

CC(3) AC 77

Communities and Culture Committee

Response from Llantarnham Grange Arts Centre

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What we'd like from you - consultation questions

1. Do you consider the Welsh Government to have achieved its commitment of ensuring that 'high-quality cultural experiences are available to all people, irrespective of where they live or their background?' How effective has its investment in arts and cultural activities been in realising this objective?

Considering the size of the Nation, I feel that Wales pulls above its weight in terms of producing art. We are a country with a rich and vibrant portfolio of cultural bodies giving the people of Wales an opportunity to experience and have access to a cultural heritage of the highest quality. It would be impossible for people to have at their doorstep access to all possible options of cultural engagement. But neither does this mean that all cultural provision has to be levelled at the lowest common denominator in order to play the numbers game.

There will inevitably be a gravitation of cultural provision to the Capital and larger conurbations. Economies of scale, densities of qualified professionals and population, logistics and population density all contribute to a centralisation of cultural provision. This happens not only at a national level but also at a regional and sub regional level. E.g Large conurbations have a greater provision nationally, regional centres/cities (Newport, Swansea etc) have a disproportionately higher provision within the region, market towns and rural centre (Newtown, Ruthin, Carmarthen etc) have a higher concentration than the rural communities they serve.

2. How exactly are arts and cultural venues – including museums, libraries and archives – actively promoting access, attracting new audiences and encouraging participation in line with the One Wales commitment and the Arts Council's strategies?

There is not one simple answer. Each professional organisation has a differing role within the national cultural matrix. As an example, Llantarnam Grange Arts Centre sees its role as the regional centre for the applied arts in Southeast Wales. We perceive our local communities to be the population making up that region. To us "local" means an area from the outskirts of Cardiff to the Severn Bridge and the

Gwent levels to the Border with Powys. We actively promote access to and participation in the applied and visual arts through a wide and diverse marketing mix. This encompasses everything from the way visitors are greeted to web sites and from information on local notice boards to touring applied art exhibitions to venues in Wales, UK and the European Union. Developing audiences encompasses a range of activities from engaging with young people both formally through the education sector and informally through out of school and outreach activities, workshops and events.

3. Is the current network of arts and cultural venues in Wales sufficient, and are there any geographic or other issues that continue to act as barriers to participation (eg in rural areas or areas of deprivation)?

There are a significant number of arts and cultural venues and organisations within Wales that provide a considerable amount of opportunities for access and participation. However, there is not universal coverage and there are areas that are not as well served as others.

There are a number of questions the Wales Government, Arts Council of Wales and local authorities will need to face if they wish to address the situation.

One of the key issues is financial, if there is a desire for provision to be free at the point of delivery the amount of money that would need to be invested would be unsustainable in the current climate. If organisations need to generate a proportion of their funds through “unrestricted” income generation, then the normal laws of economics will apply. There will be activities that will be cost effective and there will be those where demand will be low, and therefore generate losses. It would then depend on the long term sustainability of running year on year losses that would counteract issues of coverage. If there is a desire for universal coverage, who would make the decision when for example a regular event attended by 10 people that did not break even would be cancelled when other arts activities are allowed to continue.

4. What will be the impact of the Arts Council’s Investment Review on the network of venues and cultural activities that take place across Wales? Do you consider that the Arts Council’s decision to discontinue funding to 32 organisations, as a result of the Investment Review, will have a significant impact on the accessibility of cultural venues or activities? Does a concentration of funding avoid it being spread too thinly, and achieving little?

The main thrust of the Arts Council of Wales Investment review was to create a funding matrix and portfolio that would allow arts organisations in Wales to thrive, rather than merely survive. By funding fewer organisations at a significantly higher level, the Arts Councils aim seemed to be to create a sustainable, robust and adventurous portfolio of organisations that could deliver its strategic aims.

The decision to discontinue funding 32 organisations will inevitably have an impact on the accessibility of cultural venues and activities. However, this needs to be seen in the context the long term accessibility to cultural venues and activities. If there is a year on year erosion of the level of “real” funding to the arts. Organisations will have to reduce the levels of activity provided. Leaving the overall picture as one of gradual erosion and discontinued arts and cultural activity. The objective in the reduction in the number of organisations funded by the ACW will

only achieve its goal if those that remain receive significant uplift in funding to achieve their potential and achieve the vision of the Wales Government and ACW.

