

Task and Finish Group on Participation in the Arts

Response from Llenyddiaeth Cymru Literature Wales

1. Literature Wales - Background

Literature Wales is the National Company for the development of literature in Wales. It was formed in April 2011 and includes Yr Academi Gymreig / The Welsh Academy - the national Society of Writers in Wales, and Tŷ Newydd Writers' Centre. Literature Wales is the Arts Council of Wales' agent for delivering and developing its literature strategy.

Literature Wales is both an enabling body, through its grants and bursaries, and a producer and direct organiser of high-profile literature activity. Literature Wales works in partnership with hundreds of organisations across Wales to deliver an inclusive and wide-ranging programme of literature activity – specifically targeting children and young people, and areas where uptake of arts activity is low.

Literature Wales' mission is to:

- Nurture a love of literature in people of all ages, abilities and background
- Develop the creativity and literacy skills of children and young people
- Encourage innovation and experimentation
- Celebrate Wales' literary heritage
- Connect communities and build new audiences
- Embrace all forms: strict metre and Twitter too
- Champion writing in all of Wales' languages
- Take the words of Wales to the world

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2. Public Participation – Principles

Literature Wales has a national reach and a responsibility to make sure that each and every community in Wales engages with its literature. This involves working with

schools and groups in the most remote parts of the country, embracing Wales' many languages and taking literature on the road and into the homes of those who are housebound.

Key to ensuring participation in all corners and communities of Wales is the **Writers on Tour Scheme**. This funding scheme is unique to Wales; organisers here are able to access funding for literature events in a way that is simple, direct and continuous. No other part of the UK has similar scheme.

Through the Writers on Tour Scheme, Literature Wales works with groups, schools, community organisations and many others to ensure that literature programmes reach every part of Wales. The scheme offers up to 50% funding towards the costs for a writer to give a workshop, lecture or talk. Funding offered by Literature Wales is matched pound for pound by the event organiser, which means double investment in literature. By working with local organisations, the community's engagement and support is ensured and we are able to present affordable and accessible activities which are planned by the people who know and understand their communities best.

Fieldworkers also play a large part in making sure that literature is accessible to all. In partnership with Local Authorities, Literature Wales employs a Gwynedd Literature Promoter and a South Wales Valley Literature Development Officer. Members of staff based in the Llanystumdwy office are responsible for developing links with groups and organisations across north Wales in order to increase participation in literature activities. The fieldworkers deliver over 150 events and projects each year, reaching over 5,000 people.

The main aim of the fieldwork is to engage people who would not otherwise get involved in a literature activity. The key, therefore, is to forge partnerships with other organisations, from within and beyond the cultural sector, to reach an audience previously untapped. Successful initiatives have been possible through working with partners such as Local Authorities, boxing clubs, the Football Association, Arriva Trains, care homes, Abergavenny Food Festival and district general hospitals – to name but a few.

3. Public Participation - Projects

Writers on Tour Scheme – over a million users and counting

Through the **Writers on Tour Scheme**, Literature Wales supports over 1,700 literature events each year. These take place in schools, libraries, Merched y Wawr, cultural venues and other organisations in all parts of Wales, reaching over 85,000 people. Since taking responsibility for the scheme in 1998, Literature Wales has supported over 18,000 events reaching **over 1,200,000** people.

Although there is no one typical Writers on Tour event, they are often participatory activities such as a creative writing workshop, an interactive discussion with a local writers or more ambitious projects such as live blogging and rap choirs.

Each year, the Writers on Tour Scheme is heavily over-subscribed: far more applications are received than can be fulfilled within current budgets. Over the past two years, we have seen an increase in the number of applications, and in particular the number of applications for larger projects. We believe this is due to budgetary cuts within local authorities, schools and arts organisations who can no longer deliver literature programmes without additional support. It is also evident that there is more competition generally for support from charitable trusts, foundations and other bodies and, therefore, more call on alternative funding streams.

The Writers on Tour scheme is reviewed annually and reports, broken down by language and area, show up regions and groups within Wales which do not currently engage in literature. Following recent research into this, 250 organisations or schools have been identified who do not currently engage in literature activities. A publicity drive, led by the fieldworkers in south and north Wales, will address these gaps and encourage new groups to engage in literature.

Fieldworkers

The Literature Wales Fieldworkers play a key role in developing participation in literature activity and target areas or groups which have been traditionally hard to reach. Forging links with local organisations is always at the heart of initiatives led by the fieldworkers.

