

Task and Finish Group on Participation in the Arts in Wales

Inquiry into Participation in the Arts in Wales

Response from Llantarnam Grange Arts Centre

1. What organisation do you represent?

Llantarnam Grange Arts Centre

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

Participants from a wide cross section of our community actively take part in our activities. Young people aged 5 – 13 years from across Torfaen and Surrounding County Boroughs; School, higher and further education students; Families and those members of our community who are at the societies margins – those encountering the mental health system and those living with dementia. In 2009 we engaged with 44, 124 this has risen to 52, 038 in 2011. An increase in 7,914 a 18% increase.

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

There is no doubt that there will be examples of organisations whose delivery of activities and provision of service has been affected by the changes in budgetary conditions. I have heard anecdotal evidence that in some circumstances there has been a negative change. Having experienced a cut or loss of revenue or core funding some organisations have either ceased to function or have had to reassess their core activities. In the current funding round, Llantarnam Grange Arts Centre (LGAC) maintained its level of local authority funding and saw an uplift in its Arts Council of Wales funding. This has presented the organisation with an opportunity to introduce an audience development programme. This has seen an increase in those engaging with the Centre and its activities. In 2009 6,434 people took part in our education and participation programme while in 2011 8,543 people took part. An increase of 2,109 a 32% increase.

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

As there is no national statistical data available to organisations other than the Arts Council of Wales, any view other than that which relates specifically to an organisation will be anecdotal. LGAC has experienced a fall then rise in its work with schools and young people. Questioning participants we gathered that both organisations and individuals, paused while taking stock. Our figures have now grown to a higher level than in 2009.

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

To provide a sustainable provision of arts and cultural activity with a finite level of financial support will, I feel, inevitably lead to clustering and the centring of activity in specific locations. It would be unrealistic to provide a parity of provision across the whole country. I do not feel it is the role and function of the independent sector to set national policy. As an independent charitable organisation we have a duty to deliver our stated charitable aims. If these aims coincide with the strategic vision of government, both local and national, there is the opportunity for a sustainable partnership. It would be the responsibility of Government to determine what is the appropriate level of provision and then work in partnership with local government and the independent sector to deliver that vision.

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

The funding map has changed. The way the Arts Council of Wales delivers its funds has changed, the number of organisations receiving revenue funding has decreased. Local authority funding levels are static, this position is in reality an inflationary cut in resources. Charitable trusts and foundations are receiving significantly higher numbers of applications. Capital schemes are on hold until after the 2012 Olympics. Unrestricted earned income opportunities are under pressure as the overall economy remains flat. Funding of “projects” is not the key issue. Long term sustainability and the meeting of core overheads is the more pressing issue. This is an area that does not fall easily into funding criteria. Overheads are rising at levels that are significantly high. Utilities have risen by significant levels, organisations will have pension obligations and general running costs are rising. This position is not being offset by increases in core funding. As an example if gas and electricity prices rise by 16%, this equates to a proportional 16% cut in funding as core levels remain at standstill. Although organisations are on one level grateful that core funding is not reduced the buying power of those funds is being eroded through inflation.

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 sector always has and always will play a significant role in promoting participation in the arts. A fine balance between support and over complication needs to be addressed. If people are prepared to give up their time and resource in the furtherance of artistic development, they should be supported with a lightness of touch when it comes to legislation. There has to

be checks and balances to ensure activities are delivered in an appropriate way, but in a proportionate manner.

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

What will lead to the strategic development of participation in the arts is stability. An understanding that arts organisations can focus on their core activities of delivery, rather than continually reassessing its position within a seemingly ever changing climate. The Arts Council of Wales Investment Review process began in 2008, the changes instigated by this change have yet to be fully implemented. The Arts Community have endured four years of instability and uncertainty. No strategic development can be undertaken and be successful against this back drop. I would press the Government to allow a period of consolidation and stability to allow organisations the space to deliver.

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?

I fear that the strategic equality plans will have little impact on the delivery but will have an impact on how activity is reported. Arts organisations have to plan in advance, their schemes of work are already considered. When the Equity action plans are published in April it will be a case of shoe horning existing provision into the system. My fear is that what was started out with good intentions will become a glorified tick box exercise, with organisations being creative over the use of semantics to ensure existing schemes of work can be made to fit the new policy.