

Task and Finish Group on Participation in the Arts in Wales

Inquiry into Participation in the Arts in Wales

Response from Rhondda Cynon Taff Community Arts

1. What organisation do you represent?

Rhondda Cynon Taff Community Arts

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

open access – all abilities from parent & toddler groups to oldest participant aged 93

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

There are changes to how people access arts participation – ie more focus on community groups rather than schools – it will take time to put in place new inter-linking structures to ensure nobody loses out, but change is not necessarily a bad thing – just because something has existed for a long time doesn't necessarily mean it is effective

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

There is a danger that the education system does not value the arts and there needs to be advocacy from NAW, WG, Local Authorities as well as ACW to ensure children do not lose their access to cultural and arts experiences in school. ACW cannot fund everything and they need strong partners.

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

There is a strong community arts presence in RCT, both through the local authority, Artworks and RCTCA. Strong networks ensure there is a provision across art forms and across the borough. However, there is still need for more provision in geographically isolated communities that experience high levels of poverty. Particular groups, such as teenage parents, are currently losing out through funding cuts to alternative education leading to loss of related arts provision. The current procurement system in RCT for extra-curricular arts provision in schools is leading to an isolated and ad-hoc approach to arts activities after school – without vision and purpose, this provision is much less than it could be. For example after-school photography clubs could be part of a bigger network that generates exhibitions, competitions, trips to galleries,

collaborative projects, etc – putting their club into a bigger and more meaningful context. It would be more likely to be inspirational – and continue.

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

There have been pots of money – but they are not always accessible to those who really need it. Many funds are not accessible to arts organisations (ie Big Lottery), and other funds are only available to large, established organisations (ie Trusts / Foundations). Changes in dissemination of Local Authority budgets (ie from centralised services to individual schools) makes it even more challenging for small arts organisations. There is a loss of efficiency for any arts organisation who has to sell to the highly diversified schools market, as arts do not have priority in school targets and there is no advocacy for arts in the education sector. WG has to accept a loss of arts participation in schools with this strategy. And ultimately, the loss of those companies who provided arts in schools. In addition, there are many organisations (arts and non arts) with money for NEETs – all competing for the same participants – with outcome targets that do not reach those furthest from the job market and with little real job opportunities for those closest to it. I do not know of alternative funding for those in school, or in low-paid jobs, or receiving jsa/esa to participate in the arts – to improve their chances in life. There is no other funding for those people just off the political radar but who could greatly benefit.

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 plays a different role to the professional arts sector. Both are important. As a professional community arts organisation, our role is one of intervention, of regeneration, of being the catalyst for personal growth and new ideas, to provide a framework that is supportive of voluntary arts activity. It is equally important to have a healthy volunteer arts sector, to provide targeted activities locally.

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

I am not sure I know enough of the strategic relationship between WG and ACW (who are the other bodies that distribute arts funding?) to answer this with any knowledge. Certainly, ACW has published a strategy for addressing child poverty, which links to the WG strategy. A more important question perhaps is what is WG's relationship with other funding bodies that will support ACW to be effective in increasing arts participation in other sectors – ie health / education / training / employment

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?

Raising awareness of duties towards those who have a greater need (and who are under-represented) so they can achieve an accepted level of quality in life is good. Whether it increases participation in the arts depends on how the arts are perceived by the different public bodies. There is a strong arts sector in Wales – but it would be good to see stronger political support (in addition to ACW) to raise the profile of the value of arts participation with other public bodies. The arts are subsumed by the regeneration and housing agendas – it would be good to see a higher profile of the arts not only within these agendas, but for its own value – for the transformational power the arts can have in the lives of our people and communities.