

Task and Finish Group on Participation in the Arts in Wales

Inquiry into Participation in the Arts in Wales

Response from Theatr Fforwm Cymru

1. What organisation do you represent?

Theatr Fforwm Cymru

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

Children, young people who are disengaged from school, NEETS, children/yp in care, with disabilities, young carers etc. adults with learning disabilities, mental health issues, refugee and asylum seekers, communities experiencing poverty and marginalisation

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

Negatively. I believe that there is still insufficient understanding from Government and funders about how the arts AS education can empower people to be motivated to change their own lives. There also appears to be insufficient will and/or understanding, to explore and fund opportunities to research the impact of longer term involvement with arts processes, on the long term well-being and emotional resilience of participants. We have clear examples of this.

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

All young people not designated as being NEET or at risk of it. The focus is far too narrow and short term. One project that we have been involved with in RCT called ON-Track+ has lost its funding. This has been on-going for the past 5 years and has been for young people who have low school attendance and their families! this ties in with the current Welsh Government agenda!

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

We have moved our office from Pembrokeshire where we were based for 19 years, into Swansea. Rural West Wales feels like an arts wasteland in terms of participatory arts. County councils in this area do NOT fund participatory arts or appreciate the educative value of it.

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

We have learnt to be resourceful in terms of where we go for funding. However the short term issues of many grants means that Arts organisations like ours have insufficient funding to develop our work further. For example, In Denmark there are "production schools" where young people who are not coping in mainstream education can attend these schools where the entire curriculum is arts focused. This provides an exciting, motivating and confidence building environment where the young people can achieve. We need to think outside the box in terms of the arts and we would welcome funding to develop and research the impact of our work, particularly now we are based within Swansea Metropolitan University.

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 arts sector plays a vital role in promoting participatory arts, predominantly by being close to the "front line" of communities. Core funding is a huge issue that holds the potential of voluntary arts organisations like ours back from producing even more innovative approaches.

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

I don't really know! As an arts educational charity that has been working in Wales for the past 19 years, I feel very disempowered in terms of our ability to influence the distribution of arts funding towards participatory arts. It still feels like the poor relation of the arts world. Also my understanding of what participatory arts means – may be very different to others.

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 sincerely hope so. It will be dependent on active listening on all sides and the will and heart to truly explore the many models of participatory arts that exist in Wales.