

Task and Finish Group on Participation in the Arts in Wales

Inquiry into Participation in the Arts in Wales

Response from Powys County Council

1. What organisation do you represent?

Powys County Council

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

Powys residents

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

Where cuts have been made to organisations, arts activity has either ceased or reduced causing a reduction in participation therefore the effects have been largely negative. Conversely however, the challenges of having funding withdrawn have in some cases prompted some arts organisations and indeed council services to think creatively and radically about how to approach the future. In the main this has led to an enhanced level of partnership working, more efficient and shared use of resources and a reduction in isolated working practices. It cannot be ignored however that these shifts in approach and in future policy making take time and are interlinked with other changes being imposed on or happening within the arts sector. In the meantime those directly affected are arts audiences and arts participants.

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

Among those most affected are those living rurally because where an arts provision is removed a gap forms and is not easily filled due to the geographical spread of arts venues, organisations and projects. Among those affected most negatively are children and young people due to the issue of transport being one of the main barriers to participation, so where a locality loses its arts hub for these groups arts activity disappears.

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

There are considerable gaps for people to participate in arts activity in Powys geographically, in many cases the nearest arts venue providing arts activity or organisation running an arts project can be up to 50 miles away. Taking into account poor public transport links and an absence of evening transport provision, this makes it impossible for those without their own car or access to

private transport to attend events in the evening or on Sundays. Demographically this has the greatest effect on children and young people, low income families and disabled people.

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

Simply no. The Arts Council of Wales is the key funder of arts activity in Wales, whilst Powys County Council supports the arts, resources to do so are limited and diminishing, alternative funding sources do exist but the small scale and fragility of groups and organisations delivering arts activity means that their capacity to access funding is limited threatening their sustainability.

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

In Powys specifically, the voluntary arts sector plays an extremely important role in promoting participation in the arts, notably the Young Farmers is highly successful in engaging young people but it is important to note that broadly speaking the voluntary sector is not under the same level, type and range of obligations as publicly funded organisations to promote principles such as inclusivity and accessibility, though in the main they do recognise and attempt to achieve this. Essential to this sector in providing arts activities and promoting participation is support involving advice, information and funding.

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

In reference to the Arts Council of Wales as the primary arts funding body in Wales, we believe that the imperative to increase participation is suitably emphasised within its criteria for awarding grant support however in the recent review decisions made to cut funding to three key providers in mid Powys, namely Theatr Powys, CARAD and the Wyeside clearly contradict any incentive to increase participation. It is vital to learn from this and for those distributing arts funding in Wales to work closely with local authorities to ensure that shared objectives are worked towards and that important decision making regarding providing funding or removing funding is properly and jointly consulted upon. If increasing participation in arts activities is to be considered a primary strategic objective for those awarding funding then PROVISION must be protected, encouraged and sustained.

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?

Yes, depending upon the effectiveness of implementation planning