
Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

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Ymateb gan: Rhwydwaith Iechyd a Llesiant Celfyddydau Cymru | Evidence from: Wales Arts Health and Wellbeing Network



Response to the Equality and Social Justice Committee Inquiry: Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – Post-Legislative Scrutiny

To the Equality and Social Justice Committee

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this post-legislative scrutiny of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. As the national sector support for arts health and wellbeing in Wales, we strongly advocate for the essential role of the arts in supporting the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. The Act has **provided a pioneering framework for embedding cross sector sustainable development**, social cohesion, and cultural well-being into public policy.

We have welcomed their 50 recommendations published in this, the 10th anniversary of the Act, particularly their call for a Culture Bill, and the emphasis on prevention as a key principle, encouraging public bodies to take proactive measures to improve well-being rather than reacting to problems after they arise. In the context of arts and health, this approach has been recognized as a valuable tool for promoting mental and physical well-being while reducing pressure on healthcare services.

The key points relating to arts, health, and prevention under the Act include:

- **Social Prescribing:** The Act supports initiatives that integrate arts into healthcare, such as social prescribing, where individuals are referred to creative activities to improve mental health and social well-being.
- **Mental Health and Well-being:** Arts-based interventions have been highlighted as effective in addressing mental health challenges, including

dementia and Parkinson's disease, by fostering social connections and emotional resilience.

- **Community Engagement:** The Act encourages public bodies to collaborate with arts organizations to create accessible, inclusive programs that support well-being and prevent social isolation.
- **Long-term Sustainability:** By embedding arts into health strategies, the Act aims to create sustainable, preventative approaches that reduce reliance on medical interventions and improve overall quality of life.

The Role of Arts in Promoting Well-being

The **Act's commitment to cultural well-being** aligns directly with the objectives of the arts and health sector. Over the past decade, we have witnessed transformative impacts through creative engagement in health and social care settings, including:

- **Arts-on-Prescription Programmes** – Initiatives such as the Hywel Dda University Health Board's Creative Prescribing Discovery Programme, the HARBWR Project at Swansea Bay UHB, and the national Wellness with WNO Programme demonstrate the effectiveness of creativity in health and social care.
- **Mental Health & Chronic Illness Support** – Evidence from arts-based interventions in Wales shows improvements in mental health, social connectedness, and management of chronic conditions.
- **Community Well-being & Social Inclusion** – Arts activities have played a significant role in fostering resilience, empowerment, and community building, aligning with the **Act's Preventative Health Approach, and recommendations.**
- **The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) – A Key Driver in Wales**

A particularly significant achievement in advancing arts and health integration in Wales has been the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Arts Council Wales and the Welsh NHS Confederation. This partnership has:

- Strengthened collaboration between the arts, social care, third and health sectors.
- Enhanced strategic direction, ensuring the arts contribute meaningfully to public health outcomes.
- Supported evidence-based practice, reinforcing the positive effects of arts engagement on health and well-being.
- Levered collaborative and partnership working between Arts Council Wales, Public Health Wales, Welsh NHS Confederation, WAHWN, all 7 health boards and Velindre NHS Trust.
- An MOU between Arts Council Wales and Natural Resources Wales driving creative nature arts based interventions supporting individuals to improve their mental wellbeing through the natural environment and the arts

Opportunities for Strengthening the Act

While the Act has provided a strong foundation, further policy development and investment would enhance its impact. Key recommendations include:

- Formal recognition of arts and health interventions as core elements of preventative healthcare.
- Greater integration of arts in social prescribing across health boards.
- Targeted funding and resources to scale existing initiatives and embed arts-based approaches in healthcare policy and preventative approaches.
- Clearer reporting mechanisms to capture the social and economic benefits of arts and health programmes that can effect policy change.
- We also have concerns about how the Act is being enforced. Access to culture and the arts is still a postcode Lottery, and not all public bodies are

delivering on their Culture and Welsh Language goals. As one Health Board professional has said about arts and health and collaborative working under the Act *“tell us to do it, and we will”*.

Conclusion

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 has positioned Wales as an **international leader in sustainable development and cultural well-being**. We strongly urge continued policy support, investment, and strategic collaboration to ensure arts and health remain central to Wales' vision for future generations. The MoU between Arts Council Wales and the Welsh NHS Confederation is a testament to what is possible when art, health, and policy work together. We look forward to further strengthening this interdisciplinary approach, ensuring that creativity continues to enrich the lives of people across Wales.

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