in partnership with 5 galleries in Wales (Oriol Mostyn; Oriol Myrddin; Aberystwyth Arts Centre; Ruthin Craft Centre and Oriol Ynys Mon) (Reach the Heights – ESF funding)
- Adults with mental health issues; in partnership with Oriol Myrddin; Arts Care; West Wales Action for Mental Health and MIND
- Adults with variety of disabilities in partnership with Aberystwyth Arts Centre and Penparcau Progressive Action Group
- Young Adult Carers – 16 – 25 year olds with Oriol Davies and National Museum Wales

2a) Do you think that budget changes have affected participation in the arts, either positively or negatively?

- There is never enough money for the visual arts in particular. The feedback I get from galleries is that visual arts are always last on the list and don't get the levels of funding which go to performing arts. Galleries are feeling the pinch particularly now and what is happening is that the groups which galleries reach out to run projects are not sustainable. They are often time limited. This is most definitely a negative thing.

- At one point a few years ago, there was a requirement on Local Authorities to appoint Arts Officers, with half the funding for post coming from ACW. I'm not sure what happened here, but presumably budget cuts has affected this. If managed properly, this arrangement would be a positive improvement.

2b) Do you think that certain groups of people have been affected more than others?

- There does seem to have been a focus on funding for young people and NEETS in particular. This means that other groups miss out, e.g. older people. engage Cymru has been working with galleries across Wales to offer meaningful engagement for older people; but specific funding for this does not exist. There is no national framework policy for arts and older people in Wales (as there is in Northern Ireland). WG have/do fund Gwanwyn Festival, but its my understanding that funding for this is decreasing.

3. Are there gaps in provision for people to participate in arts activities either demographically or geographically?

Gaps :

Long term opportunities for young people (NEETS). Although there has been Reach the Heights funding ESF via ACW, young people are often only being given one crack of the whip, and not allowed to take part in successive projects. engage Cymru would like to see long term projects and opportunities for young people. We need to move beyond short term project funding and find sustainable funding to offer engagement opportunities which has more impact.

Equally older people – as mentioned above. There are gaps in provision for this group both demographically and geographically – transport in rural areas is always an issue and comes up time and time again in our projects.

4. Are there enough funding sources available other than ACW?

I think ACW should have bigger budgets for arts and definitely for the visual and participatory arts. One suggestion is that there is a 'participatory arts' pot of money, that this becomes an artform in its own right. Since the ACW Portfolio Review, lots of organisations delivering participatory arts have lost core funding. Often projects rely on Lottery funding, Trusts and Foundations, Communities First, which is restrictive as its project-based time limited funding.

Also with ACW Lottery funding, its necessary for clients to find 25% match funding (15% of that needs to be cash contribution); this is getting tougher to find for galleries and arts organisations. Ideally that contribution should be significantly smaller or it should be possible to just find in kind match.

5. What role does the voluntary arts sector play in promoting participation in the arts in Wales and how can this be supported?

6. Is the Strategic relationship between the Welsh Government and the bodies that distribute arts funding effective in increasing participation?

I've always felt there needs to be more joined up thinking between Welsh Government and ACW. Arts organisations are delivering projects to a huge range of audiences and participants which affect health; education and wellbeing. Arts cuts across all of the above.

7. All public bodies in Wales will have published a Strategic Equality Plan by April 2012. Do you think these new public sector equality duties will help to increase participation in the arts among under-represented groups in Wales?

I think Strategic Equality Plans are a good thing, but ensuring that arts are included specifically in the plans is vital. As with Health and Wellbeing Action plans (local authorities); currently very few have any specific provision for participation in the arts; it often comes down to personal interest of officers involved in writing the plans. There is a wealth of evidence of value to participating in the arts.