

Task and Finish Group on Participation in the Arts in Wales

Inquiry into Participation in the Arts in Wales

Response from Spectacle Theatre Ltd

1. What organisation do you represent?

Spectacle Theatre Ltd

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

Children, young people, Community's. Young offenders, school pupils. Young people at risk ,vulnerable people, Mothers, young mothers, the elderly. Welsh speakers, those in need of confidence and living in areas of multiple deprivation. People seeking careers in the creative industry's.

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

The effects have had a negative affect. My response to the inquiry into the 'accessibility of arts and cultural activity in Wales' in 2010 was that we welcomed the opportunity to speak to the inquiry which was taking place at an important time for the Arts in Wales. We are a company that prides itself on making the arts available to some of the most disadvantaged communities in Wales. We challenge the notion that being actively engaged in a participatory play is not clear evidence of arts participation. We stated that we believed passionately that decisions being taken about the future of the Arts in Wales need to protect the entitlement for all people to access the Arts, regardless of social, financial or geographical barriers. This arts provision needs to be inclusive, and accessible to diverse audiences. We do not believe subsequent decisions by the arts council have supported access on an equal or fair level. We strongly believed the current mechanism employed by the Arts Council to assess artistic quality is not transparent and disenfranchised valleys communities. This is precisely what happened. Valleys communities no longer have a single producing theatre company. The withdrawal of revenue funding by ACW fundamentally threatened the continuation of producing theatre company's based in and working for the South Wales Valleys. The Arts Council of Wales is maintained a variety of revenue funded organisations working in the arts in the Valleys areas, this work is generally centre based and not toured. To remove the producing and touring work of Spectacle was to negate an essential aspect of the complex ecology of theatre provision in the valleys. We reach out and work in communities that no other arts organisation can access. We are an intrinsic part of a complex pattern of arts provision in the valleys with links to the voluntary, public and private sectors. We asked the question; • Does the

Arts Council of Wales have a clear understanding of the immediate impact of the investment review on the complex Theatre ecology of the South Wales valleys? No it didn't and couldn't because the process was not long enough to consider the impact. At 'some point' during the investment review ACW abandoned its Theatre in Education strategy. This resulted in no funded provision in any school in the whole of South East Wales and Powys. There is also no theatre in education provision in Wales. • Why was this decision to abandon the strategy for Theatre in Education made before developing another strategy to provide arts provision for young people? Since 1993 Spectacle has developed a theatre provision in the Welsh language for the Valleys. Over the past five years through partnership working we have extended this to the whole of South East Wales. We are a bi-lingual company reflecting the cultural make up of the valleys area. The provision, the skills and contact have now been lost. An integral part of Spectacle's work is the creation of theatre in the valleys by and for valleys people. The challenges the area presents in creating theatre that is engaging and enriching for young people requires theatre artists with experience and knowledge of the valleys. Spectacle Theatre has always been under resourced financially, yet we have maintained this provision for thirty years, overcoming financial difficulties through resourcefulness and partnership working. We provide training, mentoring, work placement and experience for young people and professionals unavailable anywhere else. The withdrawal of revenue support threatened the very existence of the company but more importantly removed young people's entitlement to the live performing arts in their own community. Schools and other organisations, who regularly booked Spectacles work expressed very strong support for a continuation of the service. Yet the decisions made by a group of people who have not seen or experienced the work in its proper context, the valleys, choose to override these needs. The whole valleys area including the Gwent valleys will be left without a single producing company because the Arts Council says it is 'not affordable'. A generation of young people will be disenfranchised from their entitlement to access the arts in their community. It is not yet clear what the social and political cost of this for young people and our community. Time will tell. All this came at a time when the relationship between teachers and companies in delivery of projects and training for the foundation phase and the skills framework was taking on a real partnership in Wales. The response from A CW was to abandon its TIE strategy. It abandoned the TIE strategy without consulting the companies that deliver that work. Why? We do not believe this lack of strategy has led to better access or participation in the arts for the people of the valleys. It also cut the participative Community work of Spectacle. This represented a third of our funding but ACW refused to recognise this. Why? An example of the negative impact is the following statistics for 2009- 10 the last year the company was able to fully deliver its work. In 2009 - 2010,

Spectacle Theatre delivered 207 performances to 10,221 young people in 171 schools. In addition, we held 66 theatre workshops with 1884 participants. That's a subtotal of 273 sessions reaching 12,378 school participants. Our additional work, outside of touring to schools, included: • A 6 week residency at a Lewis Boys School in Caerphilly, facilitating 18 sessions with 216 young people, working with the Crime & Safety Partnership to create a 'Doorstop Crime' project, facilitating 18 sessions with 216 young people and a final performance of the work with 168 people in attendance. • A Social Cohesion project in Maerdy – 10 sessions with 430 people. • A project working with Barnados & Genesis Cardiff to develop self confidence and self esteem with young mothers. 6 weeks with 73 people. • 'Friend finder' Foundation Phase workshops. 12 workshops, 373 children. • Training workshop for 120 managers working for Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC. • 2 workshops at HMP Parc, working with 18 young offenders. • Fframwaith summer holiday provision. 10 sessions working with 35 young people. • An E3 project at Treorchy Youth Centre, over a 10 week period with 116 young people. • Weekly workshops in the lead up and facilitation of the Final Major Project with BTEC Performing Arts students at Coleg Morgannwg – 40 sessions with 254 participants • The launch of RCT's Sexual Health strategy, 112 people in attendance. • HYPE workshop project in Merthyr, with 36 participants. This project is then delivered to all secondary schools in Merthyr That makes a total of 385 sessions, reaching a total of 14,329 participants. No one can deny that this is an outstanding achievement in a single year.

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

Yes. Valleys young people and Community. Revenue funding in the Rhondda dropped by £141,059 pounds in a single year. That is a significant amount of funding, resources and expertise lost to this area of multiple deprivation.

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

Yes.

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

No.

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

The voluntary Arts sector provides a pivotal role in the delivery and development of and promotion of participation in the arts in Wales. The ethos

of these organisations and in particular Spectacle is not to make a separation between participation and appreciation in the delivery of work. Arts Council models of funding have been driving this false schism for decades. It is important to support the work of the experienced participatory artists who are driving this work forward. Current ACW funding and policy is yet again lagging some way behind the artistic practise and understanding. The Arts councils need to listen to practitioners and the public.

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

Partially. Some geographic areas do well and other areas are not supported. The Valleys and the disastrous Portfolio review emphasises this. Many Valleys areas did not get their fair share of lottery funding. This may be because organisations / individuals did not apply for funding; however this surely would alert the ACW that the Valleys were a special case and needed additional revenue funding not less. We would argue that areas of multiple deprivation require additional funding to provide and deliver the Arts not less. They need to be treated as a special case. If the Arts council say we have the policy in place to address this, then we would argue they are not working in practice.

9. 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?

Only time will tell. If the current lack of respect for Artists in Wales continues then no. The reason we say no is that ACW is out of touch with arts practice and has no effective mechanism to monitor quality and the impact of its distribution of funds. However if the strategic equality plan includes the democratic voice of Artists in the delivery plans and also in distribution of public funding then maybe yes. This would require the Arts Council of Wales to become an accountable body which it currently is not.