The **South Wales Valleys Literature Development Officer** has led the way with a host of ground-breaking initiatives since the post began in 2007. For example, the successful *All Skilled Up* project in partnership with Cardiff City Community Foundation and the Football League engages with pupils from thirty schools in three authorities over three years. Pupils work with John Tripp Award Winner, Peter Read, performance poet Mike Church or celebrated poets Mike Jenkins and Patrick Jones to create a new football poem. The project connects football and language skills in exciting new ways and has also been adopted by Caerphilly and Rhondda Cynon Taf Authorities. The project has worked with over 700 children and young people since April 2011.

There are also ongoing partnership plans with Tonyrefail and Evanstown Community First areas to develop a range of literature activities to add value to school learning. These will be delivered January to March 2012 and will also include family learning.

Recent projects with families with low income have also proved very successful and provide a basis to build on in the future. Projects have included creative writing workshops as part of the Blaenavon Heritage Day, Pontypool Carnival and the Big Cheese Festival in the summer of 2011.

Children & Young People

For literature in Wales to thrive, it must engage with and be relevant to the children and young people who make up its future. One of Literature Wales' key areas for strategic development over the next five years is its provision for the young people of Wales.

Literature Wales delivers several initiatives to develop the creativity and literacy skills of children and young people. The **Young People's Writing Squads** identify keen and gifted young writers from schools across Wales and invite them to join their local Squad. The Squads meet four or five times a year and give members the chance to work intensively with professional writers. The Squads are organised by the local authority and supported by Literature Wales, again following the model that local organisers will know best which activities will encourage the highest level of participation. Literature Wales works with the local authorities to set up new squads and to develop those already in existence.

The opportunity to work with a professional writer is something that can help instil in a child a lifelong involvement with the written word, and this is exactly what the intensive retreats at **Tŷ Newydd** provide. At Tŷ Newydd, Literature Wales runs over 10 specially tailored courses for schools each year, with 16 pupils attending each course. They are residential courses which run from Monday to Friday. Many schools re-visit the writers' centre each year with different groups.

The **Bardd Plant Cymru** project has promoted poetry in schools since 2000. Literature Wales works with S4C, Urdd, Welsh Books Council and the Welsh Language Board to appoint a high-profile poet to the role each year and create a year of activity around the written word. Over 900 children participate in activities with Bardd Plant Cymru each year. The current Bardd Plant Cymru is Eurig Salisbury who has also been composing poetry with young dancers and creating poetry videos with Writing Squads as well as blogging, tweeting and visiting numerous schools and festivals.

The Bardd Plant Cymru has also inspired a ground-breaking new initiative for Literature Wales. In October 2011, Literature Wales unveiled the **Young People's Laureate** - the first role of its kind in Britain. Literature Wales saw that the Welsh-language Bardd Plant Cymru model could be followed to create a similar English-language role. The Young People's Laureate (YPL) will be a figurehead for projects aimed at young people, focusing on groups and areas where literature activity is low. Working towards the aim of developing the creativity and literacy skills of children and young people, the YPL will inspire a love of literature, as well as become an ambassador for young people.

Catherine Fisher was appointed as Wales' first ever Young People's Laureate. As part of the Young People's Laureate project a team of writers and workshop facilitators

will work with youth groups in areas of social and economic deprivation across Wales.

Literature Wales is working closely with the Children's Commissioner for Wales, Keith Towler, to identify specific groups which would most benefit from sessions and workshops as part of the project. Literature Wales looks forward to creating a platform where young people can raise not just their voice but also their confidence as an individual, a writer and member of society. In the face of increasing reports on the worrying literacy levels amongst the young, this project aims to be a positive influence on Wales' youth.

Literature Wales also works with partners in the Wales Millennium Centre to present multi-artform participation opportunities for children and young people. One such project, which will work with schools, is Scheherazade 2012. This is a collaborative venture between National Dance Company Wales, Welsh National Opera, Literature Wales, Arts Active, Creative Arts Support Team and Paul Hamlyn Pathfinder Project which will result in a multi-media production created and performed by school-children using music, dance, poetry, story, animations and video projections. This will be performed at St David's Hall in October 2012.

Programming

Literature Wales' main programme also aims to be accessible and provide innovative opportunities for people in Wales, of all ages and backgrounds, to take part in a literature activity.

Throughout October 2011 Literature Wales took performance, poetry, prose and all things of a literary nature into the public domain with the opening of the **Literature Lounge**, a pop-up shop situated in Cardiff's St David's Shopping Centre. The extensive events programme offered specific workshops for schools plus a wide range of drop in activities for the general public, including a book swap, talks, book launches, spoken poetry, storytelling, music and games.

