

Task and Finish Group on Participation in the Arts

Response from Wales Association for the Performing Arts

Introduction

- a) The Wales Association for the Performing Arts is the main lobbying and campaigning group for the professional performing arts in Wales. Formed in 1982, we represent the vast majority of the revenue funded arts organisation in the country including drama, dance opera and support organisations. We are self supporting and self financing.
- b) We very much welcome this Inquiry as we have been looking to the Welsh Government to take forward the recommendations of the Report of the Communities and Culture Committee Inquiry into the Accessibility of the Arts and Cultural Activities in Wales published in February 2011
- c) For the purposes of our submission we have interpreted “participation” in the widest possible way to include artists, practitioners, audiences and anyone who takes part in arts activity at any level.

Questionnaire answers

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

Responding on a collective basis, WAPA members encourage the widest possible participation. This is predominantly as audience but will also include outreach and workshop work. The membership is committed to the building of new audiences as well as those who need encouragement to attend more regularly. One of our members, Earthfall Dance Co, reports that 48% of audience on their last tour attended as direct result of participatory activity.

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

There can be no doubt about a general negative effect, although individual organisations may have increased their reach on a local basis. You cannot withdraw funding to 32 arts organisations and expect participation not to be affected. In our submission to the Communities and Culture Committee Inquiry last year we pointed strongly to the geographical shortcomings of the new arts map of Wales. The East of Wales, notably Powys and Monmouthshire as well as the Gwent Valleys were badly affected. The three Young Peoples Theatre Companies that have ceased to exist in their previous form all operated in that part of Wales. Their core work has not been replaced.

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

We believe that young people have been badly affected. We feel that it regrettable and ironic that the dis-investment in Young Peoples Theatre that put Wales on the National UK and international map has happened at a time when the Welsh Government is so pre-occupied with addressing (quite rightly) the Child Poverty agenda, in which the new strategy for Wales lists “reducing inequalities that exist in health, education and economic outcomes of children and families by improving the outcomes of the poorest” as one of the three strategic objectives. School age children and young people have now had their opportunity to see issue based educational theatre severely reduced and there are major areas of the

country the poorer for it. There is a hugely diminished service in the Welsh language particularly, because schools do have the option to buy in English language product from anywhere, but Welsh Language educational theatre does not exist outside ACW funded companies. We believe that cuts in public spending in social services that has in places prevented less mobile members of the community attending and participating has reduced the diversity of certain events. The cost of transport or the cost of carers and support workers has made trips to theatres and the arts a non starter in many places. This applies equally to many schools.

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

Dance was particularly hard hit as Community Dance Wales and Welsh Independent Dance have both ceased to exist. India Dance Wales and Dance Blast were also cut but have continued to maintain a revised service with project and other funding. We have already mentioned in 2a) and 2b) above the geographical area most affected by the changes. Theatre provision equally affected is touring Community Theatre. This type of work produced previously by the above - cut - companies and removed from the remit of others, is now almost non-existent. Work of this sort has to be bought in from England or Scotland, and much of the flavour of community touring created by product about Wales, made by creative artists in Wales and seen around Wales, has been lost. The decimation of theatre services to young people in schools is in direct opposition to the (albeit previous) Welsh Government's objective to ensure that every young person should have the opportunity to experience theatre and allied arts activity at each key stage in their school-life.

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

Very few. There are more and more charitable organisations chasing fewer and fewer pots of money, and the amount available from some UK based foundations is not that large in any case. The reserves and investments of all such Trusts have of course taken a hit over the last three years and with interest rates flat-lined, will remain in that state for the foreseeable future. For small organisations the time and expense in making applications to a variety of trusts is disproportionate to the amount that might be given out. It is also virtually impossible to find corporate sponsorship in the present financial climate. The largest arts clients, the WNO and the National Theatre Co's in both languages are finding it hard, so there is little or no chance for small community arts organisations.

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

We should stress that WAPA represents the professional arts, but we have always worked closely with the voluntary sector and many arts organisations rely very heavily on voluntary help. Voluntary Arts Wales was a member of WAPA until it lost its funding last April and the ability of the voluntary sector to have a strong and singular voice in Wales is the poorer.

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

WAPA feels strongly that strategic issues need to be looked at.

- a) The Report of the Communities and Culture Committee last year was critical of the strategic framework that led to the decisions made by the Arts Council in 2010. We believe that there should be a way in which Assembly Members through a Scrutiny Committee, like the one that has commissioned this Review, should be able to contribute to the Remit Letter issued by the appropriate Minister. We also believe that

the way in which that remit is applied by the Arts Council should be scrutinised at a later date. In other words, that the Arts Council should be subject to an element of democratic accountability for its decisions.

- b) We strongly believe that other Assembly Departments should have an input into the strategic framework. Education, Health and Economic Development are all areas impacted by output from the arts sector.
- c) We would suggest an Annual Arts Debate in the Senedd Chamber, to pick up on the concerns and priorities of AM's from across Wales, where objectives can be laid.
- d) We would like the Welsh Government to provide clear leadership on the distribution of arts funding by and through Local Authorities. The Simpson Report is urging collaborative working and there may be Wales-wide initiatives that are needed.
- e) We would recommend that the professional sector be represented at the Arts Strategy Board chaired by the Minister in order that we can have an input into the discussions and are able to report back more effectively on the priorities of the Welsh Government.

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 believe it is too early to make a judgement, but we do feel that legislation in itself does not always change anything. This is a hearts and minds issue and it is important that culture and arts are given the opportunity to help bring about change through what they create as much as by how they behave.

CHRIS RYDE

Chair

Wales Association for the Performing Arts