

Task and Finish Group on Participation in the Arts

Response from Theatr Felinfach

Thank you for the opportunity to respond on behalf of Theatre Felinfach to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee's Inquiry into Participation in the Arts.

Who we are? A short background:

Theatr Felinfach uses the arts to promote:

- the development of creative individuals and groups
- the development of skills and proficiency in the arts
- social inclusion
- personal development
- linguistic and cultural integration
- participation in the arts
- celebration of cultural expression

Theatr Felinfach operates according to the following definitions from the document **pARTicipation by Voluntary Arts Wales**:

Participation

Participation in the arts refers to people participating **actively**; making, forming and creating.

Participation in the arts:

- is an empowering process linking the whole nation;
- promotes a healthier, wealthier Wales, which is better educated and more integrated;
- is primarily a voluntary activity, motivated by personal curiosity rather than policy or profit

Voluntary Arts

This can be described as artistic practice by people who work and learn together regularly, and who also (but not necessarily) perform / display locally. The voluntary arts consist of amateur arts, youth arts, traditional arts and cultural, religious and local arts activity group. Opportunities to participate in the arts also are offered by a wide range of organizations and private individuals, including private dance schools, music tutors, etc.

There is also a wealth and variety of participatory arts activities, which are an inherent part of people's lives, and which have not, in the past, been included in formal strategic planning, eg Women's Institute, Merched y Wawr, Young Farmers, Youth Clubs; many of these offer a unique Welsh perspective on the arts.

Community Arts

Community arts include professional community arts workers who create opportunities within communities for people to develop skills and explore and develop ideas through active participation in the arts. Community arts are often targeted towards disadvantaged communities. By its nature, it should be transformative, and can be an important cultural tool in terms of supporting long term community regeneration objectives.

Arts education and outreach activities

Young people are possibly the largest sector in the community who are involved in arts activities, as participation in dance, music and the visual arts is compulsory for primary school age pupils. Many schools offer additional activities for pupils outside school hours, which include the arts, and many pupils will have been involved at some time in activities associated with "an artist in the school" project.

A number of arts venues and production companies are committed to supporting practical activities to promote participation in the arts which are often described as educational or outreach activities, and associated with a specific touring company.

Inquiry Questions:

1 Theatr Felinfach serves the county of Ceredigion, which is one of nine areas in Wales which are completely rural and this presents real challenges in terms of service provision and also in terms of addressing social, health and welfare needs of the county's residents. The national index of deprivation, WIMD, shows that access to services and housing are the main factors which lead to deprivation in Ceredigion. In relation to access to services, Theatr Felin-fach serves the most rural areas in Ceredigion and so the projects and programmes developed by the theatre reflects and responds to the context of the rural population and the countryside communities.

We work with residents of rural Ceredigion, aged from 0 to 85 +. Our participatory arts programmes include activities such as:

- Drama and theatre
- Dance
- Film
- Combined Arts

Some examples of projects:

Tic-Toc, singing, dancing and story sessions for young children aged 0-3 and their parents

Network of Drama Clubs for 7-11 year olds

2 Youth Theatres for 11-18 year olds

2 Youth dance companies for 7-11 and 11-18 year olds

Achieving our aims

Braggam - A programme of 'popular' dance sessions eg series of Zumba, Street Dancing sessions
a Dance Company for the 50 +

A school and drama project: Community Project, Foundation Stage, Reception, KS1 and 2

Welsh Actors Company

English Actors Company

Radio drama project

Fun and Recreation Society for the 60 +

Informal training programmes
Various workshops
Theater productions by different groups from the above list and others
New Writing Schemes.

During 2010-11, Theatr Felinfach provided: 43,922 arts opportunities to the residents of Ceredigion, with over 30,000 of those being opportunities to participate.

2a / b In Ceredigion there is a wide range of opportunities in the arts, be that as a member of an audience at professional shows or as a participant in a creative activity, as part of a drama company or competing in an eisteddfod. Within our county, following the CCC 2010 portfolio review, there has not been a significant decrease in participatory arts activities. However, there is continual concern in the sector that the current recession will lead to cuts in the arts. The arts are an important driver in the field of welfare of the Welsh people. The benefits of participation in arts activity is enormous in terms of developing skills, self-confidence, celebrating identity and culture and it enables assimilation and linguistic and cultural integration. Although Ceredigion has not suffered severe cuts in expenditure on the arts, we can see how a very rural area like Powys has suffered from the loss of investment in the arts. Rural isolation is a major deprivation factor in the countryside and we firmly believe that networks of participation opportunities is key to the viability of rural areas, the Welsh language and the welfare of our people.

3 Yes, very rural areas eg one of Ceredigion's Communities First areas, Tregaron and the uplands - although many organizations in Ceredigion operate in parts of that area, the areas outside the villages are difficult to reach and, more specifically, it is difficult for young people to travel to centres which provide participatory programmes. Our organization provides outreach programmes in some of these areas, but we need more hands to enable us to organize more regular activities. Fuel poverty and the lack of public transport are also very real factors in rural areas, and we find that providing free participatory activities can include people who might not otherwise take part if they had to pay for the activity as well as the cost of travelling to the centre.

4 There are other means of taking part in arts activities eg the Lottery, Esmee Fairbairn, various trusts, but the emphasis is often on creating something "new and different", whereas funding is sometimes needed to develop something which is already a success. The Arts Council of Wales provides good guidance and advice to organizations, groups or individuals on relevant financial sources. The VAW has a valuable role in acting as a "signpost" for organizations wishing to develop an idea. The WCVA plays an important role in terms of the voluntary sector as well and holds networking and information sharing events which are useful to the participatory arts sector. There is no doubt that organizations and arts bodies have seen a significant decrease in lottery funding because of the Olympics, and there is a feeling that the sector is "holding its breath" to see what happens in terms of the Games' legacy.

5 The so-called "voluntary arts sector" is perhaps a misleading term. If one was asked to list what is included in the "sector", that list would probably include dance schools, community and 'amateur' drama companies and individuals who are known as art practitioners. Activities such as local (as well as national) Eisteddfodau or arts organizations with a participatory element, eg Yr Urdd, YFC, are rarely referred to as drivers in the participatory arts and yet, these organizations have a proven track-record in encouraging participation in the arts. Such organizations use the arts as a form of expression of Welsh and bilingual culture, but they are part of the voluntary arts provision and yet tend to be "invisible" in the context of arts discussions. The role of the voluntary arts sector is key in relation to promoting participation in the arts.

6 I believe that the strategic relationship between the Welsh Government and the bodies that distribute money to arts is fairly good. For the bodies falling within the Arts Council portfolio, such as client revenue, the strategic issues are aired through the Annual Review meetings. The Annual Review process is very valuable and dialogue between organizations and the Arts Council is constructive in terms of discussing issues concerning the sector. We believe that there is scope to strengthen the Government's strategic leadership in setting priorities for the Arts Council and the organizations. For example, Child Poverty is an extremely important theme that organizations should be tackling, and while participatory arts programmes address some elements of that theme through the nature of participatory art work - the Government's leadership could be strengthened in terms of what is expected of those organizations which provide participatory opportunities in the arts or in terms of offering guidance on which type of indicators are possible and appropriate in this sensitive area.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit our comments.

Theatre Felinfach
Ceredigion
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