The shopping centre location enabled Literature Wales to engage with people who may not normally have the opportunity to participate in literature or arts activity. In total over 2,000 people visited the Lounge throughout October, a large majority of these were children with their parents and young people in addition to the many office workers, teachers, pensioners and shoppers who visited the space. The Literature Lounge, which was seen as a landmark project for Literature Wales, gained a large amount of publicity. Following its success, Literature Wales is now planning to take the project on tour across Wales in the near future.

Residential courses at Tŷ Newydd provide an intensive period of reflection, discussion and creation in one of the most beautiful settings in Wales. In the former home of Lloyd George, over twenty courses per year are held, giving over 250 budding writers the chance to sharpen their craft with professional tutors of the

highest quality including Carol Ann Duffy, Gillian Clarke, Kaite O'Reilly, John Rowlands, Angharad Price, Hugh Lupton and Menna Elfyn. Shorter courses and workshops are also presented at the Glyn Jones Centre, Literature Wales' base in the Wales Millennium Centre.

Over the past two years, the Welsh-language courses at Tŷ Newydd have been developed with the support of a Lottery grant from ACW. This additional funding has delivered a programme of courses and revived the Welsh-language programme for writers.

4. Equality of Access

The Literature Wales programme is always flexible and statistics are regularly reviewed to ensure that the activities delivered by Literature Wales are attractive to a wide audience and are inclusive. Initiatives such as the Write for Life Prisons Project (which ran creative writing workshops with professional writers in the five prisons in south Wales), the Literature Lounge, Creative Writing in Health and Social Care and the Whitchurch project reflect this principle and promote literature amongst non-traditional audiences. Literature Wales believes access to literature should be open to all and this principle underpins much of the planning and development done by the organisation.

Literature is relevant to all of the people in Wales and Literature Wales is dedicated to delivering a programme of activities and events that are inclusive and reflect the desires and needs of all communities across Wales.

Literature Wales also works regularly with groups who speak and write in languages other than Welsh or English. Supporting groups such as the Arabic Cultural Society, Bazm-e-Adab – an Urdu poetry group – and the Punjabi Mehfil poetry group, alongside work with schools whose pupils come from various backgrounds, mean that all of the literatures of Wales are respected, represented and encouraged.

In 2011 Literature Wales launched a new project in Writing in Health and Social Care, based at Tŷ Newydd Writers' Centre and supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. It aims to develop the use of creative writing and reading in health and social care. Literature Wales is developing a portfolio of courses in Writing in Health and Social Care at Tŷ Newydd to increase the opportunities available to writers and health and social care professionals to train in the field. This project will also reach out to those often excluded from the arts for social or personal reasons by developing outreach projects in health and social care which will lead to tailored courses at Tŷ Newydd.

5. Challenges

The main challenges facing participation in the arts in general is no doubt the risk of budgetary cuts and financial pressures. In order for organisations to deliver quality opportunities to participate, to create and to work with professional writers, the writers must receive professional fees and there are of course other costs related to delivering activities.

The appetite for participatory activities is on the rise, however, and the enthusiasm for and commitment to developing literature in Wales is significant.

It is vital that schemes such as Writers on Tour continues to offer support to grassroots activities, which ensure community engagement and support of the highest level and which also succeeds in delivering quality literature activity at a relatively low cost when compared with other artforms. Over 1,700 events, with 85,000 participants, are all achieved for a budget of a little over £115,000. This amounts to an investment of under £70 per event or under £1.50 per participant.

The increased demand on the Writers on Tour scheme shows not only the enthusiasm for participatory literature activities, but also the increase in the competition for funding sources. Whilst there are various sources available, through the Arts Council of Wales, Literature Wales and other charitable trusts and foundations, each funding stream is certainly facing increased demand, which means that not all applications, however outstanding, can be realised.

This means that the arts sector in general needs to think in new and more creative ways of ensuring sufficient funding. Working in partnership with the private sector is vital – yet, again, arts organisations may find themselves competing with others for the support of a particular business. Recognising the value of the artistic product is a key part of developing these partnerships with the private sector. Going to see the MD of a national business cap in hand is not going to get results for the arts organisation. It's crucial that new relationships with the business sector start from the principle of partnership and in the arts providing for the private sector – which will in turn increase the participation in the arts even further, reaching into board rooms, factory floors and watercooler moments of creative activity.

Literature Wales
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