

Task and Finish Group on Participation in the Arts

Response from Aberystwyth Arts Centre

1. Which groups of people participate in your organisation's arts activities?

.....Aberystwyth Arts Centre has a very wide ranging participatory programme which works with an exceptionally wide section of the local community across all artforms. This includes work with individuals – both adults and children / young people; schools; local community groups; young people at risk; people with disabilities; artists groups – both amateur and professional; people with specific health issues etc, etc

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

Inevitably budget changes – (and let's be honest here – we mean budget reductions. Very few organisations have received increases in funding, and even if on paper they appear to have, many of these have come after several years of standstill funding which in reality is the same as a cut) – will affect programmes of activity with more of a focus on either cost recovery or income generating activity as opposed to subsidised activity, or an overall reduction in activity or fixed costs such as staffing.

Certainly in the case of our organisation, our schools activity used to be more heavily subsidised. Take up of activity has definitely reduced since we have had to charge more. If we are able to offer activity free of charge, (we always look out for any opportunities / funding streams which make this possible), take up is always excellent.

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

Given the above, anyone on a limited / no income has been affected more than people on a regular / good income.

However, it isn't completely straightforward. Some areas which are recognised to have high levels of deprivation receive additional support / opportunities through schemes such as Communities first – (something which I definitely approve of) – which has enabled people on low incomes in those areas to have good provision. However, this doesn't always acknowledge the complicated situation for many parts of Wales – rural areas particularly – where communities tend to be very mixed, and whilst not showing the overall levels of deprivation of some areas, still contain many people who would have very limited access to the arts as funding is reduced.

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

See my point above.

Additionally, rural areas are always very difficult to service adequately, particularly given the limitations of public transport in Wales, and the financial viability of putting arts provisions / venues in sparsely populated areas. Funded outreach programmes help this, as well as improving the public transport infrastructure.

A lot of people access the arts through various community groups / organisations they are part of. Cuts to these groups has a knock on effect the ability of these people to attend on their own.

4. Are there enough funding sources available other than the Arts Council for Wales? Are alternative funding sources accessible?

...The current wider economic situation doesn't help. Previously we have received support through businesses, but this has definitely reduced. We haven't done any specific research, but it does feel as though there is less funding around generally.

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

...See point 3 re.people attending arts provision through community groups. However, my experience would suggest that funding need to be maintained both for the community groups themselves, and the Arts Venues / professionals to provide the actual arts activities for them to use / attend.

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

...Organisations like the Arts Council of Wales have a clear requirement for their funded organisations / grant recipients to provide participatory activities, and have strategic plans to ensure they reach a wide demographic. Organisations like ourselves are very aware of this when planning our public programmes.

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

...As above, I feel it helps for funding bodies to make any requirements clear to their clients. Many organisations already recognise the importance of this work, and will already be undertaking work which addresses this. However, the reality is that certain under-represented groups need specific support and input in the initial stages, which often has a resources implication. Schemes such as the Reach the Heights Project really help in situations like this.

Cath Sherrell
Education Officer, Visual Arts
Aberystwyth Arts Centre