

# Task and Finish Group on Participation in the Arts

## Response from ArtsConnect

*Arts Connect* is the new initiative in South Wales whereby Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff and the Vale of Glamorgan's local authority arts services are working collaboratively from December 2011 until March 31<sup>st</sup> 2014. In keeping with the aims of the Simpson report. This collaborative working will develop the range and quality of participatory arts experiences for people living in and visiting this wider area. Arts officers responsible for participation will work together, planning regionally and delivering locally, to continually improve and sustain arts services.

Local government arts services consist of theatre and gallery staff teams, including programmers, marketing and technical staff, and Arts Development Officers (ADOs) often with 3<sup>rd</sup> sector experience and being practising artists in their own right. These officers are knowledgeable about benefits that participating have on our health and well being, regeneration and prosperity and improving learning outcomes. Local government arts officers teams can be placed alongside Leisure, Library, Youth and Adult Education Services, Regeneration and Tourism/Events colleagues, creating an environment for sharing ideas and expertise.

### **Q 1: Which groups of people participate in the arts**

Throughout Arts Connect, various groups of people participate in arts activities developed and supported by the 4 local authority arts services. Some arts services have the capacity to deliver to a wider range of groups than others, or have specific funding streams that dictate the groups that they are able to work with. Overall, throughout the Arts Connect area we support the provision of opportunities for the following groups to participate in arts activities:

- Children and young people
- Disabled children and young people
- NEETs
- School pupils
- More Able and Talented young people
- Young Carers
- Looked after Children
- Young Offenders
- Parents & toddlers
- Families
- Disabled adults
- Adults (25+)

- Older Adults (50+)
- Those living in residential homes
- Welsh speakers
- Those living in C1st areas

### **Q 2a: Budgets changes affecting participation**

Budget changes in recent years both within local government and in the Arts Council of Wales have affected participation in the arts. Without on-going Arts Council of Wales' support many participatory arts opportunities would not be possible. Following the ACW Investment Review, some opportunities have decreased due to loss of funding, in particular those participation opportunities provided by established and experienced community arts organisations e.g. Spectacle Theatre based in RCT and operating across part of the ArtsConnect area. This has meant a diminishing of theatre opportunities for young people across the area with the company having to refocus its core business.

### **Q2.b: Which groups of people have been affected**

Current funding is targeted at very specific groups of participants e.g. NEETS, and therefore, enables this target group to participate in the arts, with projects specifically driven to reach this target group. This has impacts on *mainstream* provision albeit this provision is able to be provided by charging nominal amounts for participatory activities e.g. TakepART, RCTCA dance programme and BCBC Youth Theatre. There seems to be a lack of funding for mainstream/universal provision, and also for More Able and Talented young people

In theory the Welsh Government's Child Poverty Strategy will have a positive impact, both in terms of providing further opportunities to participate for target groups. A focus on children and young people, in particular NEETS and harder-to-reach groups, may lead to a gap in provision for other groups of society i.e. adults.

Local authority budgets for discretionary and non-statutory arts services are minimal compared to Education and Health budgets for example, and participatory arts activity is often reliant on external funding, from the Arts Council of Wales and other sources. However more collaborative working and sharing of resources, which is leading towards greater opportunity for increasing the range and quality of arts participatory experiences, as is the aim with Arts Connect.

Within the Arts Connect region some organisations e.g. Spectacle have been affected by the Arts Council of Wales' Investment Review. Young people's access to quality participatory theatre experiences is therefore affected.

Some support has been able to be provided to enable these organisations to develop opportunities to access other funding streams through the Arts Council or other sources, and to identify other resources to maintain their

programme activity. In Merthyr new participatory opportunities have been created e.g. through the new Theatr Soar.

### **Q3: Gaps in Provision**

Geographical - there are both geographical and demographical gaps in provision for people to participate in arts activity across Arts Connect. The region is diverse with urban areas, rural and semi-rural towns and villages. Limited local authority arts budgets have had an impact on the capacity of ADO officers to deliver across the whole area, and target areas determined by funding specifications. There are limited sources to access funding for the area to provide door-step arts activity accessible to those unable to travel. Arts services work with other agencies and stakeholders to identify geographical gaps, and support the development of provision (where possible) or access to provision via schemes such as Arts Council of Wales' Night Out Scheme and Timebanking schemes.

Demographically - there seems to be a gap in provision for those aged 25+, with the focus currently on under 25s, families, and older adults of 50+). Across ArtsConnect there are areas of economic deprivation with a high number of Communities First and LSOAs which presents a barrier to participation.

### **Q4: Available funding sources.**

Other than ACW there are a limited range of alternative funding sources specifically available to local government arts services for the provision of arts participatory activity although these will be available to 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations especially if they have charitable status.

Whilst there are a range of funding schemes available to local authorities in general e.g. for increasing awareness of recycling or community safety issues these will be accessed by no-arts services. And the relevant partnerships between arts and non-arts service then have to be created if they do not exist. That said the external funding is not always easily accessed for arts participation.

European funding tends to be for overarching priorities as per raising employability and whilst the arts have a key role to play, as above, they are not easily included in programmes. Reach the Heights, through the Arts Council of Wales, is an exception to the rule. External funding is often time limited, impeding long term planning and sustainability of participatory arts programmes.

### **Q5: Voluntary sector role**

The voluntary arts sector is key to developing arts opportunities within the Arts Connect area as they are often able to access funding unavailable to local authority arts services. They provide the community arts provision through external and local authority support that can be accessed by the local

community. Therefore, changes in external funding criteria and local authority budget constraints have major impacts on the arts participation opportunities that they can offer. On the other hand, with the development of Arts Connect and collaborative working between local authority areas, it is hoped that there will be increased participation, improved funding opportunities and engagement in the arts increasing opportunities for the voluntary sector to work in collaboration, supported by Arts Connect Arts Officers.

#### **Q6: Strategic relationship WG and other bodies**

We feel that the strategic relationship between the Welsh Government and the bodies that distribute arts funding continues to develop, and will be evident as the new Arts Council of Wales structure is embedded. Its effectiveness at allocating funding to increase participation could be developed further, through linking with local authorities Arts Services and having a raised awareness of what is happening 'on-the-ground' through discussing at a local level.

#### **Q7: new public sector Equality duties**

Arts organisations are required to have Equal Opportunities policies, and are a requirement of applying for funding from the Arts Council of Wales and local authorities. Equality and access is often an enabling tool in the arts, with arts activity often helping to promote minority, disability, gender and other equality issues. However, funding to enable the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector community arts organisations to market these objectives can be a barrier – translation of languages including Welsh and other required languages can be expensive and inhibitive without adequate funding and resources to enable this to happen. Often for smaller arts organisation they do not have the staffing resources to cover this, whereas larger organisations receive the funding and have adequate resources and dedicated officers to enable this to happen.

Increasing participation in the arts amongst under-represented groups in Wales will not solely happen through the introduction of strategic equality plans. Barriers to participation including the following, which also need to be addressed:

- Capacity – often demand for professionally led participatory arts activity is higher than supply
- Venue suitability – theatres, particularly those that are historic listed buildings, have access issues, as well as spaces that are not appropriately equipped for participative arts activity
- Language – restricted funding limits ability to provide for all community groups
- Knowledge and Understanding – in particular, amongst arts practitioners, enabling them to feel confident in their ability to deliver and engage with the most under-represented groups in our communities
- Cost – continuing need to look at ways in which participatory arts opportunities for these groups (which?) can be subsidised and cost effective.

- Sustainability – creating opportunities that are not solely reliant on funding and are able to become embedded within the communities programme and sustained.

## **OTHER INFORMATION**

Within Arts Connect participatory arts opportunities are created and delivered through the funding received from core Council budget to the arts services, and through strategic initiatives and partnerships with other Council Services, accessing their non-arts core budgets.

These include:

- RCT Cultural services being commissioned by Fframwaith (Rhondda Cynon Taff's Children and Young People's Partnership) to deliver the RCT Youth Arts and SONIG Youth Music industry programmes, utilising Families First funding (previously CYMORTH)
- Partnership with 14-19 Learning Pathways in RCT to deliver specific creative industries activity that supports the delivery of its enrichment and engagement agenda, with Bridgend also receiving funding on a project-by-project basis. A regional approach to 14-19 CCI provision is being encouraged throughout Arts Connect linking in with the new 14-19 Regional Network Development Plan.
- Partnerships with Youth Services i.e. in Bridgend by the ADO supporting Music provision within the Youth Service, being based in their offices for a number of days each week; ADO team in RCT supporting Services for Young People to manage its Special Schools Project with its focus on the arts. This latter project is part of Building the Future Together programme aimed at engaging NEETs, part-financed by the European Social Fund via the Welsh Government.
- Project-specific partnerships with other Council services such as Children's Services, Youth offending Teams and LAC; Community Safety Partnership; Libraries; and Community Focused Schools.

Participation within ArtsConnect includes the Bridgend Youth Theatre and Youth Dance linked to the Grand Pavilion Porthcawl, bi-lingual Writers Squads in Merthyr and participatory visual arts experiences in the Vale, linked to the Art Central Gallery in Barry. Across Arts Connect work experience and volunteering opportunities enable participation, especially for young people, in the arts.

Opportunities are also created through advocating for and supporting professional community artists and arts organisations within the region, for example, through:

- contracting third sector arts organisations to deliver community arts activity on behalf of the arts service – Valley & Vale in Bridgend, RCTCA and Elemental Force in RCT

- networking and CPD opportunities for artists/arts organisations e.g. Child Protection

- leading on strategic partnerships, such as the Youth Arts Strategic Partnership in RCT, established initially with ACW investment bringing together key Council officers and community arts providers e.g. Valleys Kids ArtWorks to develop an holistic approach to the arts in RCT. There is the intention to create an ArtsConnect YASP.

In general across ArtsConnect arts participation opportunities are either dependant on, and/or enhanced and increased by funding resources secured from other non-arts Council Services and external sources. For example:

- RCT Theatres (Coliseum Aberdare, Muni Arts Centre Pontypridd and Park & Dare Theatre), one of the 8 Arts Council of Wales revenue-funded theatres are the only ACW RFO within the Arts Connect region. *Take pART* is RCT Theatres' participatory programme, providing weekly arts workshops for young people and older adults, master classes with professional artists aimed at young people and subsidised access to the daytime programme linked to the RCT Theatres professional live programme.
- Collaborative working with Live Music Now, the organisation which offers opportunities for local people of all ages to engage with professional classical music within community settings, is enabled through the support they receive from the Arts Council of Wales.
- Provision of opportunities for live professional performing arts productions to be presented within the community via the Arts Council of Wales' Night Out scheme, which is supported by local authority arts services, and enables communities to engage with professional live arts events at a subsidised rate.

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On behalf of ArtsConnect