5. The Welsh Government will not be announcing the Arts Council's budget for 2011-2012 until December 2010. What impact do you believe a reduction in the Arts Council's budget would have on the accessibility of arts and cultural activities in Wales?

It is a shame that the decision is not being announced until December 2010. Given the current economic climate the time scale for implementing any changes to the ACW's budget is quite short, especially given the end of December and beginning of January are problematic periods.

If arts organisations are not going to be informed until the end of December or beginning of January what funding they will receive for the forthcoming financial year, programming may be affected. Arts organisations have undergone a protracted period of uncertainty during the investment review period. There is a strong desire for resolution, arts organisations will then be able to undertake what it is they do.

A further reduction in the level of funding by the ACW will undoubtedly be transferred to the delivery of arts and cultural activity. Either through a further loss of Revenue Funded Organisations or a root and branch curtailment of the grant in aid schemes. In some ways those organisations who have already received notice of a loss in ACW funding are better placed to make plans for the future. With the announcement in June those organisations have been given 10 months to implement changes. Any organisation who receives notice of a loss of funding following the December funding announcement will have less than three months to implement an exit strategy.

If the ACW have to revisit its RFO list and make further reductions, it brings into question the underlying premise of the review. The implications would be that rather helping the arts "thrive rather than merely survive", the result of investment review would be merely survival.

6. Do you have any concerns about the variation in range and quality of local authority cultural services and activities provided across Wales? Are local authorities adequately resourced to consistently fund and support cultural activities in the current economic climate?

I have serious concerns about the variation in range and quality of local authority cultural services. The creation of the 22 unitary authorities has led to an inconsistent and patchy provision with little or no regional or national strategic vision. There appears to be little joined up thinking between Wales Government, Arts Council of Wales and local authorities. Given the current economic climate and the need for local government to make considerable savings, arts, culture and heritage I fear will be disproportionately affected. The noises that are being heard from local government indicate only an extremely bleak picture.

7. The Arts Council of Wales's 2008 Omnibus Survey suggested that people who were professionals, qualified or involved in non-manual work were more likely to

attend an art event than those who were Skilled or semi-skilled manual workers, and non-working people. Is this consistent with your own experiences? Can you provide an explanation for this variation, and how can this variation be addressed?

8. The Arts Council of Wales's 2008 Omnibus Survey suggested that younger adults were more likely to attend an arts event than older adults. Is this consistent with your own experiences? Can you provide an explanation for this variation, and how can this variation be addressed?

9. The Arts Council of Wales's 2008 Omnibus Survey suggested that females were more likely to attend an arts event than males. Is this consistent with your own experiences? Can you provide an explanation for this variation, and how can this variation be addressed?

10. The Arts Council of Wales's 2008 Omnibus Survey suggested that Welsh Language Speakers were more likely to directly participate in the arts than non Welsh Language Speakers. Is this consistent with your own experiences? Can you provide an explanation for this variation, and how can this variation be addressed?

11. Are you aware of any other significant variations in the public's attendance and participation in the arts and cultural activities (for example based on ethnic background, disabilities, location in an urban or rural area)?

In relation to the questions 7 - 11 the ACW have commissioned and are in the process of publishing a report which shows that 90% of the adult population of Wales have engaged with an arts event in the last year. The report - a version of which was presented to the South Wales Regional Committee of the ACW on the 20th September 2010 - answers the above questions in much detail and provides a more eloquent answer than I can give.

12. Are there any further comments you'd like to make about the accessibility of arts and cultural activities in Wales?

I feel we have arrived at the fork in the road. If the art and cultural activity are deemed to be the benchmark by which our society is judged, there is a stark choice. Engage and fund the Arts Council so it can achieve the goal of the Investment Review, allowing the arts in Wales to thrive rather than merely survive. If not the arts in Wales will at best merely survive.

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