

Task and Finish Group on Participation in the Arts in Wales

Inquiry into Participation in the Arts in Wales

Response from Mid Wales Opera

1. What organisation do you represent?

Mid Wales Opera

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

1) Professional singers, musicians and production staff as part of our core productions 2) Young people from 5 – 24 in our current Noyes Fludde project involving five venues across Wales; and in our education and outreach work. 3) A very diverse range of people across Wales as our audience.

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

So far we have seen only limited effects in Wales of Welsh Government cuts, and we strongly appreciate the efforts of the Welsh Government to limit cuts to the arts by comparison with what is happening in England, but we are concerned at the capacity of venues who we rely on to market our touring work to continue to engage with their audiences. As a company which tours to England we are also affected by the sharp cuts to revenue funding of some venues in England by the Arts Council for England and local authorities.

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

It is difficult to answer this question at present.

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

We believe passionately that within Wales there remains a huge disparity between provision which is accessible in and around Cardiff and elsewhere. While we appreciate the need for, and support the role of, the national companies, it is also extremely important to support those organisations which ensure live arts are available to people across Wales in local venues. We are extremely grateful for the support provided by Arts Council Wales for our own activities, which ensure that people in places such as Milford Haven, Harlech, Aberystwyth, Wrexham or Aberdare can see fully staged opera without the difficulty or expense of travelling to Cardiff or Llandudno, which for many people on low budgets is simply impossible. Despite the strong support of ACW, it remains challenging financially to tour in this way, given the small size

of most Welsh venues and the limited ticket prices which most audiences can afford.

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

It is extremely challenging at present to source funding for our activity. The very low interest rates and cuts to public expenditure mean that there is extremely strong demand for funding from Trusts and Foundations, and, for companies like ourselves based in rural Wales, the opportunities for business sponsorship are really limited. UK wide data has highlighted how increasingly the largest London based companies are sucking up the vast majority of available private sponsorship and, at a smaller scale, this is true also within Wales. We would appreciate greater support from the Welsh Government, ACW and Arts and Business in trying to persuade businesses (particularly those with a national reach across Wales) to invest in arts provision beyond the national companies and to work strategically with Trusts and Foundations to see how they can support touring arts provision.

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

We believe that the voluntary arts sector does have a role to play. But it is vital to ensure that people across Wales also have the opportunity to discover and appreciate the best in professional performing arts.

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

We believe that ACW is doing an excellent job and that the way in which the Welsh Government consistently refused during the Funding Review to get drawn into individual cases was appropriate.

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?

We are not qualified to comment on this.