

Task and Finish Group on Participation in the Arts

Response from Age Cymru

Introduction

Age Cymru is the leading national charity working to improve the lives of all older people in Wales. We believe older people should be able to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, have adequate income, access to high quality services and the opportunity to shape their own future. We seek to provide a strong voice for all older people in Wales and to raise awareness of the issues of importance to them.

We are pleased to respond to the Committee's call for evidence. For the past 5 years Age Cymru has run Gwanwyn, a month-long national festival held across Wales in May celebrating creativity in older age. The aim of the festival is to:

- Celebrate the opportunity for renewal, growth and creativity in older age.
- Promote the benefits to older people of exploring creativity, developing a critical voice and participating fully in the artistic and cultural life of local communities and Wales as a whole.
- Offer opportunities for greater participation by older people in the arts, including painting, photography, music, drama, storytelling, literature, dance or film.
- Highlight existing artistic work and creativity of groups and individuals who are older people themselves or whose work revolves around the concepts of older people and creativity.
- Promote the participation of older people in the arts throughout the year and highlight existing or new opportunities available locally.

The Gwanwyn Festival is a collaborative initiative between key national organisations led by Age Cymru, the Arts Council of Wales and the Welsh Government. We work closely with local arts groups, active retirement and community groups, public libraries, museums, schools and care centres.

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

Age Cymru's arts activities, through the Gwanwyn Festival, are aimed at older people in Wales (people aged 50 and over to match the Welsh Government's definition within the Strategy for Older People in Wales).

The festival has been running for 5 years. During the 2011 festival period more than 296 Gwanwyn events or sessions took place, involving an estimated 9500 people as participants or attendees. These were organised by 82 community groups and organisations who participated in, or received small grants from, the programme. The vast majority of participants are aged 50 and over, with a significant number aged over 70.

The following is a snapshot of activity which took place during the festival in 2011:

- 4 showcase events at major venues around Wales, generating publicity for Gwanwyn festival activities and encouraging participation by older people.
- A major project in partnership with the Cardiff Comedy Festival, giving older people the opportunity to take part in workshops and performances as part of a range of stand-up comedy events.
- The beginnings of a partnership project with the dementia assessment unit at Royal Glamorgan Hospital, Llantrisant. This will bring together professional artists with nursing staff and patients at the unit to create artwork to improve the environment at the unit and to begin to explore the use of artistic activity as part of the dementia assessment process.
- Work with Rubicon Dance to create a new dance toolkit for use by dance tutors and other professionals to encourage older members of the community to participate in dance activities.
- Every Picture Tells A Story, the first part of a three year project which will involve members of 'hidden' communities (e.g. Residential Care, Mental Health, Prisons etc) in the collection of life stories to contribute to the publication of a book in 2013.

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

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

We believe that reductions in budgets available for arts work will negatively impact on older people. As part of the Gwanwyn Festival, Age Cymru distributes small grants to local arts activities to establish or provide activities which increase the participation of older people in creative activities. The money to provide these grants is provided by the Department for Public Health in the Welsh Government.

As a result of reductions in funding for Age Cymru's healthy ageing work, the budget for small grants awarded by Gwanwyn will be £20,000 in 2012 compared to the £25,000 awarded in 2011. This will reduce the ability of Gwanwyn to provide funding to support and develop projects and opportunities for older people to participate in the arts.

In October 2011, Age Cymru commissioned research into the impact of the Gwanwyn Festival's small grants funding on its participants. A survey was distributed to 226 people who have participated in Gwanwyn activities over the 5 years of the project, and responses were received from 33% of those receiving the information. The main goals of the study were to gather evidence and information that would illustrate the climate for arts participation for older people in Wales, and to evaluate the impact of Gwanwyn grant funding on participants. The research demonstrated the critical role that small grants providing this type of support play in enabling activities to take place.

The survey results showed that Gwanwyn had acted as a catalyst for 69.3% of survey respondents, and more than half of those reported that they are now engaged in arts or creative activities either on a periodic or regular basis as a result of their participation in Gwanwyn.

84% of responders who had received funding Gwanwyn described it as 'mission critical' and that many activities would not have taken place without the festival's small grant scheme. Responses also highlighted the current difficult funding conditions for arts-based activities as well as the general economic climate which has a negative effect on arts participation. Responses also highlighted:

- The willingness of groups and individuals to contribute towards the cost of staging arts events (in both time and money) if there is a small sum of money to build on.
- The significance of funding for the arts for older people in Wales in the wider context of intergenerational work and a positive contribution to community cohesion.

Many arts and creative activities that older people participate in take place on a local level and only require a small amount of funding. Nevertheless, this funding can be crucial, even for volunteer-led activities, because "if you don't have the money to hire a hall, you don't have an exhibition." Our partners in the Gwanwyn Festival have told us that a reduced number of opportunities will exist for older people this year as a result of reductions in the funding available.

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

The Gwanwyn Festival small grants scheme is the only such programme specifically targeted towards older people's participation in the arts in Wales. It is simple to apply for and provides small amounts of funding necessary to establish or run one-off activities. Many of the groups who receive money from Gwanwyn will not apply for, or be a position to receive, funds from other sources or larger funding streams.

Other opportunities for older people to participate in arts or creative activities have historically been provided by local authorities, sometimes in the form of match funding or provision of educational classes. We are aware that many of these opportunities too are being scaled back and are increasingly under threat from reduced budgets. We fear that the effect of this will be to lessen the number and type of activities that older people choose to engage in. Funding provided to lifelong learning classes and venues are also under threat by the focus on vocation-related learning in the current economic climate.

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?

We are supportive of the public sector equality duties and are working with a number of public bodies on the development of their equality plans and objectives. Age is a 'protected characteristic' within the Equality Act, however public bodies retain flexibility over the specific

groups targeted by their equality objectives. Therefore we are hopeful that these equality duties will have a role to play in increasing participation in the arts against older people, as an under-represented group, though we will need to wait to see the final duties set before making a final judgment.

Conclusion

We hope these comments are of use to the Committee. We would be happy to provide further information or oral evidence